

Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Winter 2000

\$15

167

A cluster of stylized, light-colored dandelion seed heads is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the cover. The seed heads are depicted with fine lines radiating from a central point, and some have short stems with small, diamond-shaped leaves. The overall style is minimalist and artistic.

First Nations Writing

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The deadline for submissions is February 28, 2001.

Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 167, Winter 2000

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

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Editorial

Margery Fee

Reading Aboriginal Lives

5

Articles

Susanna Egan

Telling Trauma: Generic Dissonance in the
Production of *Stolen Life*

10

Christine Watson

Autobiographical Writing as a Healing Process:
Interview with Alice Masak French

32

Albert Braz

The Absent Protagonist:
Louis Riel in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Literature

45

Warren Cariou

The Racialized Subject in James Tyman's *Inside Out*

68

Robin Ridington

Happy Trails to You: Contexted Discourse and Indian
Removals in Thomas King's *Truth & Bright Water*

89

Poems

<i>kateri akiwenzie-</i>		<i>Alootook Ipellie</i>	43
<i>damm</i>	8, 108	<i>Chris Bose</i>	44
<i>Armand Ruffo</i>	9, 62	<i>Annharte</i>	64
<i>David A. Groulx</i>	30	<i>Al Hunter</i>	85
<i>Gord Bruyere</i>	31	<i>Duane Niatum</i>	87

Books in Review

Forthcoming book reviews are available at the *Canadian Literature* web site:
<http://www.cdn-lit.ubc.ca>

Authors Reviewed		<i>John E. O'Connor</i>	139
<i>Freda Ahenakew</i>	110	<i>Simon Ortiz</i>	139
<i>Valerie Alia</i>	134	<i>Judith Ostrowitz</i>	126
<i>Flora Beardy</i>	110	<i>Roberto Perin</i>	131
<i>Sarah E. Boehme</i>	112	<i>Charlene Porsild</i>	134
<i>Bonnie Burnard</i>	115	<i>Harold Rhenisch</i>	137
<i>Lisa Chalykoff</i>	119	<i>Peter C. Rollins</i>	139
<i>Daniel W. Clayton</i>	116	<i>Vita Rordam</i>	110
<i>Robert Coutts</i>	110	<i>Allan J. Ryan</i>	126
<i>Eve D'Aeth</i>	119	<i>Danielle Schaub</i>	124
<i>Wade Davis</i>	137	<i>Gregory Scofield</i>	141
<i>David Day</i>	141	<i>David Stouck</i>	144
<i>James P. Delgado</i>	134	<i>Drew Hayden Taylor</i>	147
<i>Claude Denis</i>	117	<i>Richard Van Camp</i>	126
<i>Kathleen M. Donovan</i>	121	<i>Marie Vautier</i>	149
<i>Rose Hertel Falkenhagen</i>	144	<i>Nancy Wachowich</i>	151
<i>Jonas George</i>		<i>Rudy Wiebe</i>	154
<i>(Wah-sa-ghe-zik)</i>	126	<i>Myler Wilkinson</i>	144
<i>Sherrill Grace</i>	119	<i>Jeremy Wilson</i>	144
<i>Rodney Graham</i>	120	<i>H.C. Wolfart</i>	110
<i>Janet Campbell Hale</i>	121	<i>Gary Wyatt</i>	126
<i>Cole Harris</i>	123		
<i>Coral Ann Howells</i>	124	Reviewers	
<i>Robert Hunter</i>	141	<i>Clint Burnham</i>	120
<i>William Closson James</i>	131	<i>Warren Cariou</i>	141
<i>Yvonne Johnson</i>	154	<i>Eve D'Aeth</i>	147
<i>Basil H. Johnston</i>	126	<i>Susanna Egan</i>	151
<i>Aldona Jonaitis</i>	112	<i>Bryan N.S. Gooch</i>	116, 137
<i>J.C.H. King</i>	112	<i>Sherrill Grace</i>	134
<i>Henriette Lidchi</i>	112	<i>Heather Hodgson</i>	154
<i>George Littlechild</i>	126	<i>Coral Ann Howells</i>	149
<i>David Macfarlane</i>	137	<i>Renée Hulan</i>	112, 130
<i>William R. Morrison</i>	134	<i>David A. Kent</i>	131
<i>Beatrice Culleton</i>		<i>Jennifer Kramer</i>	126
<i>Mosionier</i>	130	<i>Martin K. Kuester</i>	119
<i>John Moss</i>	147	<i>Joel Martineau</i>	123, 144
<i>Terence Murphy</i>	131	<i>Laura J. Murray</i>	117

<i>Brad Neufeldt</i>	110	<i>Deena Rymhs</i>	139
<i>Barbara Pell</i>	115	<i>Robert Thacker</i>	124
<i>Catherine Rainwater</i>	121		

Opinions & Notes

<i>Robert Bringhurst</i>			
The Origin of Mind			157
<i>Kevin McNeilly</i>			
Cutting Both Ways: Robert Bringhurst and Haida Literature			167
<i>Janice Fiamengo</i>			
Reconsidering Pauline			174
<i>W.H. New</i>			
Re-Collecting 1999			176

Last Pages

<i>Eva-Marie Kröller</i>			
Eccentric Genres			188

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Publications Mail registration number 08647
GST R108161779

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by the University of British Columbia and SSHRC. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Canadian Literature, is indexed in *Canadian Periodical Index*, *Canadian Magazine Index*, *American Humanities Index*; and the *MLA International Bibliography*, among numerous others. It is available on-line in the *Canadian Business and Current Affairs Database*, and is available in microfilm

from University Microfilm International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan USA 48106

For subscriptions, back issues (as available), and annual and cumulative indexes, write: Circulation Manager, *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z1

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FAX: (604) 822-5504
E-MAIL: Can.Lit@ubc.ca
<http://www.cdn-lit.ubc.ca>

SUBSCRIPTION: \$40 INDIVIDUAL;
\$55 INSTITUTIONAL; PLUS GST IN
CANADA; PLUS \$15 POSTAGE OUTSIDE
CANADA

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
Donna.Chin@ubc.ca
Design: George Vaitkunas
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited
Typefaces: Minion and Univers
Paper: recycled and acid-free

Canadian Literature, a peer-reviewed journal, welcomes submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada, and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

Articles of approximately 25 pages should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, Buchanan E158 1866 Main Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1. Submissions must include a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

Articles should follow MLA guidelines for bibliographic format. All works accepted for publication must also be available on diskette.

Canadian Literature, revue universitaire avec comités d'évaluation, 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.

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Reading Aboriginal Lives

Margery Fee

This special issue on First Nations writing follows *Canadian Literature's* double issue on Thomas King a year ago. We include an essay by Robin Ridington on King's latest novel, *Truth & Bright Water*, and an investigation, by Albert Braz, of Louis Riel's literary manifestations in English and French, but also bring forward three names that have not yet been much discussed in academic journals: Alice French, Yvonne Johnson and James Tyman. And as usual, although the authors certainly didn't collaborate, there are many interesting connections among the articles. Many of the works discussed are autobiographical or deal with the ways Native lives are "read" by the mainstream culture. Louis Riel's self-description as *un néant*, a ghost, reflects how he was and still is deployed as symbol more than remembered as a man. Like Oka, any incident to do with Aboriginal peoples that sparks conflict between what were once called "the two founding races," the French and the English, is read not for what it might say about the aspirations, desires, or political demands of the Aboriginal people involved, but for what it says about relations between the two solitudes. Attention is paid, but for the wrong reasons, and in the end, the Aboriginal protagonists go to jail, or worse, and the mainstream media forgets the whole subject. Did we ever find out what happened to that golf course?

The need to transform ghosts and stereotypes into human beings is one impulse that leads to life-writing. But for French, Johnson and Tyman a further need was to make sense of what happened to them as children, when they suffered not only misfortune (Johnson's cleft palate, Tyman's abusive father, the death of French's mother), but the "care" of a state that did not value

them as human children. Many First Nations people have had to bridge the gap between themselves and their own culture caused by state intervention, as Christine Watson's conversation with French reveals. Writing about this process, either as autobiography or autobiographical fiction (like Richard Wagamese's *Keeper'n Me*) is another way to write oneself into an identity that the state has "saved" one from, marking it as inferior. Warren Cariou's account of James Tyman's "recovered" life makes clear that the displaced and the othered experience identity as constructed and shifting. Beth Cuthand puts it like this in her "Post-Oka Kinda Woman," "Talk to her of post-modern deconstructivism / She'll say 'What took you so long?'" Making sense of abuse and trauma caused directly or indirectly by a long and repressive colonial history is a theme not just in these three autobiographical pieces, but also in *Truth & Bright Water*, where Lum commits suicide because he cannot make sense of his life. As Ridington points out, his cousin Tecumseh, the narrator, has a better chance at making sense of his own life and of the life of his community, as he is mentored by "the famous Indian artist," Monroe Swimmer.

Part of this involves remembering the pain, a process that, as Susanna Egan notes, can feed into the widespread desire for what she calls "victim literature." Again a writing process that may well be part of a liberatory struggle is read through the dominant culture's scripts. A person in the process of recovering his or her own life is read as a victim, someone to be gaped at, briefly pitied, then ignored.

The problematic collaboration between the white man and Aboriginal woman, Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson, is one that Wiebe himself might well have discussed explicitly, given that he is aware of the issues (or at least he was when debating W.P. Kinsella over his refusal to think about the feelings of the people of the Hobbema Reserve whose reserve he was fictionalizing). Wiebe's historical fiction, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" about the death of Almighty Voice (accused of stealing a cow, then evading arrest, finally machine-gunned in a shallow trench from which he was defending himself) has always been a touchstone for me on the issue of appropriation. Here Wiebe focuses on the museum where the few remains of the incident are kept, describes photographs in obsessive detail, goes over the known historical record, and recreates the man's last moments, when finally, Almighty Voice sings his warrior's death song. The narrator describes the song as a "wordless cry," but then he says "I say 'wordless cry' because that is the way it sounds to me. I could be more accurate if I had a reliable

interpreter who would make a reliable interpretation. For I do not, of course, understand the Cree myself” (81).

These last lines have always meant, for me, that Wiebe acknowledges both the peculiar Romantic intensity of his obsession with the Aboriginal past (which is, apart from his own Mennonite heritage, almost all he has written about) and his ultimate inability to understand or make sense of another culture that is now lost to us, mainly because our ancestors did their best to destroy it. However, Yvonne Johnson is alive, against the odds, and she and Wiebe presumably could have had an interesting conversation about the motivations behind his writing career. Just why is Big Bear, Johnson’s ancestor, at the centre of Wiebe’s fictional world? This is, of course, not an easy question to answer—is it just that over-developed Mennonite sense of guilt? Was it an attempt to ally his own religiously rebellious and persecuted ancestry with that of the Cree? Was it an attempt to shift out from under the burden of blame by representing the whole sorry colonial history of the Plains rebellions in as much detail as possible? Another chance has gone by to start the conversation, a conversation that John A. Macdonald could have had with Louis Riel at least, if not with Big Bear. Without a conversation with living First Nations people about what they think and feel about their writing, their culture and their lives, the likelihood that we will have produced bad interpretation rises, as we make ourselves the experts, and them into the mute subjects of monologic expertise.

Egan’s article raises a whole range of questions that will have to be raised as long as the huge power imbalance between Aboriginal cultures and the mainstream remains. We may get tired of these issues (aren’t we over appropriation yet? do we have to give them credit for this, when we did all the work? do we have to ask permission?), but if we do we have forgotten all the lessons that post-colonial theory has tried to teach about the ways in which colonial ideologies replicate themselves in the service of power. Interpretation can be a kind of respectful listening or it can be a kind of appropriation, and we always have to raise the issue that what we hope has been the first may in fact have been yet another example of power disguising itself as benevolence.

With this editorial, Margery Fee takes her leave as Associate Editor of Canadian Literature to devote herself to her work in the Dean of Art’s Office. Her work on the journal has been outstanding, and distinguished by its intellectual energy and courage especially in the area of First Nations writing. Her job as book reviews editor has been taken over by two worthy successors, Kevin McNeilly and Glenn Deer. Both have already introduced themselves to readers of Canadian Literature as editors of special issues.

fish head soup

mmmmmmm

this delicious longing
for you
is

a lick
of seaweed
stretched in the sun

this impoverished love for you
is

a kettle
of fish
boiling at sunrise

for you this coastal craving

is
an ocean
of oolichan
oiling the earth

this open l-l-l-l-lust for you

is
a mouthful
of salmon roe
playing on my tongue

Today the Lake (Again)

You move soundlessly slipping into your boots while everyone else continues to sleep through dawn's half light. And I whisper across the cold cabin floor. Then we are out on the water, mist rising like a dream over the bright lilies. And somewhere a loon, while behind us a breeze creaking through the trees like old bones. For now, the two of us in silence.

Unlike the night before, when we drank wine and called cards and marked points with a blunt pencil on a yellow pad. When I strummed an old tune about trains going on forever. And loss. When it moves up inside us, not like wine that leaves you light-headed and dry, but like spring water so clear you hardly notice you're drinking. What does good water taste like anyway?

And today I am so full from drinking that water longer than I ever thought possible. Like that morning when the fish were jumping around the boat, and we laughed in our frustration and said we should just dipnet them rather than try to catch them on a line. Because the hour has turned into days and the fish are still not biting, which has turned into weeks, and still no fish, turns into months, and still none, which turns into years and more years. And here I am still holding onto that thin filament, the dusty lure on my desk.

Telling Trauma

Generic Dissonance in the Production of *Stolen Life*¹

S*tolen Life* by Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson is the life story of a young Cree woman presently serving a life sentence for murder. The child of a Cree mother and a Norwegian American father, Yvonne was born with a severely cleft palate that was not repaired until she was in her teens. Recalling her early struggles with language and with the basic tasks of breathing and eating, Yvonne also remembers chronic and continuous abuse: from other children who despised her as “Indian,” and from babysitters and neighbours, acquaintances and strangers, who raped her. Her own grandfather, father, and brother are among her sexual abusers. Her childhood memories include strong family bonds and times in which she hid under the house, emerging only to eat when she had to. Her acceptance into the Red Pheasant Reserve in Saskatchewan as a young adult was significant for her sense of Native identity. Her relationship with a white house-painter in Wetaskiwin, and the birth of her three children, precede the brutal murder on which this text finally focuses. Yvonne was part of a drunk and violent group that turned on a casual acquaintance whom they had invited over because they suspected him of child abuse.

The story of life stolen and life stealing makes for painful reading; it disturbs—far more than is usual even with narratives of trauma—those blurred boundaries between personal response, social responsibility, and literary criticism. After several readings, many discussions, and attention to very thoughtful criticism,² I find my own disturbance begins with Yvonne’s appalling story (no child, ever, anywhere, should suffer as she describes herself suffering) but concludes with what I perceive as a generic dissonance in

the narration of her experience. Generic dissonance is surely a very small problem beside life-experience of trauma and abuse, but it is not insignificant at all for the reception of Yvonne's story or the uses to which it can be put. With serious respect for the courage and integrity of both narrators, I propose to unravel what I mean by generic dissonance and to explain its effect on this one sympathetic reader. While focussing exclusively on *Stolen Life* for this discussion, the issues I propose to raise concern collaborative autobiography in general and narratives of trauma in particular. I begin and end with questions about narrative as a maker of meaning and about the meanings that narrative can make.

First, in terms of category, this work has run several risks from conception to production. Three risks in particular can be described as the political results of a fairly straightforward reading derived from the information that is available in *Stolen Life* prior to any significant shaping: that is, the attraction of voyeurs, the provocation of the extreme right, and the provocation of the politically correct. (As I name these risks, I wonder whether any reader is entirely excluded.) If I am correct, and if Wiebe, Johnson, and Alfred A. Knopf have considered these particular risks, their choices for narrative and for production will have been critical and carefully deliberate. I am, therefore, puzzled to consider that the dissonance that troubles me may be neither careless nor accidental and must take care to acknowledge the benefits of this collaboration. I would like to pause on the risks as I see them and propose, in describing them, to introduce the genres involved in this work and their relationship with each other, which I see as problematic.

As a story of incest and abuse, *Stolen Life* enters a market that has been flooded with victim literature, which is a seriously problematic genre. On the one hand, societal and narrative opportunities are now available to people who have traditionally been mute or unheard both during and after appalling experiences of abuse. Courts are being sensitized, social workers and health professionals are being educated, and victims themselves are turning to what Suzette Henke has called "scriptotherapy," "writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (xii). To my mind, these are valuable achievements. Raised on "the canon," trained to appreciate quality, I have learned how hard it is for me to hear unfamiliar voices and am a latter-day convert to the importance of literature that serves more purposes than the aesthetic. On the other hand, more problematically, this sensitizing, education, and therapeutic production have led to what Louise Armstrong has referred to as "an incest industry" (qtd. in Tal 195), a

cheapening of the experience by virtue of its value as commodity. Michael Posner's recent article in the *Globe and Mail* is entitled "Chronic book syndrome" and repeats the point. He writes of "the Medical Misery Library (a subset of the much larger Victimology genre)," which describes "an increasing trend in publishing." "Pick a disease," he writes, "any disease." His mocking search for some work on the ingrown toenail dismisses all forms of scriptotherapy as self-indulgent and inane with scant attention for writing that is not opportunistic, for the political work that such writing does, or for the large readership that finds the humblest stories of survival against odds personally helpful. Nonetheless, the "incest industry," or the ingrown-toenail saga, does describe with some justice one reading constituency of which publications like *Stolen Life* need to beware.

One need only cast back to the infamous O. J. Simpson case or similar coverage in the popular media to realize that "the incest industry" has developed an audience of voyeurs. In the case of *Stolen Life*, a combination of circumstances invite such voyeurism, not only the violence, abuse, and murder, but also the position of this story among Native issues and the fact that Yvonne is the only Native woman in Canada currently serving a life sentence. Where the public's desire for personal narratives of chaos and distress may be served by the sort of "information" that makes popular headlines, neither scriptotherapy for the victim nor redress on a larger scale is served as efficiently as that public desire for more story. However serious the situation, and however valuable the decision for a woman in Yvonne's position to speak out, the risk remains that her story will be cheapened by public response. The question for her and for Wiebe had to be what kind of story?

Yvonne's story is so personal that even those closest to her, who knew or may well have surmised what was going on, could not or did not take responsibility for knowing. Further, as atomised, pre-narrative experiences, emerging only in nightmares, the constituents of Yvonne's story lacked language both because they go back so far in her life and because of the cleft palate that seriously impeded her speech. Significantly, Yvonne's experience of chronic and silent trauma only becomes a "story" with her implication in the violent murder for which she was brought to trial and convicted. Where murder requires attention both in itself and for the human experiences that have made it possible, trial provides a trope for narrative and its powers for explanation. From this point on, Yvonne seems to have become compulsive in her need to write and to talk, to retrieve her own history and to create a viable identity. Henke's term "scriptotherapy" is useful for Yvonne's urgent

and massive task of *re/collection*. It implies a healing activity dependent on language, a process rather than a product. It implies, too, all the repetitions that Wiebe notes in Yvonne's talking and writing, revisitations of moments that are not yet resolved. Scriptotherapy is profoundly personal, of and by and for the self, likely uncensored, certainly unshaped. Insofar as it seeks narrative meaning, it does so in far too fragmentary and voluminous a form to arrive. Eventually, perhaps, it stops.

In contrast, Rudy Wiebe is the listener, the one who becomes "you" when Yvonne's words need an audience. His task is to hear and receive Yvonne's scriptotherapy, a distinctive trauma in its own right. His ability to do so entails huge responsibility for good and for ill and in complex ways; Wiebe's failure to hear would effectively annihilate Yvonne's past while his ability to nurture her use of language will validate her story but must also affect the form of story that emerges.³ His attention to Yvonne convinces him that her chronic suffering needs to be known, that her conviction for murder is inappropriate, and that her strengths and gifts as a remarkable woman deserve recognition. In other words, he becomes her advocate, wrapping her scriptotherapy (and his own extensive research) into his testimony.⁴ Wiebe stands by Yvonne in her processes of scriptotherapy and then takes responsibility for the interpretive and public act of inserting her experience into history. His testimony is necessarily a political act involving choices and articulating positions. Always, it seems to me, the risk with testimony is that it overrides complexity because it has a case to make. Where Yvonne had called upon Wiebe to listen, so now Wiebe calls upon his reading public, and his task is to persuade us of the righteousness of his cause. He is first recipient and interpreter of Yvonne's story, and bears it out of the prison, beyond her own limited reach, to an audience whom he addresses with indignation on her behalf.

Collaboration enables the co-authors of *Stolen Life* to divide responsibility for genres in this text and my treatment of their two names denotes the basic distinctions between these two genres. Yvonne Johnson plays a double role; insofar as she is author of this text, involved in the complex decision-making about its final form and part of its promotion, she is (as is common in Humanist academic discourse) "Johnson." Insofar as she is the subject of a personal story, she is "Yvonne." Wiebe, on the other hand, plays essentially one role, enabling me to specify one site at which I feel the dissonance setting in.

Despite Yvonne's references to "Rudy," and her perception of him as a free-standing subject and friend, Wiebe is not a subject in this work. He

does, of course, position himself as invited by Yvonne to help her with this book. He does express his interest in working with a descendant of Big Bear. He does quite frequently express his concern to understand and his respect and sympathy for Yvonne as she struggles to speak. He does acknowledge the problematic nature of his role in relation to Yvonne in that he is both white and male. Nonetheless, these positioning moves are infrequent in the text. Wiebe is, for the most part, a silent witness, an investigator, journalist, novelist, but not a part of the narration, not a man with his own questions, concerns, and reactions. He claims no personal need to tell this story (beyond his interest in everything pertaining to Big Bear), nor any personal involvement in it. Wiebe's own relative absence as subject certainly defers to Yvonne's central role. However, it also removes from his testimony all sense of his role as mediator between Yvonne's trauma and the reader's reception of it. Even as this testimonial narrator engages so centrally with the meaning-making process, Rudy Wiebe the man seems to withdraw from personal presence or involvement. As the making of meaning is so extensively determined by the genres that attempt it, I need to pause at this point to consider the dynamics of testimony that may be in force in *Stolen Life*.

Ross Chambers has described "testimony" as complex, multi-faceted, and subversive in form, "hijacking" familiar genres, as he puts it, for unconventional uses.⁵ In this case, for instance, Wiebe may be described as hijacking the genres of novel, biography, history, and journalism in order to filter through all of them a story that is "obscene," or, literally, off the cultural stage, and to insist upon its being noticed. Insofar as genres determine meaning within culturally acceptable parameters, testimony witnesses experience beyond cultural acceptance; it insists upon representing the unrepresentable, and giving voice to the unheard. Significantly, therefore, testimony increases the range of genres that regulate cultural discourse, expanding the kind of information that can be received and attended to. (This possibility is worth bearing in mind as a possible rejoinder to my understanding of dissonance; I may, of course, be failing to appreciate generic development that works for other readers.)

For trauma on a major scale, testimony is a powerful political tool.⁶ Testimonial literature has emerged as a significant genre from South America. It has been important to narratives of war, of the Holocaust, and of the AIDS epidemic.⁷ Sometimes it overlaps with autobiography when the personal story serves a political purpose. However, and this point is another key to the dissonance I am identifying in *Stolen Life*, Wiebe's testimony is distinct

from autobiography in its separation from the primary subject position. In this case, for instance, Wiebe's testimony implicates him only as mediator between subject and reader. He is not by any means an autobiographical subject. Further, because I read his intervention as so largely determining of meaning, I hope to show that he produces not a subject, Yvonne, but a discursive assemblage through which Yvonne can be read and understood. Wiebe creates meaning from the traumatic experiences for which Yvonne's "scriptotherapy" can find only primary expression. Furthermore, because the man Rudy is not fully implicated and Wiebe the writer makes meaning, the genre that emerges most clearly in this work is that of the journalistic or documentary novel. And here is another part of my problem: in its many variations, the novel creates an emotional truth but does not claim an extra- or pre-linguistic truth-to-experience. It tends to be language at work for the literary, not language at political work in the world. (I recognise, of course, that these categories overlap but am nonetheless drawing some necessary distinctions.) And literature is where Wiebe and I both begin, but it is not at all where Yvonne's trauma begins or, indeed, her need for reclamation.

If I am understanding Chambers' distinctions accurately, I can also suggest that Wiebe conflates two distinct kinds of testimony in this work—the political, which requires action (as in the court of appeal), and the ethical, which defers action but requires moral engagement (as with reader response). Neither is best suited to or most commonly used for the primary expression of "scriptotherapy," which, in its effort to find vocabulary, circles and recircles potential meanings without conclusion. With or without Chambers' distinctions, testimony works to establish meaning in ways that are external to scriptotherapy, indeed, in ways in which scriptotherapy cannot, and offers closure on matters that scriptotherapy keeps open. Crucially, testimony that relies on the novel as its prime genre may find itself defeated by the raw materials of scriptotherapy and will accordingly create meanings that could be persuasive on their own but are challenged by a counter-text that seems to be pulling in another direction.

Stolen Life clearly moves between these two genres with uneven results: in terms of scriptotherapy, Yvonne produced many volumes of journals and talked into numerous tapes quite apart from her phone conversations and meetings with Wiebe, pouring out her narrative, repeatedly approaching and avoiding dangerous terrain. References to Yvonne's circular narration describe her psychological distress but also represent a distinctly non-European, non-linear approach to story-telling: "her awareness flowing

through time and endless people and places as unstructured as the questing mind flows,” Wiebe writes at one point (41). As so often, this novelistic observation is his, not hers, an interpretive commentary by an apparently omniscient narrator. In terms of testimony, Wiebe is clearly an advocate for a woman he comes to believe has been unjustly singled out for conviction for a murder in which a group was involved. Not just Wiebe’s role in the production of this book but, more specifically, his own narrative as Johnson’s collaborator ensure that *Stolen Life* is read as testimony. Where Yvonne may begin with the nightmares, the flashbacks, the suicide attempts, and the helplessness of chronic trauma requiring urgent therapy, Wiebe as primary recipient and respondent for her stories takes up her cause against her conviction for murder, against her brother Leon for rape, and against the systemic racism and sexism in which she has been trapped. However, familiar as he is with the role of testimony, Wiebe, too, is trapped in this instance. As a white man, Wiebe sees himself as part of the history that has oppressed Yvonne’s people and Yvonne herself. Telling her story, he is either implicated among the guilty or can choose to redress her ills by means of a testimony that is wholehearted and, therefore, uncritical. Wiebe has chosen the latter; an unwavering advocate for Yvonne, he serves the case for her “defence” without perhaps imagining the complexities of possible “prosecution” in the form of reader response.

Then again, we might conclude that scriptotherapy and testimony combine in *Stolen Life* in such a way as to serve the purposes of both genres. Certainly the victim, Yvonne, does not depend on Wiebe to fight her battles for her. She emerges from this text as a powerful woman who, at her most vulnerable moments, seems to have had impressive resources of her own. She is clearly what Australians would call “a battler.” For her, collaboration has proved to be a valuable tool that shifts narrative responsibility at crucial stages of the story. For example, insofar as this work is testimony, Johnson faces the serious difficulty, which she addresses in the text, of speaking against her own people.⁸ As Kalí Tal has observed, the earliest feminists to speak out on abuse were white and tended to erase distinctions of race and class in their analyses of women’s oppression. Comparatively, their indignation was single in focus and in directness of attack. If they had consulted the African-American testimonial literature, Tal suggests, they would have learned of the complex ramifications of accusation and “they might have realized that testimony signals the beginning of a long process of struggle towards change, rather than effecting the change by itself” (160). Like

African-American women, Johnson must remain silent or, in seeking change, must implicate her own people, already oppressed in other ways, in her accusations. Certainly, she herself and not Wiebe presses charges against her brother Leon, and she herself and not Wiebe also accuses her father and her grandfather of rape. However, because Wiebe is indeed the primary recipient of these stories of incest and abuse, he serves as a filter, as first interpreter, as advocate, in ways that free Johnson within the text at least into therapeutic rather than accusatory mode.

Tracing a fine line, then, between a personal story of lifelong abuse whose reception could well be “obscene” and a testimonial that implicates close family members (father, grandfather, and brother in this case) and therefore separates the narrator within her ethnic community, Johnson’s story finds an inspired middle path. She has turned to Wiebe as collaborator both for his professional skills and for his already proven advocacy on behalf of First Nations peoples with his prize-winning novel, *The Temptations of Big Bear*. Establishing herself as a descendant of the Cree Chief, Big Bear, and choosing as co-author the prize-winning writer who had constructed Big Bear as a romantic hero in the early days of the British move west in Canada, Johnson effectively aligns her own oppression with that of her people and dignifies the obscenity of her own experience by association with the experience of defeated nations whose spirituality was very closely tied to the land and to the natural world. To identify these effects is by no means to be cynical because many layers of narrative determine reception of this very powerful book. However, this alignment of distinct oppressions does ensure that Wiebe’s largely white and immigrant readership stands accused with him of the originary situations for Yvonne’s personal experience of chronic abuse.

Significantly, given this choice that Yvonne’s personal trauma should be aligned with the oppression of her people, Wiebe’s very involvement induces a particular kind of backlash—the second of the risks that this book has run from its inception. *Western Report* (July 20, 1998) ran a cover story titled “Dances with Wiebe.” Under a photograph of a smiling Wiebe flanked by Yvonne Johnson on one side and Big Bear on the other, the caption explains: “Big Bear’s biographer stokes the fires of white guilt by invoking the chief’s memory to defend a native murderer.” Seriously over-simplifying the politics of the Wiebe/Johnson collaboration and suggesting a (distinctly white) rapacity in Wiebe’s “mining” of Native issues, *Western Report* and its author, Davis Sheremata, nonetheless touch a nerve. Part of my own reservations about this book involve questioning the effect of Wiebe’s involvement on

Johnson's very painful story. Not least, is it possible that Wiebe's commitment to Johnson, based on her history of appalling and repeated abuse, her spiritual development, and her appeal to him for understanding, have led to denial of and apologia for her involvement in a particularly brutal murder? Sheremata's story, which dwells on the details of the murder, is unambiguous in deciding that Wiebe (like Norman Mailer in the case of Jack Henry Abbott, or William F. Buckley in the case of Edgar Smith) has been "conned," and that Yvonne Johnson has been appropriately imprisoned for murder. In practical terms, this pattern of denial and apologia is a moot point; Johnson is serving a life sentence and the process of this work has not granted her an appeal. In narrative terms, the effects are uncomfortably open to Sheremata's crude diatribe. What remains troubling is not, in fact, Yvonne's guilt or innocence in the case of Leonard Skwarok's murder. She herself tells of many occasions when reckless behaviour has driven her to violence. What remains disturbing are the evasive or slippery moments in the narrative when meaning does not flow clearly from scriptotherapy to testimony, when Wiebe's romance does not match the raw brutality of the experience, when meaning is most patently manipulated for public consumption. Notably, Knopf has controlled production in every detail so as to combine and control possibilities, overriding the ugliness of Yvonne's personal experience and endorsing Wiebe's creation of a hero to succeed Big Bear.

Production of this book indicates in every detail that Knopf has anticipated a problematic reception for *Stolen Life*.⁹ Knopf presents *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* with impressive flair and subtlety: Rudy Wiebe is the first author.¹⁰ Every detail of the cover design appeals to a particular kind of mass market, that of the educated white liberal who wants to take some responsibility for the injustices of stolen generations—Japanese, Chinese, or, in this case, First Nations. These are Rudy Wiebe's readers. This large volume joins his impressive list of publications all stamped with his moral indignation, social concern, and profound empathy in particular for First Nations peoples. However, Knopf's cover also complicates this presentation, listing Yvonne Johnson as co-author, the Cree woman of the subtitle, whose "journey" moves from her own "stolen" life, and the stolen lives of her generation and of the generations from which she descends, to the life that she herself stole and for which she is now serving a life sentence.

Johnson's involvement as co-author for her own story introduces the issues of abuse narrative that I have already noted as well as issues of ownership; this is, after all, Johnson's story, but she has entered some strange form

of collaboration in which she is not first author. The designers at Knopf have foregrounded such questions and framed reception of the text as “Native issues.” For example, the letters for “Stolen Life” appear as dramatic brush strokes, white against the rich reds, yellows, and purplish blue of a sky at sunset. Beneath these brushstrokes on the spine, but inserted through them on the front cover, the subtitle, like the authors’ names, is given in simple golden capitals shadowed in black for further dimension. At the bottom of the cover, beneath the text, a black landscape, gently rolling hills, is overlaid with four glossy brushstrokes or feathers that pick out the brilliant colours of the sky. Yellow, red, blue, and white, these are also the colours of the four directions (6), a point that is entirely clear on the paperback issue, where the brushstrokes appear on all four edges of the front cover. Where the gold lettering inscribes dignified and traditional western authority, suggesting a work of substance and value, the thick, white brush strokes for “Stolen Life” (the brief title, the quick reference), suggest activity and drama. This drama, furthermore, licks at the edges of a narrow picture of a little girl produced in glossy black and white. (On the spine, this picture is cropped to provide just her upper body.)

Here, at the centre, fragile and beleaguered, stands the “shattered subject” (see Henke). Knock-kneed, pigeon-toed, her arms crossed tightly across her chest (is she hugging a stuffed animal that merges with the white of her skirt?) she grins at the photographer (and therefore at the bookstore browser)—a tight grin explained in the text as deformed by a cleft-palate. This picture has been severely cropped to exclude the people with whom the child was standing. Holding herself tightly together, she stands alone. Her appeal is instantaneous and powerful. Distinct from the rich colours of the jacket and the fine gold lettering, her white skirt creating the visual centre for the white brushstrokes of “Stolen Life,” this child is the original waif that sold *Oliver Twist* and, more recently, *Angela’s Ashes*.

Yvonne’s story is appalling, and this picture is certainly worth the proverbial thousand words in terms of its immediate presentation of just how much was stolen and from how early an age. However, the work of this photograph is not over. On the back cover, behind text from this book and “Praise for Rudy Wiebe’s *A Discovery of Strangers*,” Big Bear in his blanket fills the page, mouth grimly closed, eyes narrowed in intense gaze into the distance. Here, in contrast to the rich colours and dramatic lettering of the front cover, regular black type overwrites the muted browns and creams of both photograph and jacket. Big Bear is not so much a declared as a haunting presence.

Even to those of us who might not recognize him, he is evidently “Indian,” culled from the archives, romanticized by distance.¹¹ This nineteenth-century Plains Cree Chief held out on his own against white ownership of the land that settled Native peoples on reserves. Returning after protracted trauma to the spirituality of her ancestors, Yvonne claims her lip as “the Bear’s Lip” (436) and accepts her Cree name “Muskeke Muskwa Iskewos,” or “Medicine Bear Woman” (435). Yvonne’s wholehearted adoption of her Native heritage enables her to reach for meaning out of chaos and enables Wiebe to identify her plight with that of the Cree people.

The colour photograph of the two authors on the inside back flap of the hard-cover version sets them against green open spaces and against the distinctive round roof and radiating poles of the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge for Native Women in Saskatchewan. Sent there from the notorious Kingston Penitentiary to complete her sentence, Johnson has returned to her spiritual homeland and to the healing traditions of her people. This photograph positions her accordingly. She and Wiebe together, windswept and gently smiling, present the resting place for this particular visual journey that begins with the waif on the front, refers to Big Bear on the back, one of Johnson’s stolen lives and one of Wiebe’s literary triumphs, and concludes here with the Wiebe and Johnson collaboration.

Every phase of the interior design of this work supports and develops the collaborative venture, which is, of course, complex. Yvonne Johnson’s dedication appears first, “To my children, whom I love endlessly; to all survivors and those who help them; and, with the greatest respect, to Rudy.” Johnson’s dedication moves forward in time, to her children, who should not relive the story of that front-cover waif, to her own survival from repeated trauma, and her recognition that her experience is not singular, and to the validation and healing provided by those who attend very carefully to the experience of trauma. (My own difficulty with the nature of Wiebe’s involvement in this work is distinctly nuanced by Yvonne’s appreciation of his collaboration.) With its layered emotional appeal, Johnson’s dedication is profoundly political. Wiebe’s subsequent dedication is “To the memory of Mistahi Muskwa (Big Bear), 1825-1888.” Wiebe’s dedication is apparently self-effacing except insofar as it implicitly claims his right to speak on behalf of a Cree woman (even preferring Big Bear’s Cree name). Both dedications implicate Wiebe quite centrally, as immersed in Cree culture, inspired by Big Bear, whose story has also brought him fame and royalties, and as a powerful channel for Johnson’s story.

Three introductory epigraphs, from Elly Danica, Albert Camus, and Peter Fallon, all engage with trauma and its imperatives for hearing and healing. The table of contents, centred on the page, both margins unjustified, consists of chapter titles that are catchy (“Growing Up in a Beer Bottle . . .”) and, followed by ellipses, incomplete: “Down into Disaster . . .” or “What You Did, and Where You Did It . . .,” which addresses Yvonne as involved in murder and speaks for Wiebe as part of an investigative team that begins with the police and the courts. In the body of the text, these same chapter titles, painted in brushstrokes like the short title on cover and title page, are followed in each instance by epigraphs that belong within this text. Most are extracts from Yvonne’s journals. Several are excerpts from court proceedings. One, near the end, is a quotation from Carl Jung, a significant influence on Yvonne’s healing process. Again, as with all other aspects of the production of this book, these pages dedicated to chapter headings and extracts speak both of capacious volume and of plural voices.

At every stage, the plural voices are unmistakable. Wiebe’s prefatory note positions Yvonne’s truths within the context of other people’s stories and data he has collected “from court, police, government, school, and newspaper records in both Canada and the United States.” Yvonne’s own notebooks, audiotapes, letters, statements, comments on other documents, and conversations in person and by phone contribute several layers of her story over several years in which she circled and recircled specific memories. Wiebe’s preface also positions Johnson as vivid in narration, uneducated, enriched by reading in prison, and developing her own talents through this extended process of narration. Finally, “the spelling, punctuation, and grammar in Yvonne’s letters and notebooks have been standardized.” (This honest admission of one aspect of Wiebe’s involvement signals an early warning of appropriation and distortion. Heather Hodgson, too, is troubled by this sentence: “[t]hat word’s implicit indifference to a difference of voice, even from such a compassionate figure as Wiebe, made me shudder.” “Can’t a major figure of Canadian literature offer a gift without taking?” she asks at another point in her review.) Acknowledging all sources for a richly plural narrative and the research that Wiebe himself has undertaken, this prefatory note describes Johnson as articulate and prolific, but requiring editorial work in order to go public. As her own preface, Johnson follows Wiebe’s prefatory note with a short prayer to the Creator for help in making amends and in sharing pain in order for other people to understand themselves. Yvonne’s attention to her primary experience and need for healing establishes

her role as subject of *Stolen Life*, just as Wiebe's (paternalistic) preparation of her experience for public reception establishes his role as advocate.

Given these features of the production of *Stolen Life*, I read this work as Yvonne's personal narrative (journals, letters, tapes, conversations) organized by Wiebe's capabilities as an interviewer, his extensive research, and his ability (and likely very hard work) to distil voluminous materials into a coherent narrative. Wiebe writes in his prefatory note that the "selection, compiling, and arrangement of events and details . . . were done in a manner the two authors believed to be honest and accurate." In terms of arrangement, their first meeting in the text takes place at the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, and not, as in reality, at the Kingston Penitentiary, thus highlighting in the text the distance that Yvonne has travelled on her "journey," her primary claim to Native rather than criminal identity, and Wiebe's respect for that Native identity, his interest in meeting her on her own ground. We are asked to acknowledge two levels of interaction between them: one for information and the other for interpretation. In both cases, Wiebe has been concerned to retain a sense of conversations in process with his attention to the circularity of Johnson's storytelling and the significant nuances of her oral presentation. Repeatedly, I must acknowledge the generosity of Wiebe's attention to Yvonne, the person, but also regret his tendency (increasing through the text) to sublimate these processes that he describes at this early stage. I am concerned that the novelist takes over from the collaborator and becomes a ventriloquist for Yvonne.

The nature of Wiebe's narration is problematic on two particular counts that transform his strengths as a novelist into a liability: first, because he frames his own processes of investigation and discovery in terms of Native understanding of landscape and journey; second, a further result of his downplaying of his role as mediator, he creates a deceptive (novelistic) sense of inevitability at key points of the story. Wiebe's relative absence from the text conceals his personal preferences as "natural" readings of Yvonne's story. His uncritical reception creates gaps in comprehension for the reader who cannot lose sight of the narrative as grounded in specific experience and is accordingly startled by disjunctions between narrative and the "reality" so far. Central to my own discomfort with this text, therefore, is an identifiable disjunction between experience and narration by virtue of pre-determined meaning. Although Johnson, Wiebe, and Knopf of Canada may all have agreed on one single and forceful meaning—that Yvonne's long history of abuse, with its apparently natural result of crime and imprisonment,

mirrors the history and present situation of her people—this meaning does not adequately describe or account for the experiences of the scriptotherapist. This meaning is, perhaps, too tidy for the mess of trauma on which it is based, with the result that each part of this collaborative team undermines the other, creating not corroboration but two “unreliable” narrators.

Wiebe positions himself from the beginning of this text as so immersed in Cree culture as to have no critical distance, no position separate from Cree culture from which the Mennonite writer, Rudy Wiebe, may come into the situation. For me, this immersion rings alarm bells for the third risk I identify this work as running—that of provoking the politically correct reading that excoriates Wiebe for appropriation of a Native woman’s voice and story. Again, as reader, I find myself with mixed sympathies, identifying with Wiebe even while I deplore the possibility that he has, indeed, subsumed the Native voice into his own. For example, Wiebe renders his understanding of the landscape on his opening journey to the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge for Women in Saskatchewan in terms of Cree culture: “At the road crossing,” he writes, “where I feel the pavement end, I stop, turn right, and drive south—the Cree direction of the Law of Order, which is the natural order of Creation, the order of how things will happen. I need that today: order” (3). On the one hand, Wiebe’s entry into specifically Cree territory, following the extensive research that he must have undertaken for *The Temptations of Big Bear* and the extensive research and personal commitment involved in Yvonne’s story, surely give him some claim to use Cree cultural terms. On the other hand, he is either naturalizing these terms, as if his largely white readership surely knew that south was the direction for order, or he is romanticizing them, introducing a Native element that makes sense of and therefore justifies the world of the initiated. He introduces the Cree name for these hills, “pa-ha-toonga” (4), and returns to the Cree points of the compass to describe the setting of the Lodge: “The level land disappears everywhere into horizonless silver under the blue, brightening sun, disappears everywhere north, which is the direction of the Bear and Honesty and the Law of Harmony that subsumes within itself all four of the sacred laws—the control, order, balance, and harmony within Creation” (6). While Wiebe as mediator for Yvonne’s story may be demonstrating receptivity to her world, he is also luring his reader into a novelistic world order in which he forfeits his own distinctive subject position and therefore the possibility of his own critical stance to lived experience.

Nowhere does this lack of critical distance, or this tendency to naturalize or romanticize, come more forcefully into play than during the extended and

problematic scenario and description of Leonard Skwarok's murder. Because Wiebe writes as Yvonne's advocate, because Yvonne has taken a long time to come to this part of her story, and because the events themselves are so ugly and confused, the meaning that is made in this section is fraught with difficulties. For a start, the situation is made to seem inevitable, a word that recurs like a refrain; with hindsight, every event in that day becomes significant. Wiebe may claim to have worked with Yvonne's stories and with trial and appeal records (239), but the novelist takes over from the reporter: "Outside, the gentleness of a September day, trees gold and shedding, Yvonne could see children jumping in the leaves in the park across the street; her littlest ones were there and her heart gave a jolt, and suddenly she ran, she had to for ever be on watch for them every minute, every second, like a deer or caribou mother" (240). The explicit naturalizing of Yvonne's maternal vigilance in a form that would be bizarre if not offensive to a white woman, cannot cover the gaps in which this same mother seems to leave her children in order to run errands, to collect beer, or to become helplessly drunk. Apparently unable to account for discrepancies in this mother's behaviour, or demonstrate that she was indeed a loving and careful mother whenever she could be, Wiebe as apparently uncritical advocate reasserts the harmonies of the natural world in order to rarify this troubled woman at one of the most troubled points in her story.

As a further instance of such discrepancy between messy experience and deliberate narrative meaning, the night of the murder continues with another momentary focus on the children. When the eldest girl emerges, disturbed by a five-person punch-up slamming into walls and furniture just outside her room and then down the basement stairs, she is told to go back and watch her brother and sister. Wiebe as narrator continues:

There may be heavy thuds and shouts and crashes in the basement, but that small room with most of its floor covered by mattresses for sleep or play must hold only quiet breath. The block letters of the alphabets they pasted to the wall begin just above the middle mattress, Chantal's, and rise like a mountain to the brightness of the T lit by the streetlight shining through the frilly curtains, and turn the corner of the room on U to Z by the window. Straight across, the ABCs begin again, slant down until M disappears into the closet doors folded open. The three children asleep. (257)

Somewhere behind the caribou mother and the tender homemaker with all her children safely asleep is the terrible mess of a night in which Yvonne participates in a violent murder, heads out into the night to collect beer, is raped by the man who spots her as an easy target and later informs on her, wishes to kill herself, and somehow gets her daughter off to school, from

which the daughter has to be collected when her parents are arrested. Wiebe's meaning does not take all of these pieces into account; it presents but fails to acknowledge the information it sets out to shape. It is not accountable either to events or to Yvonne's explicit recognition of the task in hand. "You see," she writes, "I've spent the last thirty years running . . . but due to imprisonment I was forced to stop running, and that's so hard" (5). The facts presented in this text, the raw experience on which this work depends, require a facing of the trauma both received and inflicted if meaning and information are to coincide in a satisfactory manner.

For me, concern for the children recurs throughout this long chapter. (How *could* they be forgotten?) One justification, perhaps, for Wiebe's naturalising and romanticising of Yvonne as mother is my own unfortunate but deeply cultural tendency to be more critical of a delinquent mother than of a murderer, more prone to respond emotionally than rationally. Nonetheless, and taking such tendencies into account, I am still responding as a reader to a text when I say this part of the narrative is spongy and infirm. The alphabet drawn like a magic circle around the mattresses on the floor and the frilly curtains at the window become as false as the quiet breath of sleeping innocence. The advocate is justifying extraordinary violence on the grounds that this caribou mother is holding a supposed child molester at bay. Then, lacking the critical distance that could keep the telling honest, the advocate turns novelist, amalgamating information he may well have gleaned from other points in his exchanges with Yvonne with information about the night of the murder to create a scenario that aims to account for but, in the process, avoids the lived experience of that night.

One strange question remains: is it possible that a text created by two writers, including the life-story of one and the research story of the other, not to mention court records, newspaper articles, and numerous interviews with other people, should ultimately be monologic in effect? If the discrepancies I have been noting represent, as I suspect, the soft ice of interpretation rather than strategically juxtaposed alternative meanings, then Wiebe as meaning-maker has assumed a protective control over the darkest aspects of Yvonne's narrative. For Wiebe as a writer, and for Wiebe as advocate for Canada's First Nations, this control over narrative is retrograde. In *The Temptations of Big Bear*, for example, Penny Van Toorn sees Wiebe as releasing "archival documents into new interpretive contexts in the open-ended present, where they may enter into dialogue with a diversity of readers" (113). Despite what Van Toorn calls Wiebe's tendency to arrest polyphonies

with his monologic, Mennonite voice, she suggests that Wiebe “dialogizes the historical records—releases these suppressed voicings—by bringing the documents into the zone of contact with the unfinished, open-ended present, where their meaning remains open to negotiation” (Van Toorn 114). *Stolen Life*, on the other hand, reaches the relatively single conclusion that justice has miscarried in the case of a chronically abused young woman, who is a good wife and mother and a deeply spiritual person.

By way of tentative conclusion, I suggest that no collaborative venture can afford such definite closure, far less a single conclusion. In this case, the uninvolved and therefore invisible writer of testimony encloses the script-therapist, trapping her subject position in an ideal configuration that exonerates her from personal responsibility, that ultimate validation of the viable subject. I am reminded of Lee Maracle’s “Prologue” to *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*: “There are two voices in the pages of this book, mine and Donald Barnett’s. As-told-tos between whites and Natives rarely work, when they do, it’s wonderful, when they don’t it’s a disaster for the Native. Don never intended it to be a disaster for me” (19). I have been reading *Stolen Life* with every respect for Rudy Wiebe’s intentions, and with no ability to separate myself from them, but with mounting concern for the dissonance, if not disaster, that results. Where John Beverly, writing on specifically South American *testimonio*, describes “[t]he powerful textual affirmation of the speaking subject” (96) and “a challenge and an alternative to the patriarchal and elitist function the author plays in class and sexually and racially divided societies” (97), Wiebe has used his gifts as a novelist to intervene between the speaking subject and her audience in a protective ploy that invites me to hear with his ears and see with his eyes. One result is a powerful book that is selling well and that must, to a very significant degree, bring comfort to Yvonne Johnson. Another less fortunate result is a shortfall between this collaboration and what Gilmore or Chambers might call a limit-case narrative, an exploration of trauma that pushes the boundaries for modes of telling and enables me to read and to understand in new ways.

NOTES

- 1 This paper has developed out of a Peter Wall Foundation project, “Narratives of Disease, Disability and Trauma,” in the course of which I have worked extensively with Angela Henderson in Nursing at the University of British Columbia. Her work on women’s experience of trauma and abuse has been important to my reading, and discussions with her have affected my thinking.

- 2 Gabriele Helms raised important questions. Marilyn Iwama has been generous with her guidance and critical questioning. An anonymous reader for *Canadian Literature* also challenged me to think through my categories with more care than I had originally shown. I am also grateful for the careful work of Michael LaPointe as research assistant and for Kieran Egan's help with web-based information.
- 3 I am drawing on the work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub for this brief discussion of witnessing and testimony. Much of their discussion treats of the subject as bearing witness to his or her own experience of the Holocaust, and bearing witness, as well, to the process of bearing witness. For discussion of *Stolen Life*, I am therefore reading "witness" in one part of its potential only. Although Yvonne's purpose includes witness, she depends on Wiebe to bear that witness. Because *Stolen Life* is a collaborative work, and because Yvonne remains in prison while Wiebe travels with the story and reads to a large public, I see him as the witness to her story.
- 4 The legal connotations for much of the language I find myself using in this discussion of narrative are quite striking: Wiebe works with Yvonne's "evidence" to arrive at (his own) "conviction" and bear "witness" to her experience. The implications of this discursive overlap are important beyond this one story that involves murder, trial, and conviction, in that they bear also upon the very role of storytelling as meaning-maker.
- 5 Comparative Literature Seminar at the University of British Columbia, Winter 1999.
- 6 Critical indignation at the presumably "false" testimony of Benjamin Wilkomirski and Rigoberta Menchu indicates how seriously readers connect such writing to appalling circumstances that need to be remedied and how seriously they feel betrayed by any suggestion of fraud. Menchu has disavowed portions of her autobiography as the work of the French anthropologist who recorded them. See also David Stoll. The assault on Wilkomirski's work has also been expressed through popular media. In both cases, discussion of the relations between fact and fiction in autobiography plays out with particular ferocity when doubt is cast on testimony. Testimony, therefore, is not primarily a literary genre, or does not enjoy the literary privilege of separation between language and experience. Rather, testimony is language at work in the world. See, in particular, John Beverly, who distinguishes the political from the literary and identifies the political risks involved in literary reception.
- 7 A web search for "testimonio" produced 46,000 entries, nearly all South American, and nearly all individual. See also, the extensive AIDS literature, which frequently depends on the personal story for political manifesto. Holocaust literature consists very largely of the personal story that serves the urgent purpose of cultural memory.
- 8 Yvonne's urgent and painful accusations against her own family members run counter to the other strong impulse she expresses in this collaboration. In her first letter to Wiebe, Yvonne seems powerfully impressed by his understanding of Native issues as evinced in *The Temptations of Big Bear*: "How is it you came to know as much as you do?" she writes. "Were you led? What was the force behind you? Who are you? Why did you choose Big Bear to write about?" (9). She then expresses interest in clearing Big Bear's name, recovering his medicine bundle, and reclaiming both the family and the place that have been scattered.
- 9 In fact, a tribute to this whole production, *Stolen Life* received wide and favourable coverage when it appeared in 1998. See, for example, *The Globe and Mail*, Saturday, 27 June; 1998, *Maclean's*, 13 July, 1998, and *The Vancouver Sun*, Tuesday, 19 January, 1999. Although Heather Hodgson's review in *Canadian Literature* is on the whole sympathetic and favourable, she does take issue with the nature of Wiebe's intervention.

- 10 According to conventions in the Humanities, alphabetical listing indicates equal partnership. Reversal or scrambling of alphabetical listing, therefore, indicates superior responsibility for the first name. In the case of *Stolen Life*, Wiebe and Johnson, in that order, marks Wiebe's contribution as superior to that of Johnson. It is possible that Johnson herself chose this order. It is also possible that the publisher and its legal representatives require the responsibility to rest with a recognized authority. Julie Cruikshank, for example, is the primary author of *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders*. However, despite the "Cruikshank" on the spine, the title page in that case allows no pause between Cruikshank's name and the phrase "in collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned." In that case, too, the University of Nebraska Press has placed photographs of the three Native elders to face the title page. Ownership of publication is clearly fraught with complications. Copyright for *Stolen Life* belongs, as is traditional, to the press and not to either author.
- 11 As I have noted, Yvonne Johnson reached out to Rudy Wiebe for help with her story because she respected his work in *The Temptations of Big Bear*. See *Stolen Life* 9-11 for Wiebe's outline of the Big Bear narrative. *The Temptations of Big Bear* won the Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1973. So many works of fiction and life-writing were published on Native themes in 1973 that this year has been called the year of the Indian. See, in particular, the very influential *Halfbreed* by Maria Campbell. *Stolen Life*, published in 1998, is part, therefore, of a quarter-century tradition of life-writing, much of it collaborative, often coercively so, in which Native peoples have written themselves into Canadian history and agitated for political change. Rudy Wiebe has also co-authored the film script for *The Temptations of Big Bear* with Gil Cardinal. The film, starring Gordon Tootoosis, Tantoo Cardinal, Lorne Cardinal, Michael Greeyes, Kennetch Charlette, Patrick Bird, Gail Maurice, Dianne DeBassige, and Simon Baker, and directed by Gil Cardinal, was shown on CBC TV, 3 and 4 January, 1999.

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Excavating the Will

The bold young pimple faced
archaeologist
meticulous-ly excavates

my grandmother's mason jars
of boiled moosemeat
he cracks it open
to see what's inside

he finds my grandfather's
beaver traps hanging in the pine
pimpleface decides this is evidence
that Indians lived off the land
and he takes them

he finds my mother's
white worn suitcase
he pries it open with a Mastercraft
screwdriver
and pokes around inside

proving they [Indians] were nomads

My mother hates that when you go through her stuff

behind him

he leaves the sage and the sweetgrass

standing in the wind

Laugh in an Indian Way

James saw my father eating an orange one time
and said, "Hey Gordie, if you give me the orange peels,
I'll stick up for you all week."
And they both laughed in an Indian way.

Kids would return on Sunday afternoons and the lucky ones
would bring fruit that their parents had given them.
One girl would always slurp and hum to a circle of girls
while she ate every piece by herself.

The younger ones would make an offering
to the older girls and ask, "Will you stand for me?"
If the older one accepted, none of the others
would pick on the gift bearer for a while.

Not everyone was so lucky
to get fruit or have parents.
James was lucky enough and so was my father.
My mother never got fruit except once.

There are pouches of time where
the blood of our ancestors
will boil to the surface and pierce the shells
that were created in that school.

Those ancestors boiled and churned the blood
of one girl enough to notice my mother's empty hands.
Suddenly my mother's arms were full,
and she did not know what to do.

Her shell made her ask Sister if it was okay
to share her bundle with the other kids, but it was
her own frothing blood that gave her the idea,
and which also made her laugh as she told me all this,

Laugh in an Indian way.

Autobiographical Writing as a Healing Process

Interview with Alice Masak French

Introduction

Alice Masak French is an Inuk woman from the Western Arctic region. She was born in 1930 on Baillie Island. At the age of six, her mother died and she was sent to live at an Anglican boarding school in Aklavik. She remained there—with only sporadic visits with her family—until she was fourteen. The first volume of her autobiography, *My Name is Masak* (1977), covers these first fourteen years of her life, recording the stark differences between the warm protection of her close-knit family and the cold institutional life at the boarding school. The final scene of the book describes her joyous feelings when her father arrives to pick her up from the boarding school and take her home permanently. Her second volume, *The Restless Nomad* (1991), continues where *My Name is Masak* leaves off. It encompasses the experience of returning to her family, re-learning and learning skills expected of a young Inuk woman, years of travelling around the Western Arctic region as they followed seasonal food sources, her first marriage, the birth of her children, the meeting of her second husband, Dominick French, and their travels with the RCMP throughout various small towns in Northern Ontario and Manitoba. *The Restless Nomad* finishes as Dominick and Alice are about to leave for Ireland to take over Dominick's family farm. After living in Ireland for several years, Alice and Dominick returned to Canada and have recently settled in Medicine Hat, Alberta. This interview was conducted at Alice's home in Medicine Hat on 13 January 1999.

The two volumes of Alice's autobiography document the changes and transitions that took place in the Western Arctic from the 1930s to the late 1980s. Alice describes the various ways in which she and her family were

affected by the introduction of Christian boarding schools, government programs and policies, declining sources of food, and changing social values. Alice's stories of growing up in a period of cultural upheaval are poignant, poetic and often humorous as she grapples with new and frightening experiences such as adapting to the rigid rules of boarding school, learning to drive a dog-team or riding a public transit bus in Vancouver for the first time. Both *My Name is Masak* and *The Restless Nomad* have been valued as historical and cultural records by her family, her community, and by schools in Northern Manitoba which have often placed them on their curricula. But these books are not just mere historical artefacts. They also have significant literary merit as a result of the complex development of personal and community stories side by side and on top of one another, so that Alice's personal narrative cannot be understood outside the context of her community's experiences and traditions. In this interview, Alice explores the ways in which writing her autobiography has helped her to overcome the legacy of anger and frustration left by her years in boarding school. She discusses the reasons for initially starting to write and describes the journey that led to the publication of her books.

Interview

cw Maybe you can tell me how you got the idea to start writing your life story. You said that your children were coming home from school and asking you questions?

AMF They were. They'd come home and they'd say, "Is it true that you lived in an igloo all year round?" or "Is it true that this was your diet all year round?" They thought Mommy lived in an igloo all her life, and I hadn't. I've lived in igloos but not as much as I've lived in houses. The houses are only 15x26. Men built them from logs coming down the Mackenzie River during spring break-up. They'd haul all this driftwood coming down the Mackenzie and they'd build the houses. They were lovely colours, lovely silvery-grey colours. And they'd caulk them with mud and moss in the cracks and put windows in—probably just two windows—and a sod roof.

There were a lot of questions about Eskimo children playing, what did they play at? What games did we play and how did we amuse ourselves and that sort of thing. My children would come home and ask, "Mom, did you have swings or slides?" We played games, just hand games, played juggling with stones and little hand games. It's kind of hard to describe them. And as they grew older, they'd ask about wife-swapping and that sort of thing.

They'd pick it up I don't know where, but they'd come home and say "I heard that there was a lot of wife-swapping among the Eskimo." I'd try and think back and when I was growing up, maybe it did happen, I don't know. But when I was growing up, it wasn't in our particular area. In fact, if it was, maybe there was one or two, like any other place, there were one or two women that had different boyfriends, but that wasn't condoned among the elders.

So, it was those kind of questions they'd come home with. What did we eat, did we eat all our meat raw? And I suppose before the white men came with all their metal things, maybe they did. But I don't think so. I think what they did was just heat up stones and throw them into a sealskin bag of water or some container and heat up the water and semi-boil things. And did we eat whales all year around? Well, we didn't because we only went whaling in the summer and had enough to do until the spring when all the birds came north to nest. So we had a lot of fresh birds. In the falltime, then we went fishing. We got all our fish for the winter and stored that. Froze it in underground icehouses. We had big underground ice houses in the permafrost, so you could put a lot of caribou in there. You could fit maybe 15 or 20 caribou in there and fish and ducks and geese and berries. In the summertime we went berry picking. So, it was kind of nice to be able to tell them about that sort of thing. I'd tell them snippets about what it was like. We lived in tents in the summer, and houses in the winter, either snow houses or log houses. And whole families lived in a house. We had three generations in our house. But I was just thinking, gosh, what a difference between my grandchildren's and my upbringing. It really makes you think. So, I thought I'll write these pages. I thought it was just going to be a little wee thing and my first book was a little wee thing. In it, I tried to tell the kids what it was like when you are from an intimate family group to suddenly be thrown into a boarding school situation. It's really frightening. You've never seen so many kids in your life. Suddenly you are being told what you can and can't do. They told us when to get up, when to go to bed, when to eat, all those kind of things. You are suddenly—it's not quite a non-person person—but you are no longer a part of a family. You are part of a group and it's very hard on children. I wanted them to know what boarding school meant for a lot of kids. When I first went to boarding school, there were just families that had no mother or families that thought that maybe it would be advantageous for them to have an English-speaking person in the family that put their children in boarding school. But after awhile, it became so that everybody went, the churches collected children and brought them to school, that kind of thing.

It kind of disrupted family life for years, for a couple of generations. When I think of it, sometimes it makes me sad because it really disrupted a people I knew who were really self-sufficient and looked after each other. They were outgoing and happy people, suddenly becoming people who didn't know what to do, their way of life was suddenly disrupted. They were building the DEW-line (Distant Early Warning Line) at the time, and a lot of the men went out to work and left their families at home. They were earning money, but the family life suddenly became unhinged, they lost a closeness there. It got so that instead of my people going out to different camps, because you need to keep moving to find the different food, follow the food chain, they suddenly had to stay in one place. And that was a really disruptive part of their lives because they didn't know how to do that. They were pulled in two directions. When I look back, I don't look back too often, it's kind of painful and sort of hard.

They went through like that from the late 50s to the 90s, there was that thirty years where they were neither geared for a good job and they weren't really geared any more to go out to hunt and fish because they had lost something in between because they weren't doing it on a regular basis. They got used to this town life. They weren't used to it, but they had to do it because the kids were going to school and they didn't know any other kind of life anymore, which is sad.

But, we are starting to see the benefits now, of the kids that have been in school for most of their lives and their parents have stayed put and made sure that they have gone to school. A few are going to universities and coming out as teachers, and lawyers, and doctors which is really, really promising. For a while there, there were really a lot of problems. There was a lot of drinking, like any other society that suddenly has no direction. There was a lot of alcohol and drug abuse, but I think we're on the upturn, thank-goodness! It's been a long time coming. Well, probably not, it's probably taken as long as any other society to turn around.

CW How have you dealt with the transition in your own life?

AMF Well, I guess I've had problems. Not great big problems, but little problems like adjusting to life down south. When I came down, there were a lot of things I didn't know. I didn't know how to walk down the streets and go across streets. I didn't know what stoplights were, crosswalks I didn't know. I used to think how clever the people were, they knew exactly when to go across. And it was many months before I learned that there were lights! And the food I found strange. Like grocery shopping—in the north you have the Bay. You go there and you get biscuits, and lard, and flour, and sugar, and

tea and some canned bacon and some canned fruit and canned tomatoes and that's it. Your meat comes from the land. But down south, boy, they had everything! All prepared for you! And I'm not used to vegetables. I still don't eat much of vegetables, because I didn't grow up with them. We had apples and oranges, but that's about it.

Another difference was living in an apartment where there were all kinds of other people living in the building, families living in the same building and yet not knowing one another. At home, you go out of the house and you see people and you know them. And you walk and you see them everyday and you talk to them and you smile and say hi. But in Ottawa, you say hi to somebody, and they just kind of look at you and keep walking. Or you smile at them—no response. And after a while, you don't smile or say hi anymore, but it takes you a little while, because you just can't think that people don't say hi or smile. There were a few, but not many who did. Also, living in an apartment, you had houses in between, you couldn't see the hills. You couldn't see the rivers or the bush, and I kind of missed those.

CW How have you shared your culture with your children?

AMF The Inuit way of life? It's kind of been sporadic. It's hard to teach your children the Inuit way of life in the south. We'd teach them how to make cooking fires and how to set up camps and Dominick is good at snaring, so they'd snare rabbits.

Before I go on I just want to say another thing. You know, when we went to Ottawa, it was in the 60s and there was this great threat of this atomic thing. Oh, I used to think, why am I down here, what happens if the whole world blows up. They were talking about shelters and we didn't have a shelter, what do we do? How do we live in the city? We can't go in the bush and we can't go out and find food. What do we do if the whole world blows up and there's no store next door, how do we eat? And that used to worry me. I used to get really quite anxious for all of us. So when we moved from Ottawa to Deep River and we could go out into the bush to camp, I used to encourage the kids to learn from Dominick how to snare rabbits, to go fishing, to hunt. He'd teach them how to use a .22 and they'd go out and shoot partridges and birds. And I'd teach them how to cook them over fires so that they didn't need pots and pans. So, I knew that if anything happened, if the whole world blew up, we could go into the bush and we could survive. In the city, there was no place to run. So, we taught them to survive in the woods and as they grew up, they took their own children out to teach them these things. So, that's good.

They are just starting to get interested in their Inuit part of them. It's taken them a long time. Now they are starting to think about who they are and where they've come from. So, writing the book at the time didn't do much for them, because life was too full and too happy for them. But as they are getting older, they are getting more interested in their family in the north. The children are becoming more aware of their Inuit ancestry and what their Inuit ancestors were like when I was young and what life was like for me. That part I share. I've tried to teach them a few words except that it takes me a long time because I have to get it back. When I go back home, I can understand when people talk to me but because I've been speaking English all this time, I can't wrap my tongue around some of the words and they come out stiff and funny. And sometimes, with words that are very close together, unless you pronounce them right, they mean the opposite. So, it's very interesting and funny and sometimes very sad and frustrating.

CW What is the language called?

AMF Our language is called the Inuvialuit language. The Eastern Arctic is Inuktitun, so there's a few sets of language. But then there's a lot of little dialects in between, such as Siglit, Ummarmiut, and Kangiryournuit dialects. Any little settlement has its own dialect so it's very hard to say that everybody has the same language, because they don't. The Western Arctic is Inuvialuit. Inuktitun means "the language of the people" and Inuit means "the true people."

CW Are there many language speakers left?

AMF Yes, there are quite a lot. Especially in the Eastern Arctic. They have kept their language alive through all these years. I don't know how they did it, but they've kept it alive much more than we have in the Western Arctic. We have lost a lot. But we've got a lot of good Inuvialuit teachers coming into the schools to teach the language which is good. But, somehow, we just didn't keep our language like the Eastern Arctic has.

CW I noticed in your books that you don't use any Inuvialuit language at all, whereas other authors use language and then translate it or use glossaries. Is there a reason why you did not put your language into the books?

AMF Well, I stuck to English mainly because it was easier for me to keep it flowing. If I used Inuvialuit terms, I would have to stop and explain all the time and so it would get disjointed. And the other reason was that my children didn't know their language and they would have to forever come to me and say, "What does this mean?" or "Does this really explain what that is?" So it was mainly easier for my own work to use English. I tried in one chapter to

use Inuvait terms, but I got so muddled because I'd have to explain what it was and then try to get back my train of thought when I was there and to get back to it. So, that's the reason.

cw I noticed in your first book especially that you do a lot of naming. Was that a deliberate thing to do?

AMF Yes, it was. I needed to get the names down so that the kids would know who their grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins were. And for them to see that we lived in a very close community, family community that was close-knit unlike what it is now. Parents and then their children and the children grow up and go away and just the parents are left and the children have their own home. When I was growing up, there was my grandparents, my parents, my aunts and uncles and we all lived in the same house and would always live together during the winter; this was the way Inuit people had done it for thousands of years in the wintertime. So, they needed to know that. That was why I put names down so that they would know who their grandparents were.

cw Going back to why you wrote the book, you also mentioned that it was sort of a healing process. (AMF Yes, it was.) How was it a healing process?

AMF I think it got a lot of anger out of the way in my life. When I started writing, and I went through my boarding school years, I was still so angry and so frustrated that each chapter and each step I took was hard. When I'd start a chapter, I'd have to go through a real anger period and then through a softening and then a healing. When you think of some bad memory and you get so angry—like taking walks [at boarding school] for instance. Like I said, I'm not an outdoorsy type of person and I hated those walks. Oh, I hated them. I used to get so cold! So, I'd run back to the school and therefore get into trouble because I was supposed to be on the walk, which to me made no sense.

And so you kind of shove everything down, and when you start bringing memories up, it is like opening up a really bad something, it's like opening a bag of things that have gone rotten and dirty and horrid because you've shoved it down so long, and now you are opening it up. And you can only do it in snatches, so it takes you a long time.

It's like opening this bag that you tied up and you keep piling things on top of because you don't want it to burst and open. It brings out all the anger for all the unfair things that happened when you were young, that you didn't think were right that happened to you. As you write, everything that you've kept down and held down for so many years comes out and you have so many problems because of it, mainly because you weren't able to and

weren't willing to deal with them. But, now you suddenly have to deal with them, because you are writing this book. And that's where the healing comes in. You let it out, you cry about it, you get mad about it, you get angry, frustrated, and then you look at it in pieces until it all comes out.

Sometimes there is someone to blame and sometimes there isn't. You get an understanding. So, that's why it was a healing process, especially when I wrote my second book. That really was a healing process.

cw Why the second book more so than the first?

AMF I think because when I came out of school, I thought, well, I'm back with my own people, I'm going to be part of them, I'm going to be one of them. And that didn't happen. Because I came out, as my grandmother put it, a white child. She said, "You came out as a white person. We don't know you. You don't know how to do things. You're not Inuk anymore." And that hurt more than being put into school and being left there for years, because it was my own people telling me that I didn't fit any longer, that I wasn't who I was supposed to be. And then she started teaching me. Oh, she was a hard taskmaster. I think I'm a stubborn person, because I made up my mind that I was going to learn what she was teaching me and I was going to learn it so well and so much better than the Inuit! And basically, I did, except for my language, because my tongue was not used to the little curls and wavers, it just doesn't wrap around the words like they should. But I learned how to sew and I learned how to scrape skins and I learned how to shoot, although I didn't learn how to shoot very well because I hated killing anything, that was my one sore spot.

My grandmother was just bound and determined that she was going to make an Inuk woman out of me. And I'm glad she did, because now I can do all these things. It's a part of my culture and I'm glad I learned that. My children are not interested in sewing and stuff and in a way you can't really blame them, because it doesn't really make much sense. Nowadays, they've got all these nylon parkas and anoraks that are much better, they don't shed, they don't fall apart.

cw What about driving the dog teams? You seemed to have some trouble with that in *The Restless Nomad*.

AMF (laughing) Oh, I did. I was so clumsy. They always called me clumsy. I did learn how to drive dogs after a fashion, but they just didn't listen to me. I don't know how other people got them to obey, I never could do that, I think because I was afraid of them. I used to get bitten, I don't know how many times, trying to harness and unharness them and trying to get the

dogs up the stupid gangplank on the boat. Every summer, I knew we were going to Aklavik, and I would be filled with dread. I had sleepless nights, I was so worried about that gangplank, I knew I had to pull the dogs up it and they always ended up pushing me off, either fighting me, or pushing me off the gangplank into the water. I used to get so frustrated with those dogs. Like I said, I'm sure they must've been lying there every morning, on their chains, and say, "Whoo-hoo, girl is coming, what are we going to do to her this morning? Have fun!"

CW Did you start writing your books with an intention to publish them? What was the process you went through in order to get it published?

AMF When I started writing *My Name is Masak*, I hadn't thought of publishing it. I'd written it just for my kids. When I got it done, I did something that no author should do: I sent it to two publishers. I looked in the phone book and there was Mary Scorer in Winnipeg and there was Mel Hurtig in Edmonton so I sent a manuscript to each of them. Mary Scorer answered within two weeks. She'd read the book and she said she was interested and could I come down so we could talk. And so I went down to Winnipeg and talked to her and she said, "Yes, we'll publish it. I'll send you a contract within ten days." So, I went back home and she sent me one. Just before the contract came back, Mel Hurtig answered and said, "Yes, we're interested." And I thought, "Oh, what do I do now?" Well, Mary Scorer was good enough to say she liked it and would publish it so I said okay to Mary Scorer. So, I had to write a letter to explain to Mel Hurtig that I already had a publisher. See, I didn't know anything about these things until much later, that you only send to one publisher at a time. I was very lucky, Mel Hurtig was very nice about it, and I got out of that one. And that's how the first one was done. It took me a long time before I thought of writing the second book, because I knew that it was going to go into some of the more painful memories that I had. I started writing in Churchill and it took me ten years to get through it. I would write and then I would put it away because it was just too much. Then we went to Ireland, and I did most of it there, I wrote a lot there. We were there almost seven years and then we came back to Canada. I thought well, I can go back to Mary Scorer and she can publish the second one. In the meantime, she'd gone into more school curricula books so I ended up at Pemmican.

CW Did you have a book launch for either of the books, and was either of them reviewed?

AMF I had a book launch with *Masak*, but not with *Restless*. For *Masak*, I

travelled quite a bit through the Territories. I went to Edmonton, and Lethbridge and Regina, and Yellowknife and to Toronto and a couple of towns in Ontario. And the reviews were fairly good, so that was good. I think maybe because the Native people were just starting to write then. I did a library circuit a couple of years ago for *Restless*, so that was good. And I go into schools. When the kids take Social Studies and have read about the Inuit, I come in and explain and talk to them about what Inuit people are like.

cw Can you tell me more about the Baffin Island writers' group?

AMF How did I get involved in that? Somebody mentioned my name to the writers' group and said that I had written a book. I got a letter from the group in Ikaluit, the school for it, and they asked me if I'd be interested in travelling and helping people to write or learn about writing because they didn't know how to start writing. They knew they wanted to, but didn't quite know how to begin. That was very interesting because there are a lot of Native women in that area that do a lot of storytelling and they teach their young girls how to sew and scrape and that sort of thing. And they wanted to put it in books. A lot of them were older women that didn't really want to write, but wanted to tell a story. We tried to encourage them to put it down, even on tape, so that somebody could transcribe it for them and type it out and set it out in books. I think a lot of them did, because quite a lot of books came out in the next few years through the school system in different communities.

cw And what about the Oklahoma Conference? How did you get invited to that?

AMF That was in '93. I think the University of Oklahoma got in touch with different publishers to see which Natives had published books. And when they got the list, they sent letters inviting us down. That was another great thing, because when I got down there, there must have been two or three thousand people gathered. And it wasn't just for the book thing. It was a great gathering, with pow-wows and that sort of thing. There must have been a thousand authors meeting and you had workshops and different things there. We spent about ten days in Oklahoma, just sort of visiting with each other and getting to know who was writing what. It was really interesting for me, because I didn't realise that there were so many Native authors out there. It was exciting and inspirational.

cw What about your family? How did they react to your books being published?

AMF You know something, I don't think it really sunk in. Mom was just doing whatever Mom does, she goes on with these strange things she does. I don't think they ever thought that I would publish anything. But they are very

proud of me. They are all very pleased and very proud. And I have their support, which I really need, because it is a very personal thing.

cw Some critics suggest that when you write an autobiography, in a way, you are reconstructing your life and reconstructing an image of yourself. Is that what you felt you were doing?

AMF Well, I think what you are doing, you are not so much reconstructing yourself and reconstructing your image, but instead you are letting the person that you truly are out rather than trying to build something up. If you build something or someone up, it's bound to fall over. It's sort of finally saying, okay, it really matters to me what people think, and I know when I'm finished this book, they are going to think oddly of me, or they are going to say this, that or the other. And that's why it took me a long time to say, "Right, I'm going to publish this." Because you're intimidated by it—you are telling the whole world who you are and what you are and it's intimidating. But when all is said and done, people are very good, they finally accept who you are and they know you, as they didn't before. You are finally saying to other people, this is who I really am, this is what I was, now I'm telling you who I am.

cw So, if you had to do it all over again, would you change anything?

AMF I really don't think so. Maybe gone a little faster, but there needed to be a long gap. No, I don't think I would change anything. I'd like to see more people write. Not just the native people but a lot of other people. They have interesting people around every community who have interesting life stories. Because we've had so many books that don't really relate to real life. There's a lot of older generation people that have such interesting lives, but we don't hear them and those are all gone. We've lost that maybe because we don't think it is interesting enough. But it is. Later in life, people will ask, "What happened in that era?" and there won't have been any books written on it. It's a shame.

cw Did you learn something about yourself as you were writing your books?

AMF I did, in a sense. I learned that I had a whole lot of unnecessary baggage in my life, things that had gone on in my childhood, in my young womanhood, that I didn't really need to carry and could let go. So, it was good. It was hard, but it was good. It is a relief. Even now though, when people want to buy my book, you kind of think the next time you see them, you wonder what they are going to say. But they've always been kind and have found it interesting. I have been blessed.

The Igloos Are Calm in the Camp

The igloos are calm in the camp.

The wind sleeps in the sky.

Darkness envelops all the lights.

Not a person walks in the snow,

Nor makes a sound of any kind

For all now sleep with the wind . . .

. . . And once again the howling of the wolf

Takes over the silent world . . .

untitled

As
the snow piles up outside
bones begin to gather
outside my door
I hear a jet roar overhead
as my computer crashes
I see through the eyes of
a dead composer
in a court in vienna
a dead soldier beside Custer
Louis Riel as he dangled from the gallows
in the cold prairie wind
Crazy Horse as the knife slid in
“et tu brutus?”
“carpe diem”
“sic gloria transit mundi”
James Teit when he knew
his photographs were fraudulent
but he would live forever
William S. Burroughs when he first
shot junk into his arm
Chief Dan George when he realised
what hollywood was all about
you
when you hear about “indian uprisings”
anything but
alive
when someone starts in on me
“you indians . . .”

The Absent Protagonist

Louis Riel in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Literature

Que suis-je pour essayer à mener les événements?

Un néant, c'est moi.

Louis Riel (1884)

The response of Canadian writers to Louis Riel at the end of the nineteenth century, like that of politicians and the populace at large, was generally divided along ethnolinguistic lines. Anglophones tended to perceive the Métis leader as a rebel and a despot, a “traitor” to the Crown. Francophones, on the other hand, usually saw him as a victim of Anglo-Saxon bigotry, someone who was hanged precisely because of his Frenchness. However, when one examines closely the two sets of representations, one realizes that they have much more in common than one might expect. As I will attempt to demonstrate in this essay, neither English-speaking nor French-speaking Canadian writers really acknowledge Riel’s Otherness, his national specificity as a Métis. Notwithstanding their significant ideological differences, the two groups have a tendency to turn examinations of the two North-West conflicts into tracts on the perpetual Canadian question, the relationship between Quebec and the rest of the country. Consequently, even in works that purport to be about the so-called Prophet of the New World, he is often virtually absent. In the words of the Quebec sociologist Gilles Martel, when it comes to Riel, both French and English Canada are unable to transcend their “querelles ethnocentriques” and accept that the Métis leader’s story is not their own but “le drame d’une *autre* collectivité” (155).

My primary objective here is not to endeavour to prove that it is impossible for a writer to represent members of another ethnocultural group. As Robert Young notes in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, the idea that one can only know the Other “through a necessarily false representation” is problematic, since it underestimates the degree of “commerce”

among cultures. As Young asserts, today's foremost models of cultural interaction "often stress separateness, passing by altogether the process of acculturation whereby groups are modified through intercultural exchange and socialization with other groups" (4-5). The inadequacy of these theories is particularly evident in relation to Riel and the Métis, a people whose hybridity not only defines its collective identity but supposedly makes its name "agréable à tout le monde, parce qu'il n'est pas exclusif" (Riel II 120). Of all First Nations (or partly First Nations) in Canada, the Métis certainly have the greatest kinship with the dominant Euro-Canadian society, both culturally and biologically. After all, not only did Riel receive basically all his formal education from Catholic priests but he was also seven-eighths white. As he proudly asserts, "presque tout mon sang vient de la France" (II 72). But, as mentioned above, the central aim of this paper is not to elucidate the reasons both French- and English-speaking Canadian writers are unable to capture the social and psychological reality of an individual with whom they (especially the former) have many biocultural affinities. Rather, it is to explore how those authors systematically fail to address Riel's national separateness, the fact that he does not claim affiliation with their communities but with a distinct and, at times, adversarial polity.

Riel's impact on the Canadian consciousness was almost instantaneous. The first literary work on the politician-mystic, depicting him as an enemy of Confederation, appeared the very winter he entered the political scene. In February 1870, a retired Hudson's Bay Company officer named Alexander Hunter Murray responded to the Métis seizure of Fort Garry by writing a martial poem threatening to recapture Red River's economic and administrative centre. To quote the two-verse "The Marching Song":

Riel sits in his chamber o' state
 Wi' his stolen silver forks an' his stolen silver plate,
 An' a' his braw things spread out in style so great;
 He'll not breakfast alone this morning.

O Hey, Riel, are ye wakin' yet,
 Or are yer drums a-beatin' yet?
 If y're nae wakin' we'll nae wait,
 For we'll take the fort this morning. (1870b, 50)

Later that year the Scottish-born author would add several more stanzas to his work and rename it "Capture of Fort Garry, or Riel's Retreat," and further lambaste the Métis and their "President elate" for being not just rebels but also cowards. To quote Murray again, the moment Riel and his people sensed

that the Canadian soldiers were approaching the Settlement, they sank “intae the groun’, or vanished i’ the air, / Like Macbeth’s weird sisters” (58-59).

Considerably more influential than either version of Murray’s poem was the 1885 novel by J. Edmund Collins, *The Story of Louis Riel the Rebel Chief*. Published anonymously while the Saskatchewan campaign raged, Collins’s work possesses little aesthetic merit. The author himself subsequently declared that the reason he did not append his name to the text was that he was “unwilling to take responsibility for the literary slovenliness” (*Annette* 143). Yet, despite its myriad shortcomings, *The Story of Louis Riel* is pivotal in the evolution of Riel’s image in Canadian culture. Although born and raised in (pre-Confederation) Newfoundland, Collins became a fervent Canadian nationalist soon after immigrating to Canada in 1874, at the age of nineteen. While working on newspapers first in New Brunswick and then in Ontario, he embraced the national optimism that reigned in part of the country’s nascent literary community, even writing “the first significant study of the Macdonald era” (Adams 5-7). Collins was especially close to the “Confederation” poets Archibald Lampman and Charles G.D. Roberts, the first of whom considered him “almost the literary father” of a new generation of writers and the second of whom would continue to communicate with him even after the Newfoundlander’s death—through an Ouija board (Lampman 40; Pomeroy 85). Indeed, Collins’s novel is believed to reflect so well the cultural milieu in which the author circulated that it is an excellent barometer of “the mentality of Ontario,” if not of much of English Canada, during the later Riel years (Lamb 343).

The most remarkable aspect of *The Story of Louis Riel* is its idiosyncratic treatment of the relationship between Riel and Tom Scott, the controversial Ontario Orangeman executed by the Métis provisional government at Red River. As portrayed by Collins, the conflict between Riel and Scott is not religious or cultural but romantic; both men fall in love with the same woman, a beautiful young Métisse named Marie who loves Tennyson, talks to birds, and, inadvertently, precipitates the troubles of 1869-70. Like “Mohammed, El Mahdi, and other great patrons of race and religion,” Riel has a strong will but is “weaker than a shorn Samson” when facing an attractive woman. So, although the Métis leader purportedly already “rejoices in the possession of three wives,” he is immediately smitten by the dark-haired beauty when he happens to overhear Marie singing in the middle of the prairie (*The Story* 49, 131). Later, upon learning that Marie does not return his affections because she is deeply in love with Scott, Riel decides to eliminate

his rival. In fact, Riel not only frames “the mischievous, manly, sunny-hearted lad” from Ontario but, during his archenemy’s show-trial, conveniently absents himself from the court in order not to be held accountable for the proceedings by either justice or history (*The Story* 56, 108-16).

A year later, after the fall of Batoche, Collins devoted another novel to the Métis leader, *Annette, the Metis Spy: A Hero of the N.W. Rebellion*. There are extensive similarities between the two works, whole sections of the second being simply lifted from the first. As Collins justifies his strategy, the “most notable authors have done this sort of thing; and chief amongst them I may mention Thackeray” (*Annette* 142). The most interesting element in *Annette* is its short epilogue, which is not only “one of the gems of early Canadian literature” (McCourt 15), but also one of the truly curious texts in the theory of historical fiction. Unencumbered by the usually thorny relation between documentation and invention, Collins declares that “I present some fiction in my story, and a large array of fact. I do not feel bound, however, to state which is the fact, and which the fiction” (*Annette* 142). As he states:

The preceding story lays no claim to value or accuracy in its descriptions of the North-West Territories. I have never seen that portion of our country; and to endeavour to describe faithfully a region of which I have only hearsay knowledge would be foolish.

I have, therefore, arranged the geography of the Territories to suit my own conveniences. I speak of places that no one will be able to find upon maps of the present or of the future. Wherever I want a valley or a swamp, I put the same; and I have taken the same liberty with respect to hills or waterfalls. The birds, and in some instances the plants and flowers of the prairies, I have also made to order. (*Annette* 142)

Concerning *The Story of Louis Riel*, which was accepted as historically factual until the 1970s (Swainson 14), Collins adds that his first novel “has been quoted as history; but it is largely fiction.” He particularly stresses that there is “no historic truth” in his characterization of Riel and Scott as romantic rivals and thus in the claim that the Métis leader had the Orangeman killed because the woman they both love “gave her heart to that young white man. I have seen the story printed again and again as truth; but there is in it not a word of truth” (*Annette* 142-43).

In spite of Collins’s cavalier attitude toward geography and the historical past, as well as his ethnocultural chauvinism, the fact remains that he is captivated by Riel. It is true that he never perceives the Métis chief as a fellow human being, let alone a co-citizen. Still, Riel is central to both of his novels. While the originator of the North-West conflicts may be described in a single

paragraph as an “Arch Rebel,” an “arch disturber,” an “autocrat,” and a “heartless Rebel ruffian,” he is an individual that one can underestimate only at one’s peril, for Collins’s Riel has power. In an allusion to the recent assassination of United States President James Garfield by another self-declared political mystic, Riel is the “thrice-dangerous [Charles] Guiteau [of] the plains” who has the support not only of most of his people but also of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and of Quebec’s political establishment (*The Story* 96, 47). He is the “miscreant-fiend” who, even after sanctioning the “cold-blooded murder” of a young Canadian and indefensibly refusing to allow his body to be given a proper Christian burial, is somehow able to escape “the vengeance of the law” (*The Story* 119, 125). In short, for Collins, Riel is a satanic force that has infiltrated his world and that the author is unable to evade.

Collins’s works on Riel, however, are quite atypical. The Métis leader does not enjoy the prominence he has in the Newfoundlander’s novels in too many other early texts dealing with the events of 1869-70 or 1885 (Owram 317). For example, Riel does not even figure as a character in two contemporaneous plays about the latter conflict, George Broughall’s *The 90th on Active Service or, Campaigning in the North West* and L. Dixon’s *Halifax to the Saskatchewan: “Our Boys” in the Riel Rebellion*. Written by soldiers, the two burlesque dramas focus almost exclusively on military concerns, notably the alleged mistreatment of the volunteers. The grievances of the troops in both works are not so much against Riel and his “breeds” as against their own inconsiderate officers and the haughty media. To quote a foreign-born soldier, “Sometimes, mine friends, and this is true, / One meal a day was all we get” (Dixon 20-21). Or, as another soldier complains fatalistically about the press, “No matter what sacrifice a poor volunteer may make. . . , there will always be in this world, a certain class who never contribute anything to the cause, but who live only to criticize and condemn” (Broughall 40).

The Métis leader also plays a marginal role in the numerous poems elicited by the North-West Rebellion. There are exceptions, of course, such as Cleomati’s “To One of the Absent.” Perhaps as befits a work that first appeared in the memoirs of two white women who survived the killings at Frog Lake, Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, the poem is uncompromising in its celebration of the Canadian volunteers and settlers and in its condemnation of Riel. In the words that the poet addresses to her “darling” fighting “poor Scott’s heartless murderer” (63):

Let justice be done now unailing
Nought but *death* can atone for his sin;

Let the fate he has meted to others;
 By our dauntless be meted to him,
 Don't return until quiet contentment;
 Fills the homes now deserted out west,
 And the true ring of peace finds an echo,
 In each sturdy settler's breast. (64)

Most other works on the subject, however, hardly acknowledge Riel. Instead, they focus on his enemies, especially the Canadian soldiers. Poem after poem is devoted to the “loyal volunteers” who heroically preserved the North-West for “la loi’ et la Reine” (Bengough, “The Charge” 70; DeGuise 16). Those selfless young men ought to be celebrated, the poets aver, not only because “Grim Privation and Peril followed them hand in hand” as they marched to battle, but also because, in Riel and his allies, they encountered “[c]rueller enemies still;—treacherous, scarcely human.” It is only fitting that “the tears of a nation” be shed for the soldiers, since it was those “vaillants enfants, grandis dans les alarmes,” who proved to Canada that the “sang de tes aïeux gonfle encor [sic] tes artères” (Wetherald 538; Desaulniers 13).

By the mid-1970s, Margaret Laurence would have one of her Métis characters state that the “young *Anglais* from Ontario” who confront Riel in Saskatchewan “don’t know what they’re fighting for” (282). But that is not quite the impression one gets from the writings produced at the time. Particularly after Riel’s defeat at Batoche, there was such an unassailable consensus about the heroism of the soldiers, and the perfidy of their opponents, that even a poet of Isabella Valancy Crawford’s stature is not able to escape the prevailing jingoism. As Crawford writes in “The Rose of a Nation’s Thanks,”

A welcome? Why, what do you mean by that, when the
 very stones must sing
 As our men march over them home again; the walls of
 the city ring
 With the thunder of throats and the tramp and tread of
 feet that rush and run?—
 I think in my heart that the very trees must shout for
 the bold work done!
 Why, what would ye have? There is not a lad that
 treads in the gallant ranks
 Who does not already bear on his breast the Rose of a
 Nation’s Thanks! (“The Rose” 45-6)

Or, as she affirms in “Songs for the Soldiers,” “It was a joyous day for us” when the volunteers “made that bold burst at Batoche, / And with their dead flesh built a wall about / Our riving land” (“Songs” 70-71).

Virtually the only writer who examines the events of 1885 from a First Nations perspective is Pauline Johnson. In “A Cry from an Indian Wife,” the poem that would launch her career as a recitalist, the part-Mohawk Johnson subtly but unequivocally undermines the moral superiority that permeates the Euro-Canadian works, by addressing that most critical question in the relations between the First Nations and Europeans in the New World, land ownership. For the poet, the “white-faced warriors” are not the heroic defenders of the motherland but intruders into foreign territory, invaders who march “west to quell / Our fallen tribe that rises to rebel.” Therefore, rather bidding them welcome, she bewails their presence, cursing “the fate that brought them from the east / To be our chiefs—to make our nation least.” Significantly, while Johnson focuses on the brave “Indian scout” for whose “vict’ry” no one prays and his loyal “Indian wife” with her equally “wild, aching breast,” she does not say a word about the Métis, much less about their discredited former leader.

Riel is even more conspicuously absent in Ernest Henham’s *Menotah: A Tale of the Riel Rebellion* but for more sinister reasons. Sir John A. Macdonald may have considered the politician-mystic “a clever fellow” and “the moving spirit” behind the two North-West conflicts, even suggesting that he be recruited “as an officer” by Canada’s new national police force (408). For Henham, on the other hand, Riel could never have been anything other than a nonentity. By virtue of his mixed racial heritage, Riel was born not to lead but to be led—by one of his “purer” European cousins. As the author notes in his preface, he elects not to portray the Métis leader as “an active character” in his novel because Riel was “a French half-breed of the ordinary stamp,” very much like his “dull-witted, heavy-featured and obtuse” brother who still lives along the Red River. The architect of that “hopeless [Saskatchewan] enterprise” is “so colourless, so commonplace, that a true picture must have been uninteresting, while a fictitious drawing would have been unsatisfactory and out of place” (ix).

Henham, a British-born writer about whom not much is known except that he wrote other romances about the Canadian West, proceeds to depict Riel merely as the “nominal leader” of the Métis-First Nations insurrection. Its real commander is a fabled (and fictitious) young Canadian sharpshooter named Hugh Lamont “who disguises himself as ‘blood Indian’” (270). As Henham has an old Métis hunter named Billy Sinclair explain, Lamont is the third party behind the “nickle[sic]-plate plot” and his alleged plan “to stamp the whole crowd of whites clean out of the land,” the mysterious figure

“who’s supplying the brains to run this rebellion, and all the rest of it” (12-13). To quote Sinclair, “Riel was *not*, never had been, the prime factor of the revolution.” Hopelessly irresolute, “he was powerless to act as a sole leader” and “in all things he was guided by the cunning brain and persuasive voice of his white subordinate” (11, 270). That is, Riel is less a rebel or traitor than one of the great frauds of all time. Confederation’s “nemesis” turns out to be such a dunce that there is little justification for including him in works about the two watershed events in Canadian history with which his name is so indelibly associated.

Not surprisingly, the nineteenth-century representations of Riel in French are noticeably different from those in English, usually portraying him not as a renegade but as a martyr. Here, too, the first work on the subject was inspired by the troubles at Red River. Early in 1870 the Quebec writer Pamphile Le May published an invective condemning English Canada’s reaction to the Métis leader’s role in the execution of Tom Scott. Entitled “À ceux qui demandent la tête de Riel. Crucifiez-le! Crucifiez-le!” Le May’s poem begins on an acerbic note, calling sarcastically for the crucifixion of “ce faux roi, cet infâme” the “bandit sans foi que la canaille acclame / Et qu’elle appelle Majesté!” The scant irony there is in the work soon dissipates, however, as ridicule gives way to vilification of anyone who expresses a desire to bring Riel to justice, the people the author characterizes as the “[j]uifs hypocrites de nos jours” (207).

For Le May, Quebec’s poet laureate and “gardien spirituel” of its “âme nationale” (Roy 9), the outrage over Riel’s treatment of Scott is transparently dishonest, since the Orangeman is a “victime ignoble” who had attempted to “plonger son fer, la nuit, avec malice / Dans le cœur de son souverain.” Riel, in contrast, is an “homme franc, juste et noble,” a compassionate individual whose sole ambition is to “faire régner le bonheur.” So gentle is Riel’s nature that it becomes obvious that the efforts to demonize him and to “défier” Scott are not really about the two men (207-08). The poet accuses the unidentified pro-Scott forces:

Ce que vous regrettez, ce n’est point la carcasse
De votre ami traître et vénal,
Mais c’est le sceptre seul, le sceptre aimé qui passe
Dans les mains d’un heureux rival!

Ce que vous demandez dans votre aveugle rage,
C’est que le Canadien-Français
Dont l’esprit généreux partout vous porte ombrage
Soit foulé sous un pied anglais!

Ce que vous demandez c'est que le catholique
Qui toujours si bien vous traite
Expire sur la croix, ô secte fanatique,
Comme son Christ au Golgotha! (208-09)

In other words, the clamour in English Canada following Scott's death concerns not so much what Riel has done but what he is. Or rather, perhaps, what he symbolizes, Quebec.

Le May's poem apparently provoked such a storm of controversy in the English-speaking media that Louis Fréchette wondered if one might not "prendre à la même corde Riel et son poète" ("Pamphile" 181). Years later, in 1885, Fréchette himself would contribute what is arguably the most celebrated work on Riel as a victim of Anglo-Canadian chauvinism, *Le dernier des martyrs* (1885-86). Written as part of a subscription drive by the new Montreal newspaper, *La Presse*, Fréchette's work situates Riel in the long line of francophone and Catholic martyrs. The Métis leader is not "[l]e dernier des martyrs" but "le plus récent" for the "opresseurs se sont toujours trompés: le sang / Des héros en produit infailliblement d'autres" (3). In fact, the poem's central message seems to be that the "héros malheureux. . . , saint et . . . martyr" must not be allowed to perish with his death. As Fréchette concludes, in an envoy addressed directly to *La Presse's* readers, "L'an qui vient de finir s'est appelé le Crime; / Que l'an qui va s'ouvrir s'appelle Châtiment!" (7-8).

Fréchette's poet professes to be saddened by the fact that "l'ère des martyrs n'est pas encor [sic] fermée," that fanatical English-Canadian Protestants could still harbour such hatred toward adherents of another Christian denomination. He mockingly even invites "primitive" nations like the Maoris, Hottentots, Sioux, Fijians, Boers, Zulus, and Comanches to travel to Canada to witness first-hand "ce qu'on fait quand on est baptisé, / Qu'on est bon orangiste, et bien civilisé!" For the poet, the Orangemen's behaviour is unforgivable, since the objects of their venom are a most amiable and industrious group. As he writes, the Métis are a "brave petit peuple" that courageously "avait planté sa tente / Au désert." They are "paysans, sans fusils, sans canons" (8, 4-5).

Despite the affability of the Métis and the nobility of their psychologically troubled leader, who "pour protéger les femmes, les enfants, / Se livra de lui-même aux vainqueurs-triomphants," there is no placating their foes (5). While the Métis may be small and vulnerable, they are Catholic and French, and for their enemies that is all that matters. As Fréchette articulates the situation in a dramatic dialogue,

—Mais cet homme n'a fait que défendre ses frères
 Et leurs foyers.—A mort!—Mille actes arbitraires
 Ont fait un drapeau saint de son drapeau battu. . . .
 —A mort! . . . —*Mais*, songez-y, cet homme est revêtu
 Du respect que l'on doit aux prisonniers de guerre:
 Vous avez avec lui parlementé naguère.
 —A mort! . . . —Mais tout rayon en lui s'est éclipsé;
 Allez-vous de sang froid tuer un insensé?
 C'est impossible!—A mort! . . . Mais c'est de la démençce;
 Pour lui le jury même implore la clémence. . . .
 A mort! . . . —Un peuple entier réclame son pardon;
 Son supplice peut être un terrible brandon
 De discordes sans fin et d'hostilités vaines. . . .
 Allons!—A mort!—il a du sang français aux veines! (6)

Or, as the poet makes even more explicit when he revises the work for his collection *La légende d'un peuple* (1889), “A mort! à mort! il a du sang français aux veines! / A voilà son vrai crime” (287).

Fréchette does at times acknowledge the national specificity of the Métis. For instance, in a footnote to a segment of the revised version of the poem in *La légende d'un peuple*, the author states that, although the “Métis du Nord-Ouest. . . sont des descendants de Français unis à des Indiennes,” they “forment une race à part” (343). Still, the unfailing impression one gets from *Le dernier des martyrs* is that the Riel affair is not really about the Métis but about the French fact in North America, that is, about Quebec. The way the poet refers to “notre peuple asservi,” “notre foi sainte” and “nos enfants, fiers, libres et français” makes it apparent that his subject is not Riel’s new American nation, the fusion of the First Nations and the European. Rather, it is the more strictly French society on the Saint Lawrence, the “race” that has earned itself a privileged place in the Americas “par droit d’aïnesse et par droit de conquête” (*Le Dernier* 3-4).

The understanding that Riel’s hanging is merely an extension of Quebec’s seemingly endless struggle in Confederation, especially the concomitant anti-French and anti-Catholic sentiment in the rest of the country, is evident in other works triggered by his trial and death, such as the anonymous *À la mémoire de Louis Riel: La Marseillaise canadienne*. Also known as “La Marseillaise rielliste” (Vaugois and Lacoursière 441), this five-stanza poem on the “duel des races au Canada” became extremely popular in Quebec schools, reportedly transforming young scholars into “ardents cocardiers” (Groulx 36). To quote the opening stanza:

Enfants de la nouvelle France,
 Doubter ne nous est plus permis!

Au gibet Riel se balance,
Victime de nos ennemis. (*bis*)
Amis, pour nous, ah, quel outrage!
Quels transports il doit exciter!
Celui qu'on vient d'exécuter
Nous anime par son courage. (Anonymous n.p.)

Or, as the poet adds in a refrain with a distinctively Riellian touch,
“Courage! Canadiens! Tenons bien haut nos cœurs, / Un jour viendra (*bis*)
Nous serons les vainqueurs” (Anonymous n.p.).

The remaining four stanzas of *À la mémoire de Louis Riel*, a poem that members of the Quebec clergy “chercheront à interdire” after declaring it “séditieux” (Blais, *À la mémoire* 9), focus on the dreaded Orangemen, the “tyrans” who “voudraient nous voir au cercueil.” They also deal with the three Quebec federal cabinet ministers who remained loyal to Macdonald’s government, those political Judases who have “vendu vos âmes” to the enemy and who “souillèrent ta noble histoire, / Canada!” Tellingly, the poet always addresses his prospective audience as “[e]nfants de la nouvelle France” or “Canadiens.” In a work ostensibly about the leader of the two North-West conflicts, there is not a single reference to the Métis people. Thus, it does not seem illogical to deduce that when the author exhorts his listeners to remember the “[a]mour sacré de la Patrie” and that Riel’s name “souvent répété / Nous parle de la liberté, / Et nous prêche l’indépendance,” he is not alluding to a prairie homeland, be it on the Red River or on the South Saskatchewan (Anonymous n.p.).

The centrality of Quebec is also unmistakable in two poems that Rémi Tremblay devotes to Riel. “Une épopée” is the more remarkable of the two, certainly the more ironic. Tremblay’s poem is the perfect antidote to all the unadulterated poetic celebrations of the 1885 volunteers, including Gonzalve Desaulniers’s “L’absolution avant la bataille,” in which young Quebecers proudly march off to the North-West to prove to the motherland that “tes fils d’aujourd’hui sont dignes de leurs pères” (Desaulniers 13). In a disingenuous footnote, Tremblay writes that he knows that “nos braves miliciens se sont couverts de gloire” in the Saskatchewan campaign. However, he strategically adds that his “chanson ne s’applique pas aux intrépides conquérants des Métis, mais seulement à ceux qui ont eu peur” (“Une épopée” 146). In other words, he is not interested in heroes but in cowards, those soldiers for whom

Fuir est notre affaire
C’est notre salut, (*bis*)
Voilà notre but

Lorsque nous faisons la guerre.
 Nous serons peureux
 Et peux valeureux. (*bis*) ("Une épopée" 146)

In his effort to ridicule the volunteers, Tremblay is even ready to sacrifice Riel himself, turning the politician-mystic into a military nonentity utterly subservient to Dumont. As the author writes of the soldiers,

Chacun a sa corde
 Pour pendre Riel, (*bis.*)
 Mais quand Gabriel
 Se montre, ô miséricorde!
 On devient peureux
 Et peu valeureux. (*bis*) ("Une épopée" 147)

Unlike the heroic volunteers of much English-Canadian poetry, who for "kindred and country's sake" intrepidly face the "Half-breed hell-hounds" (Campbell 267; Mulvaney 74), Tremblay's "beaux militaires" make sure that the enemy stronghold has been abandoned before they venture into the village. To quote one of the prudent warriors, "Prenons donc Batoche: / Ces gueux de Métis (*bis*) / En sont tous partis" ("Une épopée" 146, 148).

Tremblay's other Riel poem, "Aux chevaliers du nœud coulant," is more characteristic of the late nineteenth-century representations of the Métis leader as a victim of ethnic and religious prejudice. Even more uncompromisingly partisan and belligerent in its language than "À ceux qui demandent la tête de Riel" or *Le dernier des martyrs*, "Aux chevaliers" presumably won its author "l'honneur de perdre un emploi" with the federal government, and it is not difficult to discern why (70). A work of "une rare violence," Tremblay's poem presents all francophone political figures who fail to support Riel not as his adversaries but as traitors, quislings who have "souffleté la patrie aux abois" and for whom "la trahison est un titre de gloire." Those "[e]nfants dégénérés d'une race virile" are a servile faction willing to betray their native soil and faith for "le vil métal," which is their "suprême loi!" Typically, in a work that decries the death of a martyr whose "sang . . . eut rougi l'échafaud," there is not a word about that individual's own people. Or, more precisely, Riel is simply incorporated into another collectivity, not his beloved Riders of the Plains but the greater French-speaking community in North America (Blais, "Coups d'aile" 158; Tremblay, "Aux Chevaliers" 70-71).

There is only one early poem on the political martyrdom of Riel that consistently identifies his plight with that of the Métis people, Georges Lemay's "Chant du Métis" (1886). Lemay, who is himself a Métis, does not minimize the ethnoreligious chauvinism that may have been responsible for

the Regina hanging. On the contrary, he writes that almost immediately after Riel's death a strong wind blows across the prairie, murmuring: "Les lâches m'ont vendu!" The politician-mystic is not just a victim of perfidy, but has been betrayed by his own kind. Riel has been sold by "les valets des sectaires" to the wicked "orangistes" who, he says, are now obscenely celebrating "mon trépas: 'Nous marcherons dans le sang des papistes, / Nous foulerons leurs crânes sous nos pas'" (566). Still, Lemay's Riel remains incontestably Métis. As the martyr from Saint Boniface posthumously evaluates his own political career,

Ai-je plus fait que défendre mes frères,
Dépossédés par des nouveaux venus,
Que réclamer, sur ce sol de nos pères,
Un coin de terre et des droits méconnus?
Et quand un jour, fatigués d'injustice,
Nos gens émus élevèrent la voix,
On cria: "Mort à la race métisse!"
On nos traqua jusqu'au fond de nos bois. (566)

That is, the target of Riel's enemies is not French-Catholic Quebec but the mixed-race people who claim title to the strategic centre of the country. Paradoxically, by killing Riel, his foes do not destroy the Métis nation but rather provide it with a vital symbol of national resistance. As the poet addresses his hero, "Le gibet donne à ta cause un martyr. / Un cri vengeur s'élève de ta bière / Que tout leur or ne fera que grandir" ("Chant du Métis" 567).

Lemay's poem, however, is very much an exception. Riel's identity as Métis is again subsumed into the Quebec-dominated world in two plays—both entitled *Riel*—published in response to the Métis leader's fate after the fall of Batoche. Written by two French immigrants, Charles Bayer and E. Parage, the first play is an extremely convoluted and tendentious political melodrama. For example, the leading anglophone character, the Canadian government's commissioner in the North-West, is surnamed MacKnavel. On the other hand, the visiting Franco-American journalist who wins the heroine's heart bears the family moniker of Francoeur. As well, while the playwrights may consider Riel "le glorieux martyr canadien" (66), they seem much more captivated by the romance between Francoeur and his Canadian love interest and do not even deign to include the Métis leader in the last act.

The second play, by the Quebec medical doctor Elzéar Paquin, is equally equivocal about its eponymous protagonist, and factional. In its stage directions, it describes Scott as "le bandit" and Riel as "le grand Patriote martyr" (n.p.), an "HÉROS POLITIQUE" whose sentence at Regina was nothing

less than a “MEURTRE JUDICIAIRE” (93). Yet the play then proceeds to explore the impact of Riel’s death not on the Métis people but on Quebec. Paquin’s work actually ends with a long discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of Quebec’s “annexion” to the United States, an economic and political union which the author clearly favours. In the utopian words with which he has a character close the play, “Les préjugés disparaîtront, la vérité reluira, et on comprendra que sous le rapport religieux comme sous le rapport matériel, le peuple canadien aura tout à y gagner” (142-43).

In conclusion, the relative absence of Riel from works purportedly about him is curious for a series of reasons. To begin with, his peripheral existence appears to reflect a certain ambivalence, if not outright chauvinism, toward the politician-mystic and his people. For someone like Henham, Riel cannot be the leader of the anti-Canadian forces in 1885 because of his mixed race. The celebrated cartoonist and satirist J.W. Bengough, although without necessarily subscribing to Henham’s blatant racism, is also convinced that Riel was not the architect of the Batoche campaign. The creator of some of the most memorable images from the Confederation period, and admittedly not an admirer of the Métis leader, Bengough writes that the execution of “the ill-starred Half-breed” does not put an end to the North-West Rebellion. For “Riel was but an incident of the rebellion; justice will not be satisfied until the actual authors of it are exposed and punished, whether those turn out to be plotting speculators at Prince Albert or drowsy ministers at Ottawa” (“Cartoon” n.p.). Wilfrid Laurier, in contrast, contends that Riel was not responsible for his actions, by reason of insanity. Laurier may have made the famous statement that, had “I been born on the banks of the Saskatchewan”—which Riel was not—“I would myself have shouldered a musket to fight against the neglect of governments and the shameless greed of speculators.” At the same time, the country’s first French-speaking prime minister also makes it unequivocally clear that he does not consider the Métis leader a hero. To quote Laurier, “Nature had endowed [Riel] with many brilliant qualities,” but it “denied him a well-balanced mind. . . . [T]hat he was insane appears to me beyond the possibility of controversy” (qtd. in Skelton 314, 322). Indeed, one of the great ironies about Riel is that it is his supporters who argue most passionately that he is mentally unbalanced, while his enemies—including the federal government—strive to demonstrate that he is perfectly sane (*Queen* 205-15).

However, both Riel’s allies and his adversaries—that is, both French and English Canada—are quite uncertain about his national status, an ambivalence

manifested in the history of his cultural reception. Within a few years of his hanging, the Métis leader virtually disappears from the consciousness of both communities (Owram 316-17), suggesting that neither one truly perceived him as one of its own. Interestingly, when Riel does emerge again in the late 1940s, he does so not in Quebec, which would soon begin to plot out its potential future as a separate nation, but in the predominantly English-speaking parts of the country, including the old Orange heartland of Ontario. Of course, the post-World War II Riel is radically different from the ethnoreligious martyr of the end of the nineteenth century. The new Riel is taken outside not only the Catholic-Protestant prism but also the Quebec-Ontario one. As Rudy Wiebe has the Métis bard Pierre Falcon state at the end of *The Scorched-Wood People*, “There’s no white country can hold a man with a vision like Riel. . . . Canada couldn’t handle that, not Ontario, and not Quebec, they’re just using him against the English. They all think he was cracked, mad” (351). Riel, in fact, has undergone such a metamorphosis in the last fifty years that he has been transformed into nothing less than a Canadian icon, an ancestor. Through a process that Laura Murray, in a different context, terms the “aesthetic of dispossession” (207), Euro-Canadian writers have turned the one-time rebel into the ultimate mediator, “the half-caste / neither white nor brown” who stands among the country’s various racial, cultural, linguistic, and regional groups and perhaps can bring about their unity (Livesay 151).

In spite of his increasingly positive image in Canadian culture, the new Riel still bears a surprising resemblance to his earlier incarnations—his frequent absence from narratives supposedly about himself. In order to convert Riel into a Canadian hero, contemporary writers are often forced both to denationalize and sanitize him, de-emphasizing particularly his Catholicism and his Frenchness. Even in a long narrative like Wiebe’s novel one tends to encounter a rather one-dimensional characterization of the man who saw himself as the David of the New World. One certainly finds in it little trace of the Riel who asserts that Catholicism is “la seule foi vraie une” and that “Jésus Christ Notre Dieu défend à tout catholique d’épouser aucune personne protestante” (III, 258; II, 152); the Riel who claims to be a royal pretender to the French throne, being “un des princes descendants de Louis XI” (III, 209); and, above all, the Riel who declares that Canada is the mortal enemy of the Métis people, “notre injuste agresseur,” and Confederation “une fraude immense, une tyrannie colossale” (I 416; II 299). That is, in an attempt to claim the Métis leader as their own, contemporary Canadian writers efface him by denying him his story. Or, to phrase it differently, even today Riel remains the absent protagonist.

NOTES

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship in the writing of this essay.

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Drum Song

I write words like justice, obligation,
responsibility, treaty, suicide.
And shout them from the rooftop.
My neighbours who are in their garden,
look up and conveniently ignore me.
They think I'm drunk,
but I haven't touched a drop.
The bottle I'm holding
is actually a homemade bomb,
a poetry bomb,
that will soon shower
the sky with words
they can no longer ignore.

In the archives, another photograph of a treaty expedition, more white collars and union jacks. Even on this spring day, the old air of officialdom pervades, dry as August's dead heat. The commissioners dominate the page (their faith and loyalty to king and country holding them steadfast) flanked by military men, equally stiff and formal, as though on guard. For what? For who? For you grandfather? In case you caught on to what was actually going on, what they were actually up to and tried to stop them, did something foolish—as they would say. But, no, that was never the case. By now, it is a matter of survival: with the land cut and mined, the animals gone, immigrants pouring in by the trainload, your people sick and dying.

If this bottle bomb
explodes
word scrapnel
flying every which way
responsibility hitting them between the eyes
obligation falling at their feet
justice sticking to their skin
treaty hitting them squarely
and perhaps even a word like suicide

hitting home
What would they say?
Would they find the words?

I imagine a drum beating, an old drum of worn hide with faint markings of red ochre, the power of another world. The commissioners do not notice this, instead they look at you, your people, and see a life of rags and empty bellies. They complain they don't understand all the noise, all the fuss, complain there are no real Indians left anyway. They say you are merely mimicking something you no longer understand, no longer have words for. There is a moment when they turn to the drummers and wonder when it will all end, wonder when you will finally become Canadians. Not like them, but Canadians nonetheless. In their eyes, you are like children, dependent upon the Queen mother to take care of you.

It gets to the point
where they can no longer ignore me
packing the bomb takes time
my muttering gets to them
but instead of paying attention
to what I'm saying
they run away
and dial 911
say there's a crazy man on his roof
threatening to jump
later they will tell me
they did it for my own good.

This is how I see it. From my vantage point, here in this white room, where I sit on top of a mountain of time looking down with the sight of a great eagle. The documents guaranteed health care after plagues were introduced, an education for the children, who were shipped away to residential schools where assimilation was force-fed like the mush they had to eat. But we know this, and we are told there is no use in crying over the past, because the past is today and tomorrow. Past, present and future, a life dipped into and barely held together by an old drum that I can hear even now, way up here on my perch, if I quiet myself and listen hard enough.

Geriatric Canoe Princess

she poet alive
land the river
holds body parts
as if must let go
bundle of belongings

know this sister

when tide rises inside
pain stab in breast
spirit will release
even against embrace

fighting resistance
hate this place
let's get out of here
it's boring
nothing ever happens
especially where I'm involved

land slopes upward
rocky mountain cat paws
incisor gnaws
ripped skin
she purrs
belly full
she is slaughter
furlined mound
wingless feathers
scales shells bones
from shimmer water

her eyes witness
coast line constant
her tongue
lap lap lapping water edge

she is surmised
at sun rise
canoe chant
cedar switch
she traveler princess
paddle up water drops
shine splendor
the hurt will wash out
seaweed does the job

mister sister
okay so she lost my Indian
at lost lagoon

legend place
legend mind
legend woman
legend tells one

legend past
legend remote
legend self
legend tells two

legend island
legend water
legend travel
legend blabber mouths

legend sucks
legend pukes
legend composts
legend stays put

legend wakes
legend sleeps
legend vibrates
legend explodes

legend reads
legend newspaper
legend radio
legend brunch

legend stroll
legend beach
legend rock
legend cafe

legend ashes
legend death
legend ocean
legend lived on Homer Street

legend had breast cancer
legend had sex
legend had fun
legend will come

when was the last time
sex she means
this time a definite come

mind if I smoke in bed
smoke
as I watch foreplay
smoke up
as you huff and puff
smoke
myself to sleep
turn smoke meat
not rubbed raw
dance around my own fire
once I light up
send a smoke signal
from my own burning bush

she said one thing I hate
is an uncircumcised cock
downtown women's center
speaker went on to say
he bought drinks for her
in his hotel room made her look
scum rise think she said
he had it out for her

then someone said
if I had a paddle
I would have pounded him
Who's talking to you anyway
let the speaker interrupt
her own story

tell the one about Dead Women's Island
or was that dead mother, dead sister, dead aunt
whatever sounds good to you
speaker chimed in
another late breaking story
she didn't want to miss
becoming a headline
hey better than a deadline
she laughed
at would-be satin coffin

it's okay boys I know all
about how you took my skull
from cave
gave me away
to a museum
down south
my bones stretch
round the world

she was the ghost
seen before a person dies
the lookalike
the one who laughs too much
too loud too soon not enough

why spook us
why be vulgar
just to get attention
suppose she said
jump in my canoe
never mind the sea bus
you don't have time
trouble times we are all legend
if we know it or not
when we go by canoe
we remember to remember
we are remembered

The Racialized Subject in James Tyman's *Inside Out*

Métis writer James Tyman's 1989 book, *Inside Out: An Autobiography of a Native Canadian*, is a combination of two well-established sub-genres in Canadian nonfiction: the prison confession narrative and the First Nations autobiography.¹ In his meditations on his own Native identity and his criminal behaviour, Tyman indirectly addresses the question of why there are so many First Nations men in Canadian prisons. But while the book's larger message may be considered to be sociological, it is first and foremost an account of the frightening realities of one Native man's experience, and it provides a visceral portrait of the ways in which racial stereotypes and the psychology of racial identity contribute to Tyman's criminal and self-destructive behavior. It also shows how cultural dislocation and cross-race adoption can affect the formation of identity. These issues could be examined from a number of theoretical viewpoints, but I have chosen in this study to undertake a psychoanalytic reading of the text, in order to uncover a symbolic vocabulary of racialized subjectivity.² As the title of the work indicates, Tyman addresses a problem that is very dear to psychoanalysis: the relation between the inside and the outside of the human subject. In his play with metaphors of interiority and exteriority, Tyman reveals a model of the racialized subject as a Möbius strip of identity, continually negotiating between inner experience and outer action and appearance. While *Inside Out* is on one level a compelling story of a Native man trying to stay alive on the dangerous streets of Saskatchewan's cities, it is also very much an interior drama about the development of identity in the face of violence, displacement, and racism.

Tyman's portrayal of his identity is complicated by two related events in his early life: the physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his biological father, and the boy's subsequent adoption, at the age of four, into a white middle-class family in southern Saskatchewan. His description of his early abuse shows it to constitute a trauma of the most extreme sort; it is so devastating to him that shortly after his adoption, he is unable to recall anything of his earlier life, and he even forgets his original name. Thus, quite literally, his adoption marks the beginning of a new identity and the repression of his former one. The only leakage between these two identities occurs in the dreams that the young boy experiences shortly after he arrives in the Tyman household, nightmares of helplessness in which, he says, "I would see him coming. I couldn't run from him. . ." (9). Even two decades later, when he writes the book, Tyman still has "no memories of the beatings and the abuse" (8). All he can do is reconstruct an imagined version of his early trauma, and he does so in the terrifying opening scene of the book, where he describes his drunken father beating him into unconsciousness. This invented scene is an appropriate allegory of the anonymous father's place in Tyman's psyche, since the father here is the violent agent of the very unconsciousness—the amnesia—from which the child never fully recovers. Tyman ends the imagined episode with the observation that "my father was too drunk to realize I was still unconscious" (7). In a very real sense, Tyman the writer is "still unconscious" of his early life even when he writes this sentence, at the age of twenty-four. The violence of the father has robbed him of his first four years of existence. In addition, this violence has had devastating effects on Tyman's sense of identity, and it may well be a catalyst for the violent behavior that Tyman himself exhibits in his youth and adulthood.

To the adoption agency, young Jimmy Tyman's installation into a relatively well-adjusted middle-class white family may have seemed like a much-needed antidote to the violence and instability of his early life. However, he experiences immediate difficulties in adjusting to his new identity. Only moments after realizing that he has forgotten his original name, the child looks at the white faces of his new family and concludes, "They look different. They stare at me like I'm different" (8). His awareness of this difference persists and even grows, despite the fact that his new parents accept him and love him as one of their own. This awareness is reinforced in his encounters with white children from the community, who say to him "you're Indian, aren't you?" (10). This identification from without, by members of the majority group, is the process by which his difference comes to have a name. When faced with

these questions, he says, “I didn’t know the difference, so I’d reply cheerfully, ‘Yeah’” (10). He accepts his status as “Indian” through the voices and the eyes of whites—and also, inevitably, through their prejudices, though he is not yet aware of them. He himself does not “know the difference” between Indian and white until he accepts the white point of view. This scene is reminiscent of a key moment of identification in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, where Fanon describes a white child who sees him and says “Look, a Negro!” (112). The label carries with it a stunning power of objectification, and it becomes a defining crisis in Fanon’s theorization of black identity. He writes,

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships. . . . (112)

The child’s repeated phrase becomes for Fanon a definition of himself as other—and this is a particular kind of otherness, burdened with centuries of colonial history and racist stereotypes. After this moment, he can no longer be simply “a man among other men” (Fanon 112); he becomes the embodiment of a symbol that has been created in the white imagination. While young James Tyman’s situation is certainly worlds away from that of Fanon, I believe that the two of them share a common reaction to the scene of white identification. When Tyman is labeled an Indian, the term is loaded with a history and a set of stereotypical assumptions which go far beyond his own knowledge. He will only gradually—and painfully—become acquainted with the symbolic value of his body in white society. But he has one immediate lesson in racial identity: after he has agreed that he is an Indian, the white children make a particularly cruel distinction by telling him, “your mom isn’t” (11). This statement goes further than the racial labeling which has preceded it, because it establishes a disjunction between his racial identity and his familial identity. His only response to such an observation is, “I couldn’t answer that” (11). Indeed, he is not able to answer that challenge for the next twenty years. He struggles to attain a sense of belonging in his family, but he is defeated again and again by the visible difference between himself and the Tymans, and by the ways in which the white community codes that difference. The perceived incongruity between his “Native” appearance and his connection to a white family creates an almost uncanny sense of doubled identity. He becomes an *unheimlich* presence in the Tyman home: he is accepted there, but the family never dis-

cusses his Native ancestry. As the family refuses to acknowledge his difference, they also reveal a willingness to overlook his ostracism from the larger community.

It is not surprising, then, that when he is first exposed to the negative values that attach to the word “Indian” in his society, he does his best to avoid this label. One way he does this is by befriending a white girl named Anita, who is unusual because she doesn’t ask him whether he is an Indian. Unlike the other kids, she seems not to recognize his difference. In fact, the two of them achieve a kind of solidarity through their mutual participation in racist comments *against* Native people. Tyman writes, “we used to joke about the stupid Indians with their dirty clothes and hair, sleeping in the tall weeds behind the hotel on Main Street” (11). As in many racially inflected jokes and slurs, the subtext of this exchange is a misguided attempt to form community: the two children denigrate the socially constructed other as a way of solidifying a sense of commonality between themselves. For young Jimmy, this involves a particularly blatant feat of racial erasure (a trick he might have learned from his adopted family).

However, the feeling of belonging that he derives from such scapegoating activity is always short-lived, because, he says, “when the day was over I’d look back in the mirror and there was that same dark skin. What was wrong?” (11) His resemblance to the objects of scorn causes him a crisis of belonging. His place in his white family and community is thrown into question by the appearance of “that same dark skin” in the mirror. This produces a split in his identity, not only between interior affect and external appearance, but also between the societal roles of persecutor and persecuted. The image of his body is a reminder that his adopted life with the Tymans involves a radical dissociation from his original Native identity.

On a theoretical level, Tyman’s reaction to this mirror image is also a potent symbolization of his situation as a person of colour in a world dominated by whiteness. It can be viewed as a mirror-stage of racialized subjectivity, in which the child identifies with the mirror image, as in Lacan, but also recognizes the self-image as the socially constructed other, the stereotypical scapegoat.³ In this case, his identification with the mirror image is not a cause for jubilation, but rather for disconcerted amazement: “what was wrong?” This is not a celebration of having attained a place in the symbolic order, but rather a troubling recognition that his body occupies a marginal location in that order. This simultaneous recognition and estrangement is reminiscent of Fanon’s scene of racialized self-identification which we have

examined above. While Fanon's situation does not contain a literal mirror, the encounter traces a very similar trajectory: the child's statement "Look, a Negro!" causes Fanon to look at himself as if he were other. He describes this process by saying "I *subjected* myself to *objective* evaluation" (112, my emphasis), a description that could well apply to Tyman's situation in front of the mirror. The act of subjecting oneself, in this racialized model, paradoxically involves seeing oneself as an object, through the racist assumptions of the dominant community.

Further on in the same section of the book, the mirror becomes a nexus not only of self-questioning, but also of self-hatred for young Tyman. Once he enters school, the teasing of his white classmates leads him to

go home and look in the bathroom mirror and curse the color of my skin. Why couldn't I be like the other kids? My parents treated me with love, but at school I learned of the Indians and their savage ways, how they scalped people, how they'd tie you across an anthill until the insects ate you alive. (15)

The colour of his skin—the mark of his difference—becomes a kind of curse because of its symbolic meaning in a racist culture. While he feels that he is accepted at home, the contrast between his family's love and his community's scorn creates an incurable disjunction in his self-image. The stories of "Indians and their savage ways" are analogous to the racist symbols which Fanon perceives ("tom-toms, cannibalism" [112], and so on) when he encounters his blackness through the eyes of a white child. Young James doesn't *want* to identify with the negative aspects of the stereotypical Indian, but like Fanon hearing the child's label, "Negro," he is unable to avoid this identification. Later, when he accepts a life of crime, he is in a sense fulfilling the stereotypical prophecy of the mirror.

While Tyman's unconsciousness of his childhood identity can be seen as a necessary mechanism of defence against the original trauma of his father's violence, the very fact of his repressed identity becomes for the boy a kind of second-order trauma, because it leads to an utter dislocation from his own origins. He is not only displaced by the paternalistic white authorities (a displacement that echoes many episodes in the history of aboriginal-white relations in Canada), but he is also cut off from his earlier identity by the defence mechanism of his amnesia. The question of his origins, which is posed again and again by his peers and his teachers, comes to be a problem of primary importance for his current identity, but it remains a question which he cannot answer. He says,

I knew I had been adopted, but from where? Who was my mom? I tried to remember, but all that came to me [that is, all he could remember] was walking in the Tymans' front door. Kids at school asked me where I came from. A few teachers did, too. "From under a rock," I'd answer cheerfully. They would laugh and the questions would stop. (17)

He uses self-deprecating humour as a strategy of subversion here, to deny the validity of the questions and possibly also to rebel against the offensive implication that he doesn't belong where he is. But perhaps because of the persistence of such questions, he becomes increasingly bothered by his ignorance of his origins. He desires information about his past, but interestingly he does not ask his adoptive family to provide it—probably because he senses their unwillingness to discuss questions of racial identity.

At this point, Tyman reaches a defining point in his development: he discovers the adoption papers that Jim and Cecile Tyman have kept in their bedroom. It is a kind of primal scene, in which he comes face to face with the secret of his origins. He makes this discovery while searching for evidence of his adoptive brother's school marks, to see whether his own poor performance in school is typical:

I was fumbling through some papers when I came across a large brown envelope marked "Saskatchewan Social Services Department." My head went light. There was a letter with "adopt Indian Métis" in dark blue letters across the top. I must be a Métis Indian, I thought. I wondered what tribe that was. I knew we had Sioux Indians all around us on the reserves. But where was the Métis reserve? I read on: "Born in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan." Where the hell was that? My mom said I was born in Saskatoon. (25)

Young Jimmy is not only surprised to find out about his Métis ancestry; he is in fact largely ignorant of what the Métis are.⁴ He has been until this point a generic "Indian" (as defined by the whites in Fort Qu'Appelle) rather than a member of a specific Native community. But unfortunately, since he knows nothing about the Métis, this new knowledge is not particularly useful in forming a sense of identity and community. Furthermore, he finds out that his adoptive mother has misinformed him about the place of his birth, and that the real, officially designated birthplace is somewhere that he has never even heard of. It is not surprising, then, that this discovery—which should, in theory, help him to solidify a sense of personal identity—actually serves to dislocate him further from his present circumstances, and perhaps even from his origins. He says, "Up until then I'd felt very close to my mother and father. Now I felt alienated" (25).

Still, he returns a few days later to "the drawer which contained my past"

(25), and he finds more information there, including letters which list a large number of diseases he had contracted as a child. “There were no names on these letters,” he says. “Just ‘the subject.’ ‘I’m a subject,’ I smiled to myself” (25). His reaction to this official label is difficult to gauge, largely because of the ambiguity of the word “subject”—an ambiguity which he may not fully understand at the time, but which nonetheless conditions his situation. Perhaps his smile is a bemused response to the absurdity of such a depersonalizing term. However, it is possible that he feels some satisfaction at the validation provided by this word, since in one definition a subject is an autonomous agent who occupies a given place in a community. His apparent amusement at being called a subject may be somewhat misplaced, since he does not yet comprehend the full extent of his subjection. In any case, it is significant that he discovers his forgotten original identity immediately after finding the above quoted designation of his status as a subject. This scene of discovery is described as follows:

Then finally I found some news: “Kenny Howard Martin was placed with William and Cecile Tyman on September 17, 1967. His new name will be James Kenneth Tyman.” I felt a heat rush. That was it! Now I know who I am! (25)

He not only learns his original name at this moment; he also learns that the state agency *gave* him his new name, or at least validated it, authorized it. He has been subjected to, and in a sense made a subject by, the white-dominated government authority—an authority against which he intuitively reacts in later life. However, the moment of his discovery is not described as a scene of trauma, but rather one of celebration. When he says “Now I know who I am,” he believes that he has indeed recovered his lost *ur*-self, and that it will serve as an anchor for his present identity. He has the government bureaucracy to thank for this discovery.

Unfortunately, however, the name “Kenny Howard Martin” remains little more than an empty signifier for Tyman in his subsequent life. This name does not bring back a rush of his early memories. In fact, he feels no particular identification with the name at all, probably because he has not known anyone with the last name “Martin,” and thus it does not provide any visible link to a community. So, after the initial sense of jubilation at discovering the trace of his previous identity, he realizes that the adoption papers have not told him who he is. In fact, his discovery serves to foreground the problem of his lost past. Documents prove to be insufficient to forge the link to his suppressed earlier self. In the final analysis, his apparent discovery becomes not an epiphany but rather a rupture in the fabric of his new identity. He says,

My emotions were in turmoil all that summer. I felt cheated by a mother I didn't even know. I felt deserted. I felt angry because the Tymans hadn't told me the truth. I felt resentment toward people who gave me a hard time about who I was. (26)

He reveals a recognition here that even if the official document *had* shown him who he was, this would not have stopped the racist comments and questions that are directed toward him from the majority white society. People would have continued to give him "a hard time" about his racial identity and his placement within a white family.

The disappointment engendered by this experience does not, however, lead him to abandon his search for his earlier identity. He continues to believe that if he connects with his "real" family, he will be restored to his original identity, or will at least be able to stabilize his current identity. This belief in the power of blood kinship, of biology, is quite striking throughout most of the text. It is only when he finally meets his biological mother, near the end of the narrative, that this belief in biology is tested. I will leave that definitive scene aside for the moment, however, in order to focus on some of the other crises of identity through which Tyman tries to work.

As we saw in his earlier racialized mirror-encounters, where his assumption of identity was simultaneously the adoption of a status as scapegoat, Tyman's identity during adolescence continues to be formulated in accordance with the stereotypical assumptions of others. Given his sense of difference from his adoptive family, and his inability to discuss the issue of race with them, this situation seems almost unavoidable for him. It may well be that identity is always given by the other, as Levinas has argued, but in Tyman's case this is perhaps more true than for most people.⁵ His models of possible Native identities during his early life with the Tymans are basically the dominant racist stereotypes of his community. The white community continually expects him to play a role dictated by the symbolic value of his skin, and eventually he begins to believe in these expectations himself. The result is a stronger identification with the scapegoated mirror image, rather than with his role as a member of the Tyman family. Because of his adoption and his repression of early memories, he has no recollection of a sense of racial belonging—a family or community in which his appearance would not have been anomalous.⁶ His adolescent subjectivity is in many ways cobbled together out of the prejudicial stereotypes of the white community, which he both internalizes and acts out. Only later does he realize that, because of this internalization, "I was myself a hardcore racist. . . . I hated my own people" (109).

The stereotypical Native images that are available to Tyman as models of behavior are contradictory, and they reflect the kind of ambivalence that white colonizers have held toward First Nations people since the earliest times of contact: the alternation between the noble savage and the plain old savage. The difference between these two contrary principles of nativeness is essentially the degree of submission that the Native person shows toward whites. According to Tyman, in Fort Qu'Appelle the "bad Indians" (34) are lazy, drunk, welfare-abusing criminals. The "good Indian" (34), on the other hand, is hard-working, punctual, and honest.⁷ The "good Indian," like many representations of the noble savage, is the exception that proves the racist rule: he or she is "an Indian who has white friends" (68); one who does not threaten white authority. This exceptional status of the "good Indian" is demonstrated in a conversation between Tyman and a group of his white teenage friends:

"I want to get a gun and shoot all the Indians!" one of them exclaimed one day.

"Shoot all the Indians! What about me?"

"Oh, not you, Jim. You're a good Indian." (34)

One of the most shocking aspects of this incident is young Jim's reaction to it: he says "I was elated that he saw me as a good Indian" (34). He has internalized white racist values to such an extent that he does not question the main premise of the boy's initial sentence. Tyman is required to define himself as different from the whites, because of his appearance, but he seems also to be hoping to maintain a differentiation between himself and the other Native people who are the objects of white hatred.⁸

Once Tyman has earned the dubious honorific of "good Indian," he worries that people (that is, white people) might mistake him for one of the "bad Indians." However, immediately after voicing this concern, he describes his first break-and-enter, a crime that he commits with the help of two Native friends whom he describes as "darker than me" (34). In other words, he adopts the role of the "bad Indian." It is difficult not to surmise that this crime is somehow related to the extreme racist incident that Tyman has just described. Perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, he is rebelling against white racism through his crimes. In one case, he steals nearly five thousand dollars from the father of his white friends, a man who had forbidden his sons to associate with James. Tyman is quite clear about the retributive nature of this crime even before he commits it, declaring "I was going to get back at that racist bastard" (38). He is far from being a crusader for anti-racism here, but some of his crimes do seem to be vindictive in their intent,

and it is possible that his daytime role of the “good Indian” results in a repression of anger which is expressed through actions that would be associated with the “bad Indian.” He certainly does maintain a double life for a time, becoming a veritable Jekyll-and-Hyde of racial stereotypes: “To my family I was a hard-working, clean-cut youth. Then on weekends I was pulling three or four break and enters a night” (37). Even after he is caught and charged for this string of robberies, he struggles with the dual Native identities that he has adopted, trying diligently to be a “good Indian,” but then succumbing to rage and feelings of powerlessness, and acting out these emotions through violence and destruction.

Ironically, the first place where Tyman feels that he really belongs is in prison, where he is finally sent at age nineteen, after several other encounters with law-enforcement authorities. “I was quickly accepted among the inmates,” he writes. “I was a solid guy, good people, a bro to my fellow Indians who made up 75% of the unit’s population” (103). For the first time, he has a community in which he is not deemed “different” because of his appearance. He is a member of the majority. This experience seems to bolster his feelings of solidarity with Native people, but it also gives him the fatalistic sense that he has been destined to become the stereotypical “bad Indian.” He goes so far as to naturalize this idea, saying “I was born criminal, I guess” (128). This suggests that he has identified his origin with a racial stereotype, and that he believes he has inherited criminal tendencies from his unknown biological parents. In a sense, he begins to claim the image of the “bad Indian” as if it *were* his lost originary identity.

Other factors in Tyman’s choice of identity are the stereotypes which many of his Native friends perpetuate. They make a distinction between an “apple”—who is “red on the outside, white on the inside” (69)—and a “bro,” who is proud of his Native heritage. Unfortunately, since the traitorous “apple” is essentially the same as what whites define as the “good Indian,” Tyman assumes that being a “bro” means adopting the identity of the “bad Indian.” His dedication to a life of crime can in some ways be attributed to this misreading of the relationship between these stereotypes, so that he comes to believe he can only be proud of his racial identity if he makes himself into the opposite of the “good Indian.” Gradually, he casts off the image of the “apple” and adopts the identity of a hardened criminal. He breaks all ties with his adoptive family because, he says, “they were straight johns and I wanted nothing to do with them. I saw them as the enemy now” (121). After this, he goes on to become a pimp, a drug dealer, and an extremely

violent man. The last half of his narrative reveals a harrowing escalation of his criminal activities and his involvement in brutal beatings and knifings.

It is only when his life is out of control that he comes to question the stereotypical dualisms he has received from the white and Native communities. He does this with the help of his girlfriend, Donna, who is also Native, but who doesn't live within the restrictions of racial stereotypes. Over time, Donna comes to represent the possibility of an alternative Native community for Tyman, one which is something like a family and which is very different from the community of his Aboriginal friends in jail. But Donna is not only a symbol of potential community, she is also a perceptive commentator on the realities of racialized subjectivity, and she plays the role of analyst in Tyman's attempts to uncover the pathology of his distorted identity. He says of Donna, "she was my only link to sanity" (200), and this is no exaggeration. She is a link to sanity first of all because she affirms him and loves him, and second because he trusts her enough to confide in her—which is something he has never done with anyone. During a long stay in jail, he writes to Donna often, expressing his inner feelings:

I felt something when I wrote to her. It was strange. I'd never been to bed with her. I'd never done anything with her. I hadn't even seen her for over a year! But when I thought of her, there was a closeness. I started to confide in her. I told her about the past. I told her how I'd screwed up a good thing with my family. I told her about the deep hatred inside me. (183)

His communication with Donna allows him to bring his inner turmoil into the outer world without resorting to violence and crime, and it also allows him to gain a certain critical perspective on his behavior. He tells her about his desire to find his biological family, and she encourages him to pursue this goal when he is released from jail.

Donna's role as a listener is extremely important to Tyman's growing self-awareness, but she also goes beyond this, offering critical advice about the way he has constructed his identity. When he says that no one would want to hire a Native for a legitimate job, she says "Proud Indians aren't disgraced by their race" (205). When he expresses revulsion at white racism, she responds by challenging one of Tyman's own stereotypes about white people: "I know, Jim. But they're not all like that" (205). By refuting Tyman's belief in the omnipresence of white racism, Donna opens the possibility for him to imagine an identity that is not absolutely conditioned by prejudice. She goes further than this when she suggests that he is in some ways complicit with the racist white attitudes that he despises, since he is

playing the very role that racist stereotypes assign to the “bad Indian.” She says, “By killing yourself or someone else you’ll let them know that you were just another rank Indian. . . . You’re helping them hate you, Nichee Moose” (205). This analysis is extremely astute, since it subverts the simplistic stereotypes upon which he has based his identity, and it suggests that he is in fact somewhat responsible for upholding and performing those stereotypes. Most importantly, Donna’s analysis asserts that Tyman does have the ability to choose a role which is neither the “good Indian” nor the “bad Indian.” This scene is a turning point in Tyman’s self-knowledge, although he declines into further violence and self-destructiveness soon afterward. While I hesitate to push the analogy of Donna as analyst too far, it is worth noting that Tyman displays symptoms of resistance when, just after her analysis of his situation, he says “I didn’t want her to straighten me out again. Crime was too lucrative and too easy” (206). He stabs her shortly after this, when she refuses to become his prostitute—and this violent action might also be seen as a particularly extreme form of resistance to the insights she has offered.⁹ It is not until after he experiences another symbolic death and rebirth that he is able to come to terms with her analysis.

Donna is quite literally Tyman’s savior, since she finds him when he has attempted suicide by overdose, and she keeps him from lapsing into unconsciousness, which would apparently be fatal. This scene is an interesting inversion of the imagined account of his originary trauma which begins the book: here, Donna keeps him awake in order to save his life, whereas in the imagined trauma, his father violently delivers unconsciousness to him, and in the process erases his early life. Both of these scenes involve a symbolic death and a rebirth into a new life, but in the later instance, the rebirth is a much more positive one. After recovering from his overdose, Tyman takes immediate steps to change his circumstances. “I’m trying to live straight and peaceful,” he says, “and it’s happening” (219). He gradually gives up on the prostitution business, finds a legitimate job, and signs up for a drug and alcohol abuse treatment program. He is not always successful in changing his behavior, but his attitude has definitely changed: he discards the fatalistic notion that he was “born criminal” (128), and he no longer conforms to the stereotypical roles of the “bad Indian.” In this final section of the book, Tyman manifests a belief in the possibility of self-determination, which enables him to take responsibility for his actions and his identity. Even after he has been convicted of a crime he didn’t commit, he refuses to revert to his earlier tactics of blaming the system. He says, “The hatred is gone. The

shame of being Indian is not there. The thought of living by crime once I get out isn't there" (226). By replacing shame with pride, he finds a positive way of identifying himself with Native communities—a way which is not entangled in stereotypical expectations.

It may be significant that Tyman finally meets his biological mother only after he has undergone this second rebirth and has begun coming to terms with his own responsibility for his actions and his identity. In an idealized narrative of the self, one might expect this kind of plot device as a reward for finding one's own way in the world, for settling on an identity that seems healthy—but in fact Tyman does not portray his reunion with his mother in such an ideal light. The scene is described in two brief paragraphs which are distinctly anticlimactic, especially when one considers the importance he has placed upon his biological family in previous years. At the end of the tearful meeting, he says, "She gave me her phone number and address. I never did phone her or go by her house on Thirty-Third Street" (220). His mother does not become the fount of his new self-respect and self-knowledge; she does not seem to fill the psychic void which he has always believed she would fill. He only learns a few details about the violence of his father in his early life, and he learns that his father was "a Frenchman" (221) rather than a Métis. He also hears that some of his siblings have grown up to be quite successful—which means that he had not, after all, been destined by genetics or by race to be a born criminal. After gaining this information, he seems to have little else to say to his mother.

Why would he feel this way, when he has expressed a desire to reconnect with his mother ever since he was separated from her? One rather straightforward answer to this question might be that he is unconsciously striking back at her. Though he knows intellectually that his mother was not to blame for the displacement he suffered, he may in a sense be abandoning *her* in return for his own abandonment. However, there is another possible explanation for this turn of events, an explanation which has a number of implications for an understanding of racialized subjectivity. Tyman's disillusionment after meeting his birth mother can be compared with his inability to relate to his "real" name after he had discovered it. When he had first made that discovery, he had said "Now I know who I am" (25), but soon afterward he realized that the name Kenny Howard Martin was just an empty signifier that did not in fact tell him who he was. He had been living under his adopted name for so long that he had in effect *become* James Tyman, and it was not possible or desirable to return to the original name.

His identity as it was practiced was more important to him than any ordinary label of identity. Now, when he meets his biological mother, he comes face to face with the ultimate symbol of his origins, a physical link to his racial identity and his lost childhood. But the experience is not the epiphany he had imagined. He writes,

I had found my mom, but it wasn't the meeting it was supposed to be. I don't know what I was expecting, but I was growing up. I was aware now of who was really my real mom: Cecile Tyman, the one who raised me, fed me, and loved me. It was wrong to think that Alice [his biological mother] was going to take over. I'd been lost all my life, but finding my biological mother wasn't going to change the way I lived. I realized that. (221)

This recognition scene is remarkable in several ways, but perhaps the most striking thing about it is Tyman's reversal of the meaning of the word "real" in relation to his mothers: he says that Cecile Tyman, not his biological mother, is "really my real mom." In this reversal of the real, he abandons the biologism which has made him feel as if he has been missing something essential, and he replaces this belief with a more pragmatic, praxis-oriented understanding of family roles. His criteria for this new "real" are performance and action, rather than origin and essence.¹⁰ By this change, he extricates himself from the fantasy of ordinary grounding, the fantasy of unity with the mother's body—a unity in which he had continued to believe precisely because it was unavailable to him. He sees that Cecile Tyman has been performing the function of a mother to him for many years, and he is willing to accept this. She has become the real mother by playing the role of the mother. Such logic could also be applied to Tyman's understanding of himself. Along with his new acceptance of Cecile Tyman's familial role comes a recognition that he too must define himself by his actions rather than his essence. This emphasis on action prompts him to work toward maintaining an ethical relationship with the communities—both white and First Nations—to which he belongs.

That Tyman considers himself both a son of Cecile Tyman and a Native person suggests that he has come to define racial identity, too, as based more on performance than essence. This is not to say that he decides race is a fiction altogether, but rather that he recognizes it to be less firmly grounded than he had imagined it to be. As we have seen, Tyman had been in a sense performing his identity all along, but the early performances were based upon the expectations of others and upon his own belief in the deterministic power of biology. His "growing up" (221) can be seen to consist

partly in the recognition that his racial roles need not be dictated by others, or by essentialist categories. This disconnection from the originary notion of race leads him toward a view of racialized subjectivity based on what might be called *racial parody*, after Judith Butler's idea of "gender parody," which "reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without origin" (*Gender Trouble* 138). As in Butler's theorization of gender, Tyman's recognition of the untenability of essentialist racial qualities is a liberating experience, and perhaps even a curative one. Certainly, his definition of his own subjectivity becomes more fluid and self-directed in the final pages of the book.¹¹ Instead of acquiescing to the barrage of racist symbols in white culture which serve to categorize and essentialize him, he comes to see himself as what Homi Bhabha calls "the subject of enunciation" (36), speaking and performing his cultural difference, claiming his own place in the world rather than accepting the status of a cultural object. He does this most publicly by writing *Inside Out*, which can be seen as a direct result of his need to enunciate his own identity to a community of readers.

NOTES

- 1 One other recent book that straddles these two genres is Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life*, although the collaborative aspect of this text differentiates it from *Inside Out*. Autobiography and autobiographical fiction are of course very common genres in Canadian First Nations writing, and they are particularly prevalent among Métis writers, such as Maria Campbell (*Halfbreed*), Lee Maracle (*Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel; I Am Woman*), and Beatrice Culleton (*April Raintree*). While the three aforementioned authors have received considerable attention from critics, Tyman's *Inside Out* has not yet been studied in detail, except in book reviews.
- 2 Psychoanalysis has sometimes been criticized as a Eurocentric discourse which might be complicit with the ideologies of white colonizers, and thus inappropriate to the study of postcolonial cultures, but I believe on the contrary that, as Fanon has shown, psychoanalysis can be very usefully applied to the idea of "race" in colonial and postcolonial situations. My intent here is not to enclose Tyman's experience in the hermetic envelope of a theoretical enterprise, but to discover what his narrative can tell us about the experience of racialized subjectivity. I am following the lead of several recent writers who have done exemplary work illuminating a psychoanalytic approach to race. The most noteworthy works in this area to date are Sander Gilman's *Freud, Race, and Gender*, Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (Chapter 6, pp. 167-85), and the anthology *The Psychoanalysis of Race*, edited by Christopher Lane. I would like to thank Gary Leonard and Julian Patrick for encouraging me to pursue this line of research.
- 3 See Lacan, "Mirror Stage," where he famously defines the mirror stage "as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that

takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (2). My discussions of persecution and scapegoating are indebted to René Girard's work in *The Scapegoat*.

- 4 Tyman only gains a clear understanding of the term Métis four years after reading it in the government document. His Native friend Lorne informs him about the hybrid identity of the Métis, and Tyman's reaction to this knowledge is an expression of relief, because "I realized I was half white" (28). Despite this recognition, Tyman does not display much anxiety about his hybrid identity in the rest of the book, which is unusual among Métis authors, many of whom feel torn between white and Aboriginal identities. Tyman for the most part identifies himself as "Indian" rather than as Métis. This may be again related to the external judgments of others, since his skin is relatively dark (Lorne calls him "the darker version" [28] of the Métis), and he is therefore identified by others as unequivocally Native.
- 5 See the metaphysical role of the face of the other in Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, especially 187-219.
- 6 Fanon describes the black person's existence within a black community as a precursor to the rupturing event of the white gaze, saying that "as long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" (109). In Tyman's case, he has no recollection of ever being "among his own," so one can see that his entire experience in his new life is conditioned by the omnipresence of the white gaze and the stereotypical assumptions that go along with it.
- 7 It is perhaps significant that the "bad Indians" are plural, whereas the "good Indian" is singular—implying that in this racist stereotype, there are more "bad" ones than "good."
- 8 This is precisely the situation described by Homi Bhabha in a commentary on *Black Skin, White Masks*, when he describes the colonizer's "ambivalent use of 'different'—to be different from those that are different makes you the same" (44). Tyman can only feel accepted in this racist community through the circuitous route of being seen as "different from those who are different."
- 9 This kind of extreme resistance can be compared to what Freud calls "negative therapeutic reaction" (*Ego and the Id* 390), during which the patients "get worse during treatment instead of better" (390).
- 10 I use the word "performance" to invoke Judith Butler's sense of the performative, which "suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (*Gender Trouble* 139).
- 11 By the term "self-directed" I do not mean to posit a sudden self-discovery or self-mastery on Tyman's part, but rather a conception of identity as what Butler calls "an act" . . . which is both intentional and performative" (*Gender Trouble* 139). The addition of phenomenological intention gives the subject an active role in its own constitution, but this intention must still be formed and expressed through culturally and temporally determined "styles." Butler writes, "These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities" (*Gender Trouble* 139).

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Dream Horses

in memory of Walt Bresette

I

Beneath the moonlight, in the sky,
My dreams are horses
running south.

South is where the journey will end
and south is where it will begin again—
in the journey of the path of souls.

Along the southern trail,
there are side paths that lead into unknown places,
perhaps into box canyons or over the edge of hidden cliffs.
The horses do not go there.

Travelling for four days and four nights,
they will stop to eat at dawn,
drink from streams that carry water
clean and blue.

They will warm themselves at dusk and through each night
at ancient fires of memory and remembrance,
dreams of horses
that have passed this way before.

On the morning of the fifth day,
they will arrive at a river
that they will not need to ford.
Their hooves will carry them, dance
like diamonds across the surface of the water,
until they reach the southern shore,
where other dream horses gather,
to be reborn at the dawning of another day.

Oh, great rememberer, come back,
come back, into the lush, blue fields
of my dreams. . . .

II

You, with the blue heart—
gazing into fields where dreams lie fallow;
gather together, the mane of your horse,
turn him into the face
of the rising sun,
where the dew clings
to sweet, new grasses,
let him drink,
let him taste,
and then ride.

Riding the Wake of the Paddle Journey

Laxaynam, our canoe, parts the water
the way waves pass through wind currents,
curl back upon themselves.

This island passage is a body of voices
and salmon swimming beside us. We will
hear the animal people and eagles

each winter ceremony and in the fathoms
of sleep. We glide over whitecaps as Sea Wolf
chants and channels our blood

in the paddles thrust. In the wake of our guardian
we return to this path to be servants of our ghosts,
the family keeping the storytelling stone

that shows our flesh's formed by tide and stump.
The tide churns and weaves a braid opposite
the direction taking us to tamahnous fires.

We offer the sea splashing our hands
and face a cedar bough for the dead to transform
their long ago grief that never leaves

the darkness on our tongues. Gulls hover above
the bow of Laxaynam; goose-bumps crawl down
our skin; Old Ones peer at us from gull eyes.

Soon we will reach our Puyallup friends, build
a fire and make our bed on the sandbanks.
We pull like ospreys and bears toward

First People's lodge, consistent as the breakers;
breathe salt and driftwood air between the sea
and Takobid, mountain of white water streams

and lake whose shells speak the words of pipers
and coots far below who rise from surf and fall
from the blue-green marsh-basket.

Drifting to the beach, we point our paddles toward
the white trail in the sky, honor Xa?E?f, the Changer,
and the mountain opening our hearts

as broad and deep as the red elderberry sky.
We honor the hosts, the Puyallups, our family,
children, and elders greeting us from shore;

their drum and song, a sunlight flame, circles
the birth of water stories, the smokehouse path
of Sun, Wolf, and Thunderbird.

NOTE: Laxaynam (1790-1855 or 1877?) is the name of a revered chief and elder of our people, the Klallam (Jamestown band), during the early part of the nineteenth century. Sea Wolf is a guardian from a sacred narrative (myth) of the author's ancestors, about which several tribes of the Pacific Northwest Coast have stories. Sea Wolf is painted on the sides of the canoe. Takobid is the sacred mountain of the Puyallup. Whites call it Mount Rainier. Other Puget Sound tribes also have stories that celebrate the magic of this mountain, allude to it as an ancestor and power source.

Happy Trails to You

Contexted Discourse and Indian Removals in Thomas King's *Truth & Bright Water*

Border Crossings

In a paper called "Coyote Pedagogy: Knowing Where the Borders Are in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*," Margery Fee and Jane Flick point out that, "There is no reader of this novel, except perhaps Thomas King, who is not outside some of its networks of cultural knowledge" (131). Fortunately, they point out, "every reader is also inside at least one network and can therefore work by analogy to cross borders into others" (131). King's third novel, *Truth & Bright Water*, challenges the reader's abilities at border crossing. Within a narrative set in the present and written in the present tense, King has embedded, and then exhumed, a wealth of stories and characters from Indian history. Events and names in the narrator's story reveal events in the tragic history of Indian removals. Pairs, partners, correspondences and reversals abound. The book reads history as story, and story as history. It shows the reader both sides of its mirrored images. It is set in the border communities of Bright Water, a Canadian Indian reserve, and Truth, an adjacent American railroad town. The border that separates them is cultural as well as political. One side is Indian, the other white, but the characters cross often, if not easily, from one side to the other.

The narrator is a fifteen-year-old boy whose parents have shops on either side of Division Street in Truth. The actual towns that correspond to Truth and Bright Water are Sweet Grass, Montana and Coutts, Alberta. The Indian-sounding name is American. The harsh one is Canadian. King intentionally reverses these values to expose "the false dichotomies people set up" (King, "Notes"; Hoy). The names Truth and Bright Water suggest the game (and television game show) "Truth or Consequences," which is also the name of a town in New Mexico. While the connection might appear

to be far-fetched, it is not. In 1950, the town of Hot Springs or “Canada Alamosa” (another oblique reference to Canada) changed its name to Truth or Consequences (Ortiz 405; Truth or Consequences). The springs themselves are known locally as Geronimo Springs, “named for Apache leader Geronimo, who used them as a gathering place for his warriors” (Truth or Consequences). Geronimo was captured by General Nelson Miles (referred in the novel by the real estate developer, Miles Deardorf), and removed from his homeland to Fort Marion, Florida (a link to the Fort Marion captives in *Green Grass, Running Water*).

The novel pairs the narrator with his cousin, Lum, to suggest “right and left handed twins from oral stories, creative figures, halves of a pair” (Hoy). The narrator is a thinker, a storyteller, and as the book ends, a minstrel. Lum is a runner, a wounded warrior, “the boy with the bad eye” (102) and in the end, a jumper (resonant with the American paratrooper’s cry, “Geronimo”). Geronimo was trained to be a great runner and fearless warrior. He was a “war shaman” (Opler 200; Barrett 32). He had a bad eye as the result of a bullet wound (Barrett 101). Apache tradition attributes eye defects to “coyote sickness” (Opler 226). In the novel, Lum is training to race in Bright Water’s Indian Days celebration, but he is troubled by the ghosts of lost Indian children. He shoots bullets into the ground by his cousin’s feet, like Apache boys who train by slinging rocks at each other (Barrett 23). In a remarkable display of daring, he even runs across a railroad bridge in front of a moving train (73). According to Opler, Geronimo had coyote power, ghost power and power over guns (Opler 311).¹ Behind Lum’s story is Geronimo’s tragic history.

The political divide between Truth and Bright Water is also a natural one, a river called “the Shield.” The book’s first sentence is, “The river begins in ice” (1). Crossing from mountains to the green grass of the prairie, it transforms into running water. The river’s name is significant. It resonates with another land of ice, the Canadian Shield, and with Plains Indian shields, which are immensely important and multivocal symbols. A warrior paints his shield with designs representing his visionary encounters with supernatural helpers. Shields are icons that actualize the power of stories. Shields bring stories to life. The symbols on shields are intertribal and, like Plains sign language, facilitate communication across the divides of particular languages and traditions. When you view a shield, you recall the stories it represents. When you dream the design of a shield, you enter its stories directly. Geronimo’s shield protected him in war and represented his power

over guns. "When you see a man with a shield, you know it was made for him by a ceremonial man in connection with a war ceremony. . . . The shield is called, 'that which I hold up'" (Opler 311). Like a shield, *Truth & Bright Water* is richly decorated with colour symbolism and with images of painting as an act of re-creation.

There is a bridge over the river that "looks whole and complete." It appears as "a thin line, delicate and precise, bending over the Shield and slipping back into the land like a knife" (1). On closer inspection, however, the bridge is a barrier, a "tangle of rebar and wire that hangs from the girders like a web" (2). The traditional way of crossing the Shield is on Charlie Ron's ferry, "an old iron bucket suspended on a cable" (42). Guarding the approach to the bridge are "the Horns." The author's prologue describes the physical setting:

Above the two towns, the Shield is fat and lazy, doubling back on itself in long silver loops as it wanders through the coulees. But as the river comes around the Horns, it drops into the deep chutes beneath the bridge. It gathers speed here, swings in below the old church, and runs dark and swift for half a mile until the land tilts and the water slowly drains away towards Prairie View and the morning sun. (1)

Multiply Contexted Discourse

Following King's prologue, the rest of the book is told in the highly contexted discourse of its fifteen-year-old narrator who, quite naturally, does not refer to himself by name. Only well into the story and only once, in the context of a narrated dialogue with the narrator's auntie Cassie, do we hear that his name is Tecumseh:

"Tecumseh!, " auntie Cassie slips out of the chair. "Last time I saw you you were a baby"
"No I wasn't." (52)

Like Lum, the narrator is both himself and a character from Indian history. Tecumseh was a Shawnee chief and warrior who attempted unsuccessfully to unite the tribes of the Mississippi valley into an Indian nation.² He was killed in 1813 at the battle of the Thames by the army of General (later President) William Henry Harrison. The defeat of Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, paved the way for an American doctrine of removing Indians to "Indian Territory" west of the Mississippi. The application of this doctrine led to the Cherokee "trail of tears." Giving the narrator the name of Tecumseh alerts the reader to the reality that Indian history underlies the stories of individual Indians. The name also suggests appropriation of Indian history through its association with Civil

War general William Tecumseh Sherman, whose “march to the sea” devastated former Cherokee homelands in Georgia.

The dialogue between Cassie and the narrator quoted above speaks to parallel stories that run through the book and are referred to in the title of this paper. One story is the narrator’s account of his attempt to make sense of a cryptic family history from the contexted discourse of conversations he hears or takes part in. When he tells Cassie, “No I wasn’t,” he is aware that there is something missing from her story, something he doesn’t yet understand about the bits and pieces of information his relations give him about their past. The other story is the author’s engagement with the tragic history of Cherokee removals, “the trail of tears.” For King, Cherokee history is an extension of family history. Story and history come together in the person of Monroe Swimmer, a central character in the book.

Monroe Swimmer is a “big time Indian artist” who returns to Truth and Bright Water after making his name in Toronto and working at restoring works of art for museums. He evokes contemporary Canadian “trickster” artists Gerald McMaster, Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Jane Ash Poitras, Shelly Niro and many others (see Ryan). In the book, Lucille Rain remembers him as “a bit of a joker” (25). She tells the story of how he showed up for Indian Days wearing elkhide shorts and playing a tuba, “pretending to be the Bright Water German Club”: “He said it was the least he could do, seeing as how Germans were so keen on dressing up like Indians” (25).

Swimmer is a coyote/trickster, a master of reversals, and an actor in the archetypal earth diver creation story. He is also a link between the narrator’s family story and Indian history. He turns out to be central to the secret that Tecumseh’s mother and her sister Cassie share, as well as central to the author’s re-writing and reversal of Indian removals. Like coyote in *Green Grass, Running Water*, he is rumored to have left town because he “had gotten someone pregnant” (26). Besides being a family and tribal legend in the narrator’s world, the name of Swimmer also invokes King’s Cherokee heritage. Swimmer was a Cherokee healer who in 1887 showed anthropologist James Mooney a book of sacred formulas written in the syllabary devised by Sequoyah in 1821.³ As Mooney discovered and King reiterates, Indians can own both orality and literacy, story and history. Mooney wrote that:

These formulas had been handed down orally from a remote antiquity until the early part of the present century, when the invention of the Cherokee syllabary enabled the priests of the tribe to put them into writing. The same invention made it possible for their rivals, the missionaries, to give to the Indians the Bible

in their own language, so that the opposing forces of Christianity and shamanism alike profited by the genius of Sikwaya. (308)

In the novel, Monroe Swimmer takes back power from the missionaries by purchasing the “Sacred Word Gospel Church” and painting it back into the prairie landscape.

Like Gerald McMaster in his painting entitled “Shaman explaining the theory of transformation to cowboys” (Ryan 30-31), this big-time Indian artist has the power to restore the whiteman’s sacred word to its proper place by making it disappear into oral tradition. Swimmer’s first name is Monroe. President James Monroe is a key figure in the shared American/Indian history of Cherokee removals. The two names are in tension like the names of cowboys and Indians in McMaster’s “The Cowboy/Indian Show” (Ryan). In 1817 Monroe wrote future President Andrew Jackson that

The hunter or savage state requires a greater extent of territory to sustain it, than is compatible with the progress and just claims of civilized life, and must yield to it. (Prucha 65)

In 1824 Monroe said in his annual message to Congress “that there was only one solution to the Indian problem: the Indians must be induced to move west” (Washburn 44).

Monroe Swimmer is a “big artist,” who activates the stories of both his names to reverse the painful history of Cherokee removal from their homeland. By a clever shift of syntax, he transforms Indians from the subject of removals into agents of their own re-creation. Swimmer’s actions evoke the Ghost Dance teachings of the Paiute prophet, Wovoka, which were also documented by Mooney. Wovoka foretold that the whitemen would disappear, the ancestors return, and the buffalo repopulate the prairies. Swimmer’s painting literally removes the colonial past from the perceptual environment. Swimmer also realizes Wovoka’s prophesy by placing iron cutout images of buffalo back on the land, where they come alive and begin to move out onto the prairie.⁴ Swimmer knows the efficacy of sacred formulas. He knows that truth and bright water are a single country, Indian country.

Wait for the Signs

The narrator of the book does not have to explain his own name or that of Monroe Swimmer, nor does he have to articulate exactly what the names of the Horns or the Shield mean. Like any storyteller in a small-scale society, he does not have to name all his relations other than by the occasional kin term embedded in quoted dialogue. The narrator tells his story as he sees

and hears it. His own internal voice creates a setting for the extensive quotations of the book. It is this dialogue that provides clues to the various mysteries of the book for reader and narrator alike. Some of what the narrator sees and hears makes no sense whatsoever to him, and even less to the reader at the time he recounts them. The narrator and his cousin, Lum, see a mysterious woman throw a child's skull into the Shield from the Horns. Only at the end of his story has he assembled enough evidence to say to himself, "I see what I should have seen before" (249). Only at the end of the story may the reader come to the same realization. Both narrator and reader will do best to "stay calm, be brave and wait for the signs."⁵

Throughout his narrative, Tecumseh reports snatches of conversation between his mother and his auntie Cassie that he cannot figure out. *Truth & Bright Water* is largely constructed of such conversations. In one scene Tecumseh's mother gives Cassie a suitcase full of what he thinks are his old baby clothes:

"So,' says my mother, 'you going to say anything to him?'" The reference to "him" is not entirely clear from the immediate context. Cassie had mentioned the narrator's father, Elvin, previously, but apparently as part of a question about his helping her sister with the shop. The reference may be to someone else, someone that both parties to the conversation may or may not acknowledge without having to name.

"Like what?" says auntie Cassie.
 "Maybe he'll want to help." (112)

She then goes on to say:

"If it were me," says my mother, "I'd say something."
 "That's because you're a romantic," says auntie Cassie.
 "Nothing wrong with a little romance," says my mother.
 "Lasts about as long as cut flowers," says auntie Cassie.

The narrator's mother asks:

"What are you going to do now?"

And Cassie replies:

"What I always do." (113-114)

The above passages and much of the book's quoted dialogue illustrate what linguist Edward Hall calls "high context" messages. According to Hall, "the more information is shared . . . the higher the context" (56-57). Highly contexted discourse assumes that the communicants share knowledge and mutual understandings. As I have noted elsewhere, "discourse within an oral

culture is highly contextualized and based on complex mutually understood (and unstated) knowledge” (Ridington “Dogs” 179). Cassie and the narrator’s mother are obviously talking about shared but unstated information. They refer to “he” and “him” without having to name the object of their discourse. Their conversation makes perfect sense to them, and little or no sense to the narrator at the time he overhears it. In due course, the signs will fall into place. With luck, further conversations will have a reflexive relationship to this one, until a pattern appears and he figures out what his mother and his auntie Cassie knew all along. When he understands, he experiences an epiphany (249).

King’s characters traverse both physical and temporal borders. While the narrator tells his story in the present tense, he refers back reflexively to events that he and his relations remember from the past. Experiences that did not make sense to him as they happened come into focus as the story develops. He quotes the voices of his mother, grandmother and auntie Cassie, and then returns to place their stories in a larger context. Each new story and experience has a reflexive relationship to all those that went before. As the novel progresses, both narrator and reader piece together clues embedded in the stories and story fragments that his mother, father, uncle, aunt and grandmother reveal in their own context-dependent conversations.

The narrator and all his relations are storytellers in the oral tradition. While the reader-listener may be a bit behind in interpreting the signs distributed through the narrated dialogue, he or she will eventually share in the narrator’s epiphany and “see what I should have seen before.” Tecumseh’s narrative present makes sense in terms of the narrated past, in the same way that traditional First Nations stories have always informed present experience. In any small-scale society where every life is known to others as a story, transformation of personal experience into culturally recognized knowledge is a powerful medium for bonding people to one another with meaning. The art of telling secrets is an important medium of communication in communities where people know one another from living together interdependently (Ridington, “Telling Secrets”).

Each story the narrator hears makes sense in relation to the larger story of which it is a part. One good story articulates with every other story. Every story is at once a fragment and an entirety. Each one hints at every other. Stories function as metonyms, parts that stand for wholes. Stories in the First Nations traditions I am familiar with are parts of a highly contextualized discourse that assumes familiarity with biography and shared experience. They

are episodic interrelated vignettes performed by a knowledgeable narrator.

Besides the mystery of the skull, which he shares with his cousin Lum, the narrator struggles to piece together what happened to his mother and his auntie Cassie in “another time, another life,” a phrase he hears from his father (188), his mother (207), and from Cassie as “another life, another time” (245). The mystery has something to do with baby clothes and birthdays. He puzzles at Cassie sending him girl’s toys in July, since he is a boy and his birthday is in April (118). Tecumseh reports several versions of a story about his mother and Cassie, when they were young, switching clothes and hairdos on a double date with two guys. When he first overhears them telling the first version of the story, he thinks the guys must have been his father, Elvin, and Lum’s father, Franklin Heavy Runner (94). Even in the first telling, the story twists and veers:

“That night in The Lodge,” auntie Cassie would begin. “You wore that white dress.”

“Long time ago,” said my mother. “Not much point in digging up the past.”

“I wore that red dress,” said auntie Cassie, and she would begin to laugh.

“You had your hair up, and I had mine down.” (94)

In the next breath, Cassie seems to reverse herself by saying that in the switch, “Yours went up . . . and mine went down” (95). Red and white are important colours in Cherokee symbolism. Red indicates success and triumph; white indicates peace and happiness.

Each telling of a story makes it new and different. In “How I Spent my Summer Vacation: History, Literature, and the Cant of Authenticity,” King writes about his encounter with a storyteller named Bella at the Blood Sun Dance:

Bella, if she exists, believes that history and story are the same. She sees no boundaries, no borders, between what she knows and what she can imagine. Everything is story, and all the stories are true. (252)

When Tecumseh first hears auntie Cassie’s story about how she and his mother switched identities, “I figured that the other guy was Franklin and that after the switch, auntie Cassie wound up with my father and my mother wound up with Franklin.” He especially liked “the best part” when “Franklin took my mother’s hand and announced that this was the woman he was going to marry” (95).

Later on, he hears another version of the story from his mother. This time, it takes on an entirely different meaning:

“I’ll bet dad and uncle Franklin were surprised.”

“Franklin:” says my mother. “Franklin wasn’t there.”

Elvin, she says, was with Cassie. "Then who were you with?" he asks.

Even before I ask the question, I know the answer.

"Monroe Swimmer?"

"Another time," says my mother. "Another life." (207)

In addition to the mystery about auntie Cassie sending girl's birthday presents in July, there is the matter of a suitcase full of baby clothes that Tecumseh first thinks are his but turn out not to be. As they go through the baby clothes, Cassie and his mother are also looking at old photographs. Tecumseh finds them strewn "all over the floor and on the kitchen table" (119).

"There are a couple of older black and white photographs of auntie Cassie and my mother with two men. One of the guys is my father" (119). He doesn't say or know at the time who the other guy is. There is also a picture of a newborn baby:

I figure it's me, only the hair doesn't look quite right. In all my other baby pictures, I have a head of black hair that sticks up in all directions, but in this picture, I don't have much hair at all, and it all lies down neatly against my head. On the back of the photograph, someone has tried to write something but the paper is slick and most of what was there has disappeared. All I can make out is a "J" and an "L" and the number one. (120)

The narrator does not report on his attempts to decipher the text fragment or whether, in fact, he ever resolved this particular mystery. The author leaves the exegesis up to the reader.

This reader went around for days, weeks, trying to come up with the missing information until, quite literally in the middle of the night, I woke up and knew it had to be July 1, Canada Day. That would be the birthday of Cassie's daughter, the one she was thinking of when she sent her nephew girl's toys in July. When the narrator's grandmother comes right out and says to Cassie, "I suppose this is about Mia . . . things go quiet then as if somebody has done something rude and no one wants to admit that they did it" (54). Then when she adds that, "Monroe Swimmer is back in town," Cassie clenches her tattooed hand. The tattooed letters are another text for Tecumseh to decipher. "The letters on the knuckles are pulled tight and stand out against the skin. AIM" (55-56).

From the perspective of a fifteen-year-old boy, the tattoos on Cassie's fingers must stand for "American Indian Movement" and they feed his story about Cassie having been a young radical. In fact, his reading of the text is reversed. When Tecumseh later writes AIM on his own knuckles and asks Cassie, "Is this how you did it?" she replies, "No . . . When I did this, I was

drunk and I did it in a mirror” (229). The letters spell out the name of Cassie’s lost daughter. They can also be read as “missing in action.”

July 1 is not only the birthday of Cassie’s lost child. It is also Canada’s birthday and it is the date of “Indian Days” in *Bright Water*. Canada’s days revert to being Indian days when Indians become active agents of their own history and begin to remove the institutions of colonial oppression. When Monroe Swimmer returns to Truth and Bright Water and takes over the Sacred Word Gospel Church, Indian removals take on a new meaning.

This According to Tom King’s Contexted Discourse

While the context of the narrator’s discourse includes his friends and relations and visitors to Truth and Bright Water, the author’s context brings in the wider range of characters, situations and literatures that make up his world. The narrator’s story and that of the author converge in the same way that story and history converge. The author knows that Bella was right. History and story are the same. There are no boundaries, no borders, between what you know and what you can imagine. Everything is story, and all the stories are true. The author transgresses conventional boundaries between the personal and the historical. His stories include his own family, friends, and colleagues, as well as figures from myth and, most importantly, characters from Indian history and literature.

Some characters in the author’s story bring together family and myth. For example, a third of the way into the book, Cassie addresses the narrator’s mother by name. “Jesus, Helen,” she says. “Where are the windows?” (112). At the most immediate level, the name is a nod to King’s partner and colleague, Helen Hoy. At another level, though, the author’s use of the name ties the story to Helen of Troy, a semi-mythic character from King’s Greek heritage. Cassie, of course, turns out to be Cassandra. The first and only time we hear her full name is when the narrator’s father tells him, “And don’t believe everything Cassandra tells you either” (210).

Helen and Cassandra are sisters in the book. In Greek history, Helen and Cassandra are sisters-in-law. Helen, the wife of Menelaus, has an affair with Paris of Troy while Cassandra, his sister, refuses the advances of Apollo and is condemned to be eternally disbelieved. Troy falls because the Trojans refuse to believe her warning about the wooden horse. Helen survives the war and returns to her husband, while Cassandra and her captor, Agamemnon, are both killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, thus initiating the Oresteia cycle of tragic stories.

By naming his characters as he does, the author plays stories and histories in relation to one another. He reminds us that the Trojan War, after all, came about because of a traumatic event in family history.

Ghosts

Even Tecumseh's dog, Soldier, carries a cultural and historical message. A reader familiar with Plains Indian culture knows that the Dog Soldiers are people willing to sacrifice their lives in defense of the camp. Tecumseh reports what his grandmother said about dogs and ghosts, which is essential information for understanding both the metaphor of dog soldier and the dog Soldier's relation to a group of Cherokees who come into the story "on their way to Oklahoma":

"In the old days," she told me, "dogs helped to guard the camp."

"Against Soldiers?"

"Other things too."

"Like what?"

"Ghosts," said my grandmother. "They watched out for ghosts." (39)

The ghosts his grandmother spoke of show up in several guises. First, there is the child's skull that Lum and Tecumseh retrieve after a "mysterious woman" throws it into the Shield. Near the end of his story, Tecumseh is able to tell his cousin that the mysterious woman was actually Monroe Swimmer in disguise. "It was you," Tecumseh tells Swimmer. "I see what I should have seen before" (249). The child's skull they retrieved from the Shield was one of many that Swimmer liberated from museums during the course of his work restoring paintings.

"Monroe rescues them from museums," I tell Lum.

"Cool." Lum cradles the skull in his arms and smooths the bone with the sleeve of his shirt.

"Anthropologists stick them in drawers," I say. "Monroe steals them back." (254)

The spirits of this child and other lost children resonate throughout the book. One of these lost children is Lum, who identifies with the skull. Initially, he thought it was a lost child abandoned by its mother:

"Did you think she was going to come back . . . Did you really think she was going to come back?" . . .

"She throws you away, and you think she's going to come back." Lum rubs the skull against his face. "Silly baby," he says. "Silly baby." (176)

The image of the lost mother connects to Silko's novel, *Ceremony*, which turns around a quest for the lost corn mother whose absence has held back

the life-giving rains. Another lost mother and child are Cassie and her daughter, Mia.

The Cherokees who show up for Indian Days and stay in the band's "Happy Trails" trailer park are another set of ghostly presences. They are real characters from Cherokee history, and it is appropriate that the trailer park's name is an inversion of their "trail of tears." It is also a reference to part-Choctaw cowboy Roy Rogers, whose signature sign-off was the song, "Happy Trails To You," and whose informal title, "The King of the Cowboys," happens to resonate with the author's name. Soldier bristles whenever he is near the Cherokees. He experiences them as ghosts who still journey along the trail of tears. Finally, there is the ghostly trio of half wild dogs, "The Cousins," who live up by the abandoned Sacred Word Gospel Church. Their name may be a reference to the "Cherokee Cousins," an organization devoted to helping people prove Cherokee ancestry by reference to "Miller Roll" applications filed between 1906 and 1908 (Cherokee Cousins accessed 04/16/00).

The Cherokees who show up at Happy Trails include John Ross ("He's got the big red trailer"), George Guess ("He reads books") and a young girl named Rebecca Neugin, who looks "strange, pale and transparent" (102). John Ross (Gu wi s gu wi) was the principal chief of the Cherokee nation from 1826-1866. He could not prevent his people being removed from their homeland. George Guess (or Gist) is the English name of Sequoyah, the Cherokee who devised a syllabary for writing the Cherokee language (Washburn 46; Prucha 66). Rebecca Neugin was a girl of three during the time of removals. In 1932, at the age of 100, she described her experience to Oklahoma historian Grant Foreman:

When the soldiers came to our house my father wanted to fight, but my mother told him that the soldiers would kill him if he did and we surrendered without a fight. They drove us out of our house to join other prisoners in a stockade. After they took us away my mother begged them to let her go back and get some bedding. So they let her go back and she brought what bedding and a few cooking utensils she could carry and had to leave behind all of our other household possessions. (Perdue and Green 169)

Rebecca especially regretted having to leave her pet duck behind. More than a hundred and fifty years after her removal from Georgia, the ghosts of Rebecca and the other Cherokees are still on their way to Indian Territory. It makes sense that they should show up for Indian Days and make contact with an Indian named Tecumseh. It is no wonder that Soldier bristles at their presence. Tecumseh, whose namesake tried to create an Indian nation

along the Mississippi valley and failed, feels a special connection to Rebecca Neugin, although he does not know exactly why. Rebecca finally leaves with her people, but not before giving Tecumseh a red ribbon from her hair.

“Here,” says Rebecca, “I’ll give you this if you and your dog will help me find my duck.” (197)

Before she leaves, Rebecca begins to speak in Cherokee. “For the first time, she doesn’t look unhappy” (220). As Rebecca begins to speak, grandmother says, “Ah, . . . A Creation story. Those ones are my favorite” (220). Tom King likes creation stories too, especially ones in Cherokee.

A Giveaway

Green Grass, Running Water was a comedy in the sense that it ends, if not with a marriage, then at least with an annunciation, a conception and the Sun Dance. *Truth & Bright Water* is tragedy that ends with the death of Lum and the faithful dog, Soldier. It is a tragedy in the same way that removing the Cherokees from their homelands and placing the bones of Indian children “in drawers and boxes and stuck away on dusty shelves” (250) are tragic assaults on Indian people. Both novels, however, end with an Indian ceremony. As Swimmer told Mooney, between 1887 and 1890 a man called “the Firekeeper” built “the honored or sacred fire” once a year, from which all the people lit fires to begin a new year. The Cherokees also had a wooden box “in which they kept the most sacred things of their old religion” (Truth or Consequences). *Truth & Bright Water* ends with Monroe Swimmer acting as firekeeper and conducting a huge giveaway for the entire community. Swimmer told Mooney that the constant fire was built on a sacred mound. Tecumseh says,

It’s still the middle of the night, but as I look east, I imagine I can see the first movements of dawn and feel the early coolness of morning air. The fire has settled into a low mound. (245)

Auntie Cassie remains standing by the fire.

Auntie Cassie opens the suitcase, takes out a small shirt, and holds it up to the light. Against the heat of the fire, the shirt looks soft and golden, and even though I’m watching, I almost miss it, the motion is so quick and casual. In the end, all I really do see is the shirt spread out and floating, bright against the night. It settles onto the embers, lies there in the fire for the longest time, and then slowly curls up at the edges, glows briefly, and is gone. (246)

Monroe asks Tecumseh,

“What do you think your auntie would like?” “I don’t know,” I say. “What do you think?” . . . Here,” he says, and he picks up an Inuit sculpture of a woman with a child on her back. “We’ll give her this.” (244)

Cassie replies, "Just be careful of what you give away . . . There are some things you want to keep" (244). Tecumseh takes the photograph from his pocket:

"Is this her?" . . . "You know . . . Mia?" "Is she someone I know?" "No," Auntie Cassie puts the photograph in her coat. "You never knew her." I wait to see if auntie Cassie is going to finish the story, but I can see that she's gone as far as she wants to go. "Another life," she says. "Another time." (245)

Following the giveaway, Monroe Swimmer removes the remaining skulls from a sacred bentwood box and initiates "the ceremony . . . for putting the bones in the river" (251). The ceremony requires ribbons to be tied to the skulls, but Swimmer has run out and Tecumseh supplies the one he received from Rebecca. "The ribbon flutters out like wings" (252). Just then, a voice comes out of the darkness saying, "Mum?" "Is that you, mum?" (252). It is Lum, who has come to believe that the mysterious woman is his mother: "It's my mother . . . She's come home" (226). Now, his own name echoes his loss: Lum, Mum.

Lum has painted his face red and black, the colours of triumph and death in Cherokee symbolism. He is prepared to enact his own personal ceremony. When Tecumseh tells him that the mysterious woman was not his mother, who died in a mysterious accident, but Swimmer, Lum begins to talk baby talk to the skull, as if to console himself by acting the role of the mother he has lost. He seems as much to be letting go of his own spirit as he is releasing the spirit of this long lost child:

"Baby wants to say goodbye." Lum holds the skull out at arm's length. He slowly opens his hand and lets the skull roll off his fingers. "Bye-bye baby," says Lum. "Bye-bye." (257)

Lum is another of the lost children. While Cassie is looking for her daughter, Lum, like Tayo in Silko's *Ceremony*, is searching for his mother. At the beginning of the story, he told Tecumseh, "I'm not going to stop until I feel like stopping" (4). Now, at the end of the broken bridge over the Shield, he repeats the statement, "I'm going to keep on going until I feel like stopping!" (258). As Lum takes charge of his destiny and picks up speed, "his body uncoils and stretches out." Soldier strains to follow him, tears his collar out of Tecumseh's hands, and "explodes out on the decking and sends me sprawling." Both disappear as "fog swirls up through the holes on the bridge" (258).

Lum's leap into the waters of the Shield plunges him and the novel into mythic time. It recreates an image from the earth diver creation stories familiar to readers of *Green Grass, Running Water*. He joins Swimmer in returning the skulls of lost children to the life-giving water of creation. In

the context of Lum as Geronimo, his return to the water suggests an identification with the Apache culture hero and monster slayer, Child of the Water (Ortiz 433) or He Was Born For Water (Farrar 19). In Apache tradition

A divine maiden [White Painted Woman] came among the people, allowed water from overhanging rocks to drip upon her head, and miraculously conceived. She bore a son, Child of the Water, and protected him from the suspicious giants by various stratagems. When the child was only four years old, he began to challenge the monsters and, in a series of daring feats, destroyed them all. (Ortiz 433)

White Painted Woman is the central figure in Isanaklesde Gotal, the Apache girl's puberty ceremony. "During the four days and nights of the rite and for four days thereafter, the girl must be addressed and referred to only as White Painted Woman" (Opler 90). Following the Apache defeat by General Miles, they were forbidden to hold their traditional ceremonies. In 1912, the federal government rescinded its order and told the people that "they could gather together as a tribe once a year to have a celebration on the fourth of July" (Farrar 134). They chose to celebrate Isanaklesde Gotal, which in earlier times had been held on summer solstice and continued to be their major world renewal ceremony. Apache girls who have begun their first menstruation the previous year run along a sacred pollen path toward the east. Upon their return, the goddess, who had grown old during the year, is made young again (Talamantez). Like King's Canadian Indians, for whom Canada Day becomes "Indian Days," the Apache reclaimed an American national holiday and made it their own.

More to a Study than Just the Words

Truth & Bright Water is complex and tightly written. It tells a tragic story, but it also features empowerment through transformation and re-creation. Monroe Swimmer is a classic trickster, capable of realizing both his Cherokee name and the promise of Wovoka's Ghost Dance, but he also knows that the creation story begins with water. He transforms Indian Removals from an intransitive to a transitive process. When he paints over the sacred word of the missionaries, their church disappears and is replaced by open prairie. The images of buffalo he places out on the prairie begin to take on lives of their own. Like his Cherokee namesake, Swimmer applies sacred formulas to contemporary situations. Like an earth diver creation figure, he moves between sky, earth and water. His kite is named, "teaching the sky about blue" (49). He makes a platform on the prairie called "teaching the grass about green" (43). Another kite is "teaching the night about dark" (49).

He wears a tee shirt with the logo of “Monroe Shocks” (45). He plays with the borders that divide Canadian, American, Indian and Cherokee identities. He transforms Canada Day into Indian Days, and makes the event a time of ceremonial renewal.

Swimmer knows that the stories he makes are like the buffalo he places on the prairie. They have lives of their own, but they need a little help getting started. In order to keep the stories alive, he asks Tecumseh to be his minstrel:

“Minstrels sing about heroes and great deeds,” says Monroe.

“You want to be my minstrel?” . . .

“Here’s how it works. I’m the hero. and you have to make up songs and stories about me so that no one forgets who I am.” (193)

After the giveaway he reminds Tecumseh of his role as storyteller:

“When you write the song about my exploits,” says Monroe, “Don’t forget the giveaway.” (247)

His words bring to mind the opening lines of Thomas Moore’s song, “The Minstrel Boy”:

The minstrel boy to the war is gone,
In the ranks of death you’ll find him;
His father’s sword he hath girded on,
And his wild harp slung behind him.⁶

Once Tecumseh has pieced together the story, he takes on the authorial role of minstrel. He “girds on” Swimmer’s sword. Swimmer knows that what Tecumseh’s grandmother said is true. There is more to a story than just the words. This richness resonates with what Dunne-za elder Tommy Attachie told me about songs and stories in his own tradition. “When you sing it now,” Tommy told me, “Just like new.” In *Truth and Bright Water*, Thomas King has gone beyond the words of his stories to make the events of a shared Indian history just like new. Besides being an obvious coyote, King also has the ear of a minstrel. He makes waiting for the signs worth our while.

Epiphany

For the last month I have been obsessed with decoding the secrets of *Truth & Bright Water*. When I sent a draft of the paper to Helen Hoy she reminded me that the book is “less allusive than GGRW.” “Could have fooled me,” I thought. But she is right that the story makes sense as a story even if you don’t know all the history behind it. At a recent meeting of the Canadian Anthropology Society I found myself raving to colleagues at a Chinese restaurant about Geronimo and Canada Day and Swimmer and the

rest of my discoveries. When I paused for breath, the very sensible Liz Furniss asked an obvious question I hadn't thought of in so many words. Why doesn't King just tell a straight-up story? Why does he write about secrets that are hidden from most of his readers?

My first reaction was to say, "Don't ask me, ask him," but that begged the question, which could be framed more generally as, "How is this book, and Native literature generally, relevant to Canadian Literature?" Is King an Indian storyteller whose writing is a transformation of Aboriginal modes of discourse, or is he just another postmodern writer who happens to write about Indians because that is who some of his ancestors were? There are probably readers who hold one or another of these views on either side of the border between Indian and non-Indian identity. As you may have gathered from my argument in this paper, I think he adds an Aboriginal dimension to the western canon rather than simply using western writing strategies to describe Aboriginal experience. His work is neopremodern, not postmodern.

Besides being a work of erudition and creativity, *Truth & Bright Water* locates collective history within personal story and reveals the storied life of Indian history. Like any good story, the book challenges its reader to take an active authorial role. He or she joins the narrator in his quest to "see what I should have seen before." The book draws its reader into the history of what Indian people experienced before anyone living today was born. Rebecca Neugin was an old woman when she told the story of what happened to her at the age of three. No one alive today remembers the trail of tears from first-hand experience. Geronimo was the war shaman of a people who now conduct their most sacred world renewal ceremony on the fourth of July. In King's country, Canada Day becomes Indian Days. King is a minstrel who makes up songs and stories so that no one forgets the actuality of Indian history. Swimmer, Geronimo, Tecumseh, The Shawnee Prophet, Sequoyah, Heavy Runner, and little Rebecca Neugin come to life in the telling of King's creation story. When Thomas King sings the stories now, they become "just like new."

NOTES

All My Relations. Thanks to Jillian Ridington, Helen Hoy and Tom King for reading versions of this paper.

- 1 An Apache informant told Opler the following story about Geronimo:

He started to sing. There were many songs, and the songs were about Coyote. They told how Coyote was a tricky fellow, hard to see and find, and how he gave these characteristics to Geronimo so that he could make himself invisible and even turn into a doorway.

They told how the coyote helped Geronimo in his curing. Geronimo accompanied his singing with a drum which he beat with a curved stick. At the end of each song he gave a call like a coyote. (Opler 40)

- 2 An undocumented webservice says that Tecumseh's name means "Shooting Star" and his motto was, "I am the maker of my own fortune." Eckert's biography gives his name as "The Panther Passing Across" (41). In the 1930s, the Tecumseh story was appropriated by nationalistic German novelists including Karl May to promote the message that even heroic resistance will fail in the absence of racial and national unity. May's "good Indians" are ones who have been improved by Germans and Christianity (Washburn 585). A piece of King's mosaic is his story of a German tourist named Helmut May and his wife Eva, who are found dead of "exposure" in their Grand Cherokee parked out on the prairie. Blanca Chester (personal communication) suggests that Helmut may be a reference to Emma Lee Warrior's short story, "Compatriots," whose central character is Helmut Walking Eagle. Walking Eagle, in turn, suggests Adolph Hungry Wolf, a German who writes about Blackfoot culture. Chester also suggests that Eva may refer to Hitler's mistress, Eva Braun, who died with him in a Berlin bunker. The photographs in May's camera have the foreground in focus and the landscape out (King, *Truth* 155). The reference to photography recalls both King's *Medicine River* and his project of "exposing" prominent Indians by photographing them wearing Lone Ranger masks.
- 3 Sequoyah may have been physically disabled since his name (Sikwo-ye) means "Pig's Foot." He was born in 1776 near Tuskegee, Tennessee and died in 1843 near Tyler, Texas. Following Sequoyah's invention of an Indian writing system, Cherokees became literate in their own language and established a newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix* (Washburn 44).
- 4 The campus of the University of Lethbridge, where King headed the Native Studies department, features metal cut-outs of animals silhouetted against the prairie horizon.
- 5 I am not going to give this one away entirely, but CBC listeners will know what I am talking about.

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driving to santa fe

a woman has to wonder what keeps the body from tumbling into outer space or drifting across the road like snow across an open plain maybe the question is simply the effect of this elevation reminding us we don't have wings and what the singer-poet said about grace rattles like pebbles inside our skulls grounding us even in moments like this

won't you dance with me? is what red streaks of sun painting the horizon say to a woman with bear cubs sleeping in her belly

there is no response but driving south from sante fe with a lump in the throat means she hasn't forgotten the owl wings beating her true love's thighs or the low loon calls floating across the smooth surface of her impaled face

a friend led her here transforming words from sculpted silence it's like kissing she wants to say but she is too shy for the intimate talk of blackbirds crying something about lovers disappearing like water on hot stones when every cloud is a spell against invisibility and each time her chest rises and falls it becomes an invocation learned from bears or the telling of a prophecy saying a man will fall from the sky to the enchanted mesa of her heart's red earth

so maybe tomorrow she will write a seed pod into being place all of this inside: three words two dreams one memory and a small garden built and placed on a table between women who have learned to speak without talking

like that night

when across the table her laughing meant she adopted this woman as kin and her teasing meant she will offer her wild strawberries then make a bed by the fire and cover her with the softest pendleton blanket and when she spoke too quietly it meant it's snowing and my hands are too cold to untie the burden basket knotted at my breastbone meant i am afraid meant (help me)

then when her friend served ginger tea this woman took it to mean when you
are cold i will warm you and when she smiled her friend heard a match strike
and in the movement of her arms a wigwam was built later they both heard the
low hum of a lullabye rising from the ground beneath her feet and when she
sang her breathing lifted the weight from her daughter's chest and her hair
falling to her shoulders was a wink

today there was snow from the rio grande to guadalupe and back but that isn't
why a young woman's head hurts it's because of a confusion of sagebrush and
snowclouds dropping seeds on distant mountains and a hot sun poking at
frozen fingers like holy places no one can name and a pregnant woman whose
belly speaks a language this frozen one has never had the courage to mouth

(she wonders if it says something about blood and memory
red clay words and a woman who enters her dreams to sing
to the unborn children who haunt her thinking)

but there are four owls trapped in my ribcage she wants to tell her
listen: their wings beat like a man playing a guitar a drum a shaker a woman's
body that is my own skin and bones and some other woman's as well

but wait
she wants to tell her

not calling you at this moment means only that i am writing poetry
because my voice cannot tell the story

of this

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Winisk: A Cree Indian Settlement on Hudson Bay. Borealis \$41.95/\$24.95

Reviewed by Brad Neufeldt

Following the format of other texts produced by the Algonquian Text Society, *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik* is an explicit folding together of biographical texts "Shaped by Two Cultures." It follows closely the structural format of *kiskinahamâkanak-âcimowinisa / Student Stories* (1989) and *Kinêhiyâwîwininaw nêhiyawêwin / The Cree language is Our Identity* (1993). The English translation of Emma Minde's recollections placed opposite the Cree text (in Roman orthography) presents a narrative that is accessible to both the English reader and the fluent speaker and reader of Plains Cree. However, those fluent in Cree who wish to read the text in Cree syllabics (such as is found in other publications of the Algonquian Text Society) will have to contact the publisher. If, as James Clifford says in "On Ethnographic Allegory" (1986), "[f]ieldworkers are increasingly constrained

in what they publish by the reactions of those previously classified as nonliterate" and who might now be reading over their shoulders, then this text exhibits a similar constraint. Prefaced by an ethnological and etymological introduction, it presents a narrative that is suited to the linguist and the Native Studies student. However, the linguistic mirroring of narratives is present only in Minde's narrative. While this structure of *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik* assumes that its readers are no longer stealing surreptitious glances at a narrative that someone else is writing, it would be interesting and appropriate to see this preface and introduction similarly mirrored by a Cree text.

Certainly this book is, as Ahenakew states, a life story shaped "by two powerful forces: the traditional world of the Plains Cree and the Catholic missions with their boarding-schools, designed to re-make their charges entirely." Minde's narrative of family history, childhood memories, marriage, child-bearing and daily life activities (hunting, preparing animal skins and food, chopping wood, and farming) and of "Self-Reliant Women" are reminiscent of the pattern of women's autobiographies presented in *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Julie Cruikshank, ed., 1990). Even as she acknowledges the inevitability of changes brought to her community by the creation of reservations and residential schools, Minde presents a particular nostalgic calm that mourns the loss of many aspects of traditional Cree life.

On the other hand, this is also an autobiography of a life in transition between two Cree communities, one that is shaped by a sense of learning based on both personal experience and a strong sense of community history. Minde tells her story beginning with a moment of transition, her marriage, which takes her from *onihickiskwapiwinihk* (Saddle Lake) to *maskwacisihk* (Hobbema). H.C. Wolfart points out in his introduction, that this transition is shaped by Minde's relationship with her two "mothers-in-law" who become at least as important as her own mother. They "may seem even more important if the bride joins her husband in a faraway place, where she finds herself among strangers." Marriage, in this case, is the starting point of learning to be in a new community, even as that community faces changes in its daily life activities.

Voices From Hudson Bay: Cree Stories From York Factory also depicts a community dealing with a changing world. However, what is presented here is not a collection of one individual life history, but a community history that can be read as an alternative to the "official" histories of York Factory that might be found in the archives of the Hudson Bay Company. Such a history might document financial records and the geographical records and journals of explorers and traders. Briefly detailing the history of York Factory (1684-1957), Robert Coutts claims that "York Factory is one of the most extensively documented contact sites in Western Canada": district reports, 200 post journals, and 2000 account books help document the material culture of the Swampy Cree, and their seasonal hunting and trading practices. But this introduction of a *documented* history serves as a juxtaposition against the oral record that is presented.

Coutts makes it clear that the intention of this book is to add to the development of an oral record of the Swampy Cree. Using interviews with elders who formerly lived at York Factory, Beardy and Coutts have

sewn together a narrative picture of a Cree community's changing place within the social and economic realities of Canada's northern fur trade. Instead of separate and individual storytellers' narratives, they have arranged a thematic grouping, one in which constant alternating voices might at times seem disjointed. While a certain integrity and coherence inherent to each of the storytellers' narratives might be lost, a larger picture of a community of voices is gained. There is, instead of a cacophony of fractured and competing voices, a coherent narrative unity that presents what might be read as a transcript of an extended discussion about life at York Factory. This arrangement of stories (around themes of trapping and trading, women's lives, seasonal life, legends and cultural traditions, grandparents, dealing with sickness, descriptions of York Factory and the effects of its closing) creates a linear progression of the life and death of a community. What is important to these storytellers is a community's survival. "When people moved from York Factory," says Catherine Anderson, "there were lots of problems. The elder chief's wish was not respected. He did not want the people to leave that area. Now today there's nobody there. People were happy at York Factory. All the old folks are passing on. I don't think there's too many alive today." And tied to this concern for community survival, a sense of a community's place and the continuity of a way of life, is a resentment of the bureaucratic intrusion into what is regarded as a natural way of living. John Neepin begins the discussion, pondering: "I often think of this. Why the people aren't allowed to hunt any time. We are allowed to hunt only at certain times. This doesn't make things any better for the wildlife. That's just like having a garden and not tending to it. If this garden is not looked after properly all that would grow in it would be weeds." A garden and a community must be tended to if they are to

survive. And an oral history must be told if it is to grow. In this light, *Voices From Hudson Bay* is a valuable contribution to the life history of a community.

Like *kwayask ê-kî-pê-kiskinowâpahtihicik, Winisk: A Cree Indian Settlement on Hudson Bay* presents a narrative of a recently married woman coming to terms with living in a new culture and community. But in contrast, this narrative of a clash of cultures might be read in a pejorative tone. *Winisk* begins like an adventurer's or tourist's story, one in which Vita Rordam repeatedly tells us how much she wants to see the North and the people there, as if she expects to leave and not return. My question is where are the Cree? Early on, Rordam spends more time talking about wanting to see northern settlements, visiting with the Catholic fathers, and working on a local government building project, belying the sub-title, "A Cree Indian Settlement on Hudson Bay." Certainly, the reader is given scenes of Rordam's encounters with the local Cree population of Winisk, but these are coloured by a bravely admitted unwillingness to learn and engage these people in their own language. Father Gagnon admonishes Rordam, saying "[Cree] traditions, attitudes and behaviour are quite different from ours. It does not mean that one is right, the other wrong, we are just different but, as a visitor, it is up to you to adjust. This is THEIR territory." On the one hand Rordam claims that "[t]he Indians have always been used to a 'feast or famine' way of life, they can subsist on very little but, when times are good, they make the most of it without worrying about the future." And yet, earlier she documents how difficult it is to procure firewood, and how the Cree are able to plan a year in advance their collection of firewood. And instead of learning to speak Cree in THEIR territory, Vita Rordam later says: "[P]erhaps the day is not too far away when the Indians will possess the necessary

knowledge, skills and freedom to govern themselves, instead of meekly accepting whatever the various levels of government decide is best." However, it is towards the end of the book, through her narrative of her correspondence with various members of what was once Winisk, that a more compelling picture of this Cree settlement begins to emerge. It is as if the death and mourning of this community creates a continually reinscribed postal remembrance. The loss of this community creates a need to understand the past, not just on the part of Rordam, but also on the part of Cree people trying to maintain a memory of Winisk.

Art Objects and Family Heirlooms

Sarah E. Boehme et al.

Powerful Images: Portrayals of Native America. Museums West / U Washington P \$41.95

Aldona Jonaitis, ed.

Looking North: Art from the University of Alaska Museum. U Washington P \$45.95

J.C.H. King and Henriette Lidchi, eds.

Imaging the Arctic. U Washington P \$40.00

Reviewed by Renée Hulan

Together, these three collections exploring the power of visual imagery in contemporary culture raise an issue that vexes the study of art by Native people: as Dave Warren puts it, "the persistent question of boundaries—where art ends and ethnographic artifact begins" (*Powerful Images*).

Powerful Images and *Looking North* consider the relationship of art and artifact within a reconsideration of the museum's function in contemporary culture. With their large "coffee table" format, glossy pages and colour plates, both collections also serve, as most museum publications do, to advertise the museums' extensive holdings.

Powerful Images presents the contents of

an exhibition organized by Museums West, a group of museums brought together to promote art from the North American West. The essays accompanying the beautiful colour plates address a general audience and will be of great interest to readers unfamiliar with the issues confronting museums holding Native American objects. In "Illusions and Deceptions: The Indian in Popular Culture," James H. Nottage challenges the distinction between fine art and kitsch, and argues that the tendency to marginalize images of the Native in popular culture indicates how viewers "have become too comfortable with the commercial exploitation of the Indian image." The plates included with this essay alone make the book worth buying. As well as fruit crate labels, lobby cards, and trade signs, they depict objects ranging from an ivory umbrella handle carved to depict a stereotyped chief in feather headdress to a puzzle produced by the Singer company depicting Plains women using their sewing machine beside a painted tipi. Sarah Boehme's essay also stands out with its balance of informative and critical commentary, as in this succinct analysis of James Earle Fraser's *End of the Trail*: "The dejected Indian, seated on a horse whose posture echoes the melancholy theme, inverts the usually heroic formula of the equestrian sculpture." Her contextualization redeems the choice of this piece for the frontispiece of the collection.

Sarah E. Boehme acknowledges the way notions of "art for art's sake" sever the link between art and culture, form and function, that Boehme and others maintain is highly valued by Native artists. While Emma Hansen emphasizes the economic, spiritual, and social functions of objects on the grounds that Native American languages have "no equivalent word for art," Mike Leslie undermines this assumption: "To simply state that a word does not exist oversimplifies the complex cultural diversity that exists among native people."

Moreover, the insistence in both collections that certain objects are "art" maintains a hierarchy that the authors argue does not exist for Native American artists. This distinction has more to do with safeguarding the contents of museum collections, ensuring that the objects are worthy of display, than with making an epistemological argument. The development of museum collections as a result of what Bea Medicine calls "laundry list anthropology" is self-consciously addressed by various authors who note the relationship between museum acquisition and the late nineteenth-century image of the "dying or disappearing Indian." Yet, acknowledging the troubled history of museum acquisition and the "theory of museology" are ambivalent gestures at best. Such gestures distract from the continued practice of museum collection, as the absence of reference to provenance of specific objects suggests an absence of controversy surrounding the individual objects and obscures their continued relevance in the present.

Looking North combines colour plates of Alaskan art objects held by the University of Alaska Museum, poetry by Peggy Shumaker ("award-winning poet and English professor"), essays, and conversation with artists and museum staff. The editors state that "[n]ew ideas on art and museums inform this publication," and this concern is apparently reflected in the book's inclusive structure, which places Aleut grass wallets alongside abstract oil painting, Inupiaq baleen baskets next to realistic watercolours, or ancient ivory carvings and contemporary sculpture. Although this approach represents the diversity of the collection, the Alaska Museum retains the conventional arrangement into departments of ethnology, archaeology, and fine art, tending to undermine the claim to new ideas. Similarly, when the focus of the text shifts from artefacts to the newly minted term

"artifakes" defined as "things made in a 'traditional' style that could easily be mistaken for Native manufacture" sold by "disreputable dealers," the fixation on the authenticity of objects disrupts the reevaluation of museology ostensibly at the heart of the project.

Most of the text consists of transcribed conversations between various artists and museum staff members. Whenever a dispute seems about to develop, such as when one participant corrects another's (and the collection's) use of "Aleut" rather than "Alutiiq," it is quickly dropped. In another instance, when Aldona Jonaitis invokes Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in order to argue the relative value of encountering an object in a museum rather than seeing a photograph or reading about it, no one questions her puzzling interpretation, and the next speaker in the dialogue changes the subject. The result is a highly self-conscious dialogue that allows the participants to circle issues concerning the practice of museology without answering the numerous questions they raise, and the ease with which subjects can be dropped is frustrating.

In contrast, *Imaging the Arctic*, a collection of papers presented at a conference entitled *Imagining the Arctic: The Native Photograph in Alaska, Canada and Greenland* at the British Museum in 1996, offers a thought-provoking and comprehensive treatment of the relationship between indigenous peoples and representation by successfully mediating the art-artifact distinction. This entails a sophisticated understanding of Benjamin's insight that, since the mimetic impulse is really a desire to become the Other, attempts to distinguish between art and artifact in cross-cultural representation will always be ideological. *Imaging the Arctic* is an eclectic gathering including biographies of individual photographers (such as Peter Pitseolak, Geraldine Moodie, and John Moller), histories and inventories

of photographs taken on a series of Arctic expeditions, and theoretical discussions of the role of photography and film in cross-cultural contact. Some of the articles concentrate on the history of expeditions rather than on the photos taken during them and tend to treat the photos as artifacts rather than art. However, even in these essays, the research is meticulous and clearly presented. Other essays combine theoretical and technical knowledge of the form with archival research successfully. Peter Geller's "Pictures of the Arctic Night: Archibald Lang Fleming and the Representation of the Canadian Inuit" describes the use of photography in the mission to Christianize the Inuit while Jim Burant's "Using Photography to Assert Canadian Sovereignty in the Arctic" does just that in a comprehensive analysis of photography on the A.P. Low expedition. Many of the essays describe the tension between the photograph as artistic expression and scientific documentation and attempt to unsettle the perceived truth value of photographs. William W. Fitzhugh demonstrates Edward Nelson's "staging" of photographs for dramatic effect and contextualizes it within Nelson's contribution to the scientization of natural history.

Many of the essays in *Imaging the Arctic* portray the historical context in which photographs were taken in the past without ignoring their value in the present. These photographs, it is remembered, have meaning for the people and communities represented in them, as Chris Wooley and Karen Brewster conclude in their essay: "Photographs can be items of ethnographic study, art objects and family heirlooms all at the same time. Professional researchers can make an important contribution to native communities by working to continue the process of visual repatriation and by making collections accessible to the communities where the photographs were taken. . . ." What Wooley and Brewster affirm for these photographs also applies to collections of "art" and "artifacts" alike.

A Good Book

Bonnie Burnard

A Good House. Harper Flamingo \$29.00

Reviewed by Barbara Pell

Bonnie Burnard was not exactly a household name when she beat out Timothy Findley and Anne Hébert for the 1999 Giller Prize for Fiction with her first novel, but she had already won the Marian Engel Award, the Commonwealth Best First Book Award (for her first story collection, *Women of Influence*), and been short-listed for the Giller for *Casino and Other Stories*. Burnard is comparable to Alice Munro and Carol Shields, for she is a master of the domestic novel.

A Good House is the story of three generations of the Chambers family from 1949 to 1997. Having survived the war (minus three fingers), Bill Chambers returns to Stonebrook, a small southwestern Ontario town near Lake Huron, to his wife, Sylvia, their children, Patrick, Paul, and Daphne, and his job in a hardware store. With typical postwar optimism, “comfortable was what the Chambers were hoping against hope to be.” But in 1952 Daphne breaks her jaw, a lifelong deformity that makes her independent and iconoclastic, and in 1955 Sylvia dies of cancer, leaving her husband desolate and her elder son angry and bitter. Less than a quarter of the way into this novel, Burnard, without melodrama or sentimentality, has established the dynamics of this remarkably realistic story about an ordinary family: the delightful joys, the inevitable sorrows, and the love, courage, and resilience that enable people to cope and adapt to life.

Bill remarries Margaret, an old friend, who wisely and gently becomes the relational glue and emotional centre for the family. As their children grow up, they have their own share of triumphs and tragedies: marriages, careers, babies, divorces, disap-

pointments, and deaths. The family circle widens to embrace spouses, ex-spouses, grandchildren, and their spouses. And all the relationships are set in the context of a community of supportive friends and fellow townspeople who bake cakes for weddings and construct a downstairs bathroom for a dying neighbour. Perhaps because we care so much about this family, the tragedies—especially in the two penultimate chapters, 1986 and 1995—seem so painful, contrived, even gratuitous. But the final chapter, 1997, unites the now thirty-seven family members in a wedding picture on the front steps of the Stonebrook Town Hall—“a legend,” as Margaret says, of love and mutual support.

The themes of this novel are the power of love and the charity of lies. They unite in the refusal of the unwed Daphne to divulge the name of her daughters’ father; when the secret is revealed at the wedding that ends the novel, the results are typically ambiguous. Concerning one of the many well-meant deceptions in the book, Margaret finally confesses to Patrick that she lied about having been on the same ball-team as his mother in order to comfort and connect with the angry, grieving young man. The middle-aged and self-righteous Patrick, now recognizing the grace of a loving lie over a hurtful truth, forgives her: “Perhaps I can tell you a lie some day.” Burnard’s portrait of this ordinary family seems superficially simple but is profoundly complex in its humanistic wisdom and emotional nuances.

The setting for the novel, Stonebrook and the Chambers’ “good house,” is precisely and lovingly detailed, as are all the everyday events of this fifties family as it grows up. The ordinary becomes the extraordinary through Burnard’s quiet, undramatic illumination. The book is structured in ten chapters by years, at first in three-year increments (1949, 1952, and so on) and later in longer periods (1956, 1963, and

so on). But in each section Burnard deftly fills in the missing years to give the reader a full canvas within the ten cameos.

The characterisation is the core of *A Good House*. The narrative voice is third person, not so much “omniscient” as all-inclusive and compassionate. Margaret dominates the book with her warmth and wisdom. Her relations with her husband and children (and their spouses and children) weave the fabric for this typical but ideal family, with all its frailties and failings. Burnard creates suspense simply through evoking the reader’s intense empathy for the daily lives and futures of her characters.

Above all, this novel celebrates a human strength and grace. The Chambers family finds no solace in religion for their crises (in fact, the absence of the church in their lives may be slightly unrealistic in small-town 1950s Ontario). Near the end of the book, as Patrick remembers his dead mother and brother, his damaged niece and sister, his broken marriage and his senile father, he almost despairs. Margaret’s voice is, like Burnard’s, wisely matter-of-fact and compassionately humanistic:

“It’s all right, Patrick,” she said. “You are a kind man. I am a kind woman.

There are lots of us around.”

“Do you ever pray?” he asked.

“I don’t waste my time asking for anything,” she said. “Although once in a while, perhaps two or three times a year when some small thing happens or maybe doesn’t happen, I catch myself feeling thankful.”

And when they go to sleep, “their separate exhaustions” are “absorbed” by the good house—“its safety, its comfort, its simple, blessed walls.” Burnard has shared these blessings with the reader, and we are also thankful.



Cartography to Colony

Daniel W. Clayton

Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island. UBC Press \$85.00

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

Daniel Clayton’s *Islands of Truth*, emerging from a Ph.D. dissertation (Geography) for the University of British Columbia, looks, in the main, at the growing awareness and development of Vancouver Island from the visit of James Cook to Nootka Sound (1778), the Spanish presence (1775-1790s), the burgeoning of the sea-otter fur trade (1780s-early nineteenth century), the remarkably detailed mapping of the Island’s coast by George Vancouver (1792-1794), the British/Spanish Nootka convention (1790), the British/U.S. Oregon Treaty (1846), and the subsequent British colonisation of the Island. In short, this volume treats the movement from early surveys to developing white/Native contact through trade (with its implications of global economy) to the appropriation and settlement of the area (made possible by the mapping). However, the focus is not simply on geographical issues but on the nature of the varied white/Native interface over time to the point at which the seemingly uninhabited bulk of land (Vancouver’s surveys gave no hint of the territory beyond the coast, leaving it *terra incognita* and therefore up for grabs) was claimed for British interests and settlers arrived, through the aegis of the Hudson’s Bay Company, to develop its resources with little or no regard for pre-colonial Native presence, history, or mode of life. In effect, Clayton has produced in this assiduously researched and thoroughly annotated book not just a geographical but, more obviously, a sociological history of white/Native contact, conflict, and eventual Native suppression as the Island is swept into the net of distant, London-based imperial interests (involving commerce and power)

and international rivalries and claim-staking.

Indeed, while some readers might wish for more detail, for example, regarding Vancouver's exacting explorations (how did he cope with the waters north of Cape Mudge?) and more generous cartographic illustrations (there are some, though a few are difficult to read even under magnification), that, really, is to ask for another book with a different agenda. Clayton, mindful of some of the concepts of Foucault, Said, *et al.*, succeeds in getting at the complexity of white/Native and Native/Native relations, for instance, in the Nootka and Clayoquot Sounds and points out, as he does in dealing with other matters, that one cannot assume that there were any simple patterns. The contact—sometimes hostile—varied in nature and across the years; rivalries within the Native population were highly influential, and misunderstandings abounded, often with unpleasant results. Just as it would have been catastrophic for an early trader to proceed on the basis of simplistic (conventional) notions of the nature and attitudes of Native *otherness* so, for the Natives, the whites were the other. Clayton deliberately steers away from rightness or wrongness: his detailed examinations of the relations with—and proceedings of—the chiefs Maquinna and Wickaninish offer clear examples of his scholarly ability and his refusal to accept a generalised view. Certainly, one of the strong features of the book is its portrayal of Native life and of the Native side/viewpoint in order to force a reader to reassess pre-colonial and early colonial history and to spark a more enlightened debate about the commercial and imperial sway which came into full bloom after the Oregon treaty and, not surprisingly, swept Native otherness into corners of apparent irrelevance. It is fair to suggest, though, that given British/US relations of the day, the way in which London saw the world (even if it did not understand the west coast in a

profound or sensitive way), and the sheer technical supremacy of white society, the absorption of the Island into the map of empire was hardly surprising. The work of Cook and Vancouver, quite genuine empirical observers, led the way to the inevitable, and it is also hard to believe that they were wholly and naively unaware of potential imperial thrusts which their work would make possible.

Few readers will be unchallenged by *Islands of Truth*; some may even be irritated to find their comfortable concepts about the rightness of the post-colonial *status quo* so pointedly questioned. However, testing of conventional concepts is always a useful exercise, and beyond that, one can be grateful for Clayton's provision of so much information, given his goals, and for a bibliography which will prove a valuable resource for future researchers.

Three Solitudes

Claude Denis

We Are Not You: First Nations and Canadian Modernity. Broadview \$18.95

Reviewed by Laura J. Murray

Claude Denis has undertaken an unusual and rewarding project: he has rooted a discussion of the underlying assumptions of the Canadian state—assumptions ranging from the “state’s claim to a monopoly of legitimate violence” to the deeply ingrained positioning of mystical spirituality as “anti-social, transgressive, ‘the outside’”—in an examination of one court case. In this case, which dates from 1992, a Salish man in British Columbia successfully sued members of his Nation’s Dance Society for assault, battery, and false imprisonment. At the behest of the man’s wife, and following common practice, members of the society had “grabbed” the man for an initiation rite that involved fasting and physical testing; when he complained that he was

suffering from ulcer-related pain, they abandoned the process and took him to the hospital. Lawyers for the defendants argued that the initiation was protected as an aboriginal right by Section 35 of the Constitution, and, furthermore, that the act did not constitute assault within aboriginal practices. The judge was not convinced, but Denis was.

The questions raised by the case (which Denis discusses under a pseudonym) are myriad and difficult. Could the practise of the dance society be considered some kind of law? Even if so, should it be countenanced within a Canadian legal system that values individual autonomy over collective rights? What was the role of the plaintiff's wife, and does this case suggest that self-government could provide better justice to Aboriginal women than is often feared? How is it decided who is a member of which community? And so on. Denis argues for the autonomy of Aboriginal legal processes and principles. Often, he is convincing, but several troubling issues remain. Denis believes that "the Charter [of Rights and Freedoms] encourages Canadians to think in ways that result in intolerance toward the autonomy that [Québécois and First Nations] have been seeking within Canada." The yoking of Québécois and First Nations sovereignty struggles is one of the strongest parts of this book (and most startling to an Anglophone with little time for Québec separatism, such as myself), and Denis is probably right in this claim. But while we may be impressed with the relativistic position that First Nations People should determine their own cultural practices, do we simply fold our hands when those cultural practices conflict with the Charter's conception of "human rights"? Denis is eager to banish this question as a vestige of unearned attitudes of superiority, but it won't go away without a more careful answer. Elsewhere Denis claims that "assault" and 'initiation' are not

natural facts . . . they are, rather, particular descriptions of the world, expressing particular cultures"—at first sight, a persuasive idea, but when we think of cases in which men defend wife abuse as "part of our culture," it becomes clear that we have to moderate the claim somehow.

Denis says that he writes "in a spirit of dialogue" with First Nations People. He is very sensitive to issues of power and knowledge, and presents a valid critique of the ethical short-comings of the so-called "ethical review process" for university research. Nonetheless, in deciding not to participate in this process, Denis has taken the easy way out, and backed away from actual dialogue with First Nations People, displaying in its place a rather laboured respect. Denis's invocation of Zen Buddhism on several occasions seems irrelevant and, in fact, a sleight of hand to get around his overdrawn tact with regard to Aboriginal religions.

If the book is problematic, it thereby embodies the intractability—at both practical and theoretical levels—of the methodological, ethical, and political problems it addresses. Denis throws many well-aimed darts at the complacency with which the Canadian state and its privileged or normative citizens assume that only they know right from wrong—so that even when his arguments don't quite work, it is not often easy to think of better ones. The book is therefore definitely worth reading for anyone interested in questions of nationalism, Quebec or First Nations sovereignty, law, community, or spirituality. The court case in question can even be seen in archetypal terms as a story of the tension between an individual and his community, told in so many different ways throughout Canadian literature, and could raise the stakes of the discussion of such narratives.



Staging Northern Ghosts

**Sherrill Grace, Eve D'Aeth, and
Lisa Chalykoff**

Staging the North: Twelve Canadian Plays.
Playwrights Canada. \$39.95.

Reviewed by Martin K. Kuester

The North—whether true, strong, free or not—has always been a central theme and a central region in the Canadian imagination. A collection of twelve Canadian plays centring upon the North such as this welcome anthology edited by Sherrill Grace, Eve D'Aeth, and Lisa Chalykoff invites a whole range of regionalist and thematic interpretations. In a certain way, and this is not a criticism, we seem to have here twelve Canadian plays in search of the North, because rather than giving us *the* North promised in the title of this anthology, the collection provides us with many different Norths existing at various and quite different places on the geographical map of Canada, some of them imaginary landscapes of the mind, some lying in a mythical past, some in a rather prosaic and sobering present.

In her introduction to the volume, Sherrill Grace states that “It is no longer possible to assume that there is *a North* that can be the subject of a Canadian theatre or that can be *staged*” and that “There are, in fact, as many Norths in this volume as in the country. . . .” As she points out, one version—and possibly the most important one, or at least the one shared by the largest number of Canadians—is that held by Southerners who take the North to be “a place of adventure, and of physical and moral challenge.” Northerners, many among them representing the First Nations, naturally have a different view of their everyday environment.

Grace briefly traces the development of drama and theatre in the North as well as the depiction of the North in drama and media such as radio and film. She justifies the choice of the twelve plays included on the grounds

of readability and success on the stage.

Rather surprisingly in a country whose authors at one time complained that they were haunted by a lack of ghosts, Grace concludes at the end of the introduction that “a common view of North emerges from these plays with great clarity. North, they tell us, is a topos rich in imagery, story, history, living myth, legends, and ghosts: the ghosts of madmen, explorers, past selves, vanished towns, dead fathers and brothers, and unappeased spirits stalk these plays, haunt the living, and dance in the Northern Lights.”

There is not enough space in a short review to analyze any of the twelve included plays in any detail. Some of them seem to work better on the page than others. They present very different Norths, ranging from a ghost town in Northern Ontario to Inuit settlements in the Arctic, from the mythical realm of puppet plays to that of kitchen sink or bar room realism.

The plays are so different that—and this is a very positive aspect of the collection—it becomes impossible for readers to believe any longer in any generalizations about life in the North or dramatic versions of this life, unless we accept the “common view” cited above as such a generalization. In the sense that it points to the existence of a plurality of Norths rather than one single North, *Staging the North* is a welcome addition especially for those of us who teach Canadian Studies abroad and are always hunting for easily accessible materials. Furthermore, this anthology has the indisputable advantage of offering—in addition to well-known plays such as Herschel Hardin's *Esker Mike & His Wife*, *Agiluk* (first performed in 1971), Henry Beissel's *Inuk and the Sun* (1973), Gwendolyn MacEwen's *Terror and Erebus* (1975) and Wendy Lil's *The Occupation of Heather Rose* (1986)—more contemporary and even recent plays such as *Changes* (1986) and *In Search of a Friend* (1988)

written and workshopped by Tunooniq Theatre, *Ditch* (1993) by Geoff Kavanagh, *Colonial Tongues* (1993) by Mansel Robinson, *Who Look in Stove* (1994) by Lawrence Jeffery, *Free's Point* (1996) by Philip Adams, *Trickster Visits the Old Folks Home* (1996) by Sharon Shorty, and *Sixty Below* (1997) by Patti Flather and Leonard Linklater.

As a teacher of Canadian literature in Europe who is looking forward to using at least some of the texts in this collection, I must add, however, that the introductions the three editors give to the twelve plays could have been more informative, especially with regard to the biographical background of the dramatists.

Conceptualism

Rodney Graham, ed.

Island Thought: An Archipelagic Journey Published at Irregular Intervals. #1 (Summer 1997) \$20.00 rom.

Reviewed by Clint Burnham

Rodney Graham is one of the most successful and celebrated artists of Vancouver's school of conceptualism. Along with Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Stan Douglas, and Ken Lum, Graham's work is exhibited, collected, and written about around the world. Cool and elegant, a Graham piece often isolates some fragment from "the world"—be it a Ponderosa pine or a Dr. Seuss book—and then re-presents it in some new way that forces the viewer to realign sensibilities and context. A photograph of the pine may show it upside down, so that the branches suddenly take on a root-like rhizome quality. Or the Dr. Seuss book may be squished into a little plastic bookshelf on wheels, suggesting the child's indoctrination into the ideology of reading.

In the summer of 1997, Graham's "installation/film presentation" was the official Canadian entry at the XLVII Venice Biennale: "Vexation Island." Part of that

presentation, and the subject of review here, was a catalogue with essays by Graham, William Gibson, Robert Linsley, and Shep Steiner.

As with the work of Stan Douglas (which may take the form of photographic prints, synchronized "antique" projectors, or a film on laser disc), Graham's work includes not merely the film itself but how it is installed; installation art, the master-code of postmodernism, thus almost inevitably is read as some allegory for the Althusserian theory of "structural causality." His work also investigates the ways in which any effect is caused not by some determinate object but by its place in the structure of (in this case) the cinematic apparatus. And thus Graham's short essay begins with the remembrance of films past, and specifically a period when, as a four-year-old, he would sit in the logging camp his father managed as Graham *père* screened such Hollywood dross as *Northwest Passage* or *The Red Shoes*. Graham thus "remained in close proximity not only to patriarchal authority but also to the cinematic apparatus itself."

And yet for all the rich Freudian possibilities here, what also is evident is Graham's contradictory relationship with history, meant here to signify both the resource industries of British Columbia and their present-day simulacra/malaise. That is, during this period Graham's father was also scabbing during a camp crew strike. Such a conflict at the patriarchal "origin" can be traced in Graham's rendition of British Columbia trees into their inverts, as well as his affection for the highway construction yellow of Finning equipment. For perhaps the most difficult relationship to be unravelled today is that between the decline of the primary industries in this province and the simultaneous importance and boom of tourism, real estate, film, and the exporting of products, be they heavy equipment (Finning in 1996 had sales of almost two billion dollars although the B.C. forestry

sector, a traditional “core market,” was off) or art or other “postmodern” commodities. Which is to say that globalization seems to require both the devaluation of the local (the historically inevitable demise of fish and lumber stocks, say) and their reproduction as simulacra (as Rodney Graham installations or *X-Files* backdrops). (An essay by Greg Elmer in issue 44 of *Border/Lines* deals well with the role of Canadian landscape in that tv show and American culture.)

Notwithstanding such a necessary historicization, Graham is also sensitive to the class and nostalgic possibilities of his installation: noting that the Canadian pavilion at the Biennale is boarded up in the winter, Graham remarks that he “intend[s] to keep it this way since it renders the interior darker and therefore more amenable to a projection. And not incidentally, in this way, from a certain perspective it almost resembles the stockade in the 50s Walt Disney production of *Treasure Island*.” And while the architects intended, in some abject colonial way, to make the building resemble a prairie “wig-wam,” Graham reads the building as “nothing so much as an architectural manifesto—a rustic hut-type . . . the humblest form of rural architecture: the out building. As a repository for tools or animals (gardening shack, chicken shed), it has a subordinate relation to the main house.”

Graham’s ruminations, then, provide a powerful account of the various strands of memory which attend our present-day viewing of buildings and films: his movie, which is about a pirate on a tropical island (and runs in a loop), was designed to play in a building which evoked kitsch 50s U.S. pop culture as well as beleaguered Canadian attempts to simulate/escape our colonial/rural heritage. Like seeds retrieved from a melon, these critiques emerge gloriously, with the rich blood of history still goeey and dripping.

As for the rest of the catalogue, well, the less said the better. William Gibson turns in

his usual non-novelistic page and a half of pastiche. Robert Linsley, himself a respected Vancouver artist and art historian, provides a pseudo-historical account of all things to do with islands (from fractals to the wandering European) that is curiously unknowing of the past decade’s postcolonial critiques of such imperial phantasies. Shep Steiner’s ponderously deconstructive effort—in full early 80s swing with X’s over words and plays on crystals and diamonds—similarly reduces all matter of tropics and geography to the sublime self.

Liminal Voices

Janet Campbell Hale

Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter. U of Arizona P \$22.95

Kathleen M. Donovan

Feminist Readings of Native American Literature: Coming to Voice. U of Arizona P \$49.95

Reviewed by Catherine Rainwater

Hale’s autobiography is metafictionalized: while the author reveals much that is true about her life, she also frankly discusses how some of the facts are transformed or amplified through the dual aesthetic filters of point of view and memory. Painful disclosures of her family’s dysfunctionality throughout her childhood and youth—and of the lingering pain that inevitably follows from such experiences—shape the mature, introspective prose of a woman who has learned to use writing to name and exorcise her demons. Writing about herself while also reflecting upon the self-transformative powers of narrative, Hale invites us to ponder how autobiography frames debilitating memories, paradoxically rendering them immediate, yet keeping them at a safe enough remove to be managed through the healing artistry of verbal self-reconstruction. Throughout the text, Hale reminds her audience that her words reveal her soul,

but at the same time, they preserve a clearly defined measure of her privacy.

Bloodlines consists of several loosely connected segments, the longest of which is a meditation on the life of Hale's mother, an emotionally disturbed woman whose meanness seemed particularly, incomprehensibly focused upon the author as a child. Apparently unbreakable ties between mother and daughter, however, inspire the structure of Hale's autobiography, which seems in part devoted to mending broken bonds, to reconnecting, even if only in her own imagination, with family members both alive and dead.

In her self-therapeutical efforts, Hale seeks transformational experiences among her tribal relations on Coeur d'Alene lands, but her autobiography presents no romanticized views of Native people or reservation existence. Hale writes about taking her daughter back to the places in Idaho where Hale grew up, where Hale's father is buried. Though the visit affords her some insight, we hear from her no traditional story of the Native woman coming home at last; indeed, at home she becomes most aware of her own oddity as a Native person in a state of perpetual estrangement from her own family. Such estrangement is perhaps best communicated through her narration of a visit to the grand house of her white ancestor, John McLaughlin, simply one more place where family ties belie true relation.

Hale's book stands in counterpoint to contemporary Native autobiographies that sometimes formulaically prescribe for the wandering Native spirit a return "home" to health and wholeness. For some Native people, home does not exist. Like many of their displaced, non-Native counterparts of the late twentieth-century, they are the denizens of an urban landscape that is a place to survive, but nurturing home to no one. The final paragraph of Hale's narrative highlights her plight when she tells us that she and her daughter returned "home"

from their trip to eat at a fast-food restaurant in Spokane, and then to take in a movie about Indians at home on the rez. They see a film rife with clichés, "full of poetic images having to do with visions of spirits, drums, and feathers, shape-shifters and eagles and things."

Native Canadian and Native American women struggling to maintain identity and power are also the focus of Kathleen M. Donovan in her collection of essays on a variety of traditional and cross-cultural texts by Beatrice Culleton, Maria Campbell, Lee Maracle, several anonymous Havasupai women, N. Scott Momaday, Mourning Dove, Paula Gunn Allen, and Joy Harjo (together with two non-Native women writers, Toni Morrison and Hélène Cixous). Donovan sets out to provide a feminist perspective on selected works by these writers. Her most insightful chapter deals with Métis women writers in their efforts to find political, as well as aesthetic voices while living between, but never fully within, Euro-Canadian and Native Canadian societies. Though we may learn something of value from each of Donovan's essays, her discussions are too frequently driven by political preconceptions that are asserted as claims rather than fully explored through substantive argument. Moreover, these same preconceptions lead to some disconcerting inconsistencies between essays. A long essay on the works of N. Scott Momaday, for example, takes this male author to task for a variety of sins, including the equation of woman and nature and the valorization of a single gender's perspective; a subsequent essay, however, on Paula Gunn Allen's novel, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, unquestioningly accepts the same approaches by a female author. Likewise, the chapter on Momaday faults the male author for showing how women's power is sometimes expressed through "duplicious" use of language, but the chapter on Havasupai women singers

praises women for their subversive use of language (song) to consolidate their limited power within a masculinist culture. Too many of Donovan's theoretical assumptions remain unexamined and are instead invoked through references to established feminist theorists; too often, a reader comes up with alternative explanations for textual evidence that need to be addressed.

Reconfiguring Power in BC

Cole Harris

The Resettlement of British Columbia. UBC Press
\$24.95 paper

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

Cole Harris specifies that the nine essays collected in *The Resettlement of British Columbia* deal with the uneven intersection of colonialism and modernity with aboriginal lifeworlds. The essays explicate strategies and tactics by which Coyote, Raven and their kind were decentred and marginalized in their own land. Harris argues that the "settlement" of what became British Columbia can be better appreciated as the "resettlement" of the area: the space was not empty, awaiting discovery; rather, sophisticated cultures thrived in the region, and the so-called settlement in truth appropriated the land and displaced its former inhabitants. He points out that resettlement introduced a new form of order, a new way of understanding space, whereby a British conception of private property imposed surveys, grids and maps as a way to parcel, appropriate and manage land. The new regime of control centred on private property, the law, and government administration. It was a powerful disciplinary regime that determined where people could and could not go. The reserve system, an integral component of this new regime, limited Natives to reserves, thus disciplining their mobility and restricting their access to resources. Harris theorizes this

arrangement of space as a technique of disciplinary power that possesses the utmost subtlety yet is murderous in its effects: "carceral" society erects enclosures in the open air and leads to a culture obsessed with divisions and boundaries; it becomes a system that confines and excludes.

The first essay establishes the important premise that sophisticated aboriginal cultures thrived in the region when the first Eurasians arrived. Harris considers a wide range of evidence—including Native stories, explorers' journals, Hudson Bay Company accounts, the census of 1830, and accounts of the smallpox epidemic of 1782-83. He determines that the population of the region on the eve of the first epidemics was "well over 200,000 people," and that Native populations declined by some 90 to 95 per cent as a result of introduced infectious diseases. The breadth and acuity of Harris's archival research combine with his lucid prose and deft application of contemporary social theory to create a persuasive foundation for the ensuing pieces.

The second essay discusses strategies and tactics employed in the cordilleran (as opposed to maritime) fur trade. Harris illustrates how traders applied European strategies of power (such as hierarchies, monopolies, spectacles of punishment, and a politics of fear) to create a discourse of the fur trade through which they could control their employees and to some extent the surrounding Native populations. The third essay details how British concepts of town and countryside, surveys and grids, private property, civil and criminal law, and industrial work camps were all brought to bear on the Fraser Valley, so that by 1881 a "new place, the Lower Mainland, had come into existence." Subsequent chapters deal with changing relations between Natives and Eurasians in the Fraser Canyon, the 1881 census, the vicissitudes of distance and power as transportation changed, farming and rural life, and immigration.

Michel Foucault, Hayden White and others have shown that historical events find their place in stories that reflect the historians' decisions to configure them according to the imperatives of one plot-structure or mythos rather than another. Cole Harris shows that colonial ideologies have long determined the historical geography of British Columbia. He illustrates, for example, how the new regime assumed a rhetoric of progress and development against which lands for Native people, a population thought doomed to dwindle and disappear, appeared as distractions to be minimized as much as possible, and how this notion of progress took for granted the superiority of white ways. Similarly, he argues that the colonial system arranged populations of the region into vastly unequal relationships: officials of the British Empire became upper management; officials of the new entities Canada and British Columbia became middle management; and white "settlers" became full citizens of those new entities, while Native people were denied elementary rights of citizenship and became wards of the federal nation-state; Asian immigrants were also denied fundamental rights of citizenship, their labor exploited. Harris's claim that this colonial expansion brought together unequal forces does not suggest that the Natives were or are powerless. He carefully shows ways that Native peoples resisted and continue to resist the imposed regime.

Of course, the carceral system that dispossessed the Native peoples of their lands and imprisoned them on reserves remains in place. Harris may describe his work as historical geography, but the present always shimmers near the surface of his writing. By emplotting the Eurasian occupation of the region as a series of ruptures and displacements rather than the triumphant settling of an untamed wilderness, Harris decentres, diffuses and complicates the geographical history of British Columbia in ways that will tend to make many readers

reconsider their privileged ties to the province. "Immigrant British Columbians' luck has been built on others' misfortunes," Harris soberingly states, "There are no simple solutions, least of all to try to maintain the politics of colonialism." *The Resettlement of British Columbia* presents a brilliant and timely thesis, often in poetic prose. The essays are well illustrated, with Eric Leinberger's cartography especially noteworthy.

Introducing Oeuvres

Coral Ann Howells

Alice Munro. Manchester UP \$19.95

Danielle Schaub

Mavis Gallant. Twayne \$32.00

Reviewed by Robert Thacker

1996 saw the publication, in both Toronto and New York, of two hefty volumes titled *Selected Stories*, one from Mavis Gallant, another from Alice Munro. Such treatment asserts the reigning critical truisms concerning these writers: since the early 1950s, each has made the short story her especial form and, equally, each should be counted among its leading practitioners in the language. Equally again, and no doubt owing something to the short story as preferred form, Munro and Gallant have over their careers been a bit slower, at least when compared to their ubiquitous junior, Margaret Atwood, to attract a critical following (Gallant, to be sure, much more so than Munro: Schaub, writing of the reception accorded Gallant's *Selected Stories*, sees it as marking "the importance of Gallant in the literary world, and most particularly in her own country, a happy denouement for a writer whose fiction was regarded with suspicion because of its un-Canadianness"). And speaking of "Canadianness"—whatever, so the witticism goes, that is taken to be—both Gallant's and Munro's work has suffered also in this country by both its putative lack of conscious Canadianism

and its regular appearance in each author's best known venue, *The New Yorker*. *Who Do You Think You Are?* indeed.

By my count, Howells's is the third book to be entitled, simply, *Alice Munro* (that is, without subtitle) among the dozen single-author critical books on Munro's fiction to have appeared. Of four on Gallant's, Schaub's is the first to be called *Mavis Gallant*. Each title is noteworthy because of its implied completeness, one born of the series in which each appears, and of the encompassing format each follows. The Twayne World Author Series needs no introduction since, Schaub's being the 871st such volume, it is even more ubiquitous than Atwood. By contrast, Howells's is just the fourth in Manchester's Contemporary World Author series, "an innovative series," according to its editor, "of authoritative introductions to a range of culturally diverse contemporary writers from outside Britain and the United States, or from 'minority' backgrounds" within these countries. The series "aims to bring together the theoretical impulse which currently dominates postcolonial studies and closely-argued readings of particular authors' works, and by so doing to avoid the danger of appropriating the specifics of particular texts into the hegemony of totalising theories." Despite such assertions, the Manchester series follows much the same format as Twayne: chronology, biographical introduction, a series of chapters covering the whole of the writer's work, conclusion, notes and bibliography. About the only real difference—a very good one, I think—is that Howells's concluding chapter also contains her overview of Munro criticism; this leaves her focus throughout largely on the fiction itself (although her notes point us, in passing, to this or that crux).

That these books adhere to their series' formats defines, to a considerable degree, each volume's articulation and accomplishment. Howells is a critic of great discern-

ment and precision, and in *Alice Munro* she displays these qualities through her thoroughgoing, careful, and subtle reading of Munro's work up to the first publication, in *The New Yorker*, of "The Love of a Good Woman." Both of these authors elect to focus on representative stories from each volume—an approach preferable to any attempt to comment on all Munro's or Gallant's stories—but they do so differently. Schaub offers very close, even intricate, readings of key stories—"The Other Paris," for instance, gets about eleven pages—while Howells chooses, usually, three stories from each volume, explaining just why she has selected those she has. This approach is in no way random, however; rather, her selections are quite apt. For instance, in an inspired decision, she elects to treat *Dance of the Happy Shades* and *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* in the same chapter. Howells knows that these books complement each other by framing Munro's single published attempt at a novel, *Lives of Girls and Women*. Since some of the stories in *Something* were left over from other draft novels, this pairing also illustrates how Howells's arguments derive, and quite necessarily so, from her knowledge of the evidence in the Alice Munro Fonds at the University of Calgary.

Equally, too, Howells uses the feminist notion of "mapping" Munro's fiction to very good effect, asserting at one point that "Munro's storytelling methods have always encouraged a plurality of meanings as alternative worlds are positioned 'alongside' each other in the same geographical and fictional space, but [in "The Moons of Jupiter,"] a new dimension is introduced as maps of landscape are overlaid by the mobile maps of cosmology or the indecipherable codes of destiny." As such a passage suggests, Howells's readings are precise, theoretically well informed, and nuanced. Hers is an excellent introduction to Munro's fiction, to Munro's critical

reputation, and so to the whole of Munro's *oeuvre*. There is, however, a rushed quality to the exposition here—probably an inevitable fault in series books that essay completeness. Yet when compared to some of the other critical volumes on Munro that have appeared over the last few years, Howells's book offers a wise understanding of Munro's writing within its numerous contexts that more than achieves the goals of the series in which it appears. Indeed, Howells's book deserves to be called *Alice Munro*.

Schaub's *Mavis Gallant*, by contrast, ultimately offers not so much critical wisdom as it does a very clear argument borne of dogged detail. Extremely well-grounded in her subject's work, Schaub defines and deliberates Gallant's style, especially, arguing that "[a]s she alternates continuity and discontinuity, she produces a disturbing discourse that forces the readers to look for possible relations between all the passages." Stepping back to generalize, Schaub argues compellingly that the "narrative strategies that Gallant exploits magnify the tension at the core of the characters' lives. Being exiles in their own country or in a land of adoption, they are forever beings 'from somewhere, living elsewhere.'"

Taken together, these two books both complement, and utterly confirm, the massed bulk of each writer's *Selected Stories*. More than that, published as they are within foreign series by noted foreign scholars of Canadian literature, Howells's and Schaub's books are themselves evidence that "un-Canadianness," whatever that is, really has nothing to do with literary accomplishment. Who do you think you are? *Mavis Gallant* and *Alice Munro*, that's who. And as these books detail most precisely and effectively, that's much more than enough.



First Nations Identity

Basil H. Johnston, Jonas George (Wah-sa-ghe-zik)

The Star-Man and Other Tales. U of Toronto P \$19.95

Judith Ostrowitz

Privileging the Past: Reconstructing History in Northwest Coast Art. UBC P \$49.95

Allan J. Ryan

The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art. UBC P \$65.00

Richard Van Camp and George Littlechild

What's the Most Beautiful Thing You Know About Horses? Children's Book P \$23.95

Gary Wyatt

Mythic Beings: Spirit Art of the Northwest Coast. Douglas & McIntyre \$26.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Kramer

At first glance, these five books seem remarkably dissimilar in genre and anticipated readership, running the gamut from academic art criticism to Native-oriented oral narrative to children's book, suggesting they were put together merely because of their First Nations content. This proves too swift a judgement, for they share an underlying focus on First Nations cultural expressions and can be productively reviewed under the rubric of contemporary Canadian First Nations identity construction. A refusal to be defined from external sources is a powerful, cohesive theme in these works. In an era when many are clamouring for First Nations voices to be heard in the literature, Johnston and Van Camp's efforts contribute to a growing body of published Native authors. Likewise, although Ostrowitz, Ryan and Wyatt are non-Native and come from groups who have traditionally defined Native art and culture from the outside (art historians, anthropologists and art gallery owners), these authors have used Native informants and recognize the need for Native artists to speak about their own artistic

productions. Although there is a certain amount of naiveté in thinking that mere recording of words is enough to rectify power differences, the attempt to equalize voices should be applauded.

These texts also speak of the reality that First Nations identity is not made in a vacuum, and Native people must recognize the external sources which they are resisting. In a sense, production can not be understood without reception. All five of these books address this interaction between Native and non-Native people and reflect on the relationship of internal and external identity construction. They flip the stereotype of the Indian as objectified in the Euro-Canadian colonial gaze and turn the lens back onto the Euro-Canadian as tourist in a Native land. First Nations authors and artists in these texts are critical of being seen as the “other,” but they make use of their outsider status. For example, Ryan describes how Plains Cree artist Gerald McMaster “interrogates the cowboy/Indian phenomenon—that curious coupling of a minor blue-collar profession with a complete race of people—to reconfigure Aboriginal history and comment on contemporary intercultural relations.” McMaster plays with the prevalent stereotype in a series of works titled *The cowboy/Indian show* in order to undermine its power and to make space for alternative perspectives. Ironically, the very stereotype he is refusing becomes the foil for his own identity construction.

Basil Johnston has collected and published a slim volume of Anishinaubae (Ojibway) myths and legends titled *The Star-Man and Other Tales*. Johnston’s goal is to honour Anishinaubae elders by publishing their oral stories and to depict the continuity and power of the “spiritual past” for the present and future. Nine stories depict a wide range of adventures from supernatural, human and animal perspectives. Some display improper behaviour, where those who act in greed or stupidity are punished

by their own comedy of errors. One story tells of a misunderstanding between a Christian bishop and an Anishinaubae community, reflecting how whether in the past or present, incorrect expectations of the “other” can create mutual distrust. The non-Native reader looking for the expected environmental or conservationist message might be surprised at some of the final endings. Although the stories twist and turn in unforeseen directions, suggesting inconsistency or broken linearity, the book’s very frustrations to a Western-trained, non-Native reader may be its teaching devices: here continuity and connection are expressed through chronological distortion, hybridity and thwarted expectations. Illustrated by Anishinaubae artist Ken Syrette, this is a visually pleasing book, which carries deeper messages than a quick perusal might suggest.

In *Privileging the Past*, Judith Ostrowitz asks why it is that First Nations Northwest Coast art gets valued as authentic only when it is perceived to be conservative in style and a reproduction of something made in the past. This fact is especially puzzling when one considers that the mainstream art world appreciates art only when it is fresh and original. To ponder the reasons for this historicism, Ostrowitz selects four case studies. Chapter one focuses on the repeated restorations of the Chief Shakes House in Wrangell, Alaska. Chapter two maps the planning and creation of the Grand Hall’s permanent Northwest Coast exhibition at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull. Chapter three studies the protocol and power plays at work to produce the Kwakwaka’wakw dance performance at the opening of the exhibition *Chiefly Feasts* at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Chapter four examines recent First Nations artworks inspired by objects in museum collections, which will be used for ceremony or sold for display.

Using careful archival research, a keen attention to photographic detail and interviews with Native artists and non-Native art patrons, Ostrowitz traces how contemporary First Nations Northwest coast replicas, restorations and reenactments are unique documents of cross-cultural process. She tells how Native artists are “cultural intermediaries” and the “near replicas” they make are generated from “cross-cultural dialogue.” Ostrowitz pursues the important point that, although accurate replication is held up as the ideal, in fact it is not necessary in order to obtain non-Native appreciation for tribal culture. Following this revelation, she documents the move towards unification of smaller Native villages into larger national units so as to project the message of the strength of contemporary Native communities. Ostrowitz has provided us with a book, albeit using dense academic language and theory, which reveals the bridge between Native and non-Native ideology and links contemporary First Nations art and identity with non-Native perception and reception.

In his book, *The Trickster Shift* anthropologist Allan Ryan asks why humour has become a significant mode for First Nations artistic expression. His answer is that humour is both a critical strategy and a cultural world view. The extent of the works displayed in these pages (160 color paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, performance pieces and installations) visually represents the outpouring of contemporary First Nations art in 1980s and 1990s Canada. The sheer exuberance and force of their critique bespeak a giant backlash building against non-Native stereotypes of Indians. Ryan’s book affords the opportunity for a mainstream audience to access these subversive works all in one place, where previously they were scattered in private and public art collections.

Ryan mimics the content of his text with a post-structuralist format or what he terms

a “trickster discourse.” His book is a collage that replicates with its design First Nations artists’ methods for post-modern art making: juxtaposition, layering, multiple competing voices. Ryan creates a space for the vibrant artwork to react with and against the words of the artists and his own organizing text. Elaborate and informative footnotes serve as factual backbone to aid in providing context and in pinpointing historical moments significant for his and the artists’ interpretations. Ryan achieves his aim: a discourse that is “[a]t once open-ended, unfolding, evolving, incomplete, . . . imagined in numerous verbal and visual narratives and a multiplicity of authoritative voices.”

Evocatively, Ryan depicts First Nations artists as “warrior diplomats.” Humour has become a diffusion strategy to disempower non-Native people who have attempted to define and limit First-Nations identity. Clearly, displaying art becomes a powerful tool for controlling one’s own identity construction. In fact, one could even suggest that this text not only reflects pre-existing First Nations identity, but that it promotes growth of positive First Nations identity. Interestingly, Ryan does not reflect on his own role in this critical act. His text belies the fact that he is only a recorder of artists’ voices or a collector and displayer of their contemporary art. Missing from his text is a self-conscious analysis of his own participation in Native identity construction. Allowing the text to be heteroglossic does not in and of itself explain away the need for self-reflection or the effects of non-Native interpretation of Native art. Ryan’s organization of artistic material into four overarching themes of self-identity, representation, political power and global presence necessarily affects the way readers view and understand these works of art. This organization should have been discussed and perhaps deconstructed within the body of his book. This criticism aside, Ryan’s rich com-

pendium of contemporary First Nations art will be seminal for teaching both Native and non-Native students about contemporary First Nations artistic identity.

Richard Van Camp's *What's The Most Beautiful Thing You Know About Horses?* is ostensibly a children's book—simple text in bold font coupled with enticing, vivid paintings by famed Cree artist George Littlechild. However, this book's terse text packs a punch on stereotypes about Indians. It depicts the ability of contemporary First Nations people to refuse to be boxed into categories under traditional labels. Van Camp allows us a peek at his life in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, where, as Métis persons of white and Dogrib heritage, his people both hunt caribou with dogs and watch the World Wrestling Federation on television. Van Camp's engaging text opens up the possibility for learning from others cross-culturally. With easy grace, Van Camp maps a world of cultural differences yet human similarities. What children have not been embarrassed by their looks or asked questions of their family and relatives about their identity? Van Camp's inclusive writing draws the reader into a friendly dialogue where one feels connected and appreciated for having an opinion and being unique. Van Camp ends this delightful feel-good story with the question: "What's the most beautiful thing you know about you?"

Gary Wyatt, owner of the *Spirit Wrestler Gallery* in Vancouver, has compiled a gorgeous collection of 75 works of art by 34 First Nations Northwest Coast artists titled *Mythic Beings: Spirit Art of the Northwest Coast*. Although this catalogue was made in the context of the commercial art world, no connoisseurship or stylistic jargon is employed. Instead, each boutique-lit colour photo is coupled with an explanatory description of the work's meaning to the artist in his or her own words. A brief yet useful biography on each artist's career follows at the end of the

book, including artistic training and commissioned works. These are individuals, not representations of tribal identity. Yet claims are still made by Native artists about respect, spirituality, stewardship of the environment and ownership of culture. In Richard Hunt's words, "I don't think of what I do as art but as cultural property." The artists highlight issues of inter-cultural translation, repatriation and political self government. Although many of the artists' self-interpretations have contemporary focus, Wyatt has chosen to divide these artworks into the four ahistorical categories of Sky World, Mortal World, Undersea World and Spirit World. These categories neither work well with the artists' concerns, nor seem to get in their way. This art catalogue gives the reader a tantalizing visual and verbal introduction to the issues which matter to today's First Nations Northwest Coast artists.

All of these authors are aware of what happens when Native artistic products are read or viewed by a non-Native audience. Accessibility or the question of how much knowledge should be shared with non-Native people is a consideration in the construction of healthy, contemporary Native identity. These texts suggest in varying degrees of straightforwardness and circumspection that there are many layers of meaning behind any given artistic product, and that not all of these layers are accessible or knowable to a non-Native audience. Ryan mentions shamanic knowledge; Ostrowitz refers to rank privileges; Wyatt points to ceremonial functions that are not being fully explicated. And certainly Johnston's stories evoke the feeling that there is a boundary to inclusiveness. This boundary is crucial for contemporary First Nations identity construction.



A Search for April Raintree

Beatrice Culleton Mosionier

In Search of April Raintree. Critical Edition.

Edited by Cheryl Suzack. Portage & Main \$14.95

Reviewed by Renée Hulan

The new critical edition of *In Search of April Raintree* edited by Cheryl Suzack makes a wonderful addition to the emerging canon of literature by Métis writers. To my mind, a good critical edition should meet certain expectations. It should place the novel in its critical, historical, political, and social contexts. It should relate the text to issues in its reception as well as to issues in the wider discourse of literary studies. It should address issues and questions arising from the novel and its reception. The critical edition of *In Search of April Raintree* succeeds in fulfilling all these expectations while also carrying out important cultural work.

In tracing the critical context, the author offers a singular perspective. In "The Special Time," Beatrice Culleton Mosionier shares some of her thoughts about writing *In Search of April Raintree*. By placing the experiences that shaped the novel in context, Mosionier addresses her discomfort with the attention to autobiographical content and she expresses concern that people she cares for might be judged unfairly because of it. "The Special Time" in the title refers to Mosionier's belief, as a child, that, given enough of the right kind of time, she could solve all the world's problems. Although she says she never found that special time, she goes on to describe how her interest in the problems of the world was translated into concern with issues facing her own family.

Just as Mosionier's response is indispensable, so is the abridged form of "Nothing But the Truth": Discursive Transparency in Beatrice Culleton," which Heather Zwicker justifiably calls Helen Hoy's "groundbreaking essay." When it appeared, Hoy's essay introduced academic readers not only to

Culleton's writing but to a constellation of issues surrounding both the novel and "Native literature" in general. It framed discussions to follow, including many of those included in this collection, and remains the standard.

Like Hoy, several of the contributors draw on their experiences in teaching *In Search of April Raintree* to university students, adding the results of research on public sources as valuable background for the critical reading. Jeanne Perreault's "In Search of Cheryl Raintree, and Her Mother" provides teachers and students with information on "the social and physical realities facing many people of Native heritage." Representing such problems, Perreault argues, are both "aesthetic" and "discursive" implications that make Culleton's novel "another mode of activism and a powerful advocate of Native women's rights." Perreault links the novel's realism to a wider discourse on rights for aboriginal people by gathering together hard evidence of the things depicted in it. In a similar way, Agnes Grant's account of her experiences as a foster parent resonates with scenes depicted in the novel. Margery Fee's "Deploying Identity in the face of Racism" does this by considering documents such as Bill C-31 and the Constitution Act of 1982, documents that continue to shape aboriginal identity even as they work with outmoded ideas of "race." By describing the difficulties arising from an identity that is "policed from both outside and inside," Fee proposes that the Métis person can fashion and "deploy" identity as a means of survival.

One of the critical edition's particular strengths is the way the voices of the contributors seem to respond to each other, as do two of the strongest pieces in the collection. In Janice Acoose's resistant and provocative reading, "The Problem of 'Searching' for April Raintree," the "problem" is whether the novel adequately represents Métis cultural identity or leaves readers with some

misconceptions about the Métis. Acoose expresses discomfort with the way writers tend to “formulate ‘culture’” as a “box” packed with “a brown blob of Nativeness” rather than creating a distinctive Métis voice. Yet, while she concludes that the novel may not contribute such a voice, it is, she writes, “an important novel for critical discourse surrounding issues of identity formation and cultural transmission.” In “The Effect of Readers’ Responses on the Development of Aboriginal Literature in Canada: A Study of Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree*, and Richard Wagamese’s *Keeper’n Me*,” Jo-Ann Thom offers an insightful analysis of the changing literary strategies in the development of Métis literary voices since Campbell’s *Halfbreed* that indicate this cultural transmission.

Throughout, the essays constitute an engaging discussion so that they stand on their own and form a whole at the same time. For example, in answer to Fee’s question “Why does Cheryl have to die?”

Mosionier herself writes that

Of the two sisters, Cheryl Raintree was the character whom I most wanted readers to love. I intended it that way so that when she died we would be so very sorry at the loss of her potential.

Heather Zwicker argues that “as feminists we desperately want Cheryl’s uncompromising political vision to triumph over April’s liberal quiescence”; instead, by denying us such an outcome, the novel points, as Zwicker’s title states, to “The Limits of Sisterhood”.

Just as, in the words of Janice Acoose, *In Search Of April Raintree* “opens up a space for critical discourse about the formation of identity and the transmission of culture,” the critical edition opens a space for more scholarship. Readers might wish it included a comprehensive bibliography of reviews, interviews, and articles concerning the novel; however, the essays themselves introduce a

range of possibilities for the interested researcher. Cheryl Suzack and the contributors are to be congratulated on a collection of critical essays that readers, students, and teachers alike will welcome and celebrate.

In Search of the Sacred

Terence Murphy and Roberto Perin, eds.

A Concise History of Christianity in Canada.
Oxford UP \$24.95

William Closson James

Locations of the Sacred: Essays on Religion, Literature, and Canadian Culture. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$39.95

Reviewed by David A. Kent

Both these books are concerned with Christianity in Canada, one with the enormously complex history of the Christian churches and the other with how the “sacred” has been embodied in narrative prose works, largely fiction, by a variety of recognized Canadian writers. Poetry is explicitly excluded, to some loss. Both books consist of a series of essays held together by common concerns and themes rather than by any dominant thesis.

A Concise History of Christianity in Canada is the work of five historians. Its five chapters are organized “along linguistic rather than regional or denominational lines.” That is, the chapters alternate between the French-speaking and the English-speaking churches. This history has appeared at a time when institutionalized Christianity is troubled by scandalous revelations of abuse and by declining membership and attendance. The broad historical scope of the volume casts current rates of participation into perspective as “recurring patterns” rather than signals of imminent extinction. Skeptical Enlightenment attitudes and “religious indifference” in the early nineteenth century were, if anything, even more scornful of the religious impulse than current consumer materialism. An

earlier, three-volume *History of the Christian Church in Canada* reflected the ecumenical tenor of the 1960s when it was written. This new volume reflects contemporary academic concerns with class, gender, and ethnicity. Rather than assessing the contribution of church leaders, for example, this history considers such matters as the place of women in religious life, patterns of worship and affiliation, and the relation of the churches to the First Nations. As a result, the evangelization of Native peoples is seen in terms of French or British imperialism, with the church acting as “an agent of colonization,” and the assimilationist goals of missionaries are portrayed as “fatally flawed.”

The Preface identifies the concerns each historian agreed to consider: “lay religious practice and outlook; relations between the church and state; missionaries and prospective converts; interdenominational relations; and the impact of Christianity on Canadian society and culture.” These priorities produce some very interesting perspectives on Canadian history. For example, the astute collaboration of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec following the English victory in 1759 guaranteed freedom of religion and protection for the church and, in the long run, permitted the Québécois to survive as a people. At the same time, the conciliatory approach of the English governor, Guy Carleton, and the subsequent Quebec Act of 1774 were equally ruled by a pragmatic consideration: the continuing threat of American invasion. In effect, both sides reached the necessary compromise for each to survive.

While the maps included in the volume seem perfunctory at best, the statistical analyses, where statistics are available, are revealing. In the early days of settlement, the proportion of priests to people, or the number of individuals in religious orders, can be helpful gauges to the significance of the church's place in society in those times.

Tables of figures are also put to special use to suggest the complicated relationship of Protestant denominations in nineteenth-century Ontario. Now that the secularization wrought by the Quiet Revolution has been extended throughout Quebec society, it is fascinating to see statistics that demonstrate how massive was the participation of French Canadians in the religious life of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec after the renewing influence of nineteenth-century Ultramontanism from Europe had been felt. All the paraphernalia associated with Catholicism—statues, images, relics, pilgrimages—and the increasing role of the church in education, social services, and even labour unions were part of this century-long development in Quebec. For example, between 1837 and 1914, 57 new female religious communities emerged, and the number of “brothers” went from 170 in 1850 to 3,270 in 1920. In 1940 the ratio of nuns to the female population was 18:1000, “a figure unsurpassed in any Catholic country.” In 1950 French Canada ranked fourth in its proportion of missionaries to overall Catholic population, the apex being 1971 when 5,250 missionaries were serving in over 100 countries.

With a judicious scanning of the index or of the thorough documentation, readers can search this history for concise treatments of subjects in which they may have a particular interest, such as the Methodist conversion experience, the ideology of anti-Catholicism, recurrent conflicts over the public school system (where language and religion have been so closely intertwined), the origins of the temperance and Sabbath observance movements in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions, the values associated with the “evangelical consensus” and its ties to patriotism and the British connection, the development of residential schools, the struggle of English-speaking Catholics outside Quebec for their own identity, or the urban issues linked to the social gospel movement. The direct influence of Christi-

anity in Canadian public and private life is undoubtedly diminished. However, the churches remain active, adjusting to new roles such as speaking out on matters of human rights and social justice, as the Epilogue indicates. Moreover, the history of Canada is inextricably bound to the history of Christianity, and this volume is an admirable introduction to that very involved story.

Locations of the Sacred is written in the shadow of a diminished Christianity, and William Closson James, who teaches religious studies at Queen's University, is acutely conscious of the "fractured" dominance of Protestantism in English Canada as well of the new multicultural, pluralistic realities that constrict his freedom to discuss the Christian religious imagination. As a result, he has used the more neutralized term "sacred" and attaches to it some of the connotations (for example, the numinous) of what we may associate with the term "religious." The danger of this procedure is inflating the new term so that its distinctiveness is reduced, as in the following operative definition: "the sacred is whatever is of foundational value, what is distinguished from the profane, and what brings order out of chaos." In seeking more inclusive language, James elsewhere opts for "faith in the transcendent" as an acceptable expression. This, too, may be a defensible and "correct" decision, but in his examinations of Canadian fiction writers such as MacLennan, Callaghan, Davies, Laurence, Munro, Mitchell, and Atwood, his preoccupations are with thematic analysis. Readers will be forced to ask, for example, if the presence of "an archetypal narrative of rebirth" qualifies a narrative as essentially "sacred" or "religious." In his conclusion, James diffusely states that the locations of the sacred are "everywhere and nowhere, multiple rather than single."

James's essays were written over a period of twenty years. The effort to link them in a sequential argument is sometimes displayed in the bite-sized chapter subdivisions and in

ponderous citations and annoying parenthetical remarks. The marshaling of secondary sources is also sometimes painfully transparent. On pages 82-84, the reader encounters undigested summaries of ideas by Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, W.L. Morton, and Blair Fraser, and then, on pages 91-93, by Arthur R.M. Lower, W.L. Morton, Joseph Campbell, Margaret Atwood, and Northrop Frye. In different chapters the "sacred" is variously located (or dislocated) in the natural world or in a canoe trip, in human love (Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*), in the "female initiation" of Engel's *Bear* and Atwood's *Survival*, or in the suffering and struggle of ethnic minorities (Kogawa's *Obasan*).

Despite my doubts about some of James's methodological premises, I found several of these essays worthwhile reading. The exploration of parallels between MacLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night* and Klein's *The Second Scroll* and the fascinating story of the Belcher Islands massacre (1941) in Chapter 5 have both been executed with commitment and care, and the concluding Chapter 10 on Joy Kogawa is most informative and skillfully written. It was courageous of James to venture out of the familiar terrain of religious studies into the strange world of contemporary literary work where religion and theology have been largely pushed to the margins. Students of Canadian literature will therefore find pioneering value in this scholar's confessedly "old fashioned" approach, but they may also wish that he had included more about the writers' "theological views" or made more use of "biblical scholarship to elucidate literary texts" promised early in the book. More important, one hopes that, encouraged by James's beginning, they will begin to investigate elements of this profound and complex subject themselves.



More Northern Indices

Charlene Porsild

Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike. UBC P \$75.00/\$19.95

William R. Morrison

True North: The Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Oxford UP \$29.95

Valerie Alia

Un/Covering the North: News, Media, and Aboriginal People. UBC P \$75.00/\$27.95

James P. Delgado

Across the Top of the World: The Quest for the Northwest Passage. Douglas & McIntyre \$45.00

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

The concept of northern indices was first articulated by Canadian geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin. In his 1988 book, *The Canadian North and its Conceptual Referents*, Hamelin tackled such questions as where North is and what distinguishes North from South in the Canadian context by developing a system for the geographical measurement of the North that he called nordicity indices (or VAPO for “valeurs polaires”). There are two aspects of Hamelin’s work that have always interested me: one is his inclusion of socio-cultural factors in his system of measurement, a system based on geographical and meteorological facts of latitude, precipitation, temperature, and vegetation cover; the other is his ability to map distinct northern zones by using these indices: Middle North, Far North, and Extreme North. On the one hand, Hamelin reminds us that defining North is not the exclusive domain of science; on the other, his system illuminates many different norths with distinct identities and specific challenges.

The four books I am reviewing begin, in a sense, where Hamelin left off. These books explore a variety of cultural, social, historical, and artistic indices across a wide swath of the Canadian North stretching from the high Arctic to the southern edges of Hamelin’s Middle North in the provinces. Together,

these four new additions to the already vast library of books on the North provide a powerful set of indices on where North is, what it has meant and continues to mean to all Canadians, and how it has been represented over several centuries, but especially during the past 160 years, from the final Franklin expedition to the creation of Nunavut. *Gamblers and Dreamers* is a story of the Klondike based on the lives and adventures of actual people rather than on the mythology that has grown up around the Gold Rush from the time of Robert Service. *True North*, a volume in the Illustrated History of Canada series, also tells the history of the Yukon and Northwest Territories from the perspective of northerners’ lived experience. *Un/Covering the North* traces the history of media coverage of the various norths by southern newspapers and the CBC and by northern, locally operated media and exposes the failures of southern reporting, while describing the successful activities of northerners when they speak for themselves. Finally, *Across the Top of the World* focuses on the high Arctic and the fabled story of exploration in search of the Northwest Passage that cost so many lives and continues to haunt, tantalize, and seduce readers, artists, and scientists today. If these studies have one thing in common it is not so much *the North*, for the norths that emerge from these pages differ dramatically from each other. What they share is a pride in and a passion for the particularities, peoples, and places that we can all recognize as northern. Moreover, they are all carefully, usefully, and, in *True North* and *Across the Top of the World*, beautifully illustrated.

Charlene Porsild’s purpose is to dispel the myths that have grown up around the Klondike during the last century, so her book, published in 1998 during the Gold Rush centenary, is a timely reassessment of the facts. Through the marshalling of data and statistics, and with the aid of good

archival photographs, Porsild argues that the Gold Rush and Dawson City were not mostly American. She maintains that the actual population was highly mixed, both in ethnicity and nationality, and that a significant number of Canadians, including French Canadians, were active in the Klondike. She insists that the Klondike was not a wild frontier of booze, gunfights, and ladies known as Lou, but a territory quickly and effectively regularized and regulated by the law, the banks, and the church. Instead of a society that was carelessly egalitarian, Dawson City, and the Klondike more generally, were strictly classed, very racist, and intensely sexist; this society, Porsild concludes, was typically Victorian. But the myth that seems most difficult to dismantle, is the notion that women were not part of the Klondike unless they were prostitutes. Porsild argues (and she is not the first to do so) that women, notably First Nations women, were always there, and that families were a part of Dawson life from the beginning. Moreover, there were few exotic dancing girls, and the prostitutes were then, as now, an underclass of working poor who led miserable lives; the people who mined the miners were lawyers and bankers.

Although there is much to praise in *Gamblers and Dreamers*, and I applaud Porsild's exhaustive research and judicious use of photographs, I found the book itself hard reading. Because she divides her ordinary Yukoners into working sectors, she ends up repeating herself from chapter to chapter, and the final effect is tedious. For example, no one wants to be told on page 158 that Laura Thompson Berton's parents need not have worried about her going to the Klondike because Dawson City was a place of Victorian propriety; that was established in chapter one. This book may attract fewer readers than its material deserves because the prose itself lacks energy and imagination, qualities which were, after all, intrinsic to the Klondike.

In *True North*, William Morrison provides a general survey of the history of Canada north of 60°, and he is especially good on the history of the Yukon. As a volume in the Illustrated History series, this is what the book is supposed to provide, and Morrison does a good job within those parameters. I was especially pleased with his handling of cultural encounter, which he discusses with sensitivity and balance. As Porsild makes clear in her book—and as is clear from accounts of the actual discovery of gold by George Carmack—Yukon First Nations did not prosper during this encounter with Whites. If I fault Morrison in this aspect of his history, it is for reproducing Samuel Hearne's account of the massacre of the Inuit by his Chipewyan guides. This scene of horror and "stark drama," as Morrison calls it, has too often been quoted without any contextualizing analysis of the historic relationships of Dene and Inuit, relationships which, as Robin McGrath reminds us in "Samuel Hearne and the Inuit Oral Tradition," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 18.2, must be located within a nexus of *mutual* hostility and legend.

The strengths of Morrison's survey are his splendid illustrations and his last two chapters. The illustrations include clear maps, archival and ethnographic photographs, reproductions of some paintings, and inserts of well-produced colour plates. Almost every page has an illustration and they provide, not just an accompaniment to the narrative, but a companion text that brings various northern peoples and places alive. I was somewhat troubled by Morrison's focus on the Yukon in his early chapters and the comparative neglect of the NWT and the eastern Arctic, but the last two chapters establish a better balance and bring both territories forward from the end of World War 2 to 1995 in a brief but fascinating overview of the challenges and potential facing this vast part of the country.

Valerie Alia's study of the representation

of northern First Nations and Inuit by the media of this country is a book that has been badly needed. For this reason alone I was pleased to see *Un/Covering the North*. I have long felt that southerners just don't get it when it comes to understanding or caring about the northern half of this country, and Alia proves that the various news media have much to answer for. I, for one, was disgusted by the *Globe and Mail* coverage of Nunavut. In articles leading up to 1 April 1999, Canada's self-styled national newspaper itemized the problems with Nunavut and implied that southern tax-payers would end up footing the bill; nowhere did journalists acknowledge or analyse the immense benefit that southern Canada gains from the North in culture, hydroelectricity, mining and oil extraction, tourism, and so forth. Alia has documented, in detail, the failure and ignorance of southern media in reporting northern news. She has also described the various ways in which northerners have seized control of the media to represent themselves to themselves, often in their own languages and in the face of repeated federal government cutbacks.

Alia's findings are impressive: southern coverage is biased, limited to crises, and inaccurate; northern self-coverage is vibrant and innovative, with Indians and Inuit anything but passive receivers of southern (read American) largesse; Canada's ANIK satellite and the CBC make us world leaders in northern communications systems; there are striking differences in success and philosophy among the different media and in their operations across the norths; and, finally, Canadians must learn about the North in order to grasp its importance for the past and future of the country and to the larger sphere of circum-polar issues. My criticisms of Alia's book are that she resorts too often to listing names, rather than selecting and analysing events, that she provides little analysis of media as a means of communication (what

characterizes southern reporting of northern news often typifies southern reporting of *any* news), and that she neglects a broader cultural sphere of the arts and historiography, disciplines which have contributed greatly to our understanding of ourselves and our country without oversimplifying or neglecting the North. Here is one example of what I mean: although Alia refers to Alootook Ipellie, she does not describe his art, his book *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*, which has been well-received in southern Canada, or his cartoon contributions to *Inuit Today*. All caveats aside, however, this is an important consideration of a major aspect of modern representation of the North and a warning about the irresponsibility of the Fifth Estate in Canada.

Perhaps I am an incurable romantic, but my favorite of these books is Delgado's *Across the Top of the World*. I like it in part because it is so well-written; Delgado's prose is lively, clear, and sharp. But I also like the subject. Although I have read widely in Arctic exploration and thought much about representations of Sir John Franklin, I am always hooked by the next recitation of his story, as of other stories about men braving the high Arctic to advance science and pursue dreams. Delgado knows the temptation of this material and is in love with it himself; like me he has heard Stan Rogers singing about the hand of Franklin reaching for the Beaufort Sea.

But of all the treatments of Arctic exploration that I know, this is by far the most succinctly written and splendidly illustrated. The pictorial record is stunning, and Delgado and his publisher stint nothing in producing history as a coffee-table book. Moreover, Delgado knows the music, poetry, fiction, and visual art that has captured and constructed Arctic exploration for us over four centuries. He reproduces paintings, maps, archival and contemporary photographs, and drawings by the explorers

themselves in a visual record of the Arctic that moves from a familiar 1577 illustration of Frobisher battling the Inuit to John Collier's moving, *imagined*, portrayal of Henry Hudson set adrift with his young son after his men mutinied, to one of Owen Beattie's forensic photographs of John Torrington from *Frozen in Time*, to a 1990s photograph of tourists examining ice from the safety of a dinghy. Delgado is right when he concludes that the Arctic is "one of the great landmarks of the human heart," and in this book he has reached mine by giving me the facts in elegant prose reinforced by a wealth of illustration.

As I reflect on these books and on the work published about the North over the past fifteen years, I have one general conclusion, which is that any truly convincing consideration of the subject will be multi- or interdisciplinary. Historiography or geography or newsmedia studies alone will not suffice because to understand the North one must appreciate all its indices. To grasp its importance for us at the beginning of a new century, we must heed Louis-Edmond Hamelin who, geographer though he was, passionately loved the North and traced its shape in charts *and* metaphors by indexing the interaction of art and science, culture and nature.

In Touch with the Land

Harold Rhenisch

Tom Thomson's Shack. New Star Books \$19.00

David Macfarlane

Summer Gone. Alfred A. Knopf Canada \$32.95

Wade Davis

The Clouded Leopard: Travels to Landscapes of Spirit and Desire. Douglas & McIntyre \$29.95

Reviewed by Bryan N. S. Gooch

Tom Thomson's Shack, a series of linked vignettes, *Summer Gone*, a novel, and *The Clouded Leopard*, a collection of essays, though markedly different from each other

in style and purpose, are all splendid in their own right. They share some common themes, among them, the necessity for a compassionate understanding of contemporaries and predecessors and, in particular, the utter importance of affinity with and concern for the land and the way that it is used.

Rooted largely in the Keremeos-Hedley area along the Similkameen River in southern British Columbia and that province's Cariboo region, Rhenisch's prose capsules offer affecting glimpses of a boy growing to become a worker at various trades and a writer, of coming to terms with the land, of the impact of mining and commercialism on small-town British Columbia, of orchardists and bee-keepers, and of clean water, urban sprawl, and fruit trees slashed to make way for a golf course. There is, in the Cariboo pictures particularly, a compelling sense of space and of the necessity of understanding the cycles of climate and of flora and fauna. Indeed, Rhenisch maintains, some Buddhists thought his Cariboo locus "the centre of the universe." Woven into his personal observations/anecdotes/reflections is an air trip to Toronto (to read from his work), to a site of the ultimate engulfing of the Canadian rural landscape by the material maw and a city from which, seemingly, there is no escape. Even his search for a red maple tree is fraught with difficulty; however, there is relief in Kleinburg, with the McMichael Collection and Tom Thomson's old shack now on display. Scenes and events in central Canada evoke memories of the west. The linkage by association works magically and thoughts about Thomson are inevitably part of the tapestry. The return to British Columbia brings a kind of peace, certainly: one does not need the metropolitan engine to feel sustained, and yet the memories of all that remain too, as part of the total fabric, as does the undetailed enormity of the land between west and east, south and north.

Particularly effective—and part of the charm—in all this is the naturalness of the narrative voice, unassuming but neither unquestioning nor uncritical, and a descriptive ability and a sense of colour which mark a painterly eye.

David Macfarlane's *Summer Gone* comes from an experienced hand; though this is a first novel, it has, in every respect, all the sure-footedness which characterizes his justly lauded *The Danger Tree*. *Summer Gone*, centred in Toronto and the Ontario cottage country, is also about memories—about a narrator bringing to mind the death of grandparents, a summer camp with swimming, canoeing, and a charismatic counsellor, and family relationships: a father's romantic indiscretion, a searing separation, and the effort of the father to bridge the gap with his somewhat estranged son—as if to bring together past and present—on a canoe trip which eventually leads to the father's death. The progress of the revelation is seamless—recollections of events, with all their associated emotions, flow naturally and tantalizingly against the background of urban life and the desire for rural escape and restoration. And yet, with all the nostalgia, a need, as it were, to find innocence and to establish the importance of early experiences, there is the awareness that the scenes of youth—the lakes and bays of southern Ontario—have changed, and not necessarily for the better as more people with the same quest to find some pastoral solace have staked their claim to distant lakeshores now speckled heavily with cottages, garnished with elaborate, burbling cabin cruisers. Highways leading to the backcountry, money, and social pressure spell change, and the sweetness of the old wooden canoe has been supplanted by the more impersonal metal replica. Of course, this "progress," as it is sometimes called, is a familiar phenomenon across the land. However, for all the seriousness of the value

of honouring and preserving a natural heritage, the message is never heavy-handed—hence its power as it emerges naturally from Macfarlane's superb handling of his characters' interactions through dialogue, his description, and his consummate attention to detail. There are relatively few books which demand not to be put down and which still leave a variety of scenes, meetings, and conversations clearly before the mind—this is one of them, for which we can all be grateful.

Wade Davis' *The Clouded Leopard* offers somewhat different fare, though some of the same central ingredients appear: truthfulness, insight, sensitivity, and a clear commitment to understanding and preserving the natural world. While some of the essays have appeared earlier, the cumulative effect of this collection of accounts of some of the travels and experiences of Davis, trained in ethnobotany and clearly a gifted, energetic, adventurous and fearless researcher, is powerful and authoritative. Taking his reader, with evident descriptive prowess, from an expedition to the South American Cordillera Blanca (involving a search for hallucinogenic plants), the northern exposure of Cape Crauford on Baffin Island, the making of Currier's film *A Passion in the Desert*, the rainforest of Borneo, and a search for the fabled clouded leopard of the Himalayas to the jungles of the Amazon, the Voudoun of Haiti, the Spatsizi country of northern British Columbia, and the cedars of the North American coast, Davis offers a series of highly detailed and passionately depicted canvases so often revealing not only his respect for the natural world and the local inhabitants who have learned to live in it (and as part of it) but his profound effort to come to understand, as it were, the spirit of the land, the magic and gifts of the earth. Here is scientific observation and discovery made clear though a vibrant artistic vision; here is passion without polemics and rage.

His coolly argued discussion, for example, of the development of the rubber industry, “White Blood of the Forest,” with blunders and blindness laid bare with the deftness of the pathologist’s scalpel, is a model of its kind—the sort of scientific cautionary report which individuals (however powerful) and governments neglect to their peril—and, as in the other essays, the uncluttered direction and fluid style easily carry the day.

Breaking Out of the Lens

Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor, eds.

Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film. UP Kentucky \$24.95

Simon Ortiz, ed.

Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing. U Arizona P \$16.95

Reviewed by Deena Rymhs

Beyond the observation that these are both collections of essays written by various stakeholders in the field of Native studies, only a few similarities exist between the two books. *Hollywood’s Indian* examines the representation of Native Americans in film with attention to how such depictions have reified values of the dominant culture or, alternatively, allowed for the expression of a counter-culture. In the genealogy of films the essays trace, the Indian on the screen has served as a repository of the concerns and interests of modern Western society. While the essays in *Hollywood’s Indian* focus on the politics of representation—and specifically on instances where Native Americans have been objectified by non-Native filmmakers for the American popular imagination—*Speaking for the Generations* is concerned with the potential for self-representation offered by the medium of writing. The Native authors who appear in *Speaking for the Generations* perform an act of self-definition within

their individual reflections. At the same time, they conceive of writing as a collective enterprise, one that ensures cultural continuance and demonstrates commitment to communal values. In the amount of self-situating the writers carry out within this volume, and in its emphasis on Native artists who promulgate their own representations, *Speaking for the Generations* offers a different type of critical contribution from *Hollywood’s Indian*.

The two books differ in the subjects they explore as well as in their presentation. *Speaking for the Generations* consists of interconnected, autobiographical reflections by Native American and Canadian novelists, poets, playwrights, and scholars on the role their writing plays for them and for their cultural communities. Writing provides a link between the past and present: it can honour past traditions at the same time as it secures a place in the modern world. All of the authors in this volume acknowledge the historical consequence of their writing and all draw on various forms to dovetail their personal and collective histories. Esther Belin’s “In the Cycle of the Whirl” turns to poetry, poetic prose, traditional knowledge, “facts,” and autobiographical reflection to bring her personal story “homeward” to her forebears. In similar fashion, Gloria Bird’s “Breaking the Silence” and Roberta Hill’s “Immersed in Words” counterpoint personal reflections with collective histories. This amalgam is then brought into dialogue with Western piecings of history.

Many of the self-reflexive essays in *Speaking for the Generations* also emphasize an organic creative process that links writing to the land—the place of origins for a people. Jeannette Armstrong, in “Land Speaking,” draws attention to the way in which her mother language of N’silxchn emulates the natural world—a connection that manifests itself on both a phonetic and phenomenological level. The same vitality

many of the authors attribute to their indigenous languages is translated into an energy and movement within the essays. This sense of living, breathing speech contributes to a conversational quality of the text as a whole. As editor Simon Ortiz suggests in his introduction, this work is a collective utterance, a moving and spirited exchange among an assembly of writers who all take to the floor to stand and speak.

In contrast with the experimental, momentous writing in *Speaking for the Generations*, most of the essays in *Hollywood's Indian* exhibit a more detached scholarly approach. The contributors either survey a number of films depicting Native people, or focus on a specific film, filmmaker, or genre. The overviews provided by such critics as Ted Jojola are useful, and the book presents two annotated bibliographies of films that serve as a good resource. While the essays of this volume show good critical stamina, some of the articles tend to overlap in the films they discuss. The articles are stronger individually than as a whole, an observation that calls attention to the lack of design or conception behind the arrangement of the essays. For instance, Hannu Salmi's illuminating essay on the translation of the American Western in Finnish film is a conspicuous, albeit welcome, departure from the otherwise American-centred criticism. There is some discontinuity among the essays, a structural weakness that becomes apparent next to the natural, easy movement of *Speaking for the Generations*.

The foreword to *Hollywood's Indian* by Wilcomb Washburn of the Smithsonian Institute does little to establish an adequate framework for the discussions which follow—in fact, I would argue that he misrepresents the otherwise complex and ambitious examinations put forth by the contributors. Not unlike the films he indicts, Washburn assumes that his reader adopts a singular position, one that seems

to exclude Native people and minority cultures. His repeated reference to “the American Indian,” a term that reduces Native people to a concept, a stock image, turns a cursory blind eye to the existence of *real* American Indians. Can the filmmaker, as Washburn asserts, *legitimately* continue to represent Native people and concurrently disavow any sense of responsibility? Sadly, Washburn's preface causes the reader to ask at the very onset of the book, “Where are the Indians in *Hollywood's Indian*?”

Fortunately, the subsequent essays in *Hollywood's Indian* are more edifying than this unpromising opening might suggest. Pauline Turner Strong builds her critique of *Pocahontas* and *The Indian in the Cupboard* around her experiences as a mother who has viewed these films with her children and taken pleasure in the activities and products marketed with the films. Turner Strong's self-situated analysis, though somewhat overdone, generates a number of worthwhile issues. Her overall conclusions about Disney's commodification of a real-life Native figure and Columbia/Paramount's distorting simplification of Lynne Reid Bank's children's novel are intelligent and critically engaging. In a similarly innovative vein, James Sandos and Larry E. Burgess call upon Chemehuevi oral telling in their discussion of Polansky's *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*. The spoken accounts provide background information about the real Willie Boy who became a sort of renegade by defying tribal taboo and running off with his cousin.

Despite their apparent differences, the books intersect in some important ways. Many of the archetypes, themes, and generic conventions identified in mainstream films originate in literary works, and both books grant importance to the re-visiting of history. *Hollywood's Indian* looks at the history of film as well as at the histories depicted in film. Yet the question remains: “What is the responsibility of the filmmaker?” The writers in *Speaking for the Generations* unques-

tionably agree that it is a serious responsibility to write, to leave a legacy that speaks to the generations past, present, and future. On this very central issue, however, the critics in *Hollywood's Indian* cannot concur.

Hybrid Imaginings

Gregory Scofield

I Knew Two Métis Women: The Lives of Dorothy Scofield and Georgina Houle Young. Polestar \$16.95

Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood. HarperFlamingo \$24.00

Robert Hunter

Red Blood: One (Mostly) White Guy's Encounters with the Native World. McClelland and Stewart \$29.99

David Day, ed.

The Visions and Revelations of St. Louis the Métis. Thistledown Press n.p.

Reviewed by Warren Cariou

Much First Nations literature deals with questions of essentialism and authenticity, but these issues can be even more problematic for people of mixed heritage. To be “in-between” the established racial norms often causes crises of identification. However, the acknowledgement of hybridity can also be seen as a radical claim of self-determination, and an act of resistance against the colonial imperative of clarifying racial boundaries. Four recent books examine—and sometimes exemplify—this tension between essentialism and resistance in the representation of Native-white hybridization.

Métis writer Gregory Scofield has long been concerned with the implications of hybridity in a cultural milieu that values authenticity. “My skin defies either race,” he writes in *The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel*, and indeed the best poems from his first three books are those that explore the defiance of his skin, translating it into angry anthems of Métis identity. In

his latest collection of poems, *I Knew Two Métis Women*, Scofield continues to examine the cultural and personal meanings of hybridity, but this time he does so with a tender, elegaic sensibility that makes these poems even more haunting than his earlier work. The book is a poetic family biography, focusing on the lives of the author’s mother, Dorothy Scofield, and his adopted “Aunty,” Georgina Houle Young. Both of these women had tough, poverty-stricken lives and died young, but despite this, *I Knew Two Métis Women* remains a book of hope. Scofield makes this poetic family album into a compelling meditation on the meanings of lineage and family.

The Métis-ness of Dorothy and Georgina is not stereotypical: they wear cowboy hats, sing country songs, and idolize Wilf Carter. Scofield recalls a time in his childhood when he was less than enthusiastic about his mother’s style, writing “I was embarrassed / of the Indian cowboy who sidled up to the front door.” But now, in these poems, he celebrates the incongruities of his mother’s identity. He even makes a nod toward the country music tradition himself, by appearing in full cowboy regalia in the author photo. In their love of singing country songs, Dorothy and Georgina are not play-acting, but they *are* performing their identities, fashioning themselves in a complex intersection of cultural values that leaves the stereotypes far behind. This melange is what Métis identity continues to be about.

Scofield’s style is not densely poetic, and it never has been, but there is a delicate lyricism in this poetry which makes up for what might be considered a lack of linguistic complexity. He makes very effective shifts from prosaic lines like

the same hand
that kneaded bannock dough,
threaded needles and beads,
picked fleas off the dog,
scratched the needle on records

to the sudden expansiveness of the sentence's conclusion:

hovered above Harry,
when love was a garden,
when times, not so ugly,
waltzed her feet without music.

This movement from the mundane to the extraordinary is what enables Scofield to explore this emotional territory without ever becoming sentimental.

In *Thunder Through My Veins*, Scofield provides an unflinching autobiographical narrative which further develops the stories of his relationships to his mother and his Aunt Georgina. *Thunder Through My Veins* and *I Knew Two Métis Women* are companion pieces in many respects, and it is rewarding to read them together. In fact, it is only when we read *Thunder Through My Veins* that it becomes completely clear that Georgina is not Scofield's blood relation but rather an adopted aunt. *Thunder Through My Veins* is itself liberally sprinkled with poetry from the author's earlier books, and many of these poems come to have new significance in the context of his autobiography.

Thunder Through My Veins recounts Gregory Scofield's search for his sexual and ethnic identity under difficult conditions. He undergoes a long struggle to understand and accept his homosexuality, and he also encounters much resistance in his attempts to assert his Native identity. He grows up in communities where hybridity is not an option, and in a household where his stepfather (who is himself part Native) doesn't allow Gregory to have "Indian stuff in the house". Even his mother is "oblivious to her Indianness," and it is only through his association with Aunt Georgina that he is introduced to the Native aspects of his identity. Aunt Georgina tells him that he "must be an *Awp-pee-tow-koosan* [half-breed] like me. . . Half dis and half dat." She shows him how to do beadwork, tells him stories, and teaches him Cree.

But young Gregory is not able to come to

terms with the concept of hybridity—which is not surprising, since most people around him also refuse to acknowledge it. For much of the narrative he moves back and forth between Native and white cultures, seeking a place he can feel at home. "I had this thing for authenticity," he writes in one interpolated poem: "Westerns were my favorite I wanted a mini / Village to be the chief." Much of Scofield's energy in his adolescence and teen years is devoted to this search for Native authenticity—a search that is sometimes frustrated by his relatively pale skin and light hair.

The turning point in *Thunder Through My Veins* is the author's discovery of the history of the Métis when a friend takes him to the cultural interpretation centre at Batoche. Here he comes face to face with the fact of hybridity, and this event becomes a galvanizing moment in his search for identity. He writes,

The importance that I had once placed on being Cree—a true and pure Indian—seemed to disappear with the sinking sun. Suddenly, the colour of my eyes, hair, and skin seemed to belong to me, perfectly matching the prairie landscape that held such a dignified history. . . . Never again would I search for a place of belonging. This place, Batoche, would always be "home," my home.

This homecoming—to a place that Scofield had never visited—says a great deal about the author's understanding of the fluidity and contingency of belonging.

In contrast to Scofield's fascinating invocations of hybridity is Robert Hunter's *Red Blood: One (Mostly) White Guy's Encounters with the Native World*. Hunter here recounts his discovery of a family secret while his mother is on her deathbed: that her great grandfather had married a Huron woman. This information has immediate effects on his perceptions. "As my mother lay dying," he writes, "she looked more and more like an Indian." As Hunter's unfortunate phras-

ing here might suggest, his treatment of this discovery of Native ancestry in the book is not particularly subtle. He takes what might have been an occasion for some very interesting meditations on hybridity, and turns it into the basis of what often seems like a New Age desire for Native authenticity. He demonstrates these New Age proclivities in many parts of the book, such as his declaration that "I was starting to see a virtually mystical (let's say) relationship between myself and the Aboriginals," and his later admission that "I was a sucker for a Medicine Man." The text is full of magical coincidences and supposedly foreordained events that are redolent of *The Celestine Prophecies*. While Hunter does indeed spend a great deal of time with First Nations people in his various adventures, and he works with them on many vital political causes, a reader often senses that he views his Native companions through a distortive lens.

This is an immensely disappointing book after Hunter's important collaboration with Robert Calihoo on the Governor General's Award-winning *Occupied Canada*, which examined the colonial history of First Nations people through a narrative of Calihoo's life story and his valiant attempts to regain his ancestral land from the Canadian Government. Perhaps Hunter's recent employment as a reporter for Toronto's City TV is somehow related to the disastrous decline in the tone and relevance of his writing, or perhaps he has simply struggled with autobiography. While one has to admire his straightforwardness and his apparent willingness to paint unflattering portraits of himself, it must be said that Hunter's persona in the book is vain, petulant, and generally difficult for a reader to sympathize with. It seems likely that the *real* Robert Hunter is not such an annoying personage, since he has accomplished many laudable things, such as founding Greenpeace and working for years as a rogue campaigner for environmental awareness. But when his

life becomes enshrined within the gonzo-inflected trappings of the media-man autobiography, the result is a glib, gratuitous, and self-serving story.

David Day's compilation *The Visions and Revelations of St. Louis the Métis* is a hybrid in its genre as well as its Métis subject matter. Day presents excerpts from Louis Riel's diaries, translated into English by Thomas Flanagan and recomposed into the format of free verse poems. Riel was himself a poet, of course, but Day argues that Riel's "formal poems are not original, or forceful. They belong to the tired European traditions of the time." Day believes that the truly poetic intensity in Riel's work can be found in his prose, which is free of the "formal restraints" of the nineteenth-century European lyric mode. By rearranging Riel's diaries into poetic lines, Day purports to unearth the Métis leader's submerged poetic talents, and he also claims to highlight the orality of Riel's language.

Day makes one compelling link between Riel's work and a Native oral tradition when he compares Riel's 1885 pseudo-poem "Voice of the Indian" with a transcription of a Sioux war song first recorded in 1895. The similarity between these two texts is indeed striking, but the possible meaning of such similarity is less clear. Day seems to be suggesting that when Riel adopts European literary models in his French poetry, he is ineffective, but when he works within First Nations traditions his words are more powerful, perhaps even more authentic. This possibility is certainly worth considering, but in the end I don't think it offers an accurate portrayal of Riel, who is in fact a much better formal poet than Day admits. Some of Riel's poems, such as "*La metisse*," are beautiful lyrics of Métis identity. Day is wrong to dismiss Riel's poems so readily, and he is also misguided in his attempt to replace them with editorially created pseudo-poems. This book serves as documentary proof that a passage of prose

which is arbitrarily broken up into poetic lines is still far from being poetry. Day provides the original prose passages in French on the verso pages, and these passages always seem more appropriate to Riel's context and his language than the poetized English versions. If Riel had intended to write poems, he would have done so.

Despite its flaws, *The Visions and Revelations of St. Louis the Métis* is an undeniably compelling book, since it gives a brief snapshot of many of Riel's most important personal and political crises. However, by taking Riel's words out of context, Day often diminishes their power and immediacy rather than heightening them. He does provide necessary contextual information in footnotes, but this is far less effective than reading the longer sections of the diaries that are reproduced in Thomas Flanagan's out-of-print 1976 edition. Indeed, the most important function of Day's compilation will be to direct readers to the Flanagan translation of the diaries, where they will find a more satisfying picture of Riel's personal thoughts in his final two years.



Narrating BC

David Stouck and Myler Wilkinson, eds.

West by Northwest: British Columbia Short Stories. Polestar \$18.95

Rose Hertel Falkenhagen

Wilderness Beginnings. Caitlin \$18.95

Jeremy Wilson

Talk and Log: Wilderness Politics in British Columbia, 1965-96. UBC Press \$29.95

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

West by Northwest collects twenty-nine short stories into a chronology that ranges from early mainstays by Pauline Johnson, Emily Carr, Ethel Wilson, Howard O'Hagan and Malcolm Lowry through stalwarts from the important "middle" years of B.C. fiction—including stories by Jack Hodgins, George Bowering and Audrey Thomas, and a throwback by Vi Plotnikoff—to eleven contemporary pieces. The editors manifest their desire to privilege "the different regions of this diverse province," a politics that—like gerrymandering the provincial legislature—skews representation toward the rural. Their second stated concern, more commendable in my view, is to collect "histories of the different peoples living in this province." They succeed, with notably greater sensitivity toward race and ethnicity than toward gender. Stouck and Wilkinson are less forthcoming about the purposes of the collection, but clues suggest that they imagine the audience as students taking introductory courses at colleges and universities.

An initial delight in reading a collection such as this is the discovery of new voices, and *West by Northwest* reveals a few nuggets: I happily encountered stories by Kathryn Woodward, Christian Peterson and Eden Robinson. Then one searches out old treasures: I found favourites by Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst, Keath Fraser, and Linda Svendsen. Particularly satisfying is to find included a story that one cherishes but feels

hasn't received the attention it merits, which describes my thrill at finding and rereading Rebecca Raglon's "The Gridlock Mechanism." And then, I began to experience a response natural for readers and inevitable for reviewers: "What if? What if I had edited this collection?" Well, if I had edited *West by Northwest* it would tilt toward more challenging material. Brian Fawcett's "Malcolm Lowry and the Trojan Horse" is more thought-provoking than either of the "Lowry" pieces found here; David McFadden's "Hiroko Writes a Story" would be a must; Hodgins's brilliant and recent "Over Here" would be included rather than his traditionally magic-realist "Earthquake"; complex feminist pieces by Alice Munro and Carol Windley would replace some of the maudlin stories present; and I would certainly find space for one or two urban torches, such as Norman Ravvin's "The Story of an Eye." I take this line of thinking, this playing at the role of editor, as a positive response to *West by Northwest*. The collection will prove useful in classrooms. I question only its unspoken assumption that one must wear kid gloves when introducing students to B.C. writing.

Wilderness Beginnings narrates a little-known strand of B.C. history by recounting the 1930s and 1940s experiences of a German immigrant to the province. Rose Hertel Falkenhagen introduces an intriguing frame in the "Prologue": it unfolds that her father, Paul Hertel, died in 1981, and that ten years later Falkenhagen has decided to tell about his first fifteen years in B.C. She writes a letter "to" her deceased father promising "a listening ear," something he could never resist. *Wilderness Beginnings* constructs her father's response: his story, told in his words, as Falkenhagen recollects that voice. In other words, we have before us biography masquerading as autobiography.

At the beginning of the biography Paul Hertel's family operates a renowned butcher shop and *Gasthof* in Rehau, a small

German town near the Czech border. Frau Hertel rules; Herr Hertel obeys; Paul's two sisters fall in line. Paul rebels. In 1929, age nineteen, he reads an advertisement, headlined "Farm Help Needed in Western Canada," in a local newspaper and decides to pursue his long-held Karl May-induced fantasies by emigrating. Falkenhagen's account traces her father's difficult years picking fruit in the Okanagan, ranch-handing near Monte Creek, and homesteading on Babine Lake. During those years Paul corresponds, albeit sporadically, with Grete, his fiancé back in Rehau. He returns to Rehau in 1934, just as the Night of the Long Knives makes Hitler absolute master of Germany. Paul marries Grete and the newlyweds hastily board ship in Bremerhaven, bound for Canada, while hundreds of workers cheer in unison "*Sieg Heil*" and "*Heil Hitler*."

Unfortunately, only the final quarter of *Wilderness Beginnings* remains to reconstruct the early years of Paul's and Grete's life in British Columbia. The struggles of the Hertels to start a family (including Rose and two older brothers) and to confront the persecution of German immigrants as war is declared in Europe provide far more compelling subject matter than the man-against-wilderness motif that comprises earlier parts of the biography. Falkenhagen achieves a poignant, bottoms-up historical description when she shows Canadian citizens of German origin having to register as "enemy aliens" and be fingerprinted, and when she illustrates how "very British and anti-German" southern Vancouver Island was (and is).

Ultimately, narrator and reader have to come to terms with the past here in the present, and *Wilderness Beginnings* helps the narrator and biographer more than the reader with that process. The narrative is most effective when Paul Hertel becomes more than Rose Hertel Falkenhagen's father—when he stands in for everyman being persecuted for national origins. If it is

true that the most engaging contemporary history-writing has left behind the chronological structures and realist forms of earlier historiography, then *Wilderness Beginnings* is rather sepia-tinted.

Talk and Log examines the impact of environmentalism on B.C. governmental forest and wilderness policy between 1965 and 1996. In the "Preface," Jeremy Wilson, a political scientist at the University of Victoria, cautions against an upbeat conclusion: "The account leads us past many small environmental triumphs, but, at the end of the story, we find the province's forest industry and government doggedly continuing along a development path that will see most of the province's remaining stands of accessible old growth timber liquidated before today's young adults reach retirement age."

Talk and Log is voluminous (some 375 pages of text and 100 pages of appendices, notes, glossary, and index), thoroughly researched and lucidly written. Wilson documents the rise of forestry and wilderness politics in B.C. as *story*, in which forces representing business-as-usual are challenged by an environmental movement that calls into question the very assumptions and premises underpinning the province's forestry practices. He complicates the story at its beginning by noting that every aspect of the province's economic and social development has been underwritten with revenues realized from drawing down B.C.'s inherited natural resource capital—that is, liquidating its old growth forests. Wilson candidly observes that in "one way or another, all British Columbians, past and present, have been at the trough."

The story starts by theorizing "business power"—roughly the careful attention that state managers pay to the "accumulation" needs of capital—on the one hand, and, on the other, the wilderness movement's success in mobilizing political resources and translating those resources into political pressure. Lest British Columbians take

lightly those successes, Wilson points out that other environmental issues have fared poorly in comparison. For example, "the scores of Vancouverites who played major roles" in forestry campaigns "generally stood by resignedly during those same years while the quality of their immediate environment was steadily diminished by speculator-driven pro-development policies, dismal city planning, uncontrolled population expansion, and even more rapid growth in automobile use."

Talk and Log describes the pressures that these competing forces bring to bear upon successive provincial governments. Chapters limn how environmentalism challenged the resource juggernaut of the 1960s, how the New Democrat government elected in 1972 encouraged a critical assessment of some central assumptions about forest management, how public confidence in Social Credit forest policy eroded from 1976 through 1991, how the discourse of wilderness politics in B.C. transformed local and provincial campaigns into national and international ones, and how the Mike Harcourt-led NDP government elected in 1991 implemented a significant reform of forestry policies.

As noted earlier, Wilson's story does not strive toward or arrive at a comfortable conclusion. The environmental movement's efforts have ensured that more than five million hectares have been added to the province's protected areas, that the scale of logging has been sharply reduced in certain high-profile areas, and that environmental considerations now play a significant role in shaping the way logging and road building are planned and carried out in the province. These gains must be considered against the stark realization that most of the "core prerogatives" of the industry are intact, and that "it continues its unrelenting advance on the remaining expanses of low-lying old growth forest." In terms of talk, wilderness politics in British

Columbia have arguably achieved some of the world's greatest environmental successes; in terms of logging, B.C. remains the Brazil of the North.

Taking Soundings

Drew Hayden Taylor

Fearless Warriors. Talonbooks \$12.76

Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth.
Talonbooks \$14.95

John Moss, ed.

Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative. U
Ottawa P \$27.00

Reviewed by Eve D'Aeth

If these works have anything in common, it is that they come from an unexpected source, from places about which one cannot make easy assumptions. *Fearless Warriors* is a collection of short stories about Otter Lake, an Ojibway reserve in Ontario. They have a strange backlit quality, the effect of a change in narrative focus midway through the story. Stories begin with a situation and set of characters observed by Andrew, and then a turn in narrative leads us further into Andrew's experiences and relationships, and hence into perception of greater complexities than the stories at first seem to offer.

Take for example the last story in which Andrew's sister Angela tries to impress on a young bouncer in a bar in Peterborough the inadmissibility of the term "wagonburner." Angela grasps the young man's prized leather vest and threatens to damage it if he doesn't apologize, and the two negotiate, uncomfortably twinned, assisted by the manager and Andrew. The visual comedy of the situation is fully exploited, and also a certain blatant didacticism. An unexpected ethical dimension is added when Andrew reveals that, unknown to Angela, he and the manager have both agreed to bribe Tom, the bouncer, to apologize, which he

eventually does. At the beginning, "Crisis Management" appears to be about racial slurs that get built into the language, and how they affect their users and the hearers. As it turns out, it also deals with a family dynamic, the relationship of brother and sister with each other and with their mother, who, while she doesn't appear in the story, plays a role in it. Like many of the stories, this one ends with unresolved questions: Which battles are worthwhile? Is it disloyal not to support family in an unworthy battle? "Fearless Warriors" indeed.

"Fearless Warriors" is an ironic reference to the participants in a barroom squabble in which Andrew feels obliged to come to the aid of his friend William. The combatants are prohibited from returning to the bar, and as they and their angry and embarrassed girl friends drive home, they run into a deer. Although all enjoy wild meat, this is different: the deer is injured and the four are distressed at its suffering. Andrew finally dispatches it with a tire iron, and the title achieves a new dimension, not wholly mocking.

"Summer Lightning" is a troubling story with its typically unresolved question of whether a son, Jamie, can come to terms with the homosexual partner and relationship of his widowed mother, and whether she can accept that her beloved husband is truly dead and not merely missing. Andrew observes, helps his friend Jamie renovate the mother's house, and records the community's hostility to the relationship; he himself can provide no answer.

Death, disappearance, disrupted lives; incidental cruelties set about with kindness and love: the tales are dramatic and strongly visual. The narrator's voice is, in contrast, gentle, unemphatic, ironic; sometimes speaking with a forthright underdog gallops humour, and sometimes with depth and subtlety.

The out-of-focus road sign of the cover picture is well chosen, and the book gener-

ally is well-produced, except for a few irritating lapses in editing: “then” for “than,” “loosing” for “losing,” “throws” for “throes.”

The play *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* is a continuation of one of the stories, “Someday,” in which a woman, Janice (or Grace), removed from her mother and the reserve as a child, returns as an adult to visit her family. She has been brought up by a non-Native family in Toronto, has no horror stories of ill treatment, is well-educated, a comfortably-off lawyer. It is she herself who has initiated the reunion; she wanted to know her birth family; but birth ties cannot withstand the differences in culture and the emotional tension: she returns to Toronto after visiting for only a few hours.

In the play, Janice is given another chance. Her sister, Barb, comes to fetch her from Toronto to take leave of their mother, who has recently died. Barb is accompanied by her partner, Rodney, and his brother, Tonto. As the three break into Janice’s apartment, Toronto is, in ironical reversal, treated like an extension of the reserve where it is customary for guests to wait inside a host’s house for her return. The theme of the play is serious enough, but its development is lightly handled, and indeed, with the deliberate reversals of stereotype that Taylor uses, comedy is inevitable.

The two women are strongly drawn and well contrasted. Both are intelligent and determined; the one is bright, polished, and professionally successful, the other, centred in her family, angry but not implacable, outspoken, and articulate. The men are both charming, funny, and sympathetic; they have voices rather like the narrator’s in “Fearless Warriors.” The outcome is perhaps predictable, but the means of getting there is not. Relationships and lines of communication are constantly queried. No one and nothing is allowed to settle into stasis.

As Moss states in his engaging preface to *Echoing Silence*, “This is a book about nar-

rative, yes, but it is a book of stories.” The multiplicity of its stories, the variety of voices coming from different places, disciplines and lives, resonate with one another and with their magnificently intractable topic, the Canadian Arctic.

Each contribution invites a unique response, although to do that is not possible here. Some are down to earth. Graham Rowley, for example, recounts part of his and Canada’s past in matter-of-fact tones and concrete terms. “There is another north, as well,” he states, “—a north that a writer may describe but which never existed except in imagination.” He himself, however, opens up vistas for the imagination when he says, “The coast proved to be farther west than the dotted lines on the map, so we added some two thousand miles to the area of Canada . . .”

Similarly, Wayne Grady in “On Making History” tells the story of ploughing through the ice in 1994 in the Louis S. St. Laurent, to reach, as near as possible, the North Pole, that “like the object of all quests, is both a mythical and an historical place.” He repeats and lets us hear, “the ancient antiphony of the sea.” The reader is made aware of physical enterprise and metaphysical adventure.

In another kind of multidisciplinary exploration, Aritha van Herk assumes the persona of Willem Barentsz, and with characteristic strength, writes her history, geography, perceptions of place, her “geografictione.”

Franklin’s expeditions appear in essays by Wiebe, Parkinson, and Woodman. Wiebe examines the reticence of Richardson’s journals, which may record a lack in the explorers rather than in their generous hosts. In solid prose, Wiebe illuminates certain barren patches of Richardson’s journal, and suggests that Richardson overlooked the heightened spiritual awareness of the Dene because of his Eurocentric background and its tendency to disregard or devalue the unfamiliar. Through the

Victory Point Record, the Admiralty form filled in by Commander Fitzjames, third in command of Franklin's final fatal expedition, Parkinson deciphers the story of the brief document itself and exposes the immense bureaucratic structure that underpinned it. Woodman examines the Inuit oral record, which likewise imparts information about the events and about their modes of communications.

Aron Senkpiel, Lorrie Graham and Tim Wilson, and Marlene Goldman criss-cross the ground, discussing the works of Wiebe, Moss and van Herk, and their relation to the actualities of place and to other works. As Goldman discusses van Herk's attempts to free Anna Karenina, the writing of narrative, and the North from masculine domination, we come across yet another dimension of North: North as an expression of gender. As Sherrill Grace states in "Gendering Northern Narrative," "van Herk turns the tables on the male adventurer/author/narrator by re-place-ing him, but that replacing is not so much an erasure . . . as an opening up of fiction and geography to another discourse. . . ." She speaks of other arts and in her discussion touches on the intrusive power of, for example, the film camera, to destroy as it exposes to view. I recall here the fragility of Northern ecosystems, where conceivably the most constructive action is sometimes to refrain even from being there/here. Grace suggests alternative ways of seeing, including Judith Currelly's, whose *Phantom Herd* appears on the cover of the book, "presenting a land suffused with warmth and filled with present and remembered life."

Hulan tells of how North supplied the background for stories for boys, inducting them into the mystique of heroism necessary for the maintenance of Empire. Grant's title "Imagination and Spirituality: Written Narratives and the Oral Tradition" encapsulates her contribution. What about the voices of those to whom the North has always been

home? *Echoing Silence* begins with Cournoyea's account of documenting oral history. Alookook Ipellie contributes his vigorous, funny, profound, and at times scathing prose, and the book ends with two wonderful warm stories related by Mary Carpenter who, in the discussion on appropriation, takes the view that writers should not be required to "second guess their thoughts when they write."

Echoing Silence is amazing in its variety. To quote Mary Carpenter again: "To support only one kind of beauty is to be somehow unobservant of nature." Land, people, images, history, voices echoing and answering coalesce in the reader's mind into the idea of Arctic, of North.

Mythologizing History

Marie Vautier

New World Myth: Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Canadian Fiction. McGill-Queen's UP \$24.95

Reviewed by Coral Ann Howells

Vautier investigates the relationship between myth, history and identity through her study of six novels from English-speaking Canada and Quebec written during the 1970s and 80s, in an ambitious attempt to define Canada's distinctive version of postcolonial literature. The great strength of this book is that it canvases questions concerning nationalist politics and cultural identities through a comparative study of texts in both English and French, thereby highlighting the multiple versions of historical "reality" and different political agendas within bilingual multicultural Canada. In constructing her theory of New World Myth, Vautier interestingly adopts a double focus which pays attention not only to differences between English-Canadian and Québécois texts but also to their common concern to resist and revise European master narratives (in which she

includes biblical and classical myths as well as European histories of the New World). This study shows how some contemporary Canadian novels are engaged in narrating the nation, for this is not about post-nationalist arguments but rather about post-European and postcolonial arguments, engaged with reconstructing national myths in a postmodern context.

The theory of New World Myth is formulated in the first chapter and developed in subsequent chapters, each of which offers comparative readings of two postmodern novels (one in English and one in French). The same six novels recur throughout, worked into different patterns in an investigation of the New World Myth concept. The structure allows for close textual analyses embedded in a sustained discussion of postmodern fictional techniques plus a range of political, cultural and historical questions relating to competing Canadian nationalisms. Written in English, this book is evidently for anglophone readers, and speaking for myself as someone most comfortable in English, I learned a great deal about the history and shifts of emphasis in Quebec's political agenda. Consequently I was better able to appreciate the ways in which the selected Québécois novels might be read as responses to specific political crises and ideological tensions. I am grateful for the critical balance which Vautier's study provides across the two literatures.

The reader is tempted to ask how this theory of New World Myth (duly acknowledging Margery Fee's use of the term in her 1986 essay on *Tay John*) differs from Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction." After all, the same questions are raised here about postmodern challenges to the authority of traditional histories and there is the same focus on the storyteller's creative imagination, the same narrative self-consciousness, the same techniques of *bricolage* and irony. But New World Myth is different in its emphasis. While no less sus-

picious of history and imperialist agendas, it is concerned not only to reinvent New World histories but also to invest them with a significance which formerly attached to biblical and classical myths. Vautier's frame of reference inevitably uses dimensions of the sacred, the supernatural and the allegorical traditionally associated with mythologizing, though these new myths make none of the traditional claims to universality. On the contrary:

This New World Myth is anchored in historiography; it is highly political; it is concerned with both epistemological uncertainty and the need to know, and is intent on imaginatively reclaiming the past while flaunting its awareness of the processes involved in this act.

Every chapter emphasizes particular strategies for New World myth-making in specific historical and ideological contexts. Discussing Rudy Wiebe's *The Scorched-Wood People* and Jacques Godbout's *Les Têtes à Papineau*, Vautier foregrounds the role of the narrator as self-conscious myth-maker, with narrators who are themselves fabulous figures: Wiebe's Pierre Falcon speaks from beyond the grave, while Godbout's "Charles et François Papineau" is a monstrous bicephalic talking head(s). The chapters on Jovette Marchessault's *Comme une enfant de la terre* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* engage with challenges to Christian belief systems, whether it be Kogawa's allusions to Buddhism or Marchessault's parodies of biblical myth and Catholic ritual together with her incorporation of Amerindian mythology. With George Bowering's *Burning Water* and François Barçelo's *La Tribu*, Vautier returns to the role of the creative artist as reinventor of history and New World myth-maker.

This brief sketch does not do justice to the diversity of theoretical issues raised by the detailed textual analyses, and it is this contextual aspect which makes the most

persuasive argument for the importance of these myth-making metafiction. The major questions relate to national and cultural identities with their different inflections in the anglophone and francophone contexts. While considering issues of race and immigrancy in anglophone novels, Vautier pays particular attention to the representation of Amerindians in Québécois texts and to the topic of *métissage*, one of the forgotten features of New France's colonial history which is foregrounded in the novels of Marchessault and Barçelo.

Barçelo's text with its blurring of divisions between Amerindian tribes and twentieth-century Québécois provides, as Vautier suggests, not only "the forum for a postcolonial re-examination of Franco-European approaches to "primitive" cultures," but also (and quite remarkably for the early 1980s) "a space to discuss Quebec's struggle with internalized historical-political myths" of a homogeneous *collectivité*. In many ways Barçelo's text is the emblematic illustration of the theory of New World Myth, combining the deconstructive strategies of historiographic metafiction with magic realism in its textual fabrication of a hybridized New World inheritance, so "reimagining the past in a postcolonial, postmodern and post-European manner."

Vautier's book is well researched and convincingly argued, and in a truly postmodern manner she does not claim comprehensiveness but chooses her texts to illustrate the discontinuities within Canadian historical narratives of nationhood. I would suggest however that the project of refiguring European myths in contemporary Canadian fiction might sometimes work in an opposite way to Vautier's theory. I am thinking of Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* or Alice Munro's story "The Children Stay," where allusions to biblical and classical myths and to literary legends arguably extend the resonance of Canadian crises

beyond the local into a global context. But that is another side to the story and would make a different book.

Women of the North

Nancy Wachowich, in collaboration with Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak, and Sandra Pikuajak Katsak

Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women. McGill-Queen's U P \$34.95

Reviewed by Susanna Egan

The title of this remarkable work describes "a wind that blows across the land or ice, a strong wind that suddenly shifts its direction but still maintains its force." The wind, in this case, is the wind of change represented in life stories from one Inuit family—grandmother, mother, and daughter—from North Baffin Island. Nancy Wachowich's sensitive and careful scholarship with these stories makes for a truly magnificent project, a powerful wind through this reader's experience. Let me explain: the review copy of this book had been sitting on my desk, unopened, for a while (not uncommon); *Canadian Literature* wanted my review or return of their review copy (not unreasonable); I was leaving the country for a two-week holiday and decided to take this book for review as airplane reading (surely an unwise decision). Thirty hours later, deaf to the claims of safety procedures, flying altitude, weather information, time changes, transition at Heathrow, and, finally, exhaustion and intense heat, I lay on my bed in Jerusalem unable to sleep before (most regretfully) concluding my extended immersion in the Eastern High Arctic. Any book that can override such an incongruous series of reading situations must top my list of gifts for family and friends—as this one now does.

Wachowich's introduction describes the processes of narration, recording, editing, and presenting that enabled 117 discrete

stories to come together as life stories of three generations of women within one family. Apphia Agalakti Awa, born in 1931 in the Eastern High Arctic, spent the first forty years of her life “travelling with her family across tundra and sea ice between hunting camps, fishing spots, and trading posts.” Her collection of stories is the longest of the three, providing vivid glimpses of a harsh nomadic life that is now history for her granddaughter Sandra, born in 1973 and thoroughly settled in Pond Inlet. The stories of Rhoda—Apphia’s daughter and Sandra’s mother—bridge the dramatic span between Apphia’s strenuous life and distinctive culture and Sandra’s diluted, southernised experience. Born in 1957 and raised on the land until she was sent to Igloolik at the age of eight for federal schooling, Rhoda reaches backward and forward in her understanding of life in the High Arctic. Together, the stories of these three women spell out the changes in family and cultural experience, childhood, community relationships, childbirth, and the skills involved in clothing and feeding the family. Their stories are not always chronological, but they are clearly linked and speak to each other, adding up to a rich and full narrative of one family’s life during seventy years of rapid change.

Nancy Wachowich met Apphia, Rhoda, and Sandra in 1991, when she spent three months in Pond Inlet doing fieldwork for her Master’s thesis in cultural anthropology. On completing her Master’s degree in 1992, Wachowich responded to an invitation from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples for three-generational life histories and spent further time in Pond Inlet, clearly becoming quite close to her three narrators. One remarkable and constant feature of this book is Wachowich’s entirely silent but attentive and participant presence throughout the stories. Her introduction provides clear and respectful context. Her editorial paraphernalia include a magnificent cluster

of photographs to which I returned again and again as narrators and family relationships became increasingly clear, notes (of the really useful kind), glossary for Inuktitut terms, an index of names, a chronology that inserts events from the stories into the broader history of the High Arctic, a historical overview, a list of the stories, suggested readings, academic bibliography, and a fine index. Moving backwards and forwards through the text, I find Wachowich anticipating my needs and the needs of her storytellers to address a southern audience. Further, Wachowich is clearly present not only because she has carefully positioned herself at the start, but also because her narrators speak so easily and so intimately to an audience of whose sympathy they are sure.

A white, southern academic, Wachowich is sensitive to differences of narration and reception of such stories over time, distinguishing among the narrative methods of grandmother, mother, and daughter. From her own listening position in a room in Pond Inlet, she conveys the gestures that called up the earliest context for Apphia’s stories: “Stories like these were told to the beat of women’s hands, cleaning and scraping skins in igloos, sod-houses, and skin tents. They were retold to the rhythm of sled runners scraping on snow during long spring trips on qamutiks. They were harmonized with the incessant buzz of mosquitoes during summer treks inland in search of caribou.” The effects of settlement, of *Qallunaat* or white schooling, and of exposure to the media necessarily affect the kind of story to be told and the most appropriate style in which to tell it. Where Apphia’s stories are episodic and sometimes repetitious in their treatment of old adventures on the land, Rhoda has a clear sense of white policies, of DEW-line communities, of scientific experiments, and of Ottawa’s relations with the North, and Sandra moves into a meditative vein, outlining a troubled youth in which she does

not seem sure of where she belongs or how best to identify herself.

So Apphia, for example, simultaneously reminiscing and teaching, ends her episodes with such phrases as “that’s how it was,” or “that’s what I was told,” or “that’s what I remember.” Her section of the book is complete when she says “This is the last tape, the last session, but I want to mention that there is no ending. I would say now that there is no ending to the stories from my life. That is all I have to say.” Rhoda is more succinct than her mother. Studying to become a certified general accountant, she is also concerned to “make up for lost time” in terms of learning how to prepare the caribou, seal, and polar-bear skin clothing for her family that she herself had been embarrassed to wear in her teens. She clearly lives the divide between generations and is entirely aware of the effects of *Qallunaat* authority and influence on her family’s life. She has learned more from school than from her mother, though her parents did finally come off the land to be with their children in school. She sees herself as part of the generation that was assimilated. Finally, Sandra’s story seems focused southwards with a painful ambivalence not present in her grandmother and modified in her mother by adaptation and maturity. Sandra did not want to be a Christian because she “wanted to get back at the *Qallunaat* for saying all those bad things about Inuit back then. I didn’t like what I learned about the *Qallunaat* moving in and telling us what to believe in, telling us the old Inuit spirits were evil. It is like they tricked us into Christianity.” However, her parents and grandparents are devout Christians and refuse to talk about the shamans. “Some people still believe that these spirits exist,” she says. “Sometimes I wonder myself.” However, her generation—Arctic exiles as they are called—is the first to experience drugs and suicides and the boredom of a very limited world in which wealth is part of the TV

experience and poverty is measured in terms of material possessions. Apphia talks of tea, biscuits, clocks, calendars, cloth, and boots as luxuries and says she did not know the meaning of poverty until she and her husband came off the land. Sandra seems unaware of loss when she says matter-of-factly that her grandfather, who had supported his family on the land for decades, is now a garbage-truck driver.

Wachowich’s choice to leave in Inuktitut those words (such as *qamutik* or *Qallunaat*) that have been adopted into the English vocabulary of the North marks one cultural exchange that has enriched Canadian English. On the whole, however, both narration and annotation tell a sad story of the erosion of the North by the South. Historically, this erosion began with the whalers and the Hudson’s Bay trading posts. It continued through Ottawa’s concern to study and control the North and settle nomadic peoples in manageable communities. Through the stories, this erosion manifests itself in terms of information and in the concern expressed at various times by all three women about their relation to the *Qallunaat* and their need to keep the best of their Inuit values even as they adapt to change. Apphia’s earliest memories go back to the days when the shaman was powerful and include fear of the white priest. Despite her adoption of Christianity and her sense of time past, Apphia’s storytelling in the 1990s includes her apparently un-ironic understanding of the way things were: “In the old days there were many rules for women, many things that they were not supposed to do. If a woman ate raw meat while she was menstruating, starvation might come to the camp. Starvation was like that.” Her sense of past conditions is complicated only by her sense of possible inadequacy—of her life and its explanations—in *Qallunaat* terms.

On the other hand, no small part of the expressiveness of these stories in each

generation stems from the energy that comes with resilience. Wachowich's list of "significant dates" reminds us that the rapid decline and eventual collapse in prices for Arctic fox furs began in 1945. One reason the elders do not speak more of the past is that those times were so hard. That Matthias Awa can leave behind the strenuous skills he has deployed until late in life and adopt a wage-based line of work in a settled community is impressive. Their daughter Rhoda, brought up, as she puts it, to be assimilated, was so angry with *Qallunaat* authority that she took Trudeau to task in a poster she drew as part of his welcome to Igloodik in 1970. Their son, James Arvaluk, named for Apphia's father, presented the first of a series of land-claim proposals to the Canadian government in 1976; these led in due course to the establishment of the territory of Nunavut in 1999. Within the stories of these three women, we can identify the hardship and the cultural strength of an older way of life in the Arctic, the deference to white authority that led to assimilation, and the resilience of a culture that evolved in geographical conditions so harsh that even those who live in modern houses find they need to understand the properties of various skins and the skills involved in preparing them. Stories that spring from the page still keep time to the lives of the women who speak them.

As I came to an end, and the muezzin sounded in 35-degree heat, I noted how far these voices travel across time and changing experience and was reminded how vividly the personal narrative belongs in history. Even Sandra knows that she lives "just a breath away from the old life," and Rhoda's observation,—"[t]hey are not just our stories"—holds true at every stage. This book will surely make a major contribution to the study and appreciation of Inuit culture past and present—and give pleasure as it does so.

Legacy of the Bear's Lip

Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson

Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman. Knopf
Canada \$34.95

Reviewed by Heather Hodgson

Stolen Life is the story of Yvonne Johnson's life and of how she came to be "the only Native woman in Canada serving a twenty-five-year sentence for first-degree murder." Yvonne was born to a Cree mother and a Norwegian father. Her parents and siblings were all victims of poverty, addiction, and various forms of abuse. Yvonne's childhood, the years she spent on skid row in Winnipeg, and the events that occurred on the night of September 14th, 1989, are horrific. Yet the story is hard to put down because it engenders in the reader a faint hope that Yvonne will find a way to redeem what she has endured. That hope keeps one reading when, alas, the worst is yet to come. And because of the way Wiebe and Johnson present the facts, readers are left to judge what story they will believe. In sharp contrast to traditional postures of disengagement, readers of this book are engaged from the start. There may be disagreement among readers about whom to believe, but few will be unmoved by Yvonne's story.

She was born with three apparent strikes against her: she is Cree; she is a woman; and she has a cleft palate. Because she could not speak when she was a little girl, she became a target for abuse: raped by a stranger before she reached grade four, she was also raped by her grandfather and her father. It was her younger brother Leon, however, who learned how to "do it right" from the Johnsons' male babysitter. Yvonne's older brother, Earl, her only protector, left her feeling even more alone when he died in suspicious circumstances, in jail. Earl's death seemed to cause the Johnson family to fall apart and her parents separated. Out of pity for her father, Yvonne chose to stay with him.

Her subsequent early adult years on skid row were also marked by poverty, violence, alcohol, and rape. Even the man who fathered her children and gave her some happiness turned out to be an alcoholic. But it was the trauma of what she endured earlier in her life, the authors suggest, that is likely to have triggered Yvonne's participation in a murder on September 14th, 1989. That night, after a drunken binge, she was convinced that a man she barely knew was a child molester. She is alleged to have played the most crucial role in his death.

The question arising out of the facts as presented concerns the extent of Yvonne's role in the murder. Readers are left with the disconcerting question of whom to believe, since the four accused tell different stories. There are questions about the credibility of witnesses, which Wiebe suggests may have contributed to a miscarriage of justice in Yvonne's case. In the end, the all-white jury of nine men and three women gave her the most severe sentence possible.

The book is a mix of autobiography, biography, and investigative journalism. It begins with Wiebe's preface and ends, after sixteen chapters, with an epilogue. Much has been excerpted from the seventeen prison notebooks and journals that contain Yvonne's memories, and the gaps are filled in with information from police interviews, from court transcripts and from research conducted by Wiebe.

A historical context sheds some light on Yvonne's story. Natives in Canada have the highest statistics for family breakdown, violence, substance abuse, accidents, and, most saliently, incarceration. These statistics are the fulfillment of the fears the Cree Chief Big Bear, Yvonne's great-great-grandfather, had for his people in the aftermath of colonization.

It was reported in 1999 that "a female Indian is 131 times as likely to be admitted to a provincial jail than a non-native." Prisons seem to have become the finishing

school for Natives, many of whom have also experienced residential school. Many Native people, particularly Native women, may identify with aspects of *Stolen Life*. The book has social significance: it generates greater understanding about the tragic predicament of many Natives in Canada. While Native readers may find Yvonne's story disturbingly familiar, they should also be inspired by her courage. Others may get realistic first-hand access to the sources of this widespread despair. Yvonne Johnson, by redeeming her horrific life through the telling of her story, may help those who are caught in similar circumstances. By some miracle of grace, she has forgiven those who hurt her so deeply.

Suffering never feels like a gift, until we emerge from it to realize how it can put life into perspective. Yvonne's turning around of the suffering caused by her cleft palate is revealed in a letter she wrote to Wiebe in 1998: "A bear always has a fold in her upper lip. My grandma, I, my eldest child, have the gift and the legacy of the bear so strong, we have the Bear's lip." Now she uses her early suffering to strengthen her cultural foundation and her spirituality. Now she understands that "to have been born imperfect [is] a sign of specialness." Her disability has given Yvonne other resources. She remembers an old man who had this knowledge, and who told her that "a child with a hare-shorn lip was a child whose soul was still in touch with the spirit world." This knowledge has become the salve she needed to begin to heal herself.

The other major voice in *Stolen Life* is that of Rudy Wiebe. His prominence as first author is an aspect of the book that cannot go unmentioned. He states that the story is "largely" from Yvonne's "seventeen black prison notebooks, her letters, her comments on official records and documents, [as well as] her statements to police." While Wiebe does elaborate aspects of Yvonne's story that she could not, he describes her as

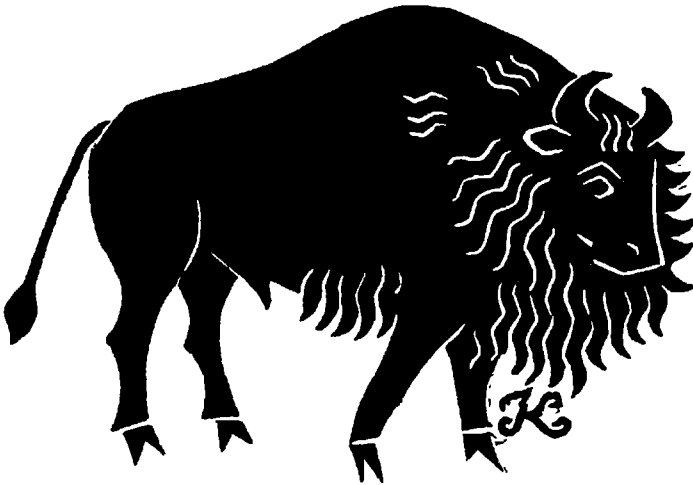
having “a natural gift of language,” and he claims to have witnessed “her powers of writing . . . expand during her time in prison.” Wiebe further emphasizes the quality of her earliest writing: “she has a profound ability to capture an astute perception with words.” All of this gives rise to a question that will not surprise Wiebe: should he be first author in a time when appropriation of voice is still such a sensitive issue? He does not provide a clear explanation anywhere in the text about how it was decided he would be first author. Furthermore, if Yvonne’s writing is so powerful, why did he “standardize” her prose as he acknowledges he has done? That word’s implicit indifference to a difference of voice, even from such a compassionate figure as Wiebe, made me shudder.

Indeed, Yvonne Johnson should be grateful to Wiebe for editing, shaping and completing the story she had “largely” already written. *Stolen Life* is still Yvonne’s story, however, in spite of Wiebe’s assertion that “no story is ever *only* yours alone.” I found it jarring to encounter Wiebe’s picturesque musings about the landscape insinuated into the fabric of Yvonne’s tragedy. She is

not without a perspective on this matter, and states that *Stolen Life* may not “be *only* my story—but it is *mine*.” Can’t a major figure of Canadian literature offer a gift without taking?

I was not able to speak with Yvonne at the Ohci Okimaw Healing Lodge, as she did not respond to my letter requesting a visit. I still wonder if she is protective of the man she asked to help her to write her book. Either way, we should be grateful to Yvonne Johnson and Rudy Wiebe for the collaboration that enabled Yvonne’s story to be told.

Self-determination for First Nations people takes on different forms in different contexts. In writing, the use of phrases such as “coming to voice” and “agency” resonate. A significant writer first to break ground in this way was Maria Campbell, and, since the publication of her book *Halfbreed*, we have witnessed numerous others follow suit. Johnson and Wiebe’s *Stolen Life* is an important addition to this literary coming to voice. If exposing the poison is essential to healing, as the Cree playwright and novelist Tomson Highway believes, then this exposure is one very important use of writing.



The Origin of Mind

Robert Bringham

Prologue

This is an attempt to hear and understand something of the past through the barrier of the present, and something of the present through the barrier of the past. It is also an attempt to walk on the water of language: to cross the barrier of language using language as a bridge.

We begin with a text, spoken in the Nootka language at the village of Ttsuuma'as on Vancouver Island in December 1913 by a Sheshaht elder named Saayaachapis and transcribed from his dictation by Edward Sapir. A translation and a short discussion follow the text. But we are dealing here with oratory trapped on paper, in a language that is rarely written down and rarely read. So the translation and discussion are followed in their turn by a key to the orthography I have used, and by some further notes that turn on the conversion of this text from the oral world to the world of writing.

Nootka, the language of the Nuuchahnulth people, is one of seven related tongues that constitute the Wakashan language family. Its relatives are Haisla, Heiltsuk, Uwekyala, Kwakwala, Nitinaht and Makah. Four of these—Haisla, Heiltsuk, Uwekyala and Kwakwala—form the northern branch of the family.¹ Nootka, Nitinaht and Makah form the southern branch. Speakers of these languages live now, as they have for a long time, on the Northwest Coast of North America, from the region of the Kitimat River in west central British Columbia, south to Cape Flattery, at the northwest tip of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state.

Before the Europeans came, there were twenty-five or thirty Nootka-speaking bands. They had for neighbours, in addition to each other, the Kwakwala-speaking peoples to the north, Nitinaht speakers to the south, speakers of three Salishan languages (Comox, Pentlatch and Halkomelem) to the east, and to the west, the wide Pacific ocean. In Saayaachapis's day, smallpox and other new diseases had markedly reduced the number of Nootka speakers, and another tribe had made its presence felt. For this tribe, a new name was coined in Saayaachapis's language: *Kinchuucchathh*. That is to say, "Kin-Chooch-persons," the King George People.

1. The Text

Uhh'atma hiihl
 ya'atiis ukwiihlshi'at.
 Iicchim·ma hiihl.
 Ukhlaama hiihl Iicha'um.
 Ukhlaama ahhkuu Kapkimyis. 5

Uushtaquyuma ahhkuu Kapkimyis.
 Ahh hihl'at tupkukkwat.
 Uwiisiikkatma ahhkuu.
 Tlupkshitol ahhkuu hhaakwaatl'i
 uyu'ahl nnachu'ahl iicchim'i quu'as. 10

Uyu'ahl nnachu'ahl yaa tupkukkwat
 ahh we'iiq·qi cchacchaattaqtlsuhl.
 Hiihl mahhtii
 uyu'ahl hiihltsaqihl'i histu'ahl
 tlupkshitol hhaakwaatl'i yaa ap·pii·qu'ihl'i. 15

Hiihl hlu'uk ahh aniittsuhl
 hihlaas'itq iicchim'i.
 Sukwi'atl 'akyyak'i.
 Cchichi'atl
 ahh histaata qatsaas'i. 20

Hhisshi'atl tsaasitl
 hhismis hlu'ahl'i yaqtqiihl'itq.
 Sukwitl Kapkimyis hhismis'i
 qwis'at kwikwinksu
 ahh'aa cchiishitl hishimyyuup hhismis'i. 25

Qwis'atl Kapkimyis
 «Hw hw,»
 waa'atl puutqshi'atl.
 Yaahl qu'iichitluk Kapkimyis hhismis'i
 uhhtaniyyapatl. 30

Yaahl me'itlqats'is
 quu'as'i
 yaaqwihl'itq puutqshitol Kapkimyis.

Nnaats-saatl ahh hhaakwaatl'i
ukwiihlshl'itl iicchim'i hlimmaqsti. 35

Yaahl hhayuuyyap quqwaas Iicha'um.
Ahh'aa'atl hitaqstu'atl quqwaas'i hlixsppiinu'atl.
Nnaats-saatl hhaakwaatl'i
Nnaasayihlim ukhlaa'atl
ahh hitaqstuppatl iicchim'i Iicha'um. 40

Waa'atl uukwihl Nnaasayihlim,
«Hlimmaqstatlma.
Uyaaqtlma'aahla wik utsachitl
qwitsamihhse'itq qatwwaatquu wwasna
wikkatl utsachitl. 45

«Cchuuchkkatl 'apaak hhayu'i
ahh'aa'atl utsachi'atl
qwitsachi'atl'itq.»
Ahh hitaqstuppatl utsa'appatl
ahhkuu hlimmaqstiiyappatl. 50

Tlaa'uuktlaa cchichitl.
Sukwitltaa Kapkimyis hhismis'i.
«Hw hw,»
waa'atllaa puutqshitl.
Yaahl qu'iichitluktlaa. 55

«Ukhlaa'atlma tiichsyyaapi,»
waa'atllaa uukwihl Nnaasayihlim.
Histaqstuppatl ttuhhttsiti'i.
«Ukhlaa'atlma tiichsyyaapi,»
waa'atl Iicha'um. 60

2. The Translation

That one there
is the maker of things.
That old man.
His name is Old Man Alone.
The name of this one is Kapkimyis. 5

- Kapkimyis is dreaming something up.
 That's why part of him is marked with black.
 This girl is the first thing he created.
 When this girl first opened her eyes,
 the old man is the only person she saw. 10
- She saw black markings on his body,
 feathers in his headband, signs around his eyes. -
 From the rear of the house,
 when she awoke, the girl
 saw him in the middle of the platform. 15
- There was a plank this wide
 where the old man sat.
 Then he took the knife.
 He cut himself
 here on the left side. 20
- Then blood flowed:
 blood spread across the plank.
 Kapkimyis picked the blood up
 this way in his hands:
 he gathered up the blood. 25
- Then Kapkimyis said
 "Hww, hww,"
 breathing on it.
 Then Kapkimyis's blood became a human being.
 It was changed in that way. 30
- There was a little boy—
 there was a person—
 where Kapkimyis breathed.
 Then this girl watched
 the old man give the boy a mind. 35
- Old Man Alone made ten human beings.
 Then he wrapped them up.
 And then the girl—Breaking Daylight is her name—
 saw the old man—Old Man Alone—
 put them into the other person. 40

Sapir was deeply impressed by Saayaacchapis—enough to write two essays and a poem about him.³ But the best source of information about Saayaacchapis is the substantial body of texts that he himself dictated—first to Sapir and then to his own grandson Hiixuqqin'is (Alex Thomas, 1895–1971), who was the first Nuuchahnulth writer.⁴

Though Saayaacchapis spoke his autobiography to Sapir, this portion of the text was not addressed to him directly. It is part of a speech, composed by Saayaacchapis for a potlatch which he hosted, sometime between 1870 and 1885, to celebrate his eldest daughter's first menstruation. At the end of 1913, he recited this speech and several others so Sapir could write them down. Sapir, of course, had come to the Nuuchahnulth country for reasons of his own, but Saayaacchapis perceived how Sapir could best be used, and Sapir, to his great credit, went willingly along.

According to his own account, Saayaacchapis built a new house in which to host this potlatch, and he carved the figure of Kapkimyis into the main interior housepost. Around this post he constructed a set with stage machinery for the presentation of what in Nootka is called a *tupaati*. This means—if I understand the term correctly—a genuine piece of intellectual property: a privately owned and privately maintained interpretation or extension of publicly shared mythology.

The potlatch was illegal in Canada from 1885 until 1951, and there is no doubt of the purpose of the act of parliament involved. Its aim was to exterminate the intellectual cultures of all the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast, so that school, church and state could take their place. The world Saayaacchapis describes, and the world from which he speaks, was the target of that campaign.

A major function of *tupaati* in those days was garnering prestige through presentation at a potlatch. These presentations took the form of extended dance dramas or shorter bursts of showmanship, and sometimes they involved highly complex and elaborate stage equipment and technique. Once upon a time, the presentations may have been as stylized and spare as Noh plays. In the nineteenth century, with the falling populations and destabilized economies brought on by European contact, it appears that enactments of *tupaati* were sometimes as ingenious and contrived as court entertainments at Versailles.

Saayaacchapis is not the best Nuuchahnulth mythteller transcribed by Hiixuqqin'is and Sapir. His old friends Qiixxa and Washtqa'a, and his son Siixuuhlmiik (Douglas Thomas) excelled him in that art—or perhaps, since he was interested in everything, Saayaacchapis just never found the time to treat Sapir to a full-scale concert of the myths he knew so well. He was nonetheless—and he remains in written form—a fountain of songs, a fountain of knowledge, a fountain of thought. He is also the author of one of the best Native American autobiographies ever published. His knowledge and his love of a lost world are two of the things that make it so, and there is a third factor, equally important.

He said to Breaking Daylight,
 “This is the mind.
 He’ll never get to where he’s heading
 if some of them are unwilling;
 he won’t go. 45

“When the ten of them consent,
 all ten of them, to go there,
 then he’s going to go.”
 He put them in, and then he left them there.
 So that became the mind. 50

Then he cut himself again.
 Kapkimyis lifted up his blood again.
 “Hww, hww,”
 he said again, breathing.
 Then there was another human being. 55

“This one is called staying alive,”
 he said to Breaking Daylight.
 He put him right inside the head of the previous person.
 “This one is called staying alive,”
 said Old Man Alone. 60

3. Commentary

This is part of a 10,000-word autobiography dictated between 18 November 1913 and 12 January 1914. Edward Sapir, who wrote it down, was at that time head of the division of anthropology at the Canadian National Museum, where his duties interfered with the intense linguistic work he loved. His transcription and prose translation of this and other Nootka texts remained unpublished until 1939.² More of his Nootka work remains unpublished to this day.

The speaker is the Nuuchahnulth elder Saayaachchapis, who was born about 1840 and died about 1920. Like all Nuuchahnulth elders, Saayaachchapis had several names. Another that he frequently used was Naawee’iik. A missionary gave him the name Thomas, which yielded his nickname, “Old Tom,” and his descendants took Thomas as a surname. With other members of the Sheshaht (or *Tsishaa’athh*) band, he hunted in Barkley Sound, spending summers largely in the Broken Islands, winters largely in the tributary fjords, and going far and wide to trade. In his later years, when blindness restricted his movements, he lived in the village of Ttsuuma’as (Tsahaheh) at the head of Alberni Inlet.

Saayaacchapis's autobiography was shaped entirely by its author and spoken in his tongue. There is none of the usual anthropological cutting, pasting and rewriting. The text was not obtained through a sieve of leading questions nor recast to fit the preconceptions of its readership. I have no doubt that editing occurred—that speeches were rewritten and events rescheduled and reshaped—but all of those decisions were made by the author himself, and by the spirit-beings of memory, as he spoke.

This speech on the origin of mind is Saayaacchapis's own elucidation of one of his cherished *tupaati*, chosen to celebrate his daughter's metamorphosis and entry into adulthood. It is not by any means the only passage in world literature linking mind and blood. Empedokles, for one, says that heart's blood is the only real constituent of thought. "I know it in my blood" is a stock metaphor in English, whose power is long lost through overuse. But we must read these words in context. Here they are tied to a piece of ceremonial theatre, which is tied in turn to an event. I know of no philosopher or poet other than Saayaacchapis who finds the origin of mind in self-inflicted male menstruation.

4. Nootka Spelling

The Nootka language uses a rich palette of phonemes and needs a correspondingly rich palette of typographic symbols. By the standards of the Latin alphabet, there can be no such thing as a simple script for a tongue so phonologically complex. The system used here is an experimental version. Like the systems that are standard for English, French and German, this one uses digraphs and trigraphs to avoid enlarging the alphabet.

A simple rule governs vowels: all single vowels are short, all double vowels are long. The consonants are somewhat more complex.

The apostrophe (') represents a glottal stop. Its mirror image, the turned comma or single open quote (ˆ), represents a phoneme that is relatively rare in human languages: a voiceless pharyngeal stop, like the Arabic *'ain* or Hebrew *ayin*. The *q* is uvular *k*, like the Hebrew *qoph* or Arabic *qâf*. The *x* is a voiceless velar fricative, like Russian *x*, Arabic *khâ*, and *ch* in German *Bach*.

The Nootka *ch* is pronounced as in English *cheese*, the *ng* as in English *sing*, the *sh* as in English *she*, and *ts* as in English *its*.

There are two laterals: *hl* = *l̥* (a voiceless alveolar lateral fricative, or devoiced *l*), and *tl* which is a voiceless alveolar lateral affricate (the phonetician's barred lambda).

The digraph *xx* represents a uvular *x*, and *hh* is a voiceless pharyngeal fricative (a smooth, deep-throated *h*) like Arabic *hâ*.

All other doubled consonants (*kk*, *mm*, *nn*, *pp*, *qq*, *tt*, *ww*, *yy*) are glottalized. In addition, there are three glottal trigraphs: *cch*, *ttl* and *tts*, which are glottalized *ch*, *tl* and *ts*. Glottalized consonants are pronounced with a glottal catch superimposed.

The sequences *kw*, *kkw*, *qw*, *qqw*, *xw* and *xxw* are labialized versions of the consonants *k*, *kk*, *q*, *qq*, *x* and *xx*. Labialized consonants are pronounced with rounded lips.

As in Catalan, a midpoint is used to separate letters that would otherwise be read as a single phoneme. For example, *k·k* represents a geminated *k*, not a glottalized *k*, and *s·h* = *s* + *h* (*sh* as in *mishap*, not as in *ship*). Other sequences that may look puzzling at first are actually unambiguous. Nootka has no *th* sounds, as in English *this* or *thing*, so *th* is always *t* + *h*, and *thh* is always *t* + *hh*. And Nootka has no glottalized *s*, so the sequence *ss* is always geminated *s*. Because there is also no *l* sound in Nootka, the letter *l* appears only in the combinations *hl*, *tl* and *ttl*. The sequence *hhhl* (as in *nnuhhhlimits* = shredded cedar bark) is therefore always *hh* + *hl*. The sequence *shhh* (as in *Paashhhak*, the name of Squirrel's daughter and Raven's wife) is always *sh* + *hh*.

A glottal stop occurs predictably at the beginning of any word in which the first written letter is a vowel.

5. In Lieu of Conclusion

I have followed Sapir in translating the Nootka word *hlimmaqsti* as mind. That is not, of course, all there is to it. "Spinal cord; heart (figurative—not the physical organ), mind, will power," says Sapir's full dictionary entry (Sapir & Swadesh 1939: 315). But that is not all there is to it either.

The suffix *-aqsti* means "within" or "among." It is not a suffix that normally provokes glottalization of the consonant preceding, as many Nootka suffixes do. Still, we can realistically look for the root in the form *hlim* as well as *hlimm*. Such stems occur in Nootka names, but I have not encountered them in words that would reveal their root meanings. Farther afield, there are likely looking cognates. In Old Wakashan, there is a root form **lm*, which means to enclose or curtain off. The derivatives include such words as Haisla *lmàxsi*, "door curtain," Uwekyala *lhemmiélkv*, "a curtained room," and Kwakwala *l'milat'si*, "sacred room of a novice (that is, curtained-off area in the house)."⁵ (If we rewrite these words in the same orthography used here for Nootka—purely for convenience of comparison—they are: **hlm*, *hlmmàxxsi*, *hlem·mmyélkw* and *hlmmilattsi*.)

Perhaps, then, *hlimmaqsti* means, at root, "among the things behind the curtain, within the enclosed space, what is hidden from view." And perhaps it is associated here, in the fertile mind of Saayaacchapis, or in the mind of his language itself, with another Old Wakashan root, **lmq*, which means to tie or to bind, and also to moor or anchor a boat.⁶

We say in English too, "to slip one's moorings" when we mean "to lose one's mind." Perhaps by using such a phrase, the early King George People would have earned a knowing smile from the people of Barkley Sound, if only they had come ashore to listen long enough to learn to talk.

I take it as axiomatic that poetry is a form of thought more important and more lasting than typography. Why then does the writing system matter? Literature is, by definition, verbal stuff so good that it is worth the work of learning a new language to encounter it first hand. In most human cultures and for most of human history, literature has been oral rather than written, but the old-growth cultures of the world now face imminent extinction. Wherever literary texts have passed from the world of speech to the world of writing, readers are confronted simultaneously by a barrier and an invitation. This is the case with over a hundred native North American languages. We need a workable script for each, though the script is only a step in the right direction.

Church and state, which sought to end the potlatch—and lately state and business, which have urged that it be revived as a tourist attraction—have not succeeded in exterminating Native American intellectual culture, but they have indeed succeeded in dampening its vigor and reducing its extent. Literature is medicine for problems such as this. Not by any means a cure, but medicine at least.

In four of the Wakashan languages—Nootka, Nitinaht, Kwakwaka'wakw and Uwekwa'waka—vital works of early oral literature survive in written form. In Nootka and Kwakwaka'wakw, these salvaged works are not just vital; they are marvelously varied and extensive. They are part of an ongoing North American polyphony of language, knowledge, memory and desire whose survival and whose health might well concern us all.

The ten human beings of the mind are in this respect an interesting metaphor. One way to read the metaphor, of course, is as a recipe for progress. Line them up and dress them in their uniforms and face them the same way and get them cheering the same cheer and we can really get somewhere. If they all speak different languages and dream of different things and some of them are busy reading poetry when others want to run, our productivity will fall, the GNP will slip, we'll all go nowhere fast.

That is, of course, the place we have to go.

The ecology of language is a part of the ecology of mind. Ecologies are self-policing structures, and languages are self-transcending ones. The latter depend on the former to give them a home. Ecologies enlarge from time to time, and they contract. But mostly they go nowhere. Their greatest and most enviable skill is in continuing, in staying where they are without destroying what enables them to stay there.

The eleventh being, placed inside the head and evidently on top of the mind, is called *tiichsyaaapi*, "continuing to live." This creature, like the trickster, has no announced agenda other than himself. His functions, like the trickster's, might include making sure that perfect order—deadly perfect order—never supervenes. Making sure, in other words, that those ten people *aren't* too often

of one mind, or that the horses (to switch metaphors and cultures) aren't pulling all the time in one direction. I think of him myself, at any rate, as a kind of blind ecological conscience: the thought that mind embodies, which is always inaccessible to mind. And I am glad to learn that he is made of the same stuff as mind itself.

NOTES

- 1 In the writings of Franz Boas, Heiltsuk is called Bella Bella, Uwekyala is called Rivers Inlet, and Kwakwaka is known as Kwakiutl. Though it is now out of fashion, that terminology is as good as any other. But Boas repeatedly speaks of the Bella Bella (Heiltsuk) and Rivers Inlet (Uwekyala) languages as dialects of the language he calls Kwakiutl. That opinion is not shared by Native speakers of the languages concerned, nor is it shared by other linguists.
- 2 The full text is in Sapir and Swadesh, *Nootka Texts* (Philadelphia: Linguistic Society of America, 1939) 138-77. The section retranscribed and retranslated here is on 164-66 of the original publication.
- 3 These are reprinted with corrections, and with a photograph of Saayaacchapis, in Sapir's *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994): 450-56, 481-510.
- 4 Many of these texts have yet to be published. The manuscripts are held at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Québec.
- 5 Neville J. Lincoln and John C. Rath, *North Wakashan Comparative Root List*, Mercury Series 68 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1980): 205.
- 6 In the northern Wakashan languages, this latter root is often reduced to a form homonymous with the former root, **hm*.



Cutting Both Ways: Robert Bringhurst and Haida Literature

Kevin McNeilly

Three years ago, Shambala—a publisher in Boston that concentrates chiefly on New Age spirituality—reissued a pocket-sized version of *The Raven Steals the Light* (US\$10.00), a 1984 collaboration between Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst recasting Haida tales for a broad, mainly non-Native audience; the Shambala publication replicates, in miniature, a reprint of the same volume by Douglas and McIntyre, which had added a preface by Claude Lévi-Strauss attesting, as an anthropological authority, to the “accuracy” of the renderings while praising “their power of seduction, their charm, and their freshness.” Shambala changes very little from the Canadian version, except to assert on the cover that these are Native *American* tales (a moniker with an ambiguous continental drift, suggesting the subtle pressures of some cultural manifest destiny) and to add a blurb to the back cover insisting that the stories are “authentic retellings of traditional Haida myths and folktales.” The contents, including Reid’s engravings, are identical; even the typography—if my eye is trustworthy—reproduces the neoclassical letterforms Bringhurst tends to prefer.

That Lévi-Strauss needs to claim the stories are accurate is at once natural and strange. It’s natural, given his academic expertise on West Coast myth (articulated in *La voie des masques*, 1975), that general readers seek his sanction and publishers his endorsement: his preface authenticates the book as document rather than imposture, a significant *impri-matur* given that both Reid and Bringhurst are to differing degrees outsiders to Haida culture. Reid in particular acknowledged that he essentially made himself into a Haida artist as a young adult. Although his own

preface attests to privileged access to Southern Haida oral tradition through stories he heard from “Henry Young of Skidegate,” an eighty-year-old storyteller Reid encountered in his twenties, Reid is also characteristically modest and deferential, asserting that his are only “slight entertainments, glancing versions of the grand old tales” and do little justice to the form and scale of Haida myth. He freely admits that he knows little of Haida language or culture, coming to it late:

I wish I had more patience and had spent the tiny part of my life [Young] requested, to learn something of the wonderful language he spoke so resonantly and so well, and to learn more of the stories of all the myth-creatures whose many adventures instructed, informed and entertained the Haidas during their long history.

The third-person pronoun is deeply significant here; for Reid, even after decades as an acknowledged master carver in the Haida tradition, the Haida are still “them,” not “us.” And this is what makes Lévi-Strauss’s preface so strange. Reid takes pains to distance himself, at least explicitly, from claims of authenticity. (Inadvertently glib, the back-cover blurb claims Reid as “a leading artist of the Haida tribe.”) If the volume needed cultural sanction, why seek it from a famous academic—no matter how sympathetic—and not from a Haida reader? The implication seems to be either that qualified Native readers, source persons like Henry Young, have wholly vanished (which cannot be the case) or (and this seems more plausible to me) that authentication is not what these stories actually demand nor what Lévi-Strauss actually provides.

Claims about accuracy become more peculiar when reading the tales themselves. They make no attempt to sound remotely “Native”—undoubtedly a wise choice, given that recognizable stylistic markers are generated principally by mainstream American culture and attend on racist stereotypes,

such as Daniel Francis's "imaginary Indian." But the formal effect of this choice is curiously academic. Reid and Bringhurst never really draw the textures and inflections of Haida speech into their English. The tales are not translations per se, more closely akin to paraphrase, but they include nothing like the quotatives or repetitions of Haida telling, settling instead for a heightened English that tends to ring false:

Well, the raven is a carrion bird, not noted for the delicacy of his sensibility nor the fastidiousness of his taste, but even he felt his stomach move somewhat uneasily, as he pondered what the big man might be expecting to catch in such malodorous waters.

Or

With great sorrow, yet also conscious of the role she was playing in the future of her family, the Bear Mother followed her husband's instructions and obtained the agreement of her brothers.

The Latinate diction and often periodic syntax suggest grandeur, but also pretense. Yet even my sense that the style "rings false" depends on expectations of catching something accurate or true in these narratives. Tale telling pretends, here, only to my own poorly considered illusions about cultural difference. What these tales actually demand and what Lévi-Strauss, as a representative reader, actually offers is a recognition of what it means to be an outsider. I don't mean to assert a cultural binarism, dividing insides from outsides, although it might sound that way. While belonging to, or exclusion from, an ethnicity or a nation may often feel self-evident (for example, to claim that I am not Haida would simply be stating the obvious), culture is also highly fluid, permeable and indeterminate. (I still have, in other words, a degree of mediated access to what it means to be Haida.) Barriers between cultures no doubt exist, as effects of political or socio-economic power, but they are also constructs that are consis-

tently negotiated and transgressed, for better or for worse, rather than fixed or quantifiable limits. Reid and Bringhurst, when read from this perspective, offer no "Haida" tales here, but present instead texts that foreground their own problematic aspirations to cultural access, the fraught cultural fiction of *becoming* Haida. "Accuracy"—understood not as correctness (an impossible ideal, in any case, produced by the documentary fixity of the written rather than the improvisational fluidity of the oral), but as acuity, as the self-attentive work of approach rather than appropriation—precisely characterizes a recognition of the cultural otherness of Haida for a mainstream "American" audience, to which the tales' uneasy style bears witness.

What I find troubling in the Shambala reissue amounts to packaging, then, rather than style. The tales, as genuine apprenticeships, are masked in a blurry exoticist spirituality that, by commodifying cultural difference through the cult of "authenticity," converts respectful approach into poaching. The book, as a pocket-sized paperback spirit guide, promises not respectful or responsible distance, a recognition at least of the difficulties of encountering a culture not your own, but unmediated access or living presence. (As one blurb puts it, "dreams come alive.") The seductive power that Lévi-Strauss reads in the tales is converted into a specific form of consumer demand, an authentic and inspirational primitivism that can be contained and owned for US\$10.00. Fortunately, Reid and Bringhurst themselves make no such claims, and their work witnesses only a coming to terms, literally, with the seduction that Lévi-Strauss describes, with their need to approach what they cannot ever call their own. Their book, as it's sold, turns against them.

In the last months of 1999, both Reid and Bringhurst were bathed in controversies generated largely by the press, controversies that hinge on popular conceptions of

authenticity and access. An article in the October 18 issue of *Maclean's* by Jane O'Hara claimed that Reid's work was not his own, that he was a poacher rather than a maker of "Haida" art; a November 1999 symposium at UBC both raised and redressed these issues. The publication of Bringhurst's *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* (Douglas and McIntyre, \$45.00), generally to non-Native academic acclaim, drew fire from Haida leaders and linguistic anthropologists alike, charging him with cultural theft and with scholarly inaccuracy. But such attacks, regardless of the very real questions of identity and cultural politics they raise and regardless of the actual merits or failings of either Reid or Bringhurst, still tend to miss the mark, since they depend on what I think is a fundamental misconstruing of seduction, of the need to engage with what is culturally other. In his Garnett Sedgewick Memorial Lecture, *Native American Oral Literatures and the Unity of the Humanities*, delivered in 1998 at the University of British Columbia and published as a pamphlet by the Department of English, Bringhurst rehearses the poetic he will articulate in his book on Haida myhtelling the following year. That poetic is framed by a hostility, as it turns out—a demand that he justify his need to engage with what is not self-evidently his:

A few years ago I found myself in the American south, giving lectures on the work of Anna Nelson Harry and the Zuni poet Nick Tumaka. The audience was a highly eclectic group, and at the end of one lecture, a young woman asked me very suspiciously, "Why are you so interested in this stuff?"

"What's in it for you?" I guess is what she meant. Or maybe, "What are you trying to steal now?" I confess that I was baffled by this question. All I could do that day, and all I can do now, is ask another question back. How is it possible not to be so interested in this stuff? What's in it for me is what's in it for you and for everyone else. The subject of

classical Native American is nothing more or less than the nature of the world. It is a literature concerned with fundamental questions. At its best, it is as nourishing and beautiful and wise as any poetry that exists.

We can understand Bringhurst's bafflement in two ways. First, he may want to dismiss a frustrating and overasked rhetorical question implicating him as an interloper in Native cultures and implying selfish cultural gain through appropriation and curatorial deference. Taken this way, the question can't be answered because it forces an admission of complicity that Bringhurst clearly finds reprehensible and that his poetic and scholarly work seeks to challenge. Second, bafflement may actually be the right mode for work attempting to encounter alterity, since it converts the posture of disinterestedness—characteristic of colonial ethnography since its inception in the journals of North American explorers, and a hallmark of cultural Eurocentrism—into an admittedly unsure but sincere interest. Seduction, for Bringhurst, is not a ruse but a fundamental condition of cultural work. What is valuable in any situation, poetic or otherwise, is the respectful encounter with what you are not, the pull of the other. Acknowledging nothing more or less, for him, is an ethical imperative, a worldliness.

It remains important, however, also to acknowledge the skeptical force of such questions, and not to be naively seduced; I worry, for example, that Bringhurst's leveling of "me" and "you" and "everyone else"—positioning the human collectively as other, a move impelled by Bringhurst's ethical stance—also neglects the differing degrees of access, fluency, accountability and identification that "everyone else" might experience. Elsewise, all readers cannot be reduced to a singular other; a "Haida" reader is not a "Cree" reader is not an "American" reader is not a "Western reader" is not a "male" reader, for instance, although even from a

rudimentary list such as this it becomes clear that such categories are neither fixed nor distinct, that patterns of response and use are necessarily overdetermined and variously delimited. We should remain cautious, *pace* Bringhurst, about making all others the same; the politics of cultural difference must be addressed with care.

I'm also puzzled by the connection, other than the arbitrary demands of occasion, that these lectures have to Garnett Sedgewick. If anything, Sedgewick serves as a benign anti-type for the form of scholarship Bringhurst wants to practice, and the lecture is predominantly a corrective for Sedgewick's humanist pedagogy (which tended, despite brusque claims of open-mindedness, to be conservative and Eurocentric). Bringhurst closes by reiterating a somewhat back-handed challenge issued by Sedgewick to his departmental colleagues: "Show me the Canadian literature that is worth teaching, and we'll have a course." Bringhurst takes Sedgewick at his word, showing that the First Nations mythtelling his lecture surveys—from Qqilti to Anna Harry, from François Mandeville to Skaay—is self-evidently worthy. Sedgewick, however, could never have known these names, let alone their works; Bringhurst's point is that we ought to be ashamed that we still don't. But it seems like wishful thinking to believe that a parochial humanism could allow room enough for this literature to be articulated and engaged; the "unity of the humanities," Bringhurst implies against his expressed intent, is exactly what excluded these writers in the first place. Whose unity, after all, are we talking about? Who lays claim to the terms? On what basis, cultural or socio-economic, can we constitute worth? And what sort of scholarly or critical or even poetic practice might fully disavow the pedigree of appropriation and expropriation—possession rather than encounter, overwriting rather than writing—that characterizes a colonial humanism?

What might permit us actually to listen, otherwise? These oral literatures are the occasion, Bringhurst asserts, but he can do little here—given the abbreviated survey format of the lecture—to put his claims of responsible and responsive engagement to the test.

This ethical poetic is tested extensively in *A Story as Sharp as a Knife*. Bringhurst gathers and translates, often for the first time, works by Haida mythtellers including Ghandl and Skaay, texts transcribed by John Swanton in the Haida Gwaii in 1901-03. His premise, clearly, is to make available to English-speaking readers a "classical" literature that has existed almost unnoticed in North America until the present. To establish its stature, its "worth" as he says, Bringhurst makes extensive comparisons to the classical canon of Western European art; the book is full of references to the painters, composers and poets (from Velázquez to Bach, from Homer to Yeats) to establish the import of the Haida literature. Comparativist frameworks such as this are certainly suspect, since the measure of worth is the same Westernized standards and traditions for which the unfamiliar literature of the Haida serves as a corrective; Bringhurst derides a smug Western blindness or deafness to Skaay's poetry, for example, but then invokes that very canon to affirm Skaay's value. Perhaps this quandary is an effect of the book's introductory mode. It aims, after all, to familiarize us, and we can have little basis for comparison and understanding but our own cultural givens. Bringhurst also tends to understand the Western artists he cites not as authoritative so much as members of a counter-tradition, subverting the Western canon from within and opening it up to the kind of cultural alterity he knows as valuable. Nevertheless, the comparative form of much of his commentary suggests that the book is a labour of salvage anthropology, the critical recovery of lost texts from a marginalized

culture, proving their worth by asserting their import for our own cultural advance. This reading no doubt contributes to the anger of some readers, especially among the Haida, over the book's publication, since it implies both condescension and appropriation.

But such a reading is also decidedly a misreading, misconstruing both Bringhurst's intent and the work itself. Despite appearances, *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* is not naive salvage, and, read carefully, the book's inherent resistance to institutional anthropological practices makes it a text of considerable value. Bringhurst's translations of Skaay, Ghandl, Sghaagya, Kilxhawgins, Ghaw and others do not claim authority, but poetic rigour: a crucial distinction if we mean to determine what "this stuff" is really for. An authoritative translation, by its nature, depends on both linguistic and institutional sanction, a decisiveness or "accuracy" that can at best barely support—if at all—the literary, especially the poetic. This argument seems like common sense for the practicing translator: poetry is culturally bound, essentially untranslatable, and the best translators of poems are probably poets themselves, who make new, coordinate poems in their own languages or, as Walter Benjamin once argued, who liberate the linguistic potential in the original and discover resonances and meanings that the original itself could not possibly contain. This sort of translation goes against common sense, however; we tend to assume that a translation conveys conceptual content, and to associate that content with meaning and with literary merit. But that sort of translation, Bringhurst wisely points out, is paraphrase, and not really translation at all, particularly when we face the transmission of the poetic or the literary across cultural and linguistic boundaries. For Bringhurst, poetry "is what is lost, not in translation, but in paraphrase." Translation, he argues, must be responsive to

the shift of substance that occurs between contexts, languages, or, really, materials:

A molded plastic copy of a piece of Haida art is . . . always a disappointment, because the form has lost its bite. Paraphrases of classical Haida literature fail on precisely the same ground. The form must be reborn when it moves to a new substance; this occurs not when it is copied but when it is reenvisioned and recarved. . . . The poetry in a classical Haida story is, in the same way, easy to lose in translation—yet it is not so inextricably bound to the language that it is certain to be lost. That is one of the reasons it makes sense to call this literature classical.

Easy to lose but not bound to be lost: the key to this sort of work, which does not erase "what's in it"—those fundamentals—but at the same time which recognizes, formally or materially, the difficulty of carrying that cultural interiority outside of the bounds that structure it and give it meaning, is to relocate that estranging principle in the work itself, to find the outside within the work and, in a Benjaminian sense, to liberate its potential: to make it bite back. "Salvaging" Haida literature is exactly what translation, carefully practiced, cannot do. Rather than assimilate the Haida texts to an institutionally sanctioned epistemology, to render them knowable by converting them into displaced "literary" works in recognizable genres or conventional forms any well-trained reader can appreciate, merely foreign reflections of his own tradition or value-system, Bringhurst emphasizes their incompatibility—despite his comparativist claims of likeness—with Western narrative and poetic practices. And he accomplishes this estrangement poetically, through his own English.

Rather than hone the uneasy style of paraphrase that he and Reid recast a decade earlier, Bringhurst produces poems that attend texturally, rhythmically and

structurally to the pressures of an unfamiliar and uncomfortable ethos. That discomfort, however, is not a flaw but a necessary condition of the poetic, particularly of a writing that wants an ethical relation to what is otherwise than itself. For example, we might pay attention to how Bringhamst editorializes, cutting commentary through his translations to explain or to elaborate; the effect is intrusive, but not a gesture of control. Rather, he makes his presence explicit, and reminds us through the devices of the critical aside and even the footnote, that these texts are not trying to pass themselves off as authentic, as transparent windows into the Haida world, but that they are versions, reconstructions, approaches. We never mistake Bringhamst's voice for an "accurate" rendition of Skaay: he won't let us, and rightly so. What we feel, instead, are the pressures exerted on that voice by an outside, and the inflections and tugs of a language that won't resolve itself, easily, into English.

And that resistance, that irresolution, is exactly where poetry arises. For instance, in Skaay's "The One They Hand Along," the figure of Wealth Woman describes a kidnapped woman as having had "grease" poured into her mind. The image, Bringhamst notes, comes from a metaphor in Skaay's transcribed Haida: "*gudaagha tawlla gutgaystlghaayang*, 'he poured grease into [her] mind'" (445 n20). But this metaphor is both culturally and ecologically specific, and doesn't really operate out of context: "*taw*," as Bringhamst points out, is eulachon "grease" or oil, "eaten like mayonnaise with dried berries or fish" (445 n20). Rendering Skaay's language into English, even with the rough equivalent "grease," requires a footnote, but also—more significantly—stands out as a strikingly unfamiliar; English, in effect, is pulled out of context by the image itself, which can't quite be made sensible. We should note too how Bringhamst's translation, a poet's

work rather than an ethnologist's, aims at the pithy density of Skaay's original word. The verbal dissonance of "grease," heightened by the thickness, the viscosity, of Bringhamst's diction, foregrounds what I have been calling the necessary discomfort of working between languages, and in Benjamin's sense actually expands Bringhamst's English beyond its established boundaries.

This is only one example among many; Bringhamst's translations attend to the work of rendering, to the inevitable mediations that take place in the transgression of linguistic and cultural limits. But his posture, as I've suggested, is not that of author but auditor. This book, really, centres not on the Haida poets but on the figure of John Swanton, who is responsible for the transcriptions and who acts as a formal stand-in for Bringhamst himself. Bringhamst, I think, wants to imitate, and learn from, Swanton's painstaking and sustained work of listening, as an outsider, to these poems. Franz Boas, Swanton's mentor, apparently by disposition or training was tone-deaf to the literary merit of these texts, and—in a sin of omission—left most of them unexamined in his office at Columbia for forty years (362 *passim.*). Swanton, on the other hand, suggests to Bringhamst a man of sensitive temperament who remained open to the value of cultural and literary difference that, from his perspective, these works embodied; he was, in the terms we have been using, seduced, while Boas, the unpoetical and staunch academic, could never be. Bringhamst devotes substantial space to discussing the process and dissemination of Swanton's transcriptions, and repeatedly acknowledges an indebtedness: but for Swanton's careful labour, this literature would have been lost. But Swanton is not exactly credited as a cultural saviour, no matter how fully involved in anthropological salvage he may seem, and the literature is clearly attributed to its authors and not to their ethnographic mediator. If anything,

what Bringhurst admires in Swanton is a kind of effacement and deference, his near non-presence and his refusal—unlike Boas—to take credit for the material he collects. Bringhurst examines a moment of reflexivity in Skaay's *Raven Travelling* when the communal, responsive form of mythtelling, of speaking poetry, is foregrounded:

Voicehandler turned to the people beside him.
"Do you know any stories from mythtime?"
"No," they replied.
He turned to the other side.
"Doesn't one of you know any stories from mythtime?"
"No, we don't"
Then he said to his father,
"They don't seem to know any stories from mythtime."
The Qinggi, his father, said,
"Really? Not even the story called *Raven Travelling*?"

Swanton's presence at Skaay's recital, for Bringhurst, is lightly implicated in the work itself, when Voicehandler's listeners don't even seem to know the poem at hand, as it is being recited; Bringhurst reads this passage as "a wink in Swanton's direction, to show that Skaay is pondering the presence of the innocent and earnest-looking man who is ravenous for stories and who tells none in his turn." Swanton, a seduced listener, is also an outsider, one who resists interloping but who nonetheless cannot respond or participate, only taking dictation. This posture, as a listener ghosted into the poem, also becomes Bringhurst's means of access to the Haida, from an outside. Intrusion is marked, authorized, in a reflexive poetic gesture that asserts, essentially, the impossibility of not being interested in this stuff; Swanton, as his surrogate reader-translator-listener, enters the poem in an acknowledgement, from Skaay, of his inevitable unknowing.

That unknowing, as desire or as seduc-

tion, suggests a primal yearning that seems to characterize the culture of colonizers—a need for myth or for poetry (and Bringhurst is resolutely Heideggerian on this point) as an ontological restorative. Discussing the idea of poetic form in Skaay and others, he resorts to a musical analogy to distinguish a mythical poetry from latter-day, derivative, empty "verse": "Myth is that form of language in which poetry and music have not as yet diverged. . . . Verse is language set part way to music. It is language that is gesturing or reaching—unsuccessfully as a rule—back toward myth, where poetry and music are one and the same." While his language is undeniably caught up in a certain primitivism of which we should be cautious, as a negative aspect of his seduction, he is also pointing out the cultural necessity of the sort of translation he has undertaken, as a primarily ethical activity. Poetry as myth, for him, is a means of opening up thinking rather than narrowing minds; comparing Skaay and Ghandl to Plato, he remains nostalgic for the oral, but persists in asserting the possible reintroduction of an active, improvisational mode of thinking into Western culture: "poetry [is] a superior form of philosophy, perhaps, and perhaps the only developed and systematic form of philosophy that is possible in a truly oral culture." The insistence on ontological absolutes ("truly") in such passages is not a resurgence of the cult of authenticity (with its attendant baggage of salvage and cultural appropriation) so much as a call to attend to an ontological plurality that will not be closed or resolved or owned; and the form of such a plurality is inevitably mythological: "A mythology is not a fixed body of stories: it is an open set. It is a narrative ecology: a watershed, a forest, a community of stories that are born and die and breed with one another and with stories from outside." That ecology takes on literary form—as *mythos*, story—when it engages with its outside; story

consists, as Skaay's joke about Swanton seems to remind his listeners, in the vital gesture of telling beyond itself. And it is the effort to engage with this fundamental alterity, in a language that is both his own and never can be, that Bringham's book brilliantly and persuasively enacts.

Reconsidering Pauline

Janice Fiamengo

Scholarly interest in Pauline Johnson has been building for some time now, but scholars have usually been more interested in Johnson's life than in her writing or the content of her stage performances. In 1965, Marcus Van Steen (*Pauline Johnson: Her Life and Work*) published a biographical sketch with selected prose and poetry, stating his hope that the collection might "encourage some future, patient, chronicler to probe the mysteries that still surround the life of this fascinating personality who was the sole poetic voice in English of the Indian people of Canada." In 1981, Betty Keller published her *Pauline: A Biography*, introducing Johnson as "an aggressive, manipulative, talented, and utterly charming part-Mohawk woman" whose popularity "was less a tribute to her poetic genius than an appreciation of her talents as one of the turn of the century's finest entertainers." Daniel Francis (*The Imaginary Indian*, 1993) includes Johnson, along with Long Lance and Grey Owl, in his study of constructions of the Indian, characterizing her as a White fantasy whose remarkable popularity stemmed from her portrayal of an exotic, vanishing figure who "demanded little from her White audience beyond sentimental regret." For these scholars, Johnson's public identity eclipsed her verse, implicitly or explicitly dismissed as simplistic and second-rate.

The biographical emphasis and corresponding devaluation of Johnson's writing is

reversed in *Paddling Her Own Canoe* (U of Toronto P, \$24.95), Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson's timely and serious contribution to scholarship on Johnson. Arguing that the poet and recitalist "had much more to say about the First Nations, women, and nationality than previous scholars have suspected," Strong-Boag and Gerson set out to demonstrate the complexity and intelligence of Johnson's advocacy for Aboriginal peoples and her progressive vision of Canada. Combining their expertise in history, literature, and women's studies with a commitment to Indigenous-Canadian history and culture, Strong-Boag and Gerson succeed in redressing the critical bias against Johnson's work. The seriousness of their approach is evident in the book's scholarly apparatus: an Appendix lists Johnson's works according to date and place of first publication, where these can be ascertained, and full endnotes document archival sources, direct readers to other materials, and correct the oversights of earlier scholars. In basing their commentary on a much fuller corpus than other scholars have accessed, the authors rightly claim to provide an unprecedented overview of Johnson's "extended conversation with European Canada." In addition, their extensive archival research and concern for accuracy provide future scholars with a valuable resource.

The Pauline Johnson who emerges in these pages is a figure encompassing so many contradictions as to trouble all generalizations. Angrily conscious of what European domination meant for First Nations people, Johnson was nonetheless an ardent promoter of the imperial connection; she was a staunch supporter of women's autonomy seemingly uninterested in suffrage; she was fascinated by the innate superiority of aristocratic peoples but an ally of democratic government; attracted by the heroism of battle but appalled by "might's injustice"; she admired British culture, living

mainly among Euro-Canadians, but regretted that her Mohawk ancestry was diluted by White blood; she championed First Nations traditions but also mythologized the Mounted Police; she was an articulate critic of racism who was openly contemptuous of Blacks and Asians. Reading through her many seemingly incompatible arguments, one wonders whether the imperatives of the market, rather than personal conviction, sometimes influenced Johnson's textual output. Yet despite the complexity of the terrain they examine, Strong-Boag and Gerson make a strong case for Johnson's attempt, against powerful odds, to imagine a new Canadian nationality based on mutual partnership between Whites and Indigenous peoples. Quoting from some of Johnson's most scathing attacks on Canadian complacency, the authors effectively rebut the view that Johnson's advocacy for Indigenous-Canadians amounted to little more than "sentimental regret." Johnson was not immune to contemporary tendencies to romanticize and mythologize the Native, but she claimed a central place for women and the First Nations in her accounts of the country and she attempted with some success to keep Native traditions alive in her writing, claiming for them an ongoing, rather than archaic, value. Proclaiming their partisanship for this remarkable woman—and they are certainly partial to a resisting Johnson over an opportunistic or exploitative one—Strong-Boag and Gerson nevertheless do a fair job of balancing Johnson's entanglements in the prejudices of her age with her significant challenge to mainstream society.

The book begins with two chapters contextualizing Johnson within First Nations, particularly Iroquois, history and the cultural phenomenon of the New Woman. While the historical scholarship is skillfully assembled, Johnson is somewhat in the background here, but given the authors' stated desire to create "an engaging and

readable story," they are probably right to assume that readers will not know these backgrounds. In the third chapter, the authors argue for Johnson's significant contribution to the newly emerging Canadian literary consciousness, demonstrating how Johnson developed from a poet whose verse did not emphasize her mixed-race origins to a highly visible symbol of Canada's Native heritage. The book hits its analytical stride from this point onwards, and is at its most subtle and useful in its insights into the cultural work achieved by Johnson's writing and public role. The fourth chapter gives a comprehensive portrait of the political and social concerns in Johnson's oeuvre, paying much-needed attention to Johnson's magazine prose, a valuable resource hitherto neglected by critics. A specifically postcolonial reading of Johnson comes in the last chapter, in which Strong-Boag and Gerson argue brilliantly for hybridity as the key to the challenge Johnson launched. Here they most vigorously overturn the "temptation to suggest masquerade" as an explanation for Johnson's ambiguous, boundary-blurring double persona. As a "highly visible bicultural mediator," Johnson occupied, through circumstance and conscious self-positioning, a double role as insider and outsider. Arguing that such doubleness persisted throughout Johnson's life, Strong-Boag and Gerson effectively account for contradiction in Johnson's work and counter the accepted scholarly reading tracing Johnson's "inevitable evolution from an angry Native critic to a less disturbing champion of the Dominion." As the authors prove, Johnson's identities were always multiple.

As would be the case for any study of a writer whose work is not widely known, the authors face the challenge of balancing exposition with argument and analysis; inevitably, choices and compromises must be made. Arrangement of the material into thematic sections rather than historical sequence means that the reader has little

sense of Johnson's developing story. Outweighing the disadvantage of such a structure, however, is its demonstration of Johnson's simultaneous intervention in a variety of political and social arenas. A more serious weakness may be the brevity with which many obscure texts are treated. Single-sentence references to little-known works ("Like the disguised heroine of her short story 'The De Lisle Affair' [1897], Johnson put listeners on guard that things might not be quite as they seemed") do not illuminate the scope of Johnson's writing to the extent some readers may wish. Finally, while the authors do a marvellous job of analyzing Johnson's importance from a twenty-first century perspective, they are much more circumspect about what she meant for her contemporaries, choosing to quote reviews and audience testimony with little or no commentary. Criticizing Roy Daniells' de-historicized assessment of Johnson's appeal (as satisfying a "secret desire . . . to reach back into an innocent and heroic world . . . before the white man came"), the authors do not counter with their own explanations, suggesting instead that responses to Johnson were as diverse as the many individuals who flocked to see her. Further reflection on the complex sources of the adulation she provoked would have been a valuable addition to the study.

Just as Johnson has been challenged or dismissed on the grounds of inauthenticity, Strong-Boag and Gerson address the potential tension surrounding their decision, as non-Indigenous women, to study Johnson. Acknowledging concerns with appropriation, the authors "distinguish the analytical mode of 'speaking about' from the appropriative mode of 'speaking for'" and use the metaphor of visiting to characterize their relationship to the material. This term does not seem to do justice to the time, energy and commitment both scholars have devoted to this project, obviously a labour of love as well as scholarship for both of

them. As they admit, Johnson's story is not completed here, and undoubtedly future scholars will find much to augment, extend, complicate and even contest, but *Padding Her Own Canoe* will stand in years to come as a significant and foundational study.

Re-Collecting 1999

W.H. New

An annual survey always manages to leave something out unintentionally, and before reviewing 1999 publications I need first to mention three works from 1998: Kerri Sakamoto's novel *The Electrical Field* (Vintage), Anne Fleming's *Pool-hopping and other stories* (Polestar), and especially Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (Knopf). All read engagingly; Carson, in particular, crosses genres to tell a poetic romance about an outsider using Classical verse measures (but adapting the contemporary vernacular to them). As a result, she takes Canadian poetry along fresh inventive lines. These are talents to follow.

1999 offered rather different kinds of pleasure—and, in some instances, disappointment—with a lot of tales of Cape Breton and Montreal, of lost children, found fathers, death, and sometimes murder. The pleasures, given these topics, often derived less from subject than from style; it was a year of stocktaking for many writers, most of them trying to come to terms with the absences that, usually with difficulty, they found in life. Some of the pleasures derived from the introduction or confirmation of the talent of new writers: Zsuzsi Gartner's brittle revelations of urban shallowness in *All the Anxious Girls on Earth* (Key Porter), where sophistication thinly masks uncertainty—a motif reiterated in the war between sensitivity and pretension that is Russell Smith's subject in *Young Men* (Doubleday), and perhaps best realized in

his story "Responsibility." The gutsy prose of Clint Burnham's *Airborne Photo* (Anvil) tells of the violence of a Vancouver that most people don't want to know about; while Grant Buday's arresting (though not ultimately developed enough) *White Lung* (Anvil) takes the reader vividly behind the scenes at a Vancouver bakery, exploring the crudeness of racism and sexism in the workplace and the even more openly violent crudeness of union-management manipulations, but foregrounding also the central figure's desperate desire for happiness.

Several other works—often through a series of linked stories—demonstrated some skill with phrasing, marking works that confirmed a reputation (Rachel Wyatt's talent for sympathetic satire of aging and desire, in *Mona Lisa Smiled a Little* [Oolichan]; Phyllis Gotlieb's inventive sf in *Violent Stars* [Tor]; and Ron Smith's skill at giving character to personal meditation, as in the riffs of *What Men Know About Women* [Oolichan] where such stories as "Shade," "The Last Time We Talked," and "The Plimsoll Line" capture what it means to age with desire, and what it means to have meaning disappear into durations of silence and lost time). Or else they initiated a reputation. Some books, that is, read like early works of writers whose talents promise to develop: Alan R. Wilson's *Before the Flood* (Cormorant), for its conversational development and ecological protest; Michael Winter's *One Last Good Look* (Porcupine's Quill), for its wonderful sense of voice, its skill at following a single character, Gabriel English, through characteristic moments of desire, angst, rivalry, and recuperation; Elyse Gasco's *Can You Wave Bye Bye, Baby?* (M&S), for its diction, its fragmented reflections on teenaged pregnancy and adoption, and its wry sensitivity; Eliza Clark's *Bite the Stars* (Harper) for its imagery—dove, butterfly, firefly: counterpointed images in the mind of a criminal's mother, who thinks she has sacrificed her-

self for him; George Elliott Clarke's *Beatrice Chancey* (Polestar), for its generic daring: poetry, drama, a powerful indictment of real Nova Scotia slave history (earlier explored in Clarke's opera libretto); Mike Barnes's *Aquarium* and K.D. Miller's *Give Me Your Answer* (short story collections, both from Porcupine's Quill); Robert Currie's *Things You Don't Forget* (Coteau), for its kindly sense of the importance of odd moments in people's lives, such as a miraculous kiss from Jayne Mansfield; and especially Warren Cariou's *The Exalted Company of Roadside Martyrs* (Coteau). In his two back-to-back novellas, Cariou writes with a fine flair for tonality; his stories begin in what looks like comedy, in what seems like an exaggeration of ethnic and political rivalries in northern Saskatchewan, but quietly they turn into revelations of guilt and fierce vengefulness, as actions go awry, expectations turn sour, perceptions skew—these narratives benefit from the author's sharp eye for details of both environment and character. In another account of responsibility, Keith Harrison's *Furry Creek* (Oolichan) captivates the reader in a different way, not through irony but through tragedy, tracing through sensitive fiction the life and death of the poet Pat Lowther.

While there were flashes of powerful writing in numerous other works as well, several of these never quite sustained their promise. Among such works were F.G. Paci's *Iceland* (Oberon), a hockey novel that doesn't have the vitality of, say, Mark Anthony Jarman's 1997 picaresque *Salvage King Ya!*; stories by Carmelita McGrath, Sky Gilbert, Linda Holeman, and a number of others; and new works by Joan Barfoot (*Putting Over Edgar*, Key Porter), Paul Quarrington (*The Spirit Cabinet*, Random House), Austin Clarke (*The Question*, M&S), and David Bergen, whose *See the Child* (Harper) begins brilliantly, with a beekeeper trying to come to terms with a child's death, but

once the narrative wanders off to Montana, the novel turns into a conventional and not very convincing tale of “Western” violence. Even some interesting experimental works did not live up to their conception. Though I am a fan of Nick Bantock’s work, for example, *The Museum at Purgatory* (Harper) lacks the *frisson* of an arresting narrative; and M.G. Vassanji’s *Amriika* (M&S), which promises to reveal how three decades of “America” look to an African immigrant, simply seems tedious. Perhaps tedium accurately reflects what these characters see, but it doesn’t make for captivating reading. Robert Majzels’ *City of Forgetting* (Mercury)—another Montreal novel, in which Clytemnestra, Lady Macbeth, Che, Le Corbusier, and others come alive, trying to be “purged of their futures,” only to run aground in the complexities of the city—at least has its allegory going for it: it asks what happens when you open the storehouse? Answer: you let out revolution—but what happens to contemporary revolutionaries in Montreal? Answer: they die. The novel, however, is inextricably caught up in its own fascination with intertextualities of alienation.

The fragmented forms of Gail Scott’s *My Paris* (Mercury), which adapts Walter Benjamin’s idea that history is relocatable in tiny observations of things, and Louise Dupré’s *Memoria* (Simon & Pierre), which uses a series of short observations to trace how a woman translator comes to terms with loss of love, both evoke more effectively how alienation inhibits appreciation—and in both these instances, the fictions work towards transformation. Also set in Paris, Nancy Huston’s *The Mark of the Angel* (McArthur) won praise from several critics, though its version of a couple of old enemies discovering and failing each other all over again in the post-war years felt more to me like a forced amalgamation of Elizabeth Smart and Françoise Sagan. Novels by Dionne Brand and Shawna Singh Baldwin also had their enthusiasts. Brand’s

At the Full and Change of the Moon (Knopf), retells Jamaican history through the lives of the descendants of a woman rebel, and Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* (Knopf) is a well-paced pop novel about a naive Punjabi girl who, after a life of suffering indignities from men who never change, herself changes into an able and wise woman. Both are passionate novels, whose earnest desire to make a political point will mostly convince those who already agree with their inevitable political conclusions. David Macfarlane’s *Summer Gone* (Knopf), too, about sons whose father has introduced them to Ontario lake country, and the father’s summer death, declares too much and shows too little; the talent here seems more for essay than for story, but the future might prove otherwise. Evan Solomon’s much-publicized mystery *Crossing the Distance* (M&S) did not consistently have the force of its strongest scenes, and nor did Lisa Appignanesi’s *The Dead of Winter* (HarperCollins), which (though based on the Lepine murders) ends in flat sentimentality. Talkiness got in the way of Josef Skvorecky’s *Two Murders in My Double Life* (Key Porter) also, and his motif—being a stranger, living a double identity by being transported to another country—is much more ably handled in Sergio Kokis’s *Funhouse* (Simon & Pierre); Kokis vividly constructs a Brazilian childhood, as remembered by an adult narrator now living in the north, where the new city seems like a playground where his lies are invisible. A more sustained mystery was *City of Ice* (HarperCollins), a Montreal/CIA thriller written by Trevor Ferguson as John Farrow.

Poetry showed the same range of accomplishment: a lot of verse, some styptic, some overwrought, much conventional; some arresting poems by new and established writers; and some works that one wants to read and read again. Many of the works that confirm existing reputations took meditative form in 1999, as in Janice

Kulyk Keefer's *Marrying the Sea* (Brick), free-flowing evocations of family, least effective when making literary allusions; Susan Musgrave's *Things that keep and do not change* (M&S), for their elegiac sensitivities; Heather Spears's *Poems Selected and New* (Wolsak & Wynn), especially those dealing with God; Tom Wayman's *The Colours of the Forest* (Harbour), ironic reflections on middle-aged sexuality, and on a Canada-that-might-have-been; Stephanie Bolster's *Two Bowls of Milk* (M&S), especially for "Le Far-West (1955)," a poem based on a Lemieux painting; Lorna Crozier's *What the Living Won't Let Go* (M&S), best at their most erotic and least effective when drawing on images of nature; Marilyn Bowering's *New and Collected Poems* (Beach Holme), which, despite its unattractive print, sustains its power from page to page, with a new poem, "Letter to Janey," effectively highlighting what absence can mean. Poems by Hannah Main-van der Kamp in *The Parable Boat* (Wolsak & Wynn) tend to work through a repetitive technique: begin with a fragment, something concrete, then say how it "transports one"—but the individual poems sometimes rise to an arresting phrase. Judith Fitzgerald uses rhymed narrative in her Joan of Arc poems, *26 Ways Out of this World* (Oberon). Jean-Paul Daoust's *Blue Ashes* (Guernica), in Daniel Sloate's translation, suggests some differences between declaration and exhibition. Lillian Allen's *Psychic Unrest* (Insomniac) seeks the vivacity of life: "Everything well and wonderful is poetry. . . . All that is visionless and full of despair is wounded poetry." Maureen McCarthy in *Sneaking through the Evening* (Harbour) attaches intense significance to the ordinary world, that of bed linen and bank book. And John Donlan's *Green Man* (Ronsdale) attempts to find in urban life (where sunrise and the union hall are both "illuminating") the unity of man and nature to which the title symbol alludes.

Works such as Patricia Keeney's *Global Warnings* (Oberon), Shari Andrews' *The Stone Cloak* (Oberon), documenting a Danish settlement in New Brunswick, Christopher Wiseman's *Crossing the Salt Flats* (Porcupine's Quill), Anne Michaels' *Skin Divers* (M&S), Susan Goyette's *The True Names of Birds* (Brick), Terence Young's *The Island in Winter* (Signal/Véhicule), and Stephen Morrissey's *Mapping the Soul* (selected poems, Muses' Company) fail to persuade quite so readily, letting a repetitive methodology or a personal need to express a message take precedence over the language, although Goyette and Young do manage some fine images, and Morrissey's introductory essay, his tribute to Louis Dudek, and his poetry itself clarify his Jungian intentions ("I open the unconscious / with a crowbar, / not intent on self-improvement / but on revelation"). Laurie Block, in *Foreign Graces* (Muses' Company), interestingly juxtaposes poems in English and Chilean Spanish. Paul Wilson's *The Long Landscape* (Coteau) convinces more when it shares its encounters with other cultures (Japanese poetry, European art, jazz) than when it looks back to personal experience. Bud Osborn, by contrast, drawing on his experience of Vancouver's central city streets, reveals in *Keys to Kingdoms* (Get to the Point Publishing) the power of the personal; the book won the City of Vancouver literary prize for detailing not only the anger, fear, and despair of alcoholism and drug abuse, but also the tenderness of the street, testifying to the possibility of the retrieval of self-esteem. Other poets took wit as their medium, as when David Solway in *Chess Pieces* (McGill-Queen's) formally probes life through the chartable moves on a playing board, or when Raymond Souster shows himself still to be the master of the wry image (*Collected Poems*, vol 8, Oberon), or when bill bissett in *scars on th seehors* (M&S) probes through sound and

typography the ecological limits of conventional definitions of “civilization” and the “inconclusiveness” of language itself.

Relatedly, Hilary Clark’s *More Light* (Porcupine’s Quill), strongly influenced by Robin Blaser, turns ratiocination—the word as sound, image, and process of knowing—into a form of tangible perception. Glen Downie’s *Wishbone Dance* (Wolsak & Wynn), a series of new and selected medical poems, gathers power from its precise observation of the inadequacy of system, disease, decay, and care and the disturbing ignorance of those who do the caring. Richard Harrison’s *Big Breath of a Wish* (Wolsak & Wynn) deals with the first months and years of a child learning language (sound/ syllable/ condition/ categorization). Gregory Scofield’s *I Knew Two Métis Women* (Polestar) is a tribute to two aunts, whose resistance to conventional order and whose enthusiastic tenderness constitute models of Métis assertion. And in two of the finest works of the year, Ken Babstock in *Mean* (Anansi) runs a series of variations on the meaning of “mean” (average, squalid, intent to say, unkind), and Jan Zwicky, in *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth* (Brick, in a facsimile of a privately published, hand-sewn 1996 edition), draws on Kant, music, grief, and the presumptuousness of despair to probe the character of terror and the promise of silence. For what, Zwicky asks, can be the perfect word? In Babstock’s voice, words come alive; his childhood in Newfoundland and the Ottawa Valley—granite and long vowels—furnish him with meaning, and a fisherman uncle mutters aloud his challenge to fate: “*I laughs when I can.*” For Zwicky, the question is a recurrent and effective form: “Now the sky above New Mexico / is hazy with Los Angeles, what words / will you invent for clarity?” The ecology of the problem is familiar (if not, to some power-that-be, familiar enough); but Zwicky also strives for a kind of ecology

of answers, an ecology of language, within which promise might prove to be more powerful than nihilism.

Worthwhile anthologies of 1999 included Alan Filewod’s *West Coast Comedies* (Borealis), bringing together some of the works of Weiss, Weir, and Lazarus; the annual Oberon selections of new writers (ed. Maggie Helwig) and ‘best’ stories (ed. Douglas Glover), the latter choosing works by Matt Cohen (who died late in 1999, shortly after winning the Governor General’s Award) and Jane Hamilton, among others; *Northern Suns* (Tor), Canadian sf stories (ed. D.G. Hartwell and Glenn Grant); and *Staging the North* (Playwrights), a collection of twelve plays by northern playwrights (for example, Tunoonig Theatre) or about northern experience, ably edited by Sherrill Grace, Eve d’Aeth, and Lisa Chalykoff. Other dramas of note, published separately, include Bryden MacDonald’s *Divinity Bash* (a seriously comic exploration of the hangups of the 1990s); Daniel MacIvor’s *Marion Bridge* (in which three women return to Cape Breton to tend a dying mother, and learn that you can go home, and then start out again, saying thank you and goodbye); two collections of George Walker’s early plays; a collection of seven plays by Linda Griffiths, under the title *Sheer Nerve*; a translation of Michel Marc Bouchard’s *The Tale of Teeka*, about the end of a boy’s childhood; and Drew Hayden Taylor’s *The Baby Blues*, a satirical farce that asks what it means to be one-sixth “Native,” and how that affects politically correct behaviour—all from Talon.

Among noteworthy translations of the year I would list the English-language version of Patrice Pavis’s 1996 *Dictionary of the Theatre* (UTP), and Sheila Fischman’s renderings of Gaétan Soucy’s *Atonement* (Anansi), Roch Carrier’s *The Lament of Charlie Longsong* (Viking), about an Arizona Indian in love with a Québécoise, and especially Christiane Frenette’s *Terra Firma* (Cormorant), a

remarkably gripping work in which, after two teenage boys drown in the St. Lawrence, an entire community must go through a process of healing. Among more generically identifiable forms of life writing, there appeared several noteworthy biographies and autobiographies, one of which was also a translation: Patricia Claxton's brilliant translation of François Ricard's *Gabrielle Roy: A Life* (M&S); with its density of psychological analysis, its clarity about political contexts, its frankness about family relationships and rivalries—to which are added Claxton's own useful comments on style and the choices a translator must make—this book is a fine example of bio-critical understanding, and a necessary book for readers of Roy.

In general, biographical works, like others, ranged from the elementary to the experimental. One could wish more, for example, from Clary Croft's enthusiastic account of the life of *Helen Creighton* (Nimbus), James King's *Jack* (Knopf), although some of the insights here into McClelland's relationship with Laurence and others is of interest (Clara Thomas touches on her own friendship with Laurence in her autobiographical memoirs, from Borealis, characteristically titled *Chapters in a Lucky Life*), and John Kendall's *Alejandro Malaspina* (McGill-Queen's), whose interesting subject (the life of the West Coast Spanish explorer) is somehow stylistically flattened. Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperley's edition of essays on *L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (UTP) seems more dutiful than engaged; and Christl Verduyn's edition of *Marian Engel's Notebooks* (Wilfrid Laurier) is desperate for an index. June Billingham's illustrated *Grey Owl* (Greystone) is ultimately a plea that his private life be left alone and his "gospel of tolerance" remembered, but, whatever is remembered, it seems likely that the private life was lived too publicly to ignore. Richard Lemm's *Milton Acorn in*

Love and Anger (Carleton UP), despite its spelling errors, is a more balanced (if still enthusiastic) account of the life of the "people's poet," and several other works took scholarly form, searching to elucidate, from archival resources, a particular aspect of a life. The late Douglas Cole shed light on the early years of *Franz Boas* (Douglas & McIntyre), for example, revealing the training of the mind that would reshape anthropology. Elizabeth Hulse's edition of essays on Sir Daniel Wilson's life and career, *Thinking with Both Hands* (UTP), is both informed and intelligent, with several comments on Wilson's literary family (Georgina Sime, Margaret Oliphant).

Charlotte Gray's eminently readable *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Viking) returns to the lives of Moodie and Traill with new insights into their British girlhood and new research into Mrs. Moodie's anti-Semitism, producing a book that ranks among the best—the most informed and illuminating—written on these figures. Michael Bliss's *William Osler: A Life in Medicine* (UTP) is more a history than a biography, interesting in this context perhaps more for its brief glimpse of the literary figures in Osler's life—Whitman, Bucke—and for its briefest of dismissals of Anne Wilkinson's version of her family, than for its enquiry into medical practice. George Bowering's iconoclastic, brilliantly stylized, shrewdly accurately account of the prime ministers of Canada, *Egotists and Autocrats* (Viking), even writes history as biographical anecdote, bringing history alive through personality, secrets, and scandals. Much more restrained, Barbara and Ormond Mitchell produced a sensitive tribute to their father in *W.O.* (M&S), tracing his life up to the publication of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, and commenting on the role of F.M. Salter and the U.S. editors in the early shaping of that novel. (Another tribute to Mitchell appeared in the form of a handsome, if somewhat repetitive, picture book, *W.O.*

Mitchell Country, M&S, with excerpts from Mitchell's prose paired up with photographs by Courtney Milne.) Still other lives were unearthed from archives: Morag McLachlan's edition of *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-30* (UBC), with absorbing comments on personal lives, ethnographic data, slavery, Americans, and the logbooks themselves; James P. Delgado, in an important work called *Across the Top of the World: The Quest for the Northwest Passage* (Douglas & McIntyre), brings together commentary on Franklin, Ross, and other explorers with early and later maps, photos, diagrams of ships, and other illustrative data. Norman N. Feltes's *This Side of Heaven* (UTP) is another excellent work, one that—choosing a marxist (not Marxist) approach, that is an historical rather than political application of materialist thought—analyzes the conditions that “overdetermined” the Donnelly murders; what comes clear, through Feltes's argument, is the way social conditions (ranging from Wakefield's land policy in the 1830s and Benthamite capitalism to the soil of the Niagara peninsula and the existence of the escarpment) shaped attitudes in Western Ontario that were not at the time even questioned. In a variant form of archival research, Jordan Zinovich's *Gabriel Dumont in Paris* (U Alberta P) is a novel based on and excerpting from known data on Riel's “lieutenant.” Taking the process still further, John Wilson produced in *North with Franklin* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside), a novel based on what is known about the “lost journals” of James Fitzjames, captain of the *Erebus*, journals that have (so far) in fact never been found.

Many “lives” were even more personal, taking the form of family memoirs, personal essays, and accounts of the relevance of place to personal understanding (a subject taken up critically in Deborah Keahey's book on prairie texts, *Making It Home*, U Manitoba P). For example, Clive Doucet in

Notes from Exile (M&S) engagingly writes on what being Acadian means to him; the reprint of Neil MacNeil's 1948 book *The Highland Heart in Nova Scotia* (Breton), which, given the number of Cape Breton allusions in 1999 fiction, is perhaps relevant all over again. Jamie Bastedo's 1994 book *Shield Country* (Red Deer) extends this connection, insofar as it tried to write the life and times of a place—and incidentally provides an interesting frame through which to read Greg Hollingshead's recent fiction. 1999 books that looked at place tended more towards the impressionistic: Pierre Berton's anecdotal and illustrated *Canada* (Stoddart), for example, which depicts places and persons (Bob Edwards, for one) important in Berton's life (to judge by the book, this means all of Canada *except* the Toronto-Quebec corridor, which is puzzling). More instructive, and illustrated in order to inform rather than for the sake of awe and wonderment, are two books by Sydney and Richard Cannings, *Geology of BC* and *Life in the Pacific Ocean*, both from Greystone, the latter with Marja de Jong Westman.

The Cannings' books deal, then, with what and how we see; by contrast, books such as Berton's, Doucet's, Hugh Dempsey's nostalgic but appealing *The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy* (Fifth House), and David Boyd and Imre Salusinszky's *Rereading Frye* (UTP) deal, at their heart, with how we remember. The relation between these perspectives informs some effective essay writing—John Moss's *The Paradox of Meaning* (Turnstone), the critic talking personally about what matters to him in cultural poetics and critical fictions; Douglas Glover's *Notes from a Prodigal Son* (Oberon), reflecting on fathers and sons and on the pressures of history in a postmodern age, wondering if people today are too burdened with “facts” to know the “truth”; Wade Rowland's engaging *Ockham's Razor* (Key Porter), where a family trip through

France becomes also a pop tour through the history of Western philosophy.

Several other works tried to re-collect different kinds of past. One wonders, sometimes, about the virtue of republishing *en masse* a batch of intrinsically ephemeral writings. While in some instances they provide accessibility to otherwise elusive examples of a given writer's entire body of work, such editions often exercise the editor more than the subsequent reader. I think that Alden Nowlan's newspaper columns (although admirably edited by Robert Gibbs, in *Road Dancers*, Oberon) might well have been left where they were; and while Robertson Davies's letters from the period 1976-95 (*For Your Eyes Alone*, M&S) are occasionally shrewd, observant, and frank, they too might well have been granted the dignity of privacy. Howard Richler's *A Bawdy Language* (Stoddart) uses its provocative title to assemble a series of columns on the character of English. (Even less provocative in reality—though marketed as “erotic”—was the thesaurus of synonyms for body parts and sexual actions, *The Bald-Headed Hermit & The Artichoke*, compiled by A.D. Peterkin for Arsenal Pulp Press.) A much funnier book satirizing contemporary Canadian preoccupations (with sex, male-female and American-Canadian relations) is Patricia Seaman's “graphic novel” *New Queen Motor City* (Coach House); my favourite of the episodes in this book is a tale of poison and lust told in hieroglyphics. And more entertaining and instructive than most newspaper column collections were the interviews that R.E. Knowles, a reporter for the *Toronto Star*, conducted in the 1920s and 1930s; collected by Jean O'Grady as *Famous People Who Have Met Me* (Colombo), the book reads like a Who's Who of world-famous public figures of the time, from Einstein on.

Much criticism perhaps also attempts to re-gather or reconfigure some strategies of discourse. *The Recovery of the Public World*

(Falon), for example, essays in honour of Robin Blaser (ed. C. Watts and E. Byrne) attempts to re-read text and world through *The Holy Forest* and other works; Peter Dickinson applies queer theory to develop fresh and persuasive readings of several Canadian fictions in *Here Is Queer* (UTP); Sam Solecki's excellent biocritical account of the life and work of Al Purdy, *The Last Canadian Poet* (UTP), constantly engages with its insights into the man and his poetic practice. Especially strong is Brian Trehearne's new book on Canadian poetry, *The Montreal Forties* (UTP). Concerned with “Modernist Poetry in Transition” (that is, Page, Klein, Layton, Dudek), Trehearne commits himself to finding a way to avoid reading these writers the conventional way, through the *Preview/ First Statement* exchanges; he endeavours—successfully, I think—to refuse easy contrasts, to examine the Modernist *poetics* of these writers, and to demonstrate that their practice was governed not merely by national concerns.

A different kind of recall characterizes the several books on Native culture that appeared during the year. I would single out, for example, Allen J. Ryan's excellent *The Trickster Shift* (UBC), which not only looks at the humour and irony that are features of much contemporary Native art (the acrylic paintings of Yuxweluptun, the cartoons of Bill Powless), but also shows how political such works are and how often they parody the icons and “great” paintings of European tradition. In a major work of retrieval, and one of the year's most powerful books, Robert Bringhurst in *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* (Douglas & McIntyre) pays tribute to the great classical Haida mythtellers of the 19th century—Skaai, and others—and in graceful, informed prose, introduces the reader to the strategies and characteristics of Haida-language storytelling, the complexities and the richness of Haida culture, and the multiple functions of mythology within it. Peter Kulchyski and

others gather examples of how aboriginal cultures are changing, in *In the Words of the Elders* (UTP); Renée Hulan's edition of critical essays, *Native North America* (ECW), adds effectively to current knowledge; and in *Talking on the Page* (UTP), Laura Murray and Keren Rice gather a series of conference papers on what has to be taken into account in the editing of aboriginal oral texts. Not unrelated here, though the particulars of history, circumstance, and application are different, is Constance Backhouse's "legal history of racism in Canada," *Colour-Coded* (UTP), a scholarly examination of the way Canadian law has made assumptions about the relation between race and colour. Marlene Nourbese Philip's essays on culture and racism, *A Genealogy of Resistance* (Mercury)—a book that asks to be read in relation to Dionne Brand's novel as well—provides a kind of contemporary footnote to Backhouse, and is particularly evocative in an essay on Tobago. With this essay, and with Basil Johnston's *Crazy Dave* (Key Porter), re-collections of the cultural past reveal themselves once again through the personal. In Johnston's hands, this portrait of the title figure—Johnston's uncle, David MacLeod, born with Down's syndrome—turns into a tribute to the man's strength and vitality despite what some people saw as a handicap, and into a symbol also of the survival skills of the Ojibwa.

The personal retrieval of the past, through autobiography, can of course be read as a process of seeking truth, history, definition, proof, explanation, happiness, satisfaction, or someone to blame; it can be recuperative or therapeutic in intent; it can discover what had not been known or remembered or previously told; it can function defensively or proactively by rearranging details to serve a desire or necessary mask; it can do more besides. It can appear as "non-fiction" prose, as thinly-veiled fiction, as drama, as poetry, as in Lien Chao's *Maples and the Stream* (TSAR; a bilingual Chinese/

English booklength series of poems, about the poet's four decades of moving from China into Canada)—or in the sometimes warm, sometimes chilling series of poems about the poet and her mother in Jeanette Lynes' very fine debut volume *A Woman Alone on the Atikokan Highway* (Wolsak & Wynn). Among 1999's personal narratives are a series of some of the most absorbing books of the year: Eric Wright's *Always Give a Penny to a Blind Man* (Key Porter), a lively, compassionate account of his youth in a Lambeth working-class family, of World War Two and army service, and of his emigration to Canada; Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead* (McArthur), a forceful memoir of her Jewish family, of Poland, the war, flight, and growing up in Canada and France; the historian Kenneth McNaught's *Conscience and History: A Memoir* (UTP), with its forthright statements about the way politics and religion surface in institutional decisions, with specific reference here to Queen's University; or Wayson Choy's *Paper Shadows* (Viking), a fascinating account of life in Vancouver's Chinatown during the 1940s, and of Choy's own discovery of his adoption and of how Canadian immigration policy disrupted families and confused family relations over at least three generations. It is through this lens of memoir that one also reads Roy MacGregor's tribute to his father in *A Life in the Bush* (Viking), which—adding to the store of Canadian "fishing literature" in the process—is sensitive both to the strength of the fathers of the generation before him, and to the distance that, for whatever reasons—a refusal of emotion, a modelling of constraint—these fathers maintained from their sons. The most powerful of such stories in 1999—or of most other years—was Wayne Johnston's remarkable, engaged, sensitive and yet unsentimental account of his father, in *Baltimore's Mansion* (Knopf). Here the son returns to the year 1949 in St. John's, reveals the love, the humour, the

irascibility, the forthright arguments that characterized his family—especially his father’s antagonism to Joey Smallwood and the idea of Confederation. In coming to terms with his father’s opposition, moreover, Johnston tellingly reveals how events in the past, even suffused through memory and rewritten by official history, shape individually the lives and sensibilities of the years that follow.

In fact, if one looks for a recurrent motif in the year’s writing, this is it: the relation between parents and children—lost parents (Choy, Appignanesi), lost children (Thomas, Smith), lost fathers (Macfarlane, Babstock), lost mothers (MacIvor, Lynes), ancestors reimaged (Kulyk Keefer, MacLeod), fathers lost and found (Glover, MacGregor, Johnston), parents and children lost and found (Burnard)—in Poland and China, the Ontario bush and St. John’s, the Vancouver streets and Tobago, Cape Breton and Montreal, places that at one time were simply sites of encounter and which have now turned resonant with association. In particular, this motif runs through the books I would highlight as the year’s most arresting novels. Caroline Adderson’s *A History of Forgetting* (Key Porter) and Timothy Findley’s *Pilgrim* (Harper) provide a kind of frame for them. In Adderson’s work (which incidentally raises a lot of questions about the politics of choosing a narrative topic), a young woman with no historical memory of the Holocaust goes to Poland to learn about the death camps, and in her discovery of the human capacity for violence, is changed; along the way she must deal with her sexuality and that of others, and with various gaps in awareness, whether those are caused by a refusal to pay attention (Findley’s recurrent theme) or by the decimations of Alzheimer’s Disease. Findley’s *Pilgrim* deals (sometimes perhaps a little indulgently) with a figure who cannot forget and cannot die; “Pilgrim”—the peregrine—lives through several lives, is

touched (violently) or touches the lives of Leonardo, St. Teresa, Wilde, and Jung, and comes to signify the power of art to be more than artifact: to be testament as well, to the persistence of violence and at the same time, despite the pain it causes, the necessity of living consciously. Read against this background, the works of Ray Smith, Audrey Thomas, Thomas King, Alistair MacLeod, Michael Turner, and Bonnie Burnard reveal—often movingly, even electrifyingly, sometimes disturbingly—what re-collection means: it doesn’t mean history, it doesn’t mean nostalgia, it means that events and lives *accumulate* rather than necessarily *progress*, and it means that only by endeavouring to sort out priorities from the maze of official truths and private regrets can people begin to learn again to live.

Curiously, the two most widely praised of these novels are the two I think fulfill their promise least: MacLeod’s *No Great Mischiefs* (M&S) and Burnard’s *A Good House* (Harper). MacLeod’s celebratory elegy for a Cape Breton Scots family is told through the interleaving of two primary narratives: a son’s efforts in Toronto to take his alcoholic brother back home to die, and his accumulated memories of tales of his parents (in a moving scene where they fall through the ice) and tales of the Highland emigrations that have been repeated through generations. The book, however, reads more like a narrative that wants to be a series of stories than a novel, and where the repetitions should gather power, here they begin to intrude. Some of the characters—a stray sister in Calgary, and the narrator, in his declared role as urban orthodontist—do not convince. But individual scenes—the drowning, and a fight at a mining camp—are wonderfully realized, and many readers will be willing to accept the book for the emotional wrench it is capable of delivering. The same might be said for *A Good House*, though Burnard relies less on the individual scene than on the tonality of the

whole. A *Good House* tells of a happy family—or at least of a family that, despite the ordinary tribulations of forty years of living (death, divorce, despair, marriage, children, and a variety of decisions that take individuals away from the mores of the 1950s and the dicta of Presbyterianism), chooses to *be* happy, in Western Ontario. It is the *house* that matters; history takes place here, in the several lives being lived and the local, immediate choices—to speak or not speak, act or not act, meet or not meet—that constitute for them whatever might be thought of as real. Again, the novel persuades, and it touches the reader's sense of truth. But one longs for it to have also attempted something of what Vassanji attempted: a sense of the relation between this house and the larger world. Yes, events are mentioned: Kennedy is assassinated, the Cold War ends—but they happen as though irrelevant to the characters, and if *their* “happiness” is acquired only through living in a kind of refusal of the larger world, then the narrative would appear (and I do *not* think that this is the novel's *intent*) to validate ignorance over engagement.

Critics took somewhat more to task the novels by Audrey Thomas (*Isobel Gunn*, Viking), Thomas King (*Truth & Bright Water*, Harper), and Michael Turner (*The Pornographer's Poem*, Doubleday), though with less reason, for these works all shape vivid characters, tell provocative tales, and resonate more with ideas. King's novel perhaps lacks the stylistic density of his earlier *Green Grass, Running Water*, and in some ways twists more predictably towards a melancholy close, but what it does do it does wonderfully. It depicts two young cousins from the prairie towns of Truth and Bright Water, on opposite sides of the (to them, artificial) Canada/US border, and of their efforts to come to terms with their broken families, disrupted inheritance, and community separation. Into

their world comes a “famous Indian artist” who (like some other characters) functions as trickster. Painting various European insinuations (for example, the church) the colour of the natural landscape, he makes them disappear—but because this is only illusion, the unwary in these communities continue to trip over what they can now no longer see. The comedy here is serious, the characters drawn with an affectionate, accurate eye, the conversations invested with an obliquity that asks characters and readers alike to listen with care.

For their part, Thomas was both praised and chastised for making the narrator of her novel a man named Magnus rather than Isobel herself; and Turner was both praised and castigated for writing so explicitly about sex. Both novels concern sexuality. Thomas's narrative is based on her new and remarkably thorough investigations into the life of a real-life Orkney woman who (masquerading as a man until she became pregnant) worked in a Hudson's Bay trading post. Thomas powerfully reimagines that life. Q: what is it that led her to seek a land of trees? (A: the Orkneys.) Q: What was it that led to her strength? (A: poverty, intelligence, aspiration.) Q: What was it that led to her exposure? (A: not desire, not passion, but rape: the violence of the one man who knew her identity.) And Q: what was it led to her decision to surrender her son to the power of the company institution? (A: faith in those who promised to help but could not help her, passionate belief that she would help the boy, chance mistake.) Isobel could simply not tell this story, except in the unlettered dialect voice that we hear only occasionally, in scrawled, unanswered, desolate letters; the educated Magnus can, however, and does—but does so partly by leaving in place his uncertainties of understanding, and partly by foregrounding his own need to speak in order to expiate his

part in the silencing. It is the silence that resonates at the heart of this fiction: the silenced voices of the margins, the unending silence of the lost child.

Silence of a different kind shapes Turner's *The Pornographer's Poem*. With unvarnished detail, the narrative speaks out about the pornographic film industry, tracing (through a kind of Q-&-A interrogation of a teenaged boy) how he was drawn into the industry: into its technology, into its greed, violence, manipulation, and perniciousness, and into a fascination with (despite those other features) pornography's social appeal. For one of the issues the novel raises is the fact that pornography would not survive if it did not transgress social tolerances; another issue, co-existent with the first, is that it would not survive if it did not attract middle-class support. Hence this novel makes its brash but somehow pitiable central character a member of Vancouver's well-to-do upper-middle class (Kerrisdale, Shaughnessy), and his growing up in this environment (alert to the differences between his adolescent experiments and the more outrageous behaviour of his ostensibly respectable neighbours) turns into an education in social hypocrisy. That he will become the victim of this hypocrisy seems inevitable. But the novel is cast as a loop, and to the degree that the boy's preoccupation with sexuality is documented openly—"realistically," some might argue—the novel becomes a fictional "porn loop," with the reader cast as voyeur. Arguing that the existence of pornography proves that a society has ethical standards (can standards exist if nothing is deemed unacceptable, asks an internal allusion to Angela Carter), the book is also uncomfortable to read. For the consumer of the commercial product is made to be already participating in the hypocrisy the fiction criticizes, and to recognize the fact. This is a strongly written

book, if not to everyone's taste, and it confirms Turner's narrative voice as one to be reckoned with.

Of a different order again, Ray Smith's novel *The Man Who Loved Jane Austen* (Porcupine's Quill) was essentially ignored by critics, reviewers, journalists, and prize juries alike, but if you read nothing else published in 1999, read this book. It tells the story of a man in Quebec who, like some other Quebecers, is coming apart at the seams, though not for the same reasons: here, the man's wife has died in an accident; he loves his two young sons and wants desperately to raise them on his own; he aspires to succeed as a college teacher, but he is professionally at sea, for he loves and wants to teach Jane Austen at a time when faddish subjects have ostensibly supplanted her. He is also involved in a kind of cold battle with his militantly Gentile Westmount in-laws, who are using their wealth and influence to claim the children for exclusivity and themselves. He resists, so they victimize him; and he ends up returning—in 1999, it seems the destination of necessity—to Cape Breton. But the novel does more than trace this narrative. Funny, poignant, and harrowing, it populates contemporary Montreal with character types that step out of Jane Austen's pages. It does so stylishly, and with intention: in order to dramatize the nature and the politics of contempt—both the contempt of the old, corrupt embodiments of privilege that once ruled Quebec, and a contempt for those in modern Quebec, or anywhere else, who are willing to give up what they love simply because they have been asked to. It is a novel that ends in midwinter: as conventional a Canadian image as one can imagine, yet reinvested here with passion and a flair for the exact word; in Smith's hands, winter is re-called into its resonance, to talk about an ongoing war between the power of money and the power of love.

Eccentric Genres

Eva-Marie Kröller

The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English, ed. Lorna Sage (Cambridge UP, n.p.), is one of those books that make one wonder how one ever got along without them. In comparison to *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, the new work adopts both a specialized perspective and a refreshingly catholic approach to its subject. Thus, readers will find entries on canonical authors like Austen, the Brontës, Eliot, Woolf, Murdoch and Carter in both encyclopedias, but only the *Guide to Women's Writing* offers information on Maeve Binchy, Daphne du Maurier, Joanna Trollope, Barbara Cartland, Danielle Steel and Jackie Collins as well. The brief essays on these authors assess the generic features of best-selling novels, their politics and their audience; however, the *Guide* also makes a determined effort to pinpoint the special qualities of the women's lives and work. The result is sometimes delicious gossip, the presence of which in a respectable reference work such as this blurs the demarcations between "high" and "low" (life-)writing. The entry on Barbara Cartland, for instance, gives an excellent sense of the social, political and personal factors that made her into the phenomenon that she was. Honours bestowed on the authors are mentioned conscientiously, as is the backlash some of them have had to suffer as a result of their recognition. Pearl Buck's Nobel Prize, for instance, was

greeted with hostility by the "American critical establishment . . . on the grounds that she had written too few books, was too much of a popular writer, and had been an expatriate." While contemporary readers may well agree that Buck's books have not stood the test of time, one cannot help but suspect a dose of misogyny in these complaints, especially if one reads that Arundhati Roy, winner of the Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things*, suffered "jeers, charges of 'vulgarity' and some barely concealed ill-will on the part of assorted literary stalwarts."

Cartland *et al.* specialize in the romantic, historical and gothic genres, and the *Guide* offers substantial entries under subject headings for each of these. However, contributors also refer to or coin new generic designations, such as "Aga Sagas" for Joanna Trollope's novels or "shopping and bonking novel" for Julie Burchill's. While these may be facetious labels, it would not be the first time that an ironic label has stuck and become the approved one. Skimming through the subject headings, one finds a few eccentric genres such as "pony stories," "scandalous memoirs," and "prophecy" along with the established ones, "fairy tale," "biography," "bildungsroman," and "children's books" among them. Food writing receives attention, as does writing about gardening (a major omission in both of these categories is Martha Stewart), while an entry on fashion writing (an important feature of the Woman's Page) is sadly missing. The elegance with which the *Guide* negotiates the

shifting borderlines between old and new, high and low genres makes one curious how it would have commented on recent adaptations of the epistolary genre, such as the e-mails in Ruth Picardie's acclaimed cancer memoir *Before I Say Goodbye*, or of the fictional diary in Helen Fielding's hugely successful *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Both books were probably too recent to be included.

For the most part, the subject headings provide excellent supplementary reading on individual authors. This relationship is well illustrated in the information on detective fiction. While the *Guide* prints generous entries on the *grandes dames* (Allingham, Christie, Sayers, Highsmith, P.D. James, Marsh, Rendell/Vine), it is much more selective with recent authors (McDermid, Paretsky and Cornwell are included, but not Dunant, Walters or Perry). The subject heading "detective fiction" picks up where the biographical entries leave off.

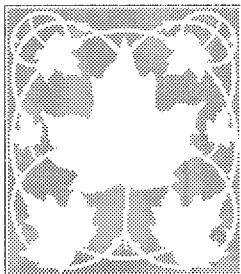
Unfortunately, subject heading and biographical entries do not complement each other as fortuitously when it comes to women travellers. The *Guide* is to be applauded for its abundant information on travellers ranging from Celia Fiennes, Mary Kingsley, Isabella Bird, and Gertrude Bell, to Freya Stark, Dervla Murphy, and Amelia Edwards (Jan Morris, regrettably, is not included), but the essay on travel writing itself is very disappointing indeed. It offers little specific information of the sort one looks for in a reference work, instead post-modernizing away about centre and periphery, the homogenization of the world's cultures, and the dangers of generic categorization. The author is Robyn Davidson who, elsewhere in the *Guide*, is given her own entry as the Australian author of various acclaimed travelogues. The Editors were probably thrilled to secure Davidson for the task, but the result is ineffectual.

At its best, the *Guide's* feminist perspective uncovers neglected material, provides

unexpected angles on traditional subjects, and belligerently insists on discussing authors and subjects previously not considered worth the trouble. At its least admirable, the *Guide* sabotages these goals by adopting a sour-faced censoriousness posturing as feminism. About *Gaudy Night*, for instance, the entry intones "[f]or women of Sayers' generation, social snobbery and reactionary ideals sometimes appeared liberatory because they made it possible, by defining limits to sympathy, both to buy into a potentially hostile society and to concentrate on personal priorities." Nor does the *Guide* reserve this sort of condescension only for detective fiction. Looking for information on Elizabeth Gaskell, I found that the *Guide* mostly acknowledges the things that she and her fiction were *not*, although the critic of this entry does not look quite as badly down her nose at the Victorian novelist as the *Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*. By comparison, the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, where I finally fled in some exasperation, gives a superb sense of Gaskell's personality and accomplishment.

Users interested in Canadian Literature will find a generous selection of Canadian authors, including a few Québécois writers (Marchessault, Brossard and Blais are in, but not Hébert and Roy). Coverage of First Nations authors is commendably thorough. Some of the choices are odd. Donna Smyth and Sharon Riis are featured along with a phalanx of recognized writers (one notable exception being P.K. Page), but Sky Lee or Hiromi Goto do not receive entries. While such inconsistencies may be unavoidable in a book such as this, a more thorough introduction explaining the choices would have been welcome. The declaration at the beginning that "[f]or everything that's here, there's a great deal that's not" sounds a little cavalier, but it does in the end not significantly diminish the accomplishment of this book.

THE AMERICAN REVIEW OF CANADIAN STUDIES



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FOR CANADIAN STUDIES
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Essays, Opinions & Notes

Albert **Braz** is a SSHRC post-doctoral fellow and Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Queen's University. His book *The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Literature* is forthcoming from the University of Toronto Press.

Robert **Bringhurst** has published over a dozen books of poetry, including his selected poems *The Calling* (1995). His most recent work is *Nine Visits to the Mythworld* (2000), a translation of the Haida poet and storyteller Ghandl of the Qayahll Llaanas. He lives in Vancouver.

Warren **Cariou** is a SSHRC post-doctoral fellow at the University of Saskatchewan, working on hybridity and racial passing in Métis culture.

Susanna **Egan** is a professor of English at the University of British Columbia. She has written extensively on autobiography. Her recent book, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*, was published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1999.

Janice **Fiamengo** is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at the University of Saskatchewan. She looks forward to teaching Pauline Johnson, with the aid of Strong-Boag and Gerson's book, in an upcoming graduate seminar on nineteenth-century Canadian literature.

William H. **New** is the author of *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence and Power in Canadian Writing* (1999) and other books on postcolonial writing; he teaches at the University of British Columbia, and is currently editing the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*.

Robin **Ridington** is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. He has worked on narrative and oral tradition with the Dane-za of Columbia and the Omaha tribe of Nebraska. His books include *Trail to Heaven: Knowledge and Narrative in a Northern Native Community* (1988) and *Blessing for a Long Time: The Sacred Pole of the Omaha Tribe* (1997).

Christine **Watson** is a PhD student from University of Queensland (Brisbane, Australia) and working on her dissertation called "My own eyes witness': Australian Aboriginal Women's Autobiographical Narratives." She is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College.

Poems

kateri **akiwenzie**-damm lives at the Cape Croker Reserve, Chippewas of Nawash First Nation, Armand **Ruffo** teaches at Carleton University, David A. **Groulx** lives in Thunder Bay, Gord **Bruyere** teaches at the University of Victoria, Alooook **Ipellie** lives in Ottawa, Chris **Bose** in Kamloops, **Annharte** (Marie Baker) in Vancouver, Al **Hunter** in Emo, Duane **Niatum** in Bellingham (Washington).

Reviews

Clint **Burnham** lives in Vancouver, Warren **Cariou** teaches at the University of Manitoba and Eve **D'Aeth** at Yukon College. Susanna **Egan**, Bryan N.S. **Gooch** and Sherrill **Grace** teach at the University of British Columbia, Heather **Hodgson** teaches at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Carol Ann **Howells** at the University of Reading/Great Britain, Renée **Hulan** at St. Mary's University, and David A. **Kent** at Centennial College. Jennifer **Kramer** lives in Vancouver. Martin K. **Kuester** teaches at the University of Marburg/ Germany. Joel **Martineau** studies at the University of British Columbia and Laura J. **Murray** at Queen's University. Brad **Neufeldt** lives in Vancouver. Barbara **Pell** teaches at Trinity Western University, and Catherine **Rainwater** at St. Edward's University (Texas). Deena **Rymhs** studies at Queen's University. Robert **Thacker** teaches at St. Lawrence University (New York).



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