

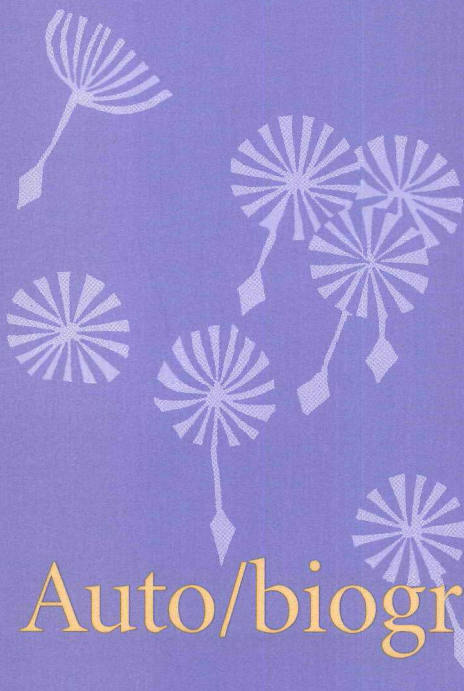
Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Spring 2002

\$17

172



Auto/biography

EVENT

new & established writers

Reading Service for Writers

If you are a new writer or a writer with a challenging or troublesome manuscript, *Event's* Reading Service for Writers may be of particular interest to you.

Every year *Event* receives hundreds of manuscripts. Many are good, but since we can't publish them all, we send many of them back, sometimes with a brief note, sometimes with only a stock reject form. Now we have an option for the writer who wants more from us.

You can now receive a commentary on your manuscript from *Event's* editors. Your manuscript will receive an assessment of about 700 to 1000 words, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the writing with attention to such aspects of craft as voice, structure, point of view or credibility, for example. That way you'll see how one group of experienced editors reads your work.

Eligible manuscripts include poetry and short prose pieces (up to a maximum of eight), and short fiction and creative non-fiction under 5000 words. Drama, chapters of novels, and journalistic non-fiction are not eligible. All manuscripts read by *Event's* Reading Service for Writers are, of course, considered for publication. You should expect to wait about four to eight weeks for the commentary to arrive.

Event's Reading Service for Writers costs a nominal fee: attach a cheque for \$75.00 (includes GST, if applicable; US and overseas residents please pay in US\$) to each manuscript, and please mark your cheque 'Event's Reading Service for Writers.' You'll also receive a two year subscription (or renewal) of six issues (worth \$35.00) with the reading fee so you can check out *Event's* award-winning mix of poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, reviews and notes on writing.

Event—The Douglas College Review
P.O. Box 2503, New Westminster, BC V3L 5B2
Phone: (604) 527-5293 Fax: (604) 527-5095
e-mail: event@douglas.bc.ca

Visit our website at <http://event.douglas.bc.ca>



Douglas
College

Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 172, Spring 2002

Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Editor: Eva-Marie Kröller

Associate Editors: Susan Fisher (General), Kevin McNeilly, Glenn Deer (Reviews),
Iain Higgins (Poetry), Alain-Michel Rocheleau (Francophone Writing)

Editorial Board

Heinz Antor *University of Cologne, Germany*
Marta Dvorak *Université Paris III - Sorbonne, France*
Irene Gammel *University of Prince Edward Island*
Carole Gerson *Simon Fraser University*
Susan Gingell *University of Saskatchewan*
Coral Ann Howells *University of Reading, Great Britain*
Chelva Kanaganayakam *University of Toronto*
Jon Kertzer *University of Calgary*
Ric Knowles *University of Guelph*
Ursula Mathis-Moser *University of Innsbruck, Austria*
Patricia Merivale *University of British Columbia*
Jane Moss *Colby College, U.S.A.*
Leslie Monkman *Queen's University*
Maureen Moynagh *St. Francis Xavier University*
Roxanne Rimstead *Université de Sherbrooke*
Stephen Slemon *University of Alberta*
David Staines *University of Ottawa*
Penny van Toorn *University of Sydney, Australia*
Mark Williams *University of Canterbury, New Zealand*

Editorial

- Susanna Egan & Gabriele Helms*
Auto/biography? Yes. But Canadian? 5
-

Articles

- Bina Toledo Freiwald*
Nation and Self-Narration:
A View From Québec/Quebec 17
- Neil ten Kortenaar*
Nega Mezlekia Outside the Hyena's Belly 41
- Sophie McCall*
"A Life has Only One Author":
Twice-Told Aboriginal Life Narratives 70
- Sherrill Grace*
Creating the Girl from God's Country:
From Nell Shipman to Sharon Pollock 92
- Margery Fee, Sneja Gunew and Lisa Grekul*
Myrna Kostash: Ukrainian Canadian Non-Fiction Prairie
New Leftist Feminist Canadian Nationalist 114

Poems

| | | | |
|-----------------------|----|--------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Cyril Dabydeen</i> | 39 | <i>Susan McCaslin</i> | 91 |
| <i>Sharon Marcus</i> | 40 | <i>Anne Compton</i> | 112 |
| <i>debbi waters</i> | 69 | <i>Gillian Harding-Russell</i> | 144 |

Books in Review

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

| Authors Reviewed | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Timothy Dow Adams</i> | 145 | <i>David J. Leigh</i> | 184 |
| <i>Isabel Overton Bader</i> | 147 | <i>Rabindranath Maharaj</i> | 170 |
| <i>Helen Buss</i> | 149 | <i>Rachel Manley</i> | 181 |
| <i>Sharon Butala</i> | 152 | <i>Susan Mann</i> | 149 |
| <i>Lisa Capps</i> | 172 | <i>Courtney McFarlane</i> | 160 |
| <i>Scott E. Casper</i> | 153 | <i>Joan Murray</i> | 192 |
| <i>Marlys Chevrefils</i> | 179 | <i>Greg Nelson</i> | 197 |
| <i>Lien Chao</i> | 155 | <i>Elinor Ochs</i> | 172 |
| <i>Denise Chong</i> | 149 | <i>Michael Ondaatje</i> | 187 |
| <i>Deana Christensen</i> | 156 | <i>Hazelle Palmer</i> | 160 |
| <i>Matt Cohen</i> | 194 | <i>Stan Persky</i> | 183 |
| <i>Carol Corbin</i> | 158 | <i>Thelma Poirer</i> | 189 |
| <i>John DeMont</i> | 158 | <i>Laurie Ricou</i> | 189 |
| <i>Debbie Douglas</i> | 160 | <i>Roxanne Rimstead</i> | 199 |
| <i>Caterina Edwards</i> | 162 | <i>Janice L. Ristock</i> | 183 |
| <i>Susanna Egan</i> | 164 | <i>Judith A. Rolls</i> | 158 |
| <i>Elizabeth Epperly</i> | 166 | <i>Roseann Runte</i> | 147 |
| <i>Anne Fabian</i> | 145 | <i>Riska Orpa Sari</i> | 188 |
| <i>George Fetherling</i> | 167 | <i>Judy Schultz</i> | 189 |
| <i>Joe Fiorito</i> | 169 | <i>Stephen Scobie</i> | 192 |
| <i>Cecil Foster</i> | 170 | <i>Carol Shields</i> | 194 |
| <i>Richard Freadman</i> | 172 | <i>Makeda Silvera</i> | 160 |
| <i>Gerald Friesen</i> | 174 | <i>Josef Skvorecky</i> | 169 |
| <i>Irene Gammel</i> | 166 | <i>K.D.M. Snell</i> | 197 |
| <i>Catherine Gibbon</i> | 192 | <i>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak</i> | 177 |
| <i>Charlotte Gray</i> | 147 | <i>John Stackhouse</i> | 199 |
| <i>Wendy S. Hesford</i> | 177 | <i>Apollonia Steele</i> | 179 |
| <i>James Hoffman</i> | 179 | <i>Douglas Stewart</i> | 160 |
| <i>Charles E. Israel</i> | 181 | <i>Kay Stewart</i> | 162 |
| <i>James C. Johnstone</i> | 183 | <i>Catherine G. Taylor</i> | 183 |
| <i>Paul Jones</i> | 189 | <i>Hilary Thompson</i> | 158 |
| <i>Lucie Joubert</i> | 184 | <i>Karen X. Tuchinsky</i> | 183 |
| <i>Marlene Kadar</i> | 149 | <i>Julia van Gorder</i> | 197 |
| <i>Farida Karodia</i> | 160 | <i>Lynne Van Luven</i> | 162 |
| <i>John Koerner</i> | 192 | <i>Gillian Whitlock</i> | 201 |
| <i>Myrna Kostash</i> | 167, 174 | <i>Betty Wilson</i> | 197 |

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 (including Notes and Works Cited), double-spaced, in 12-point font size, should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from 2 copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, 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.

Les manuscrits, d'une longueur approximative de 25 pages, doivent être soumis en trois exemplaires (dont deux anonymisés), adressés à l'Éditeur de *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, C.-B., Canada V6T 1Z1, et accompagnés d'une enveloppe de retour pré-adressée et pré-affranchie (timbrée ou munie de coupons-réponse internationaux), sans quoi ils ne pourront être retournés à leurs auteurs.

Les articles soumis doivent répondre aux exigences de forme bibliographique définies par la MLA. Tous les textes acceptés pour publication devront être fournis sur disquette.

Visit the *Canadian Literature* website for news, forthcoming reviews, submission guidelines, subscription information, archives, and other features:

<http://www.canlit.ca>

Two Calls for Papers:

Special issues on

Anne Carson

The Literature of War

See website for details.

Auto/biography? Yes. But Canadian?

Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms

Chances are good these days that the morning newspaper will include an article on the “season of the memoir” or the latest instalment of a series on immigrant stories in Canada (such as “Passages to Canada” in the *Globe and Mail*). “What a life!” says the sign over a table full of auto/biographies in the entrance area of the bookstore around the corner, prominently featuring George Fetherling’s *Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs* (2001). In the evening, television offers a wide range of auto/biography programs—from CBC’s *Life and Times* series to the Comedy Network’s *Liography*, a parody of the popular profile programs on the Arts & Entertainment channel. On occasion, we can catch one of over sixty Heritage Minutes that, for the past decade, have attempted to illustrate issues of Canada’s history and national life through mini-movies about all things Canadian—most often individuals turned heroes. Or we may watch one of seventeen episodes of the documentary *Canada: A People’s History*, a joint project of the CBC and Radio Canada that draws on the letters and diaries of people both famous and obscure in order to multiply perspectives of events of national importance and improve our understanding of our links with the past. Averaging 2.2 million viewers per episode since its launch in October 2000, this national history project now also includes a two-volume book set, video/DVD, CD soundtrack, educational material, and a multi-media website (<http://history.cbc.ca/history>). Similarly, *A Scattering of Seeds: The Creation of Canada* is a fifty-two-part documentary series for television that claims to personalize the stories of immigrants and to create collective understanding of Canadian history (<http://www.whitepinepictures.com>). In short, we live in an auto/biographical age that uses the personal narrative as a lens onto history and the contemporary world. In every medium, cultures are permeated and increasingly

transformed by auto/biographical narratives, productions, and performances of identity.

This special issue on Canadian auto/biography begins in part with this recent and prolific production in auto/biographical genres, but it also belongs in an academic history that maps the role of auto/biography studies in Canada. In 1996, Shirley Neuman, introducing *Essays on Canadian Writing: Reading Canadian Autobiography*, described the evolution of auto/biography studies in Canada. In particular, she notes that the third volume of the *Literary History of Canada* (1976), containing new chapters covering the years 1960-73, included no section on auto/biography. She suggests that critics in Canada at that time read auto/biography for Canadian content or biographical information but not at all to pursue questions about the genres or poetics of auto/biography that were involving theorists in Europe or the States. Neuman finds the auto/biographical work of Gabrielle Roy and other francophone Canadians from Québec more sophisticated than much anglophone writing, and speculates on a possible misfit between settler cultures and ancient European traditions. Writing just six years later, we note a transformation in the field that Neuman's own work has certainly helped to bring about. The proliferation of auto/biographical practices and the seriousness with which the academy is considering them testify to significant developments in this field. The essays in this volume bear witness to this theoretical sophistication and to the multiple values of auto/biographical works that are incommensurate with mere biographical information. They also engage with the "Canadianness" of the auto/biographical practices under discussion from various, albeit necessarily limited, perspectives. We note the anglophone and Eurocentric emphasis of our own work as one such perspective and are therefore particularly pleased to include work by Sophie McCall on indigenous voices and by Bina Freiwald providing a perspective from Québec.

By 1996, Neuman's research had already served to place auto/biography studies firmly on the academic map in Canada, both outlining how vast and various the field was and legitimating it as an area of research. In 1990, her massive chapter on "Life-Writing" appeared in the fourth volume of the *Literary History of Canada*, edited by W. H. New, who had invited her to write, as she puts it, on "autobiographies, memoirs, letters, diaries, travel writing, and biography within a single chapter." Our own use of the term "auto/biography" acknowledges Neuman's comprehensive agenda, insisting on the slash in auto/biography to suggest the broad continuum of life writ-

ing discourses that range from writing about the self (auto) to writing about another (biography). That slash also acknowledges that today contemporary auto/biographers increasingly practice, and theorists are recognizing, original and creative approaches to these genres, a combining or blending of genres to produce, for example, the collaborative work or the family memoir, the art installation, the film, or the web site that combine performance of identity with sophisticated levels of irony and full consciousness of theoretical implications. In this respect more than in any other, the field we investigate has developed since Neuman's last examination of it.

History and context for this volume also include a steady groundswell in conferences, essays, collections of essays, and monographs dedicated to auto/biography in Canada. K. P. Stich's edition of essays, *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature* (1988), followed a symposium in Ottawa in 1987. The 1991 Conference of the Canadian Association for Irish Studies led to *Autobiography and Biography* (1993), edited by James Noonan, in which historians and literary scholars map out their approaches to the genres of autobiography and biography, focusing on Irish-Canadian examples. The 1990 special issue of *Tessera* was dedicated to "Auto-graph(e)," as was *The Wascana Review* (2000), which focused primarily on poetry and short fiction. Marlene Kadar's *Essays on Life Writing* (1992) introduced new concepts and new issues into the discussion in Canada, assembling in one volume a community of auto/biography scholars interested in theorizing the field, and developing precisely that attention to genres and poetics of which Neuman had felt the lack. Valerie Raoul's *Distinctly Narcissistic* (1993), focusing on Québécois literature, problematized generic distinctions and drew Canadian attention to the diary and diary fiction as important auto/biographical forms. Two monographs, Helen M. Buss's *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English* (1993) and Jeanne Perreault's *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (1995), combined attention to women's writing and feminist theories with analysis of the role of auto/biography in gendered and historical identity. In 2001, Buss and Kadar edited *Working in Women's Archives*, in which contributors not only argue that painstaking archival work is necessary to reclaim women's lives and writing, but also challenge the notion of "the archive" as neutral, an observation that may have far-reaching implications for auto/biographical research and analysis.

Where academic biographers have continued to produce important work (for instance, Sandra Djwa, Ira Nadel, and Rosemary Sullivan), and Canadian

theorists have worked on auto/biography, the content of such work has not been exclusively Canadian. Nonetheless, the increasing volume of work and sophistication of theoretical approaches have served both to generate dialogue within Canada and to bring such Canadian discussion to the attention of the international academic community. Susanna Egan's *Mirror Talk* (1999) links contemporary auto/biographical experimentation with lived crises, placing Canadian writers alongside Americans and Europeans. "Autobiography and Changing Identities," a special issue of *biography* selected from an international conference held in Canada, includes five essays on Canadian auto/biography, positioning Canadian content and scholarship in an international context.

Although international centres of Canadian Studies have included auto/biography among their interests, few international theorists have paid attention to Canadian examples. It is, therefore, a matter of note that Margaretta Jolly includes six entries about Canadian auto/biography in her broadly conceived *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* published in 2001: Auto/biography to 1900; Diaries and Letters to 1900; 20th-Century Auto/biography; 20th-Century Diaries and Letters; French Canadian Life Writing; and Aboriginal Life Writing. Unlike the omnibus entries on "Biography and Memoirs," in English and French respectively, in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (1997), separate entries in the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* edited by W. H. New recognize auto/biographical genres as distinct and refer to the unique cultural work these genres perform. In other words, Neuman's concerns about the limited focus on Canadian content, separation of Canadian content from theoretical considerations, and the lack of participation in international dialogue, seem well on their way to being resolved. Where Neuman observed just over a decade ago that "all is not well with life-writing in Canada" (1990), we feel inclined to respond that things are much better now.

Or, at least, some things are. While publications of and sales figures for auto/biographical writing soar, academic attention to Canadian auto/biography does remain limited. A quick search of the MLA databases between 1963 and 2001 identifies fewer than thirty references for Canadian autobiography, biography, life writing, and memoir combined while they provide thousands of entries for the generic terms themselves. Canadian scholars have indeed focused their attention on the poetics of the genre, but much work remains to be done with Canadian examples, not only because they increasingly provide so significant a component of Canadian literature but

also because the role and function of auto/biographical genres are so closely connected to our understanding of the times and places in which we live. The call for papers for this issue of *Canadian Literature* addresses this precise need. Considering that the time has surely come to combine generic and theoretical considerations quite specifically with Canadian texts, we have invited colleagues to address contemporary Canadian auto/biography. We want to examine the work that auto/biography is doing in the world around us and to provide some cultural analysis of this moment in Canada.

The numerous and popular uses for personal narrative indicate more than a current trend in publication or a means for examining such key concerns as gender or racial identity. Increasingly, they analyse the significance of individual and communal memory and history. They provide the means to attend to trauma on every scale, giving voice to untellable experience (of abuse and illness, for instance) and incorporating even massive disaster, such as genocide, into contemporary narratives and cultural understanding. Indigenous peoples are exploring their histories and their present opportunities in terms of personal and communal narratives that permeate the cultures around them and have come to function effectively in courts of law. Like such public institutions as the CBC and the *Globe and Mail*, and like many Québécois writers and artists, First Nations implicate auto/biographical practices in their definitions of citizenship and nation. Insofar as such matters are cultural practices, auto/biographical explorations are crucial to their articulation. At the same time, auto/biographical genres now permeate such varied disciplines as anthropology, medicine, education, history, philosophy, psychology, and the visual and performing arts. Sherrill Grace's work on Nell Shipman and Sharon Pollock in this volume is a fine example of the latter as it develops in terms of contemporary theory the auto/biographical role of theatre towards which Evelyn Hinz pointed some ten years ago. Increasingly, work in auto/biography studies is multi- or inter-disciplinary and takes its place in policy decisions at many levels, in health care and education, for example. Further, as auto/biography studies have expanded their range of both content and expertise, they have refined the analytical tools with which to investigate questions about personal and communal narratives, how they work and what they achieve. It is, therefore, safe to say that in the few years since Neuman's last analysis of the field, auto/biography has begun to provide so significant a resource in so many areas of inquiry as to require a boom in academic work to respond to the boom in production.

So we ask ourselves, each other, our readers, and colleagues: What is Canadian auto/biography? What are the issues, personal, familial, commu-

nal, historical, theoretical, that preoccupy and describe us at this point in time? What strategies are auto/biographers using to explore and articulate these issues? What does this combination of self- and other-life writing contribute to Canadian literature? What part does it play in Canadian culture? Neither the theoretical work nor the surveys provided so far have attempted to establish a unified history or theory of auto/biography studies in Canada, and that is likely a good thing. (Neuman even suggests that such work might be doomed to failure from the start [1996].) Like those who precede us, we make no claim here to outline a comprehensive history or to provide answers to all these questions. Rather, appreciating the international prominence of auto/biographical studies and the value of auto/biographical practices in Canada, we see a need and an opportunity to refocus attention on the Canadian in auto/biography and the auto/biographical in Canada.

Fetherling has raised some of our questions in his "Preface" to *The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs*. "People may not agree on what a literary memoir is," he writes, "but they know one when they see it, and they have created a demand, which writers and publishers rush to satisfy." Where Fetherling's anthology responds to popular demand and depends on popular recognition of the authors he includes, the essays in this volume raise more complex questions by examining less established or authoritative texts and exploring their treatment of the individual, the community, the relations between them, and the means by which they negotiate those relations. Following their lead, we may begin to answer our own questions in terms of radical reconfigurations of political maps, human geographies, ideologies of gender, class, and "race," and the scale and repetition of intolerable suffering over the past fifty years. In Canada, the cultural work of auto/biography becomes increasingly valuable after NAFTA and its inadequate protection of Canadian culture. We may recognize the opportunities auto/biography provides for making the personal political or inserting the personal into the historical as Freiwald's Québec perspective in this volume makes so abundantly clear. We should certainly acknowledge the role of mass media and new media in disseminating and interpreting the private voice in a public context. For any and all of these reasons, auto/biographical work predominates in all genres and various media. As W. H. New writes in his review of Canadian literature for the year 2000 (*Canadian Literature* 170/171), "the personal, front and centre, is the open justification for writing and the simple reason for writing well."

For this special issue, however, the more pointed questions concern the nature of contemporary Canadian auto/biography, critical/theoretical responses to it, and its uses in the fashioning of Canadian culture.

That much of the content of contemporary auto/biography quite frequently derives from pre-Canadian experience seems not to prejudice publication, promotion, and reception of work by latter-day Canadians. In *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* (2000), Nega Mezlekia situates his story exclusively in Ethiopia, and Michael David Kwan, in *Things That Must Not Be Forgotten* (2000), situates his in China, neither one so much as acknowledging conclusions or new beginnings in Canada. Neil ten Kortenaar's discussion of *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* in this issue is timely not only because Mezlekia's work and the debate surrounding it require informed analysis but also because ten Kortenaar takes up precisely these questions of past life and present narrative. Such apparently remote auto/biography plays an important role in the entirely conscious, deliberate construction (for auto/biographer and "reader" alike) of identities that explore the meaning of "Canadian."

As we study recent publications, we note that many of them complicate or even resist Canadian identity. *Baltimore's Mansion*, Wayne Johnston's memoir of his father (2000), evokes a passionately pre-Confederation Newfoundland. His family's history on the Avalon Peninsula makes even Newfoundland look like part of the continental land mass. Clive Doucet, living and working in Ottawa, traveled to New Brunswick in order to evoke his own childhood in Nova Scotia as an Acadian without a homeland. Doucet's *Notes from Exile: On Being Acadian* (1999) follows his CBC radio coverage of the first world reunion of the Acadians in 1994. For Doucet, personal memories, family memoir, and social history combine to create (for that national icon, the CBC, in the first place) a border-free zone—not Canada by contrast but Canada without edges. Don Gillmor's search for "origins" and "home" in *The desire of every living thing* (1999), magnified to a national scale in *Canada: A People's History* (2000/2001) which he co-authored, traces his family's life in Scotland but then centres on the prairies and the early years of the city of Winnipeg. For content, for location, as for a haunting sense in each text of dis-content and dis-location (that could not easily be either British or American), these works are thoroughly, indisputably Canadian. However, in these cases, identifying as Canadian involves a desire for origins and for ethnic belonging that contrasts with the unspecified and malleable nature of an imaginary Canada.

More positively, those qualities of Canadian identity that leave

descendants of early settlers unsatisfied work in favour of new immigrants. Stereotypes of identity that may seem limiting at home, where the literature begins, also operate in an international arena where they become attractive. Ken Wiwa writes in the recent *Globe and Mail* series on "Passages to Canada," "I was moving to a place that encourages you to bring your past with you. You get a pretty hefty baggage allowance when you come to Canada." Notably, this series of immigrant stories has been commissioned by the Dominion Institute of Canada, which promotes Canadian history and culture, in conjunction with Westwood Creative Artists, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, and *The Globe and Mail*. As with CBC productions, this institutional promotion of Canadian writers, specifically in terms of their choice of Canada, articulates the public role of private lives in the constitution of national identity and culture. As Anna Porter writes in her contribution, her immersion in the writing of Canadian writers provided a rich education for "becoming a citizen." Wiwa's baggage allowance and Porter's literary immersion, and this very official sanctioning of auto/biographical experiences, all describe processes of desire and becoming rather than triumphant arrival, an exploration rather than an immediate or obvious belonging.

So easily does auto/biography in Canada situate itself as bi- or multi-national, whether technically or psychologically, that we must actually consider whether Canada as the context for reception is not also the opportunity for narrative in the first place. What can be written or analysed here that could not be examined closer to its source—such as Wiwa's relations with his father and with Nigeria in *In the Shadow of a Saint* (2000)? What secrets may be winkled from their primary contexts and safely exposed (as with Anna Porter's *The Storyteller* [2000], Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Honey and Ashes* [1998], Lisa Appignanesi's *Losing the Dead* [1999], or Eric Wright's *Always Give a Penny to a Blind Man* [1999])? Even, what becomes narrative here that would not be narrative elsewhere, like Kiyooka's *Mothertalk*? Matsuki Masutani, translator of Mary Kiyooka's oral narratives from the Japanese, is currently producing a Japanese version of *Mothertalk*, which will, however, still be a Canadian story. The term "Japanese Canadian," he suggests, is unimaginable in Japan, where nationality and belonging are emphatically singular. In a Canadian context, however, the young Japanese couple who raised their children on the prairies through the Second World War, and whose story was subsidised by the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation, contribute to Canadian cultural and political history. They contribute, furthermore, to that fertile intersec-

tion between personal narratives, art, and documentary that is the particular purview of auto/biography studies.

Canadian auto/biographers are quite deliberate about importing foreign wares. For example, Porter subtitles *The Storyteller* (2000), her auto/biography of herself and her grandfather, *A Memoir of Hungary*. Or Austin Clarke, for his most recent auto/biographical work, *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit* (1999), uses the subtitle *A Barbadian Memoir*. Whereas *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* (1980) may have evoked for many Canadians as well as for Barbadians the complex relations of colonized to colonizer, *Pig Tails* brings Barbadian English into a Toronto kitchen to demonstrate both the narrator's own transplantation and that of his reader. For Clarke, nonetheless, as for Porter or Wiwa, Canada is not the subject but the occasion and the audience. These memoirs are neither set in Canada nor explanatory of Canada as a shared experience. Rather, they are about elsewhere, other "origins," to use Gillmor's term, of narrators who have become Canadian, for primarily Canadian consumption. So, for instance, Porter's Hungarian stories are contained within the cover that describes her as "one of Canada's most respected publishing professionals." Similarly, Johnston is rooted in Avalon by his father, in particular, and by his own childhood memories, but has become what Mordecai Richler's cover note describes as "[a] major Canadian talent." Clarke has lived and worked in Canada for nearly fifty years as a writer, broadcaster, professor, politician—and a narrator primarily of Barbados. Rachel Manley, in *Drumblair* (1996) and *Slipstream* (2000), writes a political history of Jamaica in terms of the history of her own family, drawing on the distance and the audience that Canada provides. These auto/biographers recognize borders in order to cross them, their contributions to Canadian culture depending on importation from the many "elsewheres" that borders imply. Writing as two immigrants ourselves, we find this Canadian response to immigrant narratives both reassuring and quite distinctive.

As for their contributions to this field as it is currently defined in the western world, Canadian auto/biographies appear in every public sphere and in every kind from the esoteric to the popular. Always, everywhere, one can find the lives of politicians and personalities, stars of sport and popular culture. Works on Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Ernest and Preston Manning, and Wayne Gretzky, for example, or memoirs by Céline Dion, Rita MacNeil, and Pamela Wallin assume a fan club and create a mythic persona who is, after all, one of the people. Such auto/biography represents and contributes to Canadian culture by virtue of its eclectic nature and its home-grown suc-

cess. In its more esoteric or experimental forms, which tend to be self-reflexive, ironic, and intertextual, contemporary Canadian auto/biography does its cultural work at the relatively local level, often performed by small presses. Whereas the public figure relies upon the life to sell the text, the artist experiments within a web of dialogue with other artists and for a smaller audience. The academic auto/biographer, for instance, investigates form by means of personal story, like Helen M. Buss in *Memoirs from Away* (1999), turns the lens of the accomplished biographer on herself, like Elspeth Cameron in *No Previous Experience* (1997), or explores how to write auto/biographically without writing an auto/biography, like Fred Wah in *Diamond Grill* (1996) or George Bowering in *A Magpie Life* (2001). The public intellectual, like Michael Ignatieff, in *The Russian Album* (1987) and, indeed, in his political analyses, uses auto/biography not to investigate strategies for personal narrative but to unravel meaning in personal, historical, and political terms. Margery Fee and Sneja Gunew's interview with Myrna Kostash in this volume provides a sustained example of this auto/biographical venture in collaborative form, zeroing in on another Canadian writer and public intellectual. Canadian auto/biography, in other words, provides the full range of auto/biographical production as it exists elsewhere, but for the most part it presents itself in a more hesitant, subdued way, possibly suspicious of its public role or the risks of narcissistic self-absorption.

As we appreciate this full range of auto/biographical work, we are struck by the innovative nature of much Canadian life writing. If generic features are contextual constructs rather than components of an abstract, synchronic system, if genres, in other words, are ways of seeing and conceptualizing the world, then formal innovations are not only inseparable from the "content" of the life story, but can also tell us about the Canadian cultural contexts from which they emerge and in which they will operate. In fact, such challenges to generic conventions can be important means of resistance and social change. Let us briefly mention only three types of such formal experimentation that deserve more detailed examination. First, there is no shortage of new generic terms: George Bowering's "biotext" in *Errata* (1988) (further developed by Fred Wah in *Diamond Grill*), Aritha van Herk's "crypto-frictions" in *In Visible Ink* (1991), Daphne Marlatt's "fictionalysis" in "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis" (1990), and Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell's "theatrical transformation" in *The Book of Jessica* (1989). The new generic labels signal a rethinking of auto/biographical conventions, often focusing explicitly on the curious relationship

between living a life and telling or writing one.

Second, collections of personal essays explore new ways of self-representation by bringing together conventions of auto/biography and the essay. The personal essay as a window on an individual's culture can highlight the interdependence of self and contexts, but a collection of personal essays can also trace changes in those relationships. What is more, a collection can examine the evolving essay form itself, quite possibly, in Fred Wah's words, undercutting "the hegemony of such forms" (*Faking It* [2000]). Whether writers explicitly reflect on their own discomfort with the essay form or the problem of rereading essays from a later perspective (Wah in *Faking It*, Marlatt in *Readings from the Labyrinth* [1998], and Di Brandt in *Dancing Naked* [1996]), whether they insist on the importance of writing as a social act (Roy Miki in *Broken Entries* [1996]), or attempt to think outside of the constraints of generic conventions by speaking instead of "recollections" and "notes" (Dionne Brand in *Bread out of Stone* [1994] and *A Map to the Door of No Return* [2001]), they all explore questions of identity and positioning in innovative ways through the auto/biographical practice of the personal essay.

Third, contemporary Canadian writing experiments with collaborative auto/biography, eschewing a single narrative voice and acknowledging the complexity of our relational lives and storytelling by not just accommodating but actually foregrounding multiple perspectives. From the sequential counterpoint in Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee's *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) to the multi-layered and serial collaboration in *Mothertalk* (1997), such collaborative texts raise difficult ethical issues about power differentials, privacy, and appropriation. We may want to consider the collaboration in Julie Cruikshank's *Life Lived Like a Story* (1990), written with three Yukon native elders, and Nancy Wachowich's *Saqiyuq* (1999), written with three Inuit women, as contemporary examples of ethnographic auto/biography that position the indigenous narrator as auto/biographer rather than "informant," as keeper of her stories and interpreter of her own culture. Cruikshank and Wachowich are, to our minds, more successful in their mode of reception than Rudy Wiebe, whose *Stolen Life* (1998) with Yvonne Johnson romanticizes old habits of Native need and white beneficence. Sophie McCall's paper in this volume thoughtfully explores these important issues of singular and plural voices in aboriginal life narratives.

As we struggle to pinpoint what is Canadian about Canadian auto/biography, we are obviously participating in long-standing debates about the

role of nationalism in literary studies. This question has been of central importance to the development of Canadian literature as a distinct field of study and cannot therefore be irrelevant in auto/biographical practices. For decades now, Canadian criticism has oscillated between arguments for the power of national approaches and simultaneous calls for more cosmopolitan or global perspectives. In this editorial, we have neither the time nor the place to rehearse these critical positions, which have, anyway, been dramatically recharged by the events of 9/11. However, we note that *Essays on Canadian Writing* #71 (2000), appropriately titled “Where Is Here Now?,” invites us to reflect critically on the accomplishments and shortcomings of Canadian literary criticism at the end of the twentieth century. Suffice it to say that we are deliberately participating in these debates, recognizing the ongoing need to question nationalism as an ideology and suggesting that auto/biographical practices provide an increasingly significant register for cultural observation and analysis. In fact, we propose that auto/biographical practices offer a productive angle on questions of national identities, in part because, as Freiwald’s paper on auto/biography in Québec demonstrates, they complicate easy assumptions about nation. Auto/biographical practices introduce internal multiplicity into the equation, the personal, family, and community stories quite frequently resisting or, at the least, critiquing what counts as national.

The work in this volume addresses, accordingly, some of the ways in which auto/biographers, critics, and theorists in Canada have joined international production and debate while constituting Canada as continuously in process. We read Canadian auto/biography as a shifting configuration of cultural analysis, characterized by relations between contexts of production and reception, form and content, but also themes, places, individuals and communities. The groundwork, we suggest, has been done. Now we are beginning to see its potential—on the one hand to discover new material, modes of analysis, and questions for discussion and, on the other hand, to invigorate old debates.



Nation and Self-Narration: A View from Québec/Quebec

What is really important is the structural alignment of post-1820s nationalist “memory” with the inner premises and conventions of modern biography and autobiography.

(Anderson xiv)

When I first started thinking about autobiography in Canada and Québec almost a decade ago, I began, not surprisingly, by seeking out the bibliographies and critical studies that would give me the proverbial (critical) lay of the land. What I found was the making and re-making of a homeland, or rather, homelands. Anthony Appiah has suggestively outlined the logic of this mutual implication of personal story and national narrative:

It is a familiar idea that modernity allows the ordinary citizen to make a national identity central to an individual identity. . . . It is a slightly less familiar thought that the identity of this nation is tied up with the stories of individuals . . . whose stories, in helping to fashion a national narrative, serve also, indirectly, to shape the individual narratives of other patriotic—nationally identified—citizens. (9)

One could begin to elaborate on these observations in the following manner. As narratives of identity, both autobiographies—in which an “I” speaks—and nation/alist discourses—in which a “we” is spoken—depend on the invocation of subjectivity, that is, on those speech acts through which a “subject” emerges (Benveniste 224). Moreover, the subject-constituting acts of saying “I” and saying “we” are both predicated on the mutual dependence of self and other; there is no “I” outside the reciprocal dialogue between “I” and “you” that is “constitutive of *person*,” and there “cannot be ‘we’ except by starting with ‘I’” (Benveniste 224, 202). Self and nation are thus implicated in a specular relation of mutual mirroring (or non-mirroring, as the case may be).¹ Nation offers the self (through the process of

interpellation)² an identity as a subject-of-the-nation, while individual subjects' autobiographical acts can (be made to) serve as both a model and a medium for the construction of the collective subject-nation.³

The present essay seeks to engage, more specifically, with some of the contemporary discourses—political, critical, autobiographical—that have been implicated in the mutual articulation of subject and nation in Québec/Quebec. The paper is in five parts, as the focus of analysis moves from political/public discourses and their deployment of autobiographical tropes to construct the life-narrative of the nation; to critical writing on Québec autobiography and its similar investment in a nation-building narrative; to autobiographical writings—first in French and French translation (in the case of Montagnais writer Ann Kapesch), then in English—which suggest a more complex relationship between the subject and the nation; and finally back to the political and the present, in anticipation of the future. My aim is not to offer a survey of what is (especially in French) a very large body of autobiographical writing,⁴ nor to argue for representative texts. Rather, from the space opened up by Québec/Quebec's difference from itself—the space of the “barred Nation It/Self” (Bhabha 298) that is only partially represented by the metonymic *accent aigu*, for there are other differences here than French/English—I want to ask: what are some of the ways in which “I” and “we” have been conjugated in this place? The texts selected for consideration here have been chosen with a view to facilitating such an interrogation.

1. The I of the Beholden

How fitting that the meanings of “behold,” “beholden,” and “belong” should all be so inextricably linked, thus foregrounding that fraught nexus of personal story and collective history that is my focus here. To “behold” is to be a spectator, to “observe, regard, look”; “beholden,” a past participle form of “behold,” means “[a]ttached, or obliged (to a person); under obligation for favours or services”; a third meaning of “behold” is “[t]o pertain, relate or belong to” (OED). A narrative emerges out of this web of meanings—a prototypical autobiographical narrative, if we understand the autobiographical imperative to emerge in response to the question “where do I belong?” (Gunn 23)—one whose contours some would find all too familiar. The beholder, the one not quite part of the group, the one to whom the group says “we” meaning *not* “I + you,” but “I + they” (see Benveniste 202),

looks on from the sidelines. In seeking admission into the group, s/he stands beholden for the favour of an attachment only the collectivity can grant. That favour is the gift of belonging, an affirmation of a “person’s membership in, and acceptance by” the group (OED). This line separating inside from outside, the beholder knows, is both contingent (“[n]ot of the nature of necessary truth; true only under existing conditions” [OED]) and (presumed) absolute; as Steven Hunsaker notes, the “power to define the nation by excluding is central to the sense of national belonging” (12). An Israeli writer, speaking of that strife-ridden corner of the world into which I was born, expresses such longings to belong with the eloquence of one familiar with both the hunger and the terrible price it can exact (in demanding the Other’s exclusion): “This is what it all comes down to: *Not to be foreign*. To belong . . . What sweetness surges through the body from just saying those words. What bitterness floods the heart [at being made to feel foreign]” (Grossman 58). In Montréal/Montreal, the home of my adult life, the beholder’s craving for and ambivalence towards such sweetness has been the subject of a probing and poignant eulogy, Elspeth Probyn’s autobiographical/polemical *‘Love in a Cold Climate’: Queer Belongings in Québec* (1994). Conceding the recent loss of her desire to belong here, Probyn feels nonetheless compelled to think her way through the problematics of being and belonging in a place where “identity is an institutional project” and the “constant appeals to belong” are impossible to avoid (27).

Belonging becomes particularly fraught in the context of a public/political discourse driven by that master trope of nationness, the figure of “*the many as one*” (Bhabha 294), a figure paradoxically both modeled on and contested by the autobiographical. Imagining the nation as a self-identical subject, the figure of the subject-nation occludes the very lesson autobiographies offer: that “the use of nation as a source of identity differs radically with ethnicity, gender, and economic situation” (Hunsaker 1). In Québec/Quebec, the question of national identity and collective belonging continues to be a pressing and central concern. The on-going Michaud Affair is a case in point. On 15 December 2000, the National Assembly passed a unanimous vote of censure denouncing comments made by former Parti Libéral (PLQ) MNA Yves Michaud in his brief to the estates-general on language, faulting immigrants and the Jewish community for failing to support the sovereignist project. The language of Michaud’s brief and the appended “Tableau vote ethnique” make explicit who, in his view, the col-

lective “nous” are, and who the beholden. There are those “dits de ‘souche”” who constitute the national collectivity proper, and then there are all the others (Michaud n.p.). Immigrants are needed and to be welcomed, but on condition that they recognize their status as beholden to the national collectivity, and fulfill their obligations which include, according to Michaud, adopting the national group’s language, culture, and way of seeing the world, as well as supporting sovereignty.

And so the new millennium in Québec has been ushered in by a political upheaval that saw *premier ministre* Lucien Bouchard resign, in part, over the Michaud Affair (finding unacceptable the vocal support for Michaud among some party members), and Bernard Landry succeed him with a vigorously pursued ideological/political platform rooted in the ideas of the Québec “people” and the Québec “nation.” On the occasion of the recent Summit of the Americas in Québec city, Landry’s PQ government displayed its slogan on an electronic message board situated on the grounds of the National Assembly across from the summit’s convention centre: “Québec, une nation d’Amérique et d’avenir.” But if there is a Québec nation (and a nation-state in/of the future), who are its (true) nationals? How is belonging to be articulated within an identity grid commonly represented as consisting of “les francophones de vieille ascendance [de souche],” “les Anglo-Québécois, les communautés culturelles et les Autochtones?” (Gérard Bouchard 76, 79). The danger, as Robert Schwartzwald has noted, is of subscribing to a collective discourse that “seeks to ensconce the primacy of the subject-nation at the expense of a heterogeneously articulated national subject” (287). Yet it is precisely such a discourse of the subject-nation that has characterized the political rhetoric of the governing party in the last few years. In a speech given in the months leading up to the 1995 Québec referendum, then *premier ministre* Jacques Parizeau urged his audience to rally behind the sovereigntist cause and endorse “un projet qui leur ressemble.” The national project so conceived, however, remains an inherently paradoxical one: rebelling against what are seen as the forces of homogenization from without (“les Canadiens” who have denied the collectivity its identity), it demands homogenization from within.

Québec is at a crossroads, Gérard Bouchard has recently argued, suggesting that certain current conceptualizations of the nation are leading this society towards a dangerous impasse (14). Any reflection on identity, belonging, and nation in Québec, he insists, has to engage with a complex

network of relations. He offers a list of some of the issues and considerations that should inform any narrative of the nation in Québec: the historical invasion/occupation/settlement by French-Canadians and other immigrants of the territory recognized today as Québec, and the on-going relations between these groups and the Native populations; the history of the relations between the French-Canadian population, a majority in Québec, a minority in Canada, and the French and British colonial powers, and the experience of this group within the Canadian and North American contexts; the differences and divisions *within* the francophone majority; the relations between the francophone majority and the other (state- and self-identified) linguistic and ethnic groups that inhabit the territory of Québec, considered within the larger context of changing demographic and socio-economic realities (128-31). It is such a rethinking of the narrative of the nation that leads Gérard Bouchard to his alternative vision of a New World “nation québécoise,” one that would be defined by a profound reorientation in four directions: moving away from ethnicity towards an ethics of rights; from an organic (ancestor-oriented) conception of French-Canadian identity to a language-based francophone cultural identity; from a French-Canadian culture to an inclusive national “culture québécoise”; and from a primarily cultural nationalism to a vision of social and collective progress (73).

But the difficulties of translating such a vision into a political discourse that seeks to mobilize the citizenry for a secessionist cause are nowhere more evident than in a brief text authored by Gérard Bouchard’s brother, former *premier ministre* Lucien Bouchard. There is a telling internal tension at the heart of Lucien Bouchard’s forthright and forceful resignation speech of January 11, 2001. On the one hand, Bouchard reaffirms in his speech his government’s accountability to all Quebeckers, categorically endorsing the democratic principles of *l’État québécois*: “de générosité et d’ouverture à toutes et à tous, sans égard à leur origine ethnique et culturelle.” On the other hand, he reiterates (cannot but reiterate) his mission, as leader of the Parti Québécois, to bring about Québec’s sovereignty, clearly not the wish of *all* Quebeckers (as referendum after referendum has shown), and pursue a national project conceived and advanced not in the name of the aforementioned ethnic and cultural diversity of the citizenry, but in response to what are seen as the aspirations of “le peuple québécois.”⁵ Tellingly, when Bouchard turns to English for a brief paragraph, he has little to say to his

“fellow citizens”: he expresses gratitude for their support, and states his resignation. There is no story here, no appeal to a common history or a shared destiny, no passionate invocation of the deepest ties of kinship; “le peuple québécois,” we are left to conclude, does not translate well into other idioms. In whose image, then, the “people” and the “nation”?

II. The (Critical) Lay of the Land

Like the political discourses discussed above, critical writing on autobiography in English Canada and Québec has been, until recently, strongly invested in the cultural construction of nationness. While these writings have imagined different subject-nations (Canada, Québec), they have shared a common critical orientation, reading personal narratives as sites wherein an individual constructs him/herself as a national subject, and as the collective utterance of the larger subject-nation.⁶ Such a critical project becomes problematic, however, when the principle of selection determining the chosen autobiographical corpus, and the national narrative these autobiographies are made to tell, function to elide constitutive differences *within* the nation. In national narratives, Ackermann cautions us, the heterogeneous nation is often made to appear as an individual—“the people”—conceived as “a homogeneous mass of similarly willed individuals” (122).

In Québécois literary criticism, the interest in the relationship between the individual and the collectivity has been characterized by a particular inflection, as critics have been concerned to trace “the evolution of narrative forms in Quebec in relation to Quebec’s colonized status and nationalist aspirations” (Raoul 41).⁷ Lamonde’s bibliographic study and the critical works of Van Roey-Roux and Hébert illustrate in an exemplary fashion the polemical and rhetorical means by which personal writing can be mobilized for the project of collective identity construction. Lamonde’s leading question is “Quelle expérience collective les Québécois ont-ils faite de la subjectivité?” (33), and Van Roey-Roux proceeds from the similar premise that “à travers les écrits personnels, c’est toute une société qui se dépeint et se raconte” (7). Pierre Hébert reiterates these concerns, devoting an important part of his book to tracing “[l]’histoire de la subjectivité québécoise” (47).

But who *is* this “I” in whose image a whole collectivity is conceived? One answer is provided by Lamonde’s decision to exclude from his corpus “les auteurs québécois anglophones, inuit ou amérindiens,” in order to foreground the homogeneity of the collective experience he seeks to represent (*Je me sou-*

viens 19). Similarly, Van Roey-Roux's introductory chapter makes clear her conception of the collectivity as cohesive, its history and identity continuous. Personal narratives, she suggests, contribute greatly to the creation of the national collectivity precisely because they are vehicles of a collective memory, preservers of the cultural heritage (8); they are like so many links in a chain providing a sense of cohesion and continuity that is particularly important to a society experiencing itself as threatened and endangered (14). The collective desire, as Van Rouey-Roux sees it, is a desire to see one's likeness reproduced many times over: through their personal writings it is "nos semblables" who fill in the gaps in our remembrance of the past and provide us with a sense of belonging (7-8). A crucial slippage is thus enacted at the outset of Van Rouey-Roux's study: from a recognition of the plurality of experiences that personal writings represent, to an affirmation of the singular character of "Le Québécois" (14) who thus becomes the (national) protagonist of this critical narrative.

In these studies, then, self-narration is made to tell the story of the nation, as an individual subject—*un(e) québécois(e)*—is transformed into the representative *Le Québécois*, and then the collective subject "Les Québécois" (Hébert, *Journal intime* 12). Hébert describes his book as a cultural history, and it is, in effect, the auto/biography of the québécois collective subject as he sees it. It is a story that follows the familiar evolutionary trajectory of traditional autobiography, and it begins with the collectivity's experience of colonization. Hébert identifies three stages in the evolution of the collectivity: "la Conquête anglaise" bringing to an end the prelapsarian *Habitant* experience of enjoying "la jeunesse d'une terre neuve" (Harvey in Hébert 48);⁸ resistance; and emancipation. Individual writers' experiences of selfhood are thus subsumed under (or seen as constitutive of) the evolving modalities of a québécois collective selfhood, in a movement from "moi-occulté" to "moi-recouvré" to "moi-affirmé." According to this narrative, an initial valorization of collective identity which was necessary for the survival of a colonized people but came at the expense of individual identity (1840-1930), was then followed by a transitional phase (1930-1950) in which emergent voices experienced themselves as alienated and cut off from the collectivity, leading, in the final phase (1950-present), to a truly emancipated form of writing which allows for the integration of the personal and the collective. In this final stage the "I" becomes fully liberated, a subject who can claim both a personal and a collective identity, affirming "j'existe,

donc nous sommes”: I am, therefore we are (Hébert, “Une Evolution” 37).

A very different story is told by An Antane Kapesh, who was Chief of the Montagnais Band in Schefferville in the 1960's. In her autobiographical *Je suis une maudite sauvagesse. Eukuan nin matshimanitu innu-iskueu* (1976), Hébert's legitimate yet victimized collective subject *les Québécois* becomes *le Blanc*, a cunning and ruthless colonizer who has invaded her people's territory, exploited and destroyed the natural resources, and devastated the Native culture and way of life. In the beginning, for Kapesh, there was not a “terre neuve” but a place called “*innu-assia, c'est-à-dire terres indiennes*” (“Témoignage”). Kapesh's autobiographical narrative offers a radically different version of the history of inu-assia/Québec. As Boudreau observes, the very structure of Kapesh's autobiography is dictated by the order of the White man's arrival and the subsequent phases of colonial exploitation and dispossession: first the missionaries, then the land brokers, the teachers, the police, the media (125-26).

It is from the space of the in-between—the space that opens up when Kapesh's narrative is read alongside those by Lamonde, Van Rouey-Roux, and Hébert—that I would like to engage with a number of autobiographical narratives in Québec/Quebec. Approaching these texts as sites of individual and collective self-interrogation, I am interested in the ways in which they might help us reconstruct a more ambivalent narrative of nationness, one that perceives the nation as a space “marked by cultural difference and the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations” (Bhabha 299). Probyn discovers such a shifting landscape when she sets out to question what it means to belong in Québec; what she finds, “alongside the apparent universality of the nation,” are “striking images of singularity” (62). One would do well to attend to such singularities before rushing to say “we.”

III. Témoignage d'une Québécoise

As a corrective to an homogenizing discourse of the subject-nation one might thus turn to individual autobiographical narratives in order to solicit a different kind of testimony. Kapesh's autobiographical text, written in Montagnais and first published in a bilingual Montagnais/French edition, invites us to rethink the relation between self, nation, and self-narration in this place. Kapesh opens her autobiography by boldly outlining the predicament her people find themselves in as a result of White colonization: “Après

être arrivé sur nos terres, en nous prenant pour nous enseigner son mode de vie à lui, le Blanc a pris du même coup nos enfants pour leur donner une éducation de Blanc, uniquement pour les gâcher et uniquement pour leur faire perdre leur culture et leur langue indienne” (15). What is at stake, above all, is identity and the materials out of which identity is fashioned: language, culture, a way of seeing the world. Had the Whiteman been honest, writes Kapesh, he would have told them that his true objective was to eradicate Native identity so that one day they would become strangers to themselves and to each other (27).

Kapesh's response to the threat of annihilation is to mobilize all the identitarian resources available to her, producing a narrative that integrates autobiography, autohistory, and autoethnography. A text like Kapesh's reminds us not only that autobiography is always also autohistory and autoethnography—all autobiographies are underwritten by the cultural and historical scripts within which their subjects are embedded—but also that the relative visibility of these elements and their role in the life-story are a function of two elements: the autobiographer's relative position within the dominant social order, and the reader's relative familiarity with the history and culture that inform the autobiographer's vision. John Paul Eakin has observed that “the self who writes is written” by the surrounding culture (94), but Kapesh seeks to unwrite a colonial idiom so that a different story of the self and the collectivity might be heard. Like other Native writers, Kapesh is concerned with both exposing colonial oppression and preserving a threatened Native culture, and as strategies of resistance, autoethnography and autohistory serve such ends well. They allow for the articulation of an indigenous “collective identity through the performance of language” (Lionnet 39), establishing a culturally and historically specific vocabulary for the indigenous subject's self-expression. Such strategies also enable a dialogue with the colonizing culture, through self-representations that “engage with the colonizer's own terms” (Pratt 7), and the writing of “Amerindian autohistory” in a manner that draws on “correspondences between Amerindian and non-Amerindian sources” (Sioui xx11), thus facilitating an exchange that is crucial if any change is to take place. In Kapesh's narrative, it is impossible to tell the self's story outside of the collectivity's history, and it is impossible to speak of either without calling upon multiple sources: the past and the present, Native and White ways, the said and the unsaid (Kapesh dramatizes the figure of *le Blanc* whom she makes speak the

colonizer's destructive intent). Writing as a mother, for example, Kapesh attests that "[a]ujourd'hui j'ai des problèmes avec mes enfants" (93). As her narrative makes clear, however, these problems cannot be separated from the history of residential schools and the forced White education that has estranged children from their parents and produced a generation that cannot fit in either world (83). From this personal and collective predicament arises the imperative that shapes Kapesh's autobiography: to reclaim and restore her native culture and language (93).

Yet while Kapesh insists throughout on the cultural and historical specificity of her identity—reiterating “moi, une Indienne”—her articulation of this identity reveals it to be not a fixed entity but a series of negotiations and approximations. An indigenous subject in a post-contact world, Kapesh writes in vindication of her culture, but also acknowledges that it has been forever altered: “ma culture n'existe plus aujourd'hui" (183). Defending Native ways, she also recognizes the need to go outside them: retaining elements of her oral tradition, while deciding to write and agreeing to a translation. And while she declares “Dans mon livre, il n'y a pas de parole de Blanc,” her resistance consists precisely in appropriating this colonial idiom, reclaiming the pejorative “maudite Sauvagesse” in a gesture of self-naming (Postface). Speaking out of and in defense of the specificity of her culture, moreover, Kapesh chooses to frame her autobiography by articulating truths she views as universal; in her preface Kapesh speaks of the lessons her struggle has taught her: the need to maintain hope in the face of adversity, to persevere in following one's convictions. Most importantly, Kapesh concludes, it is now the turn of non-Natives to listen before they lay any further claims to *innu-assia*.

Autobiographical writing serves to remind us that the nation(-state) shows different faces to its differently positioned subjects. When Kapesh looks into the face of *le Blanc*, she sees the anxiety that his racism betrays, an anxiety born of the knowledge that her people lived on the land long before his arrival, and that their culture exceeds his grasp (Postface). When Manon Lafleur offers her *Témoignage d'une Québécoise* (1972), she opens her testimony with another kind of face, a “fesse” (3), the naked behind of the boy who molests her at the age of five, the first in a long line of abusive men that will include colleagues, bosses, and lovers. At first glance, Lafleur's autobiography seems to promise the fusion of individual identity and collective destiny envisioned by Lamonde, Van Rouey-Roux, and Hébert. The

title appears to declare it unequivocally, the publisher is Éditions québécoises, and it features a preface by Léandre Bergeron, the Marxist-nationalist militant who made a name for himself in the early 1970s with publications like *Pourquoi une révolution au Québec*. Since for Bergeron the quintessential Québécois is a member of the proletariat, Lafleur's life-story is a *témoignage d'une Québécoise* precisely because it is "l'histoire de mademoiselle Toulemonde": taught by the nuns to feel guilt and shame about sex, she enters the adult world disastrously unprepared; daughter to parents who have been deformed by poverty themselves, she is traded in the marriage market to a possessive and abusive husband.

It is not surprising, however, that Van Rouey-Roux does not single out the testimony of this Québécoise as exemplary, classifying it instead with other "autobiographies de victimes," and briefly characterizing it as depicting "la vie pénible des femmes de milieu pauvre" (116). The challenge that Lafleur's gendered and classed subject—and the social divisions it reveals—poses for Van Rouey-Roux's unitary model of the nation goes unacknowledged. What is indeed most striking about the autobiography itself is Lafleur's alienation both as a member of her society and as an existential subject. Lafleur's world is a world devoid of the warmth of human contact, and whatever there is of a sense of self can only find expression through the naming of lack: "Moi, je n'étais pas grande-chose. Je n'avais pas d'argent, je ne connaissais personne" (19)—no money, no social status: hence, no being. Lafleur's world is a far cry from the tradition-rich collective universe of "nos semblables" evoked by Van Rouey-Roux, or is it simply its ugly underside? Far from embracing a national collectivity, Lafleur concludes by reflecting on the ills of her society, and expressing her only wish: to be one day granted the most basic right of a human being, to be respected "comme un être humain" (94).

For some, it is a gendered "we" that constitutes the collectivity of the same to which the self belongs. A prominent feminist and social activist in Québec for fifty years until her death in 1993, Simonne Monet Chartrand opens *Ma vie comme rivière* (1982) by speaking of "les femmes québécoises," a group characterized by what she sees as the inescapable similarities in women's intimate lives; in spite of and beyond differences in personality, political views, lifestyles, marital or social status, "le vécu intime des femmes se ressemble beaucoup" (8). Martha Adams would no doubt disagree. When she looks at the world, she sees two kinds of people, not men

and women, but poor and rich; in her home town of Disraéli, “il y avait seulement deux classes de gens: les riches . . . et les pauvres” (119; ellipsis in text). Adams’s autobiography is an account of her life as a prostitute and then the Madame of a brothel. She opens and concludes this account by invoking the principal shaping force of her destiny—poverty—and condemning the social order that made her an outcast.

While Monet Chartrand can say “we women,” and Martha Adams can say “us poor girls,” some subjects seem to have nowhere to go, no collective home to return to at the end of the day. Van Roey-Roux’s invocation of “nos semblables” is comforting indeed, but what if nobody recognizes you as their kin? What if the resemblance is, literally, not there? An emblematic narrative in this regard is Johanne Harrelle’s *Une leçon* (1980).¹⁰ Born and raised in French Montréal but growing up an orphan in a society that refuses to recognize her because of her skin color, Harrelle is left searching for her kin, pleading with different groups: “Aimez-moi, acceptez-moi, maintenant je vous ressemble” (214). Harrelle asks at the outset of her autobiography “Moi . . . oui, qui étais-je . . . ?” (23; ellipses in original), and is throughout her life haunted by mis-recognition¹¹ (she is often mistaken for an “Haïtienne” and ends up perpetuating the lie), suffers self-estrangement, and is plagued by debilitating self-questioning: “chaque pays visité sollicite une image de moi qui rend encore plus urgente la question de mon identité” (8). In the concluding pages Harrelle reflects on the lessons a life lived on the outside has taught her. She lies, she knows, in order not to be “orpheline,” in order to be loved and accepted, in order to belong (211).¹² For while she knows what her “légitime nationalité” is—“CANADA—QUÉBEC—MONTRÉAL; je le répète: mon pays” (215)—she also knows that in the eyes of others, she will always remain a stranger: “Je ne le comprends pas, on ne veut pas me reconnaître, je suis toujours une étrangère” (214).

IV. Être anglais/ Étranglés au Québec

In June 1989 the magazine *Liberté* published a special issue entitled “Strangers in Paradise/Étranglés au Québec” featuring invited essays and testimonials by sixteen “intellectuels anglophones.” The puns in “Étranglés” were, of course, intended, inviting a reflection on whether the equation *être anglais=étranger=étranglé* captures the experience of anglophones in Québec. In their introduction the editors ask: “Être anglais au Québec, cela se peut-il?” It is a question the writers discussed in this section have had to

address. Writing in the aftermath of the first referendum, George Tombs posed the question bluntly: "Are anglophones part of the Quebec 'Nation'?" (188). For Anglo-Quebeckers, Tombs concluded, "the idea of 'belonging' is still adrift somewhere in the distant future" (193). Two texts, both published in 1994, stand at opposite ends of the discourses on Anglo identity and belonging that are my concern here: Gary Caldwell's *La Question du Québec anglais* (a text written in English but published only in French translation) and Elspeth Probyn's *'Love in a Cold Climate': Queer Belongings in Quebec*.¹³ I read Probyn's as a critical autobiography, and Caldwell's as a cultural autobiography—a life-history that features a collectivity rather than an individual as its subject.

Caldwell appropriates the familiar tropes of traditional autobiography—(biological) origins; (linear) chronology and generational continuity; an immutable core identity—to present his polemic about collective identity. To answer the question "who is an Anglo?" Caldwell identifies the cultural group "anglophones" as the mirror image of the cultural group "francophones," both defined by language and descent, the only real criteria according to Caldwell (19). For Caldwell, only the anglophones and francophones so defined constitute real national collectivities with any legitimate claims to belonging; all the rest are mere "population" (12). To tell the collectivity's story, he begins with its confident past—firmly rooted, in his view, in Protestantism and British traditions—then traces its decline as a consequence of what he describes as a neo-liberal project that has left the state so disembodied that it has had to invent a secular religion of rights in order to create a common public sphere (104). With the advent of multiculturalism, according to Caldwell, we see a further erosion of the concept of community, so that what is left is not even "population," but "clientèle."

The plot line of Caldwell's narrative is one dictated by the inevitable ethnic conflict between the two national groups. To resolve such a conflict, the minority Anglo culture, according to Caldwell, has four options: self-pity à la Richler's *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!*; self exile; assimilation; or a return to what he regards as Canadian identity proper. This last option, favoured by Caldwell, would entail creating an independent (Anglo-ethnic) economic infrastructure, and achieving a reconciliation with the majority by rejecting pluralism in favour of a turn towards the past and towards Anglo-British history, with both groups holding on to what he considers their shared heritage: "nos valeurs occidentales de traditions grecque et judéo-chrétienne" (73).

Caldwell concludes his narrative with an exhortation to the young generation of Anglos in the regions to carry on the old Protestant, English-Canadian nationalism of British inspiration (91), and to do battle with that false divinity, neo-liberalism (104-05).

At the other end of this discursive continuum is Elspeth Probyn's extended meditation on belonging in Québec. Inspired by writers like Walter Benjamin, Homi Bhabha, and Giorgio Agamben, Probyn seeks to articulate not a unitary identity, but an "inbetweenness of belonging" (2), a belonging not predicated on the "possession of an intrinsic quality" (3) but inflected by desire and singularity. Thus while Caldwell asks the categorical question *Do you belong?* Probyn inquires *How do you belong?* It is the latter, I believe, that opens up more possibilities. As Gail Scott writes in her own meditation on being an English Quebecker: "The more we grasp that in a sense all of us have a double, perhaps multiple relationship towards the culture that surrounds us, the more we will be able to acknowledge differences, oppressions, hierarchies" (54).

What kinds of belongings, then, in this place?

Probyn argues that an obsession with "la souche" (the source)," imagined as a fixed origin, can asphyxiate (63). But a source can be imagined differently. A source of water is the central image of another autobiography published in 1994, Laurel Buck's *Stream of Memory: Reflections of Megantic County*. Buck's ancestors came to the Megantic region in Québec from Ireland in the 1820s. The actual stream, running under the family's old farmhouse, becomes a trope for the autobiographer's search for her personal and collective identity. When Buck goes back to Megantic after an absence of years, she knows she is home: "I lay in the heart of my origins" (85). In the farmhouse, she recalls, a "[s]ense of place and belonging permeated the atmosphere. It was inconceivable that change could touch it" (27). But change would, of course, touch this place, as change had touched the lives of Buck's parents and grandparents, who were forced by economic hardship to leave Megantic, first for the States, then for Montréal, and as change had touched, before them, the generation of Buck's great-grandparents, who came to Megantic from Ireland. What Buck's journey down that stream of memory teaches her is a lesson about "be/longing" (Philip 22), about the longing to belong that is constitutive of being but is not an

essence or a possession. The experience of identity, Buck discovers, is the experience of difference from oneself (one of her chapter titles reads “The Senior Citizen that I am looks at the Me who was ten”); and home, she realizes, “can be transplanted again and again and again” (17). When Buck visits Ireland for the first time, she comes across an old abandoned house built over a runlet—the Irish model for the Megantic farmhouse built by her grandfather who was, by then, already four generations removed from the old country. This allows Buck an insight into her grandparents’ sense of identity: they were “quintessential exiles,” yet Megantic *was* their home (50).

The turn towards history, then, *pace* Caldwell, can reveal not essence (and inevitable conflict) but inflections of difference, just as Buck’s initially alienating experience of linguistic difference (her first contact with French) eventually gives rise to a vision of solidarity. When Buck returns to the farm, where René Pomerleau’s family now lives, she tries to explain to him her need to revisit the “sucrerie” where her grandfather had hung himself: “I found myself remembering my French” (82). Her interlocutor responds softly “Je comprends,” telling her of his own family history. This is the vision with which the book concludes, one that embraces both “je me souviens” and “je comprends,” insisting on the dual imperative of remembering one’s own complex history while recognizing such complexity in the lives of others.

As with the French-language writings discussed in the previous section, English-language personal narratives in Québec demonstrate a diverse range of self-positionings in relation to the national collectivity. In her contribution to the *Liberté* issue mentioned earlier, writer Merrily Weisbord reflects on her family’s experience in Québec, noting that “Notre relation avec le Québec est à la fois simple et formidablement compliquée” (24). Thinking back to her maternal great-grandfather, who was chief Rabbi of Quebec City, remembering the Jewish quotas in Anglo institutions in earlier decades, and contemplating the future for her daughters whose bilingualism leaves them out in the cold (longing to belong to one side or the other), she nonetheless affirms: “Nous habitons ici, ma famille et moi, et sommes liés au sol, puisque nous y avons, pour le meilleur comme pour le pire, pris racine” (24). As Clifton Ruggles documents in *Outsider Blues* (1996), racism can indeed have a great deal to do with the sense of being “déraciné.” A generically hybrid narrative that seeks to articulate the personal within the social, *Outsider Blues* recalls other Black Canadian autobiographies,

such as Carrie Best's *That Lonesome Road* (1977) and Carol Talbot's *Growing Up Black in Canada* (1984). For Ruggles, as for Kapesh, the distinction is not so much that between Canada and Quebec, as that between a White, racializing, dominant culture, and those othered by it. In the autobiographical title-essay Ruggles writes: "As a Black Canadian with an Amerindian heritage, I go back many generations in the history of North America—[yet] I am still made to feel that I do not belong" (14). While he is made an outsider, Ruggles nonetheless makes his own belonging in Quebec and Canada, drawing on many sources: a "collective Black memory" (4); his family's history "down-home" in Nova Scotia; the mixed race friendships of his growing up years on Barclay Street in Montreal; *Black Pride*; the family he has created with his wife Olivia Rovinescu, a Romanian Jew, and their children (12). Ruggles describes himself moving "chameleon-like through different cultural terrains," seeking to give voice to those "who have remained invisible for too long" (11, 14).

Since identity is formed at the intersection of individual psychological development and community affiliation, to ask "where is home?" is ultimately to interrogate what "ties the emotional to the political" (Thompson xiv). Writing about being an English Quebecker, Gail Scott reflects on the complex character of belonging, suggesting that it involves more than a collectivity's particular and shared version of history, springing from "a deeply emotional place where our personal, social, political cultures meet" (45). In three critical-autobiographical essays in *Spaces like Stairs* (1989) Scott explores the place she writes from. In "Virginia and Colette" her reflections on her friendship with France Théoret become an occasion for interrogating the meaning of being "a minority anglophone in a largely French milieu," in the context of a "mutually antagonistic rapport [existing] between [the two] national cultures" (30-31). Important insights emerge from the experience of that relationship, allowing Scott, for example, to examine that "attraction-repulsion attitude towards the other that is both at the root of racism and of certain *grandes passions*. The other is what we lack—or fear we lack—in self" (31). Such insights, in turn, facilitate the unmaking of the mythologies of both cultures and the shedding of clichés, and open up a space within the selfsame, thereby enabling "the writer's most important tasks: a constant, rigorous criticism of her nation's dominant culture" (30).

"Everyone wants to be themselves," Anita Allen reflects, "but no one

wants to be without some group basis for sustaining identity and moral self-esteem” (123). Successful navigation of the rapids of identity and belonging, Scott adds, involves a necessary relation to the past, for “without memory (the thinking back) there can be no sense of self” (22); but she also points out that any turn or return to the past is necessarily in the service of the present and the future, “creating a conspiracy between remembering and one’s desire to move forward” (20). Belonging is thus the bridge that takes us from the past into the future; one might do well, then, to look both ways before crossing—somebody’s idea of the past might not be your idea of a future.

V. This just in

Identity discourses are the very air we breathe as subjects, they are the medium and idiom of our self-fashionings as both interpellated selves and subjects capable of agency. I have argued here that as identity narratives, autobiographies are continuous with other discourses and practices of identity that populate the social and political sphere. One of the powers that such identity discourses (whether autobiographical or political/polemical) carry is the power to effect that shift from “I” to “we” that is a necessary condition for the articulation of a collectivity. For this reason, the nation, as Anthony Cohen has observed, has to be “mediated through the self” (146). As I write, such (competing) solicitations of the individual citizen, of the individual-as-citizen, continue to define the public discourse in Québec/Quebec. Yesterday, June 7, 2001, we saw the release of the report of the *Commission des états généraux sur la situation et l’avenir de la langue française au Québec*—the committee before whom Yves Michaud presented the brief discussed at the beginning of this paper. One of the principal recommendations of the report is the establishment of a Québec citizenship founded on the French language as “un facteur d’intégration et de participation à la société” (21). Since, for the national narrative to take hold, its representation of the nation has to be experienced as “deeply personal and intimate” (McCrone VIII), one is not surprised to find that the report appeals to the individual citizen to recognize his/her responsibility in safeguarding the French language as the “bien commun” (11).

The individual so solicited, then, cannot but take the nation-narrative personally. I am heartened by the clear insistence, in the estates-general report, on the pluralistic definition of the québécois nation and the impera-

tive to break with “l’approche ethnique” (58). But I also wonder about the selves and self-narratives that disappear in the slippage enacted by the report as it moves from the naming of differences, to the celebration of “l’interpénétration de toutes ces cultures,” only to close with a coded reference to the more monolithic vision of a “vouloir-vivre collectif en français” (12). The dialogue between self and nation in this place, I know, has to continue.

NOTES

- 1 This, then, can be seen as another modality of what Susanna Egan has described as the autobiographical genres of “mirror talk,” in which “interaction between people, among genres, and between writers and readers” becomes constitutive of the experience of subjectivity (12).
- 2 I draw here on Althusser’s understanding of the individual subject as interpellated by ideology and ideological state apparatuses: “I shall then suggest that ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” (174).
- 3 A number of recent publications illustrate the discursive potential of the nexus nation/self-narration. Bell’s *Scotland’s Century* is an exemplary instance of the mobilization of personal narratives for the project of nation-building. While Bell leaves unexamined the question of how one could construct a singular nation from the widely diverse life experiences his subjects report, studies such as Watson’s *Of Self and Nation* and Hunsaker’s *Autobiography and National Identity* turn to individual autobiographies in order to explore precisely such questions. I address similar issues in “The Subject and the Nation” and “Minnie Aodla Freeman’s *Life*.”
- 4 Lamonde’s recent bibliographic study cites 874 titles published between 1980 and 2000. The interested reader will find discussions of a wide range of autobiographical texts from Québec in the critical studies by Van Rouey-Roux, Hébert, Raoul, Boudreau, and Hunsaker (who has a chapter on Pierre Vallières’s 1968 *Nègres blancs d’Amérique*). Journal articles tend to favour the more literary or canonical writers (many of them women), such as Claire Martin, Jovette Marchessault, and France Théoret.
- 5 See Elmer and Abramson for the ways in which ethnicity, while functioning as an organizing concept of the national question in Québec, has been “at once ubiquitous and absent” (13).
- 6 K.P. Stich, for example, writes that autobiographies “give an inner life to individual Canadians and add life to Canada’s psyche or soul” (x).
- 7 However, feminist scholarship on women’s autobiography in Québec—echoing Claire Martin’s critique of her society in two compelling autobiographical volumes *Dans un gant de fer* (1965) and *La joue droite* (1966)—has problematized the relation of the gendered subject to her collectivity; see, for example, Raoul; Green; and the special issue of

- Voix et Images* on “Effets autobiographiques au féminin” edited by Havercroft and LeBlanc. For a more general feminist critique of the nationalist project in Québec see the essays in the volume edited by Lamoureux, Maillé, and Sève.
- 8 Hébert is here quoting Jean-Charles Harvey, *Les Demi-civilisés* (Montréal: 1968) 39.
 - 9 National and nationalist politics enter Lafleur’s narrative with a poignant irony: she speculates that Monsieur L., the employer who rapes her, was never apprehended because of his family contacts—a brother in the Ministry of Education, and another in the Parti Québécois (33).
 - 10 Space does not permit me to examine a related auto/biographical representation, Claude Jutra’s largely autobiographical film *À tout prendre* (1966), in which he and Harrelle play themselves.
 - 11 Leigh Gilmore (drawing on Althusser, Foucault, and de Lauretis) coins “nonrecognition” to refer to an act of resistance, the subject’s refusal to recognize him/herself “within dominant representations and self-representations” (20). Harrelle’s sense of being mis-recognized by her society—her awareness that others’ interpellations of her do not coincide with her self-knowledge—is perhaps a necessary first step towards such resistance.
 - 12 For my exploration of lying as a strategy of self-construction in another Québec autobiography, see “The Interpellated Subject Lies Back.”
 - 13 The text was subsequently integrated into Probyn’s *Outside Belongings*.

WORKS CITED

- Ackermann, Robert John. *Heterogeneities: Race, Gender, Class, Nation, and State*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1996.
- Adams, Martha. *Martha Adams par Martha Adams*. Avec la collaboration de Jean Laurac. Montréal: Editions du Jour, 1972.
- Allen, Anita L. “Forgetting Yourself.” *Feminists Rethink the Self*. Ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers. Boulder, Colorado: Westview P, 1997. 104-23.
- Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation).” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review P, 1971. 127-86.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 1991.
- Appiah, Anthony K. “Introduction.” *The Seductions of Biography*. Ed. Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff. New York: Routledge, 1996. 9-11.
- Bell, Colin. *Scotland’s Century: An Autobiography of the Nation*. Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1999.
- Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: U of Miami P, 1971.
- Best, Carrie. *That Lonesome Road: The Autobiography of Carrie M. Best*. New Glasgow, N.S.: Clarion, 1977.
- Bhabha, Homi. “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation.” *Nation and Narration*. Ed. Homi Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990. 291-322.
- Bouchard, Gérard. *La nation québécoise au futur et au passé*. Montréal: VLB, 1999.
- Bouchard, Lucien. “Allocation à l’occasion de la démission du premier ministre du Québec.” http://www.premier.gouv.qc.ca/premier_ministre/ (Site officiel du premier ministre du Québec). 11 January 2001.

- Boudreau, Diane. *Histoire de la littérature amérindienne au Québec*. Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1993.
- Buck, Laurel M. *Stream of Memory: Reflections of Megantic County*. Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue: Shoreline, 1994.
- Caldwell, Gary. *La Question du Québec anglais*. Trans. Lise Castonguay. Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1994.
- Chartrand, Simonne Monet. *Ma vie comme rivière: récit autobiographique 1939-1949*. Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1982.
- Cohen, Anthony P. "Peripheral Vision: Nationalism, National Identity and the Objective Correlative in Scotland." *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values*. Ed. Anthony P. Cohen. London: Routledge, 2000. 145-69.
- Commission des états généraux sur la situation et l'avenir de la langue française au Québec. *L'Avenir du français au Québec: une nouvelle approche pour de nouvelles réalités*. Forum nationale les 5 et 6 juin 2001.
http://www.etatsgeneraux.gouv.qc.ca/pdf/document_consultation_2.pdf
- Eakin, Paul John. *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.
- Egan, Susanna. *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1999.
- Elmer, Greg, and Bram Abramson. "Excavating Ethnicity in Québécois." *Quebec Studies* 23 (Spring 1997): 13-28.
- Freiwald, Bina Toledo. "The Subject and the Nation: Canadian and Israeli Women's Autobiographical Writing." *Precarious Present/Promising Future? Ethnicity and Identities in Canadian Literature*. Ed. D. Schaub, J. Kulyk Keefer, R. Sherwin. Jerusalem: Magnes P, 1996. 10-31.
- . "The Interpellated Subject Lies Back: Angeline Hango's *Truthfully Yours*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 58 (Spring 1996): 36-59.
- . "Minnie Aodla Freeman's Life Among the Qallunaat and the Ethics of Subjectivity." *Postmodernism and the Ethical Subject*. Ed. Barbara Gabriel and Suzan Ilcan. Montréal: McGill-Queen's UP, forthcoming.
- Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.
- Green, Mary Jean. "Private Life and Collective Experience in Quebec: The Autobiographical Project of France Théoret." *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 17.1 (Winter 1993): 119-30.
- Grossman, David. "Fifty is a Dangerous Age: After half a century, the nation changes in unexpected ways." *The New Yorker* 20 April 1998. 54-58.
- Gunn, Janet Varner. *Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1982.
- Harrelle, Johanne. *Une leçon*. Montréal: Stanké, 1980.
- Havercroft, Barbara, and Julie LeBlanc. "Effets autobiographiques au féminin." Special issue of *Voix et images* 22.1 (1996).
- Hébert, Pierre avec la collaboration de Marilyn Baszczynski. *Le journal intime au Québec: structure, évolution, réception*. Québec: Fides, 1988.
- Hébert, Pierre. "Pour une évolution de la littérature personnelle au Québec: l'exemple du journal intime." *Revue d'histoire littéraire du Québec et du Canada français* 9 (1985): 13-37.

- Hunsaker, Steven V. *Autobiography and National Identity in the Americas*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999.
- Kapesh, An Antane (Anne André). *Eukuan nin matshimanitu innu-iskueu. Je suis une maudite sauvagesse*. Trans. José Mailhot, Anne-Marie André, and André Mailhot. Ottawa: Leméac, 1976.
- Kapesh, An Antane. "Témoignage." *Rencontre*, SAA [Secrétariat aux Affaires autochtones] 3.1 (1981): 14.
- Lafleur, Manon. *Témoignage d'une Québécoise*. Avec Préface par Léandre Bergeron. Montréal: Editions québécoises, 1972.
- Lamonde, Yvan. *La littérature personnelle au Québec (1980-2000)*. Montréal: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2000.
- Lamonde, Yvan. *Je me souviens: la littérature personnelle au Québec (1860-1980)*. Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1983.
- Lamoureux, Diane, Chantal Maillé, and Micheline Sève, ed. *Malaises identitaires: échanges féministes autour d'un Québec incertain*. Montréal: Les Editions du Remue-ménage, 1999.
- Liberté*. Special issue "Strangers in Paradise/Étranglés au Québec." 31.3 (June 1989).
- Lionnet, Françoise. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.
- McCrone, David. *The Sociology of Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Michaud, Yves. "Notes d'intervention de Yves Michaud à la Commission des états généraux sur la langue française." <http://www.etatsgeneraux.gouv.qc.ca/pdf-memoires/michaud-188.pdf>
- Parizeau, Jacques. "Un projet qui leur ressemble." *Le Devoir* 20-21 (May 1995): 7.
- Philip, Marlene NorbeSe. *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture 1984-1992*. Stratford, Ontario: The Mercury P, 1992.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Probyn, Elspeth. "Love in a Cold Climate": *Queer Belongings in Quebec*. Concordia University and Université de Montréal: Groupe de recherche sur la citoyenneté culturelle/Research Group on Cultural Citizenship, 1994.
- . *Outside Belongings*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Raoul, Valerie. *Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Quebec*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993.
- Ruggles, Clifton, and Olivia Rovinescu. *Outsider Blues: A Voice from the Shadows*. Halifax: Fernwood, 1996.
- Schwartzwald, Robert. "'Symbolic' Homosexuality, 'False Feminine', and the Problematics of Identity in Québec." *Fear of a Queer Planet*. Ed. Michael Warner. U of Minnesota P, 1993. 264-99.
- Scott, Gail. *Spaces like Stairs*. Toronto: Women's P, 1989.
- Sioui, Georges E. *For an Amerindian Autohistory*. Trans. Sheila Fischman. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1992.
- Stich, K.P. "Introduction." *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature*. Ed. K. P. Stich. Ottawa: U Ottawa P, 1988. ix-xii.
- Talbot, Carol. *Growing Up Black in Canada*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1984.
- Thompson, Becky, and Sangeeta Tyagi. "Introduction. Storytelling as Social Conscience: The Power of Autobiography." *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*. Ed. Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi. New York: Routledge, 1996. ix-xvii.

- Tombs, George. "The Anglophone and Quebec's Two Nationalisms." *Boundaries of Identity: A Quebec Reader*. Ed. William Dodge. Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992. 188-93.
- Van Roey-Roux, Françoise. *La littérature intime du Québec*. Montréal: Boréal Express, 1983.
- Watson, C.W. *Of Self and Nation: Autobiography and the Representation of Modern Indonesia*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2000.
- Weisbord, Merrily. "Nous habitons ici." Trans. François Hébert. *Liberté* 31.3 (June 1989): 21-24.



Post-mortem

Their meeting lasted three years
to be exact. They exchanged bones,

overlapped with skin, heaving
with the same breath day after day.

The night held them in frenzy
as their blood leaked out in the dark.

They pulsed with glued mouth,
rubbed against each other

In the momentum of their beating hearts;
then something came upon the scene—

A hard thing with minuscule eyes:
it stood without bone or flesh—

It mirrored their dissatisfaction;
it rubbed sandpaper against their eyes,

Scraping away the light and the dark.
soon they were left in the void—

In silence they whispered to each other
words that neither could understand,

And they quickly bared teeth
holding on to thunder and lightning—

And screamed out an answer
that finally set them apart.

from Non-Existent Poems

Let me tell you what's
That sultry September broke
Volte-faces, blowing un
Precariously cool and the
Us turning red a leaf
Color overnight, let me
The death of the year
Small accumulating heaps, first
To swell historically, my life
Upon yours. Have you noticed
Unpredictably with as
Have you not noticed a double
Equally pleasure and pain
This seduction of the senses
Not so much as nothing?
Possibly three thousand years
Did we dance the dance, the
Time we thought we'll keep
Except as God wills, attuning
His notation preserves, on some
Shore we'll paint, we'll write
We find and God, God
Instead of sitting in our
Obligation came and the world
Of our acts, whispers, rumors,
Thousand times a day my heart
A thousand thousand times a
Not that—it's the bridge you
Also refuse except if you
It is true new skin grows upon
Yet here we are crash-landing
And I do not know how

on my mind now
after several not so subtle
naturally hot then
dogwood which teased
at a time changed
tell you that I feel
falling among the trees in
voices in the fugue we expect
falling catastrophically
pleasure or happiness comes
little premeditation as sorrow,
edged loveliness proliferating
in this *dunya*, this world
which means nothing, no
Just three years ago or
ago for a handful of days
mad dance of the *dunya*, this
each other safe, no leaf will fall
ourselves to the perfect pitch
high mountain or quiet
such truth and wisdom as
will comfort us awhile.
safety we acted when the
still feeds me back echoes
dreams malignant; a thousand
breaks but it is not that—
day my heart melts but it is
would not cross, this I
are with me. Ah beloved
wounds conferred by the world
in the orange hell of October
to contemplate the scars.

Nega Mezlekia Outside the Hyena's Belly

Notes from *the Hyena's Belly*, Nega Mezlekia's memoir of growing up in Ethiopia, won justified acclaim when it was published in 2000. It also aroused controversy when Anne Stone, a Montreal editor and novelist, came forward to say that she had "authored" substantial parts of the Governor-General's-Award-winning text and deserved acknowledgment (Richler, "I Will Bury [You]"), something that Mezlekia vigorously denied. Mezlekia stands accused of violating what Philippe Lejeune has called the autobiographical pact: the implied understanding that in autobiography, writer, narrator, and protagonist, all referred to in the first person, can be identified with the name on the cover of the book. The purported violation does not concern the veracity of the memories (as in the case against Rigoberta Menchú, accused of not having been present at scenes she claims to have witnessed), but rather the relation of the author to the memories. I am in no position to determine the relative truth of Stone's and Mezlekia's claims or even to hazard an opinion. It is possible nonetheless, without prejudging the outcome of the legal controversy, to ask, "Who invented Nega Mezlekia?"

Stone's and Mezlekia's rival claims are inevitably overshadowed by charges of racism and sexism. Noah Richler writes of Nega Mezlekia's "quite possibly culturally rooted chauvinism, and contempt of the seemingly weak" ("So Just Who"). David Widginton, publisher of Cumulus Press, protests against the discrimination suffered by emerging writers and small presses. Karen Connelly, on the other hand, a member of the jury

that awarded Nega Mezlekia the Governor-General's Award for Non-Fiction, finds that the scandal, pitting as it does a black man against a white woman, expresses the ugliest emotions generated by race-feeling. Is this a story about two cultures and their different attitudes to truth and storytelling? a story about intolerable power differentials between genders and races? a dispute about property rights? or a bitter example of the enigma of arrival? It may, of course, be all these, for a story about a refugee given refuge can still be about treachery, and a story of guilt still involve unjust victimization. The scandal has the feel of a cautionary parable, a quality it shares with other, similar disputes: for instance, the plagiarism charges against the French African novelists Yambo Ouologuem and Calixthe Beyala (Miller 216-45; Gallimore 205-10); the accusation of mendacity against Rigoberta Menchú (Arias); or the admission by Alex Haley that his genealogical memoir *Roots* borrowed improperly from Harold Courlander's novel *The African* (Taylor).

If Anne Stone believes that she wrote substantial parts of the book, and it is hard to imagine why she would lie (which is not the same as saying that what she believes is true), it must be that she thinks her words made it possible for the tale to be told. According to the *National Post*, her lawyers allege that "Mr. Mezlekia's ideas and spoken words have been expressed into written words by our client" (Richler, "I Will Bury"). Stone implies that her relation to the text is like that of Alex Haley to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* ("Whose book is this?" Malcolm had to ask [qtd. in Sanders 456]) or Elizabeth Burgos-Debray to *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. According to others, like Gordon Platt and Rosemary Sullivan, the voice of the story, "uniform, personal, compelling and genuine," necessarily points to someone who lived the events narrated (see Gessell). "I don't believe," declared Penguin publisher Cynthia Good, "that the tone or voice of the book, the extraordinary life that is revealed in humour and drama, in event and passion, could be written by anybody who did not experience it" (see Posner, "Publisher Disputes"). In other words, Mezlekia's defenders point to something called the voice of the text to prove that the self that experienced the events narrated is necessarily the self that writes those events. They believe the words do not just belong to Mezlekia; the words *are* Mezlekia.

The fraught relation of authorship to selfhood surely explains what Richler calls Mezlekia's "particular obsession with 'authorship'" (Richler, "So Just Who?"). Indeed, Stone and Mezlekia are equally concerned with authorship, on which they stake a large measure of selfhood. She says, "after

the book went to Penguin [without any acknowledgement of her role] I felt like a ghost” (Richler, “So Just Who?”), while he takes pride in the fact that “People already recognize my face, and name” (Richler, “I Will Bury You”), and reacts as if Stone seeks to take that face and name away. Because authorship is at once a kind of intellectual property subject to contestation and a deep expression of selfhood, Mezlekia and Stone are both caught in a bind. She is not certain that anyone ever authors a text, but wants acknowledgement for her part nonetheless, while the “particular obsession with ‘authorship’” that he betrays is taken as proof that he never had the authority he claims.

Richler, in his defense of Stone, says that “no one disputes whose stories these are”: Stone merely found them, drew them out, and put them down (“So Just Who”). Marni Jackson writes that, “No matter how much Stone helped him with the language, this is his story.” Mezlekia, however, is leery of any implication that he could not speak until Stone gave him a voice. When he insists that the story narrated in *Notes from the Hyena’s Belly* is his (see Richler, “I Will Bury”), he does not believe, any more than Stone, that the writing is incidental. His claim is to more than the memories of surviving to manhood in Ethiopia that the narration relies on, to more even than the voice of the narration; he lays claim to the words themselves. Stone limits her claim to a request for acknowledgement (see Richler, “Behind All Good Writers”), but that is more than Mezlekia feels he can concede. In the relation that she presents as something more than that of editor to writer, he presumably sees the fearful shadow of the ethnographer’s relation to the native informant. The ethnographer owes her tale to a living person and takes it from an oral and private context in order to make it available to a reading public. Ethnographies commonly have two names on the cover: the name of the informant in the title—*Poppie Nongena* (a pseudonym), *Nisa, Aman*—and the name of the ethnographer listed as the writer: Elsa Joubert, Marjorie Shostak, Virginia Lee Barnes and Janice Boddy. Mezlekia insists that he is not merely the source of the story, but a writer with a literary career ahead of him whose own inspiration comes from Eduardo Galeano, Gabriel García Márquez, and Isabel Allende (see Posner, “Lion of Ethiopia”).

Behind the controversy, especially as originally framed in the pages of the *National Post*, is not just a doubt over who wrote the text but also a doubt over whether Mezlekia *could* have written it: Gatehouse and Richler leave Mezlekia’s spelling mistakes uncorrected and signal them with the word

“sic” in parentheses. It is presumably this challenge to his status as a writer, felt as a challenge to his very self, that so angers Mezlekia. He complains bitterly that Stone never believed his work would “see the light of day” (Richler, “So Just Who?”). Such doubts concerning literacy and authorship have always haunted black writers: Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass both faced the near-impossible task of proving at once the authenticity of their experience (making it ring true to white audiences and readers) and the originality of their narratives (making it their own and not the work of their white abolitionist backers), two goals that were often mutually exclusive (see Stepto). As William Andrews explains, “By the early nineteenth century black narrators realized that to assume the privileged status of author in the literary discourse of white America, they would have to write self-authorizing, that is, self-authenticating, narratives” (23).

Clearly Nega Mezlekia has been better able than most newly arrived immigrants for whom English is not a first language to understand what constitutes literary authority in his new homeland and to achieve it; yet, just as clearly, there are rules and responses that he has found more difficult to fathom. The outside position from which he looks back on his life in the hyena’s belly must seem not as safe as it once did. I am reminded of the bitterness generated by the visit to Montreal in 1995 of Taslima Nasrin, the feminist novelist who had to flee Bangladesh after receiving death threats. Expecting something of a hero’s welcome or at least sympathetic ears, she encountered instead hostile crowds of Canadian Muslims who challenged her interpretation of the Koran, and she received severe criticism in the French-language press for the harm that her provocation was doing to cultural tolerance and for what columnist Nathalie Petrowski regarded as her grandstanding (see Abley). On her first trip to North America, Nasrin was taken off-guard and very shaken. The “West” was a more complicated place than she had imagined when first inspired by Western models to seek her own liberation.

Whatever the truth of the controversy surrounding *Notes from the Hyena’s Belly*, it is significant that Stone and Mezlekia agree that the story lies not in the memories but in the written words. Autobiographical theory, and critical theory more generally, have rendered us skeptical about any suggestion that the past or the self exist somewhere apart from the narrative told of the past and of the self. The autobiographical self is brought into being by the narration and not the other way around. The Ethiopian boyhood that is the

subject of *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* did not simply exist in the author's memory, waiting to be told; it had to be invented in the course of writing. That invention presumes an understanding of language and of narrative conventions, of literary authority and audience expectations. As Kenneth J. Gergen writes, "To report on one's memories is not so much a matter of consulting mental images as it is engaging in a sanctioned form of telling" (90).

For the purposes of this discussion, let us distinguish between three selves implied by the text, roughly corresponding to what Leigh Gilmore refers to as "the *I* who lived, the *I* in the text, and the *I* who writes *I*" (93): we will call the boy who grows to manhood in the book "Nega" and the adult narrator of Nega's story "Mezlekia," and reserve the name "Nega Mezlekia" for the man who has published the book. The autobiography for which Nega Mezlekia won the Governor-General's Award presents Mezlekia's telling of Nega's story. My question "Who invented Nega Mezlekia?" can now be phrased as "What conditions made it possible for Nega's life to be a story and for Mezlekia to tell it?"

Nega Mezlekia asserts the unity of author and subject, but in this essay I will pry them apart, not in order to back Stone against Mezlekia, but to show that the division of the self implicit in all autobiography and in textuality more generally is refracted and compounded in any literary depiction of Africa. The position in which the controversy has placed Nega Mezlekia—having to assert the autonomy of his literary creation, yet never able to be as self-sufficient as he might wish—is a position the text itself performs, and would have performed if Anne Stone had never seen it. The fissures in the text do not necessarily constitute internal evidence for dual authorship. They do not arise from the "cloven tongue" that Thomas Couser diagnoses as characteristic of collaborative autobiography "because it conflates two consciousnesses . . . in one undifferentiated voice" (208), but derive instead from the division in the self of the migrant and the ambivalence inevitable to the literary representation of Africa. Of course, not every postcolonial autobiography and not every African text arouses such controversy (although, as I have already suggested, a remarkable number do). Nor can we attribute the scandal as it unfolded in the Canadian press to the fissures within the text. We can say, however, that the public controversy and the textual fissures both arise from the contradictions inherent in the dynamic of African autobiography.

I

According to Stone, the text is the product of collaboration; Mezekia insists the story is his alone. It is tempting to read the two sides of the controversy along gender lines and to see Stone as upholding what feminist theorists of autobiography, such as Stanton, Brodzki and Schenck, and Friedman, refer to as a relational model of the self, associated with the female self and opposed to the autonomous, individualist self which, it is argued, has characterized male autobiographical writing in the Western literary tradition—think of Augustine, Rousseau, Franklin, and Thoreau. According to the theorists of autobiography, the autonomy claimed by male autobiographers for a self who stands alone before God or the world (or the illusion of such autonomy) is not possible for the female subject whose subordinate position has taught her to understand her life in relation to others.

The postcolonial or minority subject, like the female subject and unlike the hegemonic white male self, is also usually defined in relation to others. According to Regina Blackburn, the self of African American autobiography

is not an individual with a private career, but a soldier in a long-historic march toward Canaan. The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members. It is a conscious political identity, drawing sustenance from the past experience of the group. (2)

Mezekia's story invites being read as just such a story of the nation—Nega's aspirations as a young man were to work for Ethiopia's freedom and modernization; his ordeal as a soldier, a refugee, and a prisoner is Ethiopia's tragedy. The title, or at least the subtitle, "Memories of my Ethiopian Boyhood," resembles the titles of other African autobiographies, black and occasionally also white—Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir*, Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History*, Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman*, Mark Mathabane's *Kaffir Boy*, Christopher Hope's *White Boy Running*, and Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa*—in referring to a synecdochical self who shares an identity with many.

Nega Mezekia has insisted, however, both within and without the covers of the book, on his autonomy as a writer. In her defence of him in the *Globe and Mail*, Connelly remarks on how surprising it is that the book acknowledges only his editor at Penguin and the Canada Council. Something is missing, she believes, for the text cannot be the product of "only one person" but must belong to "an entire community and time." In this she echoes Stone, who also says, "Authorship is an industry concept. It doesn't identify or see the communities from which a work comes—and it doesn't have to be a writer's community. It's the community that informs the work"

(qtd. in Richler, "So Just Who?"). As Connelly reminds us, the claim to self-sufficiency is not a crime, but neither is it without significance. Nega Mezlekia's need to declare that the text is his alone, what Richler calls his "ruthless ambition" ("So Just Who?"), may have its roots in a fear that anything less than full authorship implies a subordinate or minoritized self, perhaps even a feminized self. Marni Jackson compares the process of editing to midwifery or to the help of a vet in delivering a calf, implying a female, even a bovine, writer (and incidentally giving an entirely new meaning to the title *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*). But Mezlekia's narrative authority derives most emphatically from his location outside the hyena's belly. His memoir is not a communal story of the dispossessed but the tale of a survivor. Mezlekia is only able to tell his tale because he can separate his hopes for himself from Ethiopia. Nega came to Canada alone and, as Mezlekia confesses on the final page, "severed all contact with my friends and relations in Ethiopia" (350), with dire consequences for those he abandoned. The confession expresses Mezlekia's sense of guilt but also Nega's ambivalence about family and nation.

Jean Starobinski suggests that the urge to write autobiography always derives from a radical break, a conversion or new life, that makes it possible for the writer's self to look from outside on the self that lived the life (261). Nega grew into Mezlekia, the adult who can tell the boy's story, but Mezlekia can only tell the story because a break occurred that made Nega's life a complete whole available for narration. The title itself, *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*, implies a division between inside and out, which is a distinction between there and here, then and now, boy and man. The break, of course, coincides with the departure from Ethiopia and the arrival in Canada and corresponds to a familiar break between tradition and modernity.

Georges Gusdorf famously argues that autobiography originated in Europe in the Renaissance and received its form at the same time as the novel, during the Enlightenment. Conveniently leaving aside Augustine and thinking only of Montaigne and Rousseau, we can say that only at that particular historical conjuncture, coinciding with the rise of the private bourgeois individual as the privileged subject of history, did it become possible for an author to assume that his story, his psychology and private experience, could interest perfect strangers (the male pronoun is intended). The author of Rousseau's *Confessions* could trust that his private life and inner soul were of as much interest to a larger reading public as to himself because he could assume that others, too, knew themselves to be first and foremost their inner selves.

Autobiography, of course, is no longer necessarily Western or bourgeois or neocolonial, any more than the novel or modernity is. I only rehearse this history in order to point out that the question of “Who invented Mezlekia?” is more properly a question of “How does Mezlekia acquire the authority to make a claim on the interest of strangers?” Autobiography fulfils an impulse that Laurence Breiner describes as “as universal as self-pity” (3): everyone everywhere has a story. Not everyone, however, has a story s/he can publish. In his claim to an autonomous self and to literary originality, Nega Mezlekia follows deliberately in the line of Western male autobiographers (how much those male selves ever achieved the autonomy and self-sufficiency they claimed is, of course, another matter). Mezlekia’s authority, however, is not and cannot be that of Rousseau or Wordsworth: the interest of his narrative lies not in the deepest wellsprings of the self that it brings to light but in what he has to say about growing up in Ethiopia and what he has witnessed of the havoc wreaked by the Cold War in the Horn of Africa. In other words, Mezlekia’s authority derives from the way his experience is different from that of his readers. The achievement of Mezlekia’s narrative is that it sees how the land where he grew up is actually strange.

Recognizing strangeness requires imagining readers for whom the events he narrates have the force of novelty, inevitably an audience outside Ethiopia. Harrowing and tragic as they are, Nega’s experiences are in no way unusual. Among Ethiopians, his story would presumably be too ordinary to warrant attention. *Notes from the Hyena’s Belly*, contrary to what Connelly implies, is not written within the context of a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This text, by an African for a western audience, is Made in Canada. The criteria of the Governor’s General Awards stipulate only that a writer be a citizen or landed immigrant, not that the text be Canadian as well (whatever that might mean). Mezlekia’s narrative, however, would qualify on all counts: it could only have been written because he left Ethiopia.

To say that coming to Canada was a necessary condition for the invention of Nega and Mezlekia is not to diminish the achievement of the book. Coming to Canada does not immediately confer a subject upon one nor give one a voice. It must be a common experience among refugees who have come through similar horrors that their story remains incommunicable because it is beyond the imagination of anyone around them. Even where psychic health requires that they tell their story, the translation of the story into a form that others can receive may elude them. Mezlekia’s narrative,

conscious of the strangeness of what it describes, also relies on the assumption that there is something he shares with his readers. His story is only possible because he is able to leave the dreaded hyena's belly behind and join readers where they are.

Although he writes about tyranny and war, and explicitly implicates the Trudeau government in the support of African dictatorships, Mezlekia is not writing *testimonio*, the Latin American genre of memoir that publicizes atrocity in the name of justice. Doris Sommer writes that "[t]he testimonial 'I' does not invite us to identify with it. We are too different, and there is no pretense here of universal or essential human experience" (108). Nega's experience is far from universal—in its strangeness lies its interest—but in order to judge what Nega has suffered, Mezlekia must appeal to universal notions of humanity. He says, "I was no different from my fellow man" (291). Rousseau, who can boast, "I am made like no one I have seen; I believe I am made like no one that exists" (33; my translation), assumes that his difference from everyone else is what makes him the same as his readers. Mezlekia makes the opposite assumption: that he is the same as his readers *in spite of* the difference of his experience.

Notes from the Hyena's Belly is closest to the genre of the Chinese Cultural Revolution memoir, examples of which include Liang Heng's *Son of the Revolution*, Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*, and Anchee Min's *Red Azalea*. The characteristics of the Cultural Revolution memoir are that the author, who claims no special status except as a survivor, tells a world audience in the world language, English, which is his or her second language, about the horrors that occurred in the homeland which he or she has left behind, horrors whose inhumanity is brought home by appealing to notions of universal human rights. It is true that Mezlekia shows no awareness of these other memoirs of survival. When he locates his experience in a larger global context, he deliberately limits that context to Europe: the Red Terror during the rule of Mengistu in the late 70's, when 100,000 were killed, was, he tells us, "a horror surpassed only in the darkest days of Nazi Germany and, perhaps, Stalin's purges of 1937" (295), a description which ignores Kampuchea and China (not to mention Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and the list goes on). Elsewhere, however, Mezlekia does refer to Ethiopia's "killing fields" (300), an explicit reference to experiences other than European ones that have been brought to the world's attention.

Cultural Revolution memoirs are not postcolonial as that term is commonly understood. Their primary concern is not with resisting Western

hegemony but with appealing to values presumed to be universal. Most Ethiopian literature is written in Amharic, the language with an ancient literary tradition that Nega Mezlekia started to learn as a youngster beginning school but which, given the uncongenial conditions in which it was taught, he never took to. Mezlekia, like the authors of Cultural Revolution memoirs, finds the freedom and the ambition to express himself in English, a language that is not his own but that is also not the colonizer's, and that is valued because it gives access to an international audience and promises a means of judging the cruelty and absurdity of the world in which he came to adulthood.

Ethiopia has in common with China that, while it was frequently at the mercy of imperialist machinations and was occupied for a brief time by Italy, it was never colonized. Indeed, both Ethiopia and China have imperialist and colonizing histories of their own. Jijiga, the town where Nega Mezlekia was born, is a frontier outpost where his father had been sent as part of the Amhara colonial administration imposed on Somali nomads after Ethiopia's conquest of the Ogaden, which occurred in this century in collusion with the European imperial powers. Ethiopia has, of course, suffered the body blows to self-image and self-understanding that all Africans and, for that matter, the Chinese, too, have suffered, particularly in the last two centuries, as they have been fitted disadvantageously into a world order not of their own devising. Nonetheless, precisely because China escaped direct and extended colonization, Chinese students have, at different times in the twentieth century, been able to appeal to Western eyes and to a notion of universal modernity in order to criticize the emperor, the warlords, or the Communists. Mezlekia and the Ethiopian students of his generation have done the same. Writing for the West makes it possible to express some things that would otherwise remain unimaginable, even as it inevitably closes doors and makes other things difficult.

II

The title, *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*, implies a doubled position: what was once inside is now outside. The division in the text, at once in the hyena's belly and under western eyes, constitutes a claim to authenticity (these notes come from the horse's mouth) and to objectivity (the author joins readers on safe ground). The division is mirrored in the division we have already made between Nega and Mezlekia. Nega, the boy who cannot understand the events that sweep him up and make nonsense of his world,

finds appropriate life-lessons in the fables his mother told, which he recalls at important moments as he moves outward in ever widening circles: first from Jijiga to the Ogaden, then to the capital Addis Ababa, and finally outside Ethiopia altogether. Mezeleki the narrator, on the other hand, starts from the world centre that is the West and looks back to the periphery, with an historical frame and a political awareness that bring Ethiopia into a sharper focus than anything available to the boy can.

The split between Nega and Mezeleki that makes the narrative possible produces a split within Mezeleki himself, who narrates in two very different, even irreconcilable styles. One readily distinguished voice makes itself heard in the following passage, obviously plagiarized from some reference work:

Ethiopia has the largest number of domesticated animals in Africa, eighth in the world. About 27 million cattle, 42 million sheep, 17 million goats and millions of camels roam the countryside, taking up 61 percent of the land. This is a mixed blessing for the country. . . . The pastoral regions can support only 21 percent of the cattle population, 25 percent of the sheep and 75 percent of the goat herd. (118-19)

Alongside this advocate of population control, a very different voice explains what all those camels and sheep have to say to each other. "Camels don't read Amharic, as they are uncivilized," so when it comes to reading placards carried by demonstrators, they need the help of sheep:

A sheep nibbling a banana peel decided to help. It read the placards with one quick glance. Looking up at the curious camel, the sheep pronounced, "B-a-a-a-a-d!" (105)

The first voice—let us call him Mezeleki the Engineer—locates his story against a background of Ethiopian politics, which might be summarized as the struggle for modernization, motivated by a desire to join the larger world but sabotaged by the Cold War, when the larger world toyed with the desires and plans of Ethiopians. This voice favours broad generalizations based on comparative history: "If the rural land policy had led to the demise of the feudal lords, the urban land policy effectively wiped out the nascent middle class" (126) and offers historicist explanations for events: "These areas would have weathered the bad times had it not been for three significant factors" (117). To explain Ethiopia, he gives us statistics on government spending (318), comparative crop yields (322), tree cover and soil erosion (118), and armaments supplied by the Soviets (201).

The second voice, the one that reports conversations among animals,

obviously works with a very different frame, one derived from the animal fables Nega's mother told. In honour of what seems the debt to Ben Okri's magic realist novel *The Famished Road*, let us call this narrator Mezlekia the Spirit-child. The opening of the narrative—"In 1958, the year of the paradox, I was born in Ethiopia, in a hot and dusty city called Jijiga, which destroyed its young" (5)—with its emphasis on birth and on the paradox of birth that a new soul should enter an already existing world, proclaims its affinity to the literary mode of magic realism. Nega's birth is set against the backdrop of the dying of the queen in the capital, and we are led to expect an allegory of the nation, perhaps in the style of *Midnight's Children*. Mezlekia's home, however, was never the centre even of his own world but was "lost somewhere in the tangled paths of domestic Jijiga" (3). Jijiga, like García Márquez's Macondo or the slum in *The Famished Road*, is a mapless, timeless labyrinth on the periphery of the periphery. Morality is upheld elsewhere, in the northern highlands, "the seat of all great kings, the place that holds all the virtues of the old kingdom intact" (48). Mezlekia's father, called simply "Dad," like Azaro's father in Okri's novel, always feels that he lives in an "Islamized east, with an incomplete knowledge of the ethical conduct of pure Amharas" (48).

This doubly marginalized perspective proves well-suited for expressing the mixed truth of Ethiopia, at once a world apart, albeit no longer self-sufficient, and a part of the modern world, however peripheral. The narrative's double-voicedness reflects the uneven development which has left Ethiopia uneasily perched between modes of production, even between worlds. Jijiga, where Nega was born, is the home of Tsege, the midwife who helped deliver an angel's offspring with wings intact, and of Mrs Yetaferu, who observes more saints' days and holy days than there are days in the calendar. It is also where Nega goes to high school, and it is a strategic prize in an all too efficient modern war.

It would be a mistake, however, to identify the Engineer's realism as Canadian or Western and the Spirit-child's magic as African. Mezlekia the historicizing Engineer is recognizably African. It is hard to imagine the autobiography of someone who grew up in Toronto invoking economic and sociological statistics—even a story of poverty or of racism in the city will take for granted the readers' familiarity with larger sociological conditions—yet a South African like Ellen Kuzwayo will refer to average wages and census figures in order to set the background for her story in *Call Me Woman*. In Africa, where economics are more dire and individuals can never forget the

limits on their freedom to make their own lives, sociology is more likely than psychology to offer literate people an explanation of their circumstances.

The voice I have called Mezlekia the Spirit-child, which is deliberately far from the standard narrative voice of autobiography, is, of course, marked as African. Yet I can think of no other African autobiography that reports the speech of animals. In *L'Enfant Noir*, a snake talks to Camara Laye's father, but the very process of schooling that allows Camara to write the autobiography means that the snake will never talk to him. The talking animals that populate Mezlekia's narrative belong not so much to Africa in general as to African fable. I can perhaps make this point clearer by considering the relation of Mezlekia's narration to the belief world of Nega's mother. That woman "had believed" (note the past tense) that there are no good or bad people, only good or bad spirits (330), and that is also what she taught her son (65). Mezlekia's narrative, however, does not feature spirits, only a pair of unnamed angels who never speak or intervene. Although Nega twice undergoes exorcism, we never believe in the demons suspected of possessing him. Mezlekia's narrative does not reproduce his mother's world or share her value system. What it does do is imitate the stories she used to tell.

In the two exorcism ceremonies that Nega suffers, extreme physical abuse has the effect of sending his spirit on journeys to other worlds. It is unusual in an African autobiography for such dreamlike interludes to be considered worth reporting, but not uncommon in fiction. The land of clouds and the land of goats where the abused Nega travels sound like the first-person fictional narratives of Amos Tutuola or Ben Okri, and it is difficult to imagine that Nega Mezlekia has not read these. Compare the following sentences by Mezlekia, utterly devoid of comment or irony,

Millennia passed and I was still in the goat's skin. The kingdom on Earth rotted away and vanished. (85)

with this passage of Ben Okri's:

They travelled for three hundred years and arrived in our night-space. I did not have to dream. It was the first time I realized that an invisible space had entered my head and dissolved the interior structure of my being. The wind of several lives blew into my eyes. (445-46)

A phrase like "it was -10 000 C" (71), with its combination of hyperbole and precision, would not be out of place in the mouth of Tutuola's Palm-Wine Drinkard. And a sentence like "Seven students, two low-flying angels, and a devil in a wheel-chair had been injured so badly that they had to be hospi-

talized" (110) could come from the short stories of García Márquez.

My point is that the narrative's "magic" is as literary and as modern as the "realism" of *Mezlekia the Engineer* and that it belongs as much to the adult as to the child. Magic realism is not somehow more mimetic of third-world reality than realism. The talking animals in *Mezlekia's* narrative do not represent the lived experience of Ethiopians in some direct, unmediated way. No less than realism, magic realism is a narrative convention.

The magic realist text is not part traditional and part modern: tradition is itself modernity's invention. But the text most certainly is divided. The division into something that stands for tradition and something that stands for modernity is precisely what makes the magic realist text modern. The division within the text is best understood as a split between inside and outside. This is clear in the case of *Mezlekia the Engineer* who stands ostentatiously outside the experience of young Nega. The Engineer invites the reader to stroll along the Horn of Africa in the year 1000, where

you would have witnessed a human tidal wave moving inland, and wondered where it could have come from. You might even have glanced at your surroundings and surmised that these nomadic peoples had somehow crossed the bottleneck at the Gulf of Aden; the vast Indian Ocean was impossible to navigate. (193)

The "I" addressing "you" here is not an Ethiopian addressing Canadians, nor someone in Canada describing Somalis, but a scientist addressing students. The Engineer understands Nega by locating him in a frame much larger than his personal experience—"Somalia's affairs made a startling appearance in my young life one windy afternoon in October 1969" (199). This same Engineer freely provides culturalist explanations along the lines of "this is what we do because this is our culture": he will say, for instance, that "As a child of the Amhara community, I was brought up according to time-honoured aristocratic moral codes" (25) and explain that, "As in many cultures," beggars are despised in Ethiopia (256). To attribute differences in behaviour to differences in culture is to presume a vantage point above and outside cultures.

Mezlekia the Spirit-child does not offer the corresponding insider's point of view but provides a different frame, one that, no less than the Engineer's, leaves Nega's ordinary lived experience behind. *Mezlekia* reports what animals say, but only among themselves. Young Nega does not talk to animals nor they to him. Ants police schoolchildren by biting them when they fail to pay attention (27) and we are told that cats and dogs attend a party (156), but, in general, the anthropomorphized animals in the narrative do not

interact with humans. Instead they live in parallel societies that provide an outside witness, usually an ironic one, to human actions. Reading the placards carried by demonstrating students, the local dogs “became engaged in a heated argument about what ‘Land to the Tiller!’ meant and how it would affect their territories, the lines of which were painstakingly redrawn every few seconds” (105), while later, in the midst of a war among humans, “the hyenas severed their diplomatic relations with us” and the “lions made a proverb out of our carpet-bombing” (221). In other words, the animal societies are related to human society much as Canada is to Ethiopia. While the Engineer’s narrative contains Nega’s Ethiopia within a larger world, the Spirit-child’s also relativizes it and brings out its unnatural character. The division that matters is not between Africa, supposed to be the continent of childhood, and the West, the land of history, but between inside and various outsides.

The Engineer’s and the Spirit-child’s perspectives both appeal to universal values in order to judge the absurdity and inhumanity of Nega’s experience. Mezekia the Engineer appeals to human rights and to a narrative of modernization, which is identified with secularism, economic development, and democracy. These values are actually close to those of the animals in the stories that Nega’s mother tells him: animals “fight one another to assert their territory; they stalk the weak from time to time, to feed their own young; but they also accept that it is everyone’s right to share this world” (330). It is only humans who wage war against their own species: Nega’s experience of war teaches him that “the human animal . . . was the only beast to be feared in the wilderness” (163). Both the Engineer’s universal values and the values found in the animal fables that Nega learned at his mother’s knee have been betrayed by the boy’s teachers, the emperor, the military junta that succeeds him, and the Cold War politics of the super-powers.

In *Notes from the Hyena’s Belly* the true hyenas are the human ones. Early in the narrative we are told that, after nightfall, the streets of Jijiga are taken over by hyenas and otherwise deserted. No one goes homeless in Jijiga, for to remain on the streets would be suicide. The ubiquitous predators are an image with which to frighten children, and no childhood would be complete without a story of daring an encounter with them. Childhood fears gain a wholly new force, however, when a coup brings a military junta to power and random killings render the suburbs of Addis Ababa “a movable feast” for hyenas and vultures (302). The belly of the hyena becomes a

metonymic euphemism for violent death. Twice Nega is rounded up with other young men and faces the threat of summary execution, and each time the prisoners ask themselves, "Who among us would sleep our last night in the hyena's belly" (149, 253). The form of the question leaves ambiguous whether it is death or the prison from which death seems to be the only issue that is the hyena's belly. The young government cadres with the power of arrest and execution who provide the scavengers with their feast are themselves versions of the beasts they serve, "two-legged hyenas" sharing a single belly (300). The hyenas that figure in tales told to frighten children become self-consciously literary metaphors for that modern phenomenon, the ideology-spouting, superpower-dependent third-world military dictatorship.

Hyenas only come out at night. Folklore has it that, in the day, they retreat inside a cactus. During the day, the children who cower behind walls at night are free to come out. As night and day struggle for supremacy in Ethiopia, the young students who, heedless of the threats of arrest and torture, demonstrate against the government are like children who cut open the cactus and pelt the light-stricken hyena with stones (115). The forces of night, which are the forces of the tyrannical state waging war against its citizens, strike back, however, when cadres take over Jijiga; Mezlekia says, "The hyena was out of the cactus's belly, and the sun itself refused to rise" (148). Permanent darkness descends on the land, the land is swallowed, and Ethiopia becomes one large prison to which there is no outside. To escape, Nega will have to find another universe.

III

The division between Nega inside and Mezlekia outside that makes the narrative possible is not a clean break but extends cracks in every direction. The division of the autobiographical self is recreated at every level. Mezlekia's own voice cracks, as we have seen, producing the split between Engineer and Spirit-child. But the child Nega was already split between his mother's animal fables and his experience of school.

For a story about "boyhood" Mezlekia's tale is strangely reticent when it comes to talking about family. Nega's siblings are not introduced until very late in the text, although this defuses the horror of the near starvation of his younger brother Henok, of whose existence we had not been aware until then. Nega's father and his methods of discipline are only described long after the news of his death. Instead of family, *Notes* begins and ends with a

description of years of schooling. Schooling and the age-related progression through classes provide a ready-made order to the lives of most literate people. Precisely because the discipline of education is so widely shared, however, it is hard to tell it as story, which requires not just order but also novelty and deviation. Civil war, flight, torture, and imprisonment are, of course, sufficiently momentous, specific to the individual, and distinct from the tranquillity required by the reading experience that they can command the interest of readers, but large-scale violence is notoriously hard for the individual who suffers it, to narrate and make sense of. I once served as interpreter for a Salvadorean ex-guerrilla fighter applying for refugee status in Canada, and remember how much difficulty he had telling what happened first and what happened next. Life in the bush (like the experience of war more generally, or life in the refugee camp or prison, I imagine) makes nonsense of chronology, a problem inevitably compounded by the psychological effects of trauma, the need to watch one's words in front of authorities, and the desire to hide the shameful. Mezlekia's solution to the problem of balancing order and disorder is to juxtapose narratives of school and of war. War provides the interest, but school provides the order.

In Africa, school is sufficiently distinct from the experience of previous generations that it can form the core of an autobiography. School measures the expansion of the horizons of the young Camara Laye and Wole Soyinka in their autobiographies. It performs the same function in *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*, where Nega progresses from a thatched mud shed to a brand new concrete high school to the university in the capital. High school does not take Nega away from home and his truest self, as it does Camara Laye; instead it opens "a window onto the larger world, a world that had long been kept from our view by aging imperial drapes and our families' careful planning of the vista" (93). The narrow horizons of childhood turn out to be an illusion created by conspiracy. Nega the schoolboy has much in common with Manthia Diawara who celebrates the African modernity represented by Sékou Touré and the other nationalist leaders who won independence for the new states in Africa, thereby endowing Diawara and his generation "with the consciousness of a truly modern subjecthood, including the right to freedom, self-determination, and equality under the law" (56).

In high school, Nega meets students from elsewhere, and particularly from the countryside (93), and becomes conscious of belonging to a larger class spread throughout the nation but having experiences in common:

We hung around with boys from other groups, talking about the same subject: the feudal lord and his modern-day slaves. As word trickled in from young people in much bigger cities, it seemed to us that the entire student body in the nation was, somehow, entranced by the same issue. (102)

The students' consciousness of belonging to a nation is accompanied by a painful awareness that the state perpetuates feudalism and fails to be as modern as these new citizens-in-the-making feel themselves to be. Mezeleki narrates this burgeoning political awareness as a moment of disillusion: Nega loses his childhood faith in the bounty of the emperor. Yet we have known Nega as an eleven-year-old with plenty of experience of the perversity and inhumanity of teachers and other adults. This is a boy who, tired of saluting, feels that "I didn't know what it meant for a country to lose its independence, but wasn't so sure that the deprivation of a flag was such a bad idea" (199). His loss of faith in the emperor is perhaps best read as the narrative expression of a doubleness always at the very heart of the high-school student's identification with the nation: he learns to identify not with the nation as it is (feudal) but with the nation as it should be (modern and like other nations). In other words, he learns he is inside because he has been taught to see himself from the outside.

Eventually, as he makes his way to the capital and to university after some deeply disturbing, even otherworldly, experiences as a guerrilla (how could the experiences not be confusing when he was an Amhara fighting for the Somalis?) and as a refugee fleeing the war, he loses faith in the nation altogether. The self-evident good of a university education and of the participation in a larger world which it makes possible allows Mezeleki to judge the barbarity of a state that would turn all study into propaganda if it could, and since it cannot, unleashes a campaign of terror against students across the nation.

The experience of school makes clear the split in Nega but does not produce it, for he has always felt he does not belong in the corrupt and superstitious world of his birth. A constant theme is that he was born into "the wrong universe" (3): "I wished I had been born in another universe" (288). It is by some cosmic error that Nega finds himself in a land, where, as Kibret Markos puts it, parents and teachers treat childhood as "a demonic behavior to be exorcised by the whip first, and by the torturous 'therapy' of witch doctors." Jijiga, the land of story, where animals speak and angels pass through on business, is also where people wage war on the human instincts that children are born with. The readers' sympathies are all with the child,

whose pranks (hitting the teacher with a spitball, putting chillies up the anuses of the teacher's cattle) display a natural rebelliousness. After a particularly severe beating and long before he becomes aware of nation or experiences the state's tyranny, Mezlekia reports, "I knew that I had, just then, ceased to be a carefree schoolboy and become a man: a vengeful man who had just picked a fight with the entire world" (55).

The boy's distance from the world is indicated by the many questions he asks of his elders. As a child he "often wondered" why meat requires ritual (172). He asks why the herbalist has to be naked to pick herbs (161) and how it is possible for a painting to show predators and prey peacefully side by side (330). The young adult continues the pattern, asking why hospital patients must be physically abused to keep them quiet ("Kibret was surprised by my ignorance" [248]), or why a bus driver is so generous with gifts to the young boys on the road (he must bribe them to prevent them damaging the bus) (260). Nega who never knows what everyone else seems to know is in the position of Mezlekia's readers who also do not understand and who marvel at the strangeness of this world.

When young Camara Laye in his autobiography inquires after the meaning of cultural practices at his home in Guinea, it signals his loss of a world: something will remain forever inaccessible to him, a mystery closed to his understanding. When Nega questions why the people around him do what they do, it marks his ironic distance from the world. Mezlekia says, with all the detachment of a tourist, "the orthodox Christian church had always intrigued me" (333). At one point Nega asks his uncle the priest, "what is the language of the angels?" (21). The uncle's age at the time ("eighty-year-old" [20]) suggests it is probably as an adult, temporarily living with his uncle on a break from university studies, that Nega asks this question, and his intention is mildly irreverent. The narration, however, deliberately obscures the difference between the boy and the man, and suggests the man's skepticism was also the boy's.

The very sign of Nega's integration in the world into which he was born—his frequent return to the animal fables that his mother told him as a child—becomes a sign of his alienation from that world. The text supplies plenty of evidence that the stories do not have the effect intended: as often as not Nega does not heed their lessons. His mother tries in vain to quell his rebelliousness by telling him a story to show that an individual cannot exist alone. Another elaborate story bears the flimsy moral that solutions to problems are found in one's own backyard, which is patently not true in

Nega's case (341).

The status of the animal fables as icons of Ethiopian culture is itself a measure of Mezlekia's distance from the world he describes. Jack Goody points out that Africans consider animal fables something to entertain small children with and not the privileged repository of cultural wisdom: "As for those observers who take the content of such tales as a sample of the thought of oral cultures, it is no more wonder that they end up with notions of its 'primitive' nature than if some African scholar were to construe Snow White in the same manner" (83). In *Notes*, such animal fables, including one tale that Western readers may recognize as the story of stone soup and another which is a joke about a European explorer swimming among crocodiles in the Nile delta (317), and not the centuries-old literary tradition or the Orthodox Church, are taken to represent the heart of Amharic culture.

The bruised young boy who feels he belongs in another universe can sound like Azaro, the *abiku* spirit-boy in *The Famished Road*. As I have already noted, the echo is particularly pronounced when, in two separate incidents, the boy is forced to undergo painful rituals to exorcize his demons, and he travels to other lands, a land of clouds and a land where goats rule over people. But Nega knows more than does Azaro, whom we never see at school (although he does go to school). The standards of the world where Nega rightly belongs are also those of Sweden and America. Nega and his schoolmates loved the government of Sweden which donated their new high school but could not be sure "if Sweden was in the same universe" (90). So, too, the American-built university library in Addis, like something out of Von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods*, seems to have been built by hands that "had issued from another universe— . . . it was not something a two-legged, short-tempered and plain-skinned creature, such as a human, could either conceive or compose" (289). The high school and the university point to an alternative universe where Mezlekia and his implied readers rightly belong. Mezlekia can delight in the incongruity of the nomad in the market who picks up a pipette stolen from the school laboratory: he and his readers know what pipettes are for (92).

As William Pietz has pointed out, the standard emblem of Western technology used to gauge culture clash has long been the gramophone in the jungle. Judging from *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*, sound reproduction technology has now been fully integrated into African experience ("Abdi quickly rolled the reels of oral history that had been passed to him through hundreds of generations" [163-64]), and the new mark of incongruous moder-

nity is the microwave oven: when Nega's comrade-in-arms Hussain describes one that he saw in France, Mezlekia comments, "It's not that anyone believed a word of it, just that the sheer incredibility of it all was enlivening to the ear" (167).

Sometimes the discrepancy among worlds is just too great: Mezlekia says that socialism sounded admirable, but he suspects that, when imposed on a primitive agricultural economy such as Ethiopia's, "it had been delivered to the wrong universe" (142). The juxtaposition of alternative universes, some where goats rule and others where unemployed people receive money from the state and the law protects cats from abuse, emphasizes just how much of a nightmare universe Ethiopia is. When Nega comes to Canada, he finds home and appreciates how much he was in exile while growing up in Ethiopia.

By the end of the book, the hyena's belly which was the tyrannical state has become the whole of Ethiopia:

When my bus finally arrived, it was full. A sea of human faces peered out of the windows at me, one huge creature with thousands of dark eyes and countless small mouths. . . I decided to squeeze in, becoming part of the hideous beast. (285)

It seems the modern subjecthood that Nega shares with Manthia Diawara is inseparable from his despair that anything can ever be different in "sunny Africa" (351), the kind of despair Diawara deploras as Afropessimism.

IV

I have suggested that the split between inside and outside is what makes the narrative possible. It is related to the split Starobinski finds symptomatic of all autobiographical narrative. In the African autobiography, however, the split also makes the narrative problematic. However much they are papered over, cracks are forever reappearing. We can judge from the many moments of hesitation and even incoherence still found in the text how difficult it must have been to find a narrative form.

Rigoberta Menchú has been accused of lying in her own narrative because she recounts events as if she were present when she was not. It is not difficult to understand how this may have happened, and Menchú's accusers are being disingenuous: it is surely a common experience that, when telling stories orally, as Menchú did, one simplifies how one knows things by presenting them as if one had seen them. Mezlekia is almost certainly guilty of a similar narrative shortcut when, for instance, he admires

an elaborate con game perpetrated by “a most original and enterprising school of beggars” at Harar bus station while he was waiting to buy a ticket (256). Later he recounts how, as a boy, he had been “invited to witness the execution of a project,” a cruel massacre of monkeys, in circumstances which cast doubt on whether he actually saw the massacre or only its bloody aftermath (275). He says that the trap set for the monkeys did not take effect right away and the peasants had to take turns keeping vigil, which would imply that Nega, the reluctant witness, waited half a day, longer than anyone else was willing to wait, in order to see the barbaric sight that made him physically ill (276).

My point is not to challenge Mezlekia’s story of Nega but to suggest that the anomalies are traces of the difficulty in telling this story. Kuni is identified as “a rural town less than half an hour’s drive from Asebe Teferi” when Nega goes there as an adult (273-74); much later we realize that Kuni is the home of his uncle Yeneta, the priest introduced in the second chapter, and where Nega spent his vacations as a child. Only at that point, almost at the end of the book, does Mezlekia refer to the village as “my beloved Kuni” (325). Whereas in the opening chapters Nega’s hometown Jijiga and the eastern highlands are conflated as sites of the marvellous, by the end Jijiga can actually feel bourgeois and ordinary beside the primitive highlands, where the boy came in contact with the “prejudices” associated with the “Amharas’ mythical view of the world” (17). The highlands stand in relation to the modern “multicultural mixing bowl” of Jijiga (17) more or less as Isara, the grandparents’ home in Wole Soyinka’s memoir, stands to Aké, the school and mission where Wole grew up. To young Wole, Isara seems “several steps into the past”: “Age hung from every corner, the patina of ancestry glossed all objects, all human faces” (67). (I am referring here to Isara as it appears in the autobiography *Aké* and not as it appears in the eponymous novel). By the end of Mezlekia’s narrative, the world of marvels is not the world that has produced Nega, but the world from which he feels he must take his leave.

The narrative also evinces a great instability in its attitude to the young boy. Nega’s role of the uncomprehending stranger in a very strange land can come across as naïveté. Mezlekia, for instance, reports with sarcasm on the corruption of the judiciary:

Though the judge took bribes, he never permitted the money and favours he received to get in the way of his judgment. It was, after all, an open court. The bribe’s only consequence took the form of a hulking man who stood at the door to the courtroom, blocking evidence and restraining witnesses. (99)

Yet young Nega was apparently “dumbstruck” when the same judge ruled that a man with thirty-two stab wounds, a bullet wound, and a severed head had committed suicide: “I remember thinking that the learned judge had made a terrible mistake, but quickly realized that he could not have reached any other verdict, as all of the evidence and witnesses were missing from the court” (99). The reader may well doubt whether Nega, the rebel who sees through his teacher Mr Alula’s much vaunted morality, was actually ever present at the trial, for how could he ever have believed the trial would be fair? How could he have been surprised by what happened or reconciled to the verdict afterwards? Nega’s naïveté about the world he grew up in is unbelievable except as a pose: he plays the straight man to Mezlekia’s sarcasm. Mezlekia’s sarcasm has worthy targets: the self-serving rhetoric of morality (“it was immoral for the King’s musketeers to raise arms against” troublesome tribesmen; better “to dispatch another Somali tribe against them” [49]); notions of cultural superiority (“Amharic was God’s own choice for the medium of government” [129]); military spending (“All those glossy catalogues with alluring pictures of machine guns, missile-launchers, armoured personnel carriers and majestic tanks had to be put back on the shelf until new sponsors were found” [127]); superstition (“There was never a shortage of such holy men in Jijiga, who found it much easier to communicate with the unborn and the long dead than with the living” [154]); corruption (“The sacks and various containers of donated food had ‘Not For Sale’ printed boldly on them” to remind the aid donors “not to sell it to us” [122]); and tyranny (“the Emperor would have liked to help, but he was not a wealthy man”; “After all, all he had was \$1.6 billion, and it was tied up in Swiss banks” [123]), but the sarcasm comes at the cost of making Nega a naïve *Candide*. This is the boy who thinks Haile Selassie “did not seem like the kind of person who would stand by and watch a feudal lord herd a world of serfs to his private jail” (102); who discovers with “horror” that “when someone you don’t know fires a .50-calibre anti-aircraft gun at you, he actually means to kill you” (178); and who thinks “that a coup d’état was the most profiting and ingenious enterprise Africa had ever embarked on, one wherein everyone involved came out a positive winner,” except “the faceless masses” (200). The irony is inherently unstable: are we supposed to see with Mezlekia around Nega or are we to understand that Nega never really thought these things and this is only a pose?

The instability quickly spreads. A sentence like the following, “My interest in the political life of Ethiopia grew steadily in the 1960s” (101), said by

one who only turned twelve in 1970, smacks of the politician's memoir. Even when it marks his genuine engagement with the world, Nega's earnestness comes to sound naïve. The boy lies awake "many nights wondering if Kenya and Ethiopia had not heinously divided a unique people," the Somalis (188). Fortunately for his conscience, "the more I studied history, the more I questioned this view" (189). He believes that "If I had any hope of helping to change the system. . . I had better resume my education" (187) and maintains "irreconcilable differences with the military junta, because I was convinced that Ethiopia had no future under their leadership" (318), worthy sentiments that cannot, however, escape being tinged with the residue of Mezlekia's prevalent sarcasm.

The adult Nega does not know how to get a ticket for the bus (you need to hire a beggar to wait in line [305]), and is daunted by the overcrowding—"Dozens of sweaty faces pressed circles into the dirty windows while a tangle of bodies, hooked by one or more limbs to the precarious seats on top of the bus, jolted and swayed with the uneven road, like an angry nest of snakes." Somewhat incongruously, Mezlekia adds, "we must have offered a strange sight to passersby" (305). Who does he imagine would see this who had not seen it before? It is difficult to understand the juxtaposition in the same narrative of overcrowded transport with torture and mass murder. There may be a sociological relation—poverty hardens people's hearts; great disparities in wealth make people seem expendable—but the relation may also be merely rhetorical: the Canadian reader will find them equally foreign adventures.

Evelyn Waugh, who attended the coronation of Haile Selassie, compared Ethiopia to *Alice in Wonderland*. A "galvanized and translated reality, where animals carry watches in their waistcoat pockets, royalty paces the croquet lawn beside the chief executioner, and litigation ends in a flutter of playing-cards" (23) could well be a description of *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*. Mezlekia actually goes farther than Waugh or Alan Moorehead, author of *The Blue Nile*, in making Ethiopians seem what Waugh calls a "remote people." He reports, for instance, that, because of the sycophantic nature of priests, funerals of nobles last so long that, in their impatience, crowds *habitually* send armed men to rob the priests, lock them in the cellar, and throw the remains of the dead lord on the ground (334). Mezlekia also reports, for the salacious pleasure of readers, that there is a tribe in Ethiopia for whom an initiation rite involves bringing back a penis from another tribe. A sure giveaway that he has no direct experience of these people is

that he explains their behaviour in terms of culturalist imperatives: they do what they do in order to maintain “the continuity of thousands of years of culture” (222). Whatever basis in actual practice there might be for this African equivalent of urban legend— “Young men of the Adal tribe often hide themselves in the brush by the highway waiting for accidents to happen, so that they can lay claim to the members of the victims” (223)—as with all reports of African cannibalism, ritual killings to secure body parts, and witchcraft, we should be sceptical about the prevalence and the nature of the practice. The pleasure Mezlekia gets from telling this tale does not mean he sees with Western eyes—this is clearly a tale the Amhara tell of their primitive neighbours—but it does indicate how aware he is of Western readers.

V

Mezlekia who tells us about the Adal penis-hunters whom he has not met also gives us an example of healthy skepticism. Nega’s friend among the Somali guerrilla fighters, Hussain, “admitted to me that while growing up in Djibouti, he had believed that Amharas each had a short tail between their legs”:

He had heard many stories of the atrocities committed by Amharas, mostly untrue, and had formed a mental picture of the people capable of perpetrating such horrors. It was not until he had made his first trip to Dire Dawa, Ethiopia’s third largest city, that he was shocked to find the Amharas were shaped like men. (168)

Mezlekia comments that, “Far from revealing the inner workings of his mind, this revelation made him an even greater mystery,” for, if he did not hate Amharas, why was Hussain fighting them so fiercely (169)? Of course, the answer is a complicated one. As Mezlekia’s own narrative shows, some Amharas *are* capable of atrocities, and there are plenty of “two-legged hyenas” among them. Moreover, recognition of their common humanity does not make Hussain and Nega transparent to each other. When Nega meets Hussain, he is himself an Amhara among Somalis and must prove that his opposition to the government on ideological grounds gives him common cause with those who are fighting against Amhara domination. Yet he cannot be sure that he has enough in common with his comrades who remain suspicious of all Amharas. At the risk of proving their suspicions well-founded, he finds a way to desert.

I have suggested that Mezlekia the narrator is able to write this memoir because he can assume a common understanding with his English-language

readers. That shared understanding requires their common distance from Ethiopia: it presumes that what others do is strange and, in the case of the two-legged hyenas, not even human. This shared understanding of Africa remains, however, precarious: the African writer finds his own literary credentials treated with suspicion. Having written about his escape from a land where people are predators and prey, Nega Mezlekia now finds himself publicly vilified as a monster in a land where cats are protected by law. The writer who sought to establish his authority by writing his self now finds that being written is not such a comfortable position.

Let me reiterate that this analysis of the fractures in the narrative should not be construed as evidence to support the claims of either Stone or Nega Mezlekia. The controversy surrounding the text does not arise directly from the internal fractures. My argument is that the controversy and the fractures are both symptomatic of the splitting characteristic of the African self and of the migrant self. The split in the self characteristic of all textuality and of autobiography in particular is inevitably compounded in the African autobiography.

WORKS CITED

- Abley, Mark. "Columnist Voices Contempt for Visiting Writer." *Montreal Gazette*. 23 Sept. 1995. H1.
- Andrews, William L. "The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative." *PMLA* 105.1 (1990): 23-34.
- Arias, Arturo. "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects: Rigoberta Menchú and the Performative Production of the Subaltern Self." *PMLA* 116.1 (2001): 75-88.
- Barnes, Virginia Lee and Janice Boddy. *Aman: The Story of a Somali Girl*. Toronto: Knopf, 1994.
- Blackburn, Regina. "In Search of the Black Female Self: African-American Woman's Autobiographies and Ethnicity." *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Estelle C. Jelinek. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980. 133-48.
- Breiner, Laurence A. "Lyric and Autobiography in West Indian Literature." *Journal of West Indian Literature* 3.1 (1989): 3-15.
- Brodzki, Bella and Celeste Schenck. "Introduction." Brodzki and Schenck. 1-15. —, eds. *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.
- Camara Laye. *L'Enfant Noir*. Paris: Plon, 1953.
- Chang, Jung. *Wild Swans*. New York: Doubleday, 1991.
- Connelly, Karen. "Call Off the Literary Lynch Mob." *Globe and Mail*. 13 Dec. 2000. A13.
- Couser, G. Thomas. *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Diawara, Manthia. *In Search of Africa*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice." *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Shari

- Benstock. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988. 34-62.
- Gallimore, Rangira Béatrice. *L'Oeuvre romanesque de Calixthe Beyala*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997.
- García Márquez, Gabriel. *The Innocent Erendira and Other Stories*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Gatehouse, Jonathon and Noah Richler. "Massacre-Plot Manuscript Billed as Memoir: Editors." *National Post*. 13 Dec. 2000. A4.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. "Mind, Text, and Society: Self-Memory in Social Context." *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*. Ed. Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994. 78-104.
- Gessell, Paul. "Author's Voice is Unique: Judge Says It's Unlikely Winning Memoir Was Ghostwritten." *Montreal Gazette*. 28 Nov. 2000. A24.
- Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Self-Representation*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.
- Godwin, Peter. *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*. London: Macmillan, 1996.
- Goody, Jack. "The Time of Telling and the Telling of Time in Written and Oral Cultures." *Chronotypes*. Ed. John Bender and David E. Wellbery. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991. 77-96.
- Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." Trans. James Olney. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Ed. James Olney. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 28-48.
- Hope, Christopher. *White Boy Running*. London: Abacus, 1988.
- Jackson, Marni. "The Mysterious Process of Birthing a Book." *Globe and Mail*. 2 Dec. 2000. D26.
- Joubert, Elsa. *Poppie Nongena*. New York: Holt, 1980.
- Lejeune, Philippe. "The Autobiographical Pact." Trans. Katherine Leary. Lejeune. *On Autobiography*. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989. 3-30.
- Liang, Heng, and Judith Shapiro. *Son of the Revolution*. Douglas: Fontana, 1984.
- Kuzwayo, Ellen. *Call Me Woman*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1985.
- Markos, Kibret. "Africa from the Inside." *St Petersburg Times*. 18 Feb. 2001. 14 May 2001. <http://www.sptimes.com/News/021801/Perspective/Africa_from_the_insid.shtml#Anchor-49575>
- Mathabane, Mark. *Kaffir Boy*. New York: New American Library, 1986.
- Menchú, Rigoberta. *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Ed. Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. Trans. Ann Wright. London: Verso, 1984.
- Mezlekia, Nega. *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*. Toronto: Penguin, 2000.
- Miller, Christopher. *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.
- Min, Anchee. *Red Azalea*. New York: Pantheon, 1994.
- Modisane, Bloke. *Blame Me on History*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990.
- Moorehead, Alan. *The Blue Nile*. London: H. Hamilton, 1972.
- Okri, Ben. *The Famished Road*. London: Vintage, 1992.
- Pietz, William. "The Phonograph in Africa: International Phonocentrism from Stanley to Sarnoff." *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*. Ed. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young. New York: Cambridge UP, 1987. 263-85.
- Posner, Michael. "Publisher Disputes Mezlekia's Prize." *Globe and Mail*. 6 Dec. 2000. A9.
- . "The Lion of Ethiopia." *Globe and Mail*. 26 Feb. 2000. 30 Oct. 2001. <<http://www.globebooks.com/interviews/mezlekia.html>>

- Richler, Noah. "I Will Bury [You] If It Takes Me a Hundred Years." *National Post*. 4 Dec. 2000. A1.
- . "So Just Who Is the Real Author?: Why We Should Listen to Anne Stone." *National Post*. 4 Dec. 2000. D1.
- . "Behind All Good Writers." *National Post*. 7 Dec. 2000. A18.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les Confessions*. Vol. 1. Paris: Gallimard, 1959.
- Sanders, Mark A. "Theorizing the Collaborative Self: The Dynamics of Contour and Content in the Dictated Autobiography." *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 445-58.
- Shostak, Marjorie. *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981.
- Sommer, Doris. "'Not Just a Personal Story': Women's *Testimonios* and the Plural Self." Brodzki and Schenck. 107-30.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Aké*. London: Rex Collings, 1981.
- Stanton, Domna C. "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Domna C. Stanton. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. 3-20.
- Starobinski, Jean. "Le Style de l'Autobiographie." *Poétique* 3 (1970): 257-65.
- Stepo, Robert B. "Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Frederick Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1988. 45-57.
- Taylor, Helen. "'The Griot from Tennessee': The Saga of Alex Haley's *Roots*." *Critical Quarterly* 37.2 (1995): 46-62.
- Tutuola, Amos. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. 1952. London: Faber, 1961.
- Waugh, Evelyn. *Remote People*. 1931. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
- Widgington, David. "Unacknowledged." *National Post*. 7 Dec, 2000. A19.



Miles Davis' Horn*

miles davis was a junkie

the world is full of junk and more junk and more junk
and we get depressed so we do junk we get down so we buy junk
we're poor so we buy other peoples junk we are closets and cupboards and on
the floor junk he rattled jazz miles davis was a junkman but he could blow
a tune and you could feel his powerful junk collapsing onto you
so you could Feel the world is junk and we all partake we have our
junk babies and fill their rooms with junk so they grow up to want
more junk and then there are garbage artists who use junk to build multi-
millions of dollars for their collections so they can sell it to austere
wealthy corporations who like neat colorful just one piece of junk in their
environmental japanese decor settings and where these artists live on farms where they grow
and collect old junk down junkie cars and trucks and their
children wear other peoples junk and we junk up our bodies with tattoos and
body piercing and more junk as if human flesh wasn't enough
junk we recycle junk then buy the same junk made thinner
it costs to salvage in a junkyard for a rearview mirror to fit your
beater 60's chevy the rear view is getting bigger with junk food and junk
fans and junkie junkie jewelry strands of it on the neck of an innocent
six year old

miles davis blow harder blow harder blow harder

clean the vain and hurricane
this worlds junk into dust
the New York harbor blow the garbage from here till kingdom come
then i'll be ready to sweep it all up

miles davis was a junkie
but he was useful
he could blow his horn more than i can say about the rest of this
ya say it

junk.

* This poem previously appeared in *CL 169*, with typographical errors.

“A Life Has Only One Author”: Twice-Told Aboriginal Life Narratives

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. The first *Bobbi Lee* was a reduction of some two hundred pages of manuscript to a little book. What began as a class to learn how to do other people's life history, turned into a project to do my own. We had disagreements over what to include and what to exclude, disagreements over wording, voice. In the end, the voice that reached the paper was Don's, the information alone was mine.

—Lee Maracle, Prologue, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*

In the Prologue to the 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*, Lee Maracle contests the editorial control that the recorder, Don Barnett, had maintained in the first edition. Maracle's anger at Barnett's editing is palpable. By obscuring his own role, Barnett reproduced the historically asymmetric relations of address in “as-told-tos between whites and natives.” He also failed to account for the process of collaboration in compiling the recorded testimonial life story. Significantly, Maracle, in 1990, does not re-write but rather re-frames the first version with a new preface, Foreword, Prologue and Epilogue. Although Maracle does not change the content of the narrative, re-framing the narrative fundamentally transforms the life story. In this paper, I examine how collaboratively produced “told-to” life narratives radically mutate when they are re-told and re-framed.

While critical studies of recorded life narrative have focused on the agenda of either the writer or narrator in the making of the life narrative, such a focus often elides the social contexts in which tellings, re-tellings or re-readings take place.¹ For M. M. Bakhtin, it is impossible to consider speakers and listeners, or writers and readers, in isolation from one another, or dissociated from the world in which they interact: “Still current in linguistics are such fictions as the ‘listener’ and ‘understander’ (partners of the speaker). . . . These fictions produce a completely distorted idea of the complex and multifaceted process of active speech communication” (68). These

insights are especially pertinent to the process of “entextualizing”² First Nations’ oral texts, a process historically steeped in culturally determined notions of orality and literacy, of ethnicity and difference.³ In retelling their life story, narrators re-negotiate the relations of authority that govern the life narrative.

Changes in these relations can lead to shifts in the form of the life narrative—from ethnographic life history to autobiography; from biography to testimonial; from the dually produced narrative to the collective life story. In Margaret Blackman’s *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, A Haida Woman*, feminist ethnographic life history “move[s] towards autobiography” (Godard 7). However, though Blackman insists upon the collaborative nature of the recorded (auto)biographical project, she holds unilateral authority in shaping the arc of the life. More dramatic are the changes when the narrator re-publishes the life story in new forms. Lee Maracle’s additional frames in the edition of *Bobbi Lee* fundamentally change the reader’s comprehension of the unchanged text. Similarly, in *Night Spirits*, co-authors Ila Bussidor and Üstün Bilgen-Reinart retell the story of the relocation of the Sayisi Dene, contesting the formal report initially prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). In contrast to Virginia Petch’s report, *Night Spirits* highlights the collective nature of the testimonial project. However, the collaborative relationship between Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart is complicated by the historical legacy of mistranslation between Sayisi Dene and Euro-Canadian groups. Finally, Beverly Hungry Wolf, in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, re-writes the stories she initially collected for her husband, Adolph Hungry Wolf. Adolph first published the stories under his own name in ethnographic monographs of Blackfoot culture. In contrast, Beverly explicitly acknowledges and highlights all of the narrators and writers who contributed to the collective life story. In so doing, *The Ways of My Grandmothers* calls into question the standard relations of address in the ethnographic life story and autobiography. My aim in examining these “twice-told” or “thrice-told” life stories is to bring into focus the multiple forms of mediation that constitute the recorded life narrative and to show how the life story is transformed through various tellings, re-tellings and re-readings.

An important genre mode of the recorded Aboriginal life narrative is the feminist ethnographic life history, especially popular in the 1970s, that aimed to bring to light lives of women through detailed description of their daily lives.⁴ These narratives emphasize personal connection and collabora-

tion between women in cross-cultural contexts. However, while friendship may even out some power imbalances, it may also serve to disguise the workings of ethnographic authority. In *During My Time*, anthropologist Margaret Blackman describes how she worked closely with Florence Edenshaw Davidson of the Haida nation over several years. Blackman identifies friendship and mutual trust with Davidson as the reason the project came into being. She limits her interaction with Davidson to small, intimate spaces, as if to emphasize the close connection she feels with Davidson. Much is made of the “kitchen table” where Blackman and Davidson discuss life in a frank and open manner.⁵

Blackman downplays her own role in writing Davidson’s life story, claiming that it was Davidson who initiated the project. In 1977, Blackman returned to Haida Gwaii “to fulfill a promise made to Florence Edenshaw Davidson of Masset in 1973: we would, one of these days, sit together and record her life history” (xx). Blackman explains that “Justification for me lay in my personal relationship to Florence Davidson. She had served as my main female teacher in my previous Haida studies and we had developed a close working relationship; she had taken me into her home and I lived with her during most of my field research; but, most importantly, she accepted me, as she has others, as a grandchild” (xx). Blackman calls Davidson “Nani” (Grandmother) to increase the effect of intimacy in the text.

Yet the reader begins to suspect that the intimacy flows only one way when Blackman, determined to secure personal revelations from her informant, presses Davidson to speak candidly about her experiences “as a Haida woman”: “Nani was somewhat embarrassed to discuss her puberty seclusion knowing that the account might be published. I, on the other hand, felt the subject significant enough to pursue until she had exhausted her memory” (16). Blackman impels Davidson to reveal her private recollections to ensure the narrative’s ethnographic “significance.”

The close relationship between Blackman and Davidson is supposed to convince the reader that Blackman has shared authorial control with Davidson. However, the alleged sharing in fact increases Blackman’s ethnographic authority. Though Blackman argues that the recording of a life history is necessarily a collaborative activity, collaboration merely provides “an affective or experiential dimension” that “complements” the “standard ethnography” (4). “Nani” might command centre stage in the text, but she does so as exemplary evidence within Blackman’s interpretive framework. By claiming a special, even familial bond with Davidson, Blackman endeav-

ours to dissolve the outsider/insider dichotomy of anthropologist and informant. She personalizes the differences between herself and Davidson, thus attempting to isolate their differences from larger political and colonial contexts. By suggesting shared and transparent communicative relations, Blackman confers greater legitimacy upon her dispassionate anthropological interpretations.

In her study of recorded life story, Carol Boyce Davies discusses the function of precisely this kind of friendship in bonding “the oral narrative contract in life story telling.” The oral narrative contract “turns on the concept of ‘trust.’” Indeed, “[a]ll of the collectors identified building ‘trust’ as the critical ingredient in having the stories told at all” (13). However, while trust, reciprocity and collaboration are often proclaimed in the prefaces and introductions of recorded life stories, that trust frequently dissolves at the time of writing. Boyce Davies argues that “[i]n the written version . . . this oral life narrating contract is often violated”:

At the point of writing . . . the dominant-subordinate relationships are enforced and the editor becomes a detached, sometimes clinical, orderer or even exploiter of the life stories for anthropological ends, research data, raw material, or the like. Writing another person’s life can become an act of power and control. (13)

The loss of trust, I would argue, is not due to the function of writing so much as to the function of authorship. The breakdown in trust occurs as the author signs the title page and the publisher circulates the text in larger economies. Philippe Lejeune argues that authorship, with its emphasis on individual creative genius, precludes the very existence of collaborative literary production. He tells the story of a publisher who had declared that “a life has only one author” when a ghost-writer asked to include her name on the title-page of the “autobiography” she had transcribed (185). Publishers continue to privilege the singly authored work, despite recent critical work (such as Boyce Davies’s) that emphasizes relationality, dialogue and collaboration in the making of subjectivity. This is because the singly authored work enables the publisher to use the “brand name” to maintain control over profit, labour and property in print-capitalist markets. As a result, challenges to the supremacy of the author spark explosive and heated controversies.⁶

In some cases, the breakdown in trust can galvanize “the narrator” of the recorded life story to become a “writer.” When Lee Maracle re-issued her recorded testimonial life narrative, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*, under her own

name, the new edition reconceptualized Maracle's collaboration with Don Barnett, who had first transcribed, edited and published *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel: Struggles of a Native Canadian Woman* in 1975. As quoted in the epigraph above, Maracle contends that a recorder's good intentions to collaborate fairly with a teller are not enough to overcome the historically asymmetric relations of address in recorded life stories. This is particularly ironic with respect to the genre mode of the testimonial narrative. *Bobbi Lee*, part of the series of "Life Histories from the Revolution," was supposed to document Canada's "interior colonies," not engender its own form of textual colonization.

According to John Beverley, *testimonio* is meant to correct the unequal relations in ethnographic life histories, by emphasizing the narrator's control over the life story: "In oral history, it is the intentionality of the recorder—usually a social scientist—that is dominant.... In *testimonio*, by contrast, it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount" (96). *Testimonio* enacts a "powerful textual affirmation of the speaking subject" (96) while simultaneously accomplishing "a sort of erasure of the function and textual presence of the 'author,' which by contrast is so central to all major forms of bourgeois writing since the Renaissance" (97). However, Beverley's attempt to privilege the narrator over the recorder merely displaces and renders invisible the role of the author. Though he downplays the role of the author-writer as mere "compiler" or "activator" (97), he nevertheless suggests that the compiler is crucial to give voice to a "previously voiceless, anonymous" subject (98). Moreover, by simply switching the critical emphasis from the recorder to the narrator, Beverley reasserts a sharp divide between the two interlocutors, thereby nullifying any potential forms of intersubjectivity.

Don Barnett's 1975 Introduction to *Bobbi Lee* exhibits the same contradictions that complicate Beverley's theory of *testimonio*. Deleted from the 1990 publication, the Introduction creates and sustains subalternity:

The vast majority of peasants and workers in the super-exploited hinterland of the imperialist system are illiterate.... Their 'backwardness' condemns them to literary silence, as well as poverty, disease and a short life. Our objective is to provide a medium through which these classes can *speak*... [and] *be heard* by those of us who comprise imperialism's privileged and literate metropolitan minority. Their recounted lives throw our own into sharp relief, while at the same time they offer us fresh perspectives on the processes of repression and revolution from a unique vantage point: *from below*. (xi; italics in original)

Though Barnett and Maracle might have thought at one time that they were speaking a common language of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist resistance, Maracle makes clear that that moment of commonality has since splintered and fallen apart. Despite the best of intentions, *Bobbi Lee* has failed to become the shared resistance story that the two interlocutors had first envisioned. Barnett's "blatantly elitist agenda places emphasis on what colonized people can do for the dominant culture. In addition, Maracle most certainly was not illiterate. The narrative reveals that she was widely read in the literature of social revolution and was an articulate and forceful speaker for the rights of Native people" (Donovan 39-40). Indeed, Barnett's elitism is palpable as he plays the "god-trick" of "seeing without being seen," of giving voice to the voiceless while dismissing the formative role of his editorial intervention. By suggesting that he has conferred literacy upon an "illiterate" subject, Barnett renders his own intervention indispensable. At the same time, by suggesting that the life story was a collaborative project between equals, he asserts the authenticity of (his recording of) Maracle's words. By italicizing the words *speaks* and *is heard*, Barnett produces the effect of immediacy while obscuring the power relations that obtain in creating the text.

In the 1990 version, Maracle calls into question the "I" of the *testimonio* that is allegedly the powerful coming-to-voice of the subaltern subject. Thus, "[t]he new edition permits Maracle more textual control over her life narrative. Indeed the new edition inscribes a different 'I'" (Warley 66). The new edition provides Maracle with the means to take part in, but also take apart, the mediating structures that constitute her textualized voice. However, Maracle does not suggest an intimate, balanced, and truly collaborative "we" as an alternative. Instead, she redraws the lines of collaboration between herself and the editors, not by rewriting her story in her own words, but by resituating her voice within different historical and political contexts.

In the new edition, Maracle maintains an antagonistic, interventionist relation to all framing voices, including her own. She speaks doubly, beginning again and again in different registers of voice. She thus reconfigures what Beverley assumes to be the immediacy of the testimonial voice. Indeed, her testimonial voice is highly mediated: it is multiple, changeable, historically situated and collectively defined. As a result, her text becomes double-voiced in Bakhtin's sense. Bakhtin's discussion of how "heteroglossia" emerges from rigidly hierarchical social relations is particularly relevant

to *Bobbi Lee*. In her text, Maracle makes no claim that the staging of conflicting voices results in plurality, suggesting instead that the experience of living as a Native woman in painfully divided Canadian social spaces requires her to have a double voice.

In the opening preface to the 1990 version of *Bobbi Lee*, “Oka Peace Camp—September 9, 1990,” Maracle aligns herself with the Mohawk warriors at Oka. Oka, for many a symbol of First Nations sovereignty over land and community, has profoundly changed the relations between First Nations and Canada. The barricades harshly highlight the fact that First Nations do not live in a postcolonial world but under military siege: “after centuries of the colonial state pressing on our villages, taking life after life, we are finally fed up” (6). Maracle draws stark contrasts between Euro-Canadian and First Nations worldviews and values. She repeatedly returns to the persistence of these groups’ dichotomous relations that preclude reciprocity or understanding. Maracle’s discussion of Oka allows her to re-conceptualize the genre of the testimonial life narrative in a way that highlights tensions between voices, rather than implying perfect understanding between speaking “partners” (see Bakhtin).

Following the Foreword by Jeannette Armstrong, Maracle reproduces the Dedication to Don Barnett that opens the first edition of *Bobbi Lee*. Here she honours Barnett’s life and death: “We all loved him deeply. Our love must not be wasted in sorrow but rather must manifest itself in our willingness to take up the struggle for proletarian socialism with the same determination and unwavering tenacity that so characterized Don” (17-18). However, in the Prologue that follows the Dedication, Maracle distances herself from the “we” above: “I respected Don, at the time almost liked him, but not quite. I didn’t, couldn’t tell him everything. There were too many obstacles in my path” (18). Her feelings of respect have changed into a burdensome sense of indebtedness: “He did inspire me to get command of my voice. He believed I had great potential, but was quite raw” (19). The colonial and gendered implications of being “raw” material for Barnett’s “Life Histories from the Revolution” series are not lost on Maracle: “I remember Don once said his wife was ‘almost an intellectual’. It scared me into silence. Now I see it as so much white male narcissism that kept him arrogantly rooted in autocratic behaviour” (19).

Maracle acknowledges the ambivalence of having learned both from Barnett and against his authoritative interpretations of anti-capitalist struggle: “his idea of political struggle was riddled with arrogance, something I

loathed, but knew I too was full of” (18). Maracle stages a series of self-revisions over time: “I was a very distorted child *at the time* of the first book” (19, emphasis added). In the Epilogue, she distances herself from her previous writing selves: “I am sitting in my room mulling over the ancient manuscript from which *Bobbi Lee* was born. My misspent youth, the craziness of internalized racism, my own confusion and the holes rent in my memory had come back at me like cruel bill collectors wanting their pound of flesh” (199). The Epilogue is an appeal to the future, of what she is writing towards: “This epilogue is intended to fill in the missing pieces that came alive in my memory through the long process of unravelling that began in 1975. . . . The rest [of those memories] are inserted here on the final pages I will ever write about Bobbi” (201). The life of Bobbi nevertheless re-appears in *Sojourner’s Truth and Other Stories*, also published in 1990, as well as *Sundogs* (1992), *Ravensong* (1993) and the revised edition of *I am Woman* (1996). As Maracle moves from one version of the life story to another, the reader senses that the author has left open gaps in the life narrative. The story of Bobbi’s life is not a smooth chronology; rather it appears and disappears as Maracle retells the story in fiction, poetry, sociology, polemic and even told-to narrative.⁸

The additions to the 1990 *Bobbi Lee* fundamentally change the reader’s reception of the parts of *Bobbi Lee* that have not been revised. The framing texts do not permit the reader to forget that this confessional narrative emerges from Maracle’s volatile and emotionally charged relationship with Barnett. Clearly, Barnett’s role as listener and interviewer played a formative role in shaping the narrative, and the question of what Barnett removed from the text and what editorial decisions led to his selections becomes pressing. Maracle implies that Barnett’s role as editor was heavy-handed and unilateral. However, Maracle’s contradictory self-positionings indicate that her own understanding of her life story is partial, changing over time in response to changes in historical and political contexts. The reader thus becomes aware that various versions of the life story spring from the struggle for narrative control within the “collaborative” relationship.

The republication of Maracle’s autobiography marks a shift in both publication and reception of First Nations recorded life narratives between 1977 and 1990. The 1997 collective testimonial life story *Night Spirits*, co-authored by Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart and narrated by thirteen other Sayisi Dene spokespeople, initiates the kinds of life narratives published in the 1990s. It is an example of the “collective life history,” which “moves beyond the sense of a *dually authored* text to a *multiply articulated* text”

(Boyce Davies 4, italics in original): “These narratives can be read as individual stories . . . or they can be read collectively as one story refracted through multiple lives, lives that share a common experience” (4). A collective life story defies linear arrangement and chronology, interweaving women’s stories as recurring and spiralling fragments. Whereas the dually authored life story was popular in the 1970s and early 1980s,⁹ recent publications showcase collectively produced First Nations life stories.¹⁰ In these latter texts, multiple recorders and narrators exchange places, thereby limiting the recorder’s role and calling into question the paternalism of giving voice to “illiterate” speakers. Moreover, the multiplicity of narrating roles limits the importance of the recorder’s role.¹¹

As a collective life story, *Night Spirits* rejects the “affirmation of the speaking subject” that Beverley argues is crucial to the genre of the *testimonio*. According to Beverley’s strict categorization, the “true” *testimonio* can only be a full-length life story by one remarkable individual who speaks in the first person (Beverley 101-02). *Night Spirits* maintains an explicitly politicized agenda. “Every story is a tool we can use if we want to. That is what our elders say,” Ila Bussidor writes (“My Story” 8). A sense of political urgency permeates *Night Spirits*. The bibliography shows that it is closely tied to the Sayisi Dene’s political struggles for social change. *Night Spirits* has provided ammunition to the Sayisi Dene in their ongoing battles with the federal government. These include compensation for the relocation;¹² territorial disputes with the borders of Nunavut;¹³ a self-government agreement;¹⁴ and land claim negotiations.¹⁵

Though the Sayisi Dene have told and retold the story of the relocation many times to government officials, settlement managers, researchers, social workers and journalists, their presentations have not resulted in a clear acknowledgement of governmental responsibility for the loss of an entire generation of the Sayisi Dene Nation between 1956 and 1977. In this period, over three-quarters of the 117 deaths in the community were classified as “violent,” resulting from the living conditions in the Churchill camps (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 146-47). Reams of letters, interviews, transcripts from public hearings and sociological studies have passed between the Sayisi Dene and the federal government over the past forty years of protest against the 1956 relocation.¹⁶ *Night Spirits* attempts to retell the relocation in a way that will finally assert the urgent need for recognition and compensation.

The study most immediately preceding *Night Spirits* began in 1990, when the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) hired Virginia Petch

to prepare a “background report” on the Sayisi Dene relocation. Petch bases her report primarily upon historical records, such as documents from the Hudson’s Bay Company, memos and letters from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Though Petch conducted personal interviews of Sayisi Dene community members from 1990-1994, she does not reproduce those conversations. Instead, she summarizes the information they provide. Petch paraphrases what could be Bussidor’s life story,¹⁷ reporting that this band member “believes that in order to begin the healing process she must tell her story and many others must follow suit” (Section 5.0).

Bussidor, fearing that Sayisi Dene voices would again become subsumed within yet another report, appeared before the RCAP public hearings in Thompson, Manitoba in 1993, demanding a special community hearing at Tadoule Lake. Bussidor emphasizes that it is important for the commissioners to hear the story of the relocation from the Sayisi Dene themselves:

The Sayisi Dene are requesting the Royal Commission to hold a public hearing in Tadoule Lake. You are the people who will be reporting to the government. It is crucial that you hear first hand from the people who hold that story, a story not documented, but a living memory. There are no words to describe that urgency of this request. (Bussidor, “Presentation”)

Bussidor’s insistence reflects the crucial importance she places on the collective nature of the project. A few months after Petch concluded her “participant-observation” research, between October 1994 and February 1996, Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart conducted their own interviews of the Sayisi Dene. As a community-based project of remembering the past, *Night Spirits* challenges the culturally determined binary of a non-Aboriginal writer transcribing the words of an Aboriginal teller. Much of the text is made up of the narrators’ recollections of the past. Their voices create a polyphonic narrative that contrasts with the formality of Petch’s report.

Though the flexibility and inclusive nature of the collective testimonial enables Bussidor to honour the memory of the Sayisi Dene survivors of the Churchill camps, Bussidor is only too aware that the genre can transcribe the words of her community only imperfectly. For Bussidor, the work of the testimonial can never be completed, since her parents, Suzanna and Artie Cheekie, died in a house-fire in 1972. Despite her careful work of memorialization, Suzanna and Artie remain a ghostly absence that haunts *Night Spirits*. They can only be heard through their creased photographs or through their voices as “night spirits.” On the title page, Bussidor inscribes

an epigraph, connecting her mother with the night spirits that hear the smallest whisper but whose utterances cannot be understood: “When I was a little girl, every night at bedtime, my mom . . . would tuck us in and tell us we had to be quiet or *e’thzil* would hear us. The word *e’thzil* means ‘night spirits’. Night spirits are the spirits of dead people.”

The “night spirits” are symbols of what Bussidor fails to collect, or what the narrators cannot or will not recollect in the testimonial life story project. *E’thzil* highlight the difficulties of translation, mistranslation and non-translation in imperial-colonial contexts. The unintelligibility of these spirits is symbolic of the cultural and linguistic misunderstandings that caused the forced relocation of the Sayisi Dene in the first place. According to the narrators of *Night Spirits*, failure of cultural groups to communicate led directly to the dissolution of the Sayisi Dene community. With a symptomatic lack of cultural sensitivity to Sayisi Dene beliefs, the Department of Indian Affairs relocated the Sayisi Dene to Camp-10, a site adjacent to the Churchill cemetery. Ila’s grandmother Eva Anderson, one of the principal narrators of *Night Spirits*, says: “Everything about our ways as a people was overlooked right from the beginning. That is why they placed us right in the middle of a burial ground to live for the next decade” (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 61).

Night Spirits reconstructs the misguided governmental decisions based on mistranslation that led to the relocation. In July 1956, a couple of months before the relocation, the supervisor of Indian Affairs for the region, R. D. Ragan, visited the “Duck Lake Band” to discuss the intended move. “After a very full discussion it was unanimously and amicably agreed by the Duck Lake Band still at this Post that they would move to the mouth of the North River,” Ragan writes in a departmental memo (qtd. in Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 45). However, as Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart point out, the Dene spoke no English, and Ragan and his officials spoke no Dene: “In view of the immense communication problems faced by both sides, what Ragan meant by a ‘full discussion’ is anyone’s guess” (45).

Given the historical background of the “immense communication problems” between the Sayisi Dene and Euro-Canadian groups, Bilgen-Reinart is understandably uneasy and at first unwilling to become involved in Bussidor’s testimonial project. Bilgen-Reinart compensates for her reservations by insisting that Bussidor was the primary initiator and executor of the project. In the Introduction, Bilgen-Reinart suggests that she had virtually no choice but to collaborate with Bussidor in the making of the book:

In 1990 . . . [Ila] told me she wanted to tell her story, and the story of her people, in a book. She wanted me to do it with her . . . I encouraged Ila to write the book alone, to start by talking into a tape recorder. In the spring of 1994, she came right out and asked me to begin working with her, and I realized she meant business. My first impulse was to pull back. I knew some of the heart-breaking injuries my friend and her people had suffered. But to enter their experience, to re-live those nightmares with Ila, and to navigate a joint project with her, seemed perilous. (Bilgen-Reinart xiv)

According to Bilgen-Reinart, Bussidor strongly urged her to participate in the task of compiling the testimonial life. She reports that Bussidor told her “simply that we were meant to write this book together” (xiv), but insists that her co-author drove every step of the production of *Night Spirits*: “[s]he interviewed the elders, she taped her older sister and brothers, and she transcribed and translated those interviews” (xvi). However, Bilgen-Reinart neglects to describe her own role in the making of *Night Spirits*, thus reproducing the historically asymmetric relations between recorder and teller in First Nations “told-to” narrative.¹⁸

However, because the making and circulation of *Night Spirits* is defiantly collective, and closely tied to the Sayisi Dene’s political demands, the ambiguity of Bilgen-Reinart’s role is of less importance than, for example, Don Barnett’s role in the 1975 edition of *Bobbi Lee*. The active participation of multiple narrators diffuses the recorder’s strict control over the narrative. *Night Spirits* has played a vital role in establishing or reviving community networks among the Sayisi Dene. Participation in the RCAP public hearings at Tadoule Lake has brought Sayisi Dene groups together, and has encouraged them to take stock of misdirected governmental policy leading up to, and dating from, the relocation. Re-opening communication channels in Aboriginal communities is one of the main achievements of RCAP, while the validity of the commissioners’ interpretations, conclusions or recommendations remains open to question.¹⁹

If Don Barnett’s vigorous editing pushed Lee Maracle to write her own version of *Bobbi Lee*, and if Petch’s report inspired Ila Bussidor to collect, transcribe and translate fuller accounts of her community’s relocation, perhaps Adolph Hungry Wolf’s ethnographic studies of Blackfoot customs motivated his wife, Beverly Hungry Wolf, to trade in her role as Native Informant for the role of Native Anthropologist in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*. Beverly, only too aware of how recordings can paraphrase Native North American verbal art as quaint Indian customs, is more careful than Adolph to describe the processes by which the life stories are put together.

First Nations women interlocutors have long played active roles as tellers, recorders and translators. However, published collections of recorded oral narrative have not always acknowledged these mediators. Moreover, because recorders such as Blackman have encouraged their tellers to get personal and stick to their own life story, the collective nature of the stories has been suppressed or ignored. In *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Beverly sets out to recognize the chain of women storytellers, including herself, whom Adolph had concealed in his book, *The Blood People*. In so doing she reconceptualizes some important genre modes of the recorded life story.

The Ways of My Grandmothers brings into sharp relief the difficult and uneasy relationship between ethnography, autobiography and Blackfoot/Blood traditions of the collective life story. In an early study of Native American recorded life narrative (1984), Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands argue that in writing autobiography, Native American women move from object of discourse to speaking subject. Helen Hoy questions the narrow forms of subjectivity that Bataille and Sands assume. For Bataille and Sands, “‘ethnographic autobiography’ approaches ‘genuine’ autobiography only when ‘the personality of the narrator breaks through’” (Hoy 109). In Hoy’s reading, *The Ways of My Grandmothers* is autobiographical, though Beverly Hungry Wolf routinely “bypasses opportunities for self-disclosure” (115): “Hungry Wolf is located even in resolutely impersonal passages and in these other women’s stories—embedded in them, that is, not simply ‘breaking through’ occasionally. . . . There is more than just a genealogical and tribal positioning here, however self-defining this cumulative layering of relational mappings may be. Because the text documents the practices of *her* grandmothers, Hungry Wolf’s selection and arrangement provide self-representation” (111-12).

As a collective life story, the text constantly changes speakers and writers, abruptly shifting from first- to third-person narration and taking advantage of the fluidity of personal pronouns. Hungry Wolf connects the stories to one another through the genealogies of the storytellers. “I am related to you, Beverly, because my mother and your grandmother, Hilda Strangling Wolf, were cousins. That makes your mother and me cousins, which, in Indian, makes me your aunt,” explains Mary One Spot (52). Genealogical description as a way to introduce the stories is prevalent in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*. Much of *The Ways of My Grandmothers* is made up of a layering of names of people and detailed descriptions of their relations. For example, Hungry Wolf maps out the different names given to one of her grandmothers, whom she calls AnadaAki:

AnadaAki means Pretty Woman in our language. It is the name she has carried the longest. When she entered school she became known as Hilda Heavy Head, and when she married my grandfather she became Hilda Beebe. After my grandfather died, she remarried and became known as Hilda Strangling Wolf. To top off this name-changing, her real father's name was Joseph Trollinger, a German name which she never carried. (19)

The multiplication of names and relations conveys the impression that more than one storyteller is speaking. Hungry Wolf meticulously draws attention to the range of mediators who pass on the stories. In so doing, Hungry Wolf reconceptualizes authorship in the collective mode. Hungry Wolf defies the voice of the single author, emphasizing instead the grandmothers as authors. In *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Mary One Spot, Paula Weasel Head, Annie Red Crow, Ruth Little Bear and Mrs. Rides-at-the-Door all submit their own contributions, both written and oral. Hungry Wolf does not enclose their passages in quotation marks, suggesting that they themselves authored their life narratives.

While autobiographical discourse affirms Hungry Wolf's legitimacy as speaker and writer, and the collective life story enables Hungry Wolf to displace the autonomous "I," "auto-ethnography" allows Hungry Wolf to explore Blackfoot traditions of self-representation. In auto-ethnographic strategies, "anthropological field research becomes a way to rediscover and study lost siblings, to learn about the transformations, transculturations, and cultural *métissages* at work in various areas of the New World" (Lionnet 26). Auto-ethnography offers Hungry Wolf the possibility of recovering Blackfoot practices (such as the Sun Dance) that Canadian and American governments have actively suppressed. However, auto-ethnography in *The Ways of My Grandmothers* is far from Blackman's earnest project of ethnographic description. Hungry Wolf uses auto-ethnography as a ruse to parody colonial ethnographic discourse. Parallel to her oblique appropriation of autobiography, Hungry Wolf writes a counter-ethnography in the ironic mode. "A TRADITIONAL BLOOD MARRIAGE: A Grandmother Who Married at Seven," is the title of Hungry Wolf's introduction (26-28) to Brown Woman's first-person account (28-31). The title mocks what could be a sensationalist headline in a colonial newspaper of "curious" customs of "primitive" peoples. Thus, auto-ethnography potentially unsettles ethnographic discourse.

Significantly, Hungry Wolf's career as ethnographer begins with her work as Native Informant for her husband, Adolph. Beverly's double role as both "Native Informant" and "Native Anthropologist" turns upside down the professional norms of address in collecting life histories "from the field." In

the Preface, Beverly describes her experience as unacknowledged gatherer of stories, to the great benefit of her husband's professional life: "I first recorded some of the stories in this book while helping my husband compile his book *The Blood People*" (B. Hungry Wolf 9). However, in his Introduction to *The Blood People*, Adolph does not refer to Beverly's participation. Instead, he explains how he came to Blackfoot territory, how he became interested in studying Blackfoot life and how he came to call the Blackfoot people "our People." He writes:

As a child I lived far from the lands of the Blackfoot People. Yet my dreams often took me among these People. As I grew older I went to schools, studied American history, and became a schoolteacher. I wanted to relate to this land and its People, both past and present. So I finally traveled to the lands of the Blackfoot People to see if there was any truth to my childhood dreams. I met an old Blackfoot man who told me there was. . . .

From this first old man I was guided north into Canada to the land of the Bloods—a tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy. These People became the relatives that I saw in my childhood dreams. They are the People of my children's mother. (A. Hungry Wolf xi)

Adolph's childhood "dream" ideologically reinscribes the Romantic nationalist impulse of appropriating indigenous peoples' lands and stories.²⁰ In referring to his adopted community as "the People of my children's mother," Adolph elides Beverly as subject. She functions solely as mother to his children, as the passage through which Adolph passes without comment. At the same time, Adolph asserts his place at the head of the Hungry Wolf family by describing the children as "my children."

In much the same spirit as Lee Maracle, Beverly appropriates passages from Adolph's texts and re-contextualizes them in *The Ways of My Grandmothers* to different political effect. Passages from at least seven earlier Hungry Wolf books (either authored by Adolph alone, or co-authored by both Adolph and Beverly) resurface in *The Ways of My Grandmothers* (see Hoy 121; 221n). Many of the previously published passages "are . . . repeated verbatim. The few changes that have been made are of a personal nature: the addition of Hungry Wolf's own experiences with a craft, the incorporation of a comment by her mother, the alteration of the general to the specific ("Blackfoot traditions" becoming "my grandmothers' traditions"), and the insertion of a first-person voice into passive constructions. . . . Pictures from other Hungry Wolf books are also cropped . . . to highlight the female experience of tribal life" (221-22n. 16). Beverly re-frames the stories to highlight women tellers (including herself) whom Adolph had failed to acknowledge.

In *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Beverly reads her husband's accounts, listens to the stories circulating in her community, and retells the narrative to highlight gender relations that had become erased in Adolph's writing. For example, both Adolph's *The Blood People* and Beverly's *The Ways of My Grandmothers* include stories of the famous war raider, Weasel Tail. However, the texts differ significantly in the representation of "his wife," Hate Woman. Adolph's publication acknowledges that "his wife accompanied him" on the war raids, though Weasel Tail remains the active participant in the "fantastic adventure[s]." Adolph recounts that in Weasel Tail's final and most glorious war raid, "while his wife waited in the nearby timber, he and the other man managed to steal fourteen good horses and they all returned home safely" (A. Hungry Wolf 269).

Beverly does not appear to appreciate the metaphorical implications of Hate Woman "wait[ing] in the nearby timber" while the men steal the horses. In Beverly's re-telling, Hate Woman is directly involved in the war raid: "Weasel Tail, Hate Woman, and one other man. . . . managed to steal fourteen good horses, with which they returned to their own camps safely" (B. Hungry Wolf 62). In Adolph's version, Hate Woman is an indirect, shadowy figure, obscured by a screen of trees. In Beverly's book, Hate Woman carries "her six-shooter, which she aimed along with the rest" (62). Hate Woman, no longer an appendage to her husband, becomes a war raider in her own right in Beverly's narration.

Beverly's version directly contests the bias of the anthropological record that has constructed Weasel Tail as the sole author of his exploits. "An anthropologist spent time with [Weasel Tail] in his last years and recorded the details of his life. Unfortunately, no one asked his wife to leave her stories about the war trails that she went on" (B. Hungry Wolf 60). In Adolph's telling, Weasel Tail enjoys the high status of storyteller in his community: "In later years, Weasel Tail was a frequent participant at Sun Dance Encampments, pow-wows and other gatherings of the Old People. He was often called upon to relate his exploits so that the ceremonies could proceed" (A. Hungry Wolf 269). However, in Beverly's re-writing, Hate Woman becomes the storyteller: "Hate Woman was asked to recount this adventure [of stealing 14 horses] during the tribal Sun Dance, which was a great and unusual honour for a woman" (B. Hungry Wolf 62).

Because of the historically asymmetric relations between non-Aboriginal editors and Aboriginal tellers, the process of translating recorded life story onto the page has often re-inscribed textual colonization and dominance.

Avowals of friendship, trust, mutual responsibility, shared agenda and the relinquishing of authorial control often cloak the workings of ethnographic authority. In *During My Time*, Blackman asserts an intimate relationship with Davidson as a means of boosting her own credentials as ethnographer. Don Barnett claims to be Maracle's equal in anti-imperialist struggle while dismissing the formative role of his editorial intervention. Üstün Bilgen-Reinart also effaces her own role in the making of *Night Spirits*, as if to intensify the authenticity of Ila Bussidor's testimonial project. In contrast, Virginia Petch and Adolph Hungry Wolf conceal the many voices that contribute to their authoritative ethnographic interpretations. However, by retelling their life stories, Maracle, Bussidor and Hungry Wolf transform the genre modes of the testimonial, report and ethnographic life history to suit their own goals. Recent examples of recorded life stories, in which First Nations interlocutors play a larger role, make good use of the flexible nature of the collective life story. The collective life story offers the possibility of imagining a diverse range of objectives, audience and forms of authorship. In the collective life story, recorders are more likely to acknowledge oral forms of copyright, in which those who pass on the stories become co-authors of the stories.

NOTES

My thanks to Barbara Godard, David Chariandy, Joanne Saul and Livia Monnet for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Canadian Literature* for their helpful suggestions and careful readings of the paper.

- 1 Speculations on whose intentionality is supreme—the recorder's or the teller's—dominate critical debates on recorded life narrative. While poststructuralist arguments posit that the Aboriginal narrator is but a cypher at the mercy of the author's textual manipulations, readings of recorded life stories as forms of *testimonio* tend to reverse the unilateral relation and insist that the narrator is the ultimate authority. For examples of critical studies that unduly emphasize the formative role of the recorder, see Murray and Lejeune. For examples of critical studies that excessively emphasize the free agency of the teller, see Donovan and Beverley.
- 2 Entextualization is the process of transforming oral discourse into written discourse. As William Clements argues, the term entextualization is helpful to show that "oral expression and textualization are not dichotomies but rather interactive" (10). For Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, the process of entextualization is in effect a process of decontextualization: "entextualization is the process of rendering discourse extractable, making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit, a text, that can be lifted out of interactional setting" (qtd. in Clements 10). See also Murray.
- 3 For more on the historically asymmetric relations between Aboriginal tellers and non-Aboriginal recorders in oral literary production, see Krupat, Murray, Clements,

- and Blaeser. In Blaeser's words, "translation in the Native American context has come to represent a process of domination" (58).
- 4 For examples from the 1970s and early 1980s of ethnographic life histories of Native women tellers by non-Native women writers, see Vanderburgh, Andrews, and Pitseolak.
 - 5 The kitchen table is a standard trope in feminist research that suggests collaboration between women interlocutors. See also Silman.
 - 6 For example, if we study the spiraling loss of trust in Linda Griffiths's and Maria Campbell's *The Book of Jessica*, the enforcement of "dominant-subordinate relationships" occurs most conclusively at the moment of the drafting of the copyright contract between Griffiths, Campbell and Theatre Passe-Muraille that legally entrenches the ownership of the play, *Jessica*, in the hands of the theatre. Also, see Feltes for more on how authorship helps to consolidate the publisher's control over the means of production.
 - 7 I borrow the phrase "god-trick" from Donna Haraway, who expands upon the notion of "seeing without being seen" as a strategy of dominance (189).
 - 8 In the re-telling of the life story in *I am Woman*, Maracle again emphasizes self-transformation over time, organizing the narrative not chronologically but around Maracle's/Bobbi's intellectual growth and development. Significantly, *I am Woman* contains its own told-to narrative, "Rusty" (43-61). Here, however, Maracle is the recorder of Rusty's story. She includes her own questions, as well as commentary on her changing views about Rusty's life, thereby creating a more explicitly dialogic testimonial life narrative.
 - 9 In addition to Blackman's *During My Time*, examples of the dually produced life narrative from the 1970s and 1980s include Vanderburgh, Pelletier and Poole, Spradley, and Speare.
 - 10 Examples of recent collective life stories include: Silman; Hanna and Henry; Hitakonanu'laxk; and Kulchyski, McCaskill and Newhouse.
 - 11 Michèle Kaltemback argues that in the collective life story, "la multiplicité des narrateurs contribue à repousser le rapporteur à l'arrière-plan" (163). Kaltemback supports Boyce Davies's analysis of the more democratic relations in the collective life story (4).
 - 12 According to Petch, "after 40 years, no answers to the relocation issue have been given by government and no compensation or apology has been received" (Section 7.0).
 - 13 In the final report of RCAP, the commissioners acknowledge that the Sayisi Dene's "traditional lands have been included within the boundaries of Nunavut," an act of land appropriation that "adds to the Sayisi Dene's sense of grievance" (Canada 438).
 - 14 In 1995, the Sayisi Dene at Tadoule Lake negotiated a self-government package that includes control over health, education and community programs (Bilgen-Reinart xii).
 - 15 In May 1996, the Sayisi Dene Nation joined nineteen other Manitoba First Nations in signing a tentative agreement with the federal government that granted 23 000 acres (9000 hectares) of land and \$580 000 for economic development to the Sayisi Dene (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 138).
 - 16 *Night Spirits* carefully documents the forty years of Sayisi Dene protest against the relocation. From 1956 onwards, leaders of the Sayisi Dene repeatedly wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs, demanding more suitable spaces for living than the shores of Hudson Bay, Camp-10 or Dene Village (the three sites where the commu-

nity had been relocated in 1956, 1959 and 1967, respectively) (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 72). Northern magazines and newspapers such as *The Musk-Ox*, *The Beaver*, *Winnipeg Free Press* and *The Taiga Press* published reports on the “plight” of the Sayisi Dene throughout the 1960s and 1970s (151-52). In 1971 Phil Dickman, a community worker who spent several years in Dene Village, published “Thoughts on Relocation,” based on interviews he conducted during his stay with the Sayisi Dene (90; 102). In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Sayisi Dene Nation commissioned studies to help construct their cases for self-government, compensation for the relocation and land title (138).

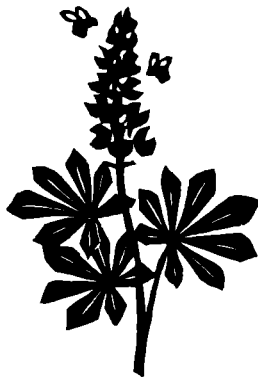
- 17 In an effort to protect the privacy of those she interviewed, Petch kept her informants anonymous. However, there are strong parallels between Bussidor’s life story as narrated in *Night Spirits* and Petch’s version in Section 5.0 of her report.
- 18 Bilgen-Reinart’s self-effacement is reflective of an old problem in Native American and First Nations “told-to” narrative. As David Brumble argues, editors of recorded Aboriginal life stories have historically attempted “to create the fiction that the narrative is all the Indian’s own” (75).
- 19 RCAP has been criticized by Aboriginal and governmental spokespeople alike for being ineffectual in bringing about the changes the commissioners recommended. The Minister of Indian Affairs has publicly disassociated the government from the report’s recommendations (470 in all), claiming that they had already been implemented by the time the report was released (Frideres 232). Patricia Monture-Angus, Mohawk legal scholar, is equally critical of RCAP. According to Monture-Angus, the commissioners spent “day after day travelling to communities to listen to the people,” only to “return . . . to Ottawa to craft solutions in isolation behind closed doors.” She maintains that RCAP remained “merely in consultation with Aboriginal Peoples” (12).
- 20 For more on Romantic nationalist appropriations of indigenous traditions, see Lutz and Fee.

WORKS CITED

- Andrews, Lynn V. *Medicine Women*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986.
- Barnett, Don, ed. *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel: Struggles of a Native Canadian Woman*. Life Histories from the Revolution Series. Richmond: Liberation Support Movement Information Center, 1975.
- Bataille, Gretchen and Kathleen Mullen Sands. *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1984.
- Beverly, John. “The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative).” In Smith and Watson. 91-114.
- Bilgen-Reinart, Üstün. Introduction. Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart. xi-xix.
- Blackman, Margaret B. *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, A Haida Woman*. 1982. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992.
- Blaeser, Kimberly. “Writing Voices Speaking: Native Authors and an Oral Aesthetic.” *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*. Ed. Laura Murray and Keren Rice. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 53-68.

- Boyce Davies, Carol. "Collaboration and the Ordering Imperative in Life Story Production." Smith and Watson. 3-19.
- Brumble, David. *American Indian Autobiography*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.
- Bussidor, Ila. "My Story." Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart. 3-8.
- . "Presentation by the Sayisi Dene First Nation." Round III. Thompson, Man. (93. 06. 01). *The Electronic Series: Public Hearings, Round I-IV: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. CD ROM. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1993.
- Bussidor, Ila, and Üstün Bilgen-Reinart. *Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene*. Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 1997.
- Canada. *Final Report of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples; Vol 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply & Services, 1996.
- Clements, William. *Native American Verbal Art: Texts and Contexts*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1996.
- Dickman, Phil. "Thoughts on Relocation." *The Musk-Ox* 8 (1971): 27-30.
- Donovan, Kathleen. *Feminist Readings of Native American Literature: Coming to Voice*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1998.
- Fee, Margery. "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature." *The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives*. Ed. Thomas King, Cheryl Calver, and Helen Hoy. Downsview: ECW, 1987. 15-33.
- Feltes, Norman. *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1986.
- Frideres, James S. "The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples." *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts*. 5th ed. Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1998. 228-35.
- Godard, Barbara. *Talking About Ourselves: The Literary Productions of Native Women in Canada*. Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 1985.
- Griffiths, Linda, and Maria Campbell. *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*. Toronto: Coach House, 1989.
- Hanna, Darwin, ed. and Mamie Henry, ed., trans. *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nlha7káp̓mx People*. Vancouver: UBC P, 1995.
- Hitakonanu'laxk. *The Grandfathers Speak: Native American Folk Tales of the Lenapi People*. New York: Interlink, 1994.
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Hoy, Helen. *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001.
- Hungry Wolf, Adolph. *The Blood People: A Division of the Blackfoot Confederacy*. New York: Harper, 1977.
- Hungry Wolf, Beverly. *The Ways of My Grandmothers*. New York: William Morrow, 1980.
- Kaltemback, Michèle. "Portraits d'autochtones: (auto)biographies rapportées." *La Création biographique/Biographical Creation*. Ed. Marta Dvorak. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1997. 161-68.
- Krupat, Arnold. *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989.
- Kulchyski, Peter, Don McCaskill, and David Newhouse, eds. *In the Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999.
- Lejeune, Philippe. "Autobiography for Those Who Do Not Write." *On Autobiography*. Trans. Katherine Leary. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989. 185-215.

- Lionnet, Françoise. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1989.
- Lutz, Hartmut. "Nations Within as Seen from Without." *Native North America: Critical and Cultural Perspectives*. Ed. Renée Hulan. Toronto: ECW, 1999. 83-108.
- Maracle, Lee. *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*. 2nd and rev. ed. Toronto: Women's P, 1990.
- . *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*. 2nd ed. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1996.
- . *Ravensong*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1993.
- . *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1990.
- . *Sundogs*. Penticton: Theytus, 1992.
- Monture-Angus, Patricia. *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations' Independence*. Halifax: Fernwood P, 1999.
- Murray, David. *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts*. London: Pinter, 1991.
- Pelletier, Wilfred, and Ted Poole. *No Foreign Land: The Biography of a North American Indian*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973.
- Petch, Virginia. "The Relocation of the Sayisi Dene of Tadoule Lake." June 30, 1994. Rev. August, 1995. Sections 1.0-9.0. *For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. CD ROM. Libraxus. 1997.
- Pitseolak. *Pictures Out of My Life*. Recorded by Dorothy Eber. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1971.
- Silman, Janet, ed. *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out*. Toronto: Women's P, 1987.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson, eds. *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992.
- Speare, Jean, ed. *The Days of Augusta*. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1973.
- Spradley, James P. *Guests Never Leave Hungry: The Autobiography of James Sewid*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1969.
- Vanderburgh, Rosamond. *I am Nokomis, Too: The Biography of Verna Patronella Johnston*. Toronto: General, 1977.
- Warley, Linda. "Reviewing Past and Future: Postcolonial Canadian Autobiography and Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*." *Essays on Canadian Writing*. 60 (1996): 59-77.



Petrified at Every Turn

From wheelchair row the view can be grim.
You swallow the horse pill of the world sitting down.

A whiskey's what I mostly need,
she said, cryptic, bemused.

This is finally the loosening of words
as when a child is everything

before all divisions and theories.
Nothing matters now but the whispered transmissions.

The eye is the same, mandala of the eye.
Cat tiptoes by, sentient, unconcerned.

These are the proverbs of Phyllis
At Crossroads Retirement Center:

Watch your words. Never
Put your faith in a sphinx.

Beware of chocolates.
Sometimes they shoot bolts of electricity

that blunder around the room.
Don't worry about me,

I'm sitting in the Mercy Seat.

Creating the Girl from God's Country: From Nell Shipman to Sharon Pollock

She experiences her life by telling stories about her life that living her life never gave her. Meaning is derived from the act of telling the story. Meaning is not derived from living the story.

(Sharon Pollock, qtd in Nothof 174)

I

How does one take an autobiography from the page to the stage, and what happens to the life story and its meaning when it is performed? These are not simple questions, but in this study I examine two autobiographical texts that invite comparison, provoke my questions, and promise some possible answers. The first is a prose narrative called *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart* (1987) by Canadian-born silent filmmaker, actress, and script-writer Nell Shipman (1892-1970); the second is a stage play called *Moving Pictures* (1999), by contemporary Canadian playwright Sharon Pollock, in which Pollock creates her version of Nell Shipman as she relives, through telling, her life.¹ Each of these texts is fascinating in its own right, and each is complex and multi-layered. Embedded within Shipman's narrative, for example, are the movies that created her even as she was scripting and acting in them; she became "the Girl from God's Country" due to casting and marketing pressures and an internalized identification with her screen image. Embedded within Pollock's play are events and passages from Shipman's autobiography, but the Nell Shipman figure in the play is much more than the woman Shipman herself portrays because Pollock creates a multiple self-portrait of a woman artist looking back on her life to understand its meaning and value. Because these two texts are so closely linked, they make an excellent case study for what is only my first step in theorizing the performance of autobiography on stage.²

While the play *Moving Pictures* is my main concern, *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart* provides essential context for my analysis and is too inter-

esting, too apposite, and too useful for my comparative investigation to dismiss as mere backdrop. My chief goals, however, are to examine the autobiographical strategies in each text in order to draw some distinctions between them and then to trace some of the ways in which this stage play constructs an autobiographical process and to suggest some preliminary conclusions about how plays perform autobiography. Through comparative semiotics I isolate some of the ways in which these texts signify and consider what their signifying practices might mean in performance.

To uncover these signifying practices I draw primarily on the recent work by Paul John Eakin, in *Making Selves: How Our Lives Become Stories*, and E. Ann Kaplan, in *Looking for the Other*. While neither Eakin nor Kaplan works on theatre, they do suggest at least two *foci* for considering the representation of autobiography on stage: one is the relationality that Eakin identifies as a primary factor in all autobiography; the other is the phenomenon of the gaze that has received so much attention from feminist film theorists and that Kaplan critiques. However, these two concepts—relational selves and the gaze—are in turn connected to a much wider set of issues that have been explored and debated by many other scholars (feminists, film theorists, and students of autobiography) since the 1970s, and my thinking on these questions of representation and autobiography, or representation *in* autobiography, owes much to this wider discourse.³

As I see it, both Eakin's concept of relational lives and Kaplan's re-conceptualizing of the gaze are informed by the principle of Bakhtinian dialogics. In its simplest formulation, a relational life is one that takes its autobiographical shape through the stories of a self's relation to others. Moreover, this narrated relationality can be *interrelational*, that is between the self and other people, usually family members, especially parents, and/or *intrarelati-*onal, when a narrator addresses the self, or fragments of the self, as *you* (Eakin 55-59 and 93-98). Above all, such stories are conversations; they are addressed to an implied or represented addressee, and they exist within the condition of addressivity. Such a dynamic of address is fundamentally dialogic, whether or not Bakhtin is invoked to support the concept of relationality (Eakin 64-65). And Eakin summarizes this dynamic precisely when he comments that "the dialogic play of pronouns [in autobiographical texts] tracks the unfolding of relational identity in many registers, in discourse with others and within our selves" (98).

In *Looking for the Other*, Ann Kaplan argues convincingly for the limitations of the "gaze," as that term has come to be understood and used in film

criticism, and she develops a separate concept called the “look” in order to explain the structure of looking in certain films that problematize the gaze (xvi-xx). According to Kaplan, the look, or what she often refers to as the “looking relation,” is a process that facilitates the returning of the gaze in a potentially interactive, interrelational activity of looking at, of looking into, and of exchanging looks that resists the binary trap of the gaze in which the objectification of one participant reinforces and confirms the subjectivity of the other. It is precisely this objectification that is central to the gaze and makes it such a powerful instrument of oppression. But the “looking relation,” or simply, the “look,” is a two-way process that allows the traditionally marginalized, silenced, and exploited in society to return the gaze, to see themselves as self as well as other. When the looking relation succeeds in film (Kaplan’s subject), one result is the creation of a complex, dynamic restructuring of identity as multiple, evolving, and interactive, in short, as dialogic. I will return to both Eakin and Kaplan in the discussion that follows, but for the moment it is enough to say that both “relational lives” and the “looking relation” acquire a particular force in autobiography, where they structure the multiplicity and addressivity of identity and of the stories that tell us who we are. When these two structuring principles work together, as they do in Pollock’s play, then autobiography takes to the boards with some very interesting results. But first Nell Shipman and her story.

II

Nell Shipman (1892-1970), born Helen Foster Barham in Victoria, British Columbia, knew as a child that she wanted to be an actor. By 1910, when she married Canadian producer/entrepreneur Ernest Shipman, she had performed in stock touring companies and vaudeville, seen many “Flickers” (as silent short films were then called), and become a convert to the new medium. The feature-length silent that brought her serious public attention was *God’s Country and the Woman* (1915), a film based on a James Oliver Curwood nature story, and in 1917 she co-directed, co-wrote, and starred in another Curwood adaptation called *Baree, Son of Kazan*, thereby consolidating her connection with Curwood’s northern wilderness material and her image as the outdoors woman in tune with nature and animals. Shipman’s biggest hit, and the film for which she is remembered, was *Back to God’s Country* (1919), a film she adapted from a Curwood story to give the heroine (played by herself) the major role (see Figure 1). Two years later, with *The Girl from God’s Country* (1921), Nell’s image, life-style, and film

aesthetic seemed secure: she *was* that girl and God's country was a northern wilderness in which animals were free to play themselves and human beings fitted into their natural surroundings.⁴

By 1922, however, a rapidly emerging film industry was catching up with Shipman. Because she wished to continue her brand of nature film she moved, with her second partner, director/producer Bert Van Tuyle, to a remote northern Idaho lake, where she set up her independent film production company and headquarters, complete with an entire zoo of wild and domestic animals. Lionhead Lodge was her home for the next two years, but when she left it in December 1924, she was virtually bankrupt and would never again succeed in films. She died in poverty thirty-six years later, with the loss of Lionhead Lodge, the demise of Shipman Productions, two more husbands, two more children (she had one son with her first husband), and a great many unsuccessful ventures behind her. The failure of her professional endeavours after 1924 is as much the story of Hollywood studio monopoly, of talkies, and of the marginalization of women within the new industry, as it is the story of one woman's life (see Morris), but her later failures and the rise of Hollywood are not mentioned in *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart*. The autobiography covers only the glory years, 1892 to 1924, from her birth to the loss of Shipman Productions and Lionhead Lodge.

As a narrative, Nell Shipman's autobiography has some unusual qualities that shed light on Pollock's use of the text for her play. The first of these is the ending. While it may be common enough to begin a life-story at the beginning—with one's parents and birth, as does *Tristram Shandy*—it is not as common to end the story in the middle, especially when one is writing that story late in life as Nell Shipman was. Apparently she was not planning to continue the autobiography in another volume, so I must assume that December 1924, with Bert gone mad, her favorite dog poisoned, other of the Lionhead Lodge animals starving, and no prospects for money, work, or success in view, represented the end to her. Moreover, her December flight to safety through the snow with her young son, while it recapitulates her films, most notably *Back to God's Country*, offers no hint of a conventional happy ending, and Shipman provides no commentary, no distance shot, as it were, to contextualize or interpret her life up to that point. We are left wondering what to make of such an ending to such a grim story and why, finally, we have been told this story. The ending, with its dangling questions, is precisely where Pollock begins, but before I turn to the play, I want to consider how Shipman deals with relationality and the gaze.

The structure of *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart* is highly fragmented and episodic. Time as a linear force is not an organizing principle in this narrative, which develops through flashbacks and flashforwards with very few dates. Instead of linearity, causality, or historical perspective (all of which serve to ground relationships), there is a strong sense of immediacy because Nell lives in the present moment. The intensity of this present is further heightened by the spatial intangibility of her descriptions; seldom does she give her readers a precise or detailed sense of where she is, either geographically or, more generally, within physical space. She seems unaware of, unrelated to most aspects of external reality. Nevertheless, the narrative does convey a strong sense of location within Nell herself as the feeling, perceiving centre of all that goes on around her. She constructs a sense of self as a chronotopic lens for focussing the emotional, remembered scenes of her life.⁵ Both this abstract immediacy, or what I prefer to call her chronotopic sensibility, and the fragmented nature of the narrative derive from and, at the same time, constitute the scenario-like structure of the narrative. This structure combines the “silent screen” of her career with the chronotopic sensibility of her “talking heart,” but Nell is only talking to herself in a monologic narrative that reduces or eliminates a fully relational self.

This restricted relationality is painfully clear in the descriptions of her human relationships. The autobiography opens, in a chapter called “This Is Where I Came In,” with this startling line: “The doctor said, ‘I’m sorry Mrs. Barham, but your baby is dead’” (1). However, she describes her mother carrying the “blue, breathless, ten-day-old creature” to the cliffside near Victoria, British Columbia, overlooking Juan de Fuca Strait, where she stood rocking the dead child in her arms until “it came alive,” as if miraculously reborn by “the wind from [the] snowy mountains” of her Canadian homeland (2). Not entirely satisfied with this rebirth story, she goes on to speculate that, if the cold, pure Canadian air did not revive her, then perhaps she is a “changeling” (2), and she links these complementary theories about her birth to explain her love of all things contrary to her parents’ lifestyle—wilderness, wild animals (especially bears), primitive living conditions, and her life in theatre and film.

Nell’s second rebirth occurs in 1918. She caught the influenza that killed millions that year and returned to her parents’ home to be nursed by her mother, who shortly thereafter fell ill and died. But Nell survived, and in her telling of this rebirth, she wonders if her mother “bargained or prayed” for God to “take her instead of the woman upstairs [the daughter]” because

the daughter was the one “with something still to be said” (66). In a seeming contradiction, however, she concludes that her mother’s sacrifice was pointless: “A life grown useless—or so she believed—exchanged for one I must come to believe completely worthless” (67). This puzzling comment haunts the rest of the narrative, although Nell will not pick up this thread again to question the value of her own or her mother’s life. Instead, she quickly scripts more scenes and plays “the Girl from God’s Country” right up to her third rebirth from the icy waters of Priest Lake.

This time she tells her story *as if* she were on camera. Life is going very badly at Lionhead Lodge; Bert is increasingly deranged; she cannot sell her films and make the money needed to keep Shipman Productions going. One winter night, while she is walking alone on the frozen lake, the ice suddenly breaks plunging her into the water and an “adventure” for which she has “no camera” (140). As she describes struggling to save herself, she protests that the last thing she wanted at that moment was a camera with “its three legs, its one eye, its celluloid gluttony, its demands and my own failure” (140), and yet her retrospective description captures the drama and danger of the scene, as if she were viewing it through a camera lens. After a struggle, she drags herself out on the ice and runs, half frozen, for the Lodge, where she changes quickly, dresses in dry clothes, and goes “into the kitchen to fix supper” (141). She has performed the role of stoic heroine, the girl who can survive the worst in God’s country and be reborn.⁶

Even from this brief description, it should be clear that Nell Shipman’s construction of identity through relationality and the gaze is complex and problematic. Nell’s primary relationship is not with people but with animals and nature, and above all with a camera. Two early experiences appear to have consolidated these relations for Nell: the first occurred when she learned, apparently in a brutal telling (12-13), that her best friends on the touring circuit were gay; the second occurred when she was on tour in Dawson City, Yukon. As a consequence of the first experience she rejected humans in favour of animals because they “made no false promises, betrayed no trusts” (13). The second she identifies as a symbolic identification with the natural world, “a home-coming of the soul,” during which “something was stirring within me, something answering the width of the limitless skies, the tumult of the river, the boundless heights of the ranges beyond” (21). These experiences underscore Nell’s bond with nature, which is privileged in her rebirth stories, and consolidate her self-definition as a woman who is part of nature and whose closest relations are with animals—“the Girl from God’s Country” *avant la lettre*.

But if Nell's articulation of her relational identity is unusual (in her preference for animals and wilderness over other humans) and limited by her narcissistic obsession with the camera, her use of the gaze is troubling. Over and over again, she objectifies herself, watching herself perform for an imagined camera or, indeed, for a specific male gaze. The imagined camera (as in the near-drowning adventure) often operates as a trope for a mirror in which she can see and judge her own performance as a female object on display. This self-objectification is especially clear when she describes being seen by the great Cecil B. DeMille. She invites us to watch her as she pauses on a "Dark Stage" to speak to a caged bird. Without her having seen him, DeMille has also entered the stage, but Nell senses his presence:

I knew that in my long-tailed, blue-sequined gown, posed by the gilded cage, making pucker-up whistles to the inmate, I was framed. Mr DeMille paused. I felt deep eyes pry my marrow. After a bit, he exited. I had given no sign, but *I had been seen.* (46)

Exactly what good this being seen does for her is unclear, and yet she fully identifies with the male gaze and hopes, somehow, to gain by cooperating with it. As the acting, posing female, she is penetrated by this gaze, and she re-presents this economy of the gaze by looking at herself as DeMille sees her (or as she hopes he sees her). She constructs herself, in her own autobiography, as the passive object of his subjectivity. There is no trace of Kaplan's "look" in this scene, either as it might have occurred on that Dark Stage, or as Nell recreates it forty years later.

The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart is a hybrid narrative merging elements of early film history with memoir and apology. However, the subject created by the narrative is not multiple but singular and singularly centred on her self as the perceiving, experiencing, active, yet observed "I." Shipman creates herself, after the fact, as "the Girl from God's Country," from the scene of her first rebirth to her escape from Lionhead Lodge. Moreover, she makes rebirth a key to her identity, which does not evolve but springs from that originating miracle and does not relate her to her human parents but cements her primary and defining relationality with animals and the wilderness. Of particular note, at least for my present purposes, is the static, self-objectifying focalization of this narrative. Rarely does Nell indulge in self-criticism or self-analysis; we seldom glimpse her inner or private self, or learn about her doubts or her questioning of motivation, aesthetics, or mores. She speaks monologically and presents her self from the outside as she performs for a real or imagined camera, as she

appears, or wants to appear, in the reader's/spectator's gaze—a heroic female, capable in the bush and able to communicate with wild beasts and vicious dogs, yet always feminine, reliant on men, vulnerable, and basically helpless.⁷ The dominant image created by this autobiography is of a woman posing before us as she once posed for DeMille, seeking our approbation and our confirmation that her life had worth, while withholding necessary information about motivation, ambition, and choice, or refusing, as Ann Kaplan might phrase it, to look back at us or, indeed, to look into her self.

In *Moving Pictures* it is as if Sharon Pollock, sensing the aporia, the gaps in Nell Shipman's autobiography, has written her play so that Nell can complete the autobiography, flesh it out with interpretation, and bring it forward in time to the moments shortly before her death. Pollock's Nell—or Nells, for there are three of them—argues with her selves, challenges past decisions, provokes, criticizes, accuses, and pushes for a reconstruction of memory and identity, before reaching understanding and acceptance of her own complexity and multiplicity, failures and successes. The image of Nell that emerges from the play is of a woman who is more three-dimensional, more self-reflective, and more intelligent (or self-aware) than the "Girl from God's Country" that Nell Shipman created.⁸

Moving Pictures, a title Pollock might have taken from *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart* (27), follows the autobiography closely in the events to be remembered, but it differs radically from the narrative in other ways. Pollock takes as her initial premise the importance of telling stories in order to give meaning to a life. The character who leads and bullies the others into telling stories is the elderly "Shipman" in her seventies, quite near her death, and at the age when Nell Shipman wrote her autobiography. "Helen" is her younger self, the idealistic young actress who falls in love with the "Flickers," but the self to be reckoned with is "Nell," the woman in her prime as an actress in *Back to God's Country* and as the independent filmmaker who created Lionhead Lodge at Priest Lake, Idaho. It is "Shipman," however, who provides the focalizing centre in the play because she demands to know what "Helen" and "Nell" make of her life:

/ say Now, as you sit here, essentially destitute, in your little rent free cottage, courtesy of affluent old friends, Now as you digest the meat of the message, Now as The End looms up there on the screen—what do you make of it? (13)

Making something of her life will involve stories and performance because "Shipman" will force her younger selves to face facts, failures, betrayals, errors, guilts, losses, and some successes, before the three aspects of the self

can come together in understanding and with a modicum of forgiveness at the end (see Figure 2).

In a sense, the entire play takes place within “Shipman’s” mind, or on the literalized metaphor of the Dark Stage screen for the set design.⁹ The men in her life are remembered presences, powerful but abstract and lacking the three-dimensionality of the women who constitute “Nell Shipman.” Thus, one male actor plays Carl Laemmle, the founder of Universal Studios *and* Ernie Shipman, while a second plays Bert Van Tuyle *and* Sam Goldfeldt, the founder of Goldwyn Pictures. In addition, there are two important male voice-overs: one for Barry Shipman, Nell’s son with Ernie, and another for Thomas Edison, the inventor of moving pictures. Pollock’s intention is to demonstrate the degree to which Nell Shipman was surrounded and controlled by these masculine forces that occupy the recesses of memory and haunt her even in old age. In the initial stage instructions, Pollock stipulates that the two men who play the four male roles “are always present on stage and observing the action”:

While they may seem to play roles assigned by the women, real power is vested in them; they have an ultimate interest in maintaining that power; in blocking any challenge to it and in preventing any loss of it. (3)

In their re-enacted encounters with each of these men, “Helen” or “Nell” will re-tell what happened in the past, while “Shipman” watches and scoffs or criticises or, most devastatingly, falls silent before the spectacle of her younger selves’ failure or foolishness.

Of the two voice-overs, that of Thomas Edison is the more interesting and is Pollock’s invention. Barry, who does appear in Nell’s autobiography, functions as a kind of externalized conscience in the play, reminding “Nell” of her refusal to pay any attention to him. Edison, however, operates as a kind of touchstone for reality and history, the male voice of authority and power “*describing his greatest achievement, savoring the words*”: “The Illusion of Continuous Movement Through Persistence of Vision!” a claim that opens the play and is repeated several times (4).¹⁰ Pollock’s use of this voice-over device is strategic. Booming out over the beginning of the play, it provides historical and technological context, linking Nell’s fate and life-story with the “moving pictures” (Edison 63), while commenting, with complex irony, on the nature of film itself as an illusion of reality, as virtual motion created from stasis that can seem, even *become*, more real (convincing, consuming, authoritative) than life itself. Indeed, the metaphor of illusion, based here on the principle of optics called “persistence of vision,” links the theatre/film

stage with one of the most persistently powerful of theatrical metaphors (life as mere illusion on the stage of this world), and describes what unfolds on Pollock's stage: by looking at her selves and forcing her selves to look at each other, so to speak, "Shipman" creates the illusion of meaning performed for an audience, which must participate in this illusion to make it (appear to be) real and acquire meaning.

As the action unfolds, in a one-act flow of memory, story, and debate, uninterrupted by scene or act division, Pollock has her three Nells relive, through replay, a series of defining scenes drawn from *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart*. Thus, we watch young "Helen" perform as Lady Teazle; we look on as "Nell" confronts Sam Goldwyn and rejects his seven-year contract; we share in "Shipman's" struggle to remember how she and "Nell" and "Helen" related to "daddy" and "mummy"; and we observe Bert's turning on "Nell" to accuse her of a self-involved obsession with her animals and her films.¹¹ These scenes from the past are contained within a frame located on "Shipman's" memory screen, and the action frequently returns to the present to allow the old woman to reflect, digest, and come to terms with what has just been replayed. The shifts in time, between the present of an elderly "Shipman" remembering and of her younger selves telling and performing the stories of her life, are triggered by the command: "Play." At this command, given by any one of the three women, a new scene unfolds, or a new version of a scene we have already had supersedes the previous one as a series of overlapping interpretations of past events emerges. At the end, which represents the stopping of the play and of "Shipman's" remembering, as well as the end of the stories from Nell's autobiography, the old woman's "persistence of vision" has allowed her to make something of her life through telling her stories. The three Nells move together on stage, "*the sound and the flickering black and white film stop*," and "Shipman" instructs the lighting technician to "Gooo-to Black" (139). But just as the lights begin to dim, "Nell" contradicts "Shipman" with a "Never!" and the lights come back up. "Shipman" protests that all she wants now is peace because "I'm an old woman you know. You're an old woman! We're an old woman!" to which "Nell" again insists "Never" (139). And the playing, the illusion of motion, stops on the promise that it could start again at any moment.

Pollock's Nell leads an intensely relational life, especially what Eakin calls an *intrarelatational* life, performed in the play through the second-person addressivity among the multiple selves. Because Nell's animals do not appear on stage, except in the fragments of film projected against the

women and onto the upstage flats, her identity in the play is constituted by her primary relation to her selves and her secondary relation to men. I will consider the men when I examine how Pollock works with the gaze, but Pollock's staging of Nell's constitutive relations with selves and parents are of paramount importance to any understanding of this play's "autobiographics."¹²

In *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart*, Nell Shipman described both her mother's and her father's deaths: the first she related to her own rebirth in a brief scenario which, I believe, hides much more than it reveals; the second she described in terms of her own loss and mourning, with the eye of an imagined camera tightly focused on the weeping Nell comforted by her two Great Danes (*Silent Screen* 76). Pollock reverses the order of the replays to make "Nell" first remember her father's death, while she was on location in northern Alberta filming *Back to God's Country* (44-49), and then, step by step, unwillingly, to replay her mother's death (56-58). When "Nell" and "Helen" refuse to participate, "Shipman" tells "the real mummy story . . . How Mummy Died for Nell" (56), and in doing so she brings the entire play to one of its most terrifying stops and silences. Following the autobiography closely, "Shipman" forces her selves to listen as she tells this unwelcome story about "Mummy's" "pact with God," made on that night in 1892, when her ten-day-old baby was declared dead. Now, twenty-six years later, "Mummy went up and lay on her bed. She'd made a pact. And in the morning, *you* woke up" (57). A long silence follows this shattering revelation and accusation, for without spelling out the meaning in so many words, Pollock makes this the most complex and profound confrontation in the play, the opening of a wound, the articulation of a daughter's unresolved and unresolvable guilt and responsibility.¹³ Neither "Helen" nor "Nell" is able to continue the game, so "Shipman" concludes: "I win," but Pollock's stage instruction for this line reads: "(*defeated*)" (58). As I read this scene, "Shipman" has held herself accountable to the mother who died for her, and she has found her selves wanting.

When the silence is broken and the story-telling resumes, "Helen" begins "*an alternative to SHIPMAN's story in an effort to reassure, comfort, support NELL,*" that recaps Nell's mourning for "daddy" with the scene, drawn directly from the autobiography, in which Nell wept and her dogs comforted her with their love. "Helen" lifts the storying from death, failure, and guilt to "a love story, Shipman! Not old and not dying but living!" (60) The identity that emerges from a sequence like this, as from the entire tra-

jectory of the play, is one in which the three selves of Nell Shipman argue with each other, tell and re-tell their versions of their life-story, address each other in anger, bitterness, and grief, but always come together again around the “persistence of vision” that transforms the transitory illusions of living into the meaning of storying by integrating the past into the present and connecting various pasts with a process of living into the future. Where “Shipman” forces the ugly secrets to the surface, her more ebullient, younger self, “Helen,” insists on reliving the joys, and her spirited, determined, undaunted (if selfish and self-centred) self, “Nell,” never gives up or concedes that “Shipman” has won.

But while “Shipman,” and “Nell,” and “Helen” are telling their stories and forging a strong sense of identity through an *intrarelational* process that integrates family relations into a sense of who Nell is, the men are always on the stage watching, and the voice-overs of Barry and Edison continue to insist on their definition of what she is—or should be. They are always there, employing the gaze and trying to force Nell to see herself as they see her: as mother, as sex object, as star material to make them money, in short, as a commodity with no agency or subjectivity of her own. Pollock leaves no doubt that she sees these men as representatives of masculine authority (3), but she manipulates the story to allow her women the power of refusal that goes hand-in-hand with the look. She stages her women as looking back at these men as well as looking into her selves; she “figures the looking relation as process, as becoming, beneath the superficial subject-object structure” (Kaplan 15). One example will suggest how this process works on stage.

In *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart*, Nell gave us a story about being seen by the great DeMille, but she dropped the story before examining its purpose or meaning in her life. In *Moving Pictures*, Pollock takes this moment of seeing and conflates it with the seeing of all the other men (Ernie, Sam, Carl, even Barry and Edison) to construct a powerful, homogeneous masculine gaze against which her women must struggle to survive. Thus, “Nell” (as Nell did in life) refuses to be called mother and insists that her son call her “Nell,” and, when she refuses to sign Sam Goldwyn’s seven-year contract, she does so in a fully articulated analysis of what the contract would do to her. In this long scene with Sam (74-80), “Nell” takes the offensive and in doing so forces the audience to see *her* as active, decisive, and smart enough to see the danger of his offer and to see *him* as a “stupid . . . ass” (78). Unlike the historical woman in her own autobiography, Pollock’s “Nell” defiantly tells Sam that she is making her own film:

I'm writing the screenplay and I'm playing the role. Guess what? Female lead: strong woman. Male lead: sick husband. She beats arctic weather and villains. Saves husband and self with the aid of a great vicious hound. . . . The villains all want it. But none of them get it. Here's your contract. . . . I'm not for sale. (78)

In this superb theatrical upstaging of the gaze, Pollock puts words into "Nell's" mouth that one wishes the real woman might have used, while at the same time re-enforcing "Nell's" chosen identity as the "girl from God's country" through this description of the plot for *Back to God's Country*. As the looking "Shipman" realizes, "Nell" has both won and lost here: she has refused to be bought, but she has also refused an opportunity and insisted on going her own way as an independent producer; she has taken an irrevocable step towards her future ruin. But most importantly, and most theatrically, Pollock has created a scene in which "Helen" and "Shipman" watch "Nell's" encounter with Sam and comment upon it, discussing and assessing its meaning for her life. In addition, we watch them watching her refuse him, and we watch as she debates the significance of what she has just done. In short, she sees her former self as an active agent, resisting the authority of a masculine economy, and we see this conversation between "Nell" and Sam and between "Nell" and her selves as a performance of the "looking relation"; we are constructed as spectators (which is not the same thing as *being* spectators), and, as a result, we are able to see through both our identification with the male gaze of Sam and our participation in the "look" of "Nell" and the "looking relation" of "Helen" and "Shipman."

The representation of self in *Moving Pictures* is the result of a complex process of conversation among selves and an articulation, through these often heated and aggressive exchanges, of the self's relations with others. When those others are family members, notably father and mother, the dialogised debate about issues of guilt, betrayal, abandonment, and debt, focussed through "Shipman's" *intrarelationality*, constitutes a gradual approach to recognition, acceptance, and a moving forward that preserves the metonymic multiplicity of identity while bringing those selves together around a coherent meaning centred in the old woman. When those others are the men, added pressures are brought to bear upon the relational selves: where "Helen" seems prepared to accept her role as object of the gaze, "Nell" resists this objectification and dares to look back at Ernie, Sam, and even poor Bert, while "Shipman" looks at all the men and at her younger selves performing for and against their masculine power. Pollock effectively problematizes the gaze for her characters and for her audience, which cannot sit back and assume the masculine perspective; she forces *us* to identify

with both sides, with the men's gaze and with the women's look. The result is a staging of an extremely dynamic series of *moving pictures* that refuses to settle into a finalised product. "Shipman's" "persistence of vision" enables her to create a meaningful story of her life out of its many scenes, fragments of film footage, memories, relationships, and contradictions and to realize a dynamic, multiple, dialogic self that makes sense without reducing that self to some essentialized core or objectified image. Although "Shipman" cannot deny that she has been shaped in part by the gaze, she also knows she has performed a "looking relation" that supports and empowers her own complex subjectivity. If there are no ultimate truths, no absolute forgiveness or atonement, in this play, it is because the story does not conclude. Conclusions and finalities are not Pollock's goal. Like her "Nell," she will only call a temporary halt to on-going conversation and story-telling with the assertion—"Never."

III

The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart, though written by an elderly Shipman and cast in a retrospective mode, does not acknowledge the old woman or incorporate her potential wisdom and hindsight into the narrative. Because of the loosely chronological structure, the stories have very little overt causal relation or linear connection; they do not reveal or build an awareness of motivation or an assessment of what the life-story means. Nell is certainly self-conscious and at times self-reflective—she knows she is setting up scenarios, projecting scenes from life as if they were from her films—but her voice throughout is monologic: there is little or no sense of inner debate, of addressivity with self or others, in short, of the dialogic that would ground an interactive relation with others or an *intrarelationality* with the self. Thrice re-born and thrice named, she remains stubbornly singular: Helen Barham *is* Nell Shipman, who *is* the Girl from God's Country. When she could no longer sustain the metaphor of that identity, she stopped telling the story and seems to have been unable to identify another life-storying role.

By comparison, *Moving Pictures* is a highly complex, ironically self-reflective text. Pollock locates the play's unifying centre in a vibrant, combative, intelligent, demanding, and ruthlessly honest old woman whose desire to understand the meaning of her life motivates the play. While the play is, like the autobiography, a retrospective and loosely chronological narrative, it returns repeatedly to its firm location in the present remembering of old

“Shipman,” before swinging back into the past at the command: “Play.” Significantly, past stories come to life through the medium of past selves, who are both separate from and parts of “Shipman”; they are still with her in old age, still contributing to her self-awareness, but they are different from her, never neatly subsumed or erased or silenced by the old self. The identity created by these voluble, story-telling selves is profoundly dialogic; as such, it is produced by and is inseparable from the processes of address, conversation, and relationality in *performance*. Where Nell Shipman seeks and isolates the dominant metaphor of rebirth to define herself, Sharon Pollock shatters that metaphor into a metonymic complex of multiple selves who are held together by an illusion—the persistence of vision that tricks us into the metaphor of seeing life as a meaningful continuity of moving pictures.

The condition of performance that produces this powerful metaphor of illusion, which is, in its turn, based upon the metonymic structure of relationality, takes the play in directions that the narrative cannot go, and I say *the* narrative, not *this* narrative, deliberately. While both works present stories of Nell Shipman’s life, narrative cannot escape its metaperformativity, its being *about* the life, even while that life is a carefully scripted performance. A play, however, *is* performance, and a written playtext, as Pollock insists, is a stimulus for performance (see Nothof 172-73). The narrative is fixed, locking Nell Shipman into her chosen role, but the play is performed anew each time the houselights go down and the actors’ voices break the silence to create live theatre. The difference between the two media is nowhere more dramatically clear and effective than in the play’s problematization of the gaze, which is fixed in the narrative but open to resistance and subversion in the play.¹⁴

This narrative fixity is further enforced by the conditions of the book’s posthumous publication and by the photographs chosen as illustrations. In every photograph Nell appears as a young woman—Helen the stage actress, Nell with her beloved animals, Nell as a movie star, and Nell in fur parka as “the Girl from God’s Country.” There is one image of Nell, taken about four years after the autobiography ends, showing her as Mrs. Ayers with two young children, but there is no image of her in middle- or old-age. This visualization serves to freeze her in time. The play, however, disrupts this attractive image by placing an old woman on stage for all to see and by showing, through the live contrasts with two younger selves, what has been lost in beauty and youth but gained in resilience and understanding over the years.



Figure 1:
 Poster advertising the film *Back to God's Country* (1919) showing Nell Shipman as Dolores in her northern cabin threatened by the villain. National Archives of Canada, C-137813. Reprinted from D.J. Turner



Figure 2: From the Calgary Theatre Junction premiere of Sharon Pollock's *Moving Pictures*, March 1999, directed by Brian Richmond with Shawna Burnett (l) as the young Helen Barham (her original name), Thea Gill (r) as Nell, and Lori Wainberg (c) as the elderly Shipman watching her younger selves. This production photograph has been provided by Theatre Junction and is reproduced with permission. Photo: Charles Hope. For help in securing this photograph it is a special pleasure to thank Lourdes Arciniega of Theatre Junction. My thanks, also, to Joyce Doolittle and the actors.

After considerable research on Nell Shipman and the times in which she lived, Sharon Pollock concluded that this woman did not consciously reject a system on principle and that she never understood her situation or why making films her way would not work (Nothof 173). Pollock, however, does understand the politics of trying to be a woman in a male-dominated industry, the difficulty of resisting the system, the ethical and aesthetic necessity of doing so, and the terrible cost to anyone who tries. Her “Nell Shipman” is a vehicle for enunciating this consciousness and conscience. By recreating Nell Shipman’s autobiography in/as performance, Pollock brings this forgotten artist back to life and gives that life meaning. She frees it from its narrative freeze-frame into a process of storying that Nell Shipman did not tell (about becoming an old woman), but that Sharon Pollock can imagine and tell by drawing deeply on her own experiences as a woman, an artist, and a mother looking back and into a life lived in theatre. From her own autobiographical position, which exceeds while it informs “Shipman’s” performance of autobiography, Pollock creates Nell Shipman as the “Girl from God’s Country” . . . and much more.

NOTES

- 1 Shipman’s autobiography, edited and designed by Tom Trusky, was published posthumously with an Afterword by Shipman’s son and a contextualizing essay by Peter Morris. Trusky provides notes, maps, and several photographs. The published text follows Shipman’s draft, left at the time of her death, with only minor editorial corrections (confirmed by Trusky in a December 2000 e-mail). Pollock’s play has not yet been published; my discussion is based on the script for the March 1999 premiere by Calgary’s Alberta Theatre Projects. This premiere, commissioned and directed by Brian Richmond, starred Lory Weinberg as “Shipman,” Thea Gill as “Nell,” and Shawna Burnett as “Helen,” with sets by Terry Gunvordahl.
- 2 Other examples come to mind, such as Terrence McNally’s treatment of Maria Callas in *Master Class* (1995) or Maria Campbell’s and Linda Griffith’s *The Book of Jessica* (1989), but the subject is a large one that blurs the boundaries between biography and autobiography, between text and performance, and, in many recent examples (the biography and film about cellist Jacqueline du Pré or Istvan Szabo’s 1999 film *Sonnenschein*, or Ken Russell’s 1989 film *Salomé’s Last Dance*), between text and film. Susanna Egan has begun the analysis of some of these issues, with particular attention to *The Book of Jessica*, in *Mirror Talk*; see chapter 3.
- 3 See Gilmore and Smith. For a discussion of theatre practices and the gaze, see Aston (41-44); for a consideration of performance and performativity, see Butler and Worthen.
- 4 For discussion of Shipman’s life and work, see Armatage, Trusky, and Turner. I analyse *Back to God’s Country* in *Canada and the Idea of North* (156-58), and Armatage analyses the films in “Nell Shipman: A Case of Heroic Femininity.”

- 5 In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin articulates a theory for "assimilating real historical time and space" into narrative based on the figure of the chronotope (or time-space). The chronotope facilitates the "visualization" of cognition in a novel and, among the available types of chronotope, the "adventure chronotope" most closely approximates Shipman's chronotopic sensibility; see Bakhtin 84-104.
- 6 Much remains unresolved in Shipman's relationship with her parents, especially her mother, and the role of the real and symbolic mother (here Mother Nature) is important in the autobiography and deserves greater attention than I can give it here. In this third rebirth the maternal element is both life-threatening and revivifying; the shock of the cold water is clearly meant to jolt Shipman out of her suicidal thoughts at this bleak and desperate point in her life.
- 7 Armatage comments that "Shipman's is not a cinema that poses the *difference* of women's filmmaking, but one which plunks its ample derriere firmly on its generic [narrative] base" (25). As Armatage goes on to demonstrate, that base is gendered because Shipman constructs her heroic feminine identity in conventional patriarchal terms: as an essentialized unity with nature and the body, as an ability to cope in the wilderness that arises from intuition, or instinct, rather than skill or reason, and as the embodying of a fundamental weakness or inferiority, before the superior forces of men, that leaves her in need of rescue by a male dog. See Armatage 25-33.
- 8 Pollock describes Shipman as a woman who neither understood her economic environment in the new film industry nor consciously decided to be an independent filmmaker with an oppositional aesthetic (Nothof 173). Because she found Nell lacking in perception, she sought another way into her subject and "became engaged in the reasons for telling stories" (Nothof 174).
- 9 All references to staging are to Terry Gunvordahl's set, which evoked a film *Dark Stage* with vintage cameras, limelights, and upstage flats on which fragments of Nell Shipman's films were projected to include the three women situated downstage.
- 10 Edison describes "persistence of vision" as "the principle of optics . . . which proves that the sensation of light lingers in the brain for anywhere from one-tenth to one-twentieth part of a second after the light itself has disappeared" (Edison 71). This principle, he explains, accounts for the "illusion" of "moving pictures," a phrase he uses in the diary (Edison 63).
- 11 While Nell makes it very clear that Bert became hostile and violent, she does not describe the scene that Pollock creates in the play, where Bert accuses "Nell" of killing him and beats her savagely (125-26).
- 12 See Gilmore 42-45. I analyse Pollock's "autobiographics" in "Sharon Pollock's Portraits of an Artist."
- 13 Pollock may well be drawing upon her own life and family relationships to deepen her treatment of this and other moments in her creation of Nell Shipman, but biographical speculations are beyond the scope of this study. For other plays in which Pollock works from autobiography, see *Doc* and *Getting It Straight*; see also Zimmerman (97).
- 14 For discussion of feminist subversion through performance in Pollock's plays, see Clement and Sullivan, and Stratton; for discussion of the broader issues, see Worthen.

WORKS CITED

Armatage, Kay. "Nell Shipman: A Case of Heroic Femininity." *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*. Ed. Kay Armatage, Kass Banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 17-38.

- Aston, Elaine. *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. 270-82.
- Clement, Susan, and Esther Beth Sullivan. "The Split Subject of *Blood Relations*." *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter*. Ed. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993. 259-76.
- Eakin, Paul John. *Making Selves: How Our Lives Become Stories*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.
- Edison, Thomas Alva. *The Diary and Sundry Observations of Thomas Alva Edison*. Ed. Dagobert D. Runes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1948.
- Egan, Susanna. *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1999.
- Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.
- Grace, Sherrill. "Sharon Pollock's Portraits of an Artist." Unpublished paper, 2000.
- . *Canada and the Idea of North*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2002.
- Griffiths, Linda, and Maria Campbell. *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*. Toronto: Coach House, 1989.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- McNally, Terrence. *Master Class*. New York: Plume, 1995.
- Morris, Peter. "The Taming of the Few: Nell Shipman in the Context of her Times." *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart*. Shipman. 195-204.
- Nothof, Anne E. "Interview with Sharon Pollock." *Sharon Pollock: Essays on her Works*. Ed. Anne E. Nothof. Toronto: Guernica, 2000.
- Pollock, Sharon. *Doc*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada P, 1984.
- . *Getting It Straight*. 1992. *Heroines: Three Plays*. Ed. Joyce Doolittle. Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College P, 1992. 86-126.
- . *Moving Pictures*. Unpublished script. 1999.
- Shipman, Nell. *The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart: An Autobiography*. Designed and edited, with notes, by Tom Trusky. Boise, Idaho: Boise State UP, 1987.
- Smith, Sidonie. *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practice in the Twentieth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Stratton, Susan. "Feminism and Metadrama: Role-Playing in *Blood Relations*." Nothof 68-80.
- Trusky, Tom. Notes to *Nell Shipman: The Silent Screen & My Talking Heart*. 167-83.
- Turner, D.J. "Who was Nell Shipman and why is everyone talking about her?" *The Archivist* 110 (1995): 31-34.
- Worthen, W.B. "Drama, Performativity, and Performance." *PMLA* 113.5 (1998): 1093-1107.
- Zimmerman, Cynthia. *Playwriting Women: Female Voices in English Canada*. Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1994.



Tidying the Tower: the Lady of Shalott without Tennyson

I did not want to be awakened
called from cloth to casement

when he stepped into my mirror, a fire
plumed in my body

from frame to frame he filled its space
till space existed for his resplendent bearing

his unbearable light put out the world
emptied me of the pictured landscape

back then, I never could tell
what in the mirror was me, the room, or the world

two small boys, their red bonnets bobbing
among yellow leaves: saw all from above, my perspective

around a topography of hills and distance
my hair grew briary, seasons unfolded over my face

one winter a herd of deer stepped
delicately over the frozen river

their soft nubile horns nudged
velvety through my threads

the sight of him cracked my gaze:
sickened of sight, I wanted touch

stones crumbled under the weight
of my longing, the pattern unravelled

small boys bled on the flagstone floor,
deer crashed through ice

tidied the tower, twigs from my hair, swept up
bits of mirror, spread

tapestries on the floor to lie on
a glittering professional, he did not turn back

up there, I'd said, *this blue for the water:*
it must have been a trick of the light, effect of distance

in here it's more like grey and ever
so swift

Myrna Kostash:

Ukrainian Canadian Non-Fiction Prairie New Leftist Feminist Canadian Nationalist

Preface:

This interview is part of a larger project, “Diaspora, Indigeneity, Ethnicity,” funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Margery Fee and Sneja Gunew are studying contemporary writer-intellectuals in Australia and Canada whose work reflects their sense of belonging (however uneasily) to an ethnic or an indigenous community as well as to the wider nation, including George Elliott Clarke and Marlene NourbeSe Philip in Canada, and Antigone Kefala and Christos Tsiolkas in Australia. In the interviews they are conducting in the initial stages of the project, their main question (and sometimes the only question they have had to ask) has been “describe your intellectual formation.” Oddly, although these writers are frequently at the centre of controversy or acclaim, they seem rarely to have been asked to reflect on how they came to their current political beliefs or on how they have constructed an identity for themselves out of a set of contradictory discourses. Once the interviews are complete, we can begin to draw comparisons between the experiences of such writer-intellectuals in two settler colonies, Australia and Canada, in the context of their different histories of immigration and treatment of indigenous peoples. Lisa Grekul did the bibliographical and contextual research, arranged the interview itself, and produced and edited the transcript. Margery Fee also did editorial work on the manuscript. The interview was held in Vancouver, July 2000, shortly after the appearance of Kostash’s latest book, *The Next Canada: In Search of Our Future Nation* (2000, reviewed on page 174 of this issue of *Canadian Literature*).

SNEJA GUNEW Let's begin by asking you to give a kind of intellectual autobiography: important formative events, people and so on.

MYRNA KOSTASH I'm 56 years old. This is going to go back a ways.

SG I know, I know. There won't be time for any other questions really.

MARGERY FEE This is the question that holds all the answers.

MK I suppose political memory would mark the beginning of an intellectual memory as well. I can see myself reading the *Edmonton Journal* headline: "Stalin Dead!"¹ Now obviously the fact that this made an impression on me comes from the fact that I grew up in a household, in a community, for whom that was meaningful. I knew he was a bad man and it was a good thing he died. It's interesting I picked that because sometimes I think that if I follow the thread of how I feel about the Soviet Union and about the socialist world and the relationship of the Ukrainians to that world and to that history and to that experience, I would say that that was an important moment of an intellectual formation. And then the next one would have been the reception of the kids who were Hungarian refugees in '56. I have a vivid memory of them arriving in school when I was in grade 6. I was really ambivalent about them. On the one hand, there was something very pathetic about them and my heart went out to them, particularly because the school I was going to at the time was still very much a working-class East European neighborhood school in Edmonton.

Perhaps my ambivalence emerged later, my ambivalence toward that figure of what I call the tatterdemalion blown away from the Soviet Empire onto our shores. At the time we received them—they were pathetic, yet almost heroic figures—but later I would find them very ambivalent figures because they became encrusted with my understanding of nationalism from Eastern Europe: Hungarian anti-Soviet nationalism, Ukrainian anti-Soviet nationalism overlapped with the right-wing agendas in North America. So, I found myself increasingly alienated from that refugee figure, but nevertheless it was an important moment in terms of my relationship to those places and those events. The next important moment was the impinging on my consciousness in high school of internationalism, notably the apartheid struggle in South Africa which I found so awe-inspiring and then the emerging civil rights movement in the United States. Again I have a very vivid memory of myself as an undergraduate student wishing fervently that I was called to some kind of great political moment as these young people were in the southern United States and being stuck in this place called Edmonton where nothing really politically interesting happens.

SG So, when did it start happening politically for you, when did the call actually reach you?

MK It would have been when I went to Seattle as a graduate student in 1965/66 and joined the Students for a Democratic Society. The branch in Seattle was very pastoral, actually, quite bucolic. It wasn't anything like its membership in Berkeley or Michigan. It was the closest I'd got to the generational, political upheaval. The American-led New Left was the one I identified with right up until my momentous encounter with Canadian nationalism in the early 70s. So, it was a long period of this kind of transnational political allegiance to the international New Left. Within all of that was the fact that I was studying Russian literature; I did that as a kind of in-your-face gesture towards the Ukrainian community, to show that I didn't share their phobia about the Russians. I went through a period of eroticizing Bolshevism. I had pin-ups of Lenin on my wall. Mixed up in all of that as well were the drugs, the sex and rock 'n' roll. It was a very fertile little period. Nothing like that has ever happened again that's so concentrated. But that's true for any of us who grew up at that time who had this kind of consciousness; it was an immensely multi-themed experience from which all the separate threads of the rest of your life can be seen emerging.

I grew up in a household of teachers, Ukrainian Canadian teachers who themselves were children of very poor—on my mother's side—very poor Bolshie immigrants. My father's side was more educated and considered to be one of the founding families of Ukrainian Canadians in Western Canada.

SG Did you grow up with the language at all?

MK It was around me constantly. I never spoke it credibly as a child. My parents spoke to us in English.

SG Why?

MK Well, they said at the time it was so that we would never ever have any inhibitions, we would never have any barrier linguistically in Canadian society, that we would be English-speaking people.

SG But there was a belief around, I think that was in the '50s and '60s, that somehow you couldn't hold more than one language in your head.

MK No, we were meant to learn Ukrainian secondarily. But the first one, the one in which we were absolutely confident sure as hell had to be English. Now I see that argument as slightly different. I see it in terms of gender politics in the home because the fact is my father's Ukrainian was much better than my mother's and if they were to raise us in a Ukrainian-speaking home my mother would be subordinate linguistically, that's my

theory. When they chose English as the language of the family, then everybody was on the same level. They were considering to send us to Ukrainian school on Saturdays.

SG And did you go?

MK Yes. Didn't get much out of it. Did not become Ukrainian speakers—

SG Why the resistance, do you think?

MK Couldn't understand the value of what we were struggling to learn—actively thought that it was humiliating, actually. Another vivid memory—this is when I was a teenager—we'd moved away from that working-class East European neighborhood to one of the new middle-class suburbs in Edmonton, just after the teachers had organized and got huge raises and salaries, so we could move out. And having friends at home from school and my father speaking Ukrainian on the telephone to somebody and me being anxious to close the door so my friends wouldn't hear this language.

SG So, do you think it was a sense of class humiliation?

MK I don't understand it as class. Anybody who was Ukrainian was probably tarred with the same brush.

SG But what was that brush?

MK At the time I don't know how I understood it. I know that in grade school I was already persuading people that I was Greek instead of Ukrainian, and I could say, "Well, I'm Greek Orthodox," therefore I'm Greek.

SG Where did that come from?

MK Somewhere I figured that Greeks were more highly valued than Ukrainians, or at least nobody had any opinion about Greeks, there weren't any around, but boy, did they have opinions about Ukrainians. Now of course I can see that I had instinctively understood the hierarchy of cultures in Edmonton. As ubiquitous as Ukrainians are, that didn't give them any greater value. I remember being intensely embarrassed by my Baba and her friends when my mother and I would meet her downtown shopping, at the Eaton's Store, and Eaton's was notorious as the place where East Europeans congregated to shuffle around in between department stores. And these congregations of Ukrainians with the garlic breath and the bad clothes, I was so embarrassed by them. These are my people? Ooh. But there was a bourgeoisie, there was a Ukrainian Canadian bourgeoisie. My mother was very ambivalent toward them, and I picked up a lot from her too, I think. She came out of this working class—this sort of lumpen family herself. And when she married my father, she increased her status within the Ukrainian com-

munity because she married a university graduate who belonged to an important family. Her reaction to the Ukrainians who arrived in Edmonton after the Second World War, these DPs, was really quite violent. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but now I understand it. This was an immigration—unlike hers—[which] came from the cities. They were very urban, very politicized, very nationalist, very Europeanized and really resented the fact that they were exiles. And, more to the point, they were very disapproving of the Ukrainian Canadian culture that they found. We didn't speak properly, we'd become really anglicized, we didn't know how to behave in church, we had these Protestant-style churches, even though we called them Orthodox. The DPs' mission was to elevate us. My mother had a perspective on all this from being a volunteer in the church, the women's committee preparing the food for the weddings that some of the émigrés would have at the church, and resenting terribly this status of "kitchen Irish," you know, in service to these hoity-toity Ukrainian bourgeois from Europe. Their children intimidated the hell out of me when we ended up in the same youth groups together.

SG There must have been convergences.

MK Oh yes. I mean, these Ukrainian classes for example on Saturdays. One of the reasons why my sister and I rebelled and said we're not going to go there anymore is that we were dumb bunnies compared to the progeny of these DPs who spoke beautiful Ukrainian, knew how to do things, actually knew how to dress in some strange way that we didn't know.

SG So how did you compensate for that?

MK Became a left-winger and got out of there.

SG Studied Russian literature?

MK Yes, I decided early on that I had a choice to make and that was to stay inside the community and try to improve my prospects within it or get the hell out of there as a socialist hippie, and that's what I did.

SG And you had your sojourn in the national centre of hippie-land, the US, and then you said you had your encounter with Canadian nationalism in the 70s. How did that come about?

MK That's how I got started as a writer as well, professionally.

SG Because you were on an academic path at that time?

MK No, no, no. I did a Master's degree in Russian literature at the University of Toronto but I had no intention of doing a Ph.D. I didn't know what I was doing, just reading lots of books, wrote a thesis about Dostoevsky, of course. I can remember working on the concluding paragraph of that

thesis the night that Bobby Kennedy was shot. Anyway, I went off to Europe after I got my Master's degree, hitchhiked around for a year in 1969.

Well, by hitchhiking through Europe I dropped out of the ferment in 1968 because I went down into Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey. When I got back to England in 1970, I discovered two things: I discovered that there was a women's movement. A friend I went to visit in England, an expatriate Canadian, handed me a stack of documents, leaflets and small little pamphlets and said, "I think you might find these interesting." The only one I remember in the whole pile was Anne Koedt, *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*, and it just changed my life.

SG Still a classic text.

MK Changed my life, or at least re-routed it, because feminism came right on the heels of the sexual revolution and I realized how incredibly resentful I was towards men in terms of my sexual experience, and this conviction that I had been frigid the whole time because I wasn't having these vaginal orgasms, right? I walked back down into the kitchen after I'd done the reading and told Sandy, "Well, I guess I'm a feminist, I believe all of this." So when I got back to Canada a year later, I just walked straight into the women's movement in Toronto. But Canadian nationalism hit me at the same time. In England I had been trying to write short stories hoping to be published in British magazines and had no luck whatsoever. But one night I was visiting these same friends, these ex-pats, and we were watching television together and it was a BBC dramatization of the Chicago Seven Trial. The trial itself had taken place while I was away already in Europe. So this was my first look at it, this British dramatization of it, and I was very, very struck by it and appalled and aghast at what had happened, but what *really* struck me, was that for the first time it finally sank in that none of these things—these events that were dramatized and the experiences of the people in them—had happened to anybody I knew. I didn't know anybody who had been in Chicago, I didn't know anybody who had had that kind of violent experience with police because I was a Canadian. I was so struck by this revelation, I ran upstairs and I hastily wrote this—what was later called gonzo journalism²—I realized it came out of the New Journalism which I was reading constantly, I was reading *Rolling Stone* magazine. I penned this thing about my own revelation of the specificity of a Canadian experience within this larger North American New Left.

SG I've not read that one, so what was the tenor of it?

MK Very smart-ass, cheeky, as though I had just figured something out that

nobody else had figured out. Deriding, in a sense, my earlier self, my younger self for identifying so completely with the American experience, but at the same time I realized now that I had absolutely no content for the Canadian. All I knew was that it wasn't that thing in Chicago, but what it was I didn't actually find out until I wrote my book about the '60s. My book about the '60s was my way of trying to fill in the gaps. So, that piece of New Journalism got published in *Saturday Night* magazine, in June of 1970. I was paid \$150.

MF \$150. That's pretty good.

MK So when I came back to Canada, to Toronto, in the spring of 1971, I started this intense reading of everything—Canadian studies, basically. I had missed the entire October Crisis. I was gone from the beginning of '69 to early '71. So, I had to catch up with that too. I read books about what had happened in October. The book that I remember being most mind-expanding was Kari Levitt's book *Silent Surrender*. It was the same thing as *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*. It just blew the whole paradigm open. What I remember more vividly was the extent to which we were colonized economically and that we didn't own our own resources and that we were a branch plant economy, that American corporate enterprises dictated what was going to happen to us. And we were colluding with this. Oh, and of course, the second thing I read was George Grant's *Lament For a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965). God! It's sensational. But then it was all part and parcel of my realizing that the sort of total uncritical identification with the American New Left was exactly that, uncritical, and I needed to re-examine my relationship to the idea of the left in the light of Canadian experience. And so this specific Canadian New Left and then the loony left as the Brits might refer to it within the NDP that emerged in the 1970s. I was never a member, but I was a member of something called the Canadian Liberation Movement, which was very short-lived.

They were fully formed (as far as I could tell because I missed the formative part of it), these Canadian entities, political, cultural, social, it was an emerging intellectual history that was specifically Canadian. Very interesting experience in the Canadian women's movement around all of these issues. I was involved in what was then still experimental Women's Studies, it was interdisciplinary—that's what made it experimental. People like me were invited to teach in it—activists, and journalists and so on, as well as people like Kay Armatage on their way up into the official Women's Studies hierarchy eventually. So, as a teacher in that program, I think in 1973, I helped students organize a

women's cultural festival at University of Toronto. We still didn't have our heads straight. The drawing card for the whole program was a rock-and-roll dance played by the Chicago Women's Revolutionary Rock Band. It never occurred to us that we might have found some Canadian musicians. At the same time we thought of ourselves as passionate Canadians. These women from Chicago rolled into town and came in with their van full of instruments and whatnot, and proceeded to sit around and chat with each other and smoke while we Canadians unloaded the van.

MF . . . Kitchen Irish . . .

MK That's right! There's the kitchen Irish again.

MF This is too symbolic. (laughter)

MK And I went up to them because they were these big bull dykes with their groupies following them around from all over the United States—I went up and I said, "We could use some extra manpower here." And this woman turns to me and says, "Ain't no manpower around here, baby." That was that, never did get any help. Later I learned that in that same period—'72-'73—remember the Canadian feminists instrumental in organizing a meeting between American feminists and the women from North Vietnam, and they met in Vancouver? Because it was impossible for the anti-war people in the United States to meet the Vietnamese.³ So, that was organized here, through women in Vancouver, but the Canadians were not invited to be part of the discussion. This is how it was told to me anyway. They were asked to supply the coffee and sandwiches. A lot of American women ended up in Toronto. They'd come up with draft dodgers or they'd come up on their own account. The radical feminists—that's who they were. And I see now that that was in fact an Americanizing location, and I was never, ever sympathetic to it.

SG To the radical feminists?

MK Right, despite my consciousness-raising about vaginal orgasms. I never went that route—I was always a socialist feminist, I always understood that feminism was about the larger liberation.

SG And the socialist feminists in the States have had a much harder time of it than those in Britain or Australia or here.

MK I left Toronto in '75 and started another part of my life altogether. All kinds of things happened for me at once. I became a professional writer in a serious way, freelancing. I was immersed in Canadian Studies, and identifying as a Canadian nationalist, and positioned myself as a socialist feminist, but I wasn't an activist. I struggled with this for a long time and finally made my peace with it years later: that my writing was my

activism and that was how I made my contribution. But I felt very guilty for the longest time that I wasn't out organizing, that I was writing books instead.

SG When you said that you became thoroughly Canadianized with Canadian nationalism, was this a comfortable experience?

MK Oh yes.

SG Did that change at all, say around or maybe before the writing of something that brought you back to the initial community you were so eager to leave?

MK I still don't understand that. The only discomfort I've ever had with Canadian nationalism is with my friends in Western Canada who are regionalists and who bear that historical grudge and suspicion of centralizing politics in Ottawa, or an NDP that's run from Ontario. I've never identified myself as a regionalist in that discourse.

SG Not so much that, but I think you were saying in various interviews in relation to *All of Baba's Children* that when you were doing this work it suddenly gave you a new place, a new perspective to position yourself that you hadn't had before which was very much a redefinition of yourself as a Canadian.

MK Multiculturalism emerged as a discourse from Canadian nationalism as a kind of corrective. By that time I was already back in the West. When I went back to Alberta, multiculturalism was a fully formed movement, if you like, among Ukrainian Canadians and I realized then how important it was in terms of understanding Canada as a more complex place than just an Anglo-Franco dichotomy.

SG Can you remember what your feelings were when you first heard about this new concept?

MK But you know what, those feelings went way back, were much more primordial than Canadian nationalism.

SG What do you mean?

MK It had to do with the valorization of being Ukrainian finally, because Ukrainians are really, really important in multiculturalism in Western Canada and more to the point, the Ukrainians who had emerged as multiculturalist activists in Alberta, in Edmonton in the mid-'70s, which is when I returned, were from this DP generation, the children of those DPs whom I'd so feared and was so humiliated by as a child. Here they were, we all were, twenty years later, and they were fantastically romantic figures to me because they were Left, very Left, they were very feminist, and at the same time were very critical of the Soviet Union and had a way of sympathizing with Ukraine in a way that was completely con-

sistent with the rest of their political stance and this was absolutely mind-blowing to me.

It was all of a piece. I wrote about it at the time that these were all parts of being alienated. I mean, I used language then I wouldn't use anymore—the "other." For example, in *All of Baba's Children* I have a chapter called "Racism." Well, I would never use that word now in relation to the experience that Ukrainians have. You can't if you're white. This is jumping ahead of myself. I made a career of this. I saw myself—what did I call myself—a Ukrainian Canadian Non-Fiction Prairie New Leftist Feminist Canadian Nationalist.

SG Does it form an interesting acronym? (laughter)

MK I would change the order of those things, but all of those seem to me to form some kind of coherent self.

SG But to what extent did you have to plead a case?

MK Not in the West, I didn't have to plead the case in the West.

SG But you were being published in the East.

MK Well, that was part of what astonished me actually, that there was in fact a constituency out there that picked up on this, that *All of Baba's Children* was read across the country. I had readers outside the Ukrainian community because I already had a reputation as a writer, as a Canadian writer, an un-ethnicized writer and as a feminist as well. And *Saturday Night* magazine which had published me in the first place, were the ones that ran the piece that became notorious because they called it "Baba Was a Bohunk" and I had to live this down. Although I do use the word in my essay. It was published in advance of the book, and it was while I was writing the book that I wrote "Baba Was a Bohunk" and that's what in fact precipitated the phone call from one of these glamorous Ukrainian Canadians who had arrived at the University of Alberta and whose circle I then became very close to. They were very piqued by this article, and wondered who I was and wondered what I was up to, and that was the beginning of the huge change in my life. So, the fact that *Saturday Night* magazine had run this article indicated to me that there was—I just simply assume that speaking as a Ukrainian Canadian within this official multiculturalism was really kosher.

SG What was your perception of the official multiculturalism?

MK Well, as a member of this group in Edmonton which was called *Hromada*, meaning community, we saw ourselves as left, we had a left critique of official multiculturalism.

SG Do you remember what that was?

MK That we should understand that there was a class politics involved here as well and that official multiculturalism was just a way of pacifying the ethnic communities and allowing them to have their song and dance.

SG Even then?

MK Oh, yeah, yeah. We understood all of that. What we had hoped would happen is that we would then overlap in our project—which we saw as cultural, a cultural and political project—with like-minded leftists from other ethnic communities—and we never found them!!

SG So, what would have been the other likely groups?

MK We thought maybe the Métis.

SG That's a good place to bring it in.

MK The Red Power.

SG What were the relations with the Métis and the First Nations?

MK None. In fact, I was a much more innocent, and naive undergraduate when I still lived in Edmonton in the early 60s. Do you remember model parliaments? I joined the Liberal club at the University of Alberta in my first year.⁴ We won the elections for the model parliament. I was named Minister of Culture and Immigration because Ellen Fairclough in Diefenbaker's cabinet had been the first woman cabinet minister so I guess they had to give me the same portfolio, right? And I, out of thin air, decided, as Minister of Immigration responsible for what were then called Indians, I was going to do something about the reservations, never having been on one, of course. So, I evolved this elaborate bill that was going to demolish them. You know, assimilation was a good thing, bring them into the city. . .

MF This is very Liberal.

MK Very Liberal. Then Chrétien did it some ten years later.⁵ I don't know where I got this. Anyway, I don't know how the word got around, but I was visited then by members of the NDP Club—I think it was still CCF then, I'm not sure—this is the social democratic group right? And among them was Maria Smallface,⁶ first real Indian I met, and she was from one of these reservations, and she said, "Sit down and I'm going to tell you about what it means to be an Indian on a reservation." And that's where I had my first "oh" about the importance of the reservation to the cultural continuity and the sense of home place. So, together we redrafted my bill which I then presented to my cabinet colleagues in the full expectation that there was going to be a revolt and I expected they were going to say, "This is not possible, this isn't Liberal policy, this is something else" and that I was going to cross the floor and join the NDP on the opening day of parliament. But in fact, what happened

instead was that there was a vote of non-confidence by the opposition—that was the end of the government. So, I never got to do this. That was what I understood about Native Canadians at the time, and it wasn't until I returned to live in Edmonton in 1975 and met Maria Campbell that I thought again about First Nations' experience. But, nevertheless, we Ukrainian-Canadians thought that maybe there was something to be done with the Métis because of the whole Gabriel Dumont/Louis Riel legacy in Western Canada, you know, that was one of our stories. A very important person to me was George Melnyk, also Ukrainian Canadian but from Winnipeg, from a post-war immigration but in the working class. He grew up literally on the wrong side of the tracks in Winnipeg and he arrived in Edmonton about the same time I did and wrote an essay called "The Indian as Ethnic."⁷ And that was very, very important. It led to our first meeting, because I was fascinated by the idea of ethnicity, or, as we, the third generation, understood it among Ukrainian Canadians, that in fact it was a Canadian identity. That this experiment that we were involved in in Western Canada (because we've been longer in Canada than the Ukrainians in the east) was in fact evolving a particular kind of Canadian self and that we were doing this along with other ethnics. George was theorizing a view of Aboriginality as one of these ethnicities. Now, that also got blown out of the water later.

SG What was the reception for these ideas outside?

MK Well, I kept getting asked to speak about it. First at the Women and Words Conference,⁸ and I was on a panel, a very important one here.

MF That stuff is archived at UBC.

MK Weren't papers published for a while?

MF Not all of them.

MK I'm not sure that the panel I was on was reproduced. But there was a panel put together to talk about how our ethnicity affected our writing, and it was a panel that had an Aboriginal writer from Winnipeg and I don't know who that was.⁹ It was this complete hodge-podge. We had nothing in common with each other. One person I had most in common with was the Aboriginal woman because we were both born in Canada. All the others were immigrant writers. I was an English speaking writer, others spoke about having to learn English as a second language and so on, and those who were not white who spoke about racism, I thought about it after, what were we all doing on this panel together? It was a very important moment for me because I realized that we were all there just because we had funny names and I was still being constructed as an exotic other, even though I saw myself as being profoundly implicated in the Canadian project.

SG In a sense, what you're more aware of is a kind of stratification that happened vis-à-vis the women's movement, right, because you were saying earlier on that you became aware more of different groups within the women's movement. That was easier to perceive in some ways than a stratification that happened in terms of cultural difference. Well, through ethnicity and the whole kind of consciousness around it, people began to be more aware of different ethnic groups within the larger kind of Canadian, as of course they knew about the Francophone groups. But I guess what I'm trying to push a little bit here is when you were constructing a very interesting and complex notion of ethnicity within the Canadian milieu, you must have been having kind of a dialogue with people outside your community who have a different point of view or were questioning certain aspects of this ethnicity, this new ethnic self.

MK You mean outside the ethnic communities themselves?

SG Outside the Ukrainian one, because you said you didn't have much contact with any other group.

MK I know that we thought that we were involved with what we would now call some sort of meta-politics. We thought—and I remember writing about this all the time up until a very important moment at a writers' festival in Calgary—that what we as Ukrainian Canadians were involved with was just one of the locations in which an anti-colonialist culture struggle was taking place.

SG What were you colonized by?

MK Coca-Cola.

SG No other colonization?

MK No. No. We didn't expect the Anglos to be in this as ethnics, obviously.

SG Why?

MK We never conceded ethnicity to the Anglos.

SG Did they try to argue their own ethnicity?

MK Oh yes. I mean, Susan Crean and I had this argument all the time. And, in fact, it forced her to understand herself as a specific kind of Anglo-Canadian and not just English-Canadian, that she understands now that she has an ethnicity rooted in the certain way of being English in Ontario.

SG But what did you mean that you didn't allow them, you didn't concede this to them?

MK We didn't concede them ethnicity because they wouldn't have had the same experience of the hierarchized relationship. They were in a dominant cultural, political and social position vis-à-vis us.

- SG So when I said there was no other colonization, obviously you were aware of a certain form of colonization by the dominant group.
- MK Yes, but with them we shared the larger colonization of international corporate capitalism. And that's why I could be a Canadian nationalist, powerfully identified with my friends like Susan Crean in Ontario on this issue, and be a Ukrainian Canadian multiculturalist in Alberta because it was all part of the same struggle.
- SG Not always though, that's the point isn't it?
- MK Well, we would have these little nuanced moments and eventually the whole thing just fell apart around race.
- SG How did it all fall apart?
- MK When I started thinking about it, that the Women and Words panel's collective relationship to the people who had organized us is that we were all funny names, we were all funny names.
- SG Did that change your relationship to Englishness, or even English?
- MK I don't think so, I mean, it just didn't bother me. I just sort of acknowledged that that was the case. It wasn't a site of struggle, the English. I mean, when they got out of hand, or if they were disrespectful, for example, the anecdote about finding myself in the first edition of the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*—Kostash Myrna, see Ukrainian writing.¹⁰ And yet, it's interesting that I found that so bothersome because that is in fact the way that I had constructed myself, and then when I see it reflected back at me from within the discourse of the dominant . . . and the only reason I'm there at all is that my then boyfriend who was asked to write the section on Ukrainian Canadian writing, he mentions my name, and so that's how I get in there at all. Now I'm in there on my own—Kostash, Myrna with her own entry written by Antanas Sileika in the current edition of the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*.
- SG You didn't feel you were up against it constantly?
- MK People around me did—kept reminding me. *All of Baba's Children*, I realize, I suppose, in a way was fueled by this accumulated resentment. But you see, my quarrel when I wrote *All of Baba's Children* was also with elements of the Ukrainian community, so I never felt a simple relationship to the English. Certainly in *All of Baba's Children* I felt I was writing on behalf of a beleaguered minority who were misrepresented.
- SG Well, the obvious other and much more official beleaguered minority at that time were the Francophones, the Québécois. How did that affect your relationship with the dominant group?
- MK It didn't at all. We were Western Canadians, we were not in a struggle

for national sovereignty, we didn't construct ourselves as a suppressed nationality, it wasn't the same categories at all. We had a broad sympathy for them, especially when we thought of the Soviet Ukrainian struggle. Those who still had some sort of national consciousness saw it as a diaspora. I've never felt part of a diasporic community because I feel so profoundly Canadian. Others felt that the Ukrainians in Canada were a diaspora.

If I were to really sit down and re-think the whole thing I would see that I did have my on-going quarrel, as it were, with Anglo Canada, but that that was subsumed within a much larger political imperative, and that was the struggle against Americans. And in that, I was allied with a large number of Anglo-Canadians. My Ukrainian-ness in relation to the non-Ukrainian Canadian left did not become obvious until I was associated with the editorial board of *This Magazine* and that's much later. I ran right up against Ukrainophobia.

SG Do you want to talk about that?

MK It's very hurtful. Everything changed with *All of Baba's Children* and I don't know why I wrote it. I wrote it from this Canadian nationalist feminist Torontonian self that was a writer by 1975, really quite established. I left all of that to go back to Alberta and to live in this small Ukrainian town and do a book about my parents' generation—I have no idea why. I had every intention of going back to Toronto once I'd finished the research, and that never happened. What happened was two things: one was the reaction of the Ukrainian community to the book, which was completely unanticipated by the publisher as well. It became something of a sensation, and I was asked to speak everywhere, and sometimes to hostile audiences—notably in Toronto.

SG What was the nature of the hostility?

MK The attack was that because I didn't read or speak Ukrainian at the time, right, I could only consult English language sources, I didn't really know what was going on. I had a very imperfect understanding of Ukrainian history, and the conclusions I drew from it. That it was basically a very naive and unsophisticated account of things. That was the kind version. The unkind version was that I had completely misrepresented Ukrainians when I talked about their misogyny and anti-Semitism, and particularly because I valorized the Red, the Commie experience within it. I was a renegade. The reaction in Western Canada was more nuanced because it was really what I was talking about, their experience. So, for them, it was a combination of pride and satisfaction in seeing their lives given this kind of display and some queasiness

around the politics that I brought to that. What surprised me in the writing of it was how deeply angry I felt about what had happened to these people. And I was angry not just in relation to the Anglo domination—that's certainly there—but angry about the way certain elements of the Ukrainian-Canadian community had colluded in suppressing the real story. And so my critical position was also as a revisionist thinker, having arrived in the midst of the community, the third generation as a feminist socialist nationalist writer looking at all this history again and how it looked to my generation. And that was the sensation, as far as the community itself was concerned. Then I got taken up by this glamorous group of left-wing revolutionary Ukrainian nationalists and feminists, *Hromada*, who in themselves all had very interesting subsequent lives, as you can imagine, once Ukraine was independent. From them I relearned that it was possible to be on the left and to be a critic of the Soviet Union at the same time. I had been de-Sovietized, of course, by the experience of Prague '68. But it was through these Ukrainians in Edmonton that I came into contact with the idea of the Ukrainian dissident movement in the Soviet Union, and once I made contact with that idea, I was just off with it. Because into Edmonton came—this would have been the late '70s—the charismatic figure of Leonid Plyushch,¹¹ who was a Ukrainian Marxist dissident, never stopped being a Marxist, had been imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital, fed all these psychotropic drugs because he had been part of the Helsinki Committee—do you know what I'm talking about? This was when Jimmy Carter was President of the United States and signed the Helsinki Accords with Soviet Premier Brezhnev and a number of other Western countries, to respect the human rights of their respective citizens. Immediately a bunch of citizens, intellectuals got involved as Helsinki Rights Citizens' Monitoring Committees—they took it upon themselves to monitor how the Soviet Union behaved in relation to human rights. Plyushch was part of that, he got arrested. Later I would discover also the figure, Vasyly Stus, on whom I based the "doomed bridegroom" who turns out to have had an even more tragic destiny, but Plyushch survived.¹² He was eventually expelled, came to Canada on a speaking tour, came to Edmonton and we were all a-flutter because we had this wounded hero in our midst. I asked to interview him. I couldn't speak Ukrainian then, so I took along with me one of my colleagues, one of my *Hromada* friends, to do the translating and I was deeply moved by the story of his life and said to him at the end of the interview that I was very moved, but I was surprised at how moved I felt and how close I felt to him

because in fact we had grown up on different planets basically, completely different experiences, and he says, “no, no, no, we come from the same village,” and I just about died. Something went straight in about this idea that I came from the same village as this man who is a Ukrainian, Soviet Ukrainian. His acknowledgment or recognition galvanized me and, really, was one of the formative moments for *Bloodlines* and what then took me repeatedly to Eastern Europe to try to find that lost relationship. Not with the national community, the “nation,” but a very particular strand in it, the dissident, the repressed, the heroic, the wounded, and so on, and that’s why the independent Ukraine holds no interest for me.

SG So, we started off the story though with your—

MK About Ukrainophobia, okay. So, because of the reaction to *All of Baba’s Children*, I became—as I wrote at that time—a re-born Ukrainian Canadian, and with this new pride, went forth through multicultural politics and eventually into politics of Eastern Europe in the waning days, as we see now, of the Soviet Union. I was a member of the editorial board of *This Magazine* and whenever I was in Toronto I was invited to their meetings. I had two revelatory moments there with Ukrainophobia among my comrades. These weren’t just Anglos—Rick Salutin was one of the editors. I had written this story of Plyushch for them in which I narrated my rebirth as a Ukrainian and my decision to identify with their history, their experience. Now admittedly I didn’t nuance it too much, but I was immediately challenged by Rick Salutin and by John Lang.

SG Challenged on what grounds?

MK “Do you really mean all Ukrainians? What about those Ukrainians who supported pogroms, what about those Ukrainians who subverted the union movement in Northern Ontario, the fascists, the anti-Semites, those Ukrainians too?” And of course, I didn’t mean them, right? I expected some kind of acknowledgment from my friends of this momentous identification that I’d come up with to re-identify with my own ethnic group. Surely it was worthy of some sort of support or something. I would have said, “Well no, I don’t mean those Ukrainians, I mean Plyushch.” But it hurt me that that was their first response, that that was their notion of what being Ukrainian meant and they were incredulous that I would want to associate with a community that they stigmatized in that particular way.

And the second time it happened at *This Magazine* was when I proposed a piece they eventually ran under duress. It was anthologized by

Susan Crean in *Twist and Shout*, an anthology of feminist writing from *This Magazine*. Susan Crean edited it and reprinted that piece. It's called "Will the Real Natasha Please Stand Up." It was my critique of fellow travelling Canadian leftists who played exactly the same role as intellectuals did in the Cold War who made their trips to the Soviet Union and saw no problems, saw that there was no difficulty there. They were making these trips to the Soviet Union as part of their politics in the home country. They were doing it in the face of McCarthyism. They didn't much care what the experience of a Soviet citizen was. In that respect the memoirs of Shostakovich¹³ were really important to me as well because he describes what it was like to be one of those Soviet artists that was trotted out to meet these official delegations from Friends of the Soviet Union, you know, groups in Canada and the United States, and despising these fellow travellers from the west who were not really seeing what was going on. In the same way, Lawrence Martin, who was the *Globe and Mail* reporter in the Soviet Union in the '80s, was reporting about going off to the provinces and being very impressed about how clean everything was and that dogs didn't shit in the street and children were well behaved. Germaine Greer went to Cuba—this was reprinted in *Granta Magazine*—she was invited to some women's conference, party conference.¹⁴ She was bowled over by the fact that Fidel Castro came to the conference and spoke the first day. "Can you imagine any Western leader doing this at a women's conference?" No, you couldn't. And she stayed on to visit in Cuba, and finally understood the roots of machismo, Latin American machismo and it's in the fact that the women are so powerful that machismo is a countervailing force to female power. I thought she'd gone completely gaga.

And then the third moment was Heather Robertson, who's my generation, my politics, in Canada, who met a woman called Natasha at a world peace congress meeting in Halifax and who—surprise—within days had an official invitation to go to Moscow because of her new friend—

SG That didn't make her suspicious? (laughter)

MK No, no because her friend Natasha was married to the guy who was the director of this notoriously KGB-riddled institution called the Institute for the USA and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.¹⁵ So, off she goes to Moscow—has a great old time with Natasha—but she is ever the vigilant journalist and says, "Gee, why are all these people lined up outside the grocery shops?" And Natasha said, "That's because the shops are so small that they can't all fit in at once." This is what

passed for journalism concerning the Soviet Union in the early '80s. In fact, into the Gorbachev era as well. I had done my travelling in Ukraine and I was by then already able to read and speak Ukrainian. I read books and taught myself how to do this again. I was aware of what the discussion was that was taking place within Ukrainian media themselves about women and society, so I proposed this piece to *This Magazine* to attack this kind of blinkered journalism from well-meaning leftist intellectuals in the west. Well, my colleagues on the board, they were very upset and feared that they would lose subscribers if they ran this kind of thing at the same time as the Reagan administration's war against the revolutionaries in Nicaragua. The thing to understand is, you couldn't be seen to give comfort to the enemy, blah, blah.

SG It's a familiar policy.

MK Yes, it's very familiar and I got caught in it. They did run the piece, they edited it. But, just as they feared, people canceled their subscriptions because they were tired of this neo-Reaganite crap from Kostash. So, it was those two moments when I realized that my proud new identity as a Ukrainian was not universally admired and that it had this other aspect to it in terms of the outside community. And all of that then I think really came to a head around the war crimes stuff, Ukrainian war criminals in Canada, the Deschênes Commission.¹⁶

SG Came to a head in what sense?

MK For me personally. It was one of those situations which, when I was with Ukrainians, I was fiercely defensive of Jews and the Jewish point of view on all this in Canada. When I was among Jews, I was very sensitive to their Ukrainophobia and Slavophobia and identified and tried to explain the Ukrainian position to them. It was an extremely uncomfortable position to be in because if you were talking to the one group the other group heard you as a sell-out. But the fact of the matter was that I felt that for all the phobia, the Slavophobia among Jewish Canadians, there was a prior issue and that was that Ukrainians had to come out of their state of deep denial about their relationship with Jews. Anyway, it came to a head for me in terms of my relationship with the *Hromada* group. Not everyone felt the same way, even though we were all socialist feminist Ukrainian Canadian patriots or whatever. My boyfriend of the time notably was very sensitive to how there was this always latent anti-Ukrainian sentiment—not just amongst Jews, but in the society at large and it comes up around this war crime issue. Of course the issue for Ukrainian Canadians was the John Demjanjuk case.¹⁷ People got really obsessed with that. By that time race politics had emerged in the writing community so it sort of crossed over.

SG We'll have to chase that up but I remember reading in one of your pieces about feeling silenced—and I can't remember whether it was a general writers' meeting or a women's meeting.

MK That was the one in Calgary which would have been in I think '88 or '89, just when I was starting to write *Bloodlines*. I finished my travel in Eastern Europe and I went to, it was when we still had the National Book Festival, it was still being financed, so communities had various literary events, Calgary had this festival and recruited a panel discussion on ethnicity and writing. I wasn't on the panel, I was in the audience. Katherine Govier, Gail Scott, Lee Maracle were on that panel, and I don't know who else. And I remember sitting in the audience wondering what nerve that Katherine and Gail were up there, not me. I mean, after all, they were Anglo—sulk, sulk, right? To be fair, Gail herself wondered out loud what the hell she was doing there—“Maybe because I come from Quebec, that's what I'm here for.” And Katherine Govier comes from some Huguenot background four hundred years ago. Anyway, the important part of that event was in the question-and-answer period afterwards where all the questions were directed at Lee Maracle and they had to do with appropriation of voice. I did not get up and ask anything and that was the new experience. I was unbelievably silent in a discussion about ethnicity and writing which had been my beat up until then. I looked at my silence not out of any sense of grievance but out of a kind of astonishment. Something had happened and it was no longer about me and I was suddenly part of the problem. I was not part of the solution, I was part of the problem, and boy, did I have to figure that one out and I just stopped writing about all of this for years until I was forced back into it as Chair of the Writers' Union.¹⁸

SG Where are you now with this?

MK With the people whom I interviewed in my new book. I discovered that in revisiting these questions with some writers of colour, that they also have moved on, and we find ourselves in roughly comparable places which is the postmodern, glossed as an acknowledgment of difference and the collapse of the multicultural meta-narrative—this idea that there was some large project that we were all subsumed within called the cultural struggle. That, plus a new appreciation of what one of them called linkages, that it wasn't about the ghettoization of difference, but the linking up of difference into some reconstruction of a larger project. That overlaps with others now such as the—I don't want to put words in their mouths but for me it would be, actually it's a revisiting of the one I identified with in the '70s and '80s as a multicultural activist, and that is—the larger struggle against the globalization of culture, it's the

same one for me. But now with a new sophistication—things have happened since the first time it was cast and one of the things that happened was the Writing Thru Race conference.¹⁹

SG Yes, and one of the components of that that resonated very strongly with me is that question: it's all very well to be lumped together under white privilege, but who counts as European is something that pops up again and again in your writing and I cheer because that's precisely where I think a huge amount of work has to be done.

MK I think those moments of hurt about being Ukrainian, how my Ukrainian is perceived by my left-wing colleagues were about their failure to understand that there are very different experiences within that European otherness, or the European dominance. As soon as I studied East European and Balkan history, I realized that there was a whole other set of constructions that were taking place between some Europeans and other Europeans and that fear of the Asiatic Other and so on that this discourse around whiteness did not appreciate at all whatsoever. And I suppose maybe that's where my brand-new project is coming from now that I've got this Canadian stuff out of my system, passed it on to the next generation, is to go back again now and look at that—to understand the Slav now, not in relationship to its Canadian experience, but the Slav as it first emerged in European history and comes up against a dominant civilization called the Byzantine or the late Roman, I suppose, and how that gets subsumed within Ottoman Europe and all of that. I'm interested in the moment where the Slav conflicted so violently with the Byzantine in the Balkans when the Slavs arrived in the sixth century.

I was raised in the Orthodox church and I found that a very interesting identity and how it's played out in those Slavic countries that share that church with the Greeks, and yet there's a Slavophobia amongst Greeks, you know? So there's maybe some sort of foundational Slavic moment that I'm going back to, as the source moment for what emerged as a Ukrainian Canadian identity in Canada.

SG Well, it's playing itself out again of course in the war in the former Yugoslavia, there are quite a number of moments actually. When I was reading through *Bloodlines* I was littering it with those yellow markers where you kept asking that question at various important moments: where does Europe begin and where does it end? And suddenly you find yourself positioned with the "Asiatic hordes."

MK That's right, and you could be positioned there by the Poles, by the Greeks, by the Croats, by the Czechs. I realized that I felt solidarity with

- all of us who are on the other side of that line. But then I get impatient with the people on the Orthodox side of the line who are themselves phobic about the Asian.
- SG Precisely, and so, I think in a very recent article in *BorderCrossings*²⁰ when you talk about revisiting the Serbians, you talk about your impatience with the kind of politics that is happening there.
- MK *BorderCrossings* was an important forum for me. When I told them I was getting onto this topic of Byzantine history, they said I don't think that's for us anymore, but thanks anyway.
- SG At least in my perception, you intrinsically raise these questions that colonial history follows us into the new world, that it has its own kind of inflections in the New World as well. So those histories pursue us.
- MK I think that's what's at the heart of the war criminals affair—the tales that are told about the homeland in the new world, about pogroms and so on. The stories of the Cossack Uprising which were told as tales of liberation among Ukrainian Canadians and as horror stories among Poles and Jews. But, for example, my cousin here—same grandparents on the maternal side—has no Ukrainian identification whatsoever. She grew up outside the organized Ukrainian community. So, I think that this story I've been telling is one that begins with the early decision of my parents to stay within the institutions of the Ukrainian community, and what happens after me—that's the other thing I realize—I think that somewhere along the way, the story ends with the third generation. The fourth one is already intermarrying, has lost the language, doesn't know the history, maybe has some nostalgic or curious interest, but no longer has . . . when my grandmother died, the last of the Europeans died. So anybody who is fourth-generation has no direct European connection.
- SG Again, that's played out in different ways in different places and one of the arguments that I've made in the Australian context is that “European” becomes merged with English. There is very much that sense of the English as being the sole proprietors of European modernity. So Europe gets a very local kind of inflection which is not made clear.
- MK That's true, I've never thought about the English as Europeans, to tell you the truth.
- SG Exactly.
- MK Except for that moment I tell in one of my *BorderCrossings* columns where on one of my trips out of Eastern Europe—I always used to go through London to see friends and decompress and buy newspapers I

could read—it was 1988 when I went to the British Library to see the Mozart exhibit. They had head phones stationed at various places around the exhibit. You could put on the headphones and listen to *The Marriage of Figaro* at the same time as looking at manuscripts and so on. I was doing that at this one particular moment. I stood up and looked around me and saw the light beams floating in from the high gothic windows on to these leather-bound volumes of jurisprudence and god knows what else—and I burst into tears, listening to Mozart, looking at these books, because I finally realized what it meant when these dissidents in Eastern Europe who used to make me so impatient, would talk about wanting to rejoin Europe as though Europe was elsewhere, it's always elsewhere, right? Especially the Czechs, that polemic that Kundera set up that the Soviets had kidnapped Czech culture out of Europe. I thought, "Where do you think Moscow is, anyway?" But, at that moment I understood what they meant, that they had been kidnapped out of it, the rule of law, the notion of a mature civil society. *That* Europe was the one that they longed for and the one that I had seen—well, it was 1991, I had just had an awful trip in the Ukraine, and being outside of Europe meant this kind of slovenly, shabby, everyday existence in which your well-being was of absolutely no concern to the authorities and you were treated with contempt by your elites, and you had no recourse, you shuffled around, you shuffled, this sort of shuffling citizenry, and that was the one that was expelled from "Europe." So, it's very complicated for me. Again, I suppose when I am among the Euros, the ones that claim the privilege—European identity—I want to remind them of the complexity of it if you're a Slav, right? But when I'm among the Slavs, there is a sort of yearning for that modernity. Or that very important moment about tractors—it's also in my *BorderCrossings* columns—where I went to an exhibit at the Guggenheim. Aah! It was so important. The Guggenheim mounted a fabulous exhibit, "The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932," in 1992. I was peering in the glass case at a textile, a fabric, that had been designed by one of the artists who'd been mobilized for the industrial effort. As I was peering at it, I realized the design was rows upon rows of little tractors, and it made me weep.

I realized the same thing in two different ways: realized what the tractor meant when it showed up as an iconic image in Soviet Ukrainian periodicals such as I saw in my maternal grandparents' house (they subscribed to Soviet Ukrainian periodicals) and of course there would be the beaming farm worker on the tractor, and we'd make all those jokes

about falling in love with your tractor, ho, ho, right? Now I suddenly understood what that tractor meant. It meant modernity, being hauled into the modern world out of the bog of the village—that's exactly what it meant when they got the first tractor on my grandparents' homestead in Alberta. I asked my father about that—it meant you were modern, that tractor. I sort of wept out of shame that I had at one point belittled this, or made fun of it, or didn't understand what it meant to want to be part of this industrialized, mechanized world that I was so busy critiquing and denouncing as a left-wing person in North America, and remembering also—it's in *Bloodlines*—that film, the famous Dovzhenko film, *Zemlya, Earth*, with the arrival of the first tractor onto the collective farm.²¹

After that literary event in Calgary where I did not get up and say anything right through the *Writing Thru Race* controversy—my recollection is that basically I had nothing to say about myself as an ethnic because I felt that discussion had been overtaken or superseded by the race issue. But I, at the same time, felt very uncomfortable about rushing to join this new camp of white writers who were making their *mea culpas*, *mea maxima culpas*—rushing off to have unlearning, racism workshops. I never presented myself at those events, those political corrections, and I wondered why I didn't. I had my answer when I re-read that part of *All of Baba's Children*, a chapter called "Racism," which I re-read in the light of what had happened at the Writers' Union, or what was happening at the Writers' Union when I chaired it, and that was of course the hysteria in reaction to the Union's decision to sponsor a conference on racism and literature that excluded whites, or white writers. I was at the organizing meeting of the conference committee here in Vancouver where that decision was taken by the committee and I had to endorse it or refuse endorsement. It was a very interesting moment because I could see that around the table of committee members there was by no means a consensus. I think it was Makeda Silvera who persuaded me to go with the exclusive conference because she said in effect that "We have 362 days a year or something to meet each other as white and non-white writers; we want a couple of days just to air stuff within our own racial communities, and anyway, if you show up, then we have to worry about how you're feeling instead of getting on with our own agenda," and boy, that really rang a bell, in terms of the women's movement and how we needed *not* to have men around, especially sympathetic men.

MF Because then you'll hurt their feelings.

MK That's right.

SG And they tended to take over.

MK Exactly. Anyway, I decided that, tactically, it would be a good idea to support this exclusive conference because I could see their point, but, I suppose I could also see what would happen if I refused. Those who would refuse such a conference risked splitting the Writers' Union and there would then be a caucus that would take itself out. That had happened in other arts groups, and I did not want to be the Chair of the Union when that happened. So, having then endorsed the conference, I wrote a Chair's report in one of the newsletters that followed to explain why the Writers' Union should sponsor this conference, and it went over surprisingly well. Letters continued to come in. There were some members who had already resigned because of the June Callwood fiasco.²² Some resigned because they didn't want to be part of a union that sponsored an event they couldn't go to. But, on the whole, there was pretty impressive cohesion until the Toronto newspapers got hold of this—and they just went nuts. The editorial writers at the *Globe* and the *Toronto Star*, the cartoonists, uhghh! I had to somehow reply to all this. I waited for it all to come in (I can't reply to each one of these) and then I went and re-read my chapter on racism in *All of Baba's Children* and remembered then that there had been a moment when I had not been white and my people had not been white, very literally, I mean, explicitly so, when Anglos in Alberta had taken exception to us there. I re-read the incident that occurred in my great-uncle's life when he, as a new immigrant, a new Canadian, had decided that he wanted to run for some kind of office and become part of Canadian institutional life and put his name forward as an official weed inspector for the district of Vegreville which is in the block settlement area of Ukrainians, and the editorialist of the *Vegreville Observer* wrote that this was a scandalous event that—to think that some “Russian yokel” would have authority over Englishmen, and then finished by saying, “No white man will stand for this.” I realized that Ukrainians were not white—but I am, right? So, the burden of my response to all of this in an essay in the *Globe and Mail*—was I think that's where I entered my postmodern space, understood how these things happen, how these things work. Uncle Peter was black but I wasn't—what had happened? This notion that we keep reconstructing the idea of the other, new elements get absorbed into it, and the old story gets told anew, some new version of it. Nothing is fixed forever, and we should all just take a deep breath and wait for this latest wave of immigration in turn to become

Canadianized, as it happened to the Ukrainian Canadians and would happen again to others. This was also in response to the Neil Bissoondath school of anti-multicultural hysteria in which I am flagrantly and badly misrepresented, when he quotes me in his book as saying that I am a multiculturalist because I like the idea of being exotic, which is exactly the opposite of the case I made to him. This is not about being exotic, it's about de-exoticizing the Ukrainian self and taking the Ukrainian self out of the church basement and into Canadian normality. So, the recovery of the idea of Ukrainians who had been themselves subjects and victims of a racist discourse was really important for me to understand for what my stance could be towards the newest alienated racialized other. It was a question of waiting for the non-white other to have a new experience of itself. And lo and behold, when I went to do my interviews for the next project, the artists and intellectuals I talked to all reiterated this vision of a multicultural society in which difference had not disappeared, but which found its linkages and its overlappings with other identity discourses and in any case, was not reductive. They were really hostile to the idea that they were only racial, that their identity was *only* racial. They believed they had all kinds of selves, and that they wanted to stitch (Cameron Bailey's term)²³ themselves into the larger story. I thought I heard being said—both an acknowledgement of the collapse of the metanarrative around Canadian identity, but at the same time a kind of hopefulness that all this difference and all this alterity is somehow going to produce a new metanarrative, right? When people talk about wanting to stitch themselves back into the big story, or they want to be part of Canadian self-understanding, it seems to me that in there is implicitly a desire for a big story about ourselves again.

SG Well, the big story, or the point of reference now is globalization, there's no question about that. People position themselves in relation to that.

MK And why global capitalism should be the only one that has the metanarrative is beyond me—I think we should have one too.

SG Absolutely.

MK That's what that wonderful essay that I cite in my book about what happened to the fish is about. Marilyn Porter,²⁴ who's a sociologist at Memorial University and a socialist, asked the question: is Canada a postmodern country? She wrote an essay in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* and answers it yes, we are because this, this and this, and she's done all of her homework and she acknowledges the importance of the post-colonial critique of the nationalist narrative, or the socialist para-

digm. But she says, having done all that work, these necessary correctives, intellectually and politically, what about the fish? Here she is a sociologist in Newfoundland, she sees what's happening to the collapse of the communities because of the collapse of the cod fishing, she goes: "Now I know the fish have disappeared from the discourse, but they have actually disappeared." And it's the actually disappeared fish that she wants us to think about again. And I think that's something of what I was hearing in the following generation.

SG That's the other big story which is around environmentalism and that is rightly galvanizing youth today.

MK But not just environmentalism. Having made these necessary correctives to the Anglo, multicultural, liberal nationalist big story, made all the corrections to that, we still need to find a new way of being in solidarity with each other. And that's what I think I heard from the people I was interviewing, and not just from the non-white Canadians, but that whole generation of young Canadians that I was talking to. Over and over again this desire for a new way of being in solidarity with each other.

NOTES

- 1 In the late 1920s, Stalin launched collectivization programs in the USSR. Between 7 and 10 million Ukrainians died in 1932-33 during the resulting famine. In 1941, following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Stalin announced a "scorched earth" policy for Ukraine resulting in the relocation of all livestock, farm machinery, and industrial factories, and the destruction of valuable property (bridges, warehouses, and even architectural monuments), and the evacuation eastward of Ukrainian government officials, skilled technicians, scientists, and intellectuals.
- 2 "Gonzo journalism" is Hunter S. Thompson's unique approach to writing, a rambling and rolling style that draws in the audience, making readers feel that they are experiencing the action.
- 3 The meeting is mentioned in Susan Brownmiller's *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1999), 174-75.
- 4 Kostash was enrolled at the University of Alberta between 1962 and 1965.
- 5 In 1969, the federal government of Pierre Trudeau (with Jean Chrétien as Minister of Indian Affairs) released its "White Paper on Indian Policy."
- 6 Maria Smallface Marule is a member of the Blood Nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy and is internationally known as an educator and advocate of human rights for indigenous peoples. She has taught Native American Studies at the University of Lethbridge, and in the fields of political and economic development with CUSO, the National Indian Brotherhood, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples.
- 7 George Melnyk, "The Indian as Ethnic," *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War*, ed. Jars Balan and Yuri Klynovy (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta; 1987), 142-6.

- 8 Dybikowski, Ann, et al. ed. *In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les Femmes et Les Mots* [Proceedings of the 1983 Conference]. (Edmonton: Longspoon, 1985), West Coast Editorial Collective. *Women and Words: The Anthology/Les femmes et les mots: une anthologie* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1984).
- 9 Kostash was on a panel with the following: Lillian Allen, Kristjana Gunnars, Mary di Michele, Suniti Namjoshi and Coreene Courcjhene. The “Aboriginal writer from Winnipeg” Kostash mentions is likely to have been Coreene who was representing Pemmican Press.
- 10 Jars Balan wrote Kostash’s entry (as part of the entry on Ukrainian Canadian writing) in the first edition of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Oxford U P, 1983).
- 11 Beginning in the 1960s, Ukrainian mathematician Leonid Plyushch (1939-) was vocal in his opposition to Soviet abuse of human rights. Despite surveillance, harassment and questioning by KGB officials, he wrote protest letters, contributed reports to journals, and attended the trials of arrested friends and fellow dissidents. In 1972, he was arrested. Other dissidents arrested at this time were sentenced to labour camps and internal exile, but Plyushch was diagnosed as schizophrenic and committed to a psychiatric hospital. For two and a half years, he was given drugs that rendered him immobile and severely depressed. Interventions were attempted by the American Red Cross, the American Medical Association, Amnesty International, and various other organizations. In 1976, Plyushch was released and he and his family emigrated to France. Plyushch has published *History’s Carnival: A Dissident’s Autobiography*, edited and translated by Marco Carynyk (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).
- 12 Vasyl Stus is the figure upon whom Kostash based the figure of the “doomed bridegroom” in her book *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir* (Edmonton: NeWest P, 1998, reviewed on page 167 of this issue of *Canadian Literature*). Stus (1938-1985) was a Ukrainian poet and intellectual; like Plyushch, he was outspoken in his objections to Soviet persecution of Ukrainian intellectuals. In 1972 Stus was arrested and charged for “slandering the state,” then convicted and sentenced to five years of labour and three years of internal exile in the Urals. Despite his imprisonment and exile, as well as his deteriorating health, Stus continued his fight against the Soviet regime: he continued to write, and his documents were smuggled to the West. Following his release in 1979, Stus continued his political work and, in 1980, he was arrested again (sentenced to ten years of forced labour and five years of internal exile). In 1983, Stus’ prison notebooks circulated in the West and, in 1985, he was a candidate for the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature. Stus died in a labour camp in 1985 at the age of 47.
- 13 Volkov, Solomon, ed. *Testimony. The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).
- 14 Greer, Germaine. “Women and Power in Cuba.” *Granta* 16 (1985): 205-29.
- 15 The Institute for the USA and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences was established over thirty years ago in Moscow as a scientific research institution for advanced studies of the economy, policy, and ideology of the United States of America and Canada.
- 16 In 1985, the Mulroney government announced the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, to be headed by Quebec Superior Court Justice Jules Deschênes. The objective of the Deschênes Commission was to determine whether there were Nazi war criminals in Canada and to recommend policy that would effectively hold them accountable for their crimes. Jewish organizations in Canada saw the commission as delaying deci-

- sive government action on Nazi war criminals. Ukrainian organizations, on the other hand, felt that the commission was initiated by special interest groups seeking ethnic vengeance against the Ukrainian community. Both Jewish and Ukrainian groups lobbied the commission. The Deschênes Report was released in 1987 and the federal government simultaneously announced its decision to amend the Criminal Code to allow prosecution of acts suspected to be war crimes committed outside Canada that would have violated Canadian law. The futility of the commission became obvious to both sides: the government had made its decision about war crimes before the Deschênes Report was released and publicly debated.
- 17 In 1986, John Demjanjuk (1920-), a Ukrainian-born resident of the United States since 1951, was extradited to Israel and put on trial on the charge that he was "Ivan the Terrible," a notoriously ruthless prison guard at Treblinka. In 1988, Demjanjuk was found guilty and sentenced to death. But the case was appealed and, in 1990, brought before the Supreme Court in Israel. In 1993, Demjanjuk's conviction was overturned and he was released.
 - 18 Kostash was Chair of The Writers' Union of Canada in 1994-95.
 - 19 The Writing Thru Race conference, organized by the Writers' Union of Canada, was held from June 30 to July 3, 1994, in Vancouver. Editorials and articles appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, the *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Toronto Star* in which the conference was described as "cultural apartheid" and "reverse racism." Roy Miki discusses the conference in his *Broken Entries: Race, Subjectivity, Writing* (Toronto: Mercury, 1998).
 - 20 *BorderCrossings* is a Winnipeg-based international arts magazine; Kostash wrote a column in *BorderCrossings* from 1992 to 1998.
 - 21 Aleksandr Petrovich Dovzhenko (1894-1956) was a Ukrainian motion-picture director who brought international recognition to the Soviet film industry. The child of Ukrainian peasants, Dovzhenko made his directorial debut in 1926 with *Yagodki Lyubvi* ("The Fruits of Love"). Other films directed by Dovzhenko include *Zvenigora* (1928), *Arsenal* (1929), *Zemlya* (1930), *Ivan* (1932), *Aerograd* (1935), *Shchors* (1939), and *Michurin* (1946). *Zemlya*, Dovzhenko's last silent film, depicts the closeness between the Ukrainian peasant and his land and the upheaval in the countryside in the opening year of Soviet industrialization with the organization of collective farms.
 - 22 See Marlene NourbeSe Philip's account in her *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1984-1992* (Stratford, ON: Mercury, 1992).
 - 23 Cameron Bailey is a writer, curator and art critic who has been involved in many film and video festivals; he was a Director of the Ontario Film Development Corporation from 1990 to 1995 and he is a former Director of Toronto's Black Film and Video Network.
 - 24 Marilyn Porter. "Are Some Countries More Postmodern Than Others? Some Observations from Recent Canadian Experience." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30.2 (1995): 91-106.

Selected Bibliography of Publications by Myrna Kostash

BOOKS

- Her Own Woman: Profiles of Ten Canadian Women* [with Melinda McCracken, Valerie Miner, Erna Paris, and Heather Robertson]. Toronto: Macmillan, 1975.
- All of Baba's Children*. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1977.
- Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada*. Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1980.

No Kidding: Inside the World of Teenage Girls. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987.
Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993.
The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir. Edmonton: NeWest, 1998.
The Next Canada: In Search of Our Future Nation. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000.

ESSAYS/STORIES

- "Whose Body? Whose Self? Beyond Pornography." *Still Ain't Satisfied!: Canadian Feminism Today.* Ed. Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman, and Margie Wolfe. Toronto: Women's Press, 1982. 43-54.
- "Feminism and Nationalism." *Competition, a Feminist Taboo?* Ed. Valerie Miner and Helen E. Longino. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987. 38-47.
- "Domination and Exclusion: Notes of a Resident Alien." *Ethnicity in a Technological Age.* Ed. Ian H. Angus. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and University of Alberta, 1988. 57-66.
- "Pens of Many Colours." *The Thinking Heart: Best Canadian Essays.* Ed. George Galt. Kingston: Quarry, 1991. 175-80.
- "From *All of Baba's Children*." *Kitchen Talk: Contemporary Women's Prose and Poetry.* Ed. Edna Alford and Claire Harris. Red Deer: Red Deer College P, 1992. 23-25.
- "Will the Real Natasha Please Stand Up? Women in the Soviet Union." *Twist and Shout: A Decade of Feminist Writing in This Magazine.* Ed. Susan Crean. Toronto: Second Story, 1992. 143-55.
- "Eurocentricity: Notes on Metaphors of Place." *Twenty Years of Multiculturalism: Successes and Failures.* Ed. Stella Hryniuk. Winnipeg: St. John's College, 1992. 39-43.
- "Round Trip." *The Road Home: New Stories from Alberta Writers.* Ed. Fred Stenson. Edmonton: Reidmore, 1992. 275-85.
- "Introduction to the Idea of Atrocity." *Let the Earth Take Note: The First Anthology of the National Milton Acorn Festival from 1987 to 1991.* Ed. James Deahl. Charlottetown: Milton Acorn Festival, 1994. 72-73.
- "How I Lost My Tongue." *Eating Apples: Knowing Women's Lives.* Ed. Caterina Edwards and Kay Stewart. Edmonton: NeWest, 1994. 228-36.
- "Table Manners." *Writing Away: The PEN Canada Travel Anthology.* Ed. Constance Rooke. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994. 156-63.
- "Medicine Line Crossings." *Fresh Tracks: Writing the Western Landscape.* Ed. Pamela Banting. Victoria: Polestar, 1998. 79-88.
- "Ways of Coping." *Two Lands, New Visions: Stories from Canada and Ukraine.* Ed. Janice Kulyk Keefer and Solomea Pavlychko. Regina: Coteau, 1998. 259-71.
- "Flesh and the Devil: Eroticism and the Body Politic." *Arousing Sensation: A Case Study of Controversy Surrounding Art and the Erotic.* Ed. Sylvie Gilbert. Banff: Banff Centre, 1999. 117-28.
- "Unmasking the Political Dissident." *Threshold: An Anthology of Contemporary Writing from Alberta.* Ed. Srdja Pavlovic. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1999. 135-42.

OTHER

Teach Me to Dance. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1980. [film]
 Pavlychko, Solomea. *Letters from Kiev.* Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1992. [translation]

Small signs and scars

His concern was not comforting
unwrinkling waves under numb glass so that
I cried like someone on the other side.
He dropped the reflecting disc on my knee
unprofessionally, taken aback; but not
everything means anything.

The next doctor examined my eye
as biological flesh with geographical lines,
each subterranean eruption amid the shifting plates of the world
now under the microscope each scar and
abnormality an insignia recording a lifetime
of small disasters.

Please note that these reviews were neither invited nor edited by the guest-editors of this special issue.

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

Autobiography and Truth

Timothy Dow Adams

Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography. U of North Carolina P us\$22.50

Anne Fabian

The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America. U of California P us\$22.50

Reviewed by Arthur W. Frank

Each of these books, written by and presumably for scholars, presents a unique view of autobiography. Adams is a professor of English, concerned with autobiographies by literary figures. Fabian is a historian, performing an archaeology of otherwise neglected narratives by people whose claim to authorship was their experience of extraordinary suffering. The theme uniting the two books is truth: the complexities of telling the truth of experience.

An epigraph to the two books might be Vicki Goldberg's comment on staged photographs, quoted by Adams: "Actually, the crucial issue may not be the camera but a gnawing sense that the world itself, knowable only through imprecise perceptions, is a tissue of uncertainties, ambiguities, fictions masquerading as facts and facts as tenuous as clouds." This "gnawing sense"—that perception is imprecise, that facts are more tenuous than we would like to believe—eventually catches up both with autobiographers and with critics of autobiography. The genre that is supposed

to be founded on the truth of a life inevitably runs into the difficulties of telling a truth.

Adams analyses the subset of autobiographies in which photographs play a major part. He is equally concerned with literary autobiographers who bring family photos into their work—Paul Auster, Maxine Hong Kingston, Sheila and Sandra Ortiz Taylor, N. Scott Momaday, Michael Ondaatje, and Reynolds Price—and autobiographers who were themselves photographers—Eudora Welty, Wright Morris, and Edward Weston. He describes his project: "My major themes are family albums, ancestral ghosts, uses of documentary, likeness and copy, surface and depth in photographs, relations between photographs and their captions, posing, turning photographs into narrative, actual photographs, withheld photographs, fictional photographs, trick photographs, damaged photographs, and photographic metaphors."

Like Fabian, Adams has written a serious scholarly monograph based on a rich collection of primary and secondary sources. His book will be necessary reading for students of photography and autobiography, but I often found Adams more interested in correcting some details of previous scholarship than in developing the plot of his own story about stories. Autobiographies tell stories, but Adams is quicker to quote another scholar (albeit an interesting and appropriate quotation) than to engage the drama of the tale. The plot of what's hap-

pening to people gets lost in the formal construction of the text.

Fabian's historical study of nineteenth-century narratives of suffering offers a welcome correction to my ahistorical preconception that the popularity of personal accounts of suffering is a contemporary phenomenon. Fabian situates the narratives she studies at a particular moment in the histories of publishing (most of these books were published privately and sold by authors themselves while on lecture tours), of the United States (wars and slavery predominate as themes), of the nature of authority (the claim that suffering carries its own authority), and of the emergence of a kind of self (through the valuing of personal experience). As she writes of an early narrator, "experience among the British in Canada gave him something to say; suffering gave him moral authority to say it; and Baptist friends and sympathetic printers gave him the wherewithal to publish it." Narratives depend on this conjunction of experience, suffering as moral authority, and material wherewithal to publish. They also depend on a cultural conception of the self, even as they create this self. "All these stories turn on dramas of identity," Fabian writes. "Who were these men?" She could have said more about this question; instead she tells us much about the rhetorical problems that authors faced in establishing their identities.

Most literally, these men were beggars, convicts, slaves, and prisoners of war. The last chapter moves into the twentieth century and considers narratives in the immensely popular *True Story* magazine as the bridge between nineteenth-century narratives and contemporary confessional talk shows. *True Story* in the 1920s and Oprah today depend on a public that was taught to read certain kinds of stories in the nineteenth century. The early narratives, almost all forgotten today (except some slave narratives), taught readers to accept a certain

relation of self, suffering, and moral authority. When these narratives first appeared, that relation was anything but stable.

In Fabian's view, the major problem for nineteenth-century autobiographies of suffering was to have their accounts accepted as true. The issue of veracity is perhaps most surprising, today, with respect to slave narratives. Multiple interests and preconceptions sought to discredit slave narratives, and the issue was complicated since former slaves often felt a need to withhold certain information from their accounts—such as escape routes that others might use—and to relate incidents, often during escapes, in which they had either lied or dissembled. Thus slave narratives were often not strictly true, and again we encounter the problem of what autobiographical truth is. "In abolitionist debates over how best to read the slave narratives," Fabian writes, "we are reminded that truth is a social convention, the product of agreements among people. What good are the 'facts' of the story if no one believes them? Facts are things that must be set down in words, but the words of former slaves circulated with a world where audiences scrutinized the teller and not just the tale."

To establish the truth of their tales, slaves thus drew on rhetorical techniques established by earlier narratives of beggars and convicts. Union soldiers who had been prisoners of war then adapted these same techniques to establish the truth of their narratives. The principal technique of verification was to append some external statement attesting to the narrative's validity. These statements present another level of textual complexity, suggesting the politics of different professional groups using stories of suffering to their own ends, as ministers used the confessional statements of convicts and abolitionists used slave narratives. Prisoner of war stories were eventually validated by Congressional committee: "Professional interpreters—in this case,

doctors, reformers, and politicians—emerged to validate and interpret the narrow empirical claims of prisoners' stories." As these interpreters supported the story's truth, they also reappropriated its authority. These professionals "reserved for themselves the rights to establish facts and draw conclusions from those facts. [...] Like beggars, convicts, and slaves, prisoners by themselves could not be trusted to produce the authoritative account of events."

Perhaps Adams and Fabian are the most recent in this line of professional interpreters. Fabian plays this role with particular respect. Although she writes much more about the conditions in which sufferers' tales were written and how they were received, she expresses an appreciation for the qualities of witness and resistance in the narratives she studies: "With every successful exchange of a story, [authors] managed to wrest a little cultural authority from readers, but it was a vexed and contingent authority, dependent on a pose of humility and a pledge to forego art [by telling only 'the unvarnished truth']." Stories may have been told to provide the pensions their authors lacked, but telling stories was also a moral act. Sufferers told stories that "demanded action from audiences and readers." This demand is not Fabian's central issue—truth is—but it suggests what may still be most important to those who believe that "experience offers a kind of authority."

Fabian closes with a claim that could be a fine beginning to a next book: "tellers of plain unvarnished tales sometimes used their stories not only to alter their own lives but to change the world." Those tales continue to be told, with many of the same problems of authority and veracity, and the same objectives. Fabian's work is exemplary history in the classic sense of teaching us how we became who we are, facing issues as we have learned to define them.

Love and History

Isabel Overton Bader and Roseann Runte, eds.

A Canadian in Love. U of Toronto P \$36.00

Charlotte Gray

Mrs. King: The Life and Times of Isabel MacKenzie

King. Viking \$32.00

Reviewed by Jennifer Chambers

The title *A Canadian in Love* gives a clear indication of the romantic spin that editor Roseann Runte gives to the correspondence between Isabel Overton and Alfred Bader. To chronicle this love story, Runte has excavated Overton's letters to Bader, one side of the epistolary romance, as Bader's letters have not survived. The letters cover July 1949 to October 1951, and then a brief period twenty-five years later in March 1975 when Overton and Bader saw each other again and rekindled their correspondence. While the letters will interest some readers in terms of the personal history they uncover, Runte has chosen to preserve the letters, without contextualizing or expanding upon historical or cultural detail.

Runte's introduction urges one interpretation of the correspondence. She gives the background story to Isabel Overton's life first, focusing on her longing to visit England. It is *en route* to England where Isabel meets Alfred, and the spark which would begin their correspondence and encourage their genuine feeling for one another began there. In Runte's reading, "Isabel's two dreams had become inextricably entwined. Her discovery of her romantic dream of place coincided with her discovery of her soul mate." Runte's title and her reading of the correspondence fall into the formulaic tradition of romance fiction. Runte insists, "From the beginning, we can plainly see that Isabel is in love with Alfred. He *is* the man of her dreams and she knows it." Actually, although Isabel's love for Alfred is evident in her correspon-

dence, she is plagued by indecision about him. Because he is Jewish, and they meet at a time when mixed marriage was frowned upon, Isabel sees religion as a deterrent to their possible future together. She also wants to live and teach in England, as this has been her ambition for some time. There comes a time before the school year in 1950 when she has the opportunity to return to Canada and begin a life with Alfred, yet she chooses instead to stay in England. Isabel writes,

I cancelled the passage home, and I know that no one over there will be particularly happy about it—that you will feel worst of any. I have no right to make you unhappy, Alf.

Isabel's guilt over Alfred's feelings does not dissuade her from remaining in England, which seems to conflict with the romantic notions so strongly urged on the reader by Runte.

Alfred Bader visited England in the summer of 1949, but returned to Canada where he had established a successful chemical company. He was ambitious as well, and went on to conduct research on chemical compounds. Bader's personal history is much more fraught than is Isabel's. While Isabel grew up in northern Ontario, in a modest family, Alfred was brought up by his Jewish aunt in Europe, forced to escape the Nazis, and to survive without the support of a family when his aunt died in a concentration camp during the war. After Isabel chooses England over him, Alfred carries on with his life, eventually marrying another woman, and having two sons. Isabel, meanwhile, never marries. In 1975, when they meet again, Alfred's feelings are unleashed anew, but he is caught between loyalty to his family and his feelings for Isabel. Eventually, with some encouragement by the Overton family, and after Alfred and his wife divorce in 1981, Isabel and Alfred are free to unite. Runte explains

the story as "a true and a truly beautiful love story which, after a lapse of twenty-five years, had a happy end. The hiatus was caused by a lack of communication, by Isabel's fear that she could not be the wife she felt Alfred deserved, by her inability to express her hesitation and concerns. By the distance. Geography nearly defeated Eros." Many of Isabel's letters are socially and culturally interesting, as she lived in England just after the war when food rationing persisted, and she was a theatre enthusiast who wrote about the professional and amateur plays she attended. Her decisions about life and love also pique the reader's curiosity. Runte's romantic interpretation relies on the happy reunion of Isabel Overton and Alfred Bader. However, one is left to wonder whether such an interpretation simplifies a woman who is more dynamic and complex than is evident in the editor's view.

Charlotte Gray's first attempt at a historical biography in *Mrs. King: The Life and Times of Isabel Mackenzie King* takes as its subject a woman eclipsed in her life first by a powerful father figure and next by a successful son. The portrait compiled of Mrs. King prompts the question of how many other women in Canada's social history led intriguing and overlooked lives. Gray's biography includes helpful historical detail and cultural and social contexts.

In some respects, *Mrs. King* reads like a biography in three parts: the life of Isabel Mackenzie, as she grew up under the roof of a forward-thinking yet domineering father; the life of Isabel Mackenzie King, wife of a struggling lawyer, and mother of four; and the life of Isabel, mother of William Lyon Mackenzie King. Isabel Mackenzie lived from 1843-1917, and although it was "unusual for a man of his era, [her father] believed both boys and girls deserved a chance to read the Scriptures, and anything else they could lay their hands on." However, in most respects

Isabel's upbringing was a difficult one because William Lyon Mackenzie's cantankerous nature overruled his gift for political evangelicalism, which in turn left his family poverty-stricken. When Isabel Mackenzie met John King, she thought she had found a man who could provide her with a stable, secure life: "Isabel had been prepared to love John, but she had a self-reliant survivor's fear of being linked with defeat. Compassion was not in her emotional repertoire. It was hard for her to abandon the idea of herself as the selfless support of a powerful, important man, and recognize that she and John were going to have to muddle through life on crumbs." In fact, Isabel raised her two daughters to make the latest fashions on a tight budget and the family struggled to maintain social status in Toronto without the financial backing. The stress of maintaining a superficial mask of wealth caused both John and Isabel King to suffer health problems, which only increased as their financial situation was discovered and they were increasingly ignored by Toronto's affluent cultural crowd.

When William Lyon Mackenzie King became a success with the "Ottawa Establishment," Isabel had finally found a man with whom she could share. They were so close that Gray describes Isabel's exuberant plans for spending time at Kingsmere, William's home, "as if she were making an assignation with a lover, planning her costumes and persuading Jennie [her daughter] to run up new outfits for her." One of Isabel's letters discloses William's pride at his mother's new clothes, and specifically her lace undergarments. As Gray assesses, "[t]he idea of a son admiring his mother's underclothes is stunning to a modern sensibility, and the undertones of their relationship are clearly erotic. The passion that was suppressed by the banality of Isabel's marriage was given full rein with Willie. Yet both Isabel and Willie would

have been profoundly shocked to see their chaste ardour in anything but the most spiritual light." While Isabel and William were different in personality, they shared a determination of spirit and a love which increased as Isabel aged. Although William Lyon Mackenzie King was urged to marry to help his political position, he never did, and he was deeply stricken by the death of his mother, who he felt had lived in pain in her final year to remain a little longer by his side.

Charlotte Gray's portrait of Mrs. Isabel Mackenzie King is dense in detail and ambitious in scope. Although Gray writes that compiling such a biography is a "challenge" because Isabel was "overshadowed by her powerful father and her ambitious son," making her of "historical significance [...] only for her family," *Mrs. King* is a useful historical account of an influential woman, a work that also offers connections to political, cultural and feminist history.

Recovering Women's Lives

Helen Buss and Marlene Kadar, eds.

Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents.

Wilfred Laurier UP \$24.95

Susan Mann, ed.

The War Diary of Clare Gass.

McGill-Queen's UP \$34.95

Denise Chong

The Girl in the Picture. Penguin \$18.99

Reviewed by Laurie McNeill

Out of feminist scholarship and research into women's lives come three texts that address the process of textual recovery, highlighting the restrictive ideologies that have repressed women's lives and stories. The first, *Working in Women's Archives*, is a collection of essays from feminist scholars who

work with women's archival materials; the book is unique not only in theorizing female archival subjectivity but also in its focus on Canadian archives and resources. These articles aim to articulate a feminist praxis for archival work, and therefore address concerns both practical and theoretical. Carol Gerson's contribution, for example, is an excellent "how-to" guide for neophyte and experienced researchers; her comprehensive list of Web, print, and human resources will be particularly useful.

Several essays draw upon these scholars' experiences of working in this field: Christl Verduyn recounts working with the Marian Engel papers; Mary Rubio, one of the editors of L.M. Montgomery's diaries, chronicles the delicate process of editing the private works of a Canadian and international icon. Gwendolyn Davies's recovery work on the life of Deborah How Cottnam, an eighteenth-century Maritime woman writer, illustrates the need to explore non-print archival material, such as architectural blueprints and crockery discovered in an archaeological dig, in reconstructing the lives of women.

This issue of whose lives and what materials are valued, how they are categorized (and even catalogued—usually under their husbands' names), speaks to the recovery work that feminist scholars undertake in researching women's lives and stories. Though all archival research involves "detective" work, and bears, as Helen Buss discusses, particular "problems and responsibilities," this collection emphasizes those concerns unique to studying women's life-texts, and includes an interrogation of archives as socially constructed sites.

The one drawback to this book lies in its brevity: all of the essays, with the exception of Rubio's, are less than fifteen pages each. Though this length makes the anthology easily accessible, it also makes the articles too succinct, without sufficient space to develop arguments and discuss the textual

examples so necessary when writing on unpublished materials. Buss, in her introduction, describes the essays as "tentative markings" and "guideposts," rather than conclusive directions for archival research, but with the relative dearth of other theoretical and methodological models in this field, researchers would benefit from a more sustained discussion.

The War Diary of Clare Gass 1915-1918 enacts the primary recovery of the life writings of women who were not necessarily public figures, but whose lives intersected with public history. Clare Gass was a young woman from Nova Scotia who served in World War I as a nursing sister in the McGill University military hospital in France. Despite her busy schedule, uncomfortable living conditions, and fatigue, she kept pocket-diaries during all her tours of duty. These texts only came to light when portions of them were read by her great-grand-niece during a Remembrance Day ceremony; Mann eventually uncovered another two years' worth amongst papers held by another relative. Gass's diary gives insight into women's roles during the war, and describes a uniquely female enclave in the hyper-masculine military world, a world that, as Mann emphasizes in her introduction, provided opportunities for women to serve their country as well as experience "adventures" otherwise off-limits to women.

In publishing Gass's private writings, Mann seeks to recover a largely unrecorded chapter of women's history in Canada, and in the history of the First World War in general, a gap she explores in detail in her comprehensive introduction. Mann does not provide an index for the diary, which would have been a useful aid, but she has included extensively researched endnotes, though frequently their marking in the text is confusing and the rationale behind them seems inconsistent. Definitions of military references are also hit-and-miss: while I did

not need to have “Zeppelin” and “dirigible” defined, for example, I would like to know what the “Standard” Gass receives is. Gass’s diary, however, is on the whole comprehensible without Mann’s notes, and I appreciate her decision to include the text in its entirety, letting the reader observe how it changes over the course of the war. The diary chronicles Gass’s duties (domestic as well as medical), reports news from home (four of Gass’s brothers were also overseas; one was seriously wounded and another killed), and records her off-duty adventures, including daily “bicycle” trips through the French countryside. The resulting text is a fascinating conjunction of the pastoral and the nightmarish, sometimes side-by-side in an entry. The diary ends abruptly in 1918 with Gass’s return to Halifax and civilian life.

Denise Chong’s *The Girl in the Picture*, on the other hand, tells a story of war from the point of view of its victim. This biography narrates the life of Kim Phuc, best known as the little girl who ran naked, screaming, from a napalm attack during the Vietnam War. The attack, and the 1972 Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph that immortalized it, changed Kim’s life forever, turning her into a sometimes-unwilling spokesperson and propaganda tool for the Vietnamese government, as well as a symbol for the American anti-war movement; as Susan Sontag suggested, that one photograph “probably did more to increase public revulsion against the war” than any other image from the conflict. The pervasive, global attention this picture attracted, and continues to attract, gives Chong a popular audience eager for the story behind the image, beyond what Marianne Hirsch calls the “perpetual present” of the photograph, in which Kim Phuc is forever a nine-year-old burn victim. *The Girl in the Picture* chronicles Kim’s family and village life before and after the incident; her ongoing medical treatments and burn-related ail-

ments; her education in Communist Vietnam and Cuba; her conversion to Christianity; and her eventual defection to Canada with her husband.

Not surprisingly, metaphors of photography inform Chong’s approach to this biography. In her introduction, she casts herself as photographer, planning “to revisit [the war] through the lens of [Kim’s] life” by “[r]efocusing [her] sights beyond the frame of the famous picture.” Such metaphors do highlight the extent to which Kim has been irrevocably limited, already narrated, by her famous image, but they also evoke the troubling dynamic of the active photographer/biographer and the passive subject, an image contrary to the theme of Kim’s gaining control over her story by defecting. Kim’s agency as subject is further complicated by the fact that Chong, as in her best-seller *The Concubine’s Children*, adopts an omniscient point of view, disappearing after her preface entirely into the voice of her subject without foregrounding her own role as storyteller or amanuensis.

Chong also repeatedly places Kim’s photo in the context of other images that have come to represent that epoch, such as the street execution of a Viet Cong suspect and the shooting at Kent State. Though such a context reminds readers of the impact photographs have on popular consciousness and their capacity to embody, or perhaps frame, an era, it also reinscribes Kim Phuc as always and only the “girl in the picture,” a frame that she simultaneously resists and embraces. Though here it is finally Kim who will benefit from this rendition of her story, the notion that she continues to capitalize on the image she insists is so restrictive would be worth exploring. This negotiation of control over one’s life and one’s life-narratives complicates again the notion of recovery, reminding archival scholars and others of the problems of speaking for subjects who may not be able to speak for themselves.

Spirit and Land

Sharon Butala

Wild Stone Heart: An Apprentice in the Fields.

Harper Collins \$28.00

Reviewed by Cheryl Lousley

In *Wild Stone Heart*, Sharon Butala continues the spiritual quest she described in her 1994 bestseller, *Perfection of the Morning*. Like *Perfection*, *Wild Stone Heart* is a rambling personal narrative which intersperses dreams and anecdotes, walks and visions, local history and Jungian psychology, written in a simple, honest voice. Butala presents herself as “an apprentice” (the subtitle to both texts) and the book is ordered around her learning process.

In this book, she narrows her focus from the ranch she and her husband Peter run in southern Saskatchewan to one 100-acre field. “The field” has never been ploughed and was only rarely grazed and thus represents an edenic landscape for Butala: “the air was fresher and cleaner there and had a tang in it missing from the sweet-smelling cultivated hay fields, the cropland, or the seeded, mown, and watered grass of the front lawns and parks with which I was so familiar.” She imagines the field is an example of the pre-settler prairie landscape, albeit, she notes in parentheses, without the large carnivores like prairie wolves exterminated through European settlement. Now permanently free from grazing cattle, the field becomes an ecological and spiritual experiment: what will happen once the land and the soul are opened up to natural processes? The land, predictably, regenerates and fills with the sounds and tracks of birds, insects and wildlife by the close of the book. Butala, similarly, awakens to greater spiritual awareness.

Wild Stone Heart turns out to be more about the apprentice than the fields and the story lies in the process of experiential learning Butala adopts: “I would not dig

into the ground as an archeologist does; I would not even talk to an archeologist for clues. . . . I would just walk and think and study what was there, and in time the meaningful pattern I felt sure was there would become evident to me.” Through such walking, Butala encounters mystical shamans, unicorns, vanishing artefacts, and sun- and solstice-oriented rock formations. All have spiritual significance for Butala and she claims the visions and artefacts tie her more closely to the field and to “Amerindian beliefs.” She refuses to consult with any experts on these topics, although seemingly more out of stubbornness and shyness than an ethic of non-intervention as she regularly collects artefacts until discovering the practice is illegal. Her rambling speculations, however, grow tedious, particularly in light of her conclusion when she invites an archeologist, an elder, and an aboriginal historian to the field: they quickly show that many of her speculations were misguided and inaccurate.

Butala concludes on a note of confession. She realizes she had been so pleased with her discoveries that she failed to see how the burial cairns in the field contained the bones of “once living and walking and breathing human beings.” She was so caught up in the romantic and mystical possibilities of her connection to “ancient peoples”—thinking that she was “special” and not “just another one of those people fascinated by Indian people and their beliefs”—that she forgot “that they were *people*” (emphasis in original). The “stone in her heart” turns out to be not just the spirit within the stones of the field but also the racism she learned as a child.

But for all Butala’s honesty in sharing this realization, the confession comes too late, in the epilogue, and does not seem to shape how she recounts events. Butala seems determined to fill her “spiritual emptiness” with the apparent wholeness of others, turning first to rural people in *Perfection of*

the Morning, and now to Amerindian cultures in *Wild Stone Heart*. This shift is explained in *Wild Stone Heart*: Butala is surprised, then disillusioned by the resistance her rural neighbours express when the Butalas donate their land to the Nature Conservancy of Canada to establish the Old Man On His Back Prairie and Heritage Preserve. Whereas Butala once wrote that “the most basic ingredient of all in rural life [is] that it took place in the midst of Nature,” she now recognizes that it is “land ownership” which defines rural life. The “true rural men” she admired are now the environmental enemy. One can only wonder when the Amerindian people she now reveres will similarly disappoint her once she begins to talk to them in the flesh.

Constructing American Biography

Scott E. Casper

Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America.

U of North Carolina P \$82.50/\$32.95

Reviewed by Victoria Lamont

Poised uncomfortably between literary and “non-literary” genres, and associated with the dominant individualist ideology of the period, nineteenth-century American biography has not received the attention it deserves from contemporary scholars of American literature. *Constructing American Lives* does not merely attempt to address this gap, but appears in its vast breadth and scope to position itself as the definitive text on nineteenth-century American biography. *Constructing American Lives* maps developments in the genre from the early Republican period to the twentieth century, linking the shifting and conflicting generic boundaries of biography to broader debates about its status and purpose; the qualities that constitute a representative American

life; the relationship between the subject’s public and private life, and the extent to which each determines his or her “true” character; and indeed the very meaning of the term “character” itself.

Some of Casper’s most interesting and compelling findings include his account of the emergence of “biography” as a generic category and of the cultural and ideological context in which the purpose and quality of biography were debated. Whereas biography was understood, in the Early Republican period, as a species of historical writing, by mid-century it was possible for people like James Parton (husband to Sara Willis Eldredge Parton, who wrote under the pen name Fanny Fern) to call themselves “biographers,” thereby staking an entire literary career on the genre. Related to its shifting generic status were debates about the uses to which biography should be put, and about the aspects of the subject’s character that made his or her life worthy of biographical treatment. As history, for example, biographies could be expected to instruct, but as literature, they became valuable in their own right. Biographers, critics, and readers also debated the aspects of the subject’s character that deserved emphasis: her humble origins, with which the reader could identify, or his exceptional achievements, which raised him above the ordinary, thereby making his life a subject of especial interest. The ideology of separate spheres also inflected American biography in interesting and revealing ways: Was the subject’s “true character” revealed through his or her private life, or through public deeds, and where did one go about drawing the boundary between the two spheres? A more sensitive issue had to do with the propriety of representing the subject’s private life at all. Whereas some theories of biography required scrutiny of the subject’s private life as a prerequisite for revealing his or her true character, others considered this scrutiny an act of impropri-

ety. Such points of debate within the field of biography will certainly be of interest to scholars of nineteenth-century American culture because of what they reveal about some fundamental cultural categories in circulation during that period.

The scope of the work is broad to a fault. Casper situates developments in American biography in a number of related contexts while at the same time attending to diversity within the genre itself. The work's five chapters divide the history of American biography into roughly four chronological stages. Within each chapter, Casper identifies important developments in the genre, locating them in a more general historical context as well as addressing issues of material production and distribution. Casper also claims to take into account the views of "actual readers," in addition to critics and biographers, through his examination of reading experiences recorded in contemporary letters and diaries. His analysis of American biography also cuts across the cultural hierarchy, including "lowbrow" forms such as Beadle & Adams's mass-produced dime biographies, as well as more "respectable" biographies, such as Houghton Mifflin's *Men of Letters* series produced for middle-class bookshelves in the late nineteenth century. To a lesser degree, gender and race are also taken into consideration. Casper's account of antebellum biography shows how masculine definitions of the biographical subject as a public figure excluded women from status as "representative" American subjects. There is also a relatively fleeting mention of African American biography as an emergent tradition in the late nineteenth century. To make this exhaustive scope manageable, Casper combines general synthesis of broader periods or trends with more particular case studies of important figures or moments in the history of American biography.

The shortcomings of the work stem partly

from its very ambitious scope, and partly from its theoretical framework. To manage its inclusive approach, the work adopts a case-study strategy that ends up privileging male biographers such as William Wirt and James Parton—although one case-study does focus on Elizabeth Ellet, author of *The Women of the American Revolution*. Given that Casper argues that nineteenth-century Americans did not distinguish between biography and autobiography, his broadened definition of biography could have allowed for case studies on African American slave narratives or pioneer women's diaries, both of which were produced in great numbers in the nineteenth century. Moreover, while Scott claims that the "book's scope [. . .] sets it apart from most recent cultural analysis of genre," part of what enables this very broad scope is a less than rigorous theoretical framework. Casper's use of terms such as "constructing," "discourse," and "mediate" imply a work informed by the post-structuralist theoretical schools associated with such a vocabulary, but he makes some problematic claims that seem to conflict with the orientation suggested by this vocabulary. Indeed, Scott's use of a post-structuralist vocabulary masks a fundamentally positivist piece of scholarship that attempts to "take nineteenth-century American biography on its own terms."

Differentiating his study of readers from those engaged by Cathy Davidson and Richard Brodhead, Casper claims to introduce "actual readers into the discourse of genre" through his use of diaries and letters as "ostensibly unmediated" evidence of how biographies were read, a claim which dispenses with a rich body of scholarship on autobiographical writing calling into question its status as an "unmediated" form. Moreover, Casper's "representative" readers are drawn from published sources and manuscript collections which themselves have been structured by assumptions

about what makes a life worth preserving, and are not necessarily representative of biography reading in the everyday life of nineteenth-century Americans.

Such theoretical issues do not, however, undermine the overall value of the work as an important recovery of and introduction to nineteenth-century American biography. After reading *Constructing American Lives* one comes away with a sense of having a solid foundational knowledge of nineteenth-century American biography from which further scholarship in the field can fruitfully proceed.

Canadian Identity: Maples and Chinatowns

Lien Chao

Maples and the Stream: A Narrative Poem.
TSAR Publications \$14.95

Reviewed by Jennifer W. Jay

In *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English* (1997), Lien Chao walked us through the growing field of Chinese Canadian writings. With *Maples and the Stream*, a bilingual poetry collection inspired by Ma Peng's painting of maple leaves partitioned by a stream, she now adds her autobiography and voice to the Chinese Canadian experience.

Lien Chao's twenty-five bilingual narrative poems, roughly evenly divided between Chinese and Canadian spaces, are poignant recollections of a life from birth, youth, marriage, and divorce against the backdrop of China's turbulent politics, to the continuing process of forging a new life and identity as a Chinese Canadian academic in the field of Canadian literature. The landscape of this free verse collection is marked by the reassuring presence of the maple tree, together with its seasonal changes, and water, which accompanied her pursuit of dreams removed from the bitter political

campaigns in China, campaigns that pitted people against her and denied her freedom and a university education.

Living in Toronto since 1984, Lien Chao has been confronted by the challenge and uncertainty of academia as a vital component of her resettlement and assimilation in a new country, where Canada geese and Chinatown icons intersect and pull her towards different centres of gravity. In "Canada Geese" she wants "to belong" to the majority community, but she finds in "Ivory Tower" that even professors and students deny her entry and associate her with the landscape of Chinatown. But in a Chinese Canadian history long dominated by Cantonese culture and dialects, Lien Chao's Mandarin-speaking background makes her an outsider much like her "white friend" because "[t]he truth is, I don't understand a word in Cantonese." Curiously, Lien Chao is quick to identify with the majority community; anyone with rudimentary Chinese can function in Chinatown by writing out Chinese characters. How could she have lived in metropolitan Toronto and shopped in Chinatown for sixteen years without learning a word in Cantonese?

Lien Chao's poetry collection may be an honest lyrical memoir, but one should exercise caution if using it as an accurate reflection of Chinese Canadian history. She indicates that the wives and children of the Chinatown bachelor society were allowed to come to Canada only in the 1960s ("Gold Mountain Dream"), but in fact they began arriving in the late 1940s after the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1947. The racism that she describes in current Toronto Chinatown seems outdated and exaggerated. As someone who was a Chinese social worker in Toronto Chinatown in the 1970s when the use of "Chink" was already rare, I find it difficult to believe that she was verbally abused as a "Chink" in the multicultural 1990s that

produced a Chinese Canadian governor-general (“Who Can Resist Chinatown?”; “Gold Mountain Dream”).

These twenty-five poems were written first in English and then rewritten in Chinese, but the two versions seem to be free translations of each other. The Cultural Revolution poems are particularly well done in terms of rhythm, pace, and imagery. The other poems, both in the Chinese and English versions, are uneven in quality. The Chinese poems should have been more rigorously edited. The poet and the editor made a decision to use unsimplified characters, perhaps in the hope of attracting a larger readership from the Chinese community. But readers from Hong Kong and Taiwan are sure to note that almost every page in the Chinese version has at least one of the following writing errors: simplified and unsimplified characters are used inconsistently; the simplified and unsimplified characters are used interchangeably; wrong characters are used; and lack of knowledge of Cantonese pronunciation produces wrong characters. One wonders what could be the *jupi ya* (chrysanthemum skin duck) hanging in the Chinatown barbecue shops; this term makes absolutely no sense in Chinese cuisine unless it refers to *cui pi ya* (crispy skin duck). Could the confusion of characters in the Chinese version reflect the confused landscape of hybrid identity for the poet who, in the process of assimilating with the majority and Chinese communities, risks losing her native voice and script?



First Nations History

Deana Christensen

Ahtakakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People, and Their Struggle for Survival 1816-1896. Shell Lake: Ahtakakoop P \$49.95

Reviewed by Neal McLeod

Ahtakakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People and Their Struggle for Survival 1816-1896 is an important publication for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan. The scope of the book is certainly impressive (844 pages including index). As well, Cree has been used throughout and has been rendered in Standard Roman Orthography (with the help of Freda Ahenakew, Jean Okimâsis and Arok Wolvengrey). The stories of Chief Barry Ahenakew are also an important component of the book, adding Cree oral history to overall narrative. The numerous illustrations and clear prose certainly make the book accessible to a wide audience. Notable themes include the adoption of Christianity by the band (chapters ten and eleven) and also Treaty Six (chapters twelve to fifteen).

As noted several times in the book, Chief Ahtakahkoop at the time of the Treaties said, “Let us not think of ourselves, but our children’s children.” The Chief was speaking of how the people would attempt to survive into the future and how education would help them achieve this goal. The publication could be seen as part of the Chief’s dream as the stories of the band can be a powerful tool of transformation and survival. Beginning in the 1970s when band councils were taking over schools, there was a need for curriculum which reflected Indian history, values, and experiences. For example, in the historically important document *Indian Control of Indian Education*, it was noted that Indian children would never become full human beings unless they could know themselves and the forces

and experiences which shaped their ancestors' lives. With this book, children from the Sandy Lake reserve can learn about their ancestors and the stories which formed their collective identity.

The research in the book is exhaustive, with many interesting historical facts mentioned such as the existence of the Midêwin ceremony (an Ojibway ceremony) on the Sandy Lake reserve, which certainly speaks of the complex and multi-layered nature of Cree history. The use of archival sources such as Hines's journals, the missionary who came to the Sandy Lake in the 1870s, also adds important dimensions to the book. The journals of Hines give much insight into the conversion of Cree Indians to Christianity.

The book tells the story of the transformation of the world of the Cree from the perspective of the Crees. Depicted within the pages of the text are the struggles and challenges of the Cree people as they encounter a new way of seeing the world, most notably through farming. Christensen is very successful at showing some of the dilemmas that Cree people faced. For instance, many were concerned that if they converted to Christianity they would not see their loved ones in the next world. In keeping with the strength of the work, Christensen could have drawn more extensively on Cree oral history of the Treaties. Also, there are many narratives of change that are not in the book: the retreat of the buffalo into the water (*ê-mistapêsocik*—they drown themselves), the transformation of the land by an alien order (sometimes described using the word *pâstahowin*), and the author perhaps could have noted that the Cree word “the uprising” (chapters twenty-six and twenty-seven) is *ê-mâyikamikahk* (“where it went wrong”).

Despite its many merits, the book lacks historical analysis and interpretation. Often, the book simply seems to be a

chronicle of events, lacking any overall narrative structure. Lengthy quotations which sometimes run several pages detract from the narrative flow. Also, the author could have more widely consulted the history of Cree people and put the history of the Sandy Lake reserve in a wider context. I think that it would have been effective to describe the Treaties with reference to the leaders such as Big Bear who resisted their terms. The book loses focus at times and the titles of chapters sometimes do not correspond to the contents of the chapters (chapters eight, twenty-three).

I highly recommend the book *Ahtahkakoop* for all of those who are interested in the history of Indian people in Canada. It will be a valuable resource for anyone working in the field of Native Studies, and indeed any educator teaching in schools where Indian children attend. The band has been visionary in the creation of this book which will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable resource for their school and band members. Other band councils will, one hopes, endeavour to have band histories of their own created.



Maritime Literature: Place, Past, and Poetry

Carol Corbin and Judith A. Rolls, eds.

The Centre of The World at The Edge of The Continent: Cultural Studies of Cape Breton Island.
U College of Cape Breton P \$17.95

Hilary Thompson, ed.

Children's Voices in Atlantic Literature and Culture: Essays on Childhood. Canadian
Children's P \$12.95

John DeMont

The Last Best Place: Lost in the Heart of Nova Scotia. Doubleday Canada \$21.95

Reviewed by Jim Taylor

Cape Breton step-dancing, the card game Tarbush as a metaphor, Bingo as subculture, and Mary Morrison as the quintessential Cape Bretoner: these provide thoroughfares into a collection that explores the paradoxes of Cape Breton and attempts to explain its artistic renaissance.

Contributions include essays by scholars, teachers, journalists, artists, and aficionados of Cape Breton life. All are informative; many are witty; and some are gems.

In her introduction "Culture for Sale," Judith Rolls discusses Cape Breton humour in light of Ian McKay's claim that Premier Angus L. Macdonald (1933-1954) "was instrumental in the tartanization of Nova Scotia's cultural heritage." McKay uses the term *reconstructed ethnicity* to describe the "transformation of ethnic identities in response to the pressures of tourism." Tartanization was partly responsible for the notion that all Cape Bretoners were "simple, stupid, kind, tough, similar-looking Celts." Rolls points to the film *Margaret's Museum* as an example. The hero Neil Currie courts Margaret with bagpipe music. Rolls notes that the bagpipes were rare in Cape Breton, but fails to appreciate that Neil Curry from St. Andrews Channel—with his wit, prowess, and bagpipes—is meant to symbolize humanity

and culture destroyed by the exploitation of Glace Bay's miners. Nevertheless, McKay presents convincing evidence that tourism required a stereotype of the Great Scot.

Many ethnic groups find voice in this collection. Scottish fiddling and step-dancing are featured. Lillian MacLean's memories of childhood on MacLean's Island are captivating. The charming speaker and Gaelic cadences echo an Alistair MacLeod story. But engaging articles also comment on the Irish, Italian, and Native people of Cape Breton. "The Irish of Rocky Bay" offers authentic descriptions of life in the old days. "Kaqietaq 'All Gone'" deals with Mi'kmaw rites honoring the dead, and "Wine, Health, and Sociability" celebrates the Italian experience in Cape Breton.

Joanne Kennedy's essays on Tarbush illustrate the Cape Bretoner's penchant for blurring the distinctions between games and life. Tarbush is a game of complex rules and discussions: arguments about the subtleties of these rules constitute an important part of the game which is curiously post-modern in its self-referential preoccupations. Ellison Robertson distinguishes between General John Cabot Trail's humour, which personifies the myth of the idiot Cape Bretoner, and the more inclusive self-parody of Mary Morrison (beloved for her signature greeting "Good, Dear, good"), which moves beyond parody to the shock of recognition.

On the architecture in Tompkinsville Richard MacKinnon argues that the plain box-like houses in Reserve should be recognized "as a significant part of Nova Scotia's built heritage." One hopes that Halifax officials heed MacKinnon's conclusion. Tompkinsville deserves proper representation among our historic buildings; it does "offer [. . .] a realistic portrayal" of working class life. MacKinnon and William Davey also examine Cape Breton nicknames. Their judicious tone makes the humorous names marvellously outrageous. With

admirable reserve they trace the derivation of names like “Malcolm Is That You Norman, the Pickle Arse MacLeans, and Ten-to-six (for the tilt of his head).”

Editor Carol Corbin unabashedly identifies herself as a come-from-away, enchanted by her adopted home. Co-editor Judith Rolls, the returned expatriate, knows how “small things give big meaning.” Holding all together is the belief that the medium of cultural influence is communication; and Cape Bretoners have a wealth of rituals that enrich and renew their communities. Corbin acknowledges technology’s power, through instant communication, to reduce everything to Muzak and American TV shows. Yet she insists that to cross the Causeway is to discover a culture blessedly free from such influence and determined to resist it. *The Centre of the World at the Edge of the Continent* pays tribute to this resistance.

The most arresting article in Hilary Thompson’s anthology *Children’s Voices* is John Stockdale’s analysis of Norman Duncan’s *Harbour Tales Down North*, a collection he considers Duncan’s finest work. The stories recount the stark plight of Newfoundland’s boys being “hardened” into young men fitted to weather life as fishermen in perhaps the harshest environment on the continent. Imagination and art are subordinated to wresting a living from the sea and producing offspring to carry on the struggle. Talent for anything but coping with the fickle ocean is a curse, as “The Art of Terry Lute” ironically explores. Other articles on how Maritime children were casually neglected or abused include “Small Bodies: Death and the Child in Maritime Fiction” by David Creelman, “Childhood in Limbo” by Theresia Quigley, and “Runaway Girls and Sharp Knives” by Dierdre Kessler. Muriel Whitaker in “Missing Fathers” explores the pain of paternal absence; and “Revenge and Revolt” by Sharon Myers is a fine study of

boys’ struggles in a New Brunswick reformatory.

These essays explain why Philip Girard’s “Three Tales of Child Custody in Nova Scotia” opens the collection. He traces changes in Maritime courts’ attitude towards children’s rights. Recorded in 1753, the first case details a custody battle over an infant girl whose deceased mother attempted to secure her child’s future. Although the case was lost and the child died, the executors urged “the court to look to the best interests of the child” a century before that test became standard. Carole Gerson (“Fitted to Earn Her Own Living”) and Laura M. Robinson (“Pruned Down and Branched Out”) explore emerging feminism in Lucy Maud Montgomery, that unwitting Maritime icon of the feminist movement, who wrote poignantly about the trials of childhood—particularly the trials of impoverished, feisty females. On a lighter note, “The Gauthier Girls: Growing Up on Miscou Island” details the independence young Maritime women could enjoy, and Alan Wilson’s recollections of the 1930s and ’40s have similar charm and optimism. Even Isabelle Knockwood’s memoir of her Mi’kmaw childhood, though touched by bitterness, has the sweetness of innocence maturing into wisdom. This is a good collection, interesting and various. And as David Staines notes in his summation, “Atlantic children laugh and cry, suffer and grow as do children throughout the world.”

For John DeMont Nova Scotia’s landscape and people are heroic. In energetic prose he describes larger-than-life tribal characters, gargantuan Scottish heavyweight competitors at the Antigonish Highland Games, moonshiners in places with undisclosed names, tuna smugglers near the Tusket Islands. The form of *The Last Best Place* allows DeMont to introduce interesting snippets of Nova Scotian history and belongs to a genre best described as adventure travel literature, which uses the

journey as a metaphor for the personal search. DeMont's sojourns through Nova Scotia provide occasion for his serious but witty reflections on the expatriate Nova Scotian's need to go Down East.

Sometimes DeMont's notion that the world's rich and famous have found salvation in this Eden seems stretched. (They're holed up in every nook and inlet.) He tends to believe their presence authenticates the province's worth. He also unfortunately often lionizes the stereotype of hard-drinking, scrapping, brawling Nova Scotian men. But DeMont's discussion of the Black settlement in Birchtown is excellent, as is his commentary on the eccentricity and style of the new Halifax, the old city with the salty past. A lively read to keep in your car along with the more traditional guide-books, it offers captivating anecdotes and minutiae about well-known and not-so-well-known Nova Scotian towns and scenic spots. The book offers an even-handed coverage of a charming old province.

Colouring the Nation

Debbie Douglas, Courtney McFarlane, Makeda Silvera, and Douglas Stewart, eds.

MÁKA Diasporic Juks: Contemporary Writing by Queers of African Descent. Sister Vision P \$19.95

Farida Karodia

Against an African Sky and other stories. Sister Vision P \$13.95

Hazelle Palmer, ed.

"... but where are you really from?": Stories of Identity and Assimilation in Canada. Sister Vision P \$15.95

Reviewed by Sujaya Dhanvantari

During the winter holidays this year, I attended a Sister Vision Press book launch, and later reflected on the meaningfulness of Canada's only press which publishes works solely by Black women and women of colour in Canada. Three recent publica-

tions all represent Sister Vision's commitment to upholding the tradition of Canadian women of colour writing across regional, national, and cosmopolitan communities by challenging the dominant systems that continue to exclude such work from academic, political, and artistic circles.

Multifaceted identifications across race, gender, and sexuality find affirmation in MÁKA through a constellation of texts—poetry, prose, and autobiography—which assert the various histories of queers of African descent. The title itself, MÁKA *Diasporic Juks*, symbolically marks the particular brand of cultural and sexual collectivity that colours the experience of difference in this writing. Found in the *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, MÁKA is defined as a thorny, tropical plant, resilient and prickly, finding its counterpart in the endurance, sharpness, and longevity of writing by queers of African descent. The term "juk" alludes to a parental warning for children against approaching the plant's abrasive edges, poised to inflict injury: "Mind máka juk ya pickney!" This collection bleeds new, anglophonic coinage in attending to the multi/cultural specificities of queer identities. Terms such as Moffie, the South African gay male term; Man Royals, the term for Jamaican lesbians; Zami, the term Audre Lorde employs for lesbians in the Caribbean; and buller man, a derogatory term used in Trinidad and Tobago to describe gay men, all add to the list of queer cultures across the African diasporas.

While insisting on the need for the visibility of Black queer identities in a dominant white social system, MÁKA also contributes to an internal critique of the conservatism of families and cultural communities of African descent, who actively reinforce mainstream heterosexist communal structures both in Canada and in diasporic centres across the Americas, the

Caribbean, and the African subcontinent. In this collection, Wesley Crichlow writes most compellingly that the heterosexist discourse of Afrocentricity and Black nationalism negates same-sex relationships within Black communities. In a parallel vein, T.J. Bryan enunciates the difficulties of defining Black s/m culture within both an egalitarian-minded feminism and a colonial construction of sexual beauty found in white-dominated queer bars.

The title question of the second collection ". . . *but where are you really from?*" explores a specific facet of experience for women of colour in Canada through a compilation of writings and interviews on the topic of racialization and national belonging. This text aims to locate the experience of racism within Canadian boundaries, defying the customary displacement of racism onto the United States. The title question itself, addressed in Part One, underlines racist assumptions of national identity. This book offers an overview of the types of experiences that fragment the intellectual, emotional, and physical development of women of colour.

The following five parts articulate these experiences in detail. Part two, entitled "Fitting In," identifies assimilation as the problem that produces an internalized form of racism. For girls and young women growing up in Canada, the practice of assimilation takes the form of a pressure to conform to white standards of fashion, beauty, and culture; as Nadine Leggett says, "I was 15 before I was actually in a room of Black people and I was very uncomfortable." This bodily discomfiture is further addressed in Part Three entitled "Mirror, mirror." Problems of self-esteem that result from internalized racism are reinforced by the public desire for white femininity both in school and at work; as Lorena Gale discovers at a job interview, she did not have "the right look." Biracialism, Melody Sylvestre says, made her "not Black enough

for those who were Black and too Black for those who were White." These stories indicate that the racialization of the female body maintains a barrier to positive self-identification for women of colour in both mainstream and diasporic communities.

Such stories mark both the effects of assimilation and the obstacles to self-identification, and reveal the way in which such issues produce a condition of withdrawal; hence, the title of Part Four: "Isolation." Susan Lee writes, "I am alone in a white world / And the barriers / that divide me / from other women of colour / are immense." Alienated from the other and from the self, the woman of colour knows no friend. This alienation laments itself in Part Five entitled "Language and Identity," where Lee names the causal disconnection as language loss. Notably, however, Ayanna Black offers a responsive, redemptive note to this otherwise painful account by proclaiming that English is not her enemy, since she uses it flexibly in Jamaican creole. Part Six, entitled "Finding 'Home,'" reflects on the condition of homelessness, and the gravity of a term such as "woman of colour" in the wake of the numerous conversations featured in this book on the problem of articulating an identity, and thus a home, within a national culture obsessed with assimilation.

In *Against an African Sky*, South African Canadian writer Farida Karodia envisions a constant movement between ancestral home, now post-apartheid South Africa, and Canada. This collection of short stories records the impact of constitutional change on the daily life experiences of European, African, and Indian South Africans. While offering hope for reconciliation, these stories also recognize the way in which violence continues to infiltrate the lived experiences of South Africans, especially in the townships.

In the title story "Against an African Sky," the protagonist Johan, a white South

African who migrated to Britain after his family died in a car accident, revisits his childhood farm house to reconcile himself with his past, which includes both the car accident and the racist practices of his family during the reign of apartheid. By taking over the farm in partnership with his coloured half-brother's son, Johan attempts to open a new era of interracial relations in South Africa. The other stories in this collection reflect the lives of the disabled, the violence of the townships, and the maintenance of religious practices and business ethics in Indian families and the ensuing generational conflicts arising from the changing lifestyles of their children.

All three Sister Vision Press books clear a space for the complicated positioning of multicultural writing in both a national and global context.

Gender & Genre

Caterina Edwards and Kay Stewart, eds.

Wrestling with the Angel: Women Reclaiming Their Lives. Red Deer P \$24.95

Lynne Van Luven, ed.

Going Some Place: Creative Non-Fiction across Canada. Coteau \$19.95

Reviewed by Denise Adele Heaps

Two recent collections of short non-fiction by Canadian writers tackle issues of gender and genre. E.B. White, in the foreword to his *Collected Essays*, describes the essay as the “excursion” of a “self-liberated man”; the editors of *Wrestling with the Angel: Women Reclaiming Their Lives* make the same claim for female essayists. The editor of *Going Some Place: Creative Non-Fiction across Canada* suggests that such excursions assume the form of creative non-fiction rather than the essay, and tries to make a case that there is indeed a distinction between the two.

Wrestling with the Angel: Women

Reclaiming Their Lives is the second anthology of Canadian women's autobiographical essays that Caterina Edwards and Kay Stewart have co-edited. The mandate of their first anthology, *Eating Apples: Knowing Women's Lives*, was to reclaim Eve's hunger for knowledge about herself and her world, particularly by “illuminat[ing] the many sources of women's knowledge, all rooted in the self.” The editors shift metaphors from women as apple eaters to women writers as wrestlers in *Wrestling with the Angel*. They suggest that women who write the personal in a public mode such as the essay step into the ring with two daunting angelic opponents. The first angel resembles Jacob's rival, except this one gives blessings of autobiographical insight.

Sparring from darkness to daylight to wrest a vision of the self is surely not a gender-specific act. However, the second angel evoked by the editors, Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House, is, Virginia Woolf, in “Professions for Women,” throttled hers because the winged being “plucked the heart out of [her] writing” whenever she breached feminine propriety. Edwards and Stewart argue that women writers still wrestle with this angel, especially when trying to write honestly about their lives and bodies, because they attend to what husbands, lovers, parents, or children expect or wish to read.

The essays are as diverse as the contributors, who include women making their publishing debut as well as familiar and not-so-familiar names in Canadian literature. In soliciting manuscripts, the editors asked potential contributors to contemplate the theme of repetition, as in re-experiencing a life event or re-envisioning events or people from the past. Thus, the operative prefix in the titles is “re.” In “Reevaluating Relationships,” we find Lea Littlewolfe's “supermom”; the author reconsiders her maternal obligations to a

young, needy step-granddaughter after twenty years of caring for a special needs stepson. Exhausted, she bluntly defies the Angel in the House by stating “I’m not interested” and calling social services. Under the chapter heading “Reinventing Places,” we find several travel essays, including Gail Scott’s “there’s no such thing as repetition.” Scott’s “delicious sense of *déjà-vu*” in Paris, inspired by the voices of Stein, Hemingway, Miller, Balzac, and Proust, is interrupted by contemporary voices of racial intolerance and right-wing immigration policy. In “Reconstructing Experience” we find Sarah Murphy’s “The Night the Thirty-Ought-Six Got Shot Through the Ceiling,” one of the more formally experimental essays which transforms a violent, potentially traumatic night in her childhood into a moment (only) of surrealistic joy.

In the introduction to *Going Some Place: Creative Non-Fiction Across Canada*, editor Lynne Van Luven strives valiantly to define creative non-fiction and offers the collection itself as illustration. Most of the contributions, however, do not differ in form from the personal essays we find in *Wrestling with the Angel*. Van Luven argues that creative non-fiction “adopts, expands and in some cases embellishes the personal essay format.” In response, one might argue that the essay is an expansive genre to begin with. In the essay, according to Michel de Montaigne, “my Style and my mind alike go roaming,” and many essayists since have celebrated the latitude and license of the genre. Admitting that all writers “necessarily deploy creativity,” Van Luven then suggests the best of creative non-fiction to be a meeting of the self and the wider world, of private and public, of self and other. She seems to be describing the space between two types of essays identified by Aldous Huxley in his *Collected Essays*: “the personal and autobiographical” essay and the “concrete-particular” mode which explores

“some literary or scientific or political theme.”

When reading the works themselves, however, one loses interest in generic taxonomy because the topics are so compelling, varied, and skillfully rendered. Van Luven explains how she solicited “articles” contemplating psychological or physical “location/dislocation,” but admits her surprise that so many writers focused on the “*facts of life*”: living, loving, dying. The collection is divided into three chapters, the first of which, “A Honeycomb of Memory,” incorporates autobiographical recollections of journeys, childhood, and the loved and lost. In this chapter we find the graceful, humorous “Not My Home,” Daniel Coleman’s depiction of a displaced childhood in Emperor Haile Selassie’s Ethiopia, where “not home” was the familiar (a boarding school for the children of missionaries) and “home” was a mystery (a mythic place called Canada). The majority of pieces in the second and third chapters, “A Question of Identity” and “Breathing Spaces,” are likewise autobiographical, but we do find a few contributions that correspond with Huxley’s second sort of essay: the exploration of a political theme. In “A Question of Identity,” Nigel Darbasie traces the aetiology of racialized thinking in Western civilization followed by an assessment of its manifestation in Canada, whereas Ann Charney in “Strip-Mining the Land of Sorrow” condemns the “dead-Jews” tourist trade in a post-Communist, entrepreneurial Prague. Although interesting, these essays, where the autobiographical “I” is deployed at a minimum if at all, seem slightly out of place amongst intimate personal anecdote.



The Self's Others

Susanna Egan

Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography. U of North Carolina P \$19.95

Reviewed by Bina Toledo Freiwald

I will be teaching a graduate course on postmodern autobiography next term, and *Mirror Talk* has given me one more reason to look forward to it. Already, reading this book and Timothy Dow Adams' *Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* has made me rethink my syllabus, so that the course is now subtitled "Textual and Visual Self-Representations," and includes film, photography, and comics alongside the literary texts. Egan's book will be invaluable to us not only for its very fine readings of some of the works we'll be discussing, but also as an intellectual project that is originally and rigorously conceived, meticulously executed, and engagingly presented.

In the opening chapter, "Facing Off: Genres of Life and Death," Egan guides the reader through the by-now densely populated territory of autobiography theory and criticism in order to arrive at her central concerns. Many of the driving issues in the field converge in Egan's study: self and/as narrative; the relationship between crisis and the autobiographical imperative; the question of reference; the challenges that deconstruction and feminism have posed for more traditional conceptualizations of the self; the body both as inscribed by the variables of its cultural production, and as "the ground from which personal inscribing begins"; the possibilities of resistance; the reader's implication in the autobiographical project. In *Mirror Talk* these concerns are part of the theoretical apparatus that is brought to bear on the central questions Egan asks: what are the modalities of (self) expression used to engage with conditions of unresolved crisis? What opportu-

nities do these modes offer to individual subjects in need, and how do the forms themselves get transformed by such needs? Running through this interrogation is Egan's founding interest in those encounters that are constitutive of the experience of subjectivity. The "mirror" of her title is "more constructive than reflective of the self. It foregrounds interaction between people, among genres, and between writers and readers of autobiography."

Egan's approach to the genre is inclusive and polysemic. Commenting on the recent proliferation of terms to designate particular discourses of the self—Stanton's autogynography, Gilmore's autobiographics, Perreault's autography, Lorde's biomythography, Lionnet's autoethnography, Couser's autopathography, Miller's autothanatography—Egan suggests that we regard them not as "separate or contested territories but as significant features of the landscape." Such an approach makes it possible for her to cast a wide net. Egan examines a wide range of originary configurations of instability. Chapter Two—with sections on Hemingway's *Moveable Feast*, Meigs' *Lily Briscoe*, and Breytenbach's *Mouir*—establishes a genealogy for contemporary "mirror talk" by linking experimentation in self-representation with the beginnings of modernism. And if Hemingway's portraits of Fitzgerald serve to remind us that "the self is constructed in terms of other selves," the twin questions that Egan pursues throughout the book are "why" and "how": out of what needs and under what conditions do self and other(s) become mutually constitutive? And what are the expressive means by which autobiographers have told a story that "in the end is an explanatory myth, explanatory primarily of its own processes"? For Mary Meigs, the engagement with others is necessary in order to construct and validate her own perspective in opposition to that of others. Imprisoned for anti-apartheid activism, Breytenbach

needs to reconstitute himself in the face of the brutal severing of his normal ties and connections.

In "Speculation in the Auditorium," Egan looks at some of the strategies that can be found in drama and documentary film for creating the autobiographer through mirror talk. Examples from different genres of filmic autobiography allow Egan to tackle different questions. Her discussion of filmed interview-documentaries like Apted's *35 Up* and Lundman and Mitchell's *Talk 16* and *Talk 19* examines the control of the interviewer/editor over the personal narratives presented; in the self-documentaries by Jim Lane and Tom Joslin, Egan finds a more successful exploration of subjective expression in a medium paradoxically associated with the representation of objective realities; and in the Canadian film *The Company of Strangers* she discovers a controlled editorial vision that, contrary to expectations, works to release intense autobiographical expression in its subjects. The chapter ends with a reflection on that fraught and complex collaborative process between Métis writer Maria Campbell and the white actor/improviser Linda Griffiths that culminated in *The Book of Jessica*. Egan suggests that in its dramatization of a struggle for mutual understanding across many barriers (of "race," culture, privilege, age), and in its reaffirmation of a Native voice in the face of the threat of white appropriation, *The Book of Jessica* transforms the conflictual binaries of the original situation into a continuous and healing circle.

Chapter four focuses on diasporic subjects, the "quintessential autobiographers of the late 20th century," who need to produce and reproduce themselves anew. Drawing on a range of examples—Trinh T. Minh-ha's film *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, Audre Lorde's *Zami, Days and Nights in Calcutta* by Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise, Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Among the*

White Moon Faces, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*—Egan examines subjects who are positioned between cultures, and thus able to critique both and "choose, accordingly, what complex of hybridity to embrace." The last two chapters discuss limit cases and those genres of mirror talk that seek to represent the unrepresentable. Life writing, Janet Varner Gunn has argued, is a form of survival literature, a gesture of resistance to loss and mutilation—a writing for life. Egan's reading of Primo Levi's Holocaust writing and of autothanatography (narratives written in the face of terminal illness and death) engages a question that goes to the very heart of autobiography as a self/life affirming practice: what are the "strategies for resisting extinction both in life and in the text"? Levi counters the horrific human machinery intent on "the death of a man" that is Auschwitz by using language as a tool for comprehension, not only to tell his story but to tell it "in terms of multiple layers of dialogue," resisting the monologism of the *Lager* with the polyphony of his texts. In narratives like Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*, Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum's *Cancer in Two Voices*, and Tom Joslin and Mark Massi's film *Silverlake Life*, forms of dialogism allow for the reconstitution of self and other, and enable the dying to create the life of the moment over and over, thereby satisfying a desire "to be recognized as fully present."

I have always found powerfully suggestive Emile Benveniste's reflections on the constitution of subjectivity in language, in particular his observation that there is no *I* outside of the reciprocal dialogue between *I* and *you* that constitutes the subject: "It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*." *Mirror Talk* makes an important contri-

bution to our understanding of the ways in which autobiography—which Egan understands inclusively as a polyphonic mode characterized by a “voracious consumption of genres”—enacts and re-enacts such constitutive dialogues: both the dialogues that launch us into crisis, and the kind that promise transformation, a measure of healing, or at the very least the reciprocating gaze of the other.

The “Anne” in “Canadianness”

Elizabeth Epperly and Irene Gammel, eds.

L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture.

U of Toronto P \$25.00

Reviewed by Cecily Devereux

Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly’s new collection shows the compelling new directions which these studies have taken in the past few years. This volume is based on the proceedings of the ten-year-old L.M. Montgomery Institute’s third international conference, held in Charlottetown in 1998, and organized, as the book’s title indicates, around the question of Montgomery as she and her work figure in—and, as Gammel and Epperly suggest, “shape”—“Canadian culture.” Only two of these essays have been previously published: Atwood’s essay originally appeared as the “Afterword” to McClelland and Stewart’s 1992 NCL *Anne of Green Gables*; Calvin Trillin’s “Anne of Red Hair: What do the Japanese See in Anne of Green Gables?” was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1996. The fifteen other chapters—including three more “Reflection Pieces” like Atwood’s—the introduction by Gammel and Epperly, and the epilogue by Dierdre Kessler are new contributions. Together, they constitute what, by any measure, is a landmark work in the academic study of L.M. Montgomery.

The volume is divided into three parts:

the first takes up questions of nationalism; the second of “society”; the third investigates how the “national iconography” of Anne and of Green Gables is circulated and consumed in Canada and in other national contexts. In this latter section, Theodore F. Sheckels looks at the 1934 American motion picture of *Anne of Green Gables*; Sheckels’s argument about the “Americanization of a Canadian icon” draws attention to the “Canadianness” of Anne. Trillin’s and Yoshiko Akamatsu’s chapters on Japanese readings of *Anne of Green Gables* nicely problematize that “Canadianness” by foregrounding the ways that Montgomery’s heroine is reconfigured and revalued in Japan. Frank Davey treats *Anne* and shifts in reading of the novel as indices of feminist social change in Canada. The middle section is broadly historical in its focus: these essays situate Montgomery and her fiction in social, political, and ideological contexts. Mary Rubio draws attention to the Scots-Presbyterian culture within which Montgomery is writing and which she reproduces in so much of her fiction. Gammel and Ann Dutton look at the ideological apparatus of education; Sasha Mullally writes about the technology of the automobile. Erika Rothwell and Diana Arlene Chlebek discuss the works as they reproduce feminist and maternalist ideology of the early twentieth century. In the first section, Carole Gerson’s essay on what she terms “the triangle of author, publisher, and fictional character,” is an important account of the complex publishing history of *Anne of Green Gables*. Laura Robinson’s discussion of “Communal Identity” in *Anne of Green Gables* and *A Tangled Web* makes the interesting if arguable point that Montgomery is working to “open up” the boundaries of “Canadianness.” Jennifer Litster and Owen Dudley Edwards address the complicated investment of Montgomery’s novels in World War One nationalism.

What is most effective about this volume is its focus on Canadian culture: the collection represents not only an important critical engagement of Montgomery's work with questions of nationalism but also a more broadly significant investigation of English-Canadian nationalism itself and, to some extent, of the discourses of nationalism as they have been taken up and reconfigured in other national contexts, including Japan. This is not a collection of essays which simply revisits the past decade of Montgomery study; rather, this volume really takes it in new directions within Canadian cultural studies. The categories into which the editors have divided the book open up a range of readings, and show not only how much interesting new work already exists on Montgomery, but also how much there is still to be done.

(Re)defining Memoir

George Fetherling

The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs.

Vintage \$24.95

Myrna Kostash

The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir.

NeWest \$21.95

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

In *The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs*, George Fetherling brings together samples of literary memoirs by twenty-two well-known Canadian authors: organized thematically under four general headings, these essays and book excerpts record experiences that span the better part of the twentieth century within and beyond the borders of Canada. Similarly, in *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir*, Myrna Kostash explores her experiences—specifically, her relationships with “rebel men”—over three decades in Canada, Greece, Poland, Ukraine, and Serbia. But while Fetherling's anthology reflects rather conventional notions of literary memoir,

Kostash's book reshapes the horizon of life-writing in Canada.

Given that many of the works included in Fetherling's anthology—most notably excerpts from Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982) and Timothy Findley's *Inside Memory: Pages from a Writer's Workbook* (1990)—will be familiar to readers of Canadian life-writing, the book is probably best suited to readers who are new to the genre. One of the strengths of the anthology is the way in which Fetherling arranges the contributors' texts so that they speak to one another: John Glassco's Paris of the 1920s, for instance, becomes background to Mordecai Richler's Paris of 1951; and Janice Kulyk Keefer's explorations of her ancestors' Ukrainian heritage are juxtaposed with Michael Ignatieff's examination of his aristocratic Russian lineage.

As with all anthologies that implicitly claim to define generic and national categories, however, readers should be wary of the formal and ideological assumptions underlying this anthology's construction of the “Canadian memoir.” Because Fetherling's notion of literary memoir—prose writing that uses “accepted” literary techniques and resembles the “traditional realist novel”—is rather rigid, writers who experiment with generically ambiguous approaches to memoir (Fred Wah, Robert Kroetsch, and Roy Kiyooka come to mind) are omitted (not only from the anthology itself but also from Fetherling's suggestions for further reading). Moreover, while Fetherling seems to have considered a number of factors in selecting texts (he includes men and women writers, and writers who address their experiences as members of “racial” and “ethnic” communities, as well as queer communities), First Nations, Métis, and francophone writers are conspicuously absent, and the vast majority of the anthology's contributors reside in and/or write about Ontario or the prairies.

For the most part, Fetherling seeks to market Canada's best known writers at the expense of less known or more provocative writers. That he dwells in his introduction on the distinct aspects of Canadian literary memoirs (in comparison to those of America and Britain) is troubling. That the book begins and ends with essays by Mordecai Richler and Margaret Atwood—that the cover foregrounds these same authors (the list of contributors on the book's cover is conveniently alphabetized to feature Margaret Atwood, with a mid-list change in the colour of typeset to highlight Mordecai Richler)—is not surprising. Framed by these canonical authors, *The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs* reaffirms—albeit discreetly—the structure of the traditional Canadian literary canon.

In comparison to the more conventional samples of literary memoir collected in Fetherling's anthology, Myrna Kostash's *The Doomed Bridegroom* stands out for the way in which it pushes the memoir genre in exciting new directions. In terms of Kostash's oeuvre, too, *The Doomed Bridegroom* represents a departure from her previous writing. Readers will find her revisiting subjects (feminism, ethnicity, the sixties generation, the New Left, and Eastern Europe) that have long occupied a central position in her writing; they will find, too, the sharp journalistic style that she honed in such works as *Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (1980) and *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* (1993). But in this memoir Kostash reveals—for the first time and with remarkable candour—the intensely personal aspects of her writing life. In the aftermath of the Sexual Revolution, she explores “the erotic possibilities of female heterosexual desire”—the “inextricability,” in fact, of “political and sexual desire.” *The Doomed Bridegroom* addresses her attraction to “heroic figures in the extremity of resistance and sacrifice,”

and her subsequent “obsession to narrate a personal history of arousal by transgressive men, alive and dead, in Poland, Ukraine and Greece.”

Divided into six chapters, each focused on one of her lovers, *The Doomed Bridegroom* begins with Lenny, an American draft-dodger she meets while a university student in Edmonton, and Kostash then traces her subsequent involvement with Kostas, a (supposed) communist freedom fighter in Greece; K, an aging Polish communist (but pro-Solidarity) bureaucrat; Vasyl Stus, a persecuted Ukrainian poet; the Mennonite Canadian writer Patrick Friesen; and, finally, an unnamed Serbian poet she meets in 1997 while visiting Belgrade. Kostash incorporates shifting first- and third-person accounts of real encounters and imagined scenarios with her lovers, excerpts from their love letters and poetry, and even a constructed dialogue between herself and a mock interviewer. The boundaries of fiction, non-fiction, autobiography, biography, and travelogue are radically blurred. And as she explores her relationships with her bridegrooms—who are married to history, to their political causes and, at times, to other women (but never to her)—she simultaneously unfolds a narrative of the doomed bride. Her project is as much about coming to terms with her decision neither to marry nor to bear children (“I would bear books”) as it is about understanding the seductive pull of fraught historical and political milieux.

At times, Kostash seeks to disentangle her real lovers—like Kostas (a salesman of agricultural chemicals, in fact, and married with two children to boot)—from the romanticized roles she once assigned them; at times, she seeks to script herself imaginatively into the harsh realities of her imagined lovers' political circumstances, as in the case of Stus (whom she never actually met). With Friesen, as she examines the

uneasy (and uneven) historical relations between Ukrainians and Mennonites in colonized Ukraine (as well as the reductive representations of Ukrainians rife in Mennonite Canadian literature), she becomes the “primal Slavic body”—the figure of the Ukrainian slut—sharply juxtaposed against the chaste Mennonite wife. Throughout her memoir, Kostash establishes her subject positions—as a Ukrainian Canadian, a feminist, an advocate of the New Left; as a comrade, a girlfriend, and a mistress—only to undermine them in moments of self-doubt and even loathing inspired by historically determined circumstances.

Ultimately, what makes Kostash’s *The Doomed Bridegroom* such a richly provocative book are precisely the ways in which she challenges Fetherling’s notion that literary memoir is akin to the “traditional realist novel.” Midway through her memoir, Kostash asks, “Is there a narrative here?” Readers may well ask, too, “Is there a narrator here?” In fact, there are multiple narratives—and narrators—here, but they emerge in a stylistically complex marriage of historical and imaginative detail that requires work on the part of the reader. This is Kostash at her most vulnerable, her most demanding, and her best. *The Vintage Book of Canadian Memoirs* is, by contrast, an easy read.

Life Stories

Joe Fiorito

The Closer We Are to Dying. McClelland & Stewart \$22.99

Josef Skvorecky

When Eve Was Naked: A Journey through Life. Key Porter \$27.95

Reviewed by Joel Baetz

There is something refreshing about reading *The Closer We Are to Dying* and *When*

Eve Was Naked, two recent memoirs that forego the anxiety about self-representation so typical in contemporary life-writing. Reading these two books is a lot like watching your favourite movie after you’ve come home from a night of experimental theatre: you’re not exactly bowled over by innovation, but familiar gestures are often reassuring.

That is not to say that these books are unforgivably old-fashioned. Indeed, both authors quietly acknowledge the unreliability of their memories. In the closing chapter, Fiorito admits that “memory is counterfeit”; in his preface, Skvorecky recognizes that “to be absolutely true to what happened is not within human powers.”

That said, Fiorito’s book is the more engaging of these two books, largely because he knows how to tell a good story. *The Closer We Are to Dying* recounts the author’s return to his childhood home in Fort William after his father, Dusty, is given only weeks to live. Trading shifts with the rest of his family, Joe keeps vigil, listening to his father narrate the stories of the Fiorito family, stories of exploding moonshine stills, homicidal relatives, bandstand icons and brawling uncles. As the tales accumulate and Joe’s voice combines with Dusty’s, it becomes clear that Joe isn’t there just to see his father die but to investigate the family origins and to meditate on the inheritance fathers leave their sons.

Using spare but meaningful prose, he controls the tone of the stories and his own struggle with his father’s transgressions. With few exceptions, Fiorito avoids a maudlin tone. *The Closer We Are to Dying* may not push Canadian life-writing in any new directions, but the writing and emotional complexity make for excellent reading.

Josef Skvorecky’s book is much less successful. *When Eve Was Naked* is a collection of twenty-four previously published stories and sketches, arranged in chronological

order according to the age of the narrator, and meant to blend elements of autobiography and memoir. About two-thirds of these stories are set in Czechoslovakia in the thirties and forties and narrate the typical childhood and young adult experiences of various narrators (very often Skvorecky's Danny Smiricky) in times marked by fascism, genocide and totalitarianism. The last few stories relate the experiences of Smiricky, now a professor in Canada, who struggles to understand the naiveté and vanity of his students.

The project, of course, is to set innocence against experience. In the powerful "Eve Was Naked," for instance, Skvorecky sets young Smiricky's "happy age" against a backdrop of Hitler Youth Groups and war prisoners. In the tragic and sardonic "Jezebel from Forest Hill," Skvorecky contrasts the shallowness of students who believe their "interpersonal relations have gotten horribly complicated" with Smiricky's own recollections of friends sent to Auschwitz and acquaintances hanged on the Prague gallows.

Though Skvorecky registers this tension most powerfully in these shorter stories that open and close the collection, the longer stories that make up the middle part of the memoir do not quite carry the same weight. "The Feminine Mystique," "Laws of the Jungle," and "The Cuckoo," for instance, too intent on conveying an adolescent's confusion, do not adequately register the hopelessness of the situation. Elsewhere, lines like "[s]trange things happen to people in wars," while designed to communicate the narrator's superficiality, instead only serve to diminish any sense of tragedy.

More disappointing is that the collection never lives up to its billing as an autobiography or a memoir. Though Skvorecky admits that there is no character or event in his "so-called 'serious' fiction [. . .] without a basis in what [he] actually knew and saw

in real life," *When Eve Was Naked* reads more like a collection of short stories and less like the communication of personal experiences. The narrative fragments hang together rather loosely; unlike Fiorito's *The Closer We Are to Dying*, they just aren't able to bring a central consciousness, let alone a central character, to life.

Barrel Children and Shape-Shifters

Cecil Foster

Island Wings: A Memoir. Harper Collins \$27.00

Rabindranath Maharaj

The Lagahoo's Apprentice. Knopf \$32.95

Reviewed by Stella Algoo-Baksh

Island Wings: A Memoir records the first twenty-two years of Cecil Foster's life in Barbados. In this second revisiting of the period—the first being his novel *No Man in the House*—Foster is able to place in a broader context those people and events that were critical influences in his life, allowing him to exorcize the ghosts of the past and "to bring closure to the many matters which still haunt him." While the *Memoir* is without a doubt an intensely personal and moving story, it also offers vital insights into Barbadian politics and the character of Barbadian society.

At the personal level, Foster's *Memoir* is replete with vivid detail about the author's early life. Left in the care of "grandmothers and aunts" by parents who had gone to England to seek their fortune—and who only intermittently sent gifts and cheques by way of support—Foster, along with his two brothers, endured much suffering, including the pain of surviving nights without meals, by chewing sugar-cane "butts," the brutality of floggings by his grandmother and aunt, and the shame of not having money for clothing and education. He managed ultimately to complete sec-

ondary and post-secondary education, primarily because of the love and unstinting financial support of his two brothers and other close relatives. After becoming a successful journalist, Foster travelled to England for a reunion with his parents, which enabled him to comprehend more fully his own and his parents' fate. This cathartic experience impelled him to move on with his life, his resultant growth and maturity being reflected on his return to Barbados in his blunt coverage of local parliamentary debates. When his directness was deemed offensive in certain quarters, however, he was forced to flee to Canada.

At the societal level, the *Memoir* is highly informative, providing as it does a wealth of insights about the social, economic, and political aspects of life in Barbados as well as about political issues—for example, political murder in Guyana, the Grenada crisis, and race relations in Trinidad and Tobago—in other West Indian territories. While these themes have been explored by such writers as Austin Clarke and Dionne Brand, Foster's account adds fresh information and presents the author's own perspective on events. Certainly, the inclusion of vast amounts of social, economic and political material threatens occasionally to impede the flow of the narrative. Nevertheless, Foster's insights are engaging. He claims, in effect, that just as many Barbadian children became "barrel children" because their parents had abandoned them, so was "Little England" forsaken by Britain after Barbados gained political independence in 1966. Under colonial rule, he argues further, the island had been so socially, politically and—most important of all—economically dependent that its slide into neo-colonialism was virtually inevitable.

Sombre in tone, Foster's *Memoir* is written in the clear, crisp prose of a good journalist, but, while the factual material seems sound, the author's comments regarding some issues are too overtly didactic.

Furthermore, the work lacks the sparkle of Austin Clarke's *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* and *Pig Tails 'n Breadfruit*, which also capture the histories of young protagonists and their countries. Yet, Foster's assets as a journalist—an eye for detail, an ability to record accurately, an adeptness at creating a sense of time and place, and skill in merging personal and societal histories—make his memoir a valuable addition to recent ones by such West Indian writers as Rachel Manley and Jamaica Kincaid.

Maharaj's second novel, *The Lagahoo's Apprentice*, tells the story of the growth and enlightenment of a small-town Ontario journalist who returns to his native country to write the biography of a shady politician and plantation owner, Rampartap. Commissioned by the subject himself, Stephen is expected to fashion a book from the limited and partial accounts given by Rampartap's friends and supporters. Unwilling to write a praise-song based on fiction and half-truths, Stephen is abruptly relieved of his commission. The dismissal triggers his own personal odyssey, for in revisiting the haunts of his youth he discovers that the old recluse in Agostini Village, whom he believed to be a lagahoo (the lagahoo in Trinidad folklore being a shape-shifter, a symbol of the idea that things are not what they seem), is not as unique a phenomenon as he has thought. He discovers, in fact, that his host and hostess, their entourage, the friends of his past, and he himself are all lagahoos.

In the course of his growth, Stephen recognizes that his memory of the past and the image of a paradise he has created in his daughter's mind—"scarlet ibises and flamingos colouring the sky"—are simply convenient fictions to shield them both from the harsh social realities of life in Toronto. Subtly, in fact, *The Lagahoo's Apprentice* explores the way nostalgia shapes (even distorts) immigrants' memo-

ries of their native land. As Stephen realizes, the idyllic homeland created by nostalgia does not now exist and in fact never did. The reality was much more unpleasant. Like Sam Selvon, Maharaj indicates in a subdued but poignant way the corrosive effects of both colonialism and its outgrowth, neo-colonialism. One of the strengths of the novel, indeed, is its smooth integration of a great deal of the myth and recent history of the island and its people. In the process Maharaj, unlike V.S. Naipaul, demonstrates in his fiction that the present social, political, economic and even religious problems are outcomes of the days of colonialism, when the colonizer created "mimic men," men with black skins but white masks. In this connection, time is a crucial theme in *The Lagahoo's Apprentice*. The novel opens with Cane, the clock-maker; Stephen's daughter begins each of her stories with the words "Finally it was time . . ."; Radha asserts that "everything is shaped by time"; and Stephen accommodates himself to "the crazy shape of time." Time has enabled Stephen to grow. It may also extricate his people from the legacies of colonialism. They, like the lagahoo, have the potential to change if they so desire.

The Lagahoo's Apprentice is a well-crafted novel. It is elegant in its language, and it successfully employs satire and humour to foreground the legacies of colonialism: fragmentation of identity, disillusionment, personal and political turmoil, nostalgia for a lost "Eden," the persistent sense of futility and entrapment, and the problems of hybridity. Yet, it is not narrow in its outlook, for it exhibits both the beauty and ugliness, the virtues and the vices, of the people in Stephen's land and in this respect reflects what is also quintessential in Selvon's works. It is an invaluable addition both to Canadian writing and to immigrant writing in general.

Telling Lives

Richard Freadman

Threads of Life: Autobiography and the Will. U of Chicago P n.p.

Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps

Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling. Harvard UP n.p.

Reviewed by Joel Baetz

Near the end of *The Stone Angel*, as Hagar Shipley looks back on her life and her relationships with her husband Bram and her son John, she arrives at a moment of self-realization: "I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh, my two, my dead. Dead by your hands or by mine?" Like Margaret Laurence's Hagar, the authors of the books under consideration here are concerned with the revelatory possibilities of life-narratives, what they say about who we are and how we see ourselves. Richard Freadman, in his impressive though sometimes opaque *Threads of Life*, is specifically concerned with autobiographies and what they say about the human will. Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, in their less impressive but at times valuable *Living Narrative*, are interested in the ways in which conversational narratives are constructed and shape our perception of the past and ourselves.

As an interdisciplinary study, *Threads of Life* offers a philosophically framed account of autobiography and, specifically, how autobiographies speak about the modern condition of the human will. Although Freadman divides his book into eight chapters, it is better to think about it as divided into three parts. First, Freadman defines his terms and reasons that Western autobiography has always been the ideal site for reflection about the will. Second, he argues that the most influential conceptions of the will in the twentieth century are deeply

conflicted: those “cultural prophets” who are seen as champions of human freedom (Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx) offer interpretations of the will that are “profoundly deterministic” while those who deny the presence of the will in theory (Althusser, Skinner, and Barthes) inevitably confirm the presence of the human will in their autobiographies. Third, Freadman reads five autobiographies for their conception of the will. While Ernest Hemingway, Simone de Beauvoir, Arthur Koestler, Stephen Spender, and Diana Trilling offer highly original autobiographies, they are all inflected with the same tensions and conflicts about the will evident in the work of Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx.

Freadman’s range of reference to the history of ideas and his careful readings of the autobiographies in relation to each author’s body of work and cultural context make *Threads of Life* a worthy contribution to the understanding of both autobiography and the modern condition of the will. He is perhaps at his best while refuting the claims of postmodernism, with the implicit aim of loosening its grip on literary and cultural thinking, but his more general insights into autobiography’s preoccupation with the will are just as valuable.

As much as the scope and thoroughness of Freadman’s work make *Threads of Life* a success, they also limit the study’s accessibility. Halfway through his second chapter, Freadman says that he has avoided the signs and symbols of analytical philosophy and focused mainly on literature because “the nonspecialist reader cannot profit directly from” such “highly technical and specialized” work. What he doesn’t seem to realize or, perhaps, what he realizes all too clearly, with his inclusion of two appendices, endnotes, and a glossary of terms, is that his broad scope and heavy investment in philosophical discourses restrict his audience to a collection of experts familiar with the history of ideas and interested in autobiogra-

phy. Although Freadman contends that his study is only a philosophically framed account of autobiography, after extended discussions of and passing references to Plato, Althusser, Schopenhauer, Derrida, Wittgenstein, Hegel, Barthes, Freud, Nietzsche, Marx, Kant, and so many more, one can’t help but wonder if the frame looms too large, so large that at times it obscures everything but the broadest brushstrokes of his argument. In the end, Freadman’s argument achieves a tension similar to the one he observes in the autobiographies of Beauvoir, Koestler, Spender, and Trilling, a tension between radical contingency “that baffles understanding” and a desire for individual control as well as rational and observable outcomes.

This tension between the contingent and the controlled is also central to Ochs and Capps’s *Living Narrative*. “All narrative,” Capps and Ochs write in their introduction, “exhibits tension between the desire to construct an over-arching storyline that ties events together in a seamless explanatory framework and the desire to capture the complexities of the events experienced.” This is especially true, the authors go on to say, for the focus of their study: conversational narratives. These narratives that we construct when we recount the day’s events or explain our reasons for doing something are exponentially more open than their literary counterparts. Conversational narratives might start out as an attempt to shape events into a straightforward trajectory, but with questions, challenges, and contradictions from the audience these narrative are, in Ochs and Capps’s estimation, open-ended and contingent collaborations. After an introduction that proposes a dimensional approach in lieu of a set of distinctive features that all narratives share, *Living Narrative* devotes each of the remaining chapters to describing one aspect of a conversational narrative: how a person becomes a narrator, launches a narrative,

recounts an unexpected turn of events, uses stereotypes and familiar structures to define and configure events, and probes the moral dimensions of the narrative.

To some degree, then, the benefit of *Living Narrative* is that it drives a wedge between literary narratives, polished and produced by individual authors, and those socially constructed conversational narratives of everyday life. Though Ochs and Capps's understanding of what questions a literary narrative can raise about its own coherence seems limited at times, the authors' tendency to perform what amounts to some logical sleight of hand is more disappointing: as they insist on the difference between conversational and literary narratives and argue that conversational narratives "constitute the prototype of narrative activity," they nevertheless use "[l]iterary critics such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael Bernstein, Lawrence Langer, and Gary Morson, and historian Hayden White" to substantiate their claims. *Living Narrative* also lacks a unifying argument. Ochs and Capps offer brief glimpses of their broad purpose and underpinning assumptions but, unfortunately, the chapters are joined only by loose threads.

The Present As Watershed

Gerald Friesen

Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada. U of Toronto P
\$22.95

Myrna Kostash

The Next Canada: In Search of Our Future Nation. McClelland & Stewart \$34.99

Reviewed by Lothar Hönninghausen

Canadian books on Canada's present and future, in contrast to American books on America's present and future, are not characterized by their boisterous or brazen affirmativeness. Rather, it is their wary and

self-critical soul-searching that intrigues the outside observer. Gerald Friesen's and Myrna Kostash's books are no exception. Neither author relies on a grandiose theoretical framework. These books prefer to deal with contributions to the national culture from ordinary citizens (Friesen) and focus on social issues (Kostash). Both take the present as a watershed, Friesen to examine the legacy shaping it, and Kostash to find out what the future holds for young contemporaries.

Gerald Friesen's *Citizens and Nation* consists of four parts: I. Oral-Traditional Societies, II. Textual-Settler Societies, III. Print-Capitalist National Societies, IV. Screen-Capitalist Societies. The compounds indicate the interrelatedness of four stages in economic and communication history. Each part is comprised of two chapters, the first a descriptive case study, the second an in-depth interpretation. Thus Part III contains the two chapters "Phyllis Knight and Canada's First Century" and "Literate Communication and Political Resistance." The fact that the chapters are arranged in numerical order suggests a continuous economic and cultural development.

As the case studies represent major phases in communication history, their choice is all-important: "Elizabeth and Jim Goudie [...] represent millions of people who experienced this textual-settler version of communication and culture in various corners of the earth between the twelfth and twentieth centuries." Friesen pays attention to the typical as well as to the individual and his effective writing style provides a nuanced view of the period as well as a lively and sometimes moving picture of his witnesses: grandmother Andre who represents aboriginal society and oral culture; Elizabeth and Jim Goudie who embody textual-settler society; the Knights who illustrate working-class life in the print-capitalist society; Roseanne and Frank who

bring to mind the screen-capitalist society of our time; and Simonne Monet-Chartrand whose autobiography provides insight into the life of Montreal's francophone élite during the 1970s and 1980s.

Friesen, in the tradition of Innis and McLuhan, presents cultural history as history of communication. He takes his cue from one of Innis's remarks in *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930): "We have not yet realized that the Indian and his culture were fundamental to the growth of Canadian institutions." Broadening Innis's observation to include contributions to Canadian history by settlers, by nineteenth-century workers and twentieth-century employees, he "outlines how the very acts of communication—the social contexts created by the voice, writing, print, and modern electronic forms—establish a framework for citizenship and nationality and thus for Canada." He suggests "that over the entire course of human history in northern North America common people have experienced four constructions of the dimensions of time and space" and "that we can correlate these four constructions to four communication systems." Friesen allows for considerable overlap and for the coexistence of several communication systems ("each supplements and complements, but does not erase its predecessor;") "the oral and the literal [are] not mutually exclusive").

Further, he frequently and usefully compares the various modes in which Canadians throughout history have experienced time and space. Comparisons like the following constitute one of the attractions of his book:

By juxtaposing them [Goudie and Knight], one can observe the scale of cultural change between the world of settlers, shaped, as we saw above, by nature and other people's texts, and the world of national citizens, shaped by the first generations of mass media, by early versions

of North American capitalism, and by the boundaries of the nation-state.

[...] The very language of the Goudie and Knight memoirs reveals differences in their authors' visions of time and space.

The workers' struggle redefined time as meaning the span of work for which a wage was paid. It also restructured space, because it separated workplace from household, as the differences between the Goudie and the Knight families illustrate. Neither Alestine Andre's grandmother nor Elizabeth Goudie ever encountered insistent, externally monitored, timed changes in their daily work. Whether participation in the Princess Diana cult should indeed be regarded as an impressive contribution of Canadians to their national culture or whether the formula "one must turn from economic history and genealogy to cultural history" has to be repeated quite so often, is questionable. But these are minor problems hardly worth mentioning in view of Friesen's convincing approach, his insightful readings of the six well-chosen narratives, and the many revealing comparisons of, for instance, the different kinds of insecurity experienced by Elizabeth Goudie's settler family, by Phyllis Knight's 1930s working-class family and by Roseanne's postmodern family. Professional and readable, *Citizens and Nation* is an impressive and useful book.

The same can be said for Myrna Kostash's *The Next Canada*, an overview of the prospects of "the next Canada" that is based on a wide range of interviews and organized under five thematic headings: I. "The New World Order," II. Culture, III. Beyond Identity Politics, IV. Acts of Resistance, V. Homeplace. Kostash shares Friesen's social commitment and is no friend of Reagan's "New World Order" as implemented by Mulroney and Chrétien. She thus begins her opening chapter on the "New World Order" not with the state of the economy, but "with governments'

'adjustment' to market-driven 'realities,' that is, with the fatal impact of deficit reduction and public dis-investment in the social services ("Canadians should squirm at the top ranking [by the UN] of our quality of life"). Kostash has her misgivings about the replacement of the "workplace culture" of the sixties and seventies by "self-employment" with "the self-employed working out of their own offices, paying for their own benefits, and paying for their own utilities." However, as she is interested in a balanced picture, she also interviews representatives of the Progressive Group for Independent Business and of the Reform Party who not only demand "tax relief" but also acknowledge "the government's role in the provision of social services." From this the author seems to infer that it will be difficult to distinguish Right from Left in "the next Canada."

In her interviews, Kostash finds the next generation "team-oriented and very quality conscious" but also "driven to innovate, driven by immediacy requiring fast results, plugged trustingly into the Internet, in love with hard work because work and play are the same thing for them." But that does not keep her from sharing Jeremy Rifkin's disillusioned view that "the digitized technology of the post-industrial era has in fact eliminated jobs" and "that hundreds of millions of workers in the Western industrialized nations will be left permanently unemployed." The interviews with e-zine editors, which open the chapter on "Culture," reveal just how problematic homing in cyberspace is and how unlikely it is to preserve a Canadian cultural identity. But one cannot help thinking that if Kostash had interviewed some of the impressive writers who have done so much to establish Canada's reputation abroad, her picture of her country's cultural sovereignty in the face of the overwhelming globalism of the American media might have turned out to be more

positive. The interviews, in "Beyond Identity Politics," on "Sexualities," particularly those bringing out differences between second-wave feminists and post-feminist *Grrls*, are more striking than those on "Ethnicities." In fact, after reading all the interviews on fluid sexualities and transgressions, one wonders whether "in the next Canada" any children will be born. For Kostash, as a member of the sixties generation, it is clearly reassuring that there are some interviewees who report "Acts of Resistance" against Pepsi products and the APEC summit at UBC or who engage in feats of Eco-Activism. But these protesters clearly are not as representative of the time as were those of the sixties and seventies, and there is something inauthentic about these "Acts of Resistance." ("You read about the Sorbonne occupations in '68, in Columbia and Berkeley, but when *you* actually do it [. . .] you realize the possibilities.") Is it because many contemporaries have given up because they feel that there is too much to protest against to even begin?

Under the heading "The Shrinking Commons," Kostash courageously criticizes "privatization" as a euphemistically named and indiscriminately endorsed policy: "With every privatization [. . .] we have shed a little bit more of a citizenship in institutions that glued us together with shared responsibility and shared authority." One hesitates to subscribe to her optimistic assumption that in the next Canada "the retribalizing" in the computer interface will lead to "the persistent identification with the idea of Canada as a shared 'commons' of social consciousness." But there is no doubt that Kostash's book presents exciting new views of Canada.



Reading Lessons

Wendy S. Hesford

Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy. U of Minnesota P US\$19.95

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present. Harvard UP US\$24.95

Reviewed by Donna Palmateer Pennee

Following the critical pedagogy of Freire, hooks, Giroux, McLaren, and others, Hesford's book exhibits a disciple's passion of commitment. Its earnestness may be oppressive, however, for readers who have been teaching coloniality/postcoloniality for some years in culturally diverse curricula from materialist perspectives. (The book is a clear reminder of the differences in the theoretical, cultural, and sociopolitical awareness of some American and some Canadian universities.) The occasions for "autobiography" that Hesford offers are the most interesting dimension of her study: undergraduate composition courses, campus student activism, the formation of campus sexual offense policies, public art activism, and pedagogical activism from her own position of race and class privilege. Using local examples (from Oberlin College, Ohio) of oral, written, performative, and visual autobiographical acts, Hesford hopes readers will extrapolate to their own institutional locations: "Integrating our self-reflections with cultural, rhetorical, and material analysis, and encouraging our students to do the same, not only will go a long way towards justifying attention to the personal in the classroom but it also will help us move beyond a naive and reductive identity politics." This is a useful primer for those who have not yet set to work the challenges of diversity inside and outside the classroom; its bibliography is a very useful resource, particularly for Women's Studies students and

teachers (though, as usual, it is thin on Canadian work in similar fields).

And to preempt any feeling of smugness about what transpires in some of our literature classrooms in Canada, there is Spivak with "I repeat: I remain a literary critic by training; disciplinizing the singular. Perhaps this is also the problem with all radical interventions within firmly established conventions—academy or art—insufficiently canny not only about globality but also about their own unwitting place and role in globalization." Or: "Programs of cultural self-representation are never correct or incorrect. They are the substance of cultural inscriptions." There is no going back to a state of being that predates colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, and the means of going "forward" are irreducibly structural repetitions of what prevents the return. Spivak's 449-page book is a primer on how to read closely, deconstructively, in "the vanishing present" for the structural repetitions of imperialism in the work of postcolonial critique, whether that critique is launched through literary criticism, meta-historiography, "Gender and Development" policy, or "international" feminist activism.

The usefulness of the book as a primer may depend on significant prior engagement with Spivak's publications on languages, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxist semiotics, materialist feminism, and the philosophical tradition of German critique and speculation. Through four "chapters," each approximately 100 pages of typically dense prose, Spivak traces the itinerary of "the native informant" in the time of geopolitical space, up to the current financialization of the globe with its "credit-baiting" of women in "developing" countries. She locates this itinerary in its (dis)appearance in the institutional force fields of Philosophy, Literature, History, and Culture. She revisits and revises crucial scenes of her work to date, most notably

"Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), and "Versions of the Margin: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*" (1991), along with readings of Baudelaire's "Le Cygne," Kipling's "William the Conqueror," and a discussion paper put before the court of directors of the East India Company, to illustrate that "the tropological deconstruction of masculinism does not exempt us from performing the lie of imperialism." She adds to this grouping Mahasweta Devi's "Pterodactyl, Pirtha, and Puran Sahay" to investigate "an abuse of the Enlightenment rather than divisive identitarianism," "the postcolonial performance of the construction of the constitutional subject of the new nation, in subalternity rather than, as most often by renaming the colonial subject, as citizen." Readers may recognize "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives" (1985), here expanded to a critique of the disciplines of literature and history. Basic reading lessons involve the reminder that before the British Empire arrived in India, the East India Company had; that before "the consolidation of what will come to be recognized as 'nationalist' literature" there were "the archives of imperial governance"; and that "literature and the archives seem complicit in that they are both a cross-hatching of condensations, a traffic in telescoped symbols, that can only too easily be read as each other's repetition-with-a-displacement."

Her deconstructive reading of the anthropological moment in Kant, Hegel, and Marx locates the agency for both first world and elite third world migrant "neocolonial anticolonial" critique ("a structure that one critiques yet inhabits intimately is the deconstructive position, of which postcoloniality is a historical case"). This tradition of German philosophical critique is not the same thing as disciplinary traditions elsewhere in Europe and Britain, insofar as it did not rely on direct involvement in imperialism for its self-consolidation; more sig-

nificantly for lessons in reading, it involved figures and figurations of what would come to be called the "native informant" (Hegel's "India" and Marx's "Asiatic Mode of Production"), which is also to say that "figuration is [...] a case of theoretical production [...] making visible the impossible that is the condition of possibility of all setting of theory to work [...]." The Culture chapter deconstructs the foreclosure of temporizing (time) in recent preoccupations with space (geopolitics) in much of what goes by the name of postmodernism (the deconstruction of Jameson's work proceeds here with a kind of relish that seems reserved for comrades in the American academic elite). The term "postcolonial" emerges as a sign of cultural politics, frequently located somewhere between "postmodernism" and "hybridity," the one a kind of playing with history, the other a playing at diasporics; "postcolonial" is what one makes of these games from where/when one is. Spivak warns that we can't use "culture" (as the mid-career Foucault used "power") as an alibi for being transnationally illiterate or for doing "conscientious ethnography," with a Third World Literature anthology in one institutionally privileged hand and a Charles Taylor or John Rawls title in the other. Celebrating postcolonial hybridity and romancing the diaspora from positions of institutionalized knowledge and artistic production are complicit practices, whether conducted by Northwestern international feminists or by elite migrants who now call "home" the nation-state that "aids" the "culture" they left. They remain complicit in the discourse of "Development," the latest version of the civilizing mission. Economic migrancy is far more important as a historical and empirical concept-metaphor to put to work than postcoloniality or "cultural identity," which is not the same thing as saying that nation-states are defunct or that nationalism is always and everywhere a bad or a

good thing. Rather, “[w]e cannot use ‘cultural identity’ as a permission to difference and an instrument for disavowing that eurocentric economic migration (and eventually even political exile) persists in the hope of justice under capitalism. That unacknowledged and scandalous secret is the basis of our unity. This is what unites the ‘illegal alien’ and the aspiring academic. We can reinvent this basis as a springboard for a reading/writing/teaching that counterpoints these times.” Here, Spivak writes specifically of the United States, but neither McLuhan’s Global Village nor our current federal policy is exempt from Spivak’s purview. Insofar as Canada actively participates in the policies and funding of “Development,” it may not be involved in territorial colonization of the globe but it certainly participates in the colonization of the globe through the culture of capital.

Documenting Resistance

James Hoffman

The Ecstasy of Resistance: A Biography of George Ryga. ECW P \$19.95

Mariys Chevreffis and Apollonia Steele, eds.

The George Ryga Papers. U of Calgary P \$34.95

Reviewed by Len Falkenstein

James Hoffman begins *The Ecstasy of Resistance*, his authorized biography of George Ryga (1932-1987), by presenting his subject as something of a paradox—a famous, yet largely unknown, Canadian writer whose substantial body of work, with the exception of his groundbreaking 1967 play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, has long been unfairly overlooked: “As a subject for criticism he has invited either a rapid dismissal or a pat summation, both far short of the complexity of the man.” Hoffman, however, is guarded in his own assessment of Ryga: “He may or may not be a great writer [. . .] he may or may not be, as some

have suggested, a ‘one-play’ playwright. He is, however, indisputably an *important* Canadian writer.” In keeping with the modesty of this assessment, Hoffman states that in writing his book he set out not to make a case for Ryga’s merits but primarily “to make available the known data pertaining to Ryga so that the very necessary debate on his achievement can begin.” While *The Ecstasy of Resistance* certainly succeeds in doing so, it is questionable to what degree the book satisfies another of Hoffman’s goals, that of capturing the “powerful Ryga voice.” Although Hoffman’s thoroughness in documenting the details of Ryga’s life and works is impressive, the biography offers only limited insight into the personality and mind of a man whose reputation is based as much on the passion he embodied as a champion of Canadian cultural nationalism as on his literary accomplishments.

The biography is substantial, weighing in at 336 pages, including notes, an index, a bibliography of Ryga’s published works and photographs, and is organized strictly chronologically (indeed, Hoffman’s biographical approach is decidedly old-school in its adherence to the principles of linearity and causality). The most detailed chapters, and perhaps also the most informative and engaging, chronicle the formative years of Ryga’s career as a writer: his artistic training at the Banff School of Fine Arts, his early left-wing political activism and involvement in a series of censorship controversies related to his writing and his work as a broadcaster at an Edmonton radio station, his travels in Europe. Of the middle-aged writer of established reputation of the post-*Rita Joe* years who is the subject of the later chapters, the image that dominates is that of Ryga the “artist in resistance” (as he liked to refer to himself), the cultural warrior whose skills as a writer do not seem to have ever quite lived up to his ego and ambition. This is the Ryga who

laboured tirelessly with little more than middling success on one project after another without ever reproducing the achievement of his landmark play, at the same time periodically vaulting into the public eye as a vociferous and trenchant commentator on Canada's arts scene.

Hoffman's study offers insights that will interest both those who know Ryga's work well and those who know him only as the author of *Rita Joe*. How many would have suspected, for example, that although he gained fame primarily as a playwright, Ryga never cared much for theatre and expressed open antipathy to writing for the stage? Less surprising, but no less eye-opening, are Hoffman's revelations of the extent to which Ryga and his family lived hand to mouth as he tried to make ends meet as a professional writer, circumstances that led him to pursue numerous dubious projects that he hoped (often vainly, as it turns out) would pay off financially. Ryga likened his plight to a form of prostitution and railed against it throughout his career as the all too typical lot of the Canadian cultural worker. (Notably, we learn, Ryga received one of his most lucrative pay-cheques by penning an episode of *The Bionic Woman*.) In terms of Hoffman's contributions to critical debate concerning Ryga's literary achievements, the biography makes it abundantly clear that Ryga was both highly prolific and an inveterate recycler of his own work. While the financial pressures Ryga was working under undoubtedly had much to do with this, the biography nonetheless inclines one to question the breadth of the writer's imagination and originality. Hoffman's thesis—for the most part he is content merely to describe Ryga's work rather than analyze it—is simple but persuasive: Hoffman reads Ryga as a writer torn between two conflicting literary-philosophical traditions—the Marxist socialism that Ryga inherited from his ancestors and the “rugged individualism”

that is the dominant ethos of the rural Alberta in which he grew up. Hoffman's Ryga, then, is Ryga the Marxist Romantic, and many of the contradictions and failures that mark his writing, as well as his obsessive reworking of key tropes and themes, derive from repeated, unsuccessful attempts to reconcile the dichotomies inherent in his mixed political-aesthetic pedigree.

The biography is not, however, without some serious problems. Hoffman's prose is often cumbersome and far from engaging. Consider the opening lines of the book: “George Ryga is a Canadian playwright. He participated in an uncertain theatrical practice that has only recently been established: it was in the mid-sixties, when Canada first acquired a professional theatre, that Ryga's plays were first staged. Thus he worked in the very theatre he helped create.” At other times, the style tends toward the melodramatic: “It was a momentous period, full of suffering and disappointment, of planning and hope; even as he nursed his injured hand, he discovered he could have a writing career.” Hoffman's reluctance to offer analysis or commentary that moves beyond the bare facts is also a source of frustration. As a non-Native playwright whose two best-known dramas, *Rita Joe* and *Indian*, centre on Native characters, Ryga has become a target of charges of cultural appropriation and stereotyping. Hoffman not only side-steps this debate almost entirely, but also occasionally exhibits the same tendency towards generalization and stereotype that characterized Ryga's 1960s pronouncements on Native issues. Of the final speech in *Indian*, delivered by the play's Native protagonist, Hoffman observes, “the speech took on a universal resonance in its jarring poetry of the outcast: the rapid staccato of repeated phrases and names evokes for the first time on the Canadian stage an authentic, disturbing image of the contemporary

Indian...” And while there was a great deal of drama in Ryga’s personal life—conflicts with his family, a brief flirtation with the Communist Party, a romance with a dissident Persian poet in Bulgaria, battles with the Canadian theatrical establishment, a long period of creative decline in the 1970s—Hoffman offers little more than a dry recitation of the bare facts of these events. One senses that Ryga, despite his fiery public persona, was a very private man, and that Hoffman, writing an authorized biography that he produced in close consultation with Ryga and his family, wished to respect that privacy. The result for the reader of the biography, however, is that the dynamic human being at the centre of the work remains largely elusive.

Marlys Chevrefils and Appollonia Steele’s *The George Ryga Papers* is an inventory of the extensive Ryga holdings in the archives of the University of Calgary. The catalogue, which runs to 338 pages, is clearly and attractively laid out, with each item concisely and helpfully labeled and annotated. The inventory is preceded by an “Archival Introduction,” authored by Jean F. Tener and Juanita Walton, that outlines the rationale for the publication and explains the cataloguing methodology used in the inventory, as well as by a “Biocritical Essay” by Hoffman that distills *The Ecstasy of Resistance* into an engaging 18 pages. Attractively bound and illustrated with photographs of several documents in the archive, *The George Ryga Papers* will be an invaluable tool for Ryga scholars.



Remembering Fathers

Charles E. Israel

Son's Eye: A Memoir. Oakville. Mosaic \$20.00

Rachel Manley

Slipstream: A Daughter Remembers. Knopf

Canada \$34.95

Reviewed by Peggy Martin

Paradox and contradiction, admiration and disappointment, love and honour connect these two moving memoirs in which the authors commemorate fathers who were both powerful public figures and deeply loved parents. Charles Israel (1920-1999), author of several novels including *The Mark, Rizpah*, and *The Hostages*, and award-winning writer for television, film and radio, celebrates in *Son's Eye* his father, Edward Leopold Israel, charismatic Rabbi of Baltimore's Har Sinai Synagogue, brilliant intellectual and champion of various social democratic causes in the 1930s and 1940s. "My father died when I was 20 years old," Israel states in a quotation on the jacket of his book. "He left me a slew of unanswered questions about his life. . . . When [he] had been dead for half a century, I began trying to resolve the riddles and paradoxes that characterized so much of his life. . . . I decided to write what I had discovered." The book chronicles Israel's discoveries. Desiring to revive a memory of someone who "would have accomplished great things" but, because he died young, is little known now, Israel is wary of focusing on unattractive truths that might "make [his father] seem less than he was," and at the same time reluctant to present a revisionist myth that ignores the flaws and frailties.

Slipstream, Rachel Manley's poetic record of her father's 72-year life similarly encompasses the personal and the political, but conveys a greater sense of raw grief and immediacy because his death occurred much more recently. Michael Manley

(1924-1997), leader of the leftist People's National Party and the son of Jamaica's first Prime Minister, Norman Manley, was Prime Minister of Jamaica for three terms between 1972 and 1992. Manley explores her father's turbulent political career and his equally turbulent relationship with his daughter. Like Manley's Governor General's Award-winning *Drumblair: The Memory of a Jamaican Childhood*, *Slipstream* articulates in many voices a portrait of a time, a place, a family and a powerful father-daughter bond. Like Israel, Manley writes to ensure her father's legacy, and, as Israel does, she presents her father and herself as both flawed and heroic.

In *Son's Eye*, Israel describes a series of journeys in which he revisited the places of his youth and spoke with others who remembered his father. Rabbi Israel died of a heart attack while visiting Charles, then a student at Cincinnati's Hebrew University, and Israel begins his memoir with an account of a visit to Cincinnati to examine his father's archives, talk with old colleagues and to revive memories. Each visit forces a revision of former truths about his father. He discovers a discrepancy between his memory of his father's heroic rescue of a group of Hunger Marchers in 1932 and the archival records of the event, for example, and he must reconcile his own memories of companionable sun-dappled evenings in his father's study with his brother's memory of favoritism of an older brother that is nothing short of brutal. The new information contributes to the "warts and all" portrait the author has been striving to paint, and at the same time underlines the impossibility of ever knowing the absolute truth about anyone. *Son's Eye*, like all memoirs, becomes a story about its author as well as its subject, and Israel concludes with a reflection: his coming to "appreciate the chemistry of [his] father's strengths and weaknesses" has left him at peace with his love for his father and,

finally, with his father's death.

Her father's final battle with cancer that has metastasized to his spine provides the centre of Manley's memoir. "How could I face his death when I was still trying to assemble the pieces of his life that were mine?" she writes, and in *Slipstream* she does both and shares her experience with her readers. The book slips back and forth between a description of Michael Manley's last weeks and Rachel Manley's recollections of her joy in her father's company, her anguish during their separations, her jealousy of her four stepmothers and of what was perhaps her greatest rival, Jamaica, and her growing friendship with her step-siblings.

A series of evocative but not necessarily consistent metaphors define Michael Manley and his daughter's intense love for him. He "was his own island, . . . a safe mooring" for a child frightened of water, "a mountain," forcefully emitting life, and a boat. "Slipstream" is Michael's metaphor for his own political and personal life: "being caught-up" and carried in a powerful current in the wake of his parents, carrying on what Rachel calls their "joyful march towards a new order" of independence, self-sufficiency and social democracy for Jamaica. His daughter includes in her story her need to "pull away from [an emotional] slipstream," and with her father's strength and resolve "pushing [her] forward," to "become her own Manley." Like Israel, Manley arrives at acceptance through the process of writing. Readers will find both these memoirs a sophisticated addition to the expanding genre of life-writing.



New and Noteworthy

James C. Johnstone and Karen X. Tuchinsky, eds.

Queer View Mirror 2: Lesbian and Gay Short Short Fiction. Arsenal Pulp P \$19.95/US \$17.95

Stan Persky

Autobiography of a Tattoo. New Star Books \$19.00

Janice L. Ristock and Catherine G. Taylor, eds.

Inside the Academy and Out: Lesbian/Gay/Queer Studies and Social Action. U of Toronto P US\$24.95

Reviewed by Stephen Guy-Bray

These three books have little in common, but they could be used to demonstrate the variety of books which get published now under the rubric of queer studies and literature. *Queer View Mirror 2* is part of a mini-boom in publishing: the anthology of gay or lesbian stories, of which the most famous is probably the Men on Men series (now at number seven). These anthologies are rather a mixed blessing. Although they do introduce the public to new gay writers, they tend to satisfy this demand, with the result that there is still not much of a market for novels or collections of stories by a single writer. The emerging Queer View Mirror series is different from most of these anthologies in two ways: there are stories about lesbians and about gay men and the stories are very short. Most of the selections in this anthology are two or three pages. The sheer number of contributors means that the editors have been able to get a much more varied range of contributors than is usual in anthologies. Not all of these writers are able to deal well with the short format, but there are some notable successes. I felt that there were slightly more misses than hits, but it hardly matters here as you're on to the next story in no time. This is the perfect book to take on a flight or a train journey.

Janice L. Ristock and Catherine G. Taylor, the editors of *Inside the Academy*

and *Out*, hope that their collection of essays will help to bridge the gap between what queer scholars do in their research and teaching and what they do as social activists. To a greater or lesser extent, we all have an interest in bridging this gap, but I'm not sure that this is the book to do it. By dividing the book into two parts—Part I: Pedagogy and Research and Part II: Spheres of Action—Ristock and Taylor would appear to be conceding defeat at the outset. Furthermore, most of the essays are firmly on one side of the divide between the two parts. What would have helped, I think, is a greater awareness of pedagogy as itself a form of social action.

One of the major problems with this book is its use of theory. Most of the contributors are ambivalent about the rise of queer theory and regard it as insufficiently political. They blame this lack on queer theorists in the humanities. For instance, Namaste says that "Critics of queer theory charge that it ignores social scientific contributions to studies of sexuality." Namaste's essay relies heavily on the rather tired binary between the humanities and the social sciences, as do several of the other contributors. What she and several of the other contributors need to realize is that there is no reason for humanists to do queer theory in the same way as social scientists. We should instead try to encourage the development of different kinds of queer theory. Unfortunately, most of the contributors here appeal to queer theory without engaging with it at all. There are exceptions, of course, and in particular I would like to mention Deborah P. Britzman, who uses queer theory in order to construct a very interesting discussion which could even be useful in the classroom.

The other contributions in the first section of the book vary greatly in quality and usefulness. Namaste's essay is the weakest in the book, while Margot Francis's was apparently written for people who have

very little knowledge of any kind of theory. Both editors have interesting essays in this section: Taylor writes a good introduction to the book, while Ristock provides thoughtful reflections on her own research. Although I ultimately found Didi Khayatt's essay unconvincing, I enjoyed reading it. Khayatt's main point—that we should not assume that it is always best for everyone if we come out in the classroom—is an interesting one. It was good to be reminded that this issue is more complex than we think.

The second section also contains some good essays, particularly the ones by Diana Majury, on legal battles in Canada, and by Kristin Esterberg and Jeffrey Longhofer, on researching the Christian right in the United States. Jean Noble's essay—really two essays pasted together with lots of Freud, whom she paraphrases at considerable length—has many interesting parts, but its connection to social action of any kind is not clear to me. I thought the majority of the essays in the second section had this problem. Perhaps the editors would have done better not to divide the book into sections at all. On the whole, this is an interesting book which contains enough good essays to make it worthwhile, although the relentless use of the binary between theory and action wore on me, as did the long explanations of theory and theorists. Aren't we beyond that now? I feel obliged to add that the level of proofreading is shockingly low. There are numerous mistakes with spelling, grammar, and format. The book is simply not in publishable condition.

Stan Persky's *Autobiography of a Tattoo* is a very thoughtful reflection on a number of big topics like sex, politics, education. What makes the book unusual (at least for those who are not familiar with Persky's work) is that it is written in the form of a memoir. Chronologically, Persky moves between his early years, especially the ones he spent in the U.S. army, and the summer

of 1996, in which he, now a middle-aged professor of philosophy in Vancouver, goes to Berlin to see old friends and buy sex. In subject matter, Persky moves between philosophical debates with himself or his friends on the big topics and his own sex life and his attitudes towards it.

The point is, of course, that the paraphrase I have provided does not really work. In the end, Persky makes it impossible to separate the past from the present or the philosophical from the personal. This is one of the main strengths of this book. Writing in the philosophical tradition that goes back to Plato's dialogues, Persky creates a fascinating narrative which is also a stimulating philosophical text. And a political one: although most of Persky's text is not explicitly political, I felt that the resonance between his first trip to Europe as a soldier in the American army and this trip, as a well-off North American academic buying sex from a variety of more or less indigent German and Eastern European prostitutes, in itself set up an interesting political discourse. *Autobiography of a Tattoo* is a sophisticated and thought-provoking book which will continue to make you think long after you finish it.

Travelling Companions

David J. Leigh

*Circuitous Journeys: Modern Spiritual
Autobiography.* Fordham UP \$26.50

Lucie Joubert, ed.

Trajectoires au féminin dans la littérature québécoise (1960-1990). Éditions Nota bene \$24.00

Reviewed by Laurie Aikman

Circuitous Journeys and *Trajectoires au féminin dans la littérature québécoise* use the metaphor of the journey to convey a sense of the dynamic and shifting contours of the literary fields that they survey. Though not without weaknesses, these two works of

scholarship provide excellent travelling companions for a readerly voyage through the varied terrains of contemporary spiritual autobiography, and of three decades of women's writing in Quebec.

Circuitous Journeys is the first book-length treatment of cross-cultural, contemporary works that fall into the category of religious or spiritual autobiography. Spiritual autobiography is a genre that has largely been neglected by contemporary critics. There are those who focus on its specific historical manifestations, producing studies, for example, of seventeenth-century Puritan or Quaker conversion narratives, of nineteenth-century missionary lives, or of nuns' lives in colonial Spanish America. Others examine the lingering presence of the trope of conversion in secular autobiography. As the first wide-ranging survey of its kind, Leigh's study is a timely and important contribution to both literary criticism and literary history.

In *Circuitous Journeys*, Leigh provides a close reading of eleven modern "classics" in the genre of spiritual autobiography: works by Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, Mohandas Gandhi, Malcolm X, Black Elk, Paul Cowan, Rigoberta Menchú, Dan Wakefield, and Nelson Mandela. In his preface, Leigh sets out to answer two questions asked by his students: "[W]hat makes a book a religious or spiritual autobiography?" and "[W]hat is distinctive about twentieth-century autobiographies?" Leigh defines a spiritual autobiography as a book in which the theme is the "lifelong search for an ultimate reality that gives meaning to one's life in the face of evil, suffering, and death." He sees the modern context of the spiritual autobiographer as being characterized by a lack of institutional religious mediation, a lack of clear social roles and identities, a lack of a stable sense of self, and an awareness of the need for social change.

Leigh's critical approach is to seek out

both the literary and the psychological patterns in the books that he studies, and to make connections between the two. There are eight levels to his analysis of each spiritual autobiography, as he examines the following elements in each text: the "directional image" (an image, rooted in childhood experience, that motivates the spiritual quest of the author); the "spiral pilgrimage" or "circular journey" pattern (a three-stage movement from childhood loss to negative wandering to spiritual homecoming); the psychological dimension (tensions between the father-influence and the mother-influence); the presence of spiritual mediators; the experience of loss or death, the presence of different varieties of conversion (affective, imaginative, intellectual, moral, and religious); the way in which tensions are resolved through the act of writing; and the presence of gaps, fissures, and silences in the text.

The weaknesses of *Circuitous Journeys* will no doubt be evident from this brief summary of the momentous analytical task which Leigh has set for himself. It is perhaps too much to ask that in a 255-page overview of eleven contemporary spiritual autobiographies, a critic would be able to do justice to all the nuances of each individual text. Leigh's critical framework has a tendency to smooth over significant differences in experience or style to focus only on that which fits the common pattern of the circular journey. At times, Leigh's efforts to make each book conform, even to some degree, to his categories of analysis, seem rather forced. Furthermore, his approach makes it difficult to engage some of the important questions raised by issues of gender, race, class, culture, and religious differences.

Nevertheless, *Circuitous Journeys* is an important and timely contribution to a long-neglected genre that is at last finding its way back into the literary limelight. It is a good introduction to the field of spiritual

autobiography, a sound treatment of some contemporary classics, with a brief, speculative glance at what the future of the genre may hold. One can only hope that Leigh's book will be but the first in a new wave of critical interest in a field that seems to be once more capturing the attention of writers, readers, and scholars alike.

Trajectoires au féminin dans la littérature québécoise (1960-1990) traces the progress of a very different group of journeys. This stimulating anthology brings together papers from a conference by the same name, held at Queen's University in May 1996. The central question addressed to that gathering of writers and scholars is also the theme that unites this diverse collection of essays: "[E]n quoi le féminisme a-t-il ou n'a-t-il pas influencé le travail de nos auteures durant toutes ces années?"

Trajectoires au féminin is framed by two poetic texts, as a tribute to the creative work of the artists whose productions were the focus of the conference's more scholarly papers. The critical essays are then divided into three sections. The first section examines various women's contributions to genres in Quebec literature such as poetry/feminist theory, diary fiction, life writing, the fantastic, and postmodern feminist writing. The second section is more eclectic, grouping together essays that deal with immigrant literature (identity and mental illness), theatre (women's tragedy and women playwrights), and the literary institution (women's access to publishing and the creation of feminist presses). Finally, the third section focuses on specific issues and authors: conjugal violence, Josée Yvon, Gabrielle Roy, Marie-Claire Blais, and Madeleine Ferron.

As with the publication of the proceedings from any conference, there is a certain unevenness of quality and style among the essays gathered together in *Trajectoires au féminin*. Many of the chapters offer significant insights into the changing textual

practices and social circumstances of women writers in Quebec during this thirty-year period. However, some of the analyses are more descriptive than critical, making claims about the characteristics of women's writing without inquiring into the implications or sources of these gender differences, or viewing literary representation as an unproblematic reflection of women's social realities.

Nevertheless, the overall effect of the anthology is thought-provoking. Perhaps its most significant contribution is the sense of movement and change that it conveys, offering the reader glimpses into the shifting relationships between women's writing and feminism in Quebec: the rise (and fall) of feminist presses, the shifts from collective to individualistic poetic voices, the growing importance of immigrant literature, the increasing pluralism and hybridity of identity and literary genre. To read *Trajectoires au féminin* is indeed to embark on a journey, with travelling companions whose diverse perspectives bring various aspects of the landscape into focus.

Both *Circuitous Journeys* and *Trajectoires au féminin* offer a relational view of the literary enterprise that is immensely refreshing. Leigh focuses on his personal relationship with the religious autobiographies that he studies, and proposes a model of reading that would approach a text with the same respect with which one would enter into dialogue with an actual person. In Joubert's preface, the collegiality of the Queen's conference comes to life, bringing with it a sense of the importance of solidarity and communication between women writers, women scholars, and women's literary texts.



Writing through Terror

Michael Ondaatje

Anil's Ghost. Vintage International US\$13.00

Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

Re-reading *Anil's Ghost* (the paperback, since McClelland & Stewart sent no review copy to *Canadian Literature* when it first came out) shortly after September 11 created a unique reading experience. A statement like the following cuts more sharply into reading memory than perhaps it did in 2000: "It was a Hundred Years' War with modern weaponry, and backers on the sidelines in safe countries, . . . *The reason for war was war.*" Readers, like writers, change.

Indeed, it may be the fact that Ondaatje was so willing to change fictional direction, to attempt to write a directly "political" novel, that made *Anil's Ghost* a critical problem for some early readers. Despite many glowing reviews, some people were clearly disappointed. Apparently from a genuine unease with the writer's use of fragments, Theo Tait, in *The London Review of Books*, used *Anil's Ghost* to launch an attack on Ondaatje's failure to achieve narrative control in all his novels. I know a German critic of Ondaatje who was simply offended by the novel, which he saw as a poorly written "shadow of Ondaatje's other works." There seem to be two aspects to these negative responses: that Ondaatje has become too popular, and that, nevertheless, he refuses to repeat himself and is willing to try something problematic, like a novel about contemporary politics in his birth country.

I find *Anil's Ghost* not only stands up to re-reading, but seems tougher, more complex and complete perhaps, than it did when I first read it. Set in Sri Lanka during the times of civil war in the '80s and '90s, the novel explores the lives of a scattered group of people, all of whom that war has changed, changed utterly as Yeats said about an earlier civil war in Ireland. Like all

Ondaatje's novels, it plays games with our expectations, not least by its title, and the way it spends most of its first half apparently concentrating on Anil and her situation. In fact, *Anil's Ghost* is a fragmented collation of narratives and, as its many strands of story slowly overlay one another, all its central characters become equally important, but their narratives can reach no clear conclusion.

Some readers have suggested that Anil is in fact too much of a diversion, and that the two brothers, Sarath and Ganini, and their troubled relationship, are more interesting and should have been foregrounded. Certainly, they and their stories are compelling, but would they be if they were represented as the narrative centre of a novel that finally refuses to allow one? Is it perhaps the glancing way Anil, the representative "inside/outside" figure, reflecting the reader's insecurity of perception, comes to know them that makes their stories so powerfully effective?

As the novel ranges back and forward in time, over Anil's past life and loves, her friendship with fellow forensic anthropologist, Leaf Niedecker, her earlier work in South America, it also explores the brothers' early lives, their marriages, their attempts to break free of family expectations and seek their own ways in life. Sarath escapes his family to study with an eccentric master archeologist who eventually begins to invent a more complex past for his ancient country. Ganini becomes a doctor, and finds a kind of strange relief in practically living in the wards of wounded and dying war victims: "Eventually he felt himself on a boat of demons and himself to be the only clearheaded and sane person there. He was a perfect participant in the war." Read now, Ganini's perspective seems all too prescient, but it's a response to what is already (has always been?) there: he is, after all, a doctor who works in the emergency wards of hospitals from the north to

the south of the country, but who has “stopped believing in man’s role on earth. He turned away from every person who stood up for a war.”

I still find it hard to pin down the plan-
gent quality of *Anil’s Ghost*, although it has something to do with its refusal to say who Anil’s ghost is. It could be the skeleton she and Sarath found; it could be a lover in her past; it could even be Sarath; it could be all of these and more. Nothing is simple in this book, where Gamini and Sarath have perhaps “assumed they would crash alone in the darkness they had invented around themselves. Their marriages, their careers on this borderland of civil war among governments and terrorists and insurgents.” It is this possibility, this fear, of crashing alone that forces each of the central characters to act for another at some crucial point, but it is the fact of the borderland that may invalidate their acts, at least in the larger world they can neither escape nor really alter.

Such darkness is not all *Anil’s Ghost* has to offer. The novel is full of those small touches of sensuality and insight, those sudden images, we have come to expect of Ondaatje’s writing. There is also a sometimes savage comedy, which, like the endearing eccentric passages of particular perception, always serves the larger narrative purposes of the book and its characterizations. These figures have depths, but they are mostly hidden, glimpsed in sudden moments of illumination, under the searchlight of his metaphors and images.

So, more than a year on, *Anil’s Ghost* seems even stronger, more passionately attuned to the violent vagaries of our world. A deeply disturbing portrayal of a country at war with itself, it is also a profoundly moving study of people forced to live as best they can while driven to the very edge of human capacity and feeling. Even in the face of death and the worst duplicity of governments, it holds up, in the acts of

individual beings, the possibility that people can love, and out of that love make a world worth living in. A “political novel” that refuses to play politics, it is a worthy successor to Ondaatje’s earlier work.

Auto/Bio/Ethno/Graphe?

Riska Orpa Sari

Riska: Memories of a Dayak Girlhood.

Knopf \$29.95

Reviewed by Sophie McCall

It takes some time to warm up to *Riska: Memories of a Dayak Girlhood*. At first, the reader is turned off by the anthropologizing tendency of the framing essays by Linda Spalding and Carol Pierce Colper. “Riska, with Linda Spalding’s help, has produced a very readable book,” writes Colper, in an unsettling mix of praise and condescension. Nevertheless, the mediated status of the text raises interesting questions about the process of reading, writing and editing ethnographic life narratives in cross-cultural contexts. Moreover, Riska’s life narrative itself thematizes cultural encounter and exchange. As the story unfolds, Riska becomes increasingly sure-handed in negotiating cultural and linguistic difference. Moving between the genres of auto-ethnography, autobiography, travel writing and Dayak storytelling, Riska gives a complex portrait of cultural change in Indonesia.

The introduction is largely made up of Spalding’s struggle to make sense of her contradictory reactions to Dayak cultural practices and worldviews. Though at first Spalding is disoriented by the unfamiliar environment—“I see myself... as gawky, off balance, ill-suited to my surroundings”—she quickly becomes enamoured with “Edenic” Dayak communities. Just as suddenly, however, Spalding’s idealization turns to disenchantment. Ironically,

Spalding deems it is Riska who is caught between worlds: "Her life doesn't fit in town or forest. She does not belong anywhere."

That's not the way Riska sees it. As a traveller through multi-cultural and multi-lingual contexts in Indonesia, Riska acquires hard-won tactics of survival. At age eight, Riska moves with her family to Pangkalan Bun, a coastal factory town where Malay, Javanese, Chinese and Dayak live and work. After a short and terrifying marriage to an abusive husband, Riska, now a single mother in need of a job, becomes a tour guide. Though at first "sitting in front of blond tourists and tumbling over broken words was a nightmare," Riska later comments that "being a guide, I felt I could become another person." Riska's sense of independence grows as she becomes increasingly proficient in communicating with tourists in English, Indonesian, Japanese and German.

Especially important to Riska is to stay connected to her Dayak heritage, a goal that becomes more elusive as timber companies make their inexorable way up the Delang River to the heart of Dayak territory. Old Dayak stories, most of which are associated with the Delang River in one way or another, re-appear throughout her life narrative. The river acts as a mnemonic device for Riska as she wanders further away from her ancestral home. "At the center of our life was this one thing, the river. Always, it was part of us." Yet the river is also a symbol of her ambivalence about her ties to Dayak heritage. Recurring images of women drowning in the Delang River embody her fears about being judged negatively by her community. At the age of five, Riska herself almost drowns in a whirlpool. She dreams that her daughter drowns: "I tried to grab her, but failed." The experience of almost drowning in the Delang, Riska implies, determines a woman's fate to be a lonely wanderer. Riska, married twice,

now living alone in the decadent city of Bali without her daughter, knows the sharp pang of exile.

The Afterword by Colper reduces the complexity of Riska's figurations of cultural belonging by listing a set of characteristics supposedly attributable to Dayak culture. Culture, in Colper's words, is a "bundle of features." Given Riska's own work as ethnographer, Colper's insights seem slight and dry. One wonders why Spalding felt it necessary to end the story with such a heavy-handed device when Riska's own story explores cultural change and survival.

Locating the Self

Judy Schultz

Mamie's Children: Three Generations of Prairie Women. Red Deer College P \$16.95

Paul Jones

Pembina Country. Caitlin \$16.95

Thelma Poirer

Rock Creek. Coteau \$14.95

Laurie Ricou

A Field Guide to "A Field Guide to Dungeness Spit." Oolichan \$12.95

Reviewed by Alison Calder

Simply put, *Mamie's Children* is a good book. Judy Schultz focuses on the life of her grandmother, Mamie Elizabeth Yockey Harris, a woman who lived "an ordinary existence" on a farm in southern Saskatchewan during the Depression. But the story rises above the over-written genre of the family history because it is about more than just one pioneer life. As Schultz writes, "None of life's journeys is truly solitary. There's always somebody slipping away in front of us or elbowing for room or dogging our footsteps, and as the journey progresses, our path grows crowded with the amiable company of ancestral ghosts and the hopeful promise of children not yet born." Thus, the book starts with an

account of the immigration of Mamie's own grandmother, Magdalena, and continues through the generations, focusing on the female line, until Shultz herself concludes the narrative. Comparatively little has been recorded about the lives of ordinary women, but Schultz has researched available historical sources thoroughly, so that where the unique details of a journey, for example, are unknown, she can extrapolate from other contemporary accounts. As a result, *Mamie's Children* is able to gesture towards a general historical movement without losing sight of the specifics. Schultz's narrative includes interviews with relatives and neighbours as well as family photographs, and so provides a variety of perspectives and voices. Schultz's belief in connections, particularly connections between women, is most strongly supported by her inclusion of excerpts from Mamie's "Cash Book," a sort of diary. These extracts, encompassing weather reports, recipes, medical advice, poems, and gardening details, clearly show the centrality of the "ordinary woman" to the pioneer experience, and the strong female network that made that experience possible. In putting the experiences of Mamie's family into social and historical context, Schultz provides a valuable document of Western Canadian history.

Like Schultz's book, Paul Jones's *Pembina Country* is a memoir of a failed homesteading experience. Through a series of misadventures, Jones's parents homestead on a farm outside of Sangudo, Alberta, where the three Jones children, Olwyn, Paul, and Owen, are born. Jones's father, Jack, proves to be an incompetent farmer and seems unable to hold a job, perhaps owing to mental illness resulting from his World War I experiences. Jones's mother, Ann, a British immigrant, is similarly unsuited for farm life, becoming obese and seemingly suffering several nervous breakdowns. As a result, the family endures

extreme financial hardship, accompanied by natural disasters like drought, blizzards, and fires. In due course the family leaves the farm and moves to town, where Paul attends school for a short time before being forced to leave to find work. Eventually it becomes impossible for the family to support itself in Sangudo, and the book closes with them selling their belongings at an auction and boarding a train for what they hope will be a better life on the West Coast. But while the events Jones relates are dramatic, his narrative is not. The episodic plot allows for little reflection: events simply occur and then are left behind. The difficulty with *Pembina Country* may be that Paul, the central figure, is not a particularly interesting character. As Jones describes his younger self, Paul simply moves through the tumult around him, neither reflecting nor commenting on it. This reticence may be related to Jones's expressed wish not to "cast an unkind shadow" on any of his characters, a wish that may be admirable but that also produces a bland narrative. Given the mental illnesses of his parents, Jones's reluctance to delve deeply into emotional issues is understandable but regrettable. As a result, *Pembina Country* emerges as a decently written narrative, without the resonance of *Mamie's Children*.

Thelma Poirer's *Rock Creek* is also a memoir, firmly grounded in place. Poirer structures her narrative around her decision to walk the length of the creek that crosses the land on which she grew up: "I have seen two oceans, but I have not seen all of the creek in my own backyard. It is as though I have been wearing blinders, only removing them at certain places, long enough for glimpses of the creek, the edges of the water." Her attempt to walk the creek structures the narrative. This journey is not only episodic, as she moves from one point to the next, but also lyric. The landmarks by which Poirer navigates mark not only place but also time: each feature of the

landscape is imbued with her memories of people and events. The effect of this solitary journey is paradoxically to underscore the importance of community to Poirer, and to imbue the landscape she describes with life. Poirer's detailed knowledge of prairie animals and plants underpins her descriptions of them. Most criticism of prairie writing is governed by the idea of human alienation from the landscape, but Poirer clearly demonstrates her connection to place. Her walk along the creek is depicted not as an attempt to claim a foreign land, but rather as a chance to revisit places and people she always knew. Unfortunately, not all of those places and people are interesting. Describing a particular point on Rock Creek, she recalls an earlier trip by her father and sister, speculating that "maybe this was the way they traveled the day they stopped at Ed McPherson's place, cold and hungry, the day they rode on without eating because no one was home." That's the height of drama along Rock Creek. Poirer comes across as a rather endearingly incompetent hiker, who gets lost, falls in the creek, and is hobbled by blisters. Despite some tedious sections, the book provides a record of a life lived fully in place. The final section, in which Poirer drives to Rock Creek's confluence in Montana and is welcomed by strangers and relatives alike, underlines her message of continuity and coherence.

I can't figure out how to categorize Laurie Ricou's fascinating *A Field Guide to "A Field Guide to Dungeness Spit,"* so I'll describe it instead. The book centres on David Wagoner's poem "A Field Guide to Dungeness Spit," which describes an encounter with the Dungeness Spit, a narrow strip of sand that extends from Washington's Olympic Peninsula about five and a half miles into the Juan de Fuca Strait. The Spit has two personalities, separated at points by only a few metres of sand: the seaward side is dangerous, the

repository of many shipwrecks, while the sheltered lee side is an environmental marvel, a sanctuary to many bird species. Ricou assembles a wide variety of extracts written about the Spit itself, drawing from guide books, dictionaries, environmental reports, newspaper articles, personal letters, and sailors' logs, to name a few sources. The book is thus in some ways a field guide to the actual Spit, to its flora, fauna, inhabitants, and history. In this context, Wagoner's poem can be read as one more interpretation of place. But things are further complicated by Ricou's glossing of Wagoner's text. These passages of scholarly analysis, interpolated with the extracts about the Spit, have the effect of blurring the distinction between the empirical Spit and Wagoner's description of it. The poem, itself a guide to a place, becomes the place to which Ricou guides us. Such self-reflexivity invites readers to critique Ricou's "guiding" as he critiques Wagoner's, and provides a gentle but ironic commentary on the academic project in general. Ricou's academic "guiding" further calls itself into question through the contradictions in the guidebooks he quotes. Some sources say one thing, some another, and the empirical truth turns out to be as shifting as the sands of the Spit itself. In the face of such uncertainty, the language employed by the academic figure appears hopelessly inadequate, an inadequacy underscored (deliberately, I think) by the overly pedantic tone of some of the passages. A section on the origin of the name "Dungeness" quotes four different sources in fifteen short lines, for example, clarifying nothing. The authority of the academic voice is further undercut by the inclusion of several excerpts from other sources commenting on Wagoner's poem. Many readers' only experience of Dungeness Spit will be a textual one; that is, they will read this book without ever having been to the real Spit. Ricou's book turns full circle with the con-

cluding extract, a poem by Robert Kroetsch and Ron Smith about a trip to Dungeness Spit with Laurie and Treva Ricou, in which the author/editor/academic assumes the role of guide to the Spit itself, and also becomes the guide-character in Wagoner's poem. I haven't finished thinking about that one yet. To sum up, I can only echo Beatrice Roethke's words, which Ricou cites at the very end of *A Field Guide*: "P.S. I love that 'Dungeness Spit' poem."

Language and Painting

Stephen Scobie

Earthquakes and Explorations: Language and Painting from Cubism to Concrete Poetry. U of Toronto P \$45.00

John Koerner

Unseen Dimensions: Musings on Art and Life. Sono Nis \$24.95

Joan Murray

Tom Thomson: Design for a Canadian Hero. Dundurn n.p.

Catherine Gibbon, ed.

On the Edge: Artistic Visions of a Shrinking Landscape. Boston Mills n.p.

Reviewed by Jack Stewart

"Painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture," said Simonides of Ceos, and there has long been a desire to compare literary and pictorial styles. Critical grounds, however, have been shaky: Wendy Steiner, in *The Colors of Rhetoric* (1980), pointed out hazards, such as slippage in metaphorical terms. Stephen Scobie's lucid comparison of Cubist painting and language fills a discursive gap. His use of the Derridean concept of the "supplement" puts "mutual illumination of the arts" in a new light. Abandoning the illusory grail of exact equivalence, he shows how poetry reaches for visual space and painting for language and time. Using a post-structuralist concept of language as "the systematic

perception of difference," he sees it as having a supplementary, rather than hegemonic, relation to painting: "the verbal inside the visual and vice versa." While painting can be appreciated for its silent being, it reaches for the supplement of words, as words desire the visual sense.

Scobie discusses the semiotics of painting, including the ontological status of signs like Cézanne's apple. Signs are a linguistic concept, showing the immersion of painting in language. A painted sign has a double function, representing a thing and acting as a plastic form. When such signs do not signify anything outside themselves, as in non-objective painting, their function resembles that of the arbitrary signs in a linguistic system. Yet, in an analysis of D.-H. Kahnweiler's *The Rise of Cubism* (1920) and *Juan Gris: His Life and Work* (1946), Scobie notes that painting "transmits" or "communicates." Writing and painting are semiotic activities, and in Cubist painting conceptual and plastic are mutually interdependent.

In "Metaphor and Metonymy in Cubism and Gertrude Stein" (chapter 6), Scobie uses Jakobson's binary distinction under erasure, pointing to the way the two tropes supplement each other. He tests Roman Jakobson's statement that Cubism is "metonymical," Surrealism "metaphorical," and concludes that "Cubism is predominantly metonymical through *all its phases*" although Synthetic Cubist "puns and rhymes" function metaphorically. In Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* and "A Long Gay Book," Scobie finds "a progression from metaphor towards metonymy, from the diagram towards the list, from representation as identity towards representation as difference."

Scobie proceeds through a discussion of "Abstraction in Poetry"—Dada, Sound Poetry, bpNichol—to Concrete Poetry and a concluding chapter on Ian Hamilton Finlay. Concrete Poetry involves modernist

“juxtaposition,” rather than “transition,” and is characterized by “suppression of syntax.” Following Jacques Derrida, who deconstructs the “post” in postmodernism, he concludes that “Concrete Poetry, although its basic orientation is modernist and metaphoric, unravels into postmodern metonymy.” Finlay’s medium is “visual language”; his concrete poems tend to be ironic and conceptual plays on words and images: a drawing of a guillotine is entitled “A model of order even if set in a space filled with doubt.” Scobie argues that Concrete Poetry is itself a “model of order” that asks to be examined by the reader.

Scobie’s own style is marked by economy and wit; despite the complexity of the subject, it is admirably “uncluttered” (a favorite term of Finlay). Of a pond at Finlay’s Stonypath, a Lanarkshire garden where ways of seeing are artfully constructed by signs, Scobie says: “Step into this poem and you’ll get your feet wet.” The book ends with Scobie paying tribute to “Finlay [. . .] paying tribute to Kahnweiler paying tribute to Gris,” the latest link in a metonymic chain of writers and painters.

Interarts theory and practice have rarely been so well illuminated: despite his rigorous analyses, Scobie has not lost his love of “Beauty” or his aesthetic intuition. His alert and clear thinking across shifting and dissolving borderlines makes *Earthquakes and Explorations* an essential guide for anyone interested in language and painting in modernist or postmodernist contexts.

John Koerner takes a relaxed look at creativity. The text of *Unseen Dimensions* is a pleasure to read and the layout with inventive use of typography and contrasts of black-and-white and color has strong visual appeal. As Koerner’s paintings have a sense of distance and vision, so his musings have spiritual dimensions. At one point, where he explains the direction of the creative impulse, the layout is like a concrete poem: on the left page, an inverted pyra-

mid of text points down to a tremendous eel-like brushstroke (symbol of plastic power); on the right, a textual pyramid points up to a white flower on a black ground. These verbal shapes are self-reflexive diagrams (in Peirce’s sense). Koerner worked with Ann West and Jim Bennett on the book design and they are to be commended for their artful interconnection of text and images.

Scobie, in a discussion of Apollinaire’s and Delaunay’s “framing,” invokes Derrida’s concept of the *parergon*, which divides yet joins inner and outer space. Koerner, in his *Balcony* series, uses the window-frame similarly. There and in his *Lighthouse* series, he meditates on distance and vision, while in his *Garden of Eden* series, he illuminates the natural world with a spiritual light. Series allow him to develop perceptions, combining space and colour in subtle ways. Outside and inside, pattern and spirit converge.

Joan Murray, in *Tom Thomson: Design for a Canadian Hero*, sees Thomson as a “pleaser,” who often suppressed anger or hurt feelings. His love of plants, animals and nature became a creed that demanded expression, giving spiritual force to his colour contrasts. Thomson had trained as a designer: he looked for patterns in nature and imposed decorative harmonies. He learned post-impressionism and pointillism from A. Y. Jackson, who had studied at the Académie Julian in Paris, and came to Van Gogh through J. E. H. Macdonald. Thomson read Shelley, and Murray relates his romantic expressionism in *The West Wind* (1916-17) to the famous “Ode.” As an artist, Thomson makes the invisible wind visible, painting “[the] tumult of [its] mighty harmonies.” He found a “numinous significance” in the natural world to which he added an exquisite sense of design: these seemingly diverse qualities come together in *The Jack Pine* (1916-17), where the effect of colour and form is “hallucinatory.”

Abstraction and representation are intensely balanced and the flat rectangular brushstrokes remind Murray of Tiffany's stained glass landscapes. Thomson's modernism is evident in the way he chose European models as a "springboard" to his own inventions; at the same time, "he meant to create a Canadian tradition, distinct from American and European ones." The legend of Tom Thomson is based on his power to communicate a vision through the forms of landscape art. Murray's crisp and eloquent account of his all-too-brief career and mysterious death is a study in art and mythmaking that does much to explain Thomson's extraordinary achievement and continued cultural significance.

On the Edge: Artistic Visions of a Shrinking Wilderness interfaces poetic and ecological texts with colour reproductions of paintings, combining regionalism with universalism. Three areas of the Niagara Escarpment near Hamilton, Ontario, are featured. While the full title underlines the urgency of the project—contemplation of art is meant to lead to "social, political, ethical" action—word and image supplement each other in a celebration of natural forms, arousing the will to sustain them.

"The Quotidian Is Where It's At"

Carol Shields

Dressing Up for the Carnival. Viking \$36.95

Matt Cohen

Getting Lucky. Knopf \$32.95

Reviewed by Laura Moss

In her introductory remarks at a reading at the Harbourfront Reading Series in Toronto, Carol Shields remarked on her frustration at the critics' tendencies to focus on the "ordinary" in her works. In response to this incessant focus she read

"Soup De Jour," a story from her recent collection *Dressing Up for the Carnival*. The parodic story begins: "Everyone is coming out these days for the pleasures of ordinary existence. Sunsets. Dandelions. Fencing in the backyard and staying home. 'The quotidian is where it's at,' Herb Rhinelander recently wrote in his nationwide syndicated column. 'People are getting their highs on the roller coaster of everydayness, dipping their daily bread in the soup of common delight and simple sensation.'" This is the playful beginning to a sad story about life, love, and obsessive counting. As in most of the other stories in this collection, Shields flouts the conventions of ordinariness but she does not relinquish them. By the end of the story we still know about all the ingredients required in the soup. This is a slow read, not because of the density of prose or the complexity of plots, but because it is best to read the stories in isolation from each other. These stories are emphatically not linked. That this is not a page-turner is its success.

While several of the stories are extrapolations on "what if" stories (what if Roman ruins were found in southern Manitoba, what if meteorologists went on strike, what if you have a sexual encounter at a dinner party with a man you've just met), the best ones are imagistic flashes. Shields shares with poetic imagism a focus on crisp, clear, precise, concentrated images and an emphasis on clearing away the clutter. This is well illustrated in the title story. It is a series of portraits of characters: "A Passionate, Vibrant Woman About To Begin Her Day. Her Life"; a man carrying a mango in his left hand; a bank teller fantasizing about an empty baby stroller; a young woman reading a great classic; and an anonymous middle-aged citizen who waltzes about his bedroom in his wife's lace-trimmed nightgown: "Everywhere he looks he observes cycles of consolation and enhancement, and now it seems as though

the evening itself is about to alter its dimensions, becoming more (and also less) than what it really is." This is a fitting metaphor for this book of short stories. If Shields writes about sunsets and dandelions, detailing the "pleasures of ordinary existence," she places them beside observations on "cycles of consolation and enhancement." She presents more and less what really is.

The stories range from accounts of love to a report on ceremonial foods. There is the whimsical story, written without the letter "I," about a writer who must write a story without the letter "I." There is the story of an artist's response to the darkness and light that ensues after the government imposes a window tax. There is the story of the weather-less state that comes out of a strike by the National Association of Meteorologists and the love in a marriage that is restored when the strike is over. Perhaps most beautifully, there is the story of an author's odyssey to buy the perfect scarf for her daughter. Only one story in this collection, "Flatties," falls flat. Shields is not at her strongest in this fantastic landscape. Her vignettes about the inconsistencies of love, the way lovers stumble onto each other, and the long-haul nature of marriage provide more satisfying reading.

The collection goes well beyond exploring the intricacies of love, though. As if responding to the inadequacies of contemporary literary criticism, Shields also engages with misreadings in many of the stories. Perhaps the sharpest criticism of a misreading comes in "Edith-Esther." It is a story about the imposition of a persona on an eighty-year-old writer by her official biographer. Echoing the famous story of why Alice Munro chose to have a character dressed in brown (not because of its earthy connotations, but rather, because she liked brown), Edith-Esther is admonished by her biographer because she has always "rejected any sense of subtext" when she

attempts to explain her own phrase, "her lips form a wound in the flesh," as a reference to chapped lips or perhaps even cold sores rather than as a reference to the wounds of Christ. The biographer is so heavily invested in portraying her "kernel of authenticity" by recreating her as a spiritual woman that he ignores her avowed repudiations of religion. Shields, however, seems particularly determined to suppress outdated notions of authorial authenticity. In a sense, she has answered the readers who have misread her work as a simple fleshing out of the quotidian by presenting a collection that intensely points to her own forays into experimentation with narrative structure in *Happenstance*, *Swann*, and *The Stone Diaries*.

Reading *Getting Lucky*, Matt Cohen's posthumously published final collection of short stories, is like reading his canon in miniature. It brings to summation a lifetime of writing. Several of the stories, including the title story, "Darwin's Jars", "Napoleon in Moscow" and "The Anatomy of Insects," evoke the Eastern Ontario landscape of Cohen's Salem novels of the 1970s and of *Elizabeth and After*, the novel published shortly before his death in 1999. In "The Anatomy of Insects", an unusual story about a son coming to terms with his father's death, Cohen writes: "At some point in the last few miles the landscape has shifted. A sudden transition Lawrence never expects, never remembers, but it always arrives this way, and once he has come this far, to this place that is home, the loose whirring keys align themselves, lock into position, thunk, and suddenly he is whole again, home again, back to the place he is always so eager to escape, so reluctant to return." In this and many other stories, geography and landscape are intertwined with a reluctant sense of peace, comfort, and home.

Glimpses of Cohen's other work can be seen throughout. As in *Dressing Up for the*

Carnival, these stories are technically diverse. They range from the stark realism in a story about a man who must choose between a family he loves and a cabin he needs, to the macabre elegance of a story written in the tone of Freud: *The Paris Notebooks* about a boy, his father (the “literary executioner”), and Dostoyevsky. (As if to anchor even “Inventing Dostoyevsky” in some kind of reality, Cohen describes at length the sound of the thin chocolate coating of chocolate marshmallow cookies cracking between teeth.) Further, the whimsy in the story of Stephen Leacock’s private secretary is reminiscent of the humour evident particularly in *Café Le Dog*. The meek English teacher, Winter, is clearly a descendant of the ineffectual professor in *Nadine* (although not as disconcertingly compelling). Missing from the collection, however, is the sadness of *Last Seen*. These stories were completed when Cohen knew that he was dying of lung cancer. However, the collection lacks any kind of morbidity. It seems that he did not want to burden his final fictional work with self-pity or with anger.

These stories are fuller than Shields’s tales. The collection reads more like a series of short novels than a row of images. As a result, however, some of the stories are dense and rewarding, while other stories seem incomplete or prematurely finished. On the one hand, “Getting Lucky” and “the Anatomy of Insects,” for example, end with an uncharacteristically neat tying-up of the storylines using rather conventional proposals of marriage. They stop abruptly with an optimism that appears false in the contexts of the stories. “Darwin’s Jars,” on the other hand, is a rich twenty-page novella that ends with the haunting image of a country man, Walt, showing off his collection of bones. What seems to be a story about the pleasures of ordinary existence, helping a neighbour’s child, becomes a horrific vision. When we enter the barn

with the drunken narrator and his host, we are just as surprised as he is to find a human skeleton in a large glass coffin.

“Every bone has been meticulously cleaned and varnished. Walt must have taken the whole thing apart, worked on it for weeks or months, then put it back together, just like his reconditioned car.” Polished exhumed human remains are simply, and without comment, compared to a refurbished forty-five-year-old Ford. We are left wondering if this image is meant to be cinematic hyperbole (a theme running throughout the story) or an exposition of the potential for horror inside every character.

Perhaps the most stirring story in the collection is “Edward/ Eduardo,” the story of the adoption of a boy from Guatemala and his subsequent disappearance. After telling the story of Kiki—the dog that killed a cat to become a mother—a character asks “Which is the worst part? That the agent was telling me I would kill to be a mother or that because of me Edward would think he was a dog instead of a cat?” The answer, it is clear, is both. The “real worst part” however is “how much everyone enjoyed watching the grotesque spectacle that Kiki and her children provided.” Cohen shows the depth and complexity necessary to write about home. The desperation of motherhood, separation, and desire are presented not as grotesque spectacle, but as elements of the ordinary. While it is true that, like *Dressing Up for the Carnival*, the quotidian is where it’s at in *Getting Lucky*, it is also true that Cohen is “back in his own country, known rhythms of wind.” Given the controversy over his memoir, *Typing: A Life in 26 Keys*, this is perhaps his best final legacy.



Reading/Writing Place

K.D.M. Snell, ed.

The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990. Cambridge UP us\$69.95

Greg Nelson

Spirit Wrestler: An Historical Drama. Coteau \$11.95

Betty Wilson

The Book of Sarah. Coteau \$14.95

Julia van Gorder

Cyclone. Coteau \$14.95

Reviewed by Alison Calder

In his introductory chapter K.D.M. Snell writes that “it is hard to conceive of a subject that has been more paralysed by disciplinary boundaries than the study of regional fiction.” The essays in this collection work against that paralysis by combining history, literary criticism, and cultural geography to recontextualize and redefine the “regional novel.” The openness of the definition that emerges reflects the diversity of the study. Snell’s introduction provides an excellent discussion of the relation between regional fictions and regional realities while outlining the necessity for interdisciplinary research. The other contributors take up these questions in articles ranging from studies of a particular author, as in “Emyr Humphreys: Regional Novelist?” by M.Wynn Thomas, to studies of a particular region, as in Philip Dodd’s “Gender and Cornwall: Charles Kingsley to Daphne du Maurier.” Also running through these essays is an exploration of the relation of regionalism to nationalism, of particular import in Britain. A valuable side-effect of this study is to demonstrate to scholars of Canadian literature that the questions of identity we often consider uniquely Canadian are found in the literatures of other places, and thus should be seen in a global context. This book offers no pat answers to questions of regional identity, instead providing an excellent

understanding of the questions themselves.

Spirit Wrestler, *The Book of Sarah*, and *Cyclone* explore these questions of identity in a Canadian prairie setting. All three works historicize a particular region, while at the same time firmly establishing characters’ connections to the rest of the world. Greg Nelson’s historical drama *Spirit Wrestler* focuses on the Doukhobor immigration to Canada. The Doukhobors, a Christian sect originally led by Peter Verigin, believe that their only allegiance is to God, refuse to swear oaths of allegiance to secular governments, and live communally. They also live as pacifists. The play opens in Russia, where Nikolai, the young protagonist, wrestles with what it is to be a Doukhobor, a question that recurs throughout the play. His ritual answer is challenged by historical events. The refusal of Doukhobors to join the army and swear allegiance to the Tsar led to cruel persecution. Tolstoy brought their plight to international attention, and in 1899 the Canadian government granted permission for several thousand Doukhobors to emigrate to Canada. Special permission was required from the government to allow them to live in contravention to the Homestead Act, which required individual registration of land and an Oath of Allegiance to the Queen. Such permission was promised, and the Doukhobors settled in villages across the Canadian prairies. Peter Verigin was released from his Siberian exile and entered Canada to lead his people. But with a change of government came a change of policy, and many Doukhobors, faced with the requirements of the Homestead Act, chose instead to leave their new homes and travel west to British Columbia.

Spirit Wrestler is divided into two halves, a structure that allows the parallels between Nikolai’s struggles in Russia and in Canada to become clear. There are obvious similarities between the treatment of Doukhobors

in the two countries: the Russian official Nashkashidze's office is reflected in the office of the Minister of the Interior in Ottawa. This mirroring is emphasized by the casting: the same actor plays both Nashkashidze and McDougall, the civil servant who represents Canadian betrayal of the Doukhobors. *Spirit Wrestler* is comparable to Sharon Pollock's *Walsh* in its exposure of Canadian duplicity. While the Canadian government's policies are not as overtly violent as those of the Tsar's representative, the end result is the same: eradication of the Doukhobor way of life. But Nelson gives his drama additional depth by showing the effect of these ideological struggles on the individual. Nikolai's rejection in Russia of his father's non-belief foreshadows his ultimate rejection in Canada of Verigin's uncompromising (and perhaps corrupt) faith. The play's ending is ambiguous; Nikolai and Tanya, having rejected the proposed move to British Columbia and having signed an Oath of Allegiance to conform to the Homestead Act, stand in sunlight on the prairie. They have a new home, but its price is assimilation.

Betty Wilson's novel *The Book of Sarah* is the story of Sarah Mackenzie, a young woman growing up in Alberta during the Depression. The narrative's first section, "Youth," relates episodes in Sarah's childhood and adolescence. Her family is on relief, and Sarah is an outcast at school. Despite the hardships associated with hand-me-down clothes and an endless diet of potatoes, Sarah maintains her independence and spirit. While her mother worries about how to make ends meet, holding onto memories of a more privileged early life in England, Sarah's father spends money on bad land and on horses for Sarah. Although Sarah's school life is largely unhappy, a sensitive teacher notices the girl's artistic talent and nudges her on her way toward painting, university, and

eventually marriage. The second part, "Age," presents Sarah on her eightieth birthday, living in a care centre on the west coast and awaiting the visit of her granddaughter, Beth. Through a series of flashbacks, Wilson reveals the important moments of Sarah's adult life: the death of one son and the estrangement of the other; the resumption and conclusion of her affair with Jock, the bus driver; the eventual decline of her parents; and the increasing prominence of her painting career. At the end, Sarah is alone with the realization that she has alienated all who might have loved her, but remains unrepentant, prepared to start work on another painting. The problem with *The Book of Sarah* is that while many things happen—sexual abuse, runaway horses, a glorious painting career—the book itself is just not interesting. The characters remain undeveloped; Wilson continually tells us of the connections between the characters without showing any justification for them. Sarah's response to an argument that erupts when she meets her fiancé's family demonstrates Wilson's tendency to show, not tell: "At first Sarah is horrified; she has never seen such a display. She fully expects the sisters and their families to storm out of the house. She is amazed that the husbands do not come to their spouses' defense. Finally, she realizes that everyone is enjoying the battle." An even more serious flaw in the book is that while Sarah is supposed to be a great artist, Wilson shows us no sign of her development. At the end of "Youth," Sarah is about to embark on a passionless marriage and a career as a homemaker. The transition from that to a job teaching art at the University of Alberta and a position as a well-known painter is never shown.

Julia van Gorder's historical novel *Cyclone*, set in Regina, is less ambitious than *The Book of Sarah*, but more successful. *Cyclone* opens in 1912 with a tornado touching down in the city, killing 28 people

and causing massive destruction of property. One of the buildings destroyed is the YMCA, home to recent bachelor immigrants seeking their fortunes in the golden West. Two of the bachelors, Charles and Louis, become paying boarders at the home of Agnes Jackson, herself an immigrant from Britain. These boarders soon become integral members of the Jackson family, as does Billy, a street urchin. The novel chronicles the group's declining fortunes during the war years; the maturation, engagements, and marriages of Miriam, Deborah, and Jessie, the three Jackson daughters; and the fates of the young men of the family who are sent overseas. Meanwhile, Agnes's husband, unbalanced by the powerlessness he experiences in his reduced Canadian circumstances, is institutionalized because of a violent outburst, which forces Agnes to rely on her own wits to keep the family together. The Jackson household is a microcosm of the drastic historical and personal change of the period that the cyclone symbolizes. Van Gorder's strength lies in showing her characters in historical context, responding to their political and social milieu. She keenly differentiates between the social strata of the city: Jessie reads the newspaper account of the fancy dress ball to her mother as Agnes tears worn sheets in half so that they can be sewn together with the strong part in the middle. The descriptions of war-time life are detailed, from the types of dress fabric available to the ingredients of a Christmas cake. The novel is strongest in the first half, when it centres on Agnes. When the main action shifts to the men at war, the narrative loses its focus and wanders; I found myself at several points forgetting which character was which. While the historical detail is generally well integrated, the section detailing the history of the Pankhursts, early heroines of Agnes, is intrusive and disrupts the story's flow. Potential readers will also have to get past the ghastly cover

of the novel, which makes it look like a Young Adult ghost story.

Challenging Poverty

John Stackhouse

Out of Poverty and into Something More Comfortable. Random House \$34.95

Roxanne Rimstead

Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women. U of Toronto P \$21.95

Reviewed by Laurie Aikman

In the documentary film *Spectre of Hope*, Brazilian economist and photographer Sebastião Salgado and British art critic John Berger discuss Salgado's recent book *Migrations*, a photographic witness to the human suffering and poverty engendered by globalization. Salgado is honest about the ethical dilemmas faced by privileged intellectuals who care deeply about the lives and struggles of those who have been impoverished or dispossessed by war and global economics. He admits that he does not know if it is right for him to photograph such suffering, but that he wishes someone would tell him what is right.

Two recent books by Canadian authors from very different disciplines join Salgado in exploring this dilemma. *Out of Poverty* and *Remnants of Nation* turn their critical lenses on poverty in the global and Canadian contexts respectively, urging their readers to consider the contexts of poverty with new eyes. Both texts will have a wide appeal to readers beyond their particular audiences in the fields of economics and literature.

Out of Poverty is partly a work of economic journalism, and partly a narrative of intellectual and ideological conversion. Written by the *Globe and Mail's* first overseas development writer, John Stackhouse, and accompanied by eloquent black-and-white photographs taken by his wife, Cindy

Andrew, the book stands as a testimony to Stackhouse's willingness to be transformed by his encounters with the poor. Although he begins his career fully supporting and believing in the development policies of Western organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, the author documents his growing realization that successful "human development is not about creating wealth," nor is it "about outside interventions," but rather it is "a process, even a struggle, that [is] internal to a place and deeply democratic in nature." By telling the stories of some of those struggles, Stackhouse paints a portrait of the diversity, dignity, and resourcefulness of the world's poor.

Stackhouse's prose is engaging and highly readable. The book has the emotional power of a novel and the intellectual appeal of an essay. *Out of Poverty* is structured as a series of narratives grouped together according to their continent or country of origin: Africa, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia. Between his discussions of events occurring in these different regions, Stackhouse returns again and again to his experiences in the tiny and deeply impoverished village of Biharipur, India. A microcosm of the issues, challenges, and minor and major triumphs of human development at the most basic political level, Biharipur is also a village where Stackhouse develops the deepest and most respectful relationships with those who are living in poverty. Stackhouse's book furthermore offers a trenchant exposure and criticism of the ways in which the media create an image of developing nations for the consumption of the wealthier countries of the West. He writes with an insider's perspective.

Out of Poverty does locate poverty in developing nations, rather than in Canada itself. The oversight arises from Stackhouse's position as development writer for the *Globe and Mail*, as well as his desire to challenge "the arrogant hopes of

interventionism [. . .] that we, the West, have the will, weapons, nerve and right to police the world." However, the tendency of Canadians to locate poverty out in the developing world rather than within their own country and communities is criticized in *Remnants of Nation*. Rimstead's book contains not only a theoretical delineation of poverty narratives and a justification of their study within Canadian literature, but also a series of textual analyses that demonstrate ways of reading poverty: "I propose a new category of analysis called 'poverty narratives' and oppositional reading practices which ask broad theoretical and social questions such as what it might mean politically, ethically, and epistemologically to critique poverty in literature more rigorously." *Remnants of Nation* is a work of both literary scholarship and cultural criticism, in which these reading strategies are as central to her project as is her attentiveness to the nationally devalued narratives of poverty themselves.

In a series of interconnected articles written over the course of five years, Rimstead engages in the first comprehensive analysis of the ways in which social myths of poverty are both constructed and challenged within Canadian literature. For Rimstead, a professor of literature at the Université de Sherbrooke, reading such myths oppositionally is an ethical imperative. The social groundedness of *Remnants of Nation* makes it a valuable resource for all those who struggle to combine the study of literature with social, political, and ethical accountability.

Rimstead's book enacts "oppositional reading strategies" that "oppose the invisibility and silencing of the poor by peering more closely . . . into the images of poverty and asking what they may mean in a struggle over meaning and power." The "images of poverty" to which Rimstead refers are not only narratives *about* the poor in canonical Canadian literature, but also nar-

ratives by the poor, including autobiographies, oral histories, letters, and other forms that are often dismissed as non-literary genres. Rimstead defends the importance of examining such marginalized texts alongside the productions of canonical Canadian authors such as Susanna Moodie, Nellie McClung, Gabrielle Roy, Margaret Laurence, and Alice Munro.

Rimstead addresses the usefulness of poverty narratives as literary category, the feminization of poverty, and the neglect of poverty and class in Canadian literary criticism. She discusses poor houses in Canadian literature, the internalization of negative self-images by poor subjects, and the deliberate distancing strategies that women may use in writing about their poor childhoods. The book is densely written, tightly argued, and richly rewarding. It deserves to have a powerful impact on the field of Canadian literature.

Rimstead insists that "cultural critics should allow the possibility that poor subjects have special knowledge and can and do speak as cultural subjects in ways that academic criticism has somehow been overlooking or devaluing," and her book is as much a model of the act of listening as it is a brilliant work of comparative literary theory and practice. *Remnants of Nation*, like *Out of Poverty*, is a fundamentally hopeful book, ending with a discussion of how "resistant poverty narratives" can offer "visions of a more inclusive nation where the public good is defined not by deficit reduction but by sharing and investing in all members of the collective."



Subjects of Empire

Gillian Whitlock

The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography. Cassell \$40.50

Reviewed by Laurie McNeill

Gillian Whitlock opens *The Intimate Empire* by describing Queen Mary's Doll House, built for the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, now on display at Windsor Castle. Inside the doll house is a miniature world map, awash in the pink of the vast British Empire. Whitlock reads this tiny map, and the Exhibition for which it was created, as touchstones for British colonial discourses; the Exhibition promoted the kind of colonial enterprises and sentiment that the imperialist colouring of the map reflects: countries were either "in the pink" or irrelevant. The hegemony of imperial Britain and its attitudes are central to Whitlock's post-colonial readings of women's autobiography out of Empire, from 1830 to the present, including the writings of Mary Prince, Susanna Moodie, Karen Blixen and Sally Morgan. In its focus on Empire, her study covers an unusually diverse geographical range, with texts from Canada, Britain, Australia, Kenya, South Africa and the Caribbean.

Against this British imperial atlas, Whitlock constructs a map of the "intimate empire," a territory of reading and writing that studies the selves projected by these autobiographies from the Empire. Her approach incorporates Leigh Gilmore's theory of autobiographics, insisting on the need to locate these writers in their particular sociohistoric, institutional and cultural contexts in order to avoid universal categories of "woman"; this theory also recognizes the possibilities for "points of resistance" within these autobiographies. While mapping this Intimate Empire, Whitlock explores "the leakage between what might seem to be secure gendered,

national and racial identities." In its application of both post-colonial theory and critical approaches from autobiography studies, *The Intimate Empire* continues to expand the autobiography canon, and brings new insights into readings of colonial and settler discourse and subjectivity.

Whitlock's mapping metaphor recalls not only the activities of imperialism but also the autobiography theory of Helen Buss, whose influential *Mapping Our Selves* (1988) suggested cartography as a new trope for reading women's autobiographical subjectivity. Unlike Buss, who did not examine the politics of map-making, Whitlock concentrates on the imperial and political connotations of the metaphor, and on women's role in perpetuating Empire. Beginning with the autobiography of Mary Prince, an escaped slave who dictated her story to Susanna Strickland (better known as Susanna Moodie), Whitlock interrogates "the production of truth and authority in autobiography," of who is authorized to speak and what they can say. Because Prince's autobiography was dictated, by a woman to a woman, and by an escaped slave, it was not considered "authoritative" without the inclusion of considerable prefaces, notes, and marginalia that used Prince as a voice for the abolitionist movement. Even Prince's contemporary editor has "authorized" her autobiography, turning her story, Whitlock contends, into a mouthpiece for feminism. The history of Mary Prince's autobiography, then, details "the marking of identities through relationships and social processes" of colonialism. Prince's text, along with the travel narrative of Mary Seacote, a free-born Jamaican woman who nursed in the Crimean War and travelled widely throughout Europe, also highlights Whitlock's reading of the (racialized) body as textual performance. This concept is crucial to her map of the "Intimate Empire," and her attention to it adds a

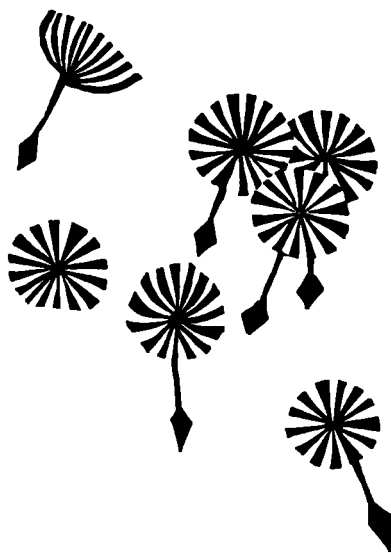
post-colonial dimension to the theorizing of subjectivity and the body by Gilmore and by Sidonie Smith.

Like Stephen Slemon, Whitlock argues against the hostility in post-colonial criticism towards discussion of settler subjects, and suggests it is time to read these texts and their subjects in their own tradition. Scholars of Canadian literature will be interested to see Whitlock's analysis of the two *grandes dames* of settler literature, Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill. She reads Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and Parr Traill's *Backwoods of Canada* as acts of "translation and reformulation of the domestic subject in the New World," where received scripts for settler narratives have failed. Considering Moodie and Parr Traill as settler subjects opens up possibilities for analysis of their identities as informed by emigration and colonizing, and shows their negotiation of identity within competing discourses of gender, nationality and class. Whitlock then turns this interrogation of white settler identity to colonial Africa, and examines the representations of Africa as Eden or as heart of darkness in the autobiographies of white women settlers in Kenya between the First and Second World Wars. She sees these narratives as dialoguing with the seductive "white imaginary" of Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, a text whose romantic view of settler society still resonates today. Like Moodie and Parr Traill, these settler autobiographers show a "new consciousness of self through emigration." Their texts also sought to create and legitimate, or in the case of second-generation colonizers, modify, a white African identity.

Against these formations of white settler identity, Whitlock looks at contemporary Black South African and Australian autobiographies, considering the politics of writing and of identity for speakers with unequal access to an "authoritative" voice. Many of these autobiographies, like Mary

Prince's, experience an ongoing process of authorization through prefaces, introductions and editor's notes. Despite the negotiation of voices and the problematics of truth and authority in autobiography, the genre does offer the possibility for oppositional narratives, where marginalized voices speak and resist categories of identity forced upon them by dominant society. Sally Morgan's *My Place*, for example, uses the technologies of autobiography to construct an Aboriginal identity, an identity that the life-writing of other contemporary

Aboriginal women such as Ruby Langford Ginibi have further problematized. The shifting identities available in autobiographies defy the fixed racial identities determined by apartheid and other racist government policy; Whitlock notes how autobiographical writings proliferated in South Africa following the Soweto uprising, and in Australia since the 1980s formation of the Aboriginal movement. Such a phenomenon suggests that the genre of autobiography has the capacity to uphold or resist the subjectivities created by Empire.



No Bedtime Story

Deborah Ellis

The Breadwinner. Douglas & McIntyre \$7.95

Reviewed by Judy Brown

Ours is a world remarkably cruel to children. In the last decade, the UN reports, two million children were slain in wars; six million were severely injured; twenty million were made refugees. For those hoping that today's children might receive news of their world in a form more coherent than the bits of type that scurry across the bottom of the screen on those incessant twenty-four-hour news channels, Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner*, dedicated in its content and its royalties to the children of war, is a novel worth considering.

Set in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime and before the events of September 11th, *The Breadwinner* tells of Parvana, an eleven-year-old girl, surviving with her parents, her two sisters, and her baby brother in a miserable one-room apartment in Kabul. Clean water is a memory, fresh and nutritious food an impossibility. Little of Parvana's eleven-year life has been lived free—none at all free of war. That war has touched the lives of Parvana and her family is an understatement. Her older brother was killed by a landmine. She and her siblings are denied the right to attend school. Her father lost part of his leg when the high school where he was teaching was bombed. Her mother, formerly an outspoken writer for a Kabul radio station, has been silenced—sentenced by Taliban law to live within the walls of her tiny residence, away from the eyes of men unless she consents to wear the tent-like burqa and walk chaperoned by a male relative.

Before her father is arrested by a squad of Taliban soldiers, Parvana accompanies him to his work as reader of letters and documents for Kabul residents whose illiteracy has made them helpless before the printed word. Small for her age, Parvana is the one female in the family permitted daily access to a world that her mother and older sister are not.

Her father seized and her mother in a debilitating depression, Parvana, reluctant at first to assume the responsibility, becomes the family's sole means of support—its breadwinner. She also becomes the roving character, taking young readers on a tour of what it means to be a child of Afghanistan's wars. Hair cut short and clothed in garments once worn by her late brother, Parvana assumes the identity of a male cousin and plays the role of boy-literate for the illiterate ones who formerly sought her father's help in the marketplace.

Basing Parvana's story at least in part on interviews she did with Afghani women in refugee camps just over the Pakistan border (see her *Women of the Afghan War*), Ellis educates young readers as cable news cannot. Parvana makes contact with tea boys who serve customers their daily beverage in the marketplace and finds among them Shauzia, another girl masquerading as a boy to feed her family and save its life. Shauzia, more war-weary than Parvana, wonders whether "someone should drop a big bomb on the country and start again." Together these friends do what they must to earn more money: they work as bone collectors for those selling remains to families desperate for signs of their disappeared; they sell cigarettes to spectators in a soccer stadium as soldiers cut off the hands of accused thieves. In the background are the

violence and everyday oppression that become more casual by contrast with these more dramatic atrocities: the beating of women and children who beg at prison gates for news of loved ones, the whipping of a child who bangs on a makeshift drum, the banning of music, the blacking out of windows to conceal the women within, the girls in boys' clothing putting their lives at risk to relieve themselves in secluded doorways near the marketplace.

Ellis's work is not for every child reader. Graphic and grim at times, it is no bedtime story. But for readers of Parvana's age keenly interested in world issues—and there are many such children—*The Breadwinner* is a book worth reading. Its paratext (maps, a brief author's note on Afghanistan's war history, its glossary of terms) is useful. Best of all, the book is not a victimology; it insists upon the resourcefulness and independent-mindedness of the children it features. Children—girls the Taliban have decreed invisible—are saving their families here. Parvana is no superhero: she complains; she is afraid; she withdraws in horror at what she witnesses. Still, she, her friends, and family embody the spirit that Ellis found in Afghans she met on her trips to those camps. This spirit is most memorably represented in a comment by Parvana's sister as she prepares to travel to Mazar-e-Sharif, then under rebel control and not subject to the law of the burqa: "As soon as I get out of Taliban territory, I'm going to throw off my burqa and tear it into a million pieces." An exhilarating image of defiance, that.

True to what is rather than to what readers might wish, the end offers no resolution. (A sequel is in the works, apparently.) Parvana's family is torn by circumstances—the fate of her mother and siblings unknown. Her father, released from prison, is much diminished. Parvana herself is approaching adolescence, when her changing body will consign her to the indoor

world and the burqa. But at the end she looks forward, "the future stretch[ing] unknown"; she "feel[s] ready for it[;] she even finds herself looking forward to it."

The Breadwinner has its flaws. Reportedly rushed into print, it is less polished than *Looking for X* (which won Ellis the 2000 Governor General's Award for children's literature). It sometimes seems to race through scenes, sacrificing development to the listing of Taliban misdeeds. Purporting to look at Afghanistan from the inside out, it can only be, given the author's position, a look from the outside in—more relevant to non-Afghan children seeking information than to an Afghan child seeking affirmation. The attempt to avoid demonizing the Taliban by including one scene in which a soldier weeps over his lost wife is unconvincing. Failure to mention America's formerly ambiguous relationship with the Taliban during the war with the Soviet Union is an omission more troubling as current events unfold and as U.S. schools, libraries, and parents embrace the book and make it a bestseller.

Still, the novel talks seriously to children about issues adults are struggling to understand and articulate. It speaks to children about matters that will affect their lives in the future. *The Breadwinner* is not for the faint of heart, but then neither is the world in which children find themselves living these days.



* Normally, the Last Pages are reserved for comment by CL's Editors. In this case we have conceded the space to a review, in order to highlight a children's book made even more topical by recent events.

Essays, Last Pages

Judy **Brown** is a Senior Instructor in the Department of English at the University of British Columbia. Her teaching and research interests include contemporary Canadian fiction and Canadian children's literature.

Susanna **Egan** is a professor of English at the University of British Columbia. She is co-editor with Gabriele Helms of *biography* 24.1 (Winter 2001) and author of *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*.

Margery **Fee** teaches Canadian, First Nations and Post-colonial literatures at the University of British Columbia. She has edited special issues on Thomas King and First Nations writing for *Canadian Literature*.

Sherrill **Grace** has published books on Malcolm Lowry, Margaret Atwood, literary Expressionism, and the North. Her most recent book is *Canada and the Idea of North*, and she is currently working on a biography of Sharon Pollock.

Lisa **Grekul** is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia. She is writing her thesis on literature by Canadians of Ukrainian descent.

Sneja **Gunew** has taught at various universities in England, Australia and Canada. She has published widely on multicultural, post-colonial and feminist critical theory and is currently Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada.

Gabriele **Helms** is an Assistant Professor in the English department at Simon Fraser University. Her book *Challenging Canada: Dialogism and Narrative Technique in Canadian Novels* is forthcoming.

Sophie **McCall** is a doctoral candidate at York University. Her interests include First Nations literatures, Canadian literatures and post-colonial studies.

Bina **Toledo Freiwald** is Associate Professor of English at Concordia University in Montréal. Her publications include essays in *Postmodernism and the Ethical Subject* (forthcoming), and *Mapping Canadian Cultural Space* (2000).

Neil ten **Kortenaar** teaches African, Caribbean, and South Asian literature at the University of Toronto at Scarborough. In the area of African literature, his most recent article is "Fictive States and the State of Fiction in Africa" in *Comparative Literature*.

Poems

Cyril **Dabydeen** lives in Ottawa, Gillian **Harding-Russell** in Regina, Sharon **Marcus** in Philadelphia, debbi **waters** in Winnipeg. Susan **McCaslin** teaches at Douglas College, and Anne **Compton** at the University of New Brunswick.

Reviews

Laurie **Aikman** lives in Sherbrooke, Jack **Stewart** in Vancouver, Stella **Algoo-Baksh** teaches at Memorial University, Joel **Baetz**, Cheryl **Lousley**, and Sophie **McCall** study at York University. Douglas **Barbour**, Jennifer **Chambers**, Cecily **Devereux**, Sujaya **Dhanvantari**, and Jennifer **Jay** teach at the University of Alberta, Alison **Calder** and Laura **Moss** at the University of Manitoba, Len **Falkenstein** at the University of New Brunswick, Arthur W. **Frank** and Stephen **Guy-Bray** at the University of Calgary, Bina Toledo **Freiwald** at Concordia University. Lisa **Grekul** and Laurie **McNeill** study at the University of British Columbia, Denise Adele **Heaps** teaches at the University of Toronto, Lothar **Hönnighausen** at the University of Bonn, Victoria **Lamont** at the University of Waterloo, Peggy **Martin** at the University of Saskatchewan, Neal **McLeod** at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, Donna **Palmateer Pennee** at the University of Guelph, Jim **Taylor** at St. Francis Xavier University.



Reading In

Alice Munro's Archives

JoAnn McCaig

Paper \$24.95 • 0-88920-336-9

Using a feminist cultural studies approach, McCaig examines the archive of Canadian author Alice Munro, including her correspondence with Robert Weaver, Virginia Barber, Douglas Gibson, Ann Close and John Metcalf.

Repossessing the World

Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women

Helen M. Buss

Cloth \$34.95 • 0-88920-408-X • **Life Writing** series

Demonstrates that the memoir makes its own art, not only through selective borrowing from autobiography, novel and essay but also through the unique and significant way this tripartite narrative voice constructs the experience of the memoirist.

Working in Women's Archives

Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents

Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar, editors

Paper \$24.95 • 0-88920-341-5 • **Life Writing**

Looks at both celebrated authors and lesser-known writers and challenges the assumption of archive as neutral space and archival document as objective text.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT www.wlupress.wlu.ca



Wilfrid Laurier University Press

Phone: 519-884-0710 ext. 6124 • Fax: 519-725-1399 • email: press@wlu.ca

The Judge's Wife
Memoirs of a BC Pioneer



EUNICE M.L. HARRISON

The Judge's Wife

Memoirs of a BC Pioneer

Eunice M.L. Harrison

Introduction by Jean Barman

Published from the manuscript copy in the National Archives, Eunice Harrison's memoir of life in BC from 1860 to 1906 offers one of the earliest accounts of the province by a woman. With a substantial introduction by Jean Barman.

0-921870-92-2 6 x 9 250 pp \$19.95 pb

THE
Last Trip
to Oregon



George Payerle

The Last Trip to Oregon

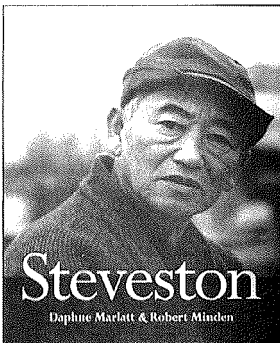
George Payerle

"The poems in *The Last Trip to Oregon* are unabashedly in love with things that matter, and disappear. They're like ad-lib cairns and graffiti, recording the glory he glimpsed in this face, this creature, that moment. I'm moved by the bittersweet pang of cherishing that resonates here." — DENNIS LEE

0-921870-96-5 6 x 9 116 pp \$14.95 pb

Steveston

Daphne Marlatt & Robert Minden



Steveston

Daphne Marlatt & Robert Minden

A new edition of this beloved favourite, by two of Canada's finest poets and photographers, with a new poem by Marlatt based on present-day Steveston and nine additional photos by Minden — never before seen.

0-921870-80-9 7-3/4 x 8-7/8 112 pp \$16.95 pb

Ronsdale Press

DISTRIBUTED BY GDS



VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.ronsdalepress.com>

Searching for...

Q U A L I T Y F F T E
U N I G R E A T S J X
A H H H Z H U I E H C
L P R I P Y L A D A E
I P R P G A P P O B L
T R R I I N R R R O L
Y B B C N B E B B O E
O O E F B T O L O K N
S P O W O O E O L S C
S L **B O O K** T R L L E
S H O R K W T O S M E
A L A **P R I N T I N G**
R E X P E R I E N C E
P R O F E S S I O N A
N I N E T Y Y E A R S

...a quality book printer?

Look no further than **Hignell Book Printing**
your short to medium run specialists.
Over ninety years of award-winning experience.
Solve the puzzle.

488 Burnell St., Wpg., MB, Canada, R3G 2B4
(204) 784-1030, Fax: (204) 774-4053, email: books@hignell.com