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Time Lord: The Remarkable Canadian Who Missed His Train and Changed the World
[A study of the life of Sir Sandford Fleming]

By **Clark Blaise**

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Editorial

Writing in the Shadow of the Bomb*

Glenn Deer

What followed was a bolt
Outside the range and target of the thunder,
And human speech curved back upon itself
Through Druid runways and the Piltdown scarps,
Beyond the stammers of the Java Caves,
To find its origins in hieroglyphs
On mouths and eyes and cheeks
Etched by a foreign stylus never used
On the outmoded page of the Apocalypse.

—E.J. Pratt, "Come Away, Death" (1941)

As the world's military powers debate the future of war in the Middle East, Pakistan and India, the ultimate "stylus" of power, the nuclear bomb, has been pondered yet again. The motorized buzz-bomb that Pratt describes in his 1941 poem is not, of course, as destructive as the nuclear one but it did change the nature of war and of the modern condition. The title "Come Away, Death" alludes to a courtly lover's death-wish in a song from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, but it also locates the origin of contemporary violence in some earlier scene of human social formation. The poem casts death as a chivalrous priest who once "offered sacramental wine" and "closed the eyelids," but now finds himself replaced by the chilling, heart-stopping moment of silence between the cutting-off of the bomb's motor and the thunderclap of its explosive impact.

The mechanization of death that leaves priestly *paternosters* crushed under a mechanical "traction tread" does not, in Pratt's poem, lead us continually forward in time, but backward to an earlier violence that predates "the outmoded page of the apocalypse." Such regressive destruction that obliterates human memory, freedom, and technological advancement is central in several novels as well, notably Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Liebowitz* (1959), Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1982) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Michael Ondaatje's *The English*

Patient (1992) and his more recent *Anil's Ghost* (2000) are similarly preoccupied. Regression into the dark ages has also been evoked to characterize the New York ruins of the World Trade Center: as Don DeLillo observes (whose sense of the "medieval" is obviously rather different from Pratt's), "whatever great skeins of technology lie ahead, ever more complex, connective, precise, micro-fractional, the future has yielded, for now, to medieval expedience, to the old slow furies of cutthroat religion."

As an elegiac and nostalgic poem, Pratt's poem never aspires to halt the apocalyptic (nothing could) but to revive the very funereal dignity that it laments as having been lost to modernity. Yet as we apparently prepare ourselves for international warfare, we also find questions of cultural control, symbolic representations, historical memory and the nature of individual interventions. What are the proprieties that will guide our speaking in the apocalyptic moment? Who can freely offer a vision of the future, without having to participate in "the dance of history" that begins, as John Gray's *Billy Bishop Goes to War* puts it, when "someone points a gun at someone's face"? What individual freedom can survive in the face of war?

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I ask these questions not only in the shadow of the nuclear threat but in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the subsequent bombing and invasion of Afghanistan, and those moments of bitter dispute between journalists, politicians, international affairs analysts and politicized intellectuals. Canadians have not committed such a large contingent of their armed forces to active duty since the Korean War. The horrible strikes on the Towers, endlessly replayed in video footage on television that captured the moments of impact and collapse from all angles, required that significant action be taken to stop future terrorism.

It is no surprise that the American debate over the events of September has been more divisive, including the identification, and implied blacklisting, of dissenters by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni headed by Lynne Cheney, wife of the American Vice-President. On both sides of the border the pundits have said that September 11th brought an end to the age of irony—or perhaps relativism, or postmodernism, or maybe postcolonialism. Stanley Fish, in his October 15, 2001 article in the *New York Times* "Condemnation Without Absolutes," responded to conservative critics who blamed "postmodern intellectuals" for weakening the American sense of "resolve" (an important abstraction in the present climate): postmodern

relativism is charged with leaving Americans "with no firm basis of either condemning the terrorist attacks or fighting back." "Not so," asserts Fish, for postmodern thinking, while denying universal absolutes, may allow us to see into the minds, motives, agenda and logic of the adversaries. Do not think of the terrorists as madmen, counsels Fish: "The better course is to think of these men as bearers of a rationality we reject because its goal is our destruction. If we take the trouble to understand that rationality, we might have a better chance of figuring out what its adherents will do next and preventing it."

Fish's defense of postmodern thinking as having practical military uses is dubious since the prevention of terrorism not only depends on theoretical strategizing, but the commitment of money, time and personnel to do it. Are we to imagine that the CIA will begin recruiting so-called postmodern cultural studies thinkers to its special forces? It is revealing, however, that Fish should find himself compelled to *defend* a cultural concept—*postmodernism*—from the taint of treason. In other words, American intellectuals must declare their patriotism or else be scapegoated for their alleged role in making these attacks possible.

This targeting of internal weakness and dissent has certainly been in the mind of the American leadership which has tried to manage national solidarity by warning dissenters: "You are either for us or against us." Although such ultimata are designed to close down debate, they did little to prevent American writers, journalists, and academics—including Barbara Kingsolver, Lewis Lapham, Fredric Jameson, Edward Said and many others —from speaking against military retaliation: thus Kingsolver wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of 25 September, 2001, "Patriotism threatens free speech with death. It is infuriated by thoughtful hesitation, constructive criticism of our leaders, and pleas for peace." Not all American intellectuals agreed with her. Marjorie Perloff, a professor of literature from Stanford, was infuriated by what she saw as a blaming of America for the attacks, in letters published in the 4 October, 2001 issue of *The London Review of Books.* The letters, authored by American and British intellectuals like Jameson, Said, Terry Eagleton, Mary Beard and a dozen others, so irked Perloff that she publicly cancelled her subscription and called upon her students and colleagues to boycott the *Review.*

The discourse of bitter accusation that has wracked American intellectual life has also emerged in the Canadian arena. Canadian journalists pilloried Sunera Thobani for daring to speak in October 2001 at a Women's

Resistance Conference in Ottawa about the violent record of American military interventions. The speech, whose content addressed themes similar to those in Lewis Lapham's later essay, "Drums Along the Potomac" in the November 2001 issue of *Harper's*, erred in its severity of tone. Still, Thobani's fiery address provoked a necessary discussion in Canada.

The Canadian management of dissent has included scathing attacks by Canadian journalist Robert Fulford ("In search of an eternal flame during a period of darkness," the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 October 2001, A10) and *Ottawa Citizen* columnist David Warren ("Wave goodbye to the age of conformity," the *Vancouver Sun*, 15 October 2001, A13) on political correctness, university intellectuals, feminists and post-colonial theory. All of these have been blamed for infecting (Fulford actually uses the word "metastasize") Western culture with relativism, moral weakness and the inability to discern and thus combat true evil.

Fulford is especially hostile to anti-racist studies, castigating such activism for allowing "irresponsible" charges to be sustained: "When we discuss racism, we impose on ourselves a kind of moral disarmament: We are cowed into silence or acquiescence by the magic authority of a word" (the *Vancouver Sun* 12 October, 2001, A10). According to Fulford, post-colonial theory is equally to blame because it fosters "The idea of dealing even-handedly with both sides" and makes society "incapable of the one act that has always been essential to survival, distinguishing friends from enemies." "And where did this simple-minded idea of even-handedness come from? It emerged in its current manifestation from the universities, in the form of post-colonial theory"(A11).

This scapegoating of a complex field of inquiry is accompanied by remarkable disrespect for those involved in the work of anti-racism: Fulford, who previously opposed the "Writing Thru Race" Conference organized by Roy Miki in Vancouver in 1994, criticizes the Durban conference held in South Africa because of its unfair treatment of Israel. Durban was obviously flawed, but does this single conference justify a discounting of all efforts in anti-racism? In a climate of international military conflict, is it helpful for democracies to demonize anti-racism movements or intellectuals who study phenomena such as post-colonial society? Post-colonial theorists are a diverse group, who work in a field marked by lively debate and disagreement. They are certainly not a mere gaggle of cultural relativists. In fact, the intellectual diversity and scepticism that characterize post-colonial inquiry are also vital to the democracies of a world that has

been shaken by the hardened orthodoxies of religious extremists.

Without the vigilant work of anti-racism, who could guarantee that innocent people are protected from ostracism and abuse? In the weeks after the attacks on New York and Washington, Muslim groups became the victims of bomb threats and physical harassment. Fortunately, politicians and civic authorities in both Canada and the United States quickly condemned such acts. Because there are multiculturalist policies and protections in North America to educate the citizenry, such backlashes have been contained and will, one hopes, continue to be thwarted in the future. Racism does its nasty work, we know, through the powerful mechanisms of stereotyping and the divisions between privileged groups and Others. These divisions must be overcome if we wish to advance to a post-racial age. It should be added, however, that anti-racism thinkers, including Constance Backhouse in her *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (1999), warn of the dangers of a colour-blind or raceless ideal, an ideal that informs the myth of the Canadian nation as entirely free of racism.

The most progressive anti-racist discourse must, in the words of Paul Gilroy's recent book *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (2000), move beyond traditional racial hierarchies. For Gilroy, evidence of "the indissoluble unity of all life at the level of genetic materials" together with work in the areas of biotechnology should lead to a radical rethinking of racial differences. His vision of a "planetary humanism" may seem idealistic, but such idealism deserves attention. The fact that all human beings share the limited but miraculous biological foundation is another way of exposing race as a social construct. As Gilroy says, "The human sensorium has had to be educated to the appreciation of racial differences. When it comes to the visualization of discrete racial groups, a great deal of fine-tuning has been required."

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Racial difference provides the drama in the concluding chapter of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* as it abruptly shifts to the Sikh bomb sapper's realization that the Americans have bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Kirpal Singh's anger provokes Caravaggio to agree: "He knows the young soldier is right. They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation."

The possibility of a nuclear attack on any nation raises urgent questions. Writing in *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word* (1992),

Peter Schwenger connects the scarred back of a postal carrier, burned by nuclear fire, that appears in Peter Townsend's *The Postman of Nagasaki* (1984) to Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card* (1987), a book also preoccupied with the interrupted posting of "letters," with scars, and retrospective knowledge: for epistemology, as Derrida states, "there is only the back, seen from the back, in what is written, such is the final word."

In the dystopic literature of nuclear annihilation, voices speak to us from across an abyss of shattered time and burned visions, in letters that never quite reach us, unable to avert another disaster, shredded paper sent back to our time: "Within this complex postal system," writes Schwenger, "what role can be played by literature, that postcard that claims the completeness of the letter? Does literature have the capacity to leave its stamp upon time, or to ensure the continuance even of the concept of time, beyond the nuclear age?"

The limits of the thinkable, the compulsive return to scenes of childhood loss and to symbolic mastery, and the body as the burned site of nuclear violence also preoccupy Dennis Bock's recent novel, *The Ash Garden.* Bock explores the complex effects of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima through several different perspectives, including that of Anton Böll, a German nuclear physicist who switches allegiances mainly to pursue his own research with the Americans; his wife, Sophie, a Jewish-Austrian refugee whose youth and linguistic isolation bind her to a distant and unfeeling husband who in 1943 helped her escape the miserable conditions of a Quebec immigrant camp; and Emiko Asai, a Japanese documentary film-maker who survived the bombing of Hiroshima but must endure disfiguring burn wounds, painful reconstructive surgery, the loss of her family and cultural displacement. The marriage of Anton and Sophia is haunted by the bombing of Hiroshima, although Anton is fully convinced that the bomb was an ethical necessity to end the war: "It was as if neither of them had been able to escape the shell of that burnt city. The memories played themselves out over and over again under their sleeping eyes like a looped newsreel. . . ."

The power of Bock's style derives from its complex handling of time, its evocations of the patient wards in Hiroshima, the desert test ranges in New Mexico, the Jewish refugee camp on the banks of the St.Lawrence. Bock favours the free indirect style to articulate the ambivalent motives and perceptions of characters, often showing their profound alienation from the events around them: "With the passing of years it began to seem that their

lives had happened not to them but to other people . . . when they did remember, it was never the event or memory in question they saw or felt but simply a snapshot of themselves from that time. . . ."

Anton and Sophie are separated by their different experiences of the war: Anton is consumed by his work on the development of the bomb in the desert test ranges of New Mexico, and later by his filming and tending of the burn victims in the Hiroshima wards; Sophie is left in New York and finds temporary comfort through an affair with Stefano, an Italian butcher. Anton's filming of the burn victims displaces his emotional connection to his wife: intending to send her personal greetings and tourist footage of himself "having a nice time on one of those islands," his silent films preserve images of the hospitalized victims that he views compulsively when he returns to America, but conceals from others until he is confronted by Emiko. As he helps in the hospitals and records the wounds of the victims, he is haunted by the constant taste of ash in his mouth, a "grey cloud" taste that wakes him in the middle of the night and coats his tongue during the day.

Anton's "old films" draw Emiko, the director of "Yellow Crane Films," to Anton. Her relationship with him presents the twists and turns of ironic power reversals: who is the film-maker and who is the documented subject —the pursuer and the pursued? Emiko's personal narration both opens and concludes the novel. The opening image shows her drawing a mud picture of her grandfather on her brother's back. Emiko's face, burned in the moments after she completes the picture, will eventually be reconstructed by the grafting of skin from her own back when she is sent to America nine years later. The motifs of the body, the bomb's injurious effects and the limits of language are poignantly extended when Emiko's communication with her dying brother is reduced to sign language. As they both lie side by side, on their stomachs, in the hospital, his thumb presses into hers when he approves of her stories, and she touches him reassuringly on the only unburned portion of his body. Emiko becomes the subject of public attention when she is brought to America for facial surgery with a group of other Japanese girls. Veiled in order to mitigate the shock of her real scars, she embodies America's contradictory forces of destruction and reconstruction. She is even a living example to those Americans "who want to help ensure that the bomb will never be used again."

While other victims of Hiroshima are burned with patterns that follow the dark and light areas of their clothing, some have buttons and zippers

blasted deep into their flesh. The outlines of incinerated people are scorched on the ruined walls of the city, atomized ghostly presences that are filmed and photographed by the stunned American investigators who are recording the effects of the destruction. The body of Anton's own wife, Sophie, also develops an almost clairvoyant sympathetic connection to the bomb victims: when she hears the news of the Hiroshima bombing in New York, she instantly develops a butterfly-shaped rash on her face, an early symptom of the lupus that will cripple her.

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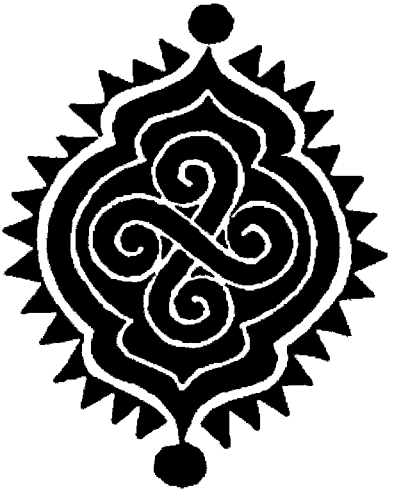
The lessons of *The Ash Garden* speak directly to the pain of the victims of war and the conscience of those who would wield weapons of mass destruction. All can be scarred by such military engagements, whose punishing effects ripple out across the decades and root themselves in the bodies of the future.

**Postscript: As this issue is about to go to press 600 Canadian troops have just returned from six months of dangerous duty in Afghanistan. While the Canadian military commitment has abated, the Americans continue, at least at this point, to prepare for a strike against Iraq. The concerns over intellectual freedom, racial profiling and human rights raised by this editorial were composed in the tragic aftermath of September 11th but these have continued to be relevant and troubling in the current international scene.*



Andrea Dancer

Ode to Elizabeth Sidal

When vain desire at last and vain regret
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
And teach the unforgetful to forget?
—Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1870, 1881

1. The painting

"Ophelia" for example: while your gaze
is pulled into a sultry stream,
a gossamer gown drifting there,
where upturned fingers loose bearded iris,
dwarf daisies, jonquil, a poppy wards banshee
away, the wavelets still eyelids
on a face cyanotic with love

2. The model

lies in a bathtub,
a counterfeit feat,
she's a prop set by north light,
flesh and blood in a petal strewn sea
turning mottled, then marble
while stone cold coal embers
are prodded and poked back to life by degree.

3. Rossetti's atonement

for the laudanum lullaby
is to immortalize Liz to the end
painter cum poet with his dower of words
to be threaded, knotted, embedded,

in the strands of her hair where
poetics perpetuate, relegate, reiterate
perfection, over and over again.

3. Time comes

to reclaim the masterful pieces
unclasp parchment and lovelocks at last
exhume, defile, yet instead her tresses
have grown, oh flown, filled up
the holes, breached gaps,
rotted the matter, while fungi gathered
to tarnish the kisscurls of hair.

4. Sprung, unspun

copper filament gallop
straddle, then swaddle relics and fodder
earth bathed bug-beetles, weevils and grubs
riddle root tendrils, disrupt foundations
deepdown, underground,
rubricate a maze

Richard Dellamora

Isabella Valancy Crawford and an English-Canadian Sodom*

In this essay, I focus on a short story, "Extradited" (1886) by Isabella Valancy Crawford, that Margaret Atwood chose to open *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (1986). By selecting the story as the point of departure for this collection, Atwood implies that it has something important to say about the emergence of modern Canada. Published in Ontario during a decade of intense nationalist fervor, "Extradited" offers a critical meditation in fictional terms on English-Canadian political ideology. Embedded in this ideology and in Crawford's response are aspects of the structure of the story of Sodom and other narratives in the opening books of the Hebrew Bible. This fact is not surprising since English settler colonies carried with them the biblically based notions of a providential national covenant that had been framed in England during the reign of Elizabeth I.[1] As the colonies began to develop a sense of themselves as emerging nation-states, they adapted English ideology to their needs. Moreover, as a nation that in the 1880s identified itself in terms of westward expansion, Canada was well suited to a mode of thinking that originated in the efforts of the ancient Israelites to displace the existing inhabitants of territories that the Israelites required for agriculture and herding.[2]

The term "English Canada" is salient since this unnecessarily rebarbarative phrase (anglophone Canada is both more accurate and more accommodating) refers not only to English-speaking Canadians but also to Canada's special relationship to Englishness or, in other words, to its colonial past. "English-Canadian" literature is usually read as working out the emergence

of a specifically Canadian difference—that, at least, is how Atwood describes it (xvi). Insofar as Canadian literature is English, however, it transmits the structures of English national identity—including the tendency, pronounced in the nineteenth century, for that term to subsume other differences (such as Scottish, Irish, and Welsh).[3] This tendency is especially apropos of Crawford since the interest in Irish migration to Canada shown in her writing indicates that she was keenly aware of her own status as an immigrant of Anglo-Irish origins. As a result, Crawford is able to identify with both English and Irish positions but with each only to a degree. Her representation of both is marked by ambivalence.[4]

Crawford's self-consciousness distances her from emergent English-Canadian nationalism. It distances her as well from the ideological construction of agricultural settlement that is a major part of the subject of "Extradited." In the story, Crawford's resistance shows both in the tensions internal to a marriage that joins Bessie, a woman most likely of English stock, with Sam O'Dwyer, an Irish-Catholic settler. Within the story, the ardent friendship that exists between O'Dwyer and a farm hand named Joe threatens to eclipse the triad of father, mother, and infant son. The violence with which the priority of the nuclear family is re-established at the end of the story underscores the exploitations and exclusions that Crawford associates with settlement in Canada.

The Sodom narrative in Genesis 18-19 poses the infidelity of the citizens of Sodom against the promises made by God to the seed of Abraham. Within this general structure, there is place for a number of figures such as Abraham's wife, Sarah, and Lot's wife, unnamed in the Bible, the presence of both of whom complicates the gender-structure of the narrative. Sarah's laughter in response to Abraham's news of her impending childbirth and the turn back of Lot's wife to Sodom in contravention of her husband's command express wifely dissidence in face of the promise of collective salvation. Since the continuity of this promise depends upon women's reproductive capacity, the resistance registered by these women is important. Female dissidence, moreover, finds unexpected affiliation in the person of Lot, whose choice of Sodom as a dwelling place, makes him a faulty patriarch. Lot's evident attraction, moreover, to the beautiful young strangers who visit Sodom situates him as yet another, albeit in his case unwitting, resister to the demands of patriarchy. And yet, without the erotic sympathy that motivates Lot's hospitality to the strangers, the providential rescue of his family would not be possible.

"Extradited" is a domestic tale—one in which a young wife who is also a mother and a teacher functions as a metaphor of the civilizing processes involved in nation-building. In Crawford's view, woman in these roles is virtually synonymous with emergent Canadian identity in settler communities. In its repulsion from this particular figure, Crawford's text instates an abiding tension and contradiction within feminist and, more generally, woman-centred thinking in Canada. Crawford implicitly condemns both the way in which woman is constituted within (and thereby serves to help constitute) nationalist discourse as well as the violent effects of that construction. The Sodom-narrative in Genesis defends patriarchal authority against an investment in same-sex desire that overruns the bounds of kinship. Woman in her identification as wife can police these boundaries—as Bessie does in "Extradited." In the Bible, however, Lot's wife turns out to be a point of resistance within the established order of things. Likewise, Crawford, in her sympathy with the shy romance of Sam and Joe, inhabits a dual position of feminine resistance to authority and alliance with sexual dissidence.[5] At the same time that woman is constituted in "Extradited" as the bulwark against sodomitic contamination by ethnic and racial others, Crawford's imaginary investment in male friendship validates that intimacy while likewise signaling a possible openness on her part to intimacy between women.

Crawford's validation of male friendship functions in another way as well. Rural settlement depended upon male collaboration, which depended in turn upon close emotional ties. In "Extradited," the survival of the farm is portrayed as depending upon the loyalty and love of a laborer for his employer. In this way, Crawford, like Walt Whitman in his poetry, makes the point that without what Whitman calls comradeship the settlement of the North American continent would not have been possible.[6] "Extradited," however, suggests that the story of westward expansion requires that the evidence of such collaboration be silenced and rendered invisible.

By the end of the nineteenth century, conservative female writers in England were proclaiming the fact that "by the depth and strength of her maternal instinct is the race preserved." Commentators such as Eliza Lynn Linton were outspoken in condemning the demands of feminists and sexual dissidents for what she describes as "a new human nature and a new political economy," demands that she saw as negatively "influencing the imperial policy of our grand old country!"[7] To Linton, the demands of women for political participation signified sexual inversion: "Like certain 'sports' which

develop hybrid characteristics, these insurgent wild women are in a sense unnatural. They have not 'bred true'—not according to the general lines on which the normal woman is constructed. There is in them a curious inversion of sex, which does not necessarily appear in the body, but is evident enough in the mind" (in Hamilton 188).

The need for a mother-centred, ultraconservative construction of the nuclear family was felt with intensified force on the ragged peripheries of empire. In Ontario, both the sense of responsibility to a collective destiny and the repulsion from threatening strangers were exacerbated. Moreover, as urbanization and industrialization took place, notions of genealogical inheritance were overlaid with the idea of economic and technological progress. In "Extradited," the dawn of this advance is hinted in Bessie's occupation as a school teacher and in the breaking log jam at the end of the story–a sign both of the exploitation of natural resources and of capital formation in the new province.[8] In English-speaking Ontario, genealogical transference remained in motion, projecting the pure country of the North as both heir and rival of a (mother) country that, by the end of the reign of Queen Victoria, was mired in economic decline and urban decay. In this perspective, the move from Liverpool or London to Ontario could be seen as a move from an Old World Sodom to a New World Zoar. Migrating as a young child from Dublin, Ireland, to the raw settlement of Paisley near Lake Huron, then eastward to Lakefield, a village in south-central Ontario and the mythic point of origin of English-Canadian literature, thence to the county seat of Peterborough, and finally to Toronto, Ontario's capital and leading city, Crawford witnessed all of these attitudes.

Ironically, Crawford finds that Sodom follows settlers to the New World as a newly constituted internal difference. In "Extradited," the little city of Zoar to which Lot and his family escape from Sodom (Gen. 19.22-23) becomes O'Dwyer's Clearing, located perhaps in the bush country outside Peterborough. The "bleak chaos of burned stumps" (116) that Crawford describes as surrounding the cabin and log barn register a Lot's wife's skepticism: the scene of desolation recalls the ashen plain of the fiery cities. Sam's wife, Bessie, serves the civilizing function of woman endorsed by idealogues such as Linton. For his part, Sam shows an unwarranted fondness for Joe, who has helped him clear the land over the past two years. Joe is a figure whose beauty, darkness, and mysterious origins signify in a number of ways. He is both a stranger from the United States and indigenous and mobile: on the morning of his death, he is absorbed in repairing a native-

style birch bark canoe. A phantasmatic focus of erotic, aesthetic, and decadent charm (his first word in the story is: "Sublime"), Joe is an ambiguous and ambivalent figure.[9] He is a young man of Sodom—tainted by "sin and wickedness" (121) in the words of Bessie, who at the opening of the story forbids him to touch her infant son, generically called "Baby." Like the Joseph of the Christian Bible, Joe is devoted in celibate fashion to the well-being of a mother and a son. But in this burnt-over landscape, he is also an apocalyptic messenger, opening hitherto unguessed reserves of affection and attraction in Sam, who grieves over the undisclosed trouble that robs Joe of peace of mind.

"Extradited" is a story about secrets and their construction within a genealogical narrative. Strong beyond his frame, sensitive, and well educated, Joe is haunted by a secret that remains nameless until near the end of the story. Bessie works to expose this secret in order to disarm a second secret that is yet more disturbing: namely the disruption of the family by Sam and Joe's entanglement. The latter secret is both open and nonetheless to be both exposed and suppressed by the violent incident with which the story ends. A third secret is that of Bessie's betrayal and destruction of love between two men—an act of treachery that she justifies by the need to defend her family and her son's inheritance.

The catalyst of the crisis of the story is a notice in a newspaper advertising a one-thousand-dollar reward for information leading to the extradition of a Yankee, believed to be in hiding in Ontario, who is wanted by police for a robbery committed in the United States. Sam never refers directly to the notice, but the secret conclave that he holds with Joe in the barn immediately after returning at sunset from a visit to his wife's parents indicates that he is looking for a way to help Joe escape. Calling Joe, Sam says: "There's something to be spoke about betwixt you an' me, Joe, an' I'd as lieve say it in the dark; let the lantern be—I'd lieve say it in the dark" (117).

Sam proposes to Joe that the four of them leave Canada to begin a new life beyond the reach of the law. In the meantime, Bessie, who has also seen the advertisement, decides to disclose Joe's whereabouts to the men who are searching for him. With her father's help, she intends to use the reward to set up a trust fund for Baby. The contrast between an eroticized discontent with the rigours of a primitive domesticity that characterizes Sam's friendship with Joe and Bessie's obsession with securing the lineage (and modest class position) of her family could not be more marked.

On the next day, when three detectives arrive to arrest Joe, Joe first saves Sam and Bessie's son, who falls into the river, then loses his own life when he is hit by the first log in the jam released upstream. As a result, Joe cannot be arrested; and Bessie is left without reward. On the other hand, Sam's complicity in offering refuge to Joe is disclosed and a new secret, that of Bessie's betrayal of her husband, constituted. Family and homestead have been preserved but at the price of further domestic alienation and the destruction of Sam and Joe's friendship. Moreover, if Sam should surmise Bessie's treachery, the marriage will fail outright. Likewise, since Bessie remains short of money, it is possible that financial problems may eventually force the sale or foreclosure of the farm.

Within a national narrative, Joe connotes not only sodomitic threat but the threat of contagion by contact with darker, Southern races—of which, for the purposes of this story and for English-Canadian nationality in Ontario, the United States, overrun in the 1880s by immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, is seen to be a reservoir. Bessie's patriotism is formed in defensive antithesis to her construction of the States. However, as the birch bark canoe signifies, Joe also carries the burden of internal differences which, in the happy myth of Canadianization, were expected to disappear (Smith). Likewise, Bessie's fantasy of extraditing her romantic rival carries other subliminal fantasies of internal exclusions—of francophone Canadians, for example.

Although I have suggested that O'Dwyer's Clearing may be set in the area outside Peterborough, neither place nor date is specifically mentioned. This ambiguity permits the story to function in the setting of Crawford's early years in Ontario while referring allusively to struggles over land ownership in the West in the 1880s. In 1885, the so-called National Policy of western settlement pursued by the Conservative government of Sir John A. Macdonald provoked a revolt by Métis and Natives in what is present-day Saskatchewan. The result was the North West Rebellion, whose major events were the defeat of an RCMP force by Louis Riel and his supporters in March, 1885, followed by his decisive defeat at the hands of the Toronto volunteers at the Battle of Batoche in May, and his subsequent trial and hanging in November. This triumph ensured that the development of the West would efface the history of continental settlement by trappers and traders from Quebec as well as the ties they and their descendants had fashioned with Canada's aboriginal inhabitants.

The right to own the land they had settled motivated the struggle of Riel's

supporters. In addition, Riel called for free land for new settlers from the East and direct management by the federal government of the lands necessary to the continued existence of the fur trade. In a letter published in the *Globe*, William Henry Jackson, Riel's personal secretary, laid out the rebels' political program:

> Let this be our aim. Let us sink all distinctions of race and religion. Let the white man delight in seeing the Indian helped forward to fill his place as a producer of wealth, and let the Indian and Halfbreed [sic] scorn to charge rent for the soil which God has given to man, upon the settler who comes in to help build up the country and increase its public funds by his arts and machinery, and let both unite in seeing the fur country be managed for the benefit of the Indians who live by hunting, not for the good of a grasping company.[10]

During her years in Toronto, Crawford had become highly sensitive to issues concerning land tenure. In the first instance, these concerns focused on the situation faced by Irish peasants. In "Wealth," a poem prompted by news of a new outbreak of famine in Ireland in 1879, Crawford mocks the hypocrisy of the Protestant churches in defending the rights of absentee landlords (*Collected Poems* 85, 86). A similar insight motivated Charles Stuart Parnell, leader of the Irish party in the House of Commons. In the 1870s and 1880s, Parnell argued both for home rule for Ireland and the redistribution of farmland to the peasants. "On March 6th, 1880, Parnell made a speech in Toronto—a speech Crawford may well have heard—in which he reiterated his view that 'the suffering of the Irish was not due to the providence of God, as many supposed, but to the wickedness of men', these men being 'grasping landlords'." Parnell urged that "the only remedy was for those who tilled the ground and improved it to own it" (Burns, "The Poet" 40).

The Irish had a reputation for devotion to the idea of personal freedom. For example, when defenders of slavery contended that slaves in the American South were materially better off than the Irish peasantry, Fanny Kemble replied on their behalf: "Though the Irish peasant is starved, naked, and roofless, the bare name of freemen—the lordship over his own person, the power to choose and will—are blessings beyond food, raiment, and shelter" (3). In the aftermath of the end of black slavery, however, first in the British Empire and later in the United States, people began to ask whether farmers could be called free if they and their families lacked claim to the small holdings that they needed to support themselves.

In Canada, the ideal of the independently owned and managed family farm was central both to Irish immigrants to Ontario and to homesteaders

headed for the Western prairies. In 1881, Crawford published "A Hungry Day," a poem which celebrates an Irish peasant, who after the death of his wife brings his famished children to Canada. There, after first working as a farm laborer, he eventually becomes the owner of his own farm.

> But thin I left the crowded city sthreets—
> Th'are men galore to toil in thim an' die;
> Meself wint wid me axe to cut a home
> In the green woods beneath the clear, swate sky . . . .
>
> 'Twould make yer heart lape just to take a look
> At the green fields upon me own big farm;
> An' God be praised all men may have the same
> That owns an axe an' has a strong right arm! (*Collected Poems* 309)

While the farmer's achievement might serve as an endorsement of the National Policy, the poem is notably ambivalent. For example, Crawford's use of stage Irish dialect in the monologue marks an ironic distance from the same Catholic Irish who were the objects of her sympathy.

This tension is even more to the fore in an unpublished parody by Crawford of *Eos: A Prairie Dream* (1884), a dream-vision written by Nicholas Flood Davin on behalf of Macdonald's policy. Davin, an Irish immigrant who had been baptized in infancy as a Roman Catholic but was raised as an Anglican by Protestant foster parents, became the leading Conservative spokesperson on behalf of Catholic Irish immigrants at a time when other Tories wished to have nothing to do with them. As a journalist, Davin covered the North West Rebellion in articles that were reprinted across the country. In her lampoon, Crawford mocks both his Irish background and his new-found Canadian jingoism. When the goddess Eos appears to Davin, she first kisses his bald head, then declaims, again in stage Irish:

> Now, Davin be aisy, my bald headed daisy
> Don't thrimble an' stare in commotion
> My darlin', my elf, shure 'tis Eos herself
> Just dhrippin' from out of the ocean
> Mywournee, 'tis swate 'tis to leather the metis
> To riddle ould Riel wid bullets
> To chase Crowfoot and crees as if they wor flees[11]
> An' shoot down the rebels like pullets. (Burns, "Crawford" 66)

Eos inadvertently discloses the brutal mindlessness of the response in Ontario to Métis and Native resistance.

As a transplanted Dubliner, Crawford was sensitive to anti-Irish prejudice

among settlers around Peterborough. In "Extradited," she immediately identifies—and identifies with—Sam's Celtic lineage; so too, apparently, does Bessie until she begins to recognize his limited economic prospects plus his capacity for affection far beyond her own. Sam, writes Crawford at the outset,

> was an Irish Canadian: a rich smack of brogue adorned his tongue; a kindly graciousness of eye made a plain face almost captivating, while the proud and melancholy Celtic fire and intentness of his glance gave dignity to his expression. The lips were curved in a humorous smile, but round them were deeply graven heroic and Spartan lines. (115)

Crawford's "Greek" Celt is clearly defensive against more customary representations of the Irish as ignorant, disorderly, and wasteful At the same time, the concept of Doric simplicity that links pastoral Ireland with ancient Sparta also associates it with what has been described as Spartan-model pederasty, the paradigm of manly love between an older and a younger man associated with military service at Sparta (Dellamora, *Postmodern* 43-64).

Crawford emblematizes to excess the barn to which Sam retires to talk to Joe. She sketches it in terms that at once naturalize, orientalize, and pictorialize it—colouring its interior with the reds and purples of a Pre-Raphaelite landscape painting. In this way, she attempts to render cosmopolitan a site that in actuality is meager enough. This cosmopolitanism, moreover, is imagined in and through the terms of male-male desire:

> The barn's uncouth eaves were fine crimson on one side, from the sunset; on the other a delicate, spiritual silver, from the moon hanging above the cedar swamp: the rude doors stood open: a vigorous purple haze, shot with heavy bars of crimson light, filled the interior; a "Whip-Poor-Will" chanted from a distant tree, like a muezzin from a minaret; the tired horses whinnied at a whiff of fresh clover, and rubbed noses in sedate congratulation. Sam looked at the ground a moment, reflectively, and then shouted:
>
> "Hullo, Joe!" (116)

Like Sam "uncouth" on the outside, the place of the friends' meeting is "shot with heavy bars of crimson light," which "filled the interior." "The Whip-Poor-Will," chanting "like a muezzin from a minaret," locates the structure—and the friendship—metaphorically within what the Victorian anthropologist, Richard Burton, referred to as the Sotadic Zone, the latitudes between which the oriental vice of sodomy thrived.[12] As with the references to Sparta, Crawford takes care to pastoralize exotic cultural references. "The tired horses" whinny at the smell of fresh clover and rub

each others' noses.

Burton's thoughts about the causes of the practice of male sodomy were confused and overdetermined. His description of the practice as pervasive over much of the globe, however, tended to suggest its naturalness—a view that recommended Burton to male homosexual Aesthetes, to whom his works principally appealed (Bleys 219). Crawford too naturalizes male romance as does Sam, in awkward fashion, when he suggests to Joe that all four might flee Canada together: "When this danger blows past I'll divide with you, an' you can make a fresh start in some sthrange counthry. South Americay's a grond place, they tell me; shure, I'll take Bessie an' the boy an' go with you. I've no kin nor kith of my own, an' next to her an' the child it is yourself is in the core of my heart" (122). Both male Aesthetes and female writers in Victorian England who resisted what today would be referred to as heterosexual normalcy often chose to portray families comprised of two women and a male infant (Vanita 28). Sam's affective domestic economy, which embraces wife, son, and heart's friend, challenges conventional domesticity—as Bessy well recognizes, hence her determination "to tear" Joe "out of" her husband's "large and constant heart" (120). Sam's wish, inoperable though it be, rejects the blockage of same-sex desire in conventional marriage. The pleasure that the narrator takes both in Sam and the tanned, lean young man, with the "nervous" face and "piercing" glance (117), suggests Crawford's sympathy with male same-sex romance. This investment registers her resistance to troping nation-building as acquiring, developing, and bequeathing land and other property within marriage and the nuclear family.

For Bessie, citizenship is a manifestation of maternal instinct as understood by post-Darwinian Victorians. Crawford says of Bessie: "Many of her exceedingly respectable virtues were composed mainly of two or three minor vices: her conjugal love was a compound of vanity and jealousy: her maternal affection an agreement of rapacity and animal instinct. In giving her a child, nature had developed the she eagle in her breast" (117). As the quotation suggests, nature combines with human greed, in the first instance to secure a homestead and to hold it intact for one's offspring but more generally, as well, with the principle of material acquisition in civil society. It is to make this point that Crawford has Bessie intend to invest the reward money in mortgages. Freedom to invest is linked with Bessie's economic uncertainty as well as with the fact that, as a woman and the wife of a settler, Bessie herself enjoys few rights of citizenship.[13] Indeed, citizenship as

practiced by Bessie, looks a lot like subjection. Crawford's association of family farm ownership with Macdonald's National Policy suggests as much.

Bessie's freedom as an English Canadian is a freedom that she experiences in the form of the identification of motherhood with imperial expansion that I earlier observed in the writing of Linton. Another form of identification in English Canada was an imaginary investment in a martial national subject. In the 1880s, the National Policy depended upon such projections, and literature soon obliged. W. D. Lighthall, for example, a self-styled English-Canadian imperialist from Montreal, wrote in his novel, *The Young Seigneur* (1888), of "the Ideal Physical Man" as the foundation of "The Ideal State" (127, 126):

> We must never stop short of working until,—now, do not doubt me, sir,—every Canadian is the strongest and most beautiful man that can be thought . . . . Physical culture must be placed on a more reasonable basis, and made a requisite of all education. We need a Physical Inspector in every School. We need to regularly encourage the sports of the country. We require a military term of training, compulsory on all young men, for its effect in straightening the person and strengthening the will. We must have a nation of stern, strong men–a careless people can never rise; no deep impression, no fixed resolve, will ever originate from easy-going natures. (127-28; Wright 144)

Lighthall's ideal man combines aspects of Crawford's pair. Like Sam, he is "strong" and, when necessary, "stern" (117). Like Joe, he is a "beautiful man." But in order to be achieved, Lighthall's man must be subjected to the surveillance of "a Physical Inspector." Lighthall's citizen-soldier is modern, technological man, a product of "physical culture."[14] And he is functional—a unit in a national military force. This is the sort of lifelong training necessary for "straightening the person and strengthening the will." Finally, Lighthall's assertion of manliness leads not to the call for political independence urged by some English Canadians in the 1880s but rather towards a reasserted subordination to the motherland. The Canadian man is to achieve virility fighting under the Union Jack.

In the story, Crawford offers an alternative to this model of subjection and sacrifice, which she had observed in operation during the 1885 Rebellion. The homosocial desire that inflects Lighthall's ideal takes on a different political valence in the mode of an aesthetic and pastoral same-sex love and friendship. This friendship is seen as democratic–it is necessary if settlement is to succeed and freedom to be gained on a primary level. But it is also seen as something reserved from the many. It is the experience of the special few who are capable of recognizing it. Just as Bessie in her jealousy

of Joe internalizes the fear of sodomitic pollution as an important aspect of the ideology of national purity, so also Crawford draws love between men into the orbit of Canada. In her presentation, however, sodomy is reconceptualized as cosmopolitanism, not the cosmopolitanism of foreign metropolises such as London and New York City, though mindful of them, but, again, as an internal cosmpolitanism that is partly constitutive of Crawford's dream of a new place in the world. How is one to characterize this cosmpolitan mode of friendship? For one thing, it presents itself as a challenge to domestic normalcy. Implicitly, it demands not the abandonment of family but its re-articulation, in terms of Sam's proposal, which I described earlier, as a quadrilateral expansion of father, mother, and son—and friend. As embodied in Joe, male friendship means a love that extends to a willing loss of the self in order to protect the future of human life. This going out of the self differs from the self-sacrifice enforced on the mechanically produced infantryman. Joe's sacrifice of his life to save Sam's son indicates that, in contrast to the limitation of the national idea within the terms of continental expansion and private ownership, Joe's experience of friendship is civic in the sense of being open to the future, confident enough in Canada as a field of possibility to risk all on behalf of an infant.

Another way to refer to the cosmpolitanism that Crawford reaches for is to describe it as Aesthetic. There are suggestions in Crawford's writing that, after moving to Toronto in 1876, she found fellow spirits among a circle of male aesthetes there. Once in Toronto, Crawford took advantage of the local media's access to the transatlantic cable to keep up, on a daily basis, with events in London and throughout the British Empire (Burns, "Crawford" 75 n. 1). "Keeping up" in part meant keeping up with Aesthetic politics. In her poetry, for example, Crawford obliquely comments on the "Fleshly School" controversy in England during the 1870s, in which Robert Buchanan attacked the effeminacy and, implicitly, the sexual irregularity of vanguard artists and poets. In that particular contest, Crawford's sympathies were with the Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetes rather than Buchanan (Ower). In the following decade, keeping up meant being aware of the politics of social purity, which were quickly imported from London. Bessie's position reflects the mother-centred ideology of national purity that characterizes this movement (Devereux, Valverde). The major legislative achievement of the social purity movement was the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, including the homophobic Labouchère Amendment, under which Wilde was to be tried a decade later. Through

her circle of acquaintances, Crawford likely knew of the distress provoked by passage of the amendment among men with sexual and emotional ties to other men. Wilde himself had visited Toronto in 1882 during his North American lecture tour (Ellmann 188).

Crawford despised the philistinism of Toronto's mercantile and industrial class and felt snubbed by its male cultural elite, such as it was. A few days after her death in 1887, a new journal published a letter in which she wrote: "No contribution of mine has ever been accepted by any first-class Canadian literary journal. I have contributed to the *Mail* and *Globe*, and won some very kind words from eminent critics, but have been quietly 'sat upon' by the High Priests of Canadian periodical Literature" (Burns, "The Poet" 30). The independence that she showed in her personal life may be due in part to the fact that she herself was sexually nonconformist. Crawford's choice of a single life, her economic independence, and her at times extremely critical view of the cultural construction of women as wives and mothers signify her place as one of Canada's first New Women. These factors and others, including contemporary descriptions by other women of her manner and appearance during the Toronto phase, further suggest that she may have been a member of the new category of female sexual inverts that Linton warned her readers against.

Conventional characterizations of Crawford, even when tone deaf to ambivalence, ambiguity, and irony in her writing, might easily be traced so as to disclose a countertype. For example, in an essay by E. J. Hathaway published in *Canadian Magazine* five months after the Wilde trials, Crawford's poems of Western local color are described as showing "masculine strength" (570). Hathaway writes: "If there is one element in Miss Crawford's writings more distinctly visible than another it is that of power–virility it would be called if applied to a man. Her work throughout is characterized by bold, vigorous treatment, purity of thought, and felicity of expression" (571). Combined with Hathaway's recognition that her poetry bears "the stamp of genius" (569) and the physical description of her that he provides, which could be lifted from Havelock Ellis's description of the passive female sexual invert (222), the Crawford valued and condescended to in the years following her death bears the marks of what Andrew Elfenbein refers to as wild poetic genius (18), supplemented by the contradictory typology of *fin-de-siècle* sexology.

Crawford's sympathy with sexual dissidents is implicit in the choice of the epitaph for the "six-foot celtic [sic] cross of grey Canadian granite" (Galvin

78) that her friends chose for her when they organized a successful campaign to erect a monument on the site of her burial in Peterborough. The marker was dedicated in 1900, the same year in which another well-known Anglo-Irish writer was buried in exile in Paris. The monument gathers connotations of sacrifice, strength, and Irish heritage together with explicit allusion to ancient Greek culture—the same combination of elements that Crawford joined in "Extradited." In the lines chosen, the poet Crawford identifies herself not with a maternal eagle but with a male dyad, one of whom adopts the form of an eagle. The pair derive from a tale in classical Greek mythology, in which Jove metamorphoses into an eagle to seize Ganymede, the ephebe whom he desires. Some members of the committee are likely to have read these lines in a way that effaces the pederastic singularity of this couple. For these readers, the eagle probably functioned as an allegorical figure of the animate Canadian landscape. The Ganymede figure referred to the nascent poetic genius that cultural nationalists hoped a Canadian sense of place would inspire. Crawford herself was recognized as the first important female poet in this new tradition. In other words, the passage describes the relationship between the sense of place and the coming into existence of national voice. Readers steeped in Victorian verse also would have recognized an allusion to the lines in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* in which the protagonist, a young, aspiring poet, compares her gift with the pair from Greek mythology.[15]

Yet other readers are likely to have been aware that the poetic genius invoked in these lines is shaded with Romantic suggestions of the diseased, perverse character of poetic genius (Elfenbein 1-6), connotations that had become determining in transatlantic media coverage of the Wilde trials five years earlier. The epitaph reads as follows:

> . . . but toward the sun
> The eagle lifts his eyes, and with his wings
> Beats on a sunlight that is never marred
> By cloud, or mist, shrieks his fierce joy to air
> Ne'er stirred by stormy pulse.
> The eagle mine, I said, "Oh I would ride
> His wings like Ganymede, nor ever care
> To drop upon the stormy earth again
> But circle star-ward, narrowing my gyres
> To some great planet of eternal peace. (Galvin 79)

The lyric voice here identifies itself both with the "fierce joy" of the eagle and with the terror and desire of the ephebe. How to read such an identifi-

cation? Some readers, in sublimating fashion, have found in these lines a prayer for personal deliverance and a promise of the ability of the soul of the poet to transcend the limits of the here and now. Read within a historical frame, however, the lines, like Joe's action at the end of "Extradited," are oracular. They suggest that Crawford and some of her readers envisaged the possibility of opening Canadian literature and history to an incarnate "fierce joy" that would find in life not only a "stormy pulse" and "cloud or mist" but also a spiral towards the light.

NOTES

* This article is drawn from a recently completed book-length study of citizenship and the politics of friendship in Victorian fiction.

1 For an example of the part played in this development by the Sodom narrative in Genesis, see "A Sermon Preached before Queene Elizabeth," in Hallam 158-67.

2 For the use of the Book of Exodus in myths of westward expansion in the United States that reflect ethnic rivalries and anxieties, in particular between Americans of Anglo-Saxon background and recent Jewish immigrants, see Gardner.

3 Katie Trumpener argues that English Canadian nationalism developed as a play of conciliatory versus antagonistic tensions between persons of English, Irish, and Scottish stock in colonial Canada (242-91).

4 For example, in "The Rose of a Nation's Thanks" (June 11, 1885), published on the occasion of the return home of the Toronto volunteers after their success at the Battle of Batoche (Burns, "The Poet" 46-47, 51). On Crawford's ambivalence, see also Mazoff 103-22, 126-127.

5 Dellamora, *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* 1-12; Dowling.

6 On comradeship in Whitman, see Martin 52, 66.

7 Eliza Lynn Linton, in Hamilton, 194, 195.

8 The story could take place either before or after Confederation in 1867, hence before or after Upper Canada was separated from Lower Canada to create the province of Ontario. It is more likely, however, that the action takes place before 1867. In this way, Crawford sets her story in two different temporal contexts: that of the pre-Confederation settlement of Ontario, often by immigrants fleeing from conditions in Ireland; and that of settlement in the Canadian West during the 1880s.

9 Assuming the coloration of Joe's outlook, the narrator later uses the same word to describe Joe's "sublime effort" (125) in rescuing Sam and Bessie's son.

10 Cited in Burns, "Crawford" 70.

11 Eos stumbles here. Crowfoot, who was a chief of the Blackfoot not the Cree, remained neutral during the conflict.

12 Bleys 217. In 1886, the year in which Crawford published her story, Burton began to translate Al Nefzawi's erotic classic, *The Perfumed Garden*, including "the passages of homosexual content that had been bowdlerized in the previous French translations." The manuscript remained unfinished, however, perhaps another unwilling offering to the Labouchère Amendment. "After Burton's death in 1890, it was destroyed by his wife Isabel." (217)

13 In Canada, women did not become legal persons until 1929 (Atwood xv).
14 See Mark Seltzer's analysis of similar conceptions in the United States.
15 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* I. 915-42.

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Beverley Brahic-Bie

Crucifixion

My god but the centurion's sexy:
slouched in his saddle, the reins lying loose
on the horse's neck, thigh thrusting
the stirrup forward. The mob will disperse,

he's in command. But the women huddled
at the foot of the Cross are oblivious to his virility,
and the soldiers to the side casting lots
for a seamlessly woven cloak are on duty.

I wonder what Barabbas would have done
to unwind—a relief to be off the hook.
Did he follow the crowd up here to watch
the crucifixions? Perhaps a quick fuck

in back of a cross? Would he feel any shame—
not his fault of course—as party to this reckoning?
Reckoning? says a voice off. What reckoning?
Well, no reckoning,then. More a bad dream

to trouble his sleep—counting lamb
after lamb leaping off to the slaughterhouse
while the people still line up to gape
incredulous at the empty tomb.

Tintoretto, Scuola di San Rocco, Venice

Ildikó de Papp Carrington

Where Are You, Mother? Alice Munro's "Save the Reaper"[1]

In an interview with Geoff Hancock nearly twenty years ago, Alice Munro recognized her lifelong "obsession" with the relationship of mothers and daughters ("Interview" 104). An evolving theme in her fiction, this obsession has repeatedly been discussed by Munro critics, most recently by Robert Thacker in his introduction to *The Rest of the Story: Critical Essays on Alice Munro* (7). With a few exceptions, such as "Miles City, Montana" and a section of "The Progress of Love," all of these mother-daughter stories have been written from the point of view of a daughter. Even in "My Mother's Dream," although the mother is the central character, the first-person narrator, simultaneously a baby and an adult, is her daughter (Levene 858).

In "Save the Reaper," however, Munro introduces a new point of view, both in her choice of a protagonist and through that choice in her ironic reversal of the mother-daughter roles. For the first time, the central character is not only a mother but also a grandmother. "When I wrote 'Save the Reaper'," Munro has commented, "in my mind . . . were the changes in the lives of people like me, who are now in their sixties," with their "choices mostly made and lived with by now . . ." (Contributor's Notes 388). Eve, an unmarried grandmother and an out-of-work actress, remembers herself at many stages of her past: as her mother's child sixty years ago; as a young woman free of her mother, and also free of conventional sexual morality; and as the mother of Sophie in various periods of her daughter's life. Eve also imagines how Daisy, her three-year-old granddaughter, will remember

her when Eve is dead. Although the main action of the story occurs in one day, Munro's characteristic manipulation of narrative time through these flashbacks and flashforwards develops the constantly changing roles of four generations of mothers and daughters. But the major catalyst of Eve's change in the story is another daughter-figure, a nameless young prostitute, who maneuvers Eve into rescuing her from a sinister house where she has been sexually abused by several partying men. A somewhat similar daughter-figure appears in "Vandals," an earlier story, in which the motherless Liza, a sexually abused child, hopes in vain to be rescued by Bea, an older woman who lives with Liza's abuser in another dark and sinister house. Unlike Bea, too absorbed in her own relationship with her lover to recognize Liza's situation, let alone to be the mother whom Liza so desperately wants, Eve not only helps the prostitute to escape but also recognizes her almost as her alter ego and perhaps her potential murderer.

Eve's name and the reaper in the title combine both the Biblical connotations of Eve as the sinful mother of all mankind and the far more ancient mythological connotations of Demeter the Reaper as the "Womb-Mother-of-All" (Leeming and Page 68). W. R. Martin and Warren U. Ober call attention to Eve's name and identify the title of the story as an allusion to "Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*" (135). Munro repeatedly alludes to the poem. The initial reference occurs when Eve misquotes a fragment of the poem as she identifies a field of barley for her grandchildren (*Love* 177-78). However, the description of the golden barley field, combined with ubiquitous references to cornfields and corn, acquires mythological resonance when Munro moves us momentarily outside her story's textual boundaries to emphasize the significance of Sophie's education: she studies Greek myths as a child and later majors in archaeology (154, 150). From this metafictional context, the image of the reaper emerges as that of Demeter, the goddess who "represent[s] all women in all phases of life" (Walker 608).

The similarities between "Vandals" and "Save the Reaper" show that, as so often before, Munro is reworking earlier materials, "reconnecting, redefining" (Thacker 6).[2] What complicates the situation here is that there are two significantly different versions of "Save the Reaper." Munro often revises her stories after their initial *New Yorker* publication, sometimes retaining and sometimes rejecting the magazine's editorial revisions (Barber). The situation, here, however, seems somewhat atypical. First published in the *New Yorker* in June 1998, "Save the Reaper" was republished in the same form in *The Best American Short Stories 1999*. When it was pub-

lished in a longer and differently structured form in *The Love of a Good Woman*, Munro added an author's note: "Stories included in the collection that were previously published in *The New Yorker* appeared there in a very different form" (n. pag.).[3] In addition to "Save the Reaper," these stories are "The Love of a Good Woman," "The Children Stay," "Before the Change," and "Cortes Island." Discussing the effects of the *New Yorker*'s editorial policies on Munro's writing, Carol L. Beran cites this note, but does not comment on the differences (211). Unlike the typical, fairly minor changes in "The Love of a Good Woman" and "The Children Stay," the differences in "Save the Reaper" are major.

In the Alice Munro Papers at the University of Calgary Library, the printer's copy for "Save the Reaper" in *The Love of a Good Woman* is a 32-page photocopied typescript that "has to the right of the title '—Munro February 28/98' in Munro's handwriting" and "varies from the published *New Yorker* text" (Steele). The June 1998 *New Yorker* version, therefore, seems to be a shortened version of the original story. Virginia Barber, Munro's literary agent, confirms this change: "The version of each of Alice Munro's stories which is 'finally approved' by the Author appears in hardcover book form. She does work with her editor at the *New Yorker*, and in the case of 'Save the Reaper,' the story was shortened with the author's approval." Omitting the metafictional references to Sophie's study of Greek myths and archaeology, this shortened version contains not only fewer but also less completely dramatized flashbacks. Its climax is less thematically explicit, and the difficult relationship between Eve and Sophie seems oversimplified by condensation and generalization. The key events in Sophie's life, summarized without dramatization, leave her "with a certain aversion to the memories of the life she's shared with Eve," an aversion that seems to spring from "some mysterious disagreement or irreparable change of heart" (121, 122). Because the causes of this transformation remain largely unexplained in the *New Yorker*'s edited version, this analysis is limited to Munro's original story in its "finally approved" version in *The Love of a Good Woman*. Here the mother-daughter relationship is fully developed to incorporate an ironic intertextualization of the archetypal Demeter-Persephone myth, already suggested in "Vandals," in which the motherless daughter seeks a surrogate mother.

In "Save the Reaper," there is a much more deeply resonant and intricately intertextual exploration of the mother-daughter theme. The relationships between Eve and Sophie and between Eve and the prostitute are

developed through interlocking associative patterns that include not only mythological parallels but also implicit and explicit references to films; to the history of art and Christianity; and, in addition to *The Lady of Shalott*, to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." All of these patterns combine to structure a narrative in which Munro uses ironic intertextuality in much the same way that she does in "The Children Stay," to continue, to subvert, and to expand the underlying myth (Hutcheon 96; Carrington, "Recasting" 192). The mother seeking her lost daughter finds not only a surrogate daughter seeking rescue but also herself. Where are you, mother? is therefore a question asked not only by the daughters in both stories but also by Eve herself in "Save the Reaper."

In the classical myth, Demeter, who originated in the ancient Minoan Earth Goddess, "appears in her three traditional roles as Maiden (or *kore* in Greek), Mother, and wise Crone." Worshipped "at her cult site, Eleusis," she is "the Grain Goddess of the fertility mysteries celebrated and practiced at [the shrine]. Her daughter [is] the menarcheal Grain or Corn Maiden seed of life" (Leeming and Page 66-67). Demeter loses her virgin daughter, Kore, when Hades, the Lord of the Underworld, abducts her from a flowery meadow and rapes her. Bursting out of the suddenly opened ground with "the thunder of hooves" and "the screech of chariot wheels shatter[ing] the air," he carries her off to his dark domain (69). In search of her lost daughter, the grieving Demeter, turned into a "wisdom-bearing Crone," wanders the earth (67). Initially, Kore refuses to eat anything in the underworld, but finally eats some pomegranate seeds. When Demeter eventually finds and rescues her, Kore's return to her mother can be only temporary. Because Kore has eaten "the food of the dead," she must annually return to Hades for the three months of winter. In the underworld she bears the new name Persephone, "she who brings destruction" (Graves I, 91, 93).

The destruction in "Vandals" is Liza's revenge for never being rescued. Liza and her brother, who live in their motherless, messy house "in the middle of a cornfield," are sexually abused by Ladner, a taxidermist who lives across the road (*Open* 290). In her excellent analysis of this story, Nathalie Foy describes his adroit "shape-shifting," his ability to change from benevolently lecturing the children about plants and animals to brutally raping them (157). But "shape-shifting" is also characteristic of the devil.[4] Both Ladner's wartime experiences and his sexual abuse increase his fiendishness. Burned by "an exploding shell" in World War II, he has a shiny metallic "splotch on the side of his face" (*Open* 267, 268). When he rapes Liza, she

feels "a sense of danger deep inside him, . . . as if he would exhaust himself in one jab of light, and nothing would be left of him but black smoke and burnt smells and frazzled wires. Instead, he collapse[s] heavily, like the pelt of an animal flung loose from its flesh and bones" (292). By identifying his postorgasmic slump with the animals he kills and stuffs, Liza classifies him as one of the "dead things" in hell (286).

Foy sees their abusive relationship as occurring in a "dark fairy-tale world" from which Bea, the " fairy godmother," could rescue the child (155, 156). But this world and the roles of its inhabitants can also be defined in mythical terms. When Liza crosses from her house in the cornfield to Ladner's house, surrounded not only by a marsh with "tropical threats and complications" but also by densely growing trees with "shaded and secret . . . places," she becomes Kore, abducted by Hades from the natural world of her mother and raped in the underworld (*Open* 291). When Bea Doud, a potential surrogate mother and therefore also a potential Demeter, moves into Ladner's house and bed, Liza immediately begins to love her, tries to protect her, gives her a pathetic little present, and hopes that she will "rescue" her and her brother from Ladner (293). Since Liza is thus Kore searching for Demeter in Hades, the roles of mother and daughter are reversed. But as Foy has shown, because Bea is completely blinded by her own relationship with Ladner and because Liza is incapable of communicating her terrible secret to Bea, this rescue never occurs (151, 152, 155). To revenge herself on both Ladner and Bea, the adult Liza, a recently married woman, returns to Ladner's house on the night before his death during surgery and, invading his house as he invaded her body, reduces everything to "rubble" and "broken glass" (*Open* 282).

The introduction of "Vandals" indicates that this climactic orgy of destruction can also be read in mythical terms. In the nonchronologically narrated story, the introduction is actually an epilogue, a dream that Bea has months after Liza has vandalized the house and tricked her into believing someone else to be responsible. During a winter storm, Liza, a born-again Christian, is symbolically reborn also as Persephone: she becomes the destroyer of Ladner's house, "cold as the grave" (278). This sinister simile is linked to Bea's dream, which she describes in an unsent letter addressed to Liza. In the dream Bea goes to a place where she is given a bag full of a "little girl's bones," exhumed from a grave according to what Bea dimly recognizes as a "pagan or Christian" custom associated with Greece (263). When someone asks her, "Did you get the little girl?" she replies, "What little girl?"

(263). This dream, which she fails to understand, not only suggests a Greek background but also foreshadows what Liza wants Bea to do, rescue the little girl from the underworld of Ladner's house. Only at the end of the story when Liza remembers Bea's blind incomprehension, "What Bea has been sent to do, she doesn't see," do *we* see the full dramatic irony of her unsent letter and its nightmare (293).

In "Save the Reaper" two houses reappear, a rented vacation house "in the middle of a cornfield" (*Love* 149), with the "name Ford on the mailbox" (177), and a sinister house to which Eve is led by following the Ford pickup truck of one of the partying men. By associating the same name with both houses, Munro subtly suggests their similarity. In the flashbacks to the immediate past that establish the genesis of the main action, an explicit echo of the Demeter-Persephone myth suggests the symbolic equation of both houses with Hades. After a five-year absence from home, Sophie has returned from California with her two children by different fathers. She shares a vacation house with her mother, who hopes that this visit will mark the end of her daughter's alienation from her. Although Sophie has originally planned to spend three weeks in the house in the cornfield, and even suggests the possibility of future summer vacations with her mother, Eve suspects her of suddenly faking a phonecall from Ian, her husband, to cut the visit short. Sophie announces that he is flying in to take his family on a trip. Repeatedly mentioned (152, 158), the number three becomes symbolic when it is combined with the difficulties both children have with seeds: Philip hates caraway seeds, and Daisy has "to be watched" with cherry stones (157). Neither child will make Persephone's mistake of eating seeds and becoming committed to repeated returns to Hades. Their presence in the rented house is only temporary.

Intensely disappointed by the double change of plan, not only by this summer's truncated visit but also by the loss of joyfully anticipated future visits, Eve takes the two children for a drive while Sophie picks Ian up at the airport. This drive, the opening scene of the story, begins Munro's narration of the story's main action. In the car, the seven-year-old Philip initiates a game: he pretends that there might be "aliens" travelling to Canada from space and "translated" into people whom they have "abduct[ed]" by sucking "them out of one car into another car" (*Love* 146, 148, 147). His excited fantasy of vehicular abduction echoes Kore's abduction in the chariot of Hades. But a more modern parallel is *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1956 science-fiction cult classic in which "a community has been invaded by

aliens" who use cars and trucks to "take over . . . the bodies" of its population (Nash and Ross IV, 1400). In his game, Philip urges Eve to follow the Ford truck supposedly driven by an alien. Doing so, she arrives at the house where she sees the young prostitute. But before narrating that crucial scene, Munro interjects Eve's memories of various key periods in her past.

These memories define the opening scene's thematic function by introducing the multiple meanings of the word "alien" and its derivatives, "alienate" and "alienation." [5] These meanings not only structure the psychological stages of Eve's change but also define the aesthetic process of alienation by which Munro creates these stages. She defines this characteristic process of her fiction when she explains, "I want . . . 'what happens' to be delivered with . . . strangeness . . ." ("Conversation" 1). To deliver this "strangeness," she recontextualizes the familiar in such an unfamiliar way that her dislocated protagonist perceives it as something startlingly new.

To begin with, the aliens in Philip's game are imaginary extraterrestrials. In Eve's memories, however, the aliens are literally foreigners. What she recalls is full of travelling foreigners and, instead of abduction, repeated seduction. The three fathers in the story are all aliens in Canada: Sophie's father was an Indian doctor on a travelling fellowship; Philip's father was an Irishman; and Ian, Daisy's father, is an Englishman who travels from Canada to California. Although seriously involved with another man, Eve spent three "guiltless, irresistible" days with the doctor in a "swaying and rocking" roomette on a transcontinental train, where "the lovers' motions were never just what they contrived themselves" because they were "underscored by" the constant movement of the train (*Love* 155). A Christian, the doctor told her about the first-century "Christians in southern India," but the mutual seduction of the lovers on the speeding train suggests a mythological image, a modern parallel to Hades' screeching chariot (155). Philip's father was also a transcontinental traveller, "an Irish boy . . . travelling around North America trying to decide what to do now that he had decided not to be a priest" (151). Sophie tells her mother that "she seduced him" (150). For a time, even the infant Philip seemed to be an alien because he resembled not only his father but also Samuel Beckett, that "alienated Irishman" (Paglia 562).

The eventual consequence of these relationships with seducing and seduced aliens expands the meaning of "alien" to include "alienation," the estrangement of people who were once close to each other or at least believed that they were. Although Eve and Sophie share the bond of having

borne a child out of wedlock, now, after not seeing her daughter for five years, Eve painfully discovers Sophie's continued alienation from her. Eve tells Sophie about a friend who went on a three-month retreat of enforced silence during which the participants imagined themselves to be "communicating in a special way" with each other, only to experience "a big letdown" when they were allowed to speak and discovered that no such communication had ever occurred (159). Recalling Sophie's conception on the train and, a generation later, Sophie's pregnancy with Philip, during which she wryly jokes with Eve about "keeping up the family tradition of fly-by fathers" (156), Eve sadly notes that Sophie no longer makes such jokes. Married to Ian, who "doesn't believe in" living together, Sophie has become a very different kind of woman (151).

As Eve and Sophie watch *The Bridges of Madison County* in the vacation house, they react the same way to the love story of another alien, originally an Italian war bride, who gives up her lover for her husband. Watching "Meryl Streep, sitting in [her] husband's truck, . . . choking with longing, as her lover [drives] away," both women first cry, then laugh together (159). But, although both of them have had such an experience with a lover, their shared reaction does not reaffirm their common past. The scene in the truck emphasizes the reason that Streep lets her lover drive away. By staying in the truck, she gives up her life for her family. Immediately after Eve recalls this movie scene, Philip tells her that Ian calls Sophie "Big Mama" (149). This juxtaposition emphasizes Streep's character as the epitome of the self-sacrificing wife and mother. Because Sophie has now assumed this role, the two women's shared reaction to the movie is not the special communication that Eve longs for.

Sophie is the kind of person whom Munro has described in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel: anxious to forget having gone "from . . . being one sort of person to being an entirely different kind of person," Sophie has "all these rooms in [her] head that [she has] shut off . . ." ("Interview" 293). To make sure that these internal rooms remain shut off when Eve mentions a taboo subject, Sophie signals her mother with a silent smile that certain subjects "need not be gone into" (*Love* 159). These subjects are "a positive minefield": Sophie's Indian father and her fatherless childhood; her education in an "alternative school," which Eve "thought . . . was better for a child whose mother was an actress and whose father was not in evidence," but which Sophie criticizes "almost viciously"; and Sophie's single motherhood (154).

Now a securely married, conventional wife and mother, Sophie has

"grown stately, womanly, graceful, and reserved." Resembling her Indian father, with "creamed-coffee skin . . . darkened in the California sun" and eyes shadowed by "lilac crescents of . . . fatigue," she possesses a "classic beauty achieved . . . by self-forgetfulness and duty"(156). The connotations of "classic" underline the already mentioned references to Sophie's knowledge of Greek myths and archaeology, which she studies for two years while Eve assumes the care of baby Philip. These metafictional comments make it clear that when the married Sophie wants to reject her earlier lifestyle and to distance herself from her unmarried mother, she, like Liza in "Vandals," is reborn as Persephone: "[O]nce Persephone, the Maiden, eats of the fruit of the dark world—the seed-filled symbol of sexual awakening and procreation—she must live within that world for half her life, returning to her mother as wife rather than virgin" (Leeming and Page 67).

Although Sophie seduces the Irishman and bears his son, she is transformed into a wife only when Ian marries her. "Ian loves corn," she tells Eve, a comment that obviously has a double meaning (*Love* 178). This transformation is the reason that "those months after Philip's birth that Eve thought of as some of the happiest, the hardest, the most purposeful and harmonious in her life" do not mean the same thing to Sophie (154). Eve's lament illustrates what Munro has defined as one of the functions of memory in her fiction: "Memory is the way we keep telling ourselves our stories . . . . We can hardly manage our lives without a powerful ongoing narrative." The fiction writer "pok[es] at" the "big bulging awful mysterious entity called THE TRUTH" under these narratives. She examines "the way people's different memories deal with the same (shared) experience" ("Conversation" 3).

Sophie's rejection of Eve's memories not only intensifies the painful impact and the symbolic significance of Eve's memories of her own mother but also foreshadows the "awful . . . TRUTH" that Eve is finally forced to confront about her life. During her drive with her grandchildren, Eve recalls that as a young woman "in her first years free of home," she played a game with her friends: each of them answered the question of what she hated most about her mother (*Love* 162). Detesting her mother's "mistakenly possessive" attitude, her sheer flowery dresses, and the "stout and shabby" shoes necessitated by her corns, Eve always replied, "Her corns" (162). Now that she understands that *she* has metamorphosed into the possessive, hated, and rejected mother, recalling this old, familiar memory is "like touching a bad tooth" (162). The pun on "corn" delivers an unexpected jolt of pain.

Brooding about this memory as she follows the Ford truck, Eve drives into a farmhouse lane where she suddenly sees some gateposts "decorated with whitewashed pebbles and . . . colored glass" that remind her of a "whitewashed" mosaic mural she saw sixty years ago with her mother (162, 163). This wall, which Eve later describes as decorated with "marvellous pictures made of colored glass, . . . a little like Chagall," is no longer there (178). But she vividly remembers brightly coloured "churches," "castles," "Christmas trees," "animals," and flowers, with "the shape of her mother loom[ing] in front of the wall" as she is "talking to an old farmer" (163).[6] Herb, the truck driver, informs Eve that the farmhouse now belongs to Harold and then, as if to insist on the legality of Harold's ownership, tells her twice that Harold had to put Mary, the previous owner, "in the Home" (166, 167). This explanation has a double function. First, it implies another meaning of "alienate," the legal meaning of changing the ownership of property. Second, the name of Mary is also meaningful. The remembered image of Eve's mother, associated with flowers, corn, farming, and the destroyed wall, and these repeated references to Mary, another mother, suggest a symbolic juxtaposition of two mother figures, Demeter and the Virgin Mary.

The significance of this juxtaposition is twofold. First, because the Greeks decorated the floors and walls of their buildings with mosaics (Baal-Teshuva 232), the mosaic mural that Eve remembers may be associated with Demeter's shrine at Eleusis. The participants in the Eleusinian mysteries "contemplated and entered into the trials of Demeter in her sorrowful quest for the lost Persephone . . ." (Angus 119). By symbolically descending with her into Hades, they ascended to a "better life" of "moral and ritual purity" (Ferguson 146). But this shrine was destroyed in 395 C.E. because the early spread of Christianity, to which Eve's lover referred, "began a system of violent persecution and vandalism of shrines" (Campbell 190). "[M]uch opposed to the Eleusinian rites because of their overt sexuality" (Walker 220), early Christians objected to "the solemn acts of intercourse" performed in darkness by "the hierophant and the priestess" (Lawson 577).

When Herb "somehow" leads Eve and her grandchildren into the house, almost as if he really were an alien abducting them, what she sees suggests the second layer of significance (*Love* 167). The names of Harold and Herb echo the names of Hades. And Herb's insistence on Mary's dispossession suggests that the house that Eve enters is perhaps similar to Eleusis as imagined by its early Christian critics. The Virgin Mary is certainly not here, but

neither is Demeter. The motherless house is no longer a shrine or even a home, but a kind of sweltering, stinking hell of "[m]assive disorder," with layers of broken old furniture "piled . . . up to the ceiling in some places, blocking nearly all the light from outside" (167). "The temperature . . . [is] about ninety degrees" (168). "[B]are mattresses and rumpled blankets" and "a smell of semen," combined with the stench of feces, sweat, and garbage, suggest a "mighty bingeing" or the sexual orgy that the Christians associated with Eleusis (167, 170). The drunken participants in this orgy seem to be all male: Harold, a "fat" man who is "entirely naked" (169); a bald man who is "as old as Eve"; "a young man with sharp narrow shoulders and a delicate neck" whom she sees only from the back; and a man who is "so heavily tattooed that he seem[s] to have purple or bluish skin"(168).

The most important aspect of the house, however, is what Eve never sees. When she initially asks Herb about the mosaic pictures, he replies, "See, if they was in the front part the house I never would've saw them because Harold, he's got the front part of the house shut off" (166). Inside the house, after he has repeated this explanation to Harold, "I told her maybe there was pictures in the front but she couldn't go there you got that shut up," Harold snaps, "You shut up" (169). Harold's demand for silence about the closed rooms echoes Eve's painful recognition that Sophie demands her silence about subjects "that need not be gone into" (159). Just as the tattooed man looks at Eve "as if she was some kind of hallucination that he [has] decided to ignore," she flees the house feeling that its "hostile" inhabitants are utterly alien to her (168, 169). But in addition to the similarity between these demands for silence, there is another disquieting parallel: the strange similarity between the tattooed man's purple skin and Sophie's lilac-shadowed complexion. And soon Eve is forced to recognize that she has been mistaken in several ways.

During her conversation with the men in the house, she repeatedly apologizes for her mistake about the mosaic mural and explains, "I was actually looking for another place" (165). But driving out of the garbage-strewn farmhouse lane, she glimpses "some fragment of a wall, to which bits of whitewash still [cling]" and thinks that she sees "pieces of glass embedded there, glinting" (171). By confirming the accuracy of her childhood memory, this broken glass emphasizes her first mistake: the alien place she has just left is the right place, after all. But the once-familiar past has been reduced to garbage and converted into hell. Its hellishness is immediately confirmed by the revelation of Eve's second mistake. The young man she has seen in

the house suddenly emerges from the roadside weeds and jumps into the car. Taking a closer look, Eve realizes that her new passenger is actually a girl. When the girl tells Eve that she has escaped from the drunken men in the house and asks for a ride, she becomes the abducted Persephone, seeking a Demeter to rescue her from Hades. She tells Eve that she has run away without collecting her pay, but protests: "I didn't know nothing about what I was getting into. I didn't even know how I got there, it was night" (172). Her androgynous appearance in Harold's vomit-stained undershirt emphasizes her role. Just as Persephone does not eat in Hades, the girl looks as if her "way of living and the style of the times" have made her lose her natural chunkiness (173). Complaining of Harold's mistreatment, she adds that he also mistreats Herb, who has "a screw loose" (173). Persephone has become an abused prostitute.

But suddenly her behavior changes: momentarily she seems to be both a potential seducer and abductor. Trying "to put herself and Eve on a new level of intimacy," she begins to talk in "a blurred tone of seductiveness" and to slide "her hand along Eve's bare thigh, just . . . a little beyond the hem of her shorts" (173). Eve's powerful physical and psychological reaction to this brief attempt at seduction is the initial step in her recognition of her third mistake: the prostitute is not utterly different from her, not an alien. Observing the details of the girl's "soiled and crumpled state," her stinking clothes, and her "glazed" eyes in her "blotched" face, Eve has been almost clinically detached (173). Now she sees herself as possibly dirty, too.

Even though Eve is not sexually attracted to her own gender and the girl's pass is only "halfhearted," it is "enough to set some old wires twitching" (174). In "the changes in the lives of people" of Eve's age, Munro includes their experience of "buffeting, surprising needs" (Contributor's Notes 388). Signalling such a need, Eve's reaction fills her "with misgiving" because it is alienating in the sense of suddenly forcing her to reconsider her familiar, lived-with choices in a totally unfamiliar way (*Love* 174).[7] Her mental dislocation has been subtly foreshadowed by the prostitute's reference to Herb's craziness, which introduces another meaning of "alienation," mental derangement. Eve's mental rearrangement is not as extreme; but because the prostitute has obviously just had multiple partners, Eve's retrospection now flings "a shadow backwards from this moment over all the rowdy and impulsive as well as all the hopeful and serious, the more or less unrepented-of, couplings of her life. Not a real flare-up of shame, a sense of sin—just a dirty shadow. What a joke on her, if she started to hanker now

after a purer past and a cleaner slate" (174). Trying to reject this longing for purity, Eve changes what she hankers for: "But it could be just that still, and always, she hankered after love" (174).

Eve's partial identification with the prostitute, however, soon gives way to her fear that the girl might abduct her and her grandchildren in her own car, even murder them. She imagines the girl taking "them along while she needed them, a knife against Eve's side or a child's throat" (175). But when the girl asks to be let out on the main highway to hitch another ride, Eve begins to feel ashamed of her fears. "It was probably true that the girl had run away without collecting any money, that she had nothing. What was it like to be drunk, wasted, with no money, at the side of the road?" (176).

This unspoken question is the second step in Eve's change of attitude. Her lonely hankering after love turns into something very similar to maternal love for the surrogate daughter whom she is rescuing. She cautions the girl to "[w]atch out for the traffic," gives her twenty dollars, and, most significantly, invites her to the vacation house if she does not get a ride. The wording of this dangerous invitation foreshadows the climax and conclusion of the story. "If you're stranded," Eve says, "I'll tell you where my house is" (177). The first indication of the importance of the word "stranded" is in Philip's comment after the girl has left. When Eve refuses to stop for ice cream because they have "enough . . . at home," Philip corrects his grandmother by echoing Herb's words about Harold's house and the Home. "You shouldn't say 'home,'" he insists with childish pedantry. "It's just where we're staying. You should say 'the house'" (177). Eve is literally stranded by her family's decision to cut their vacation short. "[S]ick of the house" and heartsick at the prospect of spending eighteen lonely days in it "by herself" (159), she cannot return to her city apartment because she has dispossessed herself by lending it to an unemployed male friend .

It is at this point that Eve drives past a barley field and tells Philip, "That's called barley, that gold stuff with the tails on it," and begins to recite from *The Lady of Shalott*: "'But the reapers, reaping early, in among the bearded barley–'" (177). She then changes it to "'Only reapers,'" the phrase that Tennyson wrote (28), but finally revises it to "'Save the reapers'" and concludes, "'Save' was what sounded best" (*Love* 178). Her incorrect revision changes the preposition "save" into the imperative form of the verb. Although Eve has just fulfilled Demeter's role by rescuing the prostitute, she recognizes that paradoxically she needs rescuing, too. Like the Lady of Shalott, heard only by the reapers, and "half sick of shadows" in her isolated

tower room (71), Eve is also isolated and sickened by the soiling shadows of her powerful reaction to the prostitute. Although Martin and Ober do not identify Demeter as the reaper, they suggest that "Munro's title" is "perhaps" Eve's "prayer for a release from the exigent present" because her past "life . . . now seems sordid and spoiled" (135).

When Eve returns to the house, Demeter and the Eleusinian mysteries permeate the contrast between the family dinner scene and the scene in the house that she has just left. There the men and the prostitute were bingeing on whiskey and beer, misusing Demeter's gifts of grain. Here Ian bows courteously as he presents Eve with a drink that she accepts by saying, "This is most heavenly" (*Love* 178). His elaborate formality and Eve's hyperbolic "heavenly" suggest the symbolic significance of this simple family meal, for which Sophie and Eve husk two dozen ears of corn. The Eleusinian mysteries involved both the ingestion and the ceremonial display of food plants. The participants shared "some kind of communion-meal of cereal and barley-wine" (Ferguson 146). At the climax of the mysteries, either "a grain of wheat" or "a golden ear of corn" was elevated (Campbell 193; Ferguson 146). Joseph Campbell emphasizes that these rituals defined ingestion as the consumption of a spiritually as well as physically nourishing "divine substance" and that even today "meditation" on this process can transform a meal into such a ritual if the participants are conscious of what they are doing (194, 195).

What Eve is conscious of in this setting is her compulsion to protect not only Sophie and Ian but also herself. So, while husking the corn, she tells them a highly censored version of her adventure, from which she carefully omits Harold's nakedness, "the fragment of a wall" she has actually seen, and "every single thing about the girl" and about what "she herself [is] afraid of" (*Love* 179). Ironically, it is now Eve who keeps silent about taboo subjects, for her recognition of the similarity between the prostitute and herself has reached its painful climax. Under the hitherto familiar narrative of her life, Eve sees the "awful . . . TRUTH" ("Conversation" 3):

> There are people who carry decency and optimism around with them, who seem to cleanse every atmosphere they settle in, and you can't tell such people things, it is too disruptive. Ian struck Eve as being one of those people, in spite of his present graciousness, and Sophie as being someone who thanked her lucky stars that she had found him. It used to be older people who claimed this protection from you, but now it seemed more and more to be younger people, and someone like Eve had to try not to reveal how she was stranded in between. Her whole life

> liable to be seen as some sort of unseemly thrashing around, a radical mistake. (*Love* 179)

Originally descriptive of the prostitute, the word "stranded" is now applied to Eve, dispossessed of her past and displaced in the present. By momentarily almost equating the two women, the sexual connotations of "unseemly thrashing around" totally transform the image of Eve and the Indian doctor rocking together in the roomette (179). Telling her life story, Eve always attributed "the existence of Sophie and the greatest change" in her own life to "the convenience and privacy of the roomette" (155). Until this climactic moment of retrospection, that conveniently closed roomette has been like the closed rooms in Harold's horrible house, the metaphorical closed rooms in Sophie's mind, and the tower room of the Lady of Shalott. Now, however, the roomette is luridly open, and its occupants are exposed.

Because Ian is an urban geographer, his response to Eve's edited narrative is to ask her "about the breakup of older patterns of village and rural life" (180).[8] This question is charged with dramatic irony because he is unaware of the breakup of Eve's inner patterns of life. Philip, on the other hand, seems to be aware of what his grandmother's story withholds, for he looks at her with "conspiratorial blankness" (180).

Because his uncannily silent complicity recalls his initiation of the aliens game, it links the desolate conclusion of the story with its opening scene. Imagining that the girl might find some "homeless, heartless wastrel of her own age," Eve fears that, when she is alone the following night, the two young people might conspire to invade the house: she imagines the girl saying, "I know where there's a place we can stay, if we can get rid of the old lady" (180). "The old lady," a contemptuous term for "mother," is charged with tough self-mockery: Eve now rejects the quasi-maternal love that prompted her invitation. Her image of herself in the "hollowed-out house, its board walls like a paper shell around her," emphasizes her age and her own homelessness. In the middle of the "deep tall corn" making "its live noise after dark," she will be a literally exposed and vulnerable old woman (180). This conclusion seems to echo Keats's description of "the sad heart of Ruth" in "Ode to a Nightingale" "when, sick for home, / She stood in tears amid the alien corn" (66-67). In this lonely echo, three of the story's key words are combined to integrate the associative structure of the plot, to define the layers of Eve's experience, and perhaps even to foreshadow her murder. If the prostitute, like the vandalizing Liza, does return as Persephone the destroyer, "save the reaper" may be Eve's prayer for deliverance from death.

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NOTES

1 "Save the Reaper," *The Love of a Good Woman*, by Alice Munro (1998). Used by permission, McClelland & Stewart, Ltd. *The Canadian Publishers*. Copyright (c) 1998 by Alice Munro. Reprinted by permission of the William Morris Agency, Inc. on behalf of the author.
The question in my title reverses Demeter's thrice-repeated question, "Where?," in Tennyson's poem "Demeter and Persephone" (67-72, 83).

2 See Carrington, *Controlling* 4-11, 71-98.

3 Martin and Ober cite only the *New Yorker* version (145).

4 See Carrington, "Double-Talking" 72.

5 See the multiple meanings of the title of "Carried Away" in Carrington, "What's."

6 The word "loom" echoes Munro's metafictional epilogue in one of her key mother stories, "The Ottawa Valley," in which she describes her inability "to *get rid* of" her mother because she "looms too close, just as she always did" (*Something* 246). For the origin of the mosaic wall and its connection with Munro's mother, see Sheila Munro 174-75.

7 A very similar situation occurs in "Eskimo." See Carrington, *Controlling* 156-62.

8 In her comment on this story, Munro has explained that the two kinds of changes, changes in the last twenty-five years in the lifestyle of country people who "aren't country people anymore" and "changes in the lives of people . . . who are now in their sixties," are combined in her story (Contributor's Notes 388).

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Donald Lorimer

Five Mezzotints

She was thinking
Of calling it
The Juggler And The Crowd
Not because she spent
Half her life
Crouched in tears and nowhere
Near a circus
But because it was all she had,
All she would ever have.

He was thinking
Of calling it
Gold Lilacs At Montclair
Not because that's where
He knew her
And shared something timeless
Beneath a gate
But because it was all he had,
All he would ever have.

She was thinking
Of calling it
Bubblebath In Chaos
Not because of sores
On her hands
Or scratched-in strategies
Left on flat plates
But because it was all she had,
All she would ever have.

He was thinking
Of calling it
Exit: Martyrdom

Not because he felt
God was cruel
And wanted neither blood
Nor finest inks
But because it was all he had,
All he would ever have.

She was thinking
Of calling it
Daughters
Not because of things
Her dad said
And did inside her room
Before the prom
But because it was all she had,
All she would ever have.

Margaret Morriss

"No Short Cuts": The Evolution of *The Double Hook*

In her copy of *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, Sheila Watson noted the following passage:

> You see I too have a passion for technique. I have a passion for making the thing into a whole . . . . Out of technique is born real style, I believe. There are no short cuts. (92)

Certainly the evolution of her novel *The Double Hook* illustrates that few short cuts were available to Watson and that technique was crucial in articulating her vision of "the whole." Based on her two years of teaching in the Cariboo District of British Columbia (1934-1936), the novel, written in the early 1950s, was finally published in 1959, after two major revisions. These revisions create and recreate the story and illustrate an increasing sophistication of structure and style. As a result, a comparatively naturalistic fiction gradually turns into prose sculpted by poetic technique and rhythm, a uniquely fashioned expression of Watson's vision of the Cariboo District.

Watson's reworking of her materials demonstrates her efforts to realize in narrative what she had envisioned, her gradual discovery of how to embody her experience and her response to that experience. Watson's *Deep Hollow Creek* (written in the 1930s, before *The Double Hook*, but published only in 1992) also records her response to the austere landscape and its inhabitants. *Deep Hollow Creek* is presented from the perspective of Stella, a newcomer to the isolated community, who provides an identification point for the reader, a transition from the everyday to the fictional world. Here the historical, geographical and social context of the characters and their locale provides background but, in *The Double Hook*, the identification tags of

nationality and history are discarded, along with the familiar narrative mode; the narrator becomes an impersonal, disembodied, almost oracular voice. These transformations foreground the imaginative and mythical qualities of the landscape and its people; the readers, bereft of a personal narrative voice, experience all the uncertainty of entering a new terrain. By eliminating links between everyday reality and the fictional world, Watson forces the reader to participate in the symbolic quest of its characters from isolation to community (see Morriss). In one sense, *Deep Hollow Creek* describes Watson's actual experience of the Cariboo country, while *The Double Hook* enacts her apprehension of its significance. The erasure of the self allows concentration on the imaginative implications of what the self has observed.

Watson's desire to articulate her response to the Cariboo Country in a narrative as arresting as her experience was clear from the start. To achieve this effect, Watson knew that her work must transcend the familiar techniques of omniscient narration and character description: "When I began the work which became *The Double Hook* I knew I had to create a total fiction out of an experience which was concrete—which defied the clichés imposed on it. I wanted to get rid of the reportage, the condescension of omniscience" ("Interview" 352-53). In an unpublished "Commentary" on her novel, Watson describes the District as "devious" and "hostile," filled with "the isolation of which spatial separation is a symbol, the isolation of mind from mind, the intolerable burden of I-ness. In this country the symbol and the thing symbolized seemed nakedly exposed. . . ." Watson notes the contrariety of the country: "It is essentially a country of opposites—heat and cold; flat rolling plateau and sheared-off hills; streams, rivers, potholes and alkali waste; large ranches and small holdings; native Indians and expatriated Europeans and great stretches where no one lives at all." In her revisions, Watson forges unity out of these opposites, honing the local and the particular to give shape to the universal human paradox of isolation and interdependence. Her purpose is to demonstrate

> . . . the isolation of the individual who has from time to time in the course of history found images which establish for him a sense of union with others and consequently a pattern of behaviour. The theme of the book is simply this: a man thrown back on the resources of his own nature alone responds to life with violence or inertia. If men are thrown back on their own nature alone and on the contemplation of natural or mechanical forces, if they have neither an image of church or state or even tribal unity, if they are cut off from a rooted pattern of behaviour . . . they respond to life with violence or apathy, because overwhelmed with a sense of isolation they attempt to wrench themselves away from human

> contact, to force themselves into conjunction with it, or retreat further into themselves to seek protection in their own loneliness. They want to bear witness to the curious power which they feel in themselves and yet to shrink from the hostile attention of others.

Watson's statement focuses on how the isolation of individuals, lacking any meaningful community, can lead to violence (as in James Potter) or apathy (as in Felix Prosper). When physical isolation is compounded by a spiritual vacuum, men will try to force connection with others, or separate and retreat into further loneliness. Above all, Watson recognizes the significance and necessity of *images*, of the *imagination*, in creating an authentic human society, based on those rituals and traditions which Watson has defined as "the organization of community" (Meyer and O'Riordan 160). These images or rituals, created during "the course of human history," allow the characters not to "shrink from the hostile attention of others" ("the fear") but to "bear witness to the curious power they feel in themselves" ("the glory").

Changes in technique between the realism of *Deep Hollow Creek* and the symbolism of *The Double Hook* forcefully draw attention to the imagery and language of the latter novel and the ways in which characters, action, voice, locale, and language are all entwined. As a result, the book

> evoke[s] a subtext that manages to call up remnants of prehistoric, tribal, pagan and Christian ritual which resonate in the backward and abysm of consciousness; time is abolished: everything happens at once . . . [t]he language of the text . . . the attitudes of its figures are so implicated with each other that often our sense of the physical appearance of the characters is that of outline and gesture. (Bowering 15, 30)

Thus in the final version of *The Double Hook*, the regional is absorbed into the universal; the isolated inhabitants, with vague memories of ritual and harmony, form a true community when these rituals regain their power to bring people together. The remnants of ritual are reinvigorated by the cycle of death and rebirth undergone by the community, whereby its members perceive that their strength lies in their relationships with each other, and in a landscape animated by human consciousness as a whole rather than Coyote alone. In this way, Watson's novel demonstrates what Joseph Frank describes as the essence of modernism in fiction: "historical depth" has vanished, replaced by a "spatial fusion" of past and present "for which historical time does not exist" (59).

II

The two major revisions constitute successive emendations to the text rather than substantive changes to plot, setting, theme and character. In her unpublished "Commentary" on the novel, Watson reveals that Rupert Hart-Davis, a British publisher/editor to whom she unsuccessfully submitted the typescript, wanted fewer characters. Such a change, Watson says, "would amount to a complete re-intuiting of the whole story," since "character comments on character and action on action." He also complained that there was too much "motion and dust." Again, Watson remains true to her original purpose and vision: "the motion and dust are the motion and dust of men who have not been taught their manage [sic]—men corraled by existence, men pawing the ground." The revisions show Watson's certainty of purpose, enabling her to refute commentary she found misguided. They also indicate her own determination to rework her materials until her original intuition was adequately expressed.

The development from drafts to the published version includes the removal of most details of personal and family history, of national or racial origin, and of references to the more institutionalized world of civilization, such as a doctor to sign the Old Lady's death certificate or the law that Kip would bring down on James, if he knew how to go about it: "Gone are the origins and options and even causes"(Flahiff 123). Watson's revisions remove details serving to anchor the story and its characters in a too-familiar world. In her final revision of the novel

> . . . [Watson] moved against such guarantees as are provided by *possibility* and *causality* and *memory* in order more fully to realize that spareness and immediacy that come to characters when they have no alternative but to be in their time and place. (Flahiff 123; italics in original text).

Cumulatively, the revisions remove context and connectivity and increase specificity. As Watson explained, she aimed at defining the characters by their relationships rather than by "documented history" or description, just as living people elude definition, although they are "resolutely there." Language merges with locale: ". . . I wanted to fuse the dialogue with the context–the reaching toward speech–the speaking out of silence–out of space" ("Interview" 358-59). Watson further fuses characters and context with language; she depicts them as "figures in a ground from which they could not be separated. . . . the people are entwined in, they're interacting with the landscape, and the landscape is interacting with them" ("What I'm Going To Do" 183).

III

There are three major versions to be considered, Draft I, Draft II and the published text of the novel. Draft I exists in two closely related forms, differing only in typography. A third typescript, at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Room at the University of Toronto, is identical to the published version, with some sentences altered on the first page.[1]

The first major revision to the text (Draft I to Draft II) occurs in response to the commentary of Frederick M. Salter, a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Alberta, in 1954. As the first enthusiastic reader of *The Double Hook*, Professor Salter provided encouragement as well as practical advice, and may well have stimulated Watson's further re-thinking of the novel. Salter advocated removing vulgarities such as "bugger" and "bullshit." As well, Salter suggested that some expressions were anomalous, such as the description of yokes resting on jaws, or incongruous, as the awkwardness of picking James' pocket if it is buttoned. Other phrases, such as "the heat of a private retreat" have an unfortunate rhyming effect. Similarly, the description of James as "A name in a stud book. James Potter out of Old Lady" suggests a more sophisticated image of horse breeding than is available in the Cariboo. Watson welcomed Salter's suggestion that she clarify the description of Angel beating her knife against the billycan to frighten away the supposed bear, only to reverse her decision in the published version. Salter's response may have liberated Watson to make her own aesthetic decisions as well as to accept advice from others. Salter's most significant contribution is to ask that an incident be removed: in Draft I, Felix teases his dogs before giving them the fish leavings to eat, cruel behaviour that Salter sees as out of character for the passive but well-intentioned Felix. Here Watson agreed. Salter also suggested that the original six sections of the novel would benefit from titles, but here Watson demurred. Overall, Salter's comments were minor; he considered the novel "perfect" and encouraged her to publish it. In this sense, his support may well have been crucial.

Watson's major revisions took place in the first half of 1956, during her stay in Paris. In her journals she notes her work on the typescript, and her desire that it go back to "something like the original form–a better form" (March 31 and April 6, [1956]). "Form," in life and work, was crucial to Watson: "I think of life as a piece of metal which must be shaped not thrown away–of work as something which must be shaped not thrown away–the something to write once given or elected turned until it has form –until it lives" (Jan. 25, [1956]).

The revisions of Draft I into Draft II consist largely of paring down repetitions and details. Kip looks at the light before the storm, "Shrinking into a pool. Elixir of light," but this phrase disappears in Draft II; the Widow Wagner, looking at her moonlit ranch, no longer senses the animals breathing, as if "Every breath breathed through her own lungs." Sometimes Draft II additions disappear in the final text: when Heinrich is looking for Lenchen and asking questions of James, he hears the loon and the killdeer: "the birds are free, he thought, like Kip. Their law is not the law of chickens." So too Lenchen says to James "[w]hat we did together couldn't be hid for always . . . . You know enough about beasts to know that," a comment not found in Draft II. James' thoughts after taking his money from the bank are too explicit for Watson's purpose: "In his pocket was the sum of life he had before him. He had already cut off miles of escape. Yet if he had the money to go to the end, at the end of the railway was the slaughterhouse."

A sense of Watson's revisions is best gained by examining one passage from all three versions. Here (in Draft I) is Heinrich in what becomes Part 2, Section 4:

> The boy stood in the reeds at the water's edge. Face answering face in the flat mirror of the lake. The night coming down. The mind at last turned away from self. Turned home by the thought that James Potter's mother had looked and found death.
>
> He had gone back a second time to have it out with James. He had let his sister wander, but Kip had been his eyes. Yet his suspicion and Kip's story fitted like bolt and screw. He had come back a second time. Riding away from the road. Thinking to come down on James from a different point. He would catch him in the barnyard. Away from the house.
>
> They had gone home the night before from James's like a crowd of fools—Ara, Angel, himself. For Kip had simply vanished. Having his own way of going and his own places to go. And he was left there to lead the horse and walk with the women. Or to mount and leave them.
>
> Ara had put everything at ease. Despite the fear [in] her eyes. Saying: We will go as we came. Singly. Meeting here by chance. Untimely.

This relatively long passage is modified in Draft II, as follows:

> The boy stood in the reeds by the water's edge. Face answering face in the lake. Ply on ply the night folded over the image. Masking the floating rootless self.
>
> James Potter's mother, he thought, had looked and found death.
> He had gone back a second time to have it out with James.
>
> He had slept. But Kip had been his eyes. Kip had seen the fact. Unless Kip lied. Yet Kip's story fitted his suspicion as a bolt fits a nut.

> He had gone back a second time. Riding away from the road. Hoping to come down on James from a different point. To catch him in the barnyard. Away from the house.
>
> They had gone away from James last night like a crowd of fools—Ara, Angel and himself. For Kip had simply vanished. Having his own way of going and his own places to go. And he was left there to lead the horse and walk with the women. Or mount and leave them.
>
> But Ara had put everything at ease. Despite the fear he saw in her eyes. Saying: We will all go as we came. Singly. Having met here by chance.

In the published novel, this passage is reduced to this section:

> The boy sat by the lake edge. Ply on ply, night bound the floating images of things.
>
> They had stood like a crowd of fools outside of James's door. He and Ara and Angel. Since Kip had gone off.
>
> Having come together by accident, Ara said. (43)

Clearly, Watson's most drastic revisions occur between Draft II and the published version. Sentences are shortened and sometimes fragmented, mirroring the human and natural isolation. Paragraphs consist of brief and jagged statements, shorn of all context and detail. Anecdotes, however appropriate, are ruthlessly excised if they do not have an immediate bearing on the central theme of the novel. Thus we lose a funny story from William about a man called Farish and his difficulties with his government pension, and one from Shepherd the game warden, looking for a stolen horse and mistaking James's gelding for a mare. The connections of the terrain of *The Double Hook* with the outside world are reduced to William the postman and Theophil's rating of Coyote at "fifty cents a brush" (47) in government bounties. Many shorter descriptive passages are removed, such as the Old Lady's capture of a muskrat, or Ara's desire for order: "All about her was the world, but she did not know where to start to find the connection of its separate parts. And she thought: It's like trying to find the first line which makes the first pattern in the kitchen linoleum." Most of the dialectical syntax (non-standard grammar) is corrected, partly to free the story from the potential clichés of its locale, which may unhappily suggest the stereotypical Hollywood western.

The most dramatic change from draft to final version occurs in the structural organization. Drafts I and II have a six-part division, modified to five in the published text. This revision simply removed a division at the end of Part 5, Section 7 (Flahiff 122). But each of the five sections now has new subdivisions which vary in number–18(1), 14(2), 9(3), 11(4) and 21(5). This

numerical partition suggests further fragmentation of the universe of the novel, further alienation of part from part, person from person. It also clarifies the montage-like composition of the novel, formally distinguishing separate scenes and signalling shifts in focus. Ironically, these formal divisions streamline the novel, reducing one sort of "choppiness," while typographically increasing the sense of disjunction and separation. The decline and subsequent rise in the number of subsections may also mirror the thematic scheme of the novel, from increasing isolation to growing community.

Drafts I and II contain far more background information: Old Man Potter was an Englishman, while no one knows where the Old Lady came from; Kip and Angel are "pure-blooded" Indians, but William and James (and presumably Greta) are "a mixed lot"; Felix is descended from "the Spaniards and Frenchmen who had come carrying boxes and taking bales of skin pressed flat for the trade"; William and Greta have bamboo chairs from the Potter household. Omitting these details of family possessions and history serves to highlight the Widow Wagner's dependence on them. Widow Wagner complains more in the drafts, and tells of her premarital pregnancy, which Lenchen now also undergoes. Coyote, Watson tells us in her "Commentary," "is fear incarnate, both cause and response. He is the eye of God and the destroyer of men." But in Draft II he is also part of a creation myth: "The country was Coyote's. He had opened the ground here, said Kip, to let men creep out into the sky." Perhaps this detail was sacrificed to maintain consistency in the presentation of Coyote.

The effects achieved by the reordering of some incidents, the fragmentation of sentences and paragraphs, and the formal separation of the subsections are enhanced by changes Watson made to the indented chant/poems, which in the final draft are used mainly for Coyote. These passages exemplify how Watson's revisions function. The scattered associations of the draft versions are reduced to concentrate on the Biblical rhythms and phrasings. Watson uses Old Testament references to create expressions of fear ("Interview" 354), and her Notebooks for the period of her revisions to the novel have dozens of citations from the Prophets. In Draft II, for example, the following occurs in Part 1 [Section 4]:

> Evil Coyote,
> if I open my mouth you will fill it with dust.
> Set your eyes toward the North
> and the lone butte
> above the chasm.

Let me wash my feet
in the ripple of the creek round the rock.
. . . . . (one paragraph of text)
No.
Felix's god is not Coyote.
In Coyote's mouth is the east wind.
There is no peace, said Coyote.
. . . . . (two pages of text)
Up over the boulder through the gap in the red rock
Went Coyote
Those who cling to the cleft rock he will bring down.
He will set his paw on the eagle's nest.

In the published version, these diverse images are reduced to:

In my mouth is the east wind.
Those who cling to the rock I will
bring down
I will set my paw on the eagle's nest (16)

Similarly, passages such as: "Said Felix, the dragon, / My river is my own / and I have made it for myself" are entirely omitted, as are Ara's thoughts (in Draft I) about wringing/breaking the necks of bottles, hens and fool hens. Watson's revisions simplify and intensify the image patterns of the novel, and link the poem/chants almost exclusively to Coyote's gnomic, ambiguous, menacing presence. Coyote's utterances become more concentrated and mysterious. In Draft II (Part I, [Section 7]) appears the following:

And Coyote
looked at his work, saying:
It is good
Where now is the stalking and the budding?
Where the longing and thrusting?
I have said to the living:
In my fear is peace.

Ultimately, only the last line survives, moved to the end of Coyote's speech in Part 4, Section 4 when James is going to the hotel in town. Again, in Draft II we have:

Eyes in the hill by the boulder.
I have set man against man
and to their hearts given certainty
for only in darkness is rest.
My daughter lit a candle against the day;
the day ate it.
Let her seek peace in darkness. (Part 1, [Section 7])

None of this appears in the final text; its image patterns of searching eyes, human conflict, the dubious security of darkness and the lighting of a candle in daylight (referring either to the Old Lady's questing lamp, or to Angel's candle against the storm) are already firmly inscribed. Repetition can reinforce a motif, but at times redundancy can dissipate the impact of the image pattern. Here Watson chooses concentration over repetition.

The most dramatic revision of Coyote's voice occurs at the end of the novel. In the drafts, Coyote speaks before Lenchen has her vision of James holding the baby in his hands. In the published text, one of Coyote's more tangential deliveries is deleted; Lenchen "sees" James, and tells him the baby's name is Felix. The novel concludes with Coyote's blend of blessing and observation: "I have set his feet on soft ground; / I have set his feet upon the sloping shoulders / of the world" (118). The placement of Coyote's words in the final position has an effect out of proportion to the mechanics involved. Frederick M. Salter had suggested that Watson might consider adding "a hint or suggestion of some kind that you have been dealing with things eternal and not transitory." Watson's simple adjustment gives Coyote, the preternatural focus of discord and abdicated humanity, the last word; the dynamic pattern of renewal instigated by his threat has completed itself, and he grants closure to it.

The drafts offer much more information, earlier in the story: Lenchen's pregnancy and her relationship with James are more fully described, for instance, as are Ara's barrenness and Angel's curiosity. Above all, the death of the Old Lady is made far more explicit; her burial by William, observed by other characters, is described for the reader. Yet in the final version, all that remains of this incident is a vague description by William (42) of his diffidence in handling his mother's body, and Kip's observation, evocative of *The Wasteland*: "No stone was big enough, no pile of stones, to weigh down fear" (50).

Revisions of the drafts do not change the contents of the story, but the experience of reading the published version is far more demanding–and rewarding–than reading earlier drafts. The reader must proceed carefully in the world of *The Double Hook*, remembering details and diction, and gradually achieving understanding along with the characters. The complex image patterns accumulate resonance as they wind their way through the texture of the novel. Watson's reworking of the text creates a heightened concentration of imagery. Felix's cup, for instance, is a literal coffee cup at the same time as it has mythic meaning (comparing Felix's pain at losing

Angel to Christ's Agony in the Garden) and a metaphoric quality, "the knobbed glass moulded to the size of his content" (29). This fusion of multiple meanings is found throughout the novel; Angels' lamp is at once a practical device against the dark of the storm, a religious emblem ("a candle to the Virgin") and a piece of folklore, a light "against the mist that brought death" (28). As well, it echoes the lamp that the Old Lady holds up in broad daylight, and the lamp Greta claims as her own. The revisions intensify the imagery, animating the earth (it has skin and ribs and lips), and reducing people and objects to their bare essences, essences which nonetheless reverberate with accumulated meanings.

In some cases Watson has added detail to the original. For instance, in Draft II the Widow Wagner, waiting for Heinrich's return, thinks as follows:

> My boy comes. Heinrich comes. The close comfort of words spoken over. Words taking body. Wrenching substance from unformed darkness. Let Heinrich be. And Heinrich is.

Of course, this passage does not survive; the perhaps unfortunate picture of Heinrich as a kind of Newtonian Incarnation does not fit easily into the other, more closely integrated, image patterns. But Watson creates an entirely new passage for the published text, relating Heinrich more closely to the complex of natural/human imagery in the novel, and granting him his role in the community about to be redeemed:

> Now he sat silent as an osprey on a snag. Waiting. Because he knew how to wait. Watching only the images he could shatter with a stone or bend in his hand. He heard a fish break water. He did not stir. He heard a bird's wing cut the air. He heard a mouse turn in the hollow of a log. (44)

Heinrich's role as the wisely passive observer is well-earned; his efforts to find Lenchen, confront James, scare away the Old Lady fishing in his pool, are all ineffective, for Heinrich's function is, with William, to await and welcome the return of James to the destroyed (soon to be recreated) Potter homestead.

Revisions made to the text are often quite subtle, such as the transformation of many simple verbs into participles, a tactic that creates a dynamic tone of process rather than dwelling on reported events or description. Diction is simplified as well, to remove abstractions and render the world of the novel in harder, more concrete words. It is easier to demonstrate than to describe the numerous stylistic revisions Watson undertook, since small deletions, reorderings and additions have a cumulative effect. Once again, it is worth comparing draft and final versions of the same passage:

She [Ara] looked up the creek. Nothing crossed in the still air. Only the twisted feet of the cottonwoods thrust naked into the stone bottom where the water moved. Only the intersecting branches of the stunted willow. Only the creek plocking over the feet of the cottonwoods, washing over the rocks, transfiguring the tree bark and hard stone. The blood of the world running low in its clay vein. Creeping around. Contracting. Indrawing. The upper lip of the margin twisted and dry.

Ara bent toward the water. The water passed through her fingers. Fingers dividing the water. Rending the veil of transfiguration. The stone lay for a minute in her hand. Until life flowed slowly from the centre.

And Coyote in a loud voice cried:
Kip. My servant Kip.

. . . . . .

Kip glanced at the sky. At the light and darkness embraced in conflict. The light retreating. The light gathering in before the massed forces of darkness. Light draining out of the sky into a pond of brightness.

Ara, pausing, looked upward in the path of Kip's glance. Violence and beauty kissing in the spaceless fields of being. But she saw the tight stretched skin hold. The sack out of which one had to struggle.

Kip raised his hand as if to grasp. Rising in the stirrups. Stirrup pulling leather taut as he reached up. Reaching to pull the glory from the sky. The hills touched with the light of it. The darkness thrusting in. Then the rain swinging into the mouth of the valley like a web. Strand added to strand. Waving like a veil. Growing and increasing. The sky, Ara thought, filled with adder tongues. With lariats. With bull whips. (Draft II)

And here is the final version:

She looked up the creek. She saw the twisted feet of the cottonwoods shoved naked into the stone bottom where the water moved, and the matted branches of the stunted willow. She saw the shallow water plocking over the roots of the cottonwood, transfiguring bark and stone. She bent toward the water. Her fingers divided it. A stone breathed in her hand. Then life drained to its centre.

And in a loud voice
Coyote cried:
Kip, my servant Kip.

. . . . . .

Kip's face was turned up to the sky. To the light stampeded together and bawling before the massed darkness. The white bulls of the sky shoulder to shoulder. He had risen in his stirrups till the leathers were pulled taut. His hand reaching up to pull down the glory.

Ara looked up too. For a minute she saw the light. Then only the raw skin of the sky drawn over them like a sack.

Then the rain swung into the mouth of the valley like a web. Strand added to strand. The sky, Ara thought, filled with adder tongues. With lariats. With bullwhips. (26)

Five paragraphs become six much shorter ones, with details removed ("blood of the world," "lip of the margin," the scattered images of embracing and kissing, the veil) and details added (the startlingly immediate image of the "massed bulls" of the sky). Repetition has vanished and the whole passage has been condensed by elision and by fused images, such as the double-layered sky as both skin and sack in the final version, rather than the separation of the two in the draft. The same effect is achieved by the compression of images when the stone "breathes" in Ara's hand. Thus Watson's focus on her central images of light and dark, on the animation of nature and Kip's reaching for "the glory" is accentuated while other, ultimately distracting images, are discarded. Diction becomes more concrete in the erasure of adjectives and abstractions such as "violence," "the spaceless fields of being," and "the veil of transfiguration." The clear physical presentation of the scene is matched by revisions which simplify shifts from character to character, from Ara to Kip and back again, thus dramatizing the dynamic of human response to the vivid and stormy landscape. These revisions create a more intense, coherent scene; the final passage achieves the suggestive yet concrete power of poetry, in keeping with Watson's revisions throughout her reworking of the text.

Watson's working toward the final text includes the ways in which she situates her characters to participate in the action of the novel. The published version is much more specific about the role each character plays, but these roles are not essentially changed: James as active but unthinking, Ara as suffering, barren, yet visionary; Angel as practical yet curious; Felix as priest and refuge; the Widow as a negative materialist; Theophil as the cynic who sees no immanence in the world; Greta and the Old Lady as life-denying and repressive; William as the pseudo-philosopher; Lenchen as life source or earth mother. As Watson explains, the characters are intended to function together, both as actors in their drama and as "voices," replacing the traditional narrative voice: "I was thinking of a group of bodies that were virtually inarticulate and I had to make them articulate without making them *faux-semblants* so to speak" (Meyer and O'Riordan 158).

Greta is more sympathetically presented in the draft versions, with references to her carefree youth. In the final text, she is more consistently repressive and controlling. Her identity with her mother, the Old Lady, is clear in the final version, though it appears even more strongly in Draft II:

> How did I know she was dead up there? She asked. How did I know without setting my foot on the steps? Because her eyes were loosed from me. I felt them

shut, she said. I felt her breath stop and the cold settle on her flesh . . . She can't be looking still. William nailed the lid tight. I heard the hammer strokes.

Earlier drafts provide more of James's thoughts too. In Draft I, when James is in the bank, Bascom asks if he has any cheques out. He answers: "If you're speaking to me, James said, I'm overdrawn. But if you're speaking of this chap Potter, he doesn't ever write cheques." This puzzling split does not survive to the next draft, nor does the following excerpt, where, at the beginning of Part 4, James examines his hand:

It was part of him. Part of James Potter. He spoke his own name as he lifted his horse into a lope. But he heard the name only as something given to a pile of gear that men called James Potter. Body, head, limbs, shirt, hat. A name given to a number of characteristics which somehow identified him as an animal might be identified at large on the range or penned in a man's stock yard.

Such reflections are rare for James. In the final text, his inner life is more often turned into action: "He wanted only one thing. To get away. To bolt noisily and violently out of the present" (79). In Draft I James is more reflective. He and Lilly are talking about time, "before" and "after":

Before is tightness and fear, the waiting with your finger on the trigger, eyes watching from the brush, your mother watching. After is fear again, looking for escape after the violence, not knowing how to make before and after square with one another. Now gets crushed between the two.

The suggestions of fear, eyes watching, conflict and violence agree readily enough with the structural images of the novel.

But James' words may too easily suggest the clichés of the trigger-happy Western movie. In this passage, there is a sense of the incongruous and the overly explicit which does not chime with the dominant tone of the novel, its powerful effects achieved by nuance, implication and suggestion.

The same discretion rules Watson's revisions to the relationship of James and Greta. The draft versions, with more factual information, insinuate their incestuous bond more strongly. United in their opposition to the Old Lady, waiting for her death to achieve some wished-for liberation, Greta shares James's rebellion against their mother, but his deed transforms that bond to a power struggle: "Greta had heard his voice and would not climb a step to help her. And his act delivered him bound to Greta."

In the drafts, Watson gives greater emphasis to the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Potter household: "The three of them, himself, the old lady, and Greta had seemed closed in and shut off somehow." James's recognition that "Ma's flesh like me" curiously acts as a catalyst for his hatred; he says

that "her flesh is my flesh and we are one and separate," and that "her search is my search." This paradox extends to Greta: "And he'd wanted to catch hold of Greta there in the face of the old lady, saying, What is divided is one." James's rebellion against their mother is in some way connected to the way she seems to have fostered their bond:

> She's drove Greta and me together. We don't know nothing but each other. She got us in tugs and we can't slip the harness. Mare and stallion of the same get, she's worked us together and kept the wagon pole somehow between us. And he'd thought how, if anything happened to her, he and Greta might come together at the same lake. As dogs creep out of the darkness to the same fire.

Greta concurs, when talking to Lenchen: "You thought, she said, that James burned with all the beauty in the world. But, she said, I was the oil that fed the flame . . . . *I tell you there was only James. I was never let run loose. I never had two to waste and spill [out] like Angel Prosper.*" And before her fiery suicide, Greta thinks: "Something lay in my hand like a bird and I crushed it fearing it might fly away." As well, Greta is associated with two kinds of rebirth. Ara fears that "*she would see Greta fleshed and sinewed, standing in the ruin she had made.*" Like the Old Lady, Greta may still be a presence after death. But later, Ara also sees Greta's death as somehow facilitating the birth of Lenchen's baby: "If it's not too late, she said to the boy, Greta's death will turn down the covers for Lenchen and she will bear her child in the hollow Greta made." During her labour Lenchen cries out: "It's Greta's baby I tell you. Ask her. She'll tell you," though immediately after she revokes her odd statement: "It's a lie, the girl cried. A lie. It's my own. My very own."

Apart from the section in italics none of the passages quoted above appears in the final version. Revisions stress Greta's likeness to her mother and her desire for control over others, if she cannot have James or another man. At the end of Part 1 she says: "Go way. This is my house. Now Ma's lying dead in her bed I give the orders here" (37). James fears Greta: "He was afraid what Greta might do . . . . Now Greta'd sat in the old Lady's chair. Eyes everywhere" (33). Similarly, Greta fears James: "He'll kill me too, Greta said. He'll shove me down for standing in his way" (55). The Potter household is still claustrophobic, its inhabitants living like animals, associated with the stench of Coyote's bedhole. Kip connects Greta with Coyote, "fitting herself into a glory" (53), while Angel blames Greta's sterility for her destructiveness: "An old hen pheasant, Angel said. Never bred. Looking for mischief. Trying to break up other birds' nests" (44). And indeed when Greta dies, Coyote claims her, and her epitaph links her to her mother:

> Greta had inherited destruction like a section surveyed and fenced. She had lived no longer than the old lady's shadow left its stain upon the ground. She sat in her mother's doom as she'd sat in her chair. (99)

Greta's suicide is depicted as an act of hate and revenge, specifically against James and Lenchen: "She wanted to cry abuse through the boards. She wanted to cram the empty space with hate. She wanted her voice to shatter all memory of the girl who had stayed too long, then gone off perhaps to die in the hills" (74). Thus Watson preserves the suggestion of an incestuous attraction between Greta and James, but, as with other revisions, she discards explicit comment and uses nuance to encourage readers to engage with the meaning of the text. Perhaps the incest theme, as originally presented, was too sensational; perhaps it disturbed the tight complex of imagery in the novel. This theme certainly distracts from central motifs in the novel; in the drafts, it causes confusion (as in Lenchen's saying her baby is Greta's). But by linking Greta less with James and more with the Old Lady, Watson retains the implication of a peculiar bond between brother and sister, while simultaneously accentuating the almost ritual pattern of destruction the Old Lady has initiated; until her shadow leaves the ground, her power continues with Greta. As Watson explains it, Greta "needs something to love and she loves James because there is no one else there. It is a displaced love. The emphasis in *The Double Hook* is not on family but on the problem of a community reduced to a single unit" (Meyer and O'Riordan 163).

IV

The Double Hook is the splendid result of Watson's determination to articulate what she wanted to say in the manner in which she wished to say it. Watson's revisions serve to foreground the immediate drama recorded in the tale, those who participate in it and the terrain in which it occurs. The style and tone of the novel mirror the starkness of the landscape, the enigmatic nature of Coyote and the deceptiveness of both. The author moves from the potential stereotype of the regional novel, to a universal and archetypal pattern of action. Any incongruous note disappears, so that the consistency and density of the text are sculpted into a self-contained whole, where every element is essential to the meaning and the construction of the tale, and to each other. In such an autonomous world, the concrete and specific smoothly become symbolic. The story that begins with the death of the Old Lady in a hostile and menacing landscape ends with the birth of the baby who signals

the transformation of that landscape and its inhabitants. As Watson said in her "Commentary," "In this country the symbol and the thing symbolized are nakedly exposed . . . image and idea came to me together."

NOTES

1 Barbour notes that the publisher made a most important change from the original manuscript by using Kip's speech from Part 2, Section 10 as the epigraph to the novel. This emendation made Watson uneasy about the prominence given Kip by this change, but she did not force withdrawal of the epigraph then or in later editions.

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Christine Wiesenthal

Vancouver Airport, Domestic Terminal

Perched on top of the *Aurora*
Shoe Shine pew, a bow-tied
gentleman from another decade
casts a long glance past slacks and white silk socks
to his feet,
and sends them tender regards, as though

they are no longer attached to him,
and he wants them back.

The rest of us witness this service,
that booth, quaint as a confessional,
reliquary of small round tins, pungent
paste and resin. We try to spy
new galaxies forming in the depths
of his right or left Italian leathers;
some patent proof that this man, banded
by yellow boater tie, may be the messenger,
sky cap from on high. His loafers
(so patiently ministered to)
could flower into flame any minute.

Between the man on the five-dollar throne
and those of us waiting to board,

the shoe shine attendant's busy backside lifts, rising to block the view:
two green apron strings, knotted at neck and sacrum.

All around the gate, asses shift
in rows of moulded plastic. Everyone
suddenly unoccupied, looks down

as if stumped
by missing feet.

Jennifer Murray

Questioning the Triple Goddess: Myth and Meaning in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*

Myth is one of those terms which has been pushed in so many directions in recent years that its definition has become somewhat vague. Margaret Atwood's 1978 definition of myth does not go very far towards remedying this problem: "Myths mean stories, and traditional myths mean stories that have been repeated frequently. The term doesn't pertain to Greek myths alone. Grimm's Fairy Tales are just as much myth or story as anything else" (*Conversations* 114).[1] Personally, I have no argument with this vagueness, as, indeed, two of the forms of mythical intertext which I will discuss in relation to *The Robber Bride* are, precisely, Greek myths and fairy tales. These domains of discourse, which are closely related in the novel to the characters Charis and Roz, are two elements in a three-fold structure which also includes history, whose field of discourse is related to Tony.[2]

However, it is essential to address the ways in which mythical intertextuality functions. Atwood's *The Robber Bride* calls upon mythological intertexts in two different ways: first of all, by echoing pre-existing texts, mythical references make actions, characters, themes and structures pleasantly recognizable to the reader. This is an open-ended mode of intertextuality whereby familiar content is reworked into a later moment of textual production. The second function of myth in Atwood's novel is to frame meaning: to frame it in the sense of keeping it within certain boundaries, but also to frame it in the sense of setting it up as something which it is not, namely, limited in its possibilities. This is intertextuality which takes over

not so much the context as the structure of the work to which it refers. The principal intertexts which *The Robber Bride* uses in this way are the Triple Goddess and The Three Little Pigs. Because of the triple structure of each of these myths, underscored by the triple narrative of the characters' personal histories, this particular use of mythical intertext is, I will argue, the restriction which prevents the novel from opening up to the reader a range of potentially radical positions.

II

The question of myth in Atwood's work in general has been given considered attention by Sandra Djwa, notably in an article entitled "Back to the Primal: The Apprenticeship of Margaret Atwood." Therein, Djwa evokes the primary literary discourses to which Atwood was exposed during her formative years, especially during the period she spent at Victoria College in Toronto: amongst these influences were the poetry of T.S. Eliot and his conception of "'the mythical method,' that is, literature structured by developing a continuous parallel between classical myth and contemporary reality" (Djwa 19). Other influences included Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* which argued that patriarchal myths are in fact derivative of an earlier, matriarchal goddess myth. Finally, argues Djwa, the influence of Northrop Frye's perspective on myths and archetypes, as well as Atwood's acquaintance and discussions with Jay Macpherson, a writer who practised the "mythical method," were also important elements:

> Macpherson was a guru to a group of younger poets who read, admired, and talked about her difficult, Blakean poetry, which combines snippets of Greek, Roman, and Biblical myth, fairy tale, and ballad in a style that moves from the formal to the colloquial voice. (29)

It is therefore no surprise to find traces of classical mythology in Atwood's writing, but it is more specifically the myth of the Triple Goddess, the goddess of the three ages—Maiden (Persephone), Matron (Venus) and Crone (Hecate)—which is the dominant mythical component of her work.

Readers of Atwood's work have already discussed this aspect of *The Robber Bride*: both Sandra Djwa and Hilde Staels point to the figure of the Great Goddess to clarify aspects of Zenia's identity and come to associate her more closely with the figure of Hecate (Djwa 41, Staels 201). I would suggest that the myth of the Triple Goddess is an intertext which is invoked far more extensively than its connection with Zenia would suggest: it contributes much to our understanding of the triad structure to which Tony,

Charis and Roz belong. It is not, however, the only intertext which informs the triadic structure; other dependencies are also hooked onto this framework which is sufficiently well-anchored to carry their weight. For the Triple Goddess is not a myth of action or odyssey, it is a myth of presence, a presence which is constructed so as to appear, at one and the same time, to precede those who receive it, and to live on beyond those who reactivate it through their story-telling.

As myth, the Triple Goddess is a chosen meaning-producing structure which Sandra Djwa sees as offering a universal site of identification for women: "For women the myth of the mother goddess is emotionally charged, expressing as it does the primal aspects of female experience: sexual initiation (the descent), followed by gestation and new birth" (16). What is presented here as universal experience captured by myth works at least as much the other way around. It is myth which is telling women what their experience of themselves should be, notably, that their sexuality involves a fall, and that sexual reproduction is the appropriate form of redemption from this fall. For many women today, sexuality is experienced differently and is far less strongly bound to the reproductive aspect. Djwa colludes, unconsciously I would like to think, in the tendency to see myth, and especially myths about women, as eternal. Roland Barthes refuses this view:

> Y a-t-il des objets *fatalement* suggestifs, comme Baudelaire le disait de la Femme? Sûrement pas: on peut concevoir des mythes très anciens, il n'y en a pas d'éternels; car c'est l'histoire humaine qui fait passer le réel à l'état de parole, c'est elle et elle seule qui règle la vie et la mort du langage mythique. Lointain ou non, la mythologie ne peut avoir qu'un fondement historique, car le mythe est une parole choisie par l'histoire: il ne saurait surgir de la "nature" des choses. (216; Barthes's emphasis)

The type of speech in which the goddess myth participates is, as mentioned above, one which depends heavily on its structure, or in other words, on its internal organization which attempts to collapse the difference between the particular and the universal. It is "one" and it is "three," it is "always" and it is "now," it is all of life, and, at the same time, life carved up into three neat phases. It is, therefore, in every aspect of its sign, the promise of presence and fullness. In myth, long-term stability of form is often invoked as the proof and the guarantee of something beyond time, beyond reach, beyond human intervention. In Derrida's general and far-reaching attempt to wrest the concept of structure from the notion of a fixed centre or origin, he writes:

> Le concept de structure centrée est en effet le concept d'un jeu *fondé*, constitué depuis une immobilité fondatrice et une certitude rassurante, elle-même soustraite au jeu. Depuis cette certitude, l'angoisse peut être maîtrisée, qui naît toujours d'une certaine manière d'être impliqué dans le jeu, d'être pris au jeu, d'être comme être d'entrée de jeu dans le jeu. (410)

The Triple Goddess, it seems fairly clear, is just this sort of centred, presence-affirming framework which allows for "les répétitions, les substitutions, les transformations, les permutations" (Derrida 410) within its walls, without the essential unity of the structure being in any way at stake. Atwood plays brilliantly, joyfully, but the deck is, to some extent, stacked. The very structure of the Triple Goddess and its variants in *The Robber Bride* allows for only one outcome, to use Atwood's terminology. The structure will remain intact, and Atwood knows that from the onset.

III

The Triple Goddess belongs to the semiotic sphere of the mysterious. Like all divine trinities, beginning with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost who is/are more familiar to many of us, she is both one and several. She is three, in her three phases: maiden, matron and crone, and yet, unified as the muse, she is at once creator and destroyer. Whether evoked through the variations on her seemingly timeless names–the Great, the White, the Triple or the Mother goddess–or situated within the various cultures which have effected these transformations–the stability and immortality of the figure never come into question. A breech in the structure, and the structure would vanish. It is this structure of immortality which serves as the basis for the construction of Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride.*

The three-in-oneness of the Triple Goddess is worked into the choice and development of the characters, as well as into the narrative organisation of their respective stories. Within the doubled framing chapters ("Onset" and "Toxique"; "Toxique" and "Outcome"), at the centre of the story, are the triple, parallel narratives of Tony, Charis and Roz. Each of these inner chapters also contains its own beginning, middle and end which are structured in a highly controlled manner. More precisely, the physical space in which each of these inner chapters begins and ends, as well as the objects present at those moments, indicates the domain of association for each character.

When, in the long inner chapter called "Black Enamel," Tony is to begin telling of her battle with Zenia, she goes into the basement and sits beside a "large sand-table" which "contains a three-dimensional map of Europe and

the Mediterranean, made of hardened flour-and-salt paste" (125); she stays by it until her story has been told, and then she "turns out the cellar lights and climbs the stairs to the kitchen" (215). In this way, the presence of the map showing "the day of Otto the Red's fateful battle" (125) holds her narrative within the sphere of her function as historian. It is her role to evoke traditional history (Canadian and European essentially) and, in the process, to question whether traditional historical narratives have any value. The answers she provides at the end of the novel are tentative and ambiguous, as the response to the following question indicates: "But do the stories of history really teach anything at all? In a general sense, thinks Tony, *possibly not*" (518; my emphasis).

Through similar structural techniques, Charis will be associated with the mythological figure of Charon, the boatman of the Styx. This connection is provoked on the one hand by the homophonic relation between "Charon" and Karen, Charis's submerged, unhappy side, but also from the fact that, before telling her story, she boards a ferry-boat which takes her from the shores of Lake Ontario to her home on Centre Island, where, having finished the narrative of her personal history, she disembarks. Other references to the ferry-boat develop the allusion to the Charon myth in such a way that it is both visible and invisible within the overall scene described. Let us consider the following passage which recounts the last time Charis sees her companion Billy:

> When she reaches the dock, the ferry is already boarding. People are going on, singly and in twos; there's something processional about their entrance, in the way they step from land to water. Right here was where she last saw Billy; and also Zenia, in the flesh. They were already aboard, and as Charis came heavily running, gasping, hands on her belly to hold it attached to her, it was dangerous for her to run like that, she could have fallen and lost the baby, the ferry men were hoisting up the gangway, the ferry was hooting and backing out, the deep water churning to a whirlpool. She couldn't have jumped. (58)

Fairly indirectly, the general atmosphere and certain details call upon the intertext of the myth of Charon. The description of the procession, for instance, suggests the solemnity which might be associated with a funeral. Charis, who is carrying a life, is excluded from the trip, and she will never see the beloved departing person again. Structurally, this creates a division between those "living on the earth" and those who have undertaken a water voyage. The water, clearly dangerous, is also associated with the river Styx because of the whirlpool which forms as the boat is leaving the harbour, recalling the whirlpool Charybdis (a name which is close to Charis in its

form). Finally, the named presence of actual "ferry men" allows us to bridge the symbolic gap between practices of contemporary life and mythological beliefs.[3]

Once the significant domains of history and mythology have been anchored in the characters of Tony and Charis, it is Roz's turn to go and find an appropriate setting to tell her story. Like Tony, she goes into the basement,

> sits down on the cellar floor . . . pulls books off the shelves at random . . . There on the cover is the dark forest, the dark wolfish forest, where lost children wander and foxes lurk, and anything can happen; there is the castle turret, poking through the knobbly trees. *The Three Little Pigs*, she reads. The first little pig built his house of straw. *Her* house, *her* house, shout the small voices in her head. (330)

In this extract, the illusion of randomness is offered, but the design is retrospectively apparent. The book which *comes into* Roz's hands will provide another far-reaching intertext to echo that of the mythical goddess in its tripleness and in its ostensible permanence: the fairy-tale mode has in Roz its ascribed godmother, and its key tale, *The Three Little Pigs*. In its economic density, the quotation cited above interlaces analeptic references to the ways in which Tony and Charis have entered into the overall structure of the fairy tale; the reference to the castle turret has already been associated with Tony ("Tony in her turret room" 211), and there have been references to the fragility of Charis's house on at least two previous instances ("her flimsy house that is still standing" 322, and "Charis wished there were a layer of straw under her . . . house" 307). In the attribution of relatively weak or strong houses to the characters, and through the conversion of male pronouns to female ones for the fairy tale characters, the text brings together key elements in the structuring of this intertext.

Moreover, as the guardian of the world of fairy tales, Roz has her own associated tales: she is, in her dreams, a confused Goldilocks in a lifeless house walking "through the white kitchen where nothing moves, past the table with the three chairs" (450). Yet, as other critics have pointed out, Roz is also very clearly associated with the Cinderella figure, the poor little girl who becomes rich. She is, however, an atypical Cinderella: just as Tony, the historian, is lacking in her field because she cannot uncover any real value in the practice of historiography, and Charis, with her repressed underwater self, is as much the passenger as the ferry-man in her own Charon myth, Roz lacks the prescribed beauty of her archetype, and must make do with a

prince whose charm is not reserved for her alone.

This exploration of one aspect of the structural organisation of *The Robber Bride* shows that each of the characters has a domain of human story-telling associated with her: for Tony it is history, for Charis it is mythology and for Roz it is the world of fairy tales. Beyond their attachment to a particular character, each of these domains receives in turn more extensive development within which the structural logic of the domain itself prevails. Hence, in the historical development of each character, time and the passing of generations shape the text. The starting point is the Second World War, marked clearly as "the past" through its association with the parental generation; then the story moves on to the "present" battles of the Tony-Charis-Roz generation (these battles are seen as being in some way related to the childhood experiences of the characters) and the novel finishes with speculative considerations about the next generation, through the children of Roz and Charis. The emphasis on cause-and-effect in historical narrative is tentatively affirmed, even if the future remains unpredictable.

Within the fairy tale structure, the three little pigs will all be bitten by the wolfish Zenia. There is no place which provides protection from her attacks, no house which is an absolute refuge. It is perhaps for this reason that the "three little pigs" do not run from their homes looking for shelter, but run to each other's house to offer aid and comfort to the most recent victim. When Tony is on her own after West leaves her for Zenia, Roz goes and stays with her. Tony and Roz do the same for Charis when she is pregnant and is devastated because Billy has left with Zenia. Finally, Tony and Charis go to Roz after she attempts to commit suicide, this following Mitch's desertion of her for Zenia, and his own subsequent suicide. According to Bettelheim, *The Three Little Pigs* in its traditional form teaches the reader that cumulative experience makes one wiser. Here, however, there is a sense of people going around in circles making consoling gestures towards each other. Nonetheless, and in spite of the transformations of the tale, the wolf gets boiled in the end, falling from her hotel balcony into the fountain/cauldron in the courtyard below. The reasons for this particular ending seem to arise, at least in part, from Atwood's decision to respect the overall structure of the fairy tale, a choice which, as I will argue further on, imposes limitations on the potential force of the novel.

I have very briefly summarized the discourses related to Tony and Roz so as to be able to focus more intensely now on that which is related to Charis,

the sphere of mythology. While it seemed important to show that there are multiple and intricately developed intertexts at work in the novel, it is the discourse of classical mythology, the one which comes under the reign of the Triple Goddess which centres the text structurally. I will begin by looking at the triad in its fragmented form, through the characters of Tony, Charis, and Roz, in order to explore the range of play (in the form of transformations, inversions, subversions, and so on) which they are allowed within the limits of their attachment to their mythical model. I will then briefly examine the more dynamic function attributed to the goddess figure: that of the muse in her specific manifestation as Zenia.

IV

Miss Tony

Tony is, in the framework of the Triple Goddess, "the elusive Diana or Maiden figure, the young girl" (Atwood, *Survival* 199). This analogical relationship in *The Robber Bride* is not based on one over-riding element, but on the interweaving of intertextual suggestions throughout the novel. The "young girl" aspect of the mythological figure is associated with youthful beauty, hunting, chastity, and childlessness. In terms of appearances, Margaret Atwood attributes this "youthfulness" to Tony by describing her in comically inappropriate clothing: when she goes to her first university "bash" wearing "a dark green corduroy jumper with a white blouse under it, a green velvet hairband, and knee socks and brown loafers," a young man "gives her an unfocused look" and comments: "Shit, the Girl Guides" (140). Later, well into her forties, Tony is described as wearing "a forest green rayon outfit with small white polka dots that she bought in the children's section at Eaton's" (18). As these descriptions suggest, Tony's childlike appearance is, at least in part, a refusal to take on the dress codes of the adult world, and with it, the world of gendered sexuality.

Moreover, the youthfulness which characterizes Tony is not in any way that of fresh-faced innocence; indeed, she is described as looking like "a very young old person, or a very old young person" (19). She is not shown to be especially attractive to men, and does not enter into the illusory magic of make-up, feeling that "Lipstick is alarming on her" (19). The stereotypical beauty that we might readily associate with the Maiden aspect of the triad is subverted in these contradictory descriptions of Tony. Nonetheless, even as, within this comparison, the component of female beauty is being undermined, the descriptions of Tony's clothing seem to be shooting out

associative filaments in the direction of another aspect of Diana, the forest huntress, through the words "forest green" (18) and "dark green" (140). Tony is, in many ways, a paradoxical Diana. Situated outside the stereotype of a seductive young goddess, she will have no suitors pursuing her and she will have to turn her hunting skills to the problem of tracking down a male partner.

Tony's potential lover is West; there is no other man on her horizon. Their relationship is initially situated on the plane of platonic friendship: "Drinking coffee was about all Tony did with West" (137). In the absence of any sexual overtures, Tony is not forced to determine her own position in relation to her sexuality and, indeed, the classic position offered by her mythological role model is that of chastity. To this extent, Tony remains in line with "Diana." Moreover, "the thought of going to bed with anyone at all is terrifying" (200). However, unlike her mythological forebear, this refusal of sexuality is not born of an ideal to defend, but of her inability to see herself as a sexual being and to project herself into such a scenario.

However, when Roz suggests that Tony should take West to bed (200), and also provides her with a reason she can believe in, or in other words, an ideal to invest, Tony responds positively, since it is not about sex, it is "really" about "saving [West's] life" (201). Depressed after Zenia's departure, West is perishing and Tony decides that in such an extreme situation "heroism and self-sacrifice are called for. [She] grits her teeth and sets out to seduce West" (201). This ironic discourse also serves to keep the military strategist that Tony incarnates in view, since it is in the name of "duty" and by developing a "strategy" that she will undertake her mission.

Margaret Atwood thus creates a paradoxical situation where the Maiden, who should be pursued by a suitor, whom she is, in fact, expected to resist, finds herself confronted by a lover who is not one. Moreover, this potential lover is not chasing her, and in fact seems to be resisting her. Even when Tony makes considerable efforts to court and seduce him, "cooking a candlelight dinner" for example or "[taking] him to movies . . . that give her a chance to clutch his hand in the dark" (201), West remains impassive. The total inversion of the active and passive roles is accomplished when West seems to be dying, his "eyelids . . . curved and pure, like those on carved tombstone saints" (201), and Tony employs the method which, in fairy tales, never fails: "[she] gives him a kiss," albeit "on the forehead" (201). Through the inversion of roles, it is the male character, put to sleep by a wicked witch (Zenia) who must await the kiss of salvation which comes from a woman.

The sense of liberation nonetheless remains attached to Tony who, by her action, has freed herself from the obligation of chastity suggested by the Diana figure.

She and West make love and the experience is like a baptism for Tony:

> [it's] like falling into a river, because West is what other people call him, a long drink of water, and Tony is so thirsty, she's parched, she's been wandering in the desert all of these years, and now at last somebody truly needs her. (202)

The metaphor at work here is that of descent and rebirth, the mythical structure of female sexuality which we referred to earlier. The myth of Persephone who was swallowed up by the earth and given to the violent Hades is clearly softened in Atwood's version, where the violence of the mythical version is transformed into a tender, comfy sort of sexuality. Not an ideal, but a situation which allows the character Tony to free herself from her sense of sexual inadequacy.

Mrs. Roz

Roz, as the only one of the three women to hold a discourse which invests the body, conjugal love and children with positive values, can be associated with the Matron figure of the Triple Goddess, the guardian of the hearth and family values. This reference can be understood most clearly in Roz's self-image, communicated through internal focalisation: "She tried so hard to be kind and nurturing" (332). The spheres included in this desire to nurture include, of course, the world of her children, over whom "[s]he extends her invisible wings, her warm feathery angel's wings, her fluttery hen's wings, undervalued and necessary, she enfolds them. *Secure*, is what she wants them to feel" (341). But it is especially in the eyes of her husband, Mitch, that Roz must cultivate this image which is, in fact, the basis of their relationship as a couple: "In Mitch's cosmology, Roz's body represents possessions, solidity, the domestic virtues, hearth and home, long usage. Mother-of-his-children. The den" (335). Traditionally, in exchange for this affective security, Mitch should fulfil the role of hunter (or breadwinner), and protector of the family.

This schema is not, however, respected, since the couple lives off Roz's fortune, inherited from her father. Instead of being the hard-working husband tradition would have him be, Mitch is described mostly as a skirt-chaser, and it is paradoxically Roz who is put in the position of the protector. Specifically, Roz saves Mitch from becoming entrapped by the situations he creates through his extra-marital affairs, by repeatedly taking

him back into the fold of the family whose stability he has put in danger.

Yet, after a certain time, Roz no longer finds herself sufficiently rewarded by the limited and limiting role of the eternally forgiving and loving wife, and she begins to push back the moment when she will save Mitch until, finally, she refuses to do so altogether. When, because of Zenia, things fall apart around him and Mitch comes looking for comfort, Roz does not comply:

> "I want to come back," he tells her, gazing around the high, wide living room, the spacious domain that Roz has made, that was once his to share. Not *Will you let me come back?* Not *I want you back.* Nothing to do with Roz, no mention of her at all. It's the room he's claiming, the territory. He is deeply mistaken . . . .
>
> Now he does finally look at her. God knows who he sees. Some avenging angel, some giantess with a bared arm and a sword–it can't be Roz, tender and feathery Roz, not the way he's staring at her. (426-27)

Roz, through Mitch's perception of her, sees herself transformed into a warrior woman, an Amazon figure closer to Diana. Since we have no access to Mitch's thoughts, he functions as a mirror for Roz, offering a reflection which Roz processes through mythological imagery. Roz is rendered insecure by the radical nature of the shift in her self-perception, and she must fight to resist the temptation to go back to more familiar modes: "[she] clenches her fists tight because she won't let herself be fooled like that again" (429). Roz achieves a form of self-affirmation here which is that of the victim confronting the victimizer, not so much as a person, but as a pattern of abuse in which both sides have colluded. She refuses to collude any longer, because the illusion which made that possibility attractive to her (the illusion that Mitch, through his unfaithfulness and return, had always been expressing a paradoxical form of love for her) has been shattered. Affirming her self-worth is, therefore, at the same time, an act which renders the comforting illusion which had also been a part of her self-definition, definitively inaccessible.

Ms. Charis

The final phase of the Triple Goddess is that of the Crone, the mystical figure who "presides over death and has oracular powers" (Atwood, *Survival* 199). Charis has already been associated with the realm of death through her proximity with the figure of Charon and she incarnates just as clearly the mystical aspect of the Crone phase. This reference is signalled on the level of "realism" since Charis's character is based to some extent on an

affiliation with New Age beliefs. An example of the forms of mysticism involved can be seen in the following description of a very elaborate private ceremony which Charis carries out to give herself the courage to affront Zenia:

> She took the book and the gloves downstairs and put them on the small table under the main window in the living room—where the sunlight would shine in on them and dispel their shadow sides—and set her amethyst geode beside them, and surrounded them with dried marigold petals. To this arrangement she added, after some thought, her grandmother's Bible, always a potent object, and a lump of earth from her garden. She meditated on this collection for twenty minutes twice a day. (470)

The hoped-for result of this ritual would be to allow Charis "to absorb the positive aspects of her friends, the things that were missing in herself" (470). For, in the same way that Tony is a paradoxical Maiden and Roz a reformed nurturer, Charis, lacking strength of will, is a problematic Hecate figure.

Fatherless, beaten and raped as a child, Charis perceives herself as divided, and she only accepts the more peaceable side of herself. Her rejection of that part of herself which knows about evil occurred when she was a child, enduring abuse at the hands of her uncle:

> [H]e falls on top of Karen and puts his slabby hand over her mouth, and splits her in two. He splits her in two right up the middle and her skin comes open like the dry skin of a cocoon, and Charis flies out. Her new body is light as a feather, light as air. There's no pain in it at all . . . . What she sees is a small pale girl, her face contorted and streaming, nose and eyes wet as if she's drowning—gasping for air, going under again, gasping. (294)

Although the violence of the uncle's sexual penetration of the child is suggested by the phrase "he splits her in two," this violence is immediately attenuated by the butterfly imagery ("cocoon," "flies out") which follows. This seems to be an attempt to attribute to Charis a defence mechanism which R.D. Laing describes under the heading of "the unembodied self." He writes:

> In this position the individual experiences his self as being more or less divorced or detached from his body. *The body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being.* Instead of being the core of his true self, the body is felt as the core of a *false self*, which a detached, disembodied, "inner," "true" self looks on at with tenderness, amusement, or hatred as the case may be. (69; Laing's emphases)

The emotion attributed to Charis's unembodied self is that of "amazement" as she watches "the man [who] grunts, as the small child wriggles and flails as if hooked through the neck" (294-95). Atwood, while constructing this pyschological way out for her character, nevertheless forces the reader to take fully into account the impact of the child being martyred by the sexual violence of an adult. Through the image of the little girl "drowning—gasping for air, going under again, gasping" (294), the reader is taken beyond Charis's amazement to the more critical perspective which we, as readers and members of society, need to keep in sight.

Charis's ritual of meditation may be seen as part of her continuing attempt to negotiate her place in a world of violence. But it also has other connotations. Amongst the objects upon which Charis meditates is her Grandmother's bible, the book which first revealed Charis's oracular powers. Charis, choosing a passage in the bible with a pin, lands, on three separate occasions, on the story of Jezebel, the whore of Babylon. The grandmother, who initiates Charis into the practice of this "art" cannot see how this story could relate to Charis, and she says "Must be too far ahead" (278). This impression is confirmed on the second occasion:

> "Ah," said her grandmother, squinting. "Jezebel again . . . . Now that's a strange thing, for a little girl . . . . You must be living ahead of yourself." (285)

The repeated prediction eventually comes to be associated with the death of Zenia which Charis also "sees" from a distance: "'I saw it in the candle', says Charis. 'I saw her falling. She was falling, into water. I saw it! She's dead'. Charis begins to cry" (500).

Unlike the situations of Tony and Roz, where the mythological roles offered can be transposed onto life patterns and psychological possibilities that are open to all of us (sexual awakening, nurturing), Charis's psychic powers require of the reader greater suspension of disbelief. Indeed, within the novel, the reality-effect accorded to this mystical experience is never contradicted; on the contrary, it is reinforced when Charis's premonitory vision turns out to be correct. At that point, for this reader, the mythological analogy is infringing on the realist boundaries to an untenable extent. This is not to suggest that *The Robber Bride* is simply, or even mainly, a realist novel, but its realist level, established by the spatial and temporal setting (Toronto in the 1990s) and by the characters whose lives are situated within recognizable limits for the contemporary reader, cannot be ignored. Within this perspective, the magical possibilities offered by the character of Charis are problematic.

Muse

In my discussion of character construction within a mythological framework, I have noted where the different characters both meet up with and diverge from their role models. We might note, in conclusion, that the points at which the characters fail to conform to their corresponding element of the Triple Goddess, Zenia gives every appearance of filling in that gap. Thus, the elements of the Maiden to which Tony can only correspond in a comic mode are fully present in their mythological form in Zenia in her relationship to West. For him, she is beauty ("Zenia is as beautiful as ever" 36) and paradoxically, chastity: "Zenia was frigid" (457). Similarly, while Roz can provide the form of the family structure, it is to Zenia that Mitch would like to give his undying love (424, 428), and where Charis is the incarnation of a fragile Hecate figure struggling to assemble strength and will, Zenia "is a cold and treacherous bitch" (424).

Zenia functions as a sort of inverted mirror figure for the characters in their Triple Goddess roles, but also, for Charis, in her Charon aspect. This is especially striking in the following image which echoes, inverts and amplifies an earlier description of Charis on the ferry, "leaning on the railing, facing backwards" (225): "Zenia sweeps through life like a prow, like a galleon. She's magnificent, she's unique. She's the sharp edge" (463). Zenia is up front, breaking new ground, claiming territory, while Charis, prudent, is looking back, trying to read the traces of the past. This comparison will later be extended to the triad of women when, at Zenia's "wake," the "three of them stand at the back of the ferry as it churns its way through the harbour, outbound towards the Island, trailing the momentary darkness of its wake" (522). They contemplate the "momentary darkness," which is also Zenia's passage in their lives, as if it were the trace of a disaster which had crossed their paths, a disaster which they had survived, and had also learned from. The rounded polysemy of the signifier "wake" comes into play here, signifying the farewell ceremony to Zenia, the churning water following the boat's path, and the overall effect of Zenia on the lives of the three women: she has "wakened" them to other ways of approaching conflict. Through their contact with Zenia, they acquire the power to recreate their self-images; instead of continuing to perceive themselves as innocent victims of circumstances beyond their control, they begin to understand and accept that they do have the power to react, intervene, protest, and even counter-attack.

Here, however, the reader needs to be wary of transforming Zenia into an

ideal. Calling her the "good witch" as Bloom and Makowsky do (177) on the basis of the fact that the women do seem to gain in self-knowledge is not tenable. It is a form of "the end justifies the means" logic. Zenia is, for the women, a catastrophe. There is nothing in Zenia's constructed personality which could be seen as positive within the human contexts provided and for that reason, "Zenia remains a female villain—that is, a toxic figure" (Bouson 162). It would require complete abstraction from context for us to be able to distil qualities such as the intelligence, cunning, perseverance, and strength of will which the character Zenia displays and to reinvest them positively. Such traits of character, empty of context, are meaningless. It is only to the extent that the other characters, at the end of the novel, can envisage, without guilt, the possibility of turning these traits to their own needs and desires that they take on positive potential.

V

We have had such pleasure in following the varying movements, transformations, hidden forms and reformulations of the Triple Goddess that it may seem ungenerous to question the very premises of the source of this pleasure. Let us begin by questioning instead what sort of pleasure we have been having. Has it been the pleasure of being "impliqué dans le jeu" as Derrida puts it, or has it been the pleasure of piecing together a puzzle which is exterior to us? We have watched the Triple Goddess take shape, shift about, be stretched in different directions, and turned upside down. We have attended the event of her modernisation, and the confrontation of her unity and her fragmentation, but we have never really doubted that she would survive. Indeed, Tony's voice, setting the story up through hindsight in the prefatory section "Onset" allows us to know from the beginning that, whatever the dangers ahead, the voice which speaks for the "we" at stake, has come through the ordeal. Moreover, even the survival of Zenia is ensured: in the burst of energetic blue light as she returns to the underworld of collective memory (526), we recognize the same blue light which, associated with Charis and her grandmother, signifies mystical power (280, 296). We understand that Zenia is simply waving *au revoir* to us and she has no sooner disappeared than she is reinstated in iconic form as an artefact which Tony can contemplate: "an ancient statuette dug up from a Minoan palace" (527).[4] Tony is then reunited with the other two members of the human form of the goddess, Charis and Roz, so that the structure, both in its unified and in its fragmented configurations, is symbolically intact at the

close of the novel.

The structure of the Triple Goddess is, I would conclude, the basis upon which the dominant possibilities of meaning in *The Robber Bride* rest. It is what serves to hold the text in place, and it is in place before the play of signification can begin; it is a form of "sure play," "[c]ar il y a un jeu *sûr*: celui qui se limite à la *substitution* de pièces *données et existantes, présentes*" (Derrida 427, his emphases). I have tried, in this interpretation of *The Robber Bride*, to focus on the play of signification, remaining open to the possibility that it might, at some point, undermine the structural expectations attached to the intertext of the Triple Goddess. For example, it might have killed off the mother goddess. It might have broken up the parallelism of the women's lives, one of the women might have joined Zenia, Zenia might have actually loved one of the men, one of the women might have killed Zenia and been forced to face the consequences of transgression. . . . That of course, would have been a radically different story, you might say. Clearly the novel is not concerned with questions of probability, but with resolving, within a predetermined framework, the questions it raises, much as fairy tales do.

But why not, we might ask ourselves? Should we not read fairy tales? It is of course an option, as long as we recognize them as fairy tales, structures of reassurance which presume that we are not yet capable of facing life without magical intervention. Indeed, Bruno Bettelheim comments on the function of such stories. He notes the importance of magic in the psychological structuring of children, but also the role these stories play in helping the child "to relinquish his infantile dependency wishes and achieve a more satisfying independent existence." In other words,

> the more secure a person feels within the world, the less he will need to hold on to "infantile" projections—mythical explanations or fairy-tale solutions to life's external problems—and the more he can afford to seek rational explanations . . . . On the other hand, the more insecure a man is in himself and his place in the immediate world, the more he withdraws into himself because of fear or else moves outward to conquer for conquest's sake. (51)

If someone who is insecure is prone either to turn to conquest or to social withdrawal as a form of self-defence, in *The Robber Bride*, it is Zenia who seems to incarnate the conquering spirit. In contrast, the female triad is characterized by the desire of its members to withdraw within themselves, and while they do gain an ounce of courage at the end, they are in fact finally delivered from Zenia and the threat that she represents to them by

the magical resolution of her timely accident. The genie goes back into the bottle, the wolf is boiled, and in this way, anxiety is temporarily mastered.

One might argue that the comforting resolution the novel offers is in fact tempered by its realist strain. The women do not find all their personal problems resolved, they have just taken a small step forward in terms of personal self-knowledge. Yet, as I argued earlier, the realist level is not the strongest one in the novel. What stands out most clearly for the reader is the impression of a congregation of the women, who will, "increasingly in their lives, tell stories" (528). It is the completion of the structure, the affirmation of the three-in-oneness which dominates meaning. It is, indeed, the reaffirmation of the mythical structure of the trinity, given (or given back) to matriarchal designs. Personally, I subscribe whole-heartedly to the point of view expressed by Angela Carter who, in *The Sadeian Woman*, wrote:

> All the mythic versions of women from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to me a fair definition of myth, anyway. Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place. (5)

This function of "obscuring the real conditions of life" is also underlined by Roland Barthes: "Nous sommes ici au principe même du mythe: il transforme l'histoire en nature" (237). The use of myth, or rather the imposition of myth as a structuring framework, and the maintaining of the integrity of this structure beyond the reaches of possible disruption is a strategy which attempts to do away with history: "En passant de l'histoire à la nature, le mythe fait une économie: il abolit la complexité des actes humains, leur donne la simplicité des essences . . . [I]l fonde une clarté heureuse: les choses ont l'air de signifier toutes seules" (Barthes 252).

In *The Robber Bride*, the impoverishment of the human possibilities of the characters and their world may be seen as the result of the illusory reassurance created by Atwood's triple frame of effects: the intimations of permanence which the myth structure offers, the assurance of survival promised by the fairy tale ending, and the budding nostalgia on which the realist level finishes create an almost oppressive sense of closure. This is not to deny that Atwood's use of traditional structures is innovative. On the contrary, her blending of the different realms of discourse does produce something new which is, at times, joyfully poetic. Yet, as the novel explores these new possibilities, it never manages to evacuate the centring force, the

anchoring presence, the fundamental logocentrism which these discursive traditions carry with them. Even as *The Robber Bride* attempts to offer women a way of reconstructing their identity more positively, acknowledging the fear and the risk of pain which the process involves, the novel cushions the reader against any such journey on the ontological level. The ending of *The Robber Bride* tries to evacuate the conflictual tension between the painful exploration of new ways of being on the one hand, and structures of reassurance on the other. The book favours the latter and thereby impoverishes, retrospectively, an important part of the reader's experience of the novel.

NOTES

1 Interview with Karla Hammond, "Articulating the Mute." Atwood, *Conversations* 109-20.

2 The frequent association of the words "history" and "story" in the novel (198, 383, 403) generally grants history the same discursive status as Greek myths and fairy tales.

3 Another intertextual association which emerges here from the processional aspect of the described scene is that of Noah's ark. Here, it is Charis who is "not wanted on the voyage," to quote Timothy Findley. One intertext suggests her exclusion from death, the other her exclusion from life. These are productive contradictions which feed the ambiguity of Charis's divided self.

4 In her conversation with Victor-Lévy Beaulieu concerning the end of *The Robber Bride*, Atwood is quite clear about Zenia's potential for resurrection: "Why scatter her ashes like that? That's a little obscure . . . At the end of a lot of vampire movies, the vampire is burned and its ashes are scattered. In a Christopher Lee movie, you know that, after a certain amount of time, the ashes of the vampire will come back together and form the vampire again. That's the image I wanted to create." *Two Solicitudes* 96.

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James Reaney

The Birth of a "Poem"

Wanna read a poem, no libraries close by?
First find a poet, then find her a muse.
For a poetess,
God bless,
A male inspirer she should not refuse.
Yes, she might,
With reason
In due season,
And, upon reflection
On the best for her selection,
Yes, she might a male inspirer choose.
Later, their baby'll be a poem!

Hurry home
Against the wind
With a poem
On your mind.
Find a quill,
Where's the ink?
Bottle full,
Please don't spill.

Here's the subject, no the object
Of what this Poet has in mind.
Down on your knees and pay attention—
Yes, yes, wait, wait for inspiration.

You want to write a poem for friends' amusement?
Or just your solitary own?
Or, it's like breathing, ye
Can't stop doing it?
Or very shyly—
It's something you would like to write

Not just for unpaid publication,
But
Even maybe
A poem baby, just think—
To be paid!
To be paid cash
For a poem once inside you, now outside
And published to be read
Perhaps—oh gosh!—in *Fiddlehead*!

Well. Simple task to find some paper,
Sweep space in the body's attic
By which I mean what's called our brain.
Now, twiddle out the mental static,
And ready you are to write a poem, but
Says she
To we,
"I can't get started in my garret.
Where's my muse? Asleep as usual?"
Yes, madam, all alone in his mountain hut,
Drowsy on his mattress hay,
Il fait la grasse matinée!

"Hey, Muse, today you marry!"
"Nothing doing," snores the jerk!
Tempt him with the bride's great beauty?
He seems to think it's too much work!
So, rave of her face so fair, her bosom hilly?
"When I last saw her," he replies,
"Flat and pancake was she—pretty?
Don't be silly!"
We reply with double entendre, suggestive slant,
And what is more
We say she's about to be buried!
At this he raises his head.
"She's called Lenore."
He gets out of bed;
"She'll soon be dead,
Yes, she's just about to die!"
He laces on his boots, oh why

For those whose job 'tis to inspire rime,
Does that get them every time?

Through wind & wet
Back to the garret
To tell our poet,
But there to find
She's gone with the wind!
She's come to harm,
She's gone to the barn
Tempted both by a free verse stable boy
Who's also postmodernist,
And also, up in the haymow,
Even now,
She's with an old tramp extremely uncouth
And, to tell the truth,
An unshaved, rampant literary theorist!
Reminding her that it is
Not a treatise
But it's a poem we're in,
And wipe philosophy off her chin.

Re the wedding ceremony text
Have a talk with groom next:
My advice?
Bridegroom, italicize
Where it says,
Oh emphasize
In particular, your groomship,
To wors-
hip her body with yours!

Now, tell the cook to bake
A higher cake
Fetch a match for the wedding candle,
Also a strong best man with chain & club,
Just in case the groom's hard to handle
Where's the ring? the church is full,
Here she comes all dressed in tulle!

Ceremony & reception over
Bride & groom, muse and author
Retired for a night
Of happy delight,
Confiscate all birth controls.
What's that sound of beaten tin pails?
The shivaree!
The charivari!
Crowds of locals intent on beer
What an unpoetic tribe!
Serenading with rattle, drum, and rusty saw,
Which might Inspiration entirely outlaw!
'Tis near the break of day
Before they go away!

Nine months later,
I return with perambulator
Now a metaphor, now a simile.
Now a leg and some synecdoche,
Trochaic heart and tiny little
Fingers beating out a punchy dactyl.
One line at a time—
Arm rhymes with arm,
Finally, the dear little head
Promises something to be read.
Tho'midwife frowns in woe
That sound as yet is no.
Midwife grabs the baby's leg
Whirls babe around over her wise old head:
"Whaaaaah! Whaaaaaaaah! Wha aaah!"
No poem better can there be
Than the first cry of newborn baby.
With a self addressed stamped return envelope
Put the new born in her cradle
And hope
Acceptance enjoyable
By all those able.

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

Kathryn Ready

Sara Jeannette Duncan's *A Daughter of Today*

Nineteenth-Century Canadian Literary Feminism and the *Fin-de-siècle* Magic-Picture Story

In his survey of London in the 1890s, Karl Beckson recounts "the magic-picture mania" (47) that swept through *fin-de-siècle* fiction. From this period he names a wide range of short stories and novels featuring mysterious pictures or mirrors (the symbolic equivalent of the picture). The novel *A Daughter of Today* (1894), written by Sara Jeannette Duncan, offers a fascinating study of the *fin-de-siècle* magic-picture story. In the preface to the modern reprinted edition, Misao Dean reports that Duncan "was a voracious reader of Canadian, British, American, and Continental works" (v). While she and other Duncan scholars have explored the literary background of *A Daughter of Today*, there has been no attempt to connect it to *fin-de-siècle* magic-picture stories like Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). Yet there are good grounds for reading the novel as a magic-picture story. Indeed, a close reading reveals a complex and innovative adaptation of the conventions of this genre. Most striking is the exploitation of the conventions of the magic-picture story to dramatize the challenges facing women artists of the 1890s. The narrative of the magic-picture story intersects with a feminist narrative that traces the heroine's efforts to free herself from the Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House and to succeed as a professional artist, as she embraces some of the principles associated with Aestheticism and Decadence, while simultaneously exposing the limitations of Aestheticism and Decadence for women artists at the *fin de siècle*.

Kerry Powell provides a good account of the historical development of the magic-picture story, and a comprehensive catalogue of its features. She traces the origin of the magic-picture device to Horace Walpole's *The Castle*

of Otranto (1764), which features "a picture capable of sighing deeply, heaving its breast, and stepping out of its frame to censure . . . [the protagonist's] evil behavior" (148). She chronicles the transformation of the magic portrait from a mere device into a vehicle to explore "the duality of art and life, the myth of Faust, the theme of the pariah, the dream of eternal youth, the clash of puritan morality and unbridled hedonism, and the like" (149) in the writings of Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Nikolai Gogol. She notes that "by the 1880s, especially toward the close of the decade, the number of magic-portrait stories swelled to the proportions of a deluge" (150). In her view, the most remarkable "instance in a curious efflorescence of novels and stories dealing with 'magic-pictures' of one kind or another" (148) was *Dorian Gray*. Based on her extensive reading, Powell identifies the following features as characteristic of the *fin-de-siècle* magic-picture story:

> Often a beautiful model . . . sits to an inspired painter who produces an unexampled masterpiece of portraiture. Sometimes the personalities of the artist and subject are curiously fused and recreated in the portrait itself, giving rise to speculations about true and false identity and the relations of art and life. In some stories a mirror is employed prominently as a device to contrast the reality of life to the sublime or demonic representation in the portrait; in others, a "magic" mirror replaces the portrait altogether. On the one hand the portrait is likely to embody some "ideal"—perhaps . . . aesthetic . . . perhaps moral . . . and it may exercise a mysterious influence on characters to do good. On the other hand the picture is associated frequently with evil impulses, even with Satan. . . . It teaches the handsome model to be vain of his beauty and to contrast enviously his human mutability with the static loveliness of the painting. In extreme cases the disillusioned model turns to a life of decadent self-indulgence, scorning the normal ties which bind mankind and inviting his own damnation. . . . The model may seek to change places with his "other self" in the portrait . . . (or . . . mirror) . . . [and] the portrait frequently takes on, among its other functions, the role of conscience. . . . Urged to repentance by what he sees, the remorseful subject of the portrait is either redeemed by his new outlook or driven to despair and suicide. In any event the portrait is likely to be attacked by the model or painter, slashed or burned and thus finally destroyed. The toll taken by these events upon the model may be reflected in his sudden aging, disfigurement, or death. (151-52)

Most obviously identifying *A Daughter of Today* as a magic-picture story is the sequence of events in which the beautiful American heroine Elfrida Bell poses for the English artist John Kendal. In keeping with the conventions of the genre, the portrait Kendal produces is a masterpiece–the best work he has ever done. The narrator states that "[h]e had for once escaped . . . the tyranny of his brilliant technique[,]" subjecting it to "the truth of the idea" (260).

The scene where Kendal captures his idea of Elfrida on canvas exhibits specific parallels to the scene in *Dorian Gray* where the artist Basil Hallward transforms Dorian into the "visible incarnation" of his "unseen ideal" (114). Before unveiling the finished product Basil looks "for a long time at . . . Dorian . . . and then for a long time at the picture" (24). Similarly, Kendal gives his model "long, close, almost intimate scrutiny" (248) before finally allowing her to see her portrait. When Dorian first glimpses his portrait "his cheeks flush[] for a moment with pleasure" as "[t]he sense of his own beauty c[omes] on him like a revelation" (24-25). "In the first instant of her gaze," Elfrida's face grows "radiant" at the "almost dramatic loveliness" (248-49) of her portrait. In both instances, joy quickly turns to pain as the protagonist grasps the import of the artist's achievement. According to the narrator, Kendal experiences an epiphany as he puts the last touches on Elfrida's portrait, sensing that "[i]t was the real Elfrida" (250). In the same terms, Basil refers to his work as the "real Dorian" (29). The narrator's remark in *A Daughter of Today* that Elfrida's portrait "revealed . . . the human secret of the face underneath" (250) recalls Dorian's admission that his portrait "held the secret of his life" (91). Art emerges in both novels as more than reflecting or representing life, namely as usurping or superseding it. "Don't you feel," Elfrida asks Kendal, "as if you had stolen something from me?" (251), while Dorian declares of his portrait, "[i]t is a part of myself" (27). Elfrida and Dorian's portraits thus serve to encourage a Decadent conception of life as art or self as image.

After his portrait is done, Dorian starts to fashion himself into an *objet d'art*, distancing himself from "nature," in the sense of both biological nature and the "natural" norms of morality and sexual behaviour. He lives his life as a series of different artistic poses, becoming an icon of fashion and an arbiter of taste in London society. During the same period, he turns to Decadent self-indulgence, exploiting his portrait to transform himself into "the visible symbol" of the "new Hedonism" (22) expounded by his friend Lord Henry Wotton, who acts as the main mouthpiece for Aestheticism and Decadence in the novel. In the aftermath of his ruthless abandonment of the actress Sibyl Vane, he first grasps the portrait's marvelous aspect, detecting a line of cruelty about the mouth not visible in his own face when he scrutinizes it in the "oval glass" (90) given to him by Lord Henry. This discovery forces him to confront an apparent impossibility. On the day of the portrait's completion, while keeping Dorian company before the final unveiling, Lord Henry had introduced him to some of the tenets of Aestheticism and Decadence, dwelling particularly on the transience of

youth and the necessity of exploiting every opportunity to experience novelty and pleasure. His words had led Dorian to exclaim, "If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that . . . I would give everything! . . . I would give my soul for that!" (25-26). In apparent accordance with this wish, the portrait has become to Dorian "the most magical of mirrors," the hidden record of his life. Dorian laments the "horrible sympathy . . . between him and the picture" (106), but does nothing to try to end it. Instead, he exploits the opportunity to pursue every novelty and pleasure without sacrificing his youth and beauty, successfully defying both biological nature and "natural" morality and sexual behaviour, and realizing the potential that Lord Henry glimpses in him during their first encounter.

Beginning when Elfrida is fifteen and still living in her hometown of Sparta, Illinois, portraits and mirrors serve as touchstones in her efforts to make herself into an *objet d'art*, distancing herself from biological nature and moral and sexual norms.[1] Filled with pride over her daughter's accomplishments, Mrs. Bell shows off a photograph of Elfrida to the highschool teacher Miss Kimpsey. Her remark that the photograph is "full of soul" (repeated by Miss Kimpsey) highlights the relationship between art and life, while her observation that Elfrida "posed herself" emphasizes her daughter's self-consciousness. The narrator reports, "It was a cabinet photograph of a girl whose eyes looked definitely out of it, dark, large, well shaded, full of desire to be beautiful at once expressed and fulfilled." She adds, "The nose was a trifle heavily blocked, but the mouth had sensitiveness and charm. There was a heaviness in the chin too, but the free springing curve of the neck contradicted that; and the symmetry of the face defied analysis. It was turned a little to one side, wistfully . . ." (8). This description evokes an image that is strikingly pre-Raphaelite, suggesting that in her early efforts to make herself into an *objet d'art* Elfrida is heeding Wilde's argument in *The Decay of Lying* (1891) about life imitating art. The image displays the same stylized sensuality as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings of women. Miss Kimpsey's comment that Elfrida reminds her of an actress highlights her air of artificiality.

Home from art school in Philadelphia, Elfrida continues to use mirrors and portraits in order to turn her life into art. The most obvious instance is the scene where she stays up late to recite poetry in the spring moonlight. Before going to bed, she pauses in front of "the looking-glass, and wafts a kiss, as she bl[ows] the candle out, to the face she s[ees] there . . . full of the spirit of Rossetti" (16). Again, it is as if she were stepping out of one of Rossetti's paintings.

Her efforts to turn her life into art redouble when she moves to Paris to finish her training in art. In Paris, she adopts a costume "of which a broad soft felt hat, which made a delightful brigand of her, and a Hungarian cloak formed important features" (26), and her conversation acquires a new air of calculation, evident in her first recorded encounter with Kendal. Also in Paris, she commits herself to a "repudiation of the bourgeois" (29), although not of an extreme form like Dorian's. It is on the ostensible grounds of repudiating the bourgeois that she later denounces her friend Janet Cardiff, whom she accuses of "adulterating the pure stream of ideality with muddy considerations of what the people are pleased to call the moralities, and with the feebler contamination of the conventionalities" (267-68). Her suicide marks the fullest expression of her Decadence, aligning her with famous Decadent heroes like George Moore's Mike Fletcher.

In *A Daughter of Today* the portrait plays no role in encouraging the protagonist's Decadent life. In this novel and *Dorian Gray* it does force the protagonist to question his or her life, serving a crucial function in the resolution of the plot. Dorian's portrait assumes the role of his conscience, representing the progressive deterioration of his soul. Elfrida describes the effect of her portrait as a "moral shock," stating that "an egotist doesn't make an agreeable picture, however charmingly you apologize for her,"[2] although she wavers between contrition and defiance. "Don't think I shall reform," she warns Kendal, "as people in books do . . ." (250). Yet she at least flirts with the idea of change, asking him, "[D]o you want me to give it up—my book . . . my ambition?" (252).

Elfrida's portrait is not magical. Indeed, there is no supernaturalism in the novel at all. Yet Powell identifies a number of magic-picture stories that "omit even so basic a feature as the painting's supernatural qualities" (152). In its lack of supernaturalism the novel resembles other instances of realistic fiction within the magic-picture tradition like Henry James's *The Story of a Masterpiece* (1868), James Payn's *Best of Husbands* (1874), and Charles Reade's *The Picture* (1884). Elfrida's portrait displays an especially strong resemblance to Stephen Baxter's portrait of Marion Everett in *Story of a Masterpiece.* Kendal's work, like Baxter's, brilliantly succeeds in capturing the beauty of its subject while ruthlessly exposing her shallowness and egotism.[3]

Dorian and Elfrida conceive the same plan to free themselves from the influence of their portraits. Dorian hopes to attain peace by killing "this monstrous soul-life" (223). Elfrida claims to have destroyed her portrait in order to end a personal torment, writing to Kendal afterwards, "I . . .

[came] either to kill myself or IT. It is impossible, I find, notwithstanding all that I said, that both should continue to exist" (276). As such, *Dorian Gray* and *Daughter of Today* uphold Powell's observation that in the magic-picture story "the picture is not so much a moral or immoral 'double' as a rival aesthetic self which threatens to destroy its real-life counterpart" (158), despite Kendal's dismissal of Elfrida's act as merely self-gratification.[4]

Daughter of Today imitates *Dorian Gray* in combining the motif of the altered picture with that of the changed model, as the act of destroying the portrait leads Dorian to inadvertent, and Elfrida to deliberate, suicide, affirming the apparent interchangeability of art and life. Powell complains that most magic-picture narratives present the double as an evil simply "to be rejected outright and obliterated," praising Wilde's ending for illustrating "that to destroy the 'shadow' self, with its dark and destructive impulses, is actually to cancel one's identity altogether" (160). The ending of *Daughter of Today* avoids the same kind of moral over-simplification.

Indeed, the narrative as a whole exhibits a complexity that suggests a debt to Wilde that extends beyond the conventions of the magic-picture story, as both authors use the magic-picture story as a vehicle to explore the implications of Aestheticism and Decadence. By the time Wilde came to write *Dorian Gray*, his association with Aestheticism and Decadence was famous. When critics attacked the morality of *Dorian Gray*, he composed a Preface for the novel in which he flaunted this association. Yet as has since been widely recognized, the events of the narrative call into question some of the principles set out in the Preface. The novel achieves a strikingly objective analysis of the attractions and dangers of Aesthetic and Decadent life, as Wilde approaches Aestheticism and Decadence not as "a creed but a problem" (310), to borrow Richard Ellmann's phrase. This approach seems to have inspired other *fin-de-siècle* writers interested in contemporary debates about art who would not necessarily have aligned themselves with Wilde, including Duncan. Duncan displays a specific interest in analyzing the implications of Aestheticism and Decadence for the female artist. The final sequence in which Kendal paints Elfrida's portrait emerges as the crux of an ongoing feminist narrative addressing both the difficulties facing the female artist at the *fin de siècle*, and the consequences of the heroine's efforts to fashion herself into an *objet d'art* according to Aesthetic and Decadent principles.

From the beginning of the novel, mirrors and portraits mark stages in Elfrida's struggle not only to transform her life into art, but also to free herself from the ideal of the Angel in the House. Prominently displayed in the family drawing-room are paintings of the Virgin Mary and the reformed

Mary Magdalene. Symbolically, this decor suggests that the main prospect Sparta offers Elfrida is the role of angel-woman (in the case of Mary Magdalene, reformed from the monster-woman). This prospect becomes clear upon her return from Philadelphia. While her mother pronounces her "tremendously improved" (10) by Philadelphia, her father asserts that it is time she married and settled down in Sparta. While allowing that painting will be a lifelong interest and that "if ever she should be badly off she can teach" (11), he cannot imagine her pursuing art seriously, or even teaching art except as a means of subsistence. The photograph Elfrida poses for when she is fifteen, and the scene in which she blows a kiss to her reflection in the mirror suggest a search for some alternative. Significantly, in the second scene Elfrida directly violates paternal injunction. Mr. Bell objects to his daughter's late night communions with Rossetti, which he fears will produce "headaches and hysteria" (15). Elaine Showalter attests that doctors during the nineteenth century "linked what they saw as an epidemic of nervous disorders including anorexia, neurasthenia, and hysteria with the changes in women's aspirations" (*Sexual* 40), inviting the conclusion that Mr. Bell's unstated concern is with Elfrida's ambitions in art.

Elfrida's Parisian image suggests a continuing search for an alternative to the Victorian feminine ideal, affirmed in her acceptance of her friend Nádie Palicsky's *union libre* with fellow artist André Vambéry. She later vocally denounces love and marriage, the first for falsely idealizing a biological urge, and the second for binding couples in "commonplaceness," "routine," and "domestic virtues" (158). She regards them as "interesting" and necessary for the survival of the species, but "degrading" and "horrible" for women, especially for those "to whom life may mean something else" (157). Beginning in Paris, she asserts the "sexlessness of artistic sympathy" (131)–an assertion repeated in the inscription on her funeral stone, "*Pas femme–artiste*" (281). She asks to be treated "not as a woman, but as an artist and a Bohemian" (46) by Kendal, treating him in the same terms. "For the artist she had . . . admiration," the narrator writes, "for the man nothing, except the half contemptuous reflection that he was probably as other men" (44).[5]

Yet the novel also explores the dangers of Aestheticism and Decadence for the female artist, raising concerns about the impact of Elfrida's ideal of creativity on her art. A belief in the sexlessness of artistic sympathy justifies a demand for recognition as an artist and Bohemian. However, there is evidence that Elfrida's failure at the academy might not be due simply to lack of talent, but to the ideal of creative androgyny endorsed there. In an early scene at the women's atelier, the master Lucien pauses to admire one of

Nádie's sketches. Praising "[t]he drawing of the neck" as "excellently brutal," he confides, "[i]n you, mademoiselle . . . I find the woman and the artist divorced. That is a vast advantage—an immense source of power" (21). Turning to Elfrida's work, he exclaims in exasperation, "Your drawing is still lady-like, your colour is still pretty, and *sapristi*! You have worked with me a year!" (23).

In *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (1995), Germaine Greer denounces the ideal of creative androgyny that evolved during the nineteenth century as damaging for women artists. In her view, "the post-Romantic claims that the great artist does not . . . [create] as a member of either sex but as a representative of humanity is . . . insidious and absurd." The contention that "[a] man does not write/sculpt/paint as a man . . . [and] therefore a woman may not write/sculpt/paint as a woman" is a fallacy, since a man's "'sexuality' colours everything he . . . [creates], even the very act of . . . [creating] itself." Greer insists that "[t]o deny this is to deny to the sex that is acutely conscious of its otherness the right to artistic expression" (101).[6]

Daughter of Today indirectly validates this argument. While Lucien's remark about divorcing the artist and the woman might seem to celebrate a capacity to transcend sex, the praise of Nádie's sketch as "excellently brutal" and the dismissal of Elfrida's drawing as "lady-like" and "pretty" points to a conception of art that is inherently masculine rather than androgynous. It appears that Lucien, instead of advocating androgyny is simply valorizing one set of gendered attributes over another. He admires Nádie not for transcending sex in her art, but for painting like a man. If Nádie meets the academy's criteria of excellence, she is exceptional among her female colleagues. The narrator indicates that it was the work of the male students that was "constantly brought up for the stimulus and instruction of Lucien's women students" (22), not the other way around. The relegation of the women to an upstairs atelier, and the discouragement of female speech at the academy, yields further proof of discrimination. The narrator observes that "[i]t chafed . . . [Elfrida] that she must day after day be only the dumb submissive pupil" (29). She sees the problem as the dynamic between pupil and teacher. However, it is clear from the narrative commentary that the atelier downstairs where the male students paint is full of noise and debate.

The intense competition between female students at the academy attests to their struggle for acceptance there, although Nádie imputes it to "a weakness of her sex" (21). The narrator explains that Elfrida is popular in the atelier because "her enthusiasms [were] so generous, her drawing so

bad" (27). Elfrida herself reacts badly to the news of Nádie's first triumph. After announcing to Elfrida and Kendal that Lucien wants to send two of her pieces to the salon, Nádie asks Elfrida to embrace her. The narrator describes Elfrida as pushing Nádie away "almost violently," banishing both friends from her apartment with "almost hysterical imperativeness" (52). The use of the term "hysterical" in this context is telling. The narrator intimates that nineteenth-century female hysteria results not from ambition, but specifically from thwarted ambition. She employs the word "hysterical" again later in her description of Elfrida's reaction to the news of Janet's successful first novel. Signs of Elfrida's persisting grudge against Nádie appear in the description of Elfrida's London apartment, where "a study of a girl's head that Nádie had given her was struck with a Spanish dagger over the fireplace," while "a sketch of Vambéry's and one of Kendal's, sacredly framed, hung where she could always see them" (58).

Elfrida might seem at first to realize an ideal of creative androgyny more convincingly in London than in Paris. Her *Decade* review impresses Kendal with its "young mocking brilliant voice," its "delicacy and truth," and its air at once "strong and gentle, with an uplifted tenderness, and all the suppressed suggestion that good pictures themselves have" (88-89)–strikingly androgynous terms of praise compared with Lucien's earlier characterization of her painting. Elfrida chooses a deliberately unladylike subject for "An Adventure in Stageland," her most ambitious and well-received literary project, temporarily adopting life as a chorus-line dancer to research it.[7] It remains unclear, however, to what extent we can attribute any success to her attempt to transcend her sex. As the modern editor astutely observes, "Elfrida . . . insists on writing about subjects which are manifestly not ladylike" but also "reflect aspects of women's lives in society" (xviii), and her writing might be said to draw its inspiration from the record of female experience. The recurring insistence on the flaws of Elfrida's writing suggest that she is unconsciously at odds with the ideal of creativity she embraces. The narrator remarks that "[i]n the pleasure [Elfrida's *Decade* article gave Kendal] he refused to reflect how often it dismissed with contempt where it should have considered with respect, how [it was] sometimes inconsistent . . . exaggerated and obscure" (88). She remarks elsewhere that as a journalist Elfrida, "went very well, but . . . was all the better for the severest kind of a bit" (163), referring to the warning of the editor-in-chief of *The Illustrated Age* that "the paper doesn't want a female Zola" (101). There is also Lawrence Cardiff's criticism of Elfrida's manuscript "The Nemesis of Romanticism"as "hopeless" (178), and the author George Jasper's negative evaluation of "An Adventure in Stageland" after the narrator has described

him as a man of "notable critical acumen" (277).

Elfrida's ideal of creativity increasingly fails to provide her with needed confidence in art. Envious of the success of Janet's first novel, she sets out purposely to hurt her. She wrongly attributes Janet's disapproval of "An Adventure in Stageland" to jealousy, commenting, "We are pretty much alike, we women, aren't we, after all?" (225). This tendency to disparage women, exhibited also by Nádie, incidentally reinforces the claims of twentieth-century feminist critics concerning the inherent misogyny of Aestheticism and Decadence.

Elfrida contributes to art mainly through the influence of her conversation and personality on other artists. While in Paris she poses for other pupils, "filling impressive parts in their weekly compositions" (27). After her departure to London, Nádie recalls, "She always understood! It was a joy to show her anything . . . she was good for me" (79). From their first encounter Janet finds Elfrida's talk stimulating, and she perhaps owes to Elfrida some of the impetus for her novel. Elfrida's *Decade* review fills Kendal with a "fine energy" and "a longing to accomplish to the utmost of his limitations" (89). He pronounces Elfrida herself "curiously satisfying from an artistic point of view" (233). She, of course, inspires his masterpiece.

Elfrida's efforts to turn herself into an *objet d'art* arguably sabotage her struggle towards artistic agency by repeating the historical pattern of female objectification in art. Showalter identifies a number of women artists of the *fin de siècle* for whom becoming "muses themselves" and having "their lives appropriated and simplified in the interest of another's art, seemed a tragic fate" (*Daughters* xv-xvi). There is a persistent danger of Elfrida's control over the process of her own objectification slipping away from her, and of her becoming appropriated and simplified in the interest of another's art. Indeed, her desire for an audience encourages her to court that danger. She welcomes the opportunity to be "the medium of . . . [Kendal's] inspiration" (247).

Elfrida's portrait effectively illustrates the dangers of becoming an *objet d'art.* During her last sitting, she confides to Kendal, "I, whom you see as an individual, am so many people. Phases of character have an attraction for me. I wear one today and another tomorrow[,]" speculating, "it must make me difficult to paint" (247). When she accuses him of not listening to her, he responds, "You said something about being like Cleopatra, a creature of infinite variety, didn't you?" (248). The Shakespearean echo inadvertently exposes the source of his attraction to Elfrida. In William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-07) it is Cleopatra's resistance to fixity that

emerges as a primary source of her attraction and power–the same quality Kendal finds most alluring about Elfrida, as he strives "to find out more about her, to guess at the meanings behind her eyes" (122). There is a recurring tension between Elfrida and Kendal as he attempts to fix her, and she resists being fixed, just as there is between Cleopatra and Caesar and his followers in Shakespeare's play. In the end, Elfrida's adoption of different poses fails to prevent Kendal from fixing her. One might even argue that her poses encourage him to label and dismiss her. Once he gets past the superficial fluctuations in her moods, he sees that at the core of her personality is a single guiding principle, which he unflatteringly captures on canvas.

Nevertheless, Kendal's evaluation of Elfrida is problematic. The narrator indirectly questions his objectivity in the observation that he "felt an exulting mastery over . . . [his subject] which was the most intoxicating sensation his work had ever brought him . . . a silent, brooding triumph in his manipulation, in his control" (246-47). When he and Elfrida examine the portrait together we are told that he experiences "curious painful interest," but no "remorse, even in the knowledge that she saw . . . and suffered" (249). There is a subsequent imputation that the portrait does not depict her "fairly" or "seriously" (250). While a number of critics have regarded Kendal as the moral centre of Duncan's novel, Thomas E. Tausky emphasizes the instances of his emotional immaturity and other negative aspects of his character, concluding that "[t]here is no character at any point in the novel who can be said to represent a moral norm against which Elfrida's excesses are judged" (119). Kendal himself qualifies his assessment when he tells Janet, "I have made it what she is, I think" (262). There is also the question of Elfrida's own motives in accepting Kendal's judgement of her. Preoccupation with display fosters her dependence on the opinions of others, rendering her vulnerable to being fixed by him. The value she places on male opinion exacerbates her vulnerability. Interestingly, the more conventional Janet displays less concern than Elfrida with impressing men, and in some respects emerges as more creatively and intellectually independent. The narrator notes her dislike that Kendal's presence "invariably turned their intercourse into a joust; as if . . . they mutely asked him to bestow the wreath on one of them" (139), and her reluctance to raise the situation with Elfrida only because she fears speculation about her feelings for Kendal. In Elfrida's case, love gives Kendal's judgements extra weight, implied in her veiled offer of herself to him immediately after she accepts his reading of her character. Compounding the problem is her own tendency to reduce her personality to Aesthetic and Decadent precepts. In an early conversation with Kendal in London, she calls herself "a simple creature."

Afterwards, she allows, "I am complex enough, I dare say," but insists, "my egotism is like a little flame within me . . . I see everything in its light" (126).

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar famously link the appearance of mirrors and paintings in nineteenth-century women's fiction to the female author's attempt to free herself from patriarchal definition. They identify mirrors and paintings as common objects through which nineteenth-century women writers express their sense of entrapment in the patriarchy, and the trope of the woman looking at a painted or mirror image of herself as symbolic of the woman writer's confrontation of the negative female stereotypes of angel-woman or monster-woman.

Kendal might be seen to envision Elfrida rather stereotypically as a kind of monster-woman. Whatever the flaws of Elfrida's character, exaggerated by her adherence to Aesthetic or Decadent principles, such an assessment seems unjust.[8] The narrator encourages a certain amount of sympathy for Elfrida. She writes with infectious enthusiasm of Elfrida's discovery of art, declaring, "Some books, some pictures, some music brought her a curious exalted sense of double life. She could not talk about it at all, but she could slip out into the wet streets on a gusty October evening, and walk miles exulting in it . . ." (14). The same enthusiasm emerges in such sentences as "The Quartier spoke, and her soul answered it; and the world had nothing to compare with conversation like that" (28), conveying Elfrida's first impressions of Paris. Marian Fowler points to similarities in the temperament of the author and heroine, including the same desire "to do *good* things . . . and to have them appreciated" (217). While Duncan gives her own second name to Janet, she gives her mother's maiden name to Elfrida, hinting that both female characters are intended to represent different aspects of the author. Her journalistic piece "A Woman Doctor" recalls her own youthful ambitions as a painter, describing herself on a picnic with some girlhood friends, looking "affectionately upon a large and ambitious daub in oils that was secured in the fork of a sapling nearby, as in some way typical of a dazzling future career in art" (20). Like Elfrida, Duncan seems to have given up painting in order to pursue a career as a writer. Although there are elements of satire and irony directed at the heroine (significantly absent from *Dorian Gray*), these are directed specifically at her Aestheticism and Decadence. After describing the costume Elfrida adopts in Paris, the narrator adds, "The Hungarian cloak suited her so extremely well that artistic considerations compelled her to wear it occasionally, I fear, when other people would have found it uncomfortably warm" (26-27). The narrator's imitation of Elfrida's use of French words and phrases, referring to the heroine's "*appartement*" (26) and "*petits soupers*" (27), conveys more subtle

mockery. Janet, despite her reservations concerning the effects of Elfrida's Aesthetic and Decadent philosophy on her character, expresses recurring hope that she will change and realize her inner potential. When Kendal convinces her to feign indifference after Elfrida repudiates her, Janet has immediate qualms. As soon as she learns of the portrait's destruction, she rushes to Elfrida's apartment determined to tell her that she did not mean what she had said in her letter, only to find that she is too late.

Once she accepts Kendal's verdict of her, Elfrida's artistic ambitions temporarily evaporate, as she offers to renounce her identity as artist and Bohemian for that of wife and mother. This gesture indirectly highlights a particular problem the author explores in relation to Aestheticism and Decadence–its encouraged repudiation of love and marriage. The account of Janet and Elfrida's debate on this subject implies a tacit agreement with Janet's position. Janet accepts the possibility that "the spirituality of love might be a Western product," but considers it "wanton" to disregard "a thing that made all the difference" (154). According to the narrator, it hurts her to hear sentiments against love and marriage "from . . . lips so plainly meant for all tenderness . . . the woman in her . . . [rises] in protest, less on behalf of her sex than on behalf of Elfrida herself, who seemed so blind, so willing to revile, so anxious to reject." The narrator's observation of Elfrida's tendency to declare her views "with curious disregard of time and circumstance, mentioning her opinion in a Strand omnibus, for instance, that the only dignity attaching to love as between a man and a woman was that of an artistic idea" (154), implicitly challenges their validity, suggesting that she has adopted them at least partly for effect. Lending weight to this interpretation is the developing relationship between Elfrida and Kendal. As Dean points out, "Elfrida's theories about sex are unseated by the evolution of her artistic camaraderie with Kendal into unmistakable physical desire" (xix). *A Daughter of Today* thus aligns itself with other New Women Canadian novels reflecting "a conservative response to the destabilizing force of first-wave feminism," depicting "women . . . [as] feminine in spite of themselves" (Dean, *Practising* 62-63). Ann Ardis goes as far as to cite an intolerance "of the New Woman's artistic ambitions" (148) in the fate assigned to Elfrida.[9]

The same principles that inhibit Elfrida's artistic achievement prevent her from winning Kendal. He explains to Janet, "It's a man's privilege to fall in love with a woman . . . not with an incarnate idea." When Janet responds, "It's a very beautiful idea," he counters, "It looks well from the outside, but it is quite incapable of any growth or much change . . ." (271). Although initially charmed by her poses, he regards Elfrida essentially as an object of

curiosity. Moreover, he has increasing trouble with her demands to be recognized as an artist and a Bohemian. According to the narrator, "the real *camaraderie* she constantly suggested her desire for he could not . . . truly tolerate with a woman. He was an artist, but . . . also an Englishman . . . He felt an absurd irritation, which he did not analyze, that she should talk so well and be so charming, personally, at the same time" (97). Although Kendal refuses to analyze his irritation, what evidently disturbs him is that a woman who insists on addressing him as a *camarade* can excite his romantic and sexual interest at all. Significantly, he never shows the same irritation towards Janet, whose intelligence and literary talents he rates as highly, if not more highly, than Elfrida's. The reason seems to be because he regards Janet as "a natural creature" (81) and "a thoroughly nice girl" (121) whose feelings for him he takes for granted.

Kendal's rejection of Elfrida leaves her lost. The narrator writes, "[h]er self-consciousness was a wreck, she no longer controlled it; it tossed at the mercy of her emotion. Her face was very white and painfully empty, her eyes wandered uncertainly around" (252). As her colour suggests, Elfrida has lost all sense of identity–she is like an erased page. Rejected by Kendal after having expressed her willingness to sacrifice her art for him, Elfrida is left with nothing. The final scene between the two in the studio invites a parallel with another *fin-de-siècle* magic-picture story, Poe's *The Oval Portrait* (1842), where an artist paints a portrait of his bride that drains her vitality, killing her the instant it is complete.

At this point, Elfrida makes a concerted effort to recover from Kendal's evaluation of her. Leaving the studio, she cries "I will never be different!" (253). Arriving home, she declares to her statue of Buddha, "It was a lie, a pose to tempt him on. I would never have given it up—never! It is more to me—I am *almost* sure—than he is[,]" reflecting, a moment later, "He thinks that he has read me finally, that he has done with me, that I no longer count" (254). Her destruction of the painting hurls her defiance at Kendal. However, if she challenges his assumption that he has done with her, she fails to repudiate his actual reading of her, setting the stage for her suicide. Her destruction of her portrait marks a symbolic self-annihilation, anticipating her real death. The final blow is the rejection of the manuscript of "An Adventure in Stageland," only posthumously published. Her suicide marks an attempt to achieve value in the only remaining terms available to her within her artistic creed. The careful staging of her suicide evokes one last comparison between Elfrida and Shakespeare's Cleopatra, who also chooses suicide in order to secure control over her identity for posterity.

To a certain extent, the effect of Elfrida's careful staging is undercut. After

her death, her parents come to England in order to collect her personal effects and to arrange to have her body brought back to Sparta, where Mr. Bell erects a showy monument that becomes the subject of local gossip. When Janet visits Elfrida's grave she hopes that her friend is not aware of the incongruity between the inscription that proclaims "*Pas femme—artiste*" and the stone itself. Together, Elfrida's memorial inscription and marker encapsulate at once the obstacles she faces in her struggle towards professional artistic success, and the limitations of Aestheticism and Decadence particularly for the female artist. Yet there emerge no easy answers. Janet, all along suspicious of Elfrida's Aesthetic and Decadent ideas, manages to write her novel while also marrying the man whom she loves. However, she finally fails to combine art with life as a wife and mother, highlighting the elusiveness of female artistic success. Moreover, it appears that if Elfrida errs in her uncritical absorption of Aesthetic and Decadent ideas, the debate that she provokes inspires Janet, Kendal, and the author herself. After their marriage both Kendal and Janet renounce art for a life of quiet domesticity. The novel concludes with an image of Elfrida's statue of Buddha, smiling enigmatically among "the mournful Magdalens of Mrs. Bell's drawing room" (281), where it now resides. Throughout the novel, the statue of Buddha acts as a kind of confessor for Elfrida. It is to him she articulates her hatred of Sparta and her artistic ambitions, as well as her doubts concerning the path she has chosen. The final image of the statue in Mrs. Bell's drawing-room underscores Elfrida's failure to succeed according to Aesthetic and Decadent principles, but also expresses hope for some surviving legacy.

This final image is apt for a novel that, like *Dorian Gray*, ultimately refuses to dogmatize. This refusal to dogmatize accounts in part for its mixed contemporary reception. While *Daughter of Today* was praised as "a serious piece of work in a serious mood and demanding . . . [our] best attention" (*Athenaeum* 705), and as a "clever study" (*Nation* 473), it also discomposed critics. The majority assumed the novel to be a satire, but as *The Bookman* reviewer pointed out, as a satire it is "not altogether a success" (88) because of its ambivalence. As one critic put it, "[i]t is rather hard to discover what the author is driving at" (*Academy* 132). Yet this ambivalence is also arguably what makes the novel so compelling. In my view, *Daughter of Today* marks another remarkable instance in the "curious efflorescence of novels and stories dealing with 'magic-pictures.'" George Woodcock states that Duncan "was to see herself outside the sentimental conventions of Victorian women's writing" (218). Dean goes farther, arguing that despite the fact Duncan would not have called herself a feminist she

did practice a kind of literary feminism in writing "against the tradition." She herself restricts her focus to the ways in which "Duncan . . . challenged the . . . conventions of the romance novel" (*Different* 8). I would argue that Duncan's literary feminism extends to other genres or sub-genres, and that in spite of its conservative elements, *A Daughter of Today* offers an innovative version of the magic-picture story, and a powerful feminist statement about female artistic life at the *fin de siècle.*

NOTES

1 The narrator's observation that "self-consciousness was a supreme fact of . . . [Elfrida's] personality" (15) suggests that Elfrida shares with Dorian a predisposition towards Aestheticism and Decadence, apparently nurtured by her reading. The lists of books on the shelves of the family drawing-room and on the shelves of her London apartment indicate possible early sources of some of her Aesthetic and Decadent principles.

2 Beginning with *A Fin de Siècle Tribute,* a sketch Kendal executes to expose the folly of Elfrida's gesture of kneeling before a writer she admires at Lady Halifax's in London, his art acquires an increasingly oracular status for her. Finding the sketch in his studio, she informs him bitterly, "It does you credit . . . immense credit. . . . It is so good, so charming, so–so true!" (172).

3 In *Story of a Masterpiece,* it is the model's fiancé Lennox who understands the significance of the portrait, and finally destroys it. Elfrida and Lennox employ curiously similar weapons of destruction. Hers is a "silver-handled . . . dagger" (275), identified alternately as Spanish or Algerian, while his is "a long, keen poniard . . . bought . . . in the East" (232).

4 The account of Kendal's discovery of his ruined masterpiece suggestively evokes Wilde's sensational ending. Kendal, like Dorian, mounts stairs to the room where the portrait is kept only to make a horrifying discovery. Dorian discovers that his portrait, which he had hoped might be improved by an attempted act of kindness, is yet more hateful than before, driving him to his fatal effort to destroy it; Kendal discovers his masterpiece already destroyed. The narrator's comment of Kendal's ruined masterpiece, "Hardly enough . . . remained . . . to show that it had represented anything human" (275), indirectly conjures the image of Dorian's portrait in his last moments.

5 As a number of critics have noted, in her rejection of marriage in favour of art school and a career Elfrida invites labelling as a New Woman. Linda Dowling's contention that the New Woman "expressed her quarrel with Victorian culture chiefly through sexual means–by heightening sexual consciousness, candour and expressiveness" (52)–attributes shared with the Aesthetics and Decadents, also effectively applies to Elfrida. Despite the similarities, Elfrida expresses little interest in the situation of women in Victorian society, rejecting "the higher education of women . . . or the suffrage agitation" (185) as possible subjects for her book.

6 According to Showalter, "the decadent artist was invariably male, and decadence, as a hyper-aesthetic movement, defined itself against the feminine and the biological creativity of women" (*Sexual* x). In *Dorian Gray,* Lord Henry epitomizes the typical Decadent attitude towards female artistry, insisting that "no woman is a genius" (47),

and that women "are charmingly artificial, but they have no sense of art" (102).

7 Dennis Denisof provides insights into the reactions of Elfrida's friends to her adventures as a chorus-line dancer, noting that "women performers, whose very creation of art occurs in public view, were often associated with a sexual transgressivity akin to prostitution" (151-52).

8 In the ambiguity surrounding Elfrida's portrait Duncan picks up on a feature latent within the Decadent movement itself, a distrust with "mimesis and representational practices," as one critic has put it. In the context of *Dorian Gray*, a number of critics have warned that to privilege the mirror-portrait as a moral centre is probably overly simplistic.

9 For an excellent, well-balanced article surveying the complex figuration of the female artist in New Woman literature, in which *A Daughter of Today* receives a brief mention, see Lyn Pykett.

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Canadian Women's Cinema

Kay Armatage, Kass Banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault, eds.

Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema. U Toronto P $21.95

Reviewed by Peter Urquhart

Gender and nation are Big Ideas which have framed much of the useful scholarship on Canadian cinema. That it has been "crises" of masculinity and that it has been the *male* gender (the stereotype of the wimpy male protagonist is a structuring myth of Canadian film studies) which have received the bulk of this scrutiny makes this new volume all the more welcome. Though it is difficult to reconcile theories of nation and gender without essentializing (or without, on the other hand, exploding them to the point of uselessness as categories of analysis), it is worth doing if Canadian and feminist film practice is to be better understood in the contexts of national and feminist cinemas generally.

The book is a very broad collection of articles that address aspects of women's film-making and feminist film practice in Canada. While the film-makers and practices are diverse (from experimental and documentary to narrative features), and although many of the analyses can be located in the vicinity of auteurist readings of Great Works by Women, the book still features a considerable variety of approaches to film practices. All of the major figures are present: Nell Shipman, Patricia Rozema, Joyce Wieland, Léa Pool, Patrica Gruben, Alanis Obomsawin, Anne Claire Poirier. There are also strong essays on lesser-known but path-breaking figures such as Jennifer Hodge de Silva. The essays are generally excellent, for example Catherine Russell on spectatorial dislocation in *The Company of Strangers*, Susan Lord on Patricia Gruben's offbeat "hybrid" films, and Zuzana Pick on Alanis Obomsawin's seemingly paradoxical position as a radical Native documentarist working inside the state institution of the NFB. There is also some flaccid scholarship, such as one piece of near-nonsense presumably on feminist documentary by Ron Burnett that concludes on this note of naive techno-boosterism: "digital images allow us to play with reality, allow and encourage us to create images as a function of who we are and as a pivot to the imaginary worlds we share." And non-digital images do not?

Although the book is useful, it does suffer from some rather surprising omissions. For example, beyond Armatage's valuable essay on Nell Shipman, there is almost no historical research. It is not as if no such work is being done, as Melanie Nash's brilliant recent work on the 1920s Canadian movie star Norma Shearer attests. Feminist film scholars in Canada do not seem to share the enthusiasm for rediscovering and reclaiming historical figures that motivates and characterizes so much feminist scholarship in literature or art history.

As well, while the book provides excellent coverage of canonical auteurist, arty, and even avant-garde film-makers such as Patricia Gruben and Joyce Wieland, the book largely ignores the popular. There is some discussion of *Loyalties*, but none of *Bye Bye Blues* or *Cowboys Don't Cry*. As a director of consistently mediocre popular films (not to mention a lot of television and television commercials), Anne Wheeler is a very rare example of a woman who has made a career of feature film-making in Canada. Though her entire career has been uncharitably attributed to her qualifications as a woman *and* a westerner, Wheeler is representative of one kind of film-maker who flourishes under the relatively high levels of state support for Canadian film. While her films tend to be about women in difficult circumstances, they do not fit well into models of feminist film-making founded on arch critical/political stances.

A similar question could be raised concerning the exclusion of animation. Many of Canada's internationally celebrated animators, Wendy Tilby (*Strings*, 1991) and Torill Cove (*My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*, 1999) for example, are women, but they are not included. I suspect the explanation may be that animated films, like Wheeler's features, cannot be accommodated by feminist film practice.

Gendering the Nation is sure to be included in the syllabuses of many Canadian and women's cinema courses.

Lest We Forget

Margaret Atwood

The Blind Assassin. McClelland and Stewart $37.99

Reviewed by Coral Ann Howells

Margaret Atwood's latest novel is a box of magic tricks, as dazzling in its intricate craftsmanship as a Victorian music box or the great nineteenth-century Sensation Novels like *The Woman in White* or *Lady Audley's Secret*. This comparison may seem to be neglectful of the actual time frame of *The Blind Assassin* when its 82-year-old narrator, Mrs Iris Chase Griffen, finishes her story in 1999 and when the major crises of her life belong to the first half of the twentieth century. However, the narrative is so haunted by restless ghosts, guilty family secrets, and questions of inheritance that it often feels as Victorian as the Chase family monument in Port Ticonderoga cemetery or the Gothic mansion of Avilion built by Iris's grandfather. But just as Avilion and the grandfather's button factory have been renovated for modern use, so Atwood has transformed a Victorian novel form, keeping its labyrinthine structure while accommodating two recognizably twentieth-century genres—a modernist love story and a science-fiction fantasy—in a hybridized postmodern construction for contemporary readers. Though these three stories seem at the beginnning to be quite disparate (and the fragmented opening may be offputting to some readers), the processes of narrative disclosure by which connections are revealed bear a strong likeness to techniques for "unhiding the hidden" practised by Wilkie Collins, M.E. Braddon or Charles Dickens who were all, like Atwood, phenomenally popular novelists.

The first thing that strikes the reader is the mysterious title, followed quickly by the death opening: "Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge"; her body was burned up in the accident. And what are we to make of those three deaths in the first twenty pages—Iris's sister, her husband, her daughter? Those deaths may be spread over thirty years, but they are all recorded through newspaper obituaries right at the beginning. Of course there are other deaths and also a death ending (when we read Iris's obituary), but it is the opening which raises our curiosity.

Who is the Blind Assassin? Is there any connection between these deaths? Iris after all did not see any of them; she is only the survivor who tells the story, as an old lady quietly living in the small Ontario town where she was born, endlessly revisiting the past through her memories. As she rightly says, "You can never get away from where you've been." Yet there is so much left unexplained that we cannot quite escape the sense that here is another of Atwood's versions of Southern Ontario Gothic; there must be more here than meets the eye. With *Alias Grace* it was a question of forgetting, but now the emphasis shifts to things deliberately hidden (Laura's notebooks, a photograph, childhood treasures, a locked steamer trunk). Iris, unlike Grace Marks, is not in prison for murder; the only sentence she awaits is death, and it is against that final silencing that she writes her memoir, which she leaves as a legacy for her granddaughter Sabrina, who is away travelling in India. But is Iris as blameless as she seems?

By now, thanks to the high exposure of the novel, augmented by its winning the Booker Prize, everyone knows that *The Blind Assassin* is a multiplot novel containing Iris's personal memoir, Laura's novel *The Blind Assassin* (posthumously published in New York in 1947) and a science-fiction story about a blind assassin embedded inside it. So the reader is challenged to respond to three different generic conventions—an autobiography in the realist mode, a female romance and a pastiche of pulp sci fi from the 1920s and 30s. Different voices and different perspectives intersect in what becomes a social history of English Canada in the twentieth century, and though these stories may not all tie up, they are all tied together at the end by Iris in the bundle which she leaves for Sabrina in her old locked honeymoon steamer trunk. Apparently there are multiple storytellers here, the most famous being Laura whose single novel has attracted a cult following, though the male lover of her story is also a hack fiction writer (while he is on the run from the police as a Communist agitator), and Iris insistently reminds us that she too is a woman writing her memoirs.

This novel is obsessed with questions of authorship, particularly female authorship, and with the slippery relation between real life and fiction. There is also the question which Iris keeps asking herself: why does she write at all? Her memoir is full of references not only to handwritng, but also to writing hands, moving fingers, left hands, wandering hands, often surrealistically disembodied but always tracing out the lines of the past. Iris writes against forgetting and being forgotten. Her memoir is really very Gothic. Part confession, past memorial, it is her tour of the underworld, her "negotiating with the dead" (to borrow the title of Atwood's book based on her Cambridge Empson lectures last year). What emerges is a deeply serious meditation on desire and loss, loneliness and yearning as she realizes the dangerous power of writing to break open the past, like an "old wound."

Iris claims to be telling the truth about her life and times as a member of the old English Canadian Establishment, and certainly her exposure of her own and her family's guilty secrets strips away carefully fabricated layers of respectability as she tunnels into the spaces behind the glamorous façades of the rich. But how reliable a witness is she really? (Atwood's female narrators have never had a good reputation for truthtelling after all.) Even Iris herself, an enormously complex and contradictory character, admits that her memoir is a mixture of memory and imagination and that she may not have done justice to some of her ghosts. Indeed, apart from herself, the other characters—saintly Laura, Iris's "shabby villain" of a husband and his witch sister, even Renee the old housekeeper, are never quite human, imprisoned in the

stereotypical roles into which Iris has cast them for her story. And is there a true story to tell? "You want the truth, of course. You want me to put two and two together. But two and two doesn't necessarily get you the truth." The truth remains elusive, sabotaged by the number two with its potential for doubling and splitting and various forms of collaboration or conflict.

In a burst of energy and an invocation to the Furies (*the Furies?*) Iris finishes her memoir, the memorial to her generation of English Canadians: "But what is a memorial, when you come right down to it, but a commemoration of wounds endured? Endured, and resented . . . *Lest we forget.*" So Sabrina's inheritance goes into the locked steamer trunk and the novel ends, with Iris's voice speaking eerily to her from beyond the grave, from the written pages. And we cannot help wondering if maybe Sabrina is right not to return till after her grandmother is dead.

Le militant et le libéral

Hélène Pelletier-Baillargeon
Olivar Asselin et son temps: le militant. Éditions Fides $34.95

Bernard Vigod
Taschereau. Traduit de l'anglais par Jude Des Chênes. Éditions du Septentrion n.p.

Reviewed by Kenneth W. Meadwell

Ayant franchi le seuil du troisième millénaire, il semble que la biographie s'avère être un genre de plus en plus pratiqué, que faire le bilan du passé ne cesse de nous fasciner. Ainsi, remonter dans le passé nous dépayse tout en dévoilant l'unicité de l'existence individuelle, engagée au sein d'une collectivité en devenir. Au Québec, l'intérêt offert par la biographie qui reconstitue la vie et l'oeuvre de l'individu, ainsi que la société dans laquelle ce dernier a évolué, se confirme par la publication de deux ouvrages qui font état de la vie et de la carrière de deux hommes remarquables, Olivar Asselin (1874-1937) et Louis-Alexandre Taschereau (1867-1952).

Journaliste et essayiste, Olivar Asselin est né en 1874 à Saint-Hilarion-de-Charlevoix, la même année où Wilfrid Laurier obtient un premier mandat comme député fédéral, où Louis Riel est expulsé de la Chambre des communes et où a lieu la première exposition des Impressionnistes à Paris. Asselin devait au cours de sa vie se tailler une place des plus importantes dans la vie socio-politique du Québec par le biais de ses polémiques, qui ont pris tour à tour pour cible des hommes politiques, des écrivains, des ecclésiastiques, des fonctionnaires et des financiers. Pamphlétaire brillant et sarcastique, militant du nationalisme québécois, journaliste doué, serviteur rigoureux de la syntaxe et de la grammaire françaises, Asselin est une figure fascinante aux yeux d'Hélène Pelletier-Baillargeon, qui a su le recréer dans toutes ses complexités.

Olivar Asselin et son temps: le militant retrace, dans un premier tome qui couvre la période 1874-1916, le cheminement d'Asselin, fils de tanneur, élève brillant au Séminaire de Rimouski, et exilé avec sa famille aux États-Unis qui promettaient des emplois dans les usines et les filatures de Nouvelle-Angleterre, avant qu'il ne devienne rédacteur *au Protecteur canadien* de Fall River dans l'état du Massachusetts. À la veille de ses dix-huit ans, Asselin découvre pour la première fois le style élégant et l'argumentation subtile des journaux de France dont la lecture l'amènera à s'adonner à sa vocation naissante de journaliste. C'est par la suite, vers l'âge de vingt ans, qu'il découvre en lui le désir de remettre en question l'injustice sociale exemplifiée, notamment, par les congédiements arbitraires de ses parents et amis, par les fermetures d'usines en Nouvelle-Angleterre, ou

encore par les accidentés du travail qui ne reçoivent aucune compensation. Asselin se trouve profondément influencé par ses premières expériences, et, installé à Montréal en 1900, jouera un rôle vigoureux dans l'élaboration des principes nationalistes avec Henri Bourassa, fondera la Ligue nationaliste en 1903, participera à la fondation du *Devoir* en 1910, et en 1913 sera nommé Président de la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

Au total, dans ce premier tome de sa biographie, Pelletier-Baillargeon recrée avec verve et enthousiasme les trente-deux premières années de la vie d'Asselin. Cet ouvrage se recommande de toute évidence par sa richesse documentaire, par le souci d'exactitude que témoigne son auteure et par une iconographie fascinante. En appendice se trouvent également une bibliographie des écrits d'Asselin, une autre des historiographies canadiennes et québécoises depuis 1962 ainsi qu'une chronologie succincte de la vie d'Asselin et des événements marquants au Québec, au Canada et à l'étranger. Cette œuvre offre un tableau panoramique très riche de la vie d'Asselin et de son époque.

Dans *Taschereau*, Bernard Vigod nous livre le portrait du premier ministre du Québec de 1920 à 1936, Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, figure politique passée sous silence par de nombreux biographes et historiens. En dépit du peu d'attention accordée à cet homme, il est indéniable qu'il a occupé une place centrale durant des périodes marquantes du développement économique, social et politique du Québec.

Né en 1867 dans une famille respectée et privilégiée, Taschereau a vite compris qu'il appartenait à l'élite du Canada français de son époque. Par exemple, son grand-père maternel, René-Édouard Caron, maire de Québec pendant les années 1840, a été lieutenant-gouverneur du Québec. Recevant sa formation classique au Petit Séminaire de Québec avec d'autres garçons de l'élite canadienne-française, il a étudié les langues et littératures grecque, latine, anglaise et française, l'histoire ancienne, médiévale et moderne, la rhétorique, l'arithmétique, la géographie et le catholicisme. La formation classique de cet établissement menait invariablement au cours en arts de l'Université Laval, et Taschereau n'a pas fait exception à la règle. Il reçu son baccalauréat ès arts en 1886 avant d'étudier le droit.

Les attachements politiques et philosophiques qui se sont formés durant la jeunesse de Taschereau ont été ressentis profondément et de façon durable. Les Taschereau étaient essentiellement des *whigs*, selon Vigod, et croyaient au système constitutionnel britannique, en une élite dirigeante cultivée, au progrès grâce à une évolution graduelle et à la religion non seulement en tant qu'affaire de conscience personnelle, mais aussi en tant que facteur d'influence stabilisatrice bénéfique pour la société. Libéral confirmé, le jeune Taschereau était motivé par le désir d'atteindre le sommet de sa profession juridique. En 1889, il a commencé à pratiquer le droit avec un oncle par alliance, Charles Fitzpatrick, lui aussi un étudiant en droit brillant et doté d'un flair pour les affaires criminelles. Au cours de cette période, Taschereau s'est bâti une réputation professionnelle des plus renommées. Aussi son avenir professionnel était-il assuré.

En 1920, Taschereau a accédé au poste de premier ministre du Québec à une époque où il a donc dû renoncer à son désir de passer plus du temps avec sa famille, à la pratique du droit avec ses fils, à la recherche d'une plus grande sécurité financière et à la possibilité de commencer une carrière de magistrat. En fin de compte, ce n'était que sur les encouragements des amis et collègues, grâce à l'appel à son sens du devoir public et de la loyauté au parti Libéral, que Tascherau a consenti à succéder à Lomer Gouin.

Vigod réussit à faire état avec précision et

clarté des manifestations du libéralisme chez Taschereau, de son courage de résister aux forces de la société canadienne-française beaucoup moins progressiste et ouverte d'esprit qu'il ne l'était, de ses désirs de défier l'idéologie et les préjugés nationalistes traditionnels et de ne pas se soumettre à l'hostilité du clergé à l'égard de réformes sociales qu'il jugeait nécessaires. L'homme souhaitait aussi aborder de front les intérêts industriels lorsque leur comportement menaçait le bien-être économique du Québec. Au cours de sa carrière, Taschereau n'a cessé de faire preuve d'un sens du devoir public prononcé.

Taschereau est la biographie intelligente d'un homme profondément engagé dans la vie socio-politique de son époque, et brosse le portrait de la société canadienne-française qui, il y a maintenant plus de soixante-dix ans, cherchait à se frayer un chemin vers la modernité.

En somme, ces deux ouvrages attestent chez l'individu le désir d'engagement socio-politique et, sur un arrière-plan historique et social, font entrevoir le cheminement personnel et politique de deux hommes extraordinaires.

Faux Fifties

George Bowering, Angela Bowering, Michael Matthews, David Bromige
Piccolo Mondo. Coach House $31.95

W.P. Kinsella
Magic Time. Doubleday $16.95

Keith Maillard
Gloria. Harper Flamingo $27.00

Stan Rogal
Restless. Insomniac $18.99

Reviewed by John Orange

If these four novels have anything in common at all, it is the deliberation one senses in their construction. All four also hearken back to the nineteen fifties in setting, theme or style presumably to make some comment on present-day art and social attitudes. *Magic Time* is a very conventional baseball tale deliberately designed to appeal to the mid-century middle-American values of the readership of his popular baseball stories. *Gloria* is the third in Maillard's Raysburg series of novels, in which he has apparently attempted to imitate the style and preoccupations of the period in which it is set: in this case the nineteen-fifties. The *Restless* stories and *Piccolo Mondo* feel more like experiments in which the authors deliberately try to appeal to postmodern interests, attitudes, and ideas; Bowering *et al.* set the novel at the end of the fifties, and Rogal creates an impression of a style fashionable in that period.

One problem with all this earnest deliberation is that it tends to interfere with the reader's enjoyment. Every paragraph seems to call attention to its own cleverness or to its studied conventionality. This kind of self-congratulatory tone can get to be tedious.

The least interesting of the four under review is *Magic Time.* This is a slight confection worked up from a popular short story about a second baseman named Mike

Houle whose baseball career is in such decline that he is sent down to the Cornbelt League in Iowa and lives with a local family in the small town of Grand Mound. From here on the novel is a coming-of-age romance that celebrates small town mid-western values. In fact, as it turns out, Mike and the other players have all been recruited by the town because the townsfolk knew they would play better when the purity of family values offered them stability and confidence. The players, and even Mike's father, also win the love of good and pure young women (usually from the family with whom they stay as in Mike's case), and the town achieves its goal of renewing its population with good clean and wholesome genes (or something like that). The moral of the story is stated in a back-story early in the novel: "It's all about distances." This is explained in a shameless fashion on the second last page when Mike realizes that "what had happened was all about distances between people, about the distances between trust and love, the distances between truth and reality." Actually the novel is hardly about any of that. Except for a few sexually explicit paragraphs which could have easily been excised, the novel *might* appeal to twelve-year-old boys.

Gloria is an exercise in form and style. The satisfaction in reading this 666-page barn burner is presumably the thrill of revisiting an old style and form: that of, say Grace Metalious. Gloria Cotter, an upper-middle-class college graduate with all the social privileges one can imagine, has to choose between her family's desire that she marry into a "suitable" family and her own goal to attend Columbia and become a professor of English Literature. She comes to be a prototype for the feminist causes that came a little later. Her father's executive position at the local Raysburg Steel Corporation in the Ohio Valley leads to a conflict with one of his alcoholic workers and Gloria, through a series of ridiculously foolish and implausible errors in judgment, is nearly raped and killed on a couple of occasions by the disgruntled sociopath.

Along the way we are privy to the thoughts of a whole range of characters including Gloria's mother, father, grandmother, best friend, and the pathetic villain who is driven off by the actual arrows of our Diana-like heroine. The problem is that we have no need to hear from the supporting players since their stories amount to very little of interest or relevance. Apparently the novel was at one time much longer and was cut down. One supposes that in the earlier drafts the other characters counted for more. When the cutting started, the importance of the omniscient point of view lessened. Perhaps it should have been dropped altogether, thus tightening this novel up by half. There are some scenes in the novel which are very intense and others that are quite moving. Maillard is clearly a gifted writer. He has done enough research on the period to work up a convincing set of details but there are far too many dreams, self-conscious literary references, very mechanical transitions, and redundant scenes.

Piccolo Mondo is set up as a "round" of four writers, G, A, M and D, each letter standing for one of the authors taking turns in writing. The only interesting thing about this mode is the way each of the narrators seems to want to pull the work in his or her direction, only to be followed by the next narrator who pulls it back. This creates a tension among four agendas that leads to a very discursive shambles. Close to the middle of the work A (whom we take to be Angela Bowering) complains that the others are not interested in her confessional character. "She wanted to tell her story . . . It's just a lark, [G] said." Unfortunately, George is right. The characters are flat and unlikeable; the tone of at least two of the narrators is, well, smart-assed and not much more. The whole project is as unsat-

isfying as one might expect of a novel written by a committee. It aims to be a parody of genres (detective, science fiction, coming-of-age novels), even at times a social satire, and is full of postmodern ticks and reflexes. It smirks and snickers, guffaws and grunts but it is not a novel many readers would want to read a second time.

Restless is a collection of thirteen short stories ranging from three to fifteen pages in length, each one honed down to spare, sometimes cryptic prose. The references to Kosinski, Carver, and Kafka reveal what to expect. Most of the stories are cold, dark experiments and they establish closed-off worlds that operate by unknown rules. There is enough of interest in some of the stories to encourage a rereading, but the dialogue is wooden in most instances and the symbolism overly self-conscious. There is craftsmanship, atmosphere, and moodiness in the writing but this isn't enough to make the stories appealing to all but very specialized tastes. Bringing the fifties to life is, apparently, no easy task.

Reading *Rereading*

David Boyd and Imre Salusinszky, eds. *Rereading Frye: The Published and Unpublished Works.* U of Toronto P $21.95

Reviewed by Graham Forst

"One of the most important humanistic efforts taking place at this point in history" is how the introduction to this new anthology of essays on Frye's work describes the enormous effort underway by the University of Toronto Press to publish the Collected Works of Northrop Frye.

Rereading Frye is partly designed to whet our taste for these volumes, which are being edited by Alvin Lee and the ubiquitous Robert Denham, both of whom are represented in the present anthology (Denham twice), as are such well-known Frye scholars as Imre Salusinszky, A.C. Hamilton, and Michael Dolzani. As well as preparing us for the forthcoming Collected Works, this anthology is also an invitation to "re-read" Frye in the waning light of deconstruction.

Based on these eight essays, what are scholars finding in this vast new archive of Frygiana to invite a "re-reading"? Not, at first glance, a lot: the more one reads Frye chronologically, the more one is inclined to see Frye as coming from the womb "streaming clouds of glory," encyclopedic theories intact. What *is* new here are the glimpses we get, first, into Frye's "strange compulsion neurosis" to create impossibly encylopedic mythological schemes (which he called variously "The Great Doodle" or "the ogdoad"); and second, insights into his creative urges, especially his on-going desire to write a novel (typical plot line: the daughter of a United Church minister becomes a member of the C.C.F.).

The Notebooks and Diaries also attest to Frye's prodigious *reading*—and, of course, his memory, which, as Salusinszky shows, reveals that Frye's famous patterns are *not* "imposed upon" literature, but induced *from* it, suggesting that "the *Anatomy* [*of Criticism*] and its schemas may actually be reread as an anatomy of Frye's own memory of literature."

Joseph Adamson's excellent contribution "The Treason of the Clerks" shows how, in his very early Notebooks, Frye had become convinced that "mythology is prior to ideology," a line of thought increasingly important in Frye's later work. For it is there, in *The Great Code* and *Words With Power*, that we find emphasized the idea that "the imaginative dimension of a culture has a decisive *authority* that separates it from its ideological and historical background." This isolation of the imaginative from the ideological (which, as Adamson correctly stresses, does *not* lead in Frye to aestheticism) reinforces for Adamson the over-arching teaching in Frye that "the

function of criticism is not to be a moral censor or judge" but rather "to look for a trans-forming energy in everything we read and to help to set it free."

Like Adamson, A.C. Hamilton, the *éminence grise* of Frye studies, is less interested here in "re-reading" Frye from the perspective gained from the Notebooks, than he is in exploring the other sense of "re-reading"—that is, re-reading to rescue Frye from charges of cultural elitism. In his strong contribution to this volume, "Northrop Frye as a Cultural Theorist," Hamilton compares Frye to Fredric Jameson, Raymond Williams, Louis Montrose and others, for whom culture and social conditions cannot be separated. According to Hamilton, Frye always considered literary work as *shaping* its context, rather than vice versa. Consequently, cultural criticism "need not belittle a literary work"—and here, Hamilton quotes Frye:

> To make a great writer gain rather than lose by a historical treatment takes a sense of the interlocking relevance of all the literature of his age, conceived as a unit of culture complete in itself.

In other words, Frye, says Hamilton, *identifies* culture with artistic creativity, thereby deserving respect as "*the* cultural critic of our generation because he is the voice of that primary mythology expressed in poetry." From this perspective, the teacher's goal is (and here again Hamilton quotes Frye from *The Great Code*)

> to get the student to recognize what he already potentially knows, which includes breaking up the powers of repression in his mind that keep him from knowing what he knows.

With Canadian letters poised to receive the projected thirty-volume Collected Works of Northrop Frye, anthologies such as *Rereading Frye* are especially welcome, if for no other reason than to ensure that Frye's theories are clearly understood, and that his position as a major contributor to western culture is confirmed.

Liberalism & the Question of Nation

Samantha Brennan, Tracy McIsaacs, Michael Milde, eds.
A Question of Values: New Canadian Perspectives in Ethics and Political Philosophy. Rodopi $36.00

Ray Conlogue
Impossible Nation: The Longing for Homeland in Canada and Quebec. Mercury $16.50

Jeffrey Simpson
Reinventing Canada/Reinventer le Canada. U of Ottawa $9.99

Stephen McBride and John Shields
Dismantling A Nation: Canada and the New World Order. Fernwood $19.95

Reviewed by Peter Babiak

There is a passage in "Culture as Interpenetration" where Northrop Frye suggests that Canada "passed from a pre-national to a post-national phase without ever having become a nation." To the extent that the notion of an homogeneous Canadian nation-state is fraught with constitutional complexities and historical ironies which have become magnified by global economic integration, there is some truth in Frye's claim. And yet, nowhere has the definition of "nation" and the principles of national sovereignty been more fiercely debated than in post-national Canada. The four texts under consideration here demonstrate that, notwithstanding the familiar liberal and postmodern affirmation that nations are non-factors in the new borderless world, critical inquiry into the nature of the nation still has a powerful hold on Canadian philosophers, journalists and cultural critics.

A Question of Values, edited by three philosophers from the University of

Western Ontario, is a collection of essays by "emerging" Canadian scholars on ethics and political philosophy. The first two parts offer specialized readings—the meta-ethics of value and the philosophy of freedom—that will have meaning for a limited community only, but in the third the focus shifts to timely issues on the constitution of a nation and the relationship of its members to the state. Take for example Karen Wendling's essay on John Rawls, a philosopher whose work has had no small impact on public policy in the West over the last three decades. Her contention that Rawlsian liberalism acknowledges "the importance of social forces in shaping who we are and what we want"—as opposed to the standard view that it sanctifies the pre-social individual of traditional contract theory—resonates well with our inherited image of the socialized Canadian state, as does Charles Mills's call for a politics that avoids both the radically situated self of communitarianism—McGill professor Charles Taylor's work is exemplary here—and the atomic individual of classical liberal thought. Michael Milde's argument that liberalism as it appears in the Canadian constitution violates the "principles and judgments which are *already* part of our social and political contexts" substantially narrows the gap between theory and political praxis, but the essayist who takes his social intentions most seriously is Wayne Norman, who quite rightly asks why scholars continue to write as if national identity and culture have withered away when recent world history shows that quite the opposite is happening. Particularly relevant to the Canadian context, a messy discursive field marred by oversimplification and stereotype, is Norman's suggestion that we identify different levels of nationalism when considering the Quebec question. As a practical reminder to "refrain from universal generalization"—the either/or logic encoded in Ottawa's Clarity Bill may serve as a reference point here—Norman recommends differentiating the "psychological nationalism" of groups like the Société Saint Jean-Baptiste and Quebec's official "civic-territorial nationalism." Regardless of the political consequences, a more nuanced approach to the politics of sovereignty would bring us closer to what he calls a "liberal morality of nationalism."

Meshing refined scholarship with the thick practices of Canadian culture and politics may be a timely task, but any such endeavour runs the risk of collapsing into overheated cerebralism. A case in point is *Impossible Nation*, where *Globe and Mail* columnist Ray Conlogue argues that "we have failed to build a bicultural country" and then suggests that responsibility for this failure rests on the shoulders of English Canada. He threads the argument on a series of light-minded propositions: English Canadians like to pretend that they are part French; history is "dead" in Canada, but it is alive in Quebec; Canadian nationalism has "failed to take flight," whereas Quebeckers have "no doubt that they are as good as anybody else"; there are more cafés, artists, and people who have interesting conversations in Montreal than in Toronto. This dialectical armature is intended to support Conlogue's central claim that Quebeckers are a "Herderian people." Unlike Canadians, who are living incarnations of stoic Lockean individualism, Quebeckers take their cultural cue from the Continent's idealists, namely from the German Romantic philosopher Johann Herder, whom Conlogue credits with inventing nationalism: "If Herder invented the idea of belonging, it was Locke who perfected the doctrine of solitude. He is the designer of the concept of the sovereign individual." The implied cultural finger-wagging may find fertile ground among a few nationalists in Quebec, perhaps even among some gallery-going liberals in English Canada, but it can be tossed aside

with relative ease. Didn't that other founding father of liberalism, Adam Smith, draw heavily from the Continental *philosophes*? Wasn't the English nation, particularly after the Romantic incursions of Burke and Coleridge, typically regarded as an organism worthy of veneration? And didn't Herder himself adore nations for being what they are, rather than condemn them for not being something else?

Indeed, lop-sided condemnation of English Canada is precisely the outcome of Conlogue's dabblings in cultural history. His synopsis of French-Canadian literature—which stretches admirably from Pierre-Joseph Olivier Chauvreau's *Charles Guérin* to Jacques Godbout's *Les Têtes à Papineau*—provides justification for recognizing Quebec's "autonomous cultural evolution," but then he contrasts this romantic tradition with the provincial imperialism of Sara Jeannette Duncan and Robertson Davies. Furthermore, now that the imperial ideal in English Canada has vanished, and with it any sense of belonging to a definable nation, Conlogue sees Canadians living outside of Quebec as lonely, atomized individuals barely eking out their cultural survival. Again, it would be easy to correct him by pointing out that Margaret Atwood, whom he cites as the theorist of English Canada's survivalist ethos, drew her inspiration from Frye's "garrison mentality," a conceptual trope which has less to do with naming our possessive individualism than with unfolding the psychological trappings of living in beleaguered *communities*. Conlogue rightly concedes that in an integrated world economy even French-Canadian writers "have become so individual and idiosyncratic that thematic overviews seem no longer to function," but unlike their counterparts in English Canada—he mentions Nino Ricci and Rohinton Mistry—they still have "shared values." The whiff of cultural posturing that informs such sweeping judgements leads him to all kinds of questionable assessments: "There is a bistro down the street from my home [in Montreal] where people read Argentine novels and talk politics passionately. One rarely hears ecstatic tales of solid brass shower heads or purpleheart inlays in the front hall." Presumably, the latter are the cultural issues that preoccupy consumer-citizens in English Canada.

If there is a single relevant point in Conlogue's book it is that the political class in Canada—*and* Quebec—is indeed enamoured with the hardheaded culture of economic liberalism. This charge is verified in *Réinventer le Canada/Reinventing Canada*, a thirty-four page transcript of Jeffrey Simpson's inaugural Charles Bronfman lecture in Canadian Studies delivered at the University of Ottawa in 1994. "Depuis quelque temps déjà, la culture politique traditionnelle du Canada s'écroule," he says, but Quebec nationalism is just one of the many cracks in the federation, no more significant than, say, Western alienation or NAFTA. The real problem is "the remorseless arithmetic of our fiscal situation." Like those of a morose banker who keeps reminding you that your savings account is dangerously overdrawn, Simpson's facts and numbers stumble over one another, and they all aim to prove that in Canada "the politics of joy has been replaced by the politics of pain." The joyful expansion of government activities in education, health and welfare undertaken since the Trudeau era have, contrary to their intended purpose, lead to further decentralization, which Simpson fears will compromise the fabric of the federation unless government puts its books in order. To be fair, he does not mimic the unapologetically free-market editorial voice of his employer, *The Globe and Mail*, but his reductionist claim that national integrity is the result of good accounting largely ignores the transformative role of global capitalism in deactivating precarious nation-states like Canada. It is

true that no country is autonomous if it has large debts, but it is equally true that autonomy is impossible when a nation's economic and public policy have been overtaken by the transnational culture of international finance.

The antagonism between the cash-nexus and the present state of the Canadian federation is taken up in *Dismantling a Nation*, but Stephen McBride and John Shields engage the question of the decentralized state from a very different perspective. Over the last three decades governmental power has been reduced to dangerously subnational levels—"sufficiently divided power is constrained power," they say—but this is the result of neo-conservative market thinking which grates on the statist political culture that has shaped Canadian history from MacDonald's National Policies, through Leonard Marsh's 1943 *Report on Social Security in Canada*, to Trudeau's nationalization programmes. Unlike Conlogue, McBride and Shields see collectivist thinking as a distinctly Canadian phenomenon—building their claim on the "staples theory" of Harold Innis, the sadly neglected communications and economic historian—and unlike Simpson, they believe that reinventing Canada will involve significantly more than modelling government as a business venture. Rather in the spirit of George Grant, they remind us of the productive role of the state in Canada's economic and cultural development. Furthermore, they maintain that neo-conservative market culture is a "foreign import" which was first naturalized during the Mulroney-era in documents like the Macdonald Report of 1985, which alleged that NAFTA would strengthen national unity by removing the disparities that lead to regional alienation, and the Meech Lake Accord, which required the federal government to compensate provinces which decided to opt out of national shared-cost programs. Although McBride and Shields admit that the post-national logic of globalization "will be extraordinarily difficult to escape," they applaud the efforts of organized labour and other social movements to articulate the "solid historical achievements of the Canadian people and their state."

National sovereignty may be an illusion in an integrated global economy. In any event, reducing cultural and economic dependence presumes a will to create a homogenous nation, and there is precious little evidence that such a will exists in Canada. But those people who are inveterately prejudiced against the interventions of the federal state, particularly liberal and postmodernist academics who fantasize about the possibilities of living in a post-national world, would do well to remember every now and then that the question of "nation" is far from settled.

Deixis / Dreams

Nicole Brossard
Installations (with and without pronouns). Translated by Erin Mouré and Robert Majzels. The Muses Company $14.95

Nicole Brossard
She Would Be the First Sentence of My Next Novel / Elle serait la première phrase de mon prochain roman. Translated by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood. Mercury $17.95

Anne Hébert
A Suit of Light. Translated by Sheila Fischman. Anansi $22.95

Reviewed by Susan Knutson

Anglophone readers of Québec's literature, and all who are interested in literary translation, will welcome these significant publications by Nicole Brossard and Anne Hébert. To begin with, the two books by Brossard fit beautifully together, although *Installations (avec et sans pronoms)* is a much earlier text, first published in 1984 (and the winner of the Grand Prix de

Poésie de la Fondation des Forges in 1989). It could not have been easy to translate these poems, evocative and tantalizing as they are, but Erin Mouré and Robert Majzels have done a very credible job. Each poem offers a noun—Country, Comparison, Gesture, Rain, Literature—viewed in a perspective established by the installation of pronouns in relation to it. Thus, "Site" recalls the etymology of deixis as a "pointing finger," while it glosses the central metaphor of *installation*:

> each time I settle [je m'installe]
> into a pronoun other than the absolute /
> I remove myself from anxiety
> pointing a finger
> at the changing shape of relations

Or as she puts it elsewhere, "I settle into my body's installation / so as to be able to respond / when a woman gives me a sign" ("Installation").

Other poems explore the plural "we," projecting possible collective or national consciousnesses (awkward but accurate), which are also located in the immediacy of the deictic order. "Culture," for example, illuminates the kind of collective subjectivity that displays an appetite for superlatives, a characteristic which has made nationalism historically suspect: "we hallucinate huge blockages of affect in the here and now / walking in history works up an appetite / one that growls / like a *we* that lurks around superlatives." Such poems, appealing to the intellect as much as the emotions, are interspersed with others of a more visceral cast; all are translated lovingly by Mouré and Majzels.

The pronominal play that characterizes *Installations* is foregrounded and more fully explored in the more recent text, *She Would Be the First Sentence of My Next Novel / Elle serait la première phrase de mon prochain roman*. The French original and the English translation by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood were both copyrighted in 1998, reflecting the close collaboration between author and translator; in her "Notes," Brossard thanks de Lotbinière-Harwood for the translation, from which she has read around the world. This bilingual edition is Brossard's most substantial theoretical text to appear in English since the publication of *The Aerial Letter* (translated by Marlene Wildeman) in 1988. *She Would Be the First Sentence . . .* is what Brossard describes as a hybrid text, "containing only brief narrative interventions with a poetic resonance." These unfold around the classic motif of women speaking together around a table, with the uncanny difference that each of the women risks identification with "Nicole Brossard." The fiction and the theory work together to decompartmentalize genres, a move "without which the feminine *I* could not have simultaneously expressed its sensibility, voiced its dissidence and explored the 'blind spots' of an individual and plural memory." Paradigmatically written "in the feminine," and in part a historical and theoretical reflection on that movement in writing, this text offers a marvelous definition of it, which I will leave readers to discover on their own.

Among the pronominal personae who step in and out of identification with "Nicole Brossard" is one third person "she" who explains herself, or at least, explains her writing, in a singularly clear and discursive manner:

> ever since the publication of her last novel, *Mauve Desert*, a book in which she had agreed to more descriptions, where she had taken the time to love her characters, to give them identities and to set them into a landscape, she seemed reconciled with prose or, at the very least, was showing it greater respect. For though she had published six novels, she had always somehow refused the novelistic . . . . She said she couldn't stand the subject-verb-object routine to which narrative inclined.

Another "Nicole Brossard"—her interlocutor—remains uncompromisingly outside of prose, in the deicitically powerful here and now of the "I":

> *I am a woman of the present, of the moment, and this no doubt explains my reluctance regarding prose. I like to feel that the world can converge, come undone and reconstitute itself inside me in the short while of the poem. I seek that tension and prose keeps it from me. Prose dilutes tension, excitement, the effect of synthesis with which the poem dazzles us . . .*

The dialoging "I" and "she" renegotiate the border between prose, poetry, fiction and reality, summarizing key points of Brossard's writing theory as it has evolved over the last thirty years.

> In Québec, writing in the feminine is characterized by its direct inscription in the modernism of Québec writing, its insertion into problematics of language and of the symbolic. It is a concept in which the intimate "I" and the "we" of belonging gesture to each other and seek to cohabit despite patriarchal meaning that isolates them, the better to invalidate them both.

Since the pronominal positioning is exactly the focus of the writerly exploration, it can hardly remain static; "I" becomes identified with "she" and begins to speak in her name, thus politicizing the scene of writing and creating a public space for a collective consciousness. Such evolutions in the addressor-addressee relationship, the text explains, are acquisitions of feminist consciousness, so it is not surprising that in the fiction, the two women are joined by a feminist and a novelist. All the women listen to the feminist, whose clarity is astonishing.

At the end of the evening, another pronominal construct is born—another writer who renews her vow to live, and to live fully, in the present tense:

> *As I write, I think about my next novel. She will be a character, she will astonish me with every sentence. I will handle the sentences with care. I will be fierce in language. Uncompromising. She will be patient before the world, perfectly desirable like a heroine. She will be a poet. I will not give in to life-likeliness where unhappiness always closes in on women.* I want this she alive.* [*English and italic in the original]

As always, Brossard's playfulness leads us gently into a most serious consideration of women's place in a patriarchal culture which damages women's imaginations, as the feminist has just argued, by sentencing us, "[t]o a certain extent . . . to elucidating our unbearable posture amid images that reflect our exclusion, our fragmentation." In defiance of this the writerly "I" affirms, "I love to exist 'live.'"

Now Anne Hébert's book reminds us, and in the most powerful terms, that men's imaginations are also damaged. Such is the fate of the young hero of her last novel, written and published shortly before her death last year, and translated by Sheila Fischman. He is the one who wears *A Suit of Light*, and his name is Miguel Almevida. This novel captures the force and poetry of those "holy monsters"—as Brossard terms them—of the Quebec novel, "[which rose up to fuel] passion, identity and imagining: sexuality and language." The young hero, trapped by a family drama that has no place for him, also experiences acculturation as a Spanish immigrant in Paris. For him, the power and shape-shifting force of dream offers a temporary richness of experience which he cannot resist, and his beautiful mother, Rose-Alba, follows him and is also lost to a night world that seems to compensate for the absent colour, heat and intensity of Spain. Both cross the frontier of taboo: he is cross-gendered; she is a whore. It ends badly. The father suffers too, as he struggles in vain for authority over his wife, "my loved one, my sly one . . . setting off on the trail of the ungrateful son we made together one night in Spain at the

hour when gardens collapse under their heavy scents." Bereft of the home she had struggled to provide, he is "thrown onto the street, I'm outside my house like a snail without its shell. At the corner café I drink white wine."

On first reading, Hébert provides a narrative closure that carries a message: a warning not to dream, not to change shape, not to cross the line. Many of her readers will find themselves in rebellion against this narrative line, refusing to believe that it is better to remain subservient to that which suffocates them and which will never understand who they are. Like Miguel and Rose-Alba, they will risk all rather than live a non-life. Thus the novel works with irony to arrive at radical and poetic conclusions.

A word about the translations, which are excellent, but do provoke any number of questions. I quibble here and there with de Lotbinière-Harwood; why, for example, do we need *life-likeliness* to translate *vraisemblance*, when the word *lifelikeness* already exists? I wonder, too, if Fischman eliminates all flavour of French from her translation of Hébert in order to write in a language as lucid and as beautiful as Hébert's own. Alternatively, is it because the characters are not French but Spanish? The presence of the italicized *paterfamilias*—a word which actually exists in both French and English—seems to point to the common Latin heritage, source of the patriarchal family structure which fails Miguel and his parents

To Plot or Not

Lynn Coady
Play the Monster Blind. Doubleday $29.95

Nora Gold
Marrow and Other Stories. Warwick Publishing $16.95

Annabel Lyon
Oxygen. The Porcupine's Quill $16.95

Reviewed by Katherine G. Sutherland

Every time my friend Greg and I talk about books, we end up arguing the same point: Greg thinks that a book has to be stylistically experimental to be brilliant, and I think that a book which is quite conventional may be brilliant too. This debate raises some important issues for this review. First, every reviewer has biases, and now you know one of mine. Second, narrative style generates the most significant differences between these three collections of short stories by Canadian women, all of which deal primarily with family and lovers, are set more or less in the present, and fall under the literary category of realism. Of the three, Lynn Coady's *Play the Monster Blind* is arguably the most conventional, while Annabel Lyon's *Oxygen* takes the most stylistic risks; Nora Gold's *Marrow* falls somewhere in the middle in stylistic terms. Of the three, Coady's work is the most consistently successful, Gold's work somewhat less so, and Lyon's work the most uneven. And while the virtue of Coady's work has little to do with her conventional stylistic choices, the weaknesses in Lyon's work are largely stylistic.

To begin with *Oxygen*, then, I should make it clear that I am not opposed to narrative innovation on principle; the canon requires regular infusions of bad attitude and invigoration; this is art, after all. I do not object particularly, for instance, to stories, short or long, which are not plot-driven. Indeed, we, the postmodern people, might sneer derisively at classic definitions of the short story,

like the Edgar Allen Poe orthodoxy of unity, particularly his notion that "unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting." Despite some engaging moments in the stories in *Oxygen*, the work lacks unity, both in the individual stories and in the work as a whole. Unity does not necessarily need to be plot driven, but in the absence of an elaborate and unified plot, these stories might have benefited from particularly detailed characterization or unifying motifs. The stories do not seem to work as impressionistic snapshots either; instead, some of the stories in *Oxygen* don't seem to have a clear design but rather fluctuate between moments of interest and moments of narrative disunity without a clear purpose.

The best stories in *Oxygen* seem to forget for a moment that they are being written, allowing the wit and insight of the author to stand out against the sometimes overworked literary styling of the collection. "Sexy Rex," for instance, is great, saying much with few words, as in this brief passage which delineates the protagonist, her dog, and the character she describes with appealing economy and humour: "She had her hair fisted up into a tortoiseshell claw. There she was, with her sweaty beer and her plain girl's pretty smile. Here I am, reminiscing at twenty-four. Meanwhile Sexy Rex is out there somewhere, taking his time in the eager republic of dogs." Balancing a hip delivery with powerful content, "Hounds" and "Song" are equally engaging. At other moments, however, Lyon's work can feel contrived, with strained figures like "And now, as if an hourglass had been turned—the first skirl of interest, whisper of grit—a new suggestion of collapse, and the inevitable sly mounding beneath." Perhaps a judicious editor might bring more restraint to Lyon's prose.

Marrow focuses on relationships, usually heterosexual and unhealthy. The collection could be split almost down the middle into stories that seem constrained by excessive analysis and stories that dazzle. The first three stories seem to be trying too hard to be meaningful, with language becoming a central theme, an all too familiar motif, as in "Marrow" which begins with the lines "She lost her baby in Hebrew. That is, she lost her baby in a hospital in a foreign language. That is, she can't talk about the death of that baby since it happened in Hebrew, in a language that made no sense." As the stories progress, however, Gold shifts subtly from oddly detached commentary on linguistic impoverishment to language in the miraculous contexts of prayer, faith and the human body. Although most of the characters in "Miniatures: Eight Women, the Day They Turned Fourty" are insecure and man-obsessed, there is one exception:

> she tears the page out of the book and eats it like a sacred ritual, chewing solemnly, and swallowing painfully around the sharp edges of paper, which slice her throat with paper cuts as she swallows. It is an old, a primitive rite—the way men drank the blood of oxen to gain the strength of the ox: Women like her, mad women, witches, eat paper, eat pages, eat words, to stave off their hunger, they devour to keep from being devoured.

The final story, "Flesh," is a fascinating and powerful tale of a reclusive aesthete, Pearl, who falls in love with the politically savvy animal-rights lobbyist, Ricky. The idealistic Pearl is unable to act on her political convictions, while Ricky is a morally ambiguous figure who nevertheless does initiate political change. These characters are fascinating and entirely plausible; their story is politically and personally engaging.

While *Marrow* is not always this good, Lynn Coady, is nothing if not consistent, and in *Play the Monster Blind* it quickly becomes clear why she is the current darling of Canadian reviewers and the woman most

likely to succeed Alice Munro as story-writer laureate of Canada: she is simply amazing, and she's my darling now too.

There just isn't a weak moment in this collection; from the first line, I was emotionally and intellectually committed to this text, and by the end of the book I was stunned by the virtuosity of this young writer. Her work leaves behind the standard late-twentieth century concerns with the human condition as performance repetition, representation, and so on, because her characters generally have few illusions about their dystopic existences. The protagonist of "In Disguise as the Sky," for example, says

> There are all sorts of holes dug into the world in certain shapes and sizes and people are born and shoved into those holes whether they care for them or not. Then they just grow into the shapes and sizes of the holes. And then everybody marvels about how those particular people are perfect for those holes, and isn't it great how perfectly things work out in this world of ours.

Coady presents us with a remarkably fresh collection of characters and narratives that explore the relationships between power and pain, desire and disappointment, human potential and our ratty little lives. "Run Every Day" begins with a paragraph that—for me, anyhow—exemplifies Coady's sensibility:

> One of the things about children that not too many people talk about is their instinctive fascination with power and pain almost as soon as they become aware such a thing exists. It comes before they can walk properly, before speech, before "mama" practically. I once witnessed a two-and-a-half-year-old pick up a block, look at it, look at her little friend sitting nearby, look at the block once more, and then hit. Apropos of nothing, as they say. Just a block, a fellow human being nearby, and a vague germination taking place in the brain.

This passage is typical Coady: in one short paragraph with no stylistic pyrotechnics, she neatly delineates the narrator and raises profound questions about the human condition, all while making the reader laugh. What makes this collection work so well is that Coady never seems to be trying too hard; all the exertion in these stories is hidden from the reader, so that the work foregrounds ideas, not style.

Perhaps this is the point I will make to Greg the next time we pick up our ongoing debate about great writing: writing is an art, and as such it requires risks; but it is also a craft requiring tremendous skill. The best writing balances art and craft with no visible seams, so that form follows function, and not the other way around.

Half a Life

Douglas Cole

Franz Boas: The Early Years, 1858-1906. U of Washington US$55.00/Douglas & McIntyre $45.00

Reviewed by Robert Bringhurst

Franz Boas was never a permanent resident or citizen of Canada, and though he edited and wrote some thirty books, he was never what lovers of literature mean by a writer. Yet there is scarcely a single figure of greater significance to the history of literature in Canada.

Boas was a creature of great complexity, but his failings are as plain as his accomplishments. I suspect that very few of his admirers have worshipped him uncritically, while his most adamant detractors—whose number has predictably increased in recent years—have usually proven to know so little about him that their ostentatious rage leaves little trace. Still, these debates confirm that Boas's stature as a linguist and anthropologist is recognized worldwide. His place in literary history will not be understood until it is admitted that literature in North America begins with the oral

literatures of the continent's native tongues.

The study of those languages and literatures was the focus of Boas's life for fifty relentless and passionate years. He was neither the first nor the best transcriber of Native American oral literature, but he was the most avid, and he was responsible for training, encouraging, directing and financing almost everyone else in the field. No one who approached this work before him left such a lasting mark, and all those who have touched the subject since have labored in his shadow.

Douglas Cole, who was by temperament and training superbly equipped for the task, started work on a biography of Boas in the early 1980s. Though he was not an art historian, Cole was an historian keenly aware of the role of art in the containment and transmission of cultural value. After writing one book and editing another on the role that Canadian artists played in forming colonial points of view, he began a serious study of the place of Native art in the colonial regime. This became his first major work, *Captured Heritage* (1985). It was while working on that study that he came to understand how central Boas was to the modern history of culture, not just in western Canada but throughout the colonized world. When he died unexpectedly at the age of 58, in August 1997, Cole had completed a clean draft of the first half of his biography of Boas and made a mountain of rough notes for the second volume. Two of his colleagues, Ira Chaikin and Alex Long, prepared volume one for publication, and that, alas, is all we shall have. It may be many years before another scholar equally well qualified and equally determined writes the rest of the biography that Boas richly deserves.

There have been several recent studies of facets of his legacy. Marshall Hyatt's *Franz Boas: Social Activist* (1990) is one. Another of greater depth is Regna Darnell's And *Along Came Boas* (1998). But nothing less than a full biography will give that lifelong scholar of humanity the human face his heirs and critics need to see.

The climax of Cole's book—the story of what Boas really did and didn't do in half a century of work in the New World—would have been in volume two. That is the part of the tale most certain to spark argument, but it is the easiest part to research and to tell. Indeed, it is a story that all of us nourished by Boas's work must piece together for ourselves. What Cole has done, through years of painstaking research, is to give those future stories, and those arguments as well, a humane, dependable foundation.

Native peoples and students of their cultures are not the only ones who stand to gain from Cole's research. In his much admired book *Consilience* (1998), the biologist E.O. Wilson complains that our archetypal social scientists—Boas, Durkheim, Marx and Freud—lacked any training in natural science and therefore found it easy to study humans in isolation from other species. Cole shows us what is wrong with such a claim. Boas's first subject of serious study was biology; his doctorate was in physics, and he moved by thoughtful steps from physics to psychology, geography, ethnology, and finally into the field that effectively combines them all: linguistics. It would be difficult to find a less anthropocentric anthropologist. There was, moreover, a good reason for his circumspect approach. Linguistics is a field that did not *per se* exist until Boas and his students had created it.

There are a few remaining signs that Cole was prematurely halted in his work. The chronology of Boas's early fieldwork could and should have been recorded with greater precision. A few of the 17 chapters are poorly organized. Several of Boas's early publications, though cited in the text, are missing from what claims to be a thorough bibliography, and careless handling of running heads has made it hard to find the

endnotes. Strange to say, it also looks as if the manuscript was never read by a linguist. If it had been, Cole would not repeat without a comment Boas's premature complaint (made in a private letter in 1897) that his colleague Q'ixitasu' (George Hunt) was "unbelievably clumsy with the Rivers Inlet dialect of Kwakwala." The language of Rivers Inlet was Uwekyala. Boas was in the position of a Chinese visiting Europe, complaining that the guide he has hired in Paris is "unbelievably clumsy" with the dialect of Madrid. Boas realized his error in due course, and so must those who write about his life. The difference is that Boas never *published* his first outburst. Unlike his biographers, he therefore had no cause to publicly retract it.

A moment of nostalgia is also in order for the days when one could almost take for granted that a scholar would be fluent enough in English, French and German to get on with his research—and when editors at academic presses could follow in such a scholar's footsteps, catching multilingual errors on the fly. Cole was a country kid from farmlands near Spokane who, out of passion for his subject, taught himself the German he could not do without. His in-house editors, with resources beyond the dreams of earlier publishers, cannot even put a list of German titles into alphabetical sequence.

Like many or most discoverers, Boas never knew quite what he had discovered, but discover it he did. He did more than any other human being to document the languages and literary heritage of Native North America—and then for forty years danced back and forth, embracing and backing away from the realization that, at their best, the texts he had transcribed were literature in the fullest and finest sense. But in his passion for gathering those texts, rather than theorizing about them, lies the lasting value of his work.

Motherhood & Desire

Lorna Crozier, ed.
Desire in Seven Voices. Douglas and McIntyre $26.95

Mary Gurekas, ed.
Seven Waves: Quebec Women Writers. Morgaine House $15.95

Reviewed by Carolyne Van Der Meer

These two collections explore elements of the female experience, yet their approaches are entirely different. In *Desire in Seven Voices*, seven Canadian women writers set out with the very specific goal of looking at desire and what it means to them. *Seven Waves* is a collection of poetry and short stories by seven Quebec anglophone women who touch on a wide range of topics, with motherhood emerging as a prevailing theme.

What is instantly remarkable about *Desire in Seven Voices* is the book itself. An attractive design enhanced with script writing, a clean typeface and ghostlike yet sensual photos of flowers, this little volume invites the reader into its seemingly private utterances on desire. And while the theme and appearance of the collection offer a kind of cohesiveness, each writer's approach to the title subject couldn't be more different. Dionne Brand, Bonnie Burnard, Lorna Crozier, Evelyn Lau, Shani Mootoo, Susan Musgrave and Carol Shields all bare their souls, and in some ways, their bodies.

In "Junkie Libido," poet Susan Musgrave explores her realization that to be desireless is to be dead, resulting in her inability to stay for a long period of time with any one man. Evelyn Lau's "Father Figures," one of the most powerful selections in the volume, looks at her deep-seated attraction to older men and the notion that desire for her is often "strangely divorced from sex." The "crush" is more exciting than any conquest, and this, she explains, is what made prostitution easy for her.

Lorna Crozier's contribution, "Changing into Fire," is more of a prose poem than a personal essay, composed of several set pieces either describing places, emotions and childhood memories or representing a one-way conversation with her loved one. While the most stylized, this piece is the least engaging in the collection, its form sometimes inaccessible.

Bonnie Burnard is the only contributor who talks of desire in terms of its role in her craft, but emphasizes that writing about desire in the way this collection demands does not entice her at all: "perhaps I have always believed that talk kills desire." Yet her wrestling with this notion brings desire very much to life. Shani Mootoos's "Photo Parentheses" is also alive with desire, exploring her discovery that she is a lesbian, and the effects this had on her family life and her future.

For Dionne Brand, writing and reading are acts of desire, and in "Arriving at Desire," she writes of the books that led her to discover desire. The Black Napoleon, an historical account hidden in her grandmother's bureau, was her first reading conquest. Carol Shields offers a short story entitled "Eros," in which a cancer victim rediscovers desire at a party, holding, under the dinner table, the penis of a man she doesn't know and isn't sure she likes. This rediscovery leads the character through memories of her childhood and her explosive marriage. Shields, through this story, raises and explores the question of what sparks sexual desire.

These seven essays, in their various forms, are sometimes titillating, often raw, and always deeply probing, both consciously and unconsciously enticing the reader to consider what desire really means. While each writer's approach is uniquely individual, the overall sense is one of coherence, each piece a part of the whole.

The same, unfortunately, cannot be said of *Seven Waves*. This collection, including selections by Claire Braux, Mary Gurekas, Alden Hadwen, Claudia Morrison, Elizabeth Ross, Nadia Slejskova and Carolyn Zonailo, lacks the smooth flow and the quality of the previously discussed collection. While the theme that seems to emerge is one of motherhood, the only common thread that pulls these writers together is the fact that they all live and write in Quebec. And while some of the selections are overwhelmingly powerful, others are overwhelmingly weak.

Claire Braux contributes one short story and four poems to the collection, with the short story "Whispers and Small Laughter" the most successful. In it, elderly women, poet Evelyn and painter Maryse, experience moments of great lucidity as they look back upon their marriages and their roles as mothers. They also seem to undergo waves of senility and confusion as they help each other through the minefields of memory. Mary Gurekas' poems "Becoming Ruth" and "Infinity Plus One" look at the intensity of loving a child, her words resonating easily with parents. Her short story of two school girls, "The Dam," fails because she spells out her protagonist's evolutionary process rather than relying on subtlety or the reader's intelligence.

Of Alden Hadwen's nine poems, the most jarring is "Anxious," in which the narrator realizes that her anxiety over her 17-year-old son's outing with the car is nothing compared to a fighter pilot's outing in the 1940s. Elizabeth Ross's three stories, "Flex-Time," "Private. No Agents," and "Twins" revolve around the real estate industry and are by far the most tedious selections in the collection. Lacking subtlety and style, they read like journal entries, merely highlighting the mundaneness of a task.

Nadia Slejskova's stories are original departures with morbid plots. In "Spiders," an apartment dweller gets caught and dies in the web-spinning of spiders; in "Christmas Carp," the child narrator

understands the hypocrisy of playing with a fish that is soon to be carved for dinner; and in "Man in the Bottle," Harry Dole, trapped in his boring career and sad marriage, actually becomes a man trapped in a bottle. These story lines promise much but fail to deliver because Slejskova tends to overwrite. Of Carolyne Zonailo's ten poems, the most powerful is "My Mother's Hands," in which the narrator explores the idea of "becoming our mothers." The free verse works well, flowing and drawing us into our own relationships with our mothers. In "The Attic Room" and "Old Ladies of Montreal," Zonailo achieves a similar power, suggesting possibilities yet imposing them.

In such an uneven grouping, the work of Claudia Morrison is a blessing. In "The Basement," she reminds us vividly of childhood fears of the dark and looming basement. "Easter Duty" is about one daughter's empty gesture of sending her mother Hallmark cards on five yearly occasions. In her poem "Guinevere," Morrison writes with wit about Guinevere running off with Galahad rather than Lancelot.

To review these collections together is almost detrimental to *Seven Waves.* While it does boast some good writing, it pales in comparison to *Desire in Seven Voices.*

Poetry, Coast To Coast

Lynn Davies
The Bridge That Carries the Road. Brick $14.00

Sandy Shreve
Belonging. Sono Nis P $13.95

Marlene Cookshaw
Double Somersaults. Brick $14.00

Reviewed by Anne Compton

Lynn Davies' *The Bridge that Carries the Road* is as concerned with time as it is with the distances implied in its title. The first poems take to the road; the speaker recollects her backpacking days—travel by ferry, highway, and flower-filled ditches—crossing the country from East to West. The map of the past is read from the distance of a decade. In "What Came Before Me," domestic settledness provokes memories of a nomadic past when a wild animal's "warm breath [could] swell our tent/ walls like sails grateful to Aeolus." Davies's long first section—a quarter of it prose poems—bridges two phases of life: the fearlessness of youth and the fear, wonder, and dread implicit in family life. No one captures so well the deep night fears experienced by a wakeful parent. In childbirth, a woman must re-negotiate "the bargains made with God" to alleviate those fears.

The suite of eleven poems, "Songs for Marion's Daughter," that closes the book goes deeper into the past and domestic danger. Two generations of women—the speaker's forbears—lose the ones they love to illness or to accident. A child tumbles to death walking "a log across the creek." Life is that dangerous, that unpredictable. A trestle bridge breaks under the weight of a train, dropping its human cargo into the "Shepody River" close to home. Contrary to Rainer Maria Rilke's claim that "staying is nowhere," a woman, whatever her generation, knows "staying" in the familiar and the familial is much more intense than going. Attachment to family and place is the real zone of danger.

Davies' engagement with place enables her to "hold east under [her] tongue." The landscape of home—lovely details of Fundy light, flora, and daily tides—"settles into syllable, rises into word." *Bridge* is a field guide to flowers and birds, a chart of constellations as they appear in Maritime skies. The tone is, however, more autumnal than vernal, more night than day. A "Violent Wind" tears Christmas decorations and security from a house, lifts "the smell of old ashes" to the speaker calmly centred in her familial world. Another storm leaves

"wreckage outside," and shreds the interior illusion of "a lamp, a pillow, and two children playing." The speaker moves in a landscape of abandoned homes, "burnt-down" houses, and lanes overgrown with "purple vetch gripping tall plumed grasses." In Davies's work, even abandonment surges with a sensual, an erotic, vitality: a "brown river muscles the mud banks/ far apart."

Davies's optical exactitude, wed to a painterly image-making, shows how "stillness works for her." Especially in "Songs for Marion's Daughter," domestic objects have the tangible, yet ethereal, quality of a pitcher, or a loaf, in a Vermeer painting. In spite of the perfectly apt plain speech ("Something needs to be said about . . ."), an otherworldly quality obtains in Davies's collection. It might be, as in Vermeer, the hint of eternity in stillness. Or, perhaps it's there because Davies' precision is sometimes brought to bear on a magical narrative, as in the poem "Once I Followed a Bird Without a Heart." The strong suite that concludes the book suggests that the Governor-General's nominee (1999) is headed in a narrative direction.

Sandy Shreve—in *Belonging*—has not taken the road back home, at least not for good. A Maritimer settled on the West Coast, she is nonetheless similarly preoccupied with time and distance. As in Davies's "Marion's Daughters," Shreve, in her first section, remembers back through ancestral women. For Shreve, the names of the "Great Aunts" who "visit[ed] the fringes of [her] childhood" have become "passwords" —a "code" and "anagram"—permitting a descendant's "passage" into "independence." Shreve is interested in reading in the relics of women's work "signature" and "motto" ("Susan Dixon's Sampler: 1861"). Whereas for Davies even the past is a perilous road, for Shreve the past is a museum. Shreve's inclination to see the past as hieroglyphic text is reinforced in "Stone Baby," a poem based on a newspaper article about a 92-year-old woman whose body houses a "calcified child." Grisly, but not stunning.

"Between Sisters," the second section of *Belonging*, offers snapshots of a personal past. One after another, these poems begin with a calendar reference—"On this July morning . . ."; "It is an overcast morning . . ."; "It is a late January afternoon and the sun . . ."—like the notes scribbled beneath photos in an album. The speaker is not inside these poems. It's as if someone said, "there, that's me at eight," the photo held at arm's length. "Skipping," "Marbles," "Hopscotch"—girls' games—are subjected to sentimental scrutiny, oxymoron intended.

Belonging is a "nice" book—poems dedicated to parents and a sister—but nothing strange or startling, nothing breathtaking, occurs in terms of language. Although the dictionary meanings of archaic words preface poems, or appear in notes, and attention is given to how words function in code, motto, and anagram, nothing transformational happens here through the deployment of words. Shreve sacrifices intensity and verbal complexity to discursiveness. At times, the language level is perilously close to Hallmark: "I am thinking of you, Dad, as I have so often. . . ." Fully aware of versing's potential to re-make as well as to remark an experience—"as if I could caulk each verse/ like winter windows/ against the cold"—Shreve's execution doesn't re-vision the recuperated.

Double Somersaults, Marlene Cookshaw's third collection, is a poetry of ecstasy and solemnity. "Astonish," and its cognates, is everywhere in this poetry. The word aptly describes the effect of the book. Like Davies, Cookshaw is a bridge-builder, but her work spans the ordinary and the possible worlds. In "The Tree of Logic and Possibility," an exceptional girl, a math-genius, tries to bring "there here"—the music "of numbers, causation, prediction" into the unruly, quotidian world—and

fails. Grief for diminished possibilities coexists with exaltation in *Double Somersaults.*

These are tensely poised poems: words on a tightwire. The bridge between desire and dailiness is no ordinary structure. *Double Somersaults* is the work of a verbal acrobat. Reading Cookshaw requires concentration, rewards with uplift. Experiences are layered, juxtaposed. Riddling questions — "What will come up by how we go on?"— issue from the speaker's sensations and reflections, memories of a grandfather, an Alberta childhood.

Cookshaw is nimble and fearless in word associations; she arranges line breaks to maximize a word's resonance. In "Roses," a poem about her father's death, she writes, "Who knows what my father wanted
out/ of life or what he wanted/ in it." Another poem "On the Ferry. On Hold," begins with the inverted syntax "For a drink . . . / for a bath or a storm/ or the bedding down/ of the ducks. What/ I would give" then veers to "What gives is/ one's beliefs or one's breath." The phrase turns again as the poem and the ferry trip ends: "One steels oneself" against giving way, giving up on desire.

In the Sisyphusian poem "Over the Shoulder," "Guilt is a bag someone has carried/ up the hill from the pub. A brown bag/ . . . duffel over the shoulder." Typically, after such an opening, a Cookshaw poem segues to something apparently unconnected. Here it is the observation that "Wind/ bares the back of a sparrow's head/ underneath its buffer of down." The bird, sure of its "potential for flight," is unperturbed by the wind or the watcher, as it goes about its "nodding and feeding in front of us." The uncanny linkage of "duffel"/ "buffer" holds the parts of the poem together even as it leaves to the reader the realization that what bares a bird's skull also bears it up in flight. The bearer of burdens shares with the bird that universe of "potential."

Cookshaw's "match" on the East Coast would be Carole Langille (*In Cannon Cave*), but it's Rilke of whom the reader is most often reminded in reading *Double Somersaults.* Cookshaw acknowledges that we are unfitted for, inadequate to, the intense engagement, the bliss, the world holds out to us: "Unendurable that we enter the world so/ incomplete."

If we arrive in the world "Unformed," the world's social codes—especially where women are concerned—further deform desire. Girls "who've learned . . .[to] put the necessary padding/ between their bellies and the world" grow up to be women who "listen harder, watch till their eyes/ ache." Like Shreve, Cookshaw considers girlhood photographs, compares "the blooming girl behind glass/ pretty and pliable," to the arrested adolescence of "Snow White." Cookshaw is more interested, however, in "the image of me not yet taken," that "radiate[s] possibility, that radiance a tunnel. . . ." Fortunately for us, Cookshaw survived those early photographic arrangements to negotiate tunnels of radiance, "corridors of energy," passageways between the body and the world where bliss is electric.

Double Somersaults expresses a longing for opener eyes, finer senses, apertures wide open to the world. And even if "Uptown the women . . ./ tell me nothing has changed since/ lions and Christians," there is still "this desire of mine/ for new structure, this attempt,/ to reorganize pieces." Cookshaw funnels that desire into language, enacts change and "new structure" at the level of language. Words, it would seem, cannot come fast enough, thick enough, in naming the ordinary, inexhaustible, pleasures of the physical world: the "denser acanthus." Her "Thanksgiving" hurtles over cats, pigs at a trough, bales of straw, the "sift of the wind through young fall rye." In a farmyard, "[t]he ark of provi-

dence rises/ on the pond." And if that farmyard is sometimes a mortuary for beloved animals, still "the Rugosa like one of Lautrec's dancers/ throws her cherry skirts in the air." In a more solemn moment, Cookshaw concedes that astonishment is gained only by "relinquishing" it all to death and to the "dispassionate air."

Often in these poems, the speaker is moving through a coastal landscape or walking a valley road. A commonplace exchange with another walking there leads to "astonishing / feats of levitation in the wavy light/ and then [we] are set down neatly/ in our separate worlds." In *Double Somersaults*, emotion is funneled into images; images swivel to metaphor. Of the three poets, Cookshaw is the most metaphorical; verbally, the most complex and formally poised: "Let the abbey bell ring ten times" for such good poetry.

In the mail arrive twelve books of poetry I'm to read. It's like a game—one in a dozen is shuddering with energy. I must read eleven to find it. *Double Somersaults* is that one.

Re/Locating Physicality

Shannon Friesen
Like Minds. Broken Jaw P $14.95

Camilla Gibb
Mouthing the Words. Pedlar P $21.95

Judy MacDonald
Jane. Arsenal Pulp P $15.95

Anne Stone
Hush. Insomniac P $18.99

Reviewed by Andrea Wasylow Sharman

Canadian literature is blooming with writing by women authors. These four novels challenge us to abandon our constants and to think about alternative securities, the absence of securities, and otherworldliness. As Camilla Gibb writes, "Worlds meet in collision and the coherence of our histories crumbles." Each author unsettles her reader by combining fantastic reality with wrenching and wretched emotions.

Wryness flirts with sadness and subversion in *Like Minds.* Shannon Friesen here creates wonderfully poignant short stories whose humour emancipates us from the bitterness of social judgements: "With no one taking an interest in her, she stopped painting her toes shades of chilled apricot. . . she eventually stopped shaving her legs and began wearing the same pair of Sears catalogue sweats like military issue." Friesen blends fetish and fantasy with the physical; for example, one memorable moment reads, "That's not jelly . . . that's my mom's placenta." Another story explores the bitter consequences of incest, a prevalent motif in each of these novels: "She hates her mom for not seeing it. How could she live in the same 1200 square feet and not see it? Not hear it? Not feel it? It dripped from the walls and pooled against the baseboards, the weight of it immeasurable in ounces." In contrast to the other three novels, Friesen's work is based in a gritty reality. The women in these short stories overcome victimhood to carve out a place for themselves in the world.

In *Mouthing the Words,* Camilla Gibb's portrait of Thelma from grade one through to graduate school shows deep insight into women's physical lives: "I have decided never to be a woman . . . I don't want to be sophisticated and wear push-up bras . . . I want to come and go like winter, be unspeaking, cold and untouchable, crystal clear," muses Thelma, "No blood, no eggs, no stomach, no breasts." Gibb's writing is emotive and replete with transitional moments. Unwanted by her mother and ritually raped by her father, Thelma conjures imaginary friends (who will play an active role into adulthood) as a defense mechanism, and wishes to occupy no physical space in the world at all. She cannot fathom why her mother would "[v]oluntar-

ily add womanhood" by enlarging her breasts. For Thelma, her body is a well-spring of shame and indignity. An anorexic teenager, she "lie[s] awake every night kneading [her] fat in disgust and resolving to stop eating." Thelma will not eat because she does not want to menstruate, to be a woman. Eventually however, she decides to adopt herself rather than relying on others to love her. The reader journeys along with Thelma, sharing her disappointments and regrets, but also her peace.

In contrast, there is no peace in *Jane*. The novel realizes no growth or achievement for any of its characters. MacDonald exploits gender stereotypes to an indiscernible end: "What would it be like, if I was a guy? Would she go for me? . . . I think I'd be good, in control. I don't think I'd miss being girly-girl. I don't think I'd miss waiting to see what happens. I would just like to do things, which is what guys do." The novel takes its title from the unnamed adolescent protagonist's contention that a "Jane" is "nobody, she's not special. She is what happens with the police or at a morgue. Somebody nobody knows or really cares about. Something dirty and secret." Every teenaged female character in this work is a "Jane," for the novel is comprised of snapshots of voyeurism, master and slave dynamics, lesbian fantasies, rape, kidnapping, torture, murder, and necrophilia. MacDonald takes on too much in this novel for any of these topics to make any significant impact on to readers, except to shock them. The blurring of fantasy and reality in this series of violent accounts is reductive, not alluring. With statements such as, "If I'm nobody now, I'd be even less without you," *Jane* offers no meaningful answers, and no meaningful questions either. As the teenager sucks on the tooth of a young woman whom she has killed and her boyfriend has raped, the reader wonders whether Jane is supposed to be a parody of feminism or a feminist parody. Either way, the novel is unsuccessful in delivering a story that treats its subjects with the gravity they deserve.

While there is an abundance of death in *Jane*, it is the mission of the characters in *Hush* to "outlive De'ath." In the story of Roses De'ath and De'ath Inn on De'ath Sound in Quebec, the odd characters, including a live-in prostitute, a stepfather/lover who is a rabbit-skinner by trade, and an old boyfriend named Bat, surface through their dis/posessions. So the periphery becomes the centre. Stone gives us poetic lines such as, "Roses could be this nothing, a hushed silence, a pulsing gap. She is the strained shift in speech . . . that has taught her to construct herself out of holes." *Hush* is primarily concerned with lack; it is structured around the presence of absence: "All loss . . . was born of man's inborn predisposition to fill holes: pot-holes, holes in rubber tires." When the prostitute admits, "I am a Whore/ I am a Whore/ I am a Whore," this haunting recognition echoes deep in the throes of De'ath. Stone takes us within and without as existing holes (accidentally stumbled upon), such as the dead twin (the ultimate lack in *Hush*), begin to be gradually filled. After her rape, Rose hears a "sound . . . coming from inside of her." The characters find the instrument of their voice, present all along to be strong.

La courte échelle

Gilles Gauthier
Pas de Chausson dans mon salon. La courte échelle $9.95

Marie-Francine Hébert
La livre de la nuit. La courte échelle $9.95

Compte rendu par Daniela Di Cecco

La courte échelle, fondée en 1978, est une maison d'édition spécialisée en littérature pour la jeunesse. Son objectif, celui d'être à

l'écoute des jeunes et de leur offrir des récits de tous genres, d'une grande qualité littéraire, a fait d'elle, en vingt ans, la plus importante maison d'édition pour la jeunesse au Québec. Si la courte échelle a fait son entrée sur le marché avec des albums, elle n'a pas tardé à ajouter d'autres collections à son catalogue, "grandissant" ainsi avec un lectorat en constante transformation. Les romans que nous évaluons ici représentent deux de ces collections. *Pas de Chausson dans mon salon* (1998) de Gilles Gauthier figure dans la collection "Premier Roman," spécialement conçue pour les jeunes qui commencent à lire (7 à 9 ans). Tenant compte des difficultés que rencontrent les lecteurs débutants, les romans de cette collection se caractérisent par une mise en page aérée, des chapitres courts, des phrases simples et de nombreuses illustrations. *Le livre de la nuit* (1998) de Marie-Francine Hébert fait partie de la collection "Roman Jeunesse," qui offre aux lecteurs de 9 à 12 ans des récits plus longs, mettant en scène des héros et des héroïnes de leur âge.

Pas de Chausson dans mon salon est le deuxième titre de la série "Chausson," (démarrée en 1997 avec *Petit Chausson, grande Babouche*). Les romans "Chausson" font suite à la très populaire série "Babouche," ce qui souligne la tendance aux héros sériels à la courte échelle. Carl, le protagoniste de ces romans, n'est pas un enfant favorisé par la vie. Orphelin de père, il vit seul avec sa mère, Nicole, et sa vieille bergère allemande, Babouche. A travers la série "Babouche" (*Ne touchez pas à ma Babouche*, 1988; *Babouche est jalouse*, 1989; *Sauvez ma Babouche*, 1989 et *Ma Babouche pour toujours*, 1990), on suit le développement de la relation entre ce garçon sensible et attachant et sa vieille chienne. Gauthier prend le temps de préparer ses lecteurs à la mort éventuelle de Babouche—un thème délicat pour les lecteurs de 7 à 9 ans. Les sentiments priment dans cette série, où l'auteur saisit avec justesse le sentiment d'abandon d'un jeune garçon.

La mort de Babouche introduit cependant un nouveau "personnage" (et une nouvelle série): "Chausson." Pour Carl, Chausson, le chien dont son meilleur ami Garry lui offre de partager la garde, ne peut pas se comparer à sa Babouche disparue. Cependant, cette série permet aux lecteurs de revivre les grandes aventures de Babouche à travers le récit qu'en fait Carl. Dans *Pas de Chausson dans mon salon*, Carl poursuit son idée d'écrire la biogaphie de Babouche malgré les diverses difficultés qui se présentent. Gauthier révèle à ses jeunes lecteurs les enjeux de la biographie et, à travers son protagoniste, sollicite l'avis des lecteurs. Au défi de l'écriture s'ajoutent d'autres épreuves: les visites de Garry et de son chien Chausson, et surtout celles de René, le père de Garry, qui fait la cour à Nicole, la mère de Carl. La découverte d'une chaussette appartenant à René bouleverse le protagoniste: "Après ma renversante découverte, je me suis couché le coeur tout de travers. Je ne savais vraiment plus quoi penser. En fermant les yeux, je revoyais contamment Chausson, le bas dans la gueule. J'imaginais maman et René ensemble. Je repensais à papa et à ma Babouche. Et j'ai pleuré." Tout en présentant des sujets difficiles, Gauthier n'oublie pas d'offrir des explications à ses lecteurs et le fait souvent par le biais du personnage de Nicole, explorant en même temps le thème du rapport entre une mère et son fils. La communication n'est pas bloquée entre les deux et la mère trouve toujours les bons mots pour rassurer son fils (et le lecteur): "Maman dit qu'il y a des hauts et des bas dans la vie. Pour tout le monde. L'important, c'est de savoir apprécier les hauts au maximum. Et de ne pas trop s'en faire avec les bas."

Avec *Pas de Chausson dans mon salon*, Gilles Gauthier arrive, encore une fois, à émouvoir le lecteur tout en lui donnant de l'espoir. Privilégiant les enfants moins chanceux dans la vie, l'auteur explore un

thème qui a une longue tradition dans la littérature de jeunesse—le rapport enfant-animal—tout en mettant en scène des personnages réalistes auxquels les lecteurs pourraient s'identifier. Comme le dit son protagoniste: "Ma pauvre Babouche et moi, on va être de drôles de héros. On ne ressemblera pas beaucoup à Tintin et à Milou, j'ai l'impression."

Avec *Le livre de la nuit* (1998), Marie-Francine Hébert emprunte et modernise un thème souvent associé au conte traditionnel: celui de l'enfant abandonné en forêt. Ce rappel au conte se fait dès la couverture où on voit un frère et une soeur (Jano et Margo) illustrés à la Hansel et Gretel par Gérard Dubois. Le début du récit évoque également l'ouverture classique du conte: "C'était l'été. Il y a de cela bien longtemps. Sur la route qui traversait la forêt de leur enfance." Comme dans la série de Gilles Gauthier, Hébert choisit pour héros et héroïne des enfants défavorisés, mais ici, c'est surtout au niveau des parents que les enfants n'ont pas eu de chance. Le portrait de ces deux adultes se fait pendant un voyage en voiture: "Le père tenait le volant d'une main. De l'autre, une bière qu'il vidait par petites gorgées obstinées, comme s'il était déterminé à se noyer de l'intérieur. A l'autre bout de la banquette, communément appelé 'la place du mort', la mère poussait des soupirs de vieux pneu qui se dégonfle lentement, mais sûrement. [. . .]. Margo reporta son regard sur l'être hirsute et mal rasé qui lui tenait lieu de père. Un flot de rage, de honte et de chagrin confondus reflua dans son coeur. Comment avait-il pu lui faire une chose pareille?".

Le suspense suscite aussi des questions chez le lecteur: comment un père peut-il abandonner ses enfants au bord de la route, au milieu de nulle part? La nuit en forêt transforme Jano et Margo. Livrés à eux-mêmes, ils vivent la peur "une fois pour toutes." A travers cette nuit inoubliable, Hébert explore également la relation frère-soeur. Margo se montre plus intrépide que son frère, en voulant retrouver à tout prix le chat que son père avait abandonné plusieurs mois auparavant: "Elle avait l'impression d'avoir mué, de s'être débarrassée de sa peau de petite fille effrayée et sans courage, pour permettre à la petite fille brave et combative qu'elle était de se manifester." Jano aussi évolue et arrive enfin à communiquer sa passion pour les livres, "ces petites portes que l'on pouvait ouvrir sur la vie, et les mots, qui en étaient des trous de serrure." Il s'agit au fond d'un roman d'apprentissage car à travers cette expérience traumatisante, Jano et Margo se découvrent et se rapprochent l'un de l'autre.

La construction du récit est intelligente, les personnages sont riches et l'intrigue est bien menée. Le suspense, soutenu jusqu'à la fin du texte, est également appuyé par les illustrations sombres de Dubois qui transmettent la frayeur et l'angoisse des deux enfants. *Le livre de la nuit* est le premier volet de la série "Jano et Margo." Les nombreux lecteurs fidèles de Marie-Francine Hébert suivront sûrement avec beaucoup d'intérêt les aventures et la quête d'indépendance de ce couple frère-soeur.

Fellow Travellers

Gary Geddes
Flying Blind. Goose Lane $12.95

Jim Smith
Leonel/Roque. Coteau $11.95

Reviewed by Dean Irvine

Flying Blind is—as you might expect of the author of *The Terracotta Army, Hong Kong, No Easy Exit/Salida dificil,* and *Letters from Managua*—another travelogue by Gary Geddes, a poetic flight through politics and poetry abroad. Figures and names unfamiliar to the untravelled and unhistoried

reader surge into view in this most recent installment.

The alienation effect of the first sequence of twelve poems is deliberate and disorienting. Its narrative is a record of Geddes's 1993 trip through Israel and Palestine with the blind poet and scholar John Asfour. If you wanted a guide, Geddes isn't going to provide one on this trip. As he warned his readers in *Letters from Managua*:

> One thing's certain: there'll be nothing of the Cook's Tour about this trip. And no one will ask me to do an update of the famous *Guide Bleu*, which Roland Barthes cleverly describes as a tourist document so concerned with types, essences, and the picturesque that it becomes, instead of a guide, "an agent of blindness."

The persona Geddes adopts in the opening sequence is not that of a travel agent, nor a tour guide, but "an agent of blindness." His persona is sighted, yet blind. This paradox at the centre of his persona's meditations is the subject of the collection's epigraph, from Jacques Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*: "The paradox stems from the fact that the blind man thus becomes the best witness, a chosen witness. In fact, a witness, as such, is always blind. Witnessing substitutes narrative for perception." Narrative is an agent of blindness. Geddes travels into his own blind spots, aware that his eye-witness narratives of Arabic politics, culture, and history are yet more occasions for blindness. That his travelling companion Asfour is blind, and a poet, presents an ideal *doppelgänger* for reflection and introspection—that is, on blindness and insight.

The middle sections that follow—"Aggregate Resources" and "Little Sleeps"—return the reader to somewhat familiar spaces and relationships: friends, family, rural eastern Ontario, portraits of the domestic, familial, natural worlds of the poet's daily travels and travail. These are poems of patient observation, insights into everyday things. They cultivate a casual voice, inviting the sympathetic reader into the poet's private sphere. These are poems full of seeing, yet they risk being sometimes "so concerned with types, essences, and the picturesque that [the poem] becomes . . . an 'agent of blindness.'" These middle poems lack the defamiliarization and culture shock that make those of the first sequence so eye-opening, so stunning, so unremitting. The last section, "Basho's Road Apples," regains the effect of the opening sequence through another travelogue. Like Basho's poetic travel diaries, this section consists of pieces written about travels in Japan. It resitutates the political urgency of the first section, beginning and ending with meditations on the nuclear holocaust of August 1945. Its final sequence—seven hokku—opens with a contemporary tourist's photo of a Zen Garden in Kyoto and closes with an historic diary entry:

> *August 5, 1945*
>
> A thousand gods
> assigned to protect children:
> 8:15, slept in.

One impulse you might have after reading Jim Smith's *Leonel/Roque* is to read Geddes again—not so much *Flying Blind* as *Letters from Managua*. Even with Smith's preface, notes and glossary, you want to reach for some other guide—like Geddes's *Letters*—to Central American poetry and politics before attempting another reading. *Letters* reveals Smith to be another of Geddes's fellow travellers—poet and *compañero*: "a gifted and irrepressible poet and graduate of Concordia University's M. A. in Creative Writing . . . one of my former students and an Old Nica Hand, who came to Managua on a solidarity mission in 1984 and attended the first book fair in 1987." Smith himself credits Geddes as "travelling companion and Canada's finest living polit-

ical poet" in his acknowledgements. And Geddes contributes a back-cover blurb to *Leonel/Roque*, calling it "a charred love-letter to two lost *compañeros* in Central America."

Smith's preface does provide context to a collection about two poets familiar to Geddes or to other fellow travellers and readers of Latin American revolutionary poetry and history, but not to those unfamiliar with the political and literary cultures of Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1970s. Smith is aware of his audience, briefing anyone who hopes to parachute into the volatile political world of these poems. He informs prospective readers that the "Leonel of the title refers to Leonel Rugama, a young Sandinista poet who at 20 years old was killed in a shootout with Nicaragua's National Guard in January 1970" and that the "Roque of the title refers to Roque Dalton of El Salvador, who at 40 years of age, and with a substantial writing career and numerous publications, was murdered by unknown members of his own revolutionary party in San Salvador in May 1975." Having established the historical content of his collection, Smith proceeds to identify the historical context of its form, locating it in a specific tradition of Latin American writing:

> *Leonel/Roque* is not a history, nor is it a biography, nor a political tract, though, as a serial poem sequence, it occasionally exercises its right to take on aspects of any of these. It is, perhaps, a distant relative of the Latin American genre of *testimonio*, in that a number of voices testify about events and experiences which arise from the latter part of this tormented century.

Testimonio is traditionally a novel or novella-length narrative, related in the first person by a narrator who is the protagonist of the events she or he recounts. When Smith speaks in the person of Dalton or Rugama, the affinity to *testimonio* is apparent; Smith's authorial interventions, self-consciously calling attention to the comparative project of writing about two poets historically unknown to one another, step outside of the *testimonio* tradition into metafictional history. These interventions more often than not foreground the improbability and untenability of Smith's doubled histories of Rugama and Dalton. "It is a slim possibility," ends one poem that had begun by entertaining this comparative project: "okay, say the task is to compare and contrast." At such moments, the reader may wonder if these poems constitute a series of workshop exercises, tasks left over from Smith's days as Geddes's student. Smith often fails to finesse his poems; they sometimes read like political tracts, pamphlets, or poster captions. Smith's own translations of "certain neglected works" Rugama and Dalton appended to *Leonel/Roque* do little to suggest that either poet wrote anything other than political propaganda. In response, Smith has written a collection of propagandistic "love-letters," to use Geddes's term, an encomiastic serial poem in memory of two "lost *compañeros*." As a serial poem, not a typical *testimonio* novel or a novella, *Leonel/Roque* is also related to the tradition of the "documentary poem," named a "Canadian genre" by Dorothy Livesay in 1969. Geddes, incidentally, has been a practitioner of the documentary poem since his *War & Other Measures* in 1976. If you wanted one of these political poets as a documentarist and fellow traveller, Geddes again proves himself the more experienced and skilled guide.

Postcolonial Diversity

Claudio Gorlier and Isabella Maria Zoppi, eds. *Cross-Cultural Voices: Investigations into the Post-Colonial.* Bulzoni n.p.

Peter O. Stummer and Christopher Baume, eds. *Fusion of Cultures?: ASNEL Papers 2.* Rodopi $28.00

John C. Hawley, ed. *Writing the Nation: Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination.* Rodopi $28.00

Reviewed by Anna Johnston

Cross-Cultural Voices is the fifth volume of a series produced by the Centre for the Study of Literatures and Cultures of the Emerging Countries, a series committed to research on "the New Literatures in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish." The scope of the book is wide-ranging, including essays on literature from Africa, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, and India, and covering poetry, drama, fiction, and author interviews.

This is a slightly old-fashioned volume in a number of respects. The first, evident from the title of the Centre from which this work emanates, is a relatively unproblematized assumption about what constitutes these "New Literatures." To be fair, Zoppi's introduction specifically notes that this volume will not take an active part in current debates about definitions of "the postcolonial," and that it will seek to encourage inclusion and diversity rather than superimposing some kind of unifying critical methodology. Still, some positioning of the texts and their surrounding cultural narratives in the introduction and the individual essays themselves is, I believe, necessary for a volume which sees itself as contributing to the broader field.

The sense in which this volume seems to reflect the old "Commonwealth Literature" school continues within the individual essays. Most of these essays focus on close readings of individual texts (by authors such as Nadine Gordimer, John Morrison, and David Dabydeen) or specific genres (contemporary Ghanaian poetry, allegory in traditional Shona narratives, and black writing in Canada). In general there is little engagement with contemporary postcolonial theory or even with the broader cultural analysis which one expects in recent postcolonial work.

The individual essays within this volume do provide detailed and thoughtful readings of interesting texts, and many of the texts analysed are those which certainly deserve more consideration. Interviews with writers from Ghana, South Africa, and the Caribbean are also valuable; Valeria Guidotti's discussions with Stephen Gray, Sipho Sepamla, and Mazisi Kunene about the place of the writer (both black and white) in the new South Africa are particularly interesting.

Fusion of Cultures?, by contrast, contains an equally diverse range of subjects and texts, but places itself carefully and politically within current debates in postcolonial studies. Stummer's introduction situates the later papers within a broader political and cultural context, and engages with what he calls "the major difficulty inherent in the post-colonial critical project," the difficulty of finding common ground for the extreme heterogeneity of cultures and histories included within contemporary postcolonial studies. Stummer does not find any singular solution to this central question within the field, yet his discussions are admirable for their breadth, provisionality, and flexibility.

The papers in this volume originated mostly from the 1993 conference of the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English, which sought to re-explore postcolonial orthodoxies in relation to difference and alterity. Issues relevant to diaspora and historical constructions of both homogenous and avowedly cross-cultural texts and artifacts

concern most of the individual papers. Christopher Balme's paper opens the volume with an intriguing history of the concept of syncretism and its positive redeployment in cross-cultural or postcolonial contexts. And this later version of syncretism connects papers on subjects as diverse as Nigerian theatre, Southern African poetry, the novels of Bessie Head and Wilson Harris, and the perils of reading cross-cultural artifacts in disparate locations.

Inevitably, the papers vary in quality and professionalism: some certainly show their origins as relatively informal oral presentations more than one would hope. The best papers however, are timely and engaged meditations upon different aspects of the postcolonial field. Wolfgang Hochbruck's paper on Zimbabwean war fiction, the duo of papers on African autobiography, and Franz Schulze-Engler's paper on the Rushdie affair, for example, are committed, provocative essays. In general these contributors are genuinely engaging with the hard questions in postcolonial studies.

Writing the Nation is another wide-ranging collection which addresses topics from Alejo Carpentier's influences to Haitian women's fiction (particular Nadine Magloire's *Le Mal de Vivre*) from nineteenth-century Latin American fiction to the contemporary Moroccan poet and novelist Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine.

Hawley's introduction wrestles with the range of possible theoretical and cultural arguments which these essays raise. While at times the introduction is rather confusing because it tries to cover so much, it does locate this collection within a range of vital issues in postcolonial studies. This introduction looks at the relationship between globalisation and postcolonialism; the diversity of historical experience and kinds of postcoloniality; the relationship between nationalism and liberation; and the relationship between local political struggles and postcolonial academics. As this abbreviated list of issues suggests, the introduction raises many more issues than it can realistically cover. The intended dual audience—the uninitiated and those already conversant with an area of postcolonial studies—also makes a rather ambitious task.

Individual essays in this volume of particular interest to this reviewer include Elaine Savory's piece on Kamau Brathwaite and the negotiation of personal and community voice in his poetry; Susan Ritchie's "Dismantling Privilege," which attempts the ambitious project of "rescuing postmodern theories of subjectivity for postcolonialism"; Nikos Papastergiadis's analysis of one of Homi Bhabha's most impenetrable essays, "DissemiNation"; and Bill Ashcroft's discussion of Peter Carey's fiction and history.

These three volumes demonstrate the pitfalls and the possibilities of postcolonial studies. The diversity of the field is in some ways a very productive and exciting characteristic, yet postcolonial studies can at times appear a rather undisciplined and unruly conglomerate of scholarly activity. This is not to argue against the kinds of different material these volumes present, but rather for a thorough and well-situated contextualisation of contributions to the field.

Body & Soul

Barbara Hodgson
The Sensualist. Raincoast $29.95

Vladimir Tasić
Herbarium of Souls. Broken Jaw $14.95

Reviewed by Wilhelm Emilsson

As the titles suggest, *The Sensualist* and *Herbarium of Souls* deal with the opposite ends of life's spectrum. The former indulges in the pains and pleasures of the

senses, while the latter focuses on the spiritual realm of existence. What both have in common, however, is a failure to achieve their aesthetic aims.

The Sensualist is a detective story of sorts. Helen, a Canadian art historian specializing in anatomical art, goes to Europe to search for her missing husband. She is quickly drawn into a search for missing Renaissance woodblocks, but the reader is even quicker to realize that the author has really sent Helen to Europe to "find herself." (Why is it that so many North American fictional characters still have to go to Europe to find themselves?) It follows that thematically there are no surprises here. Helen has to shed her puritanical upbringing in order to learn how to "Live!" to quote Henry James's famous exclamation from *The Ambassadors*. "You—when had you ever lived?" the skinny, uptight Helen is told by Rosa, her corpulent *alter ego*, whose antics force the protagonist to reconsider her life.

Hodgson's novel, though, does have some more original aspects. Since Helen is feverish, disoriented, and hallucinating a lot of the time, it is fitting that the book should feature Vienna, the city of nervous dreams, as well as strange rides on old-world trains and uncanny nights in alienating hotel rooms. But the problem is that because the author must know, consciously or subconsciously, how common the basic idea of the book is, she tries to compensate for it by cramming it with bizarre little episodes: a dog talks, a curator of a medical wax museum is killed, dipped in wax, and placed among the exhibits, and so on. All this leaves the reader cold—not because there is anything wrong with having conversing pets and unusual murders in a novel, but because the text is simply trying too hard to be different.

Hodgson is a book designer, and the novel is filled with lavish, mostly anatomical, illustrations which interact with the text. Unfortunately, they do not mask the commonplace level of the writing and the contrived, at times, juvenile plot. Dashiell Hammett once wrote: "I spend most of my time rewriting most of what I had written. I bet if I worked hard enough on those few pages, I could whittle them down to a phrase." Hodgson's prose does not show an awareness of the fact that most of the time the delete button is the writer's best friend. If she had worked as hard on her text as she did on her illustrations, *The Sensualist* could have been a success.

In *Herbarium of Souls*, Tasić draws on a wide range of sources, among them literary scholarship, the visual arts, and the sciences, but paradoxically the range of his stories is very narrow: they all deal with a longing for an ideal realm beyond the material world. Although it is clear that the author prefers the ideal to the real, his thinking has evolved beyond a naive denigration of the world. At times, his old-fashioned nostalgia for the supernatural gets the better of him, but for the most part it is balanced with a realization that often the ideal can only be maintained by deception. Hence, these stories abound with life-lies, necessary illusions, and forgeries. Tasić's reflections on this issue are fairly sophisticated, but after a while the repetition of the same idea gets a bit tiresome.

Predictably, the main characters are melancholy men. Their portrayal is not unconvincing, but the supporting characters, especially the women, are clichéd. Another problem is that the collection suffers from creaky attempts at creating suspense. In "Professor's Corben's Last Discovery," the ending involves the practice of automatic writing. The protagonist, a bright graduate student specializing in mystical Symbolist poetry, actually has to be told what automatic writing is. This is highly improbable. Even a not so bright graduate student specializing in Symbolist poetry would know what that is—or at the

very least have the decency to look it up. You cannot study Symbolism without knowing that most of its major practitioners dabbled in the occult. Yeats's fascination with automatic writing is legendary, for instance. In Tasić's story "Secrets of an Argonaut," the main character journeys to an extremely isolated lake in the Alps. There he meets a reclusive physicist. The traveller just happens to have brought with him a magazine which features an article by the recluse, and he has just read it. Later, the traveller observes: "For a moment—a brief moment before I dismissed the notion as nonsensical—I believed that all that had happened might not have been a mere coincidence." This only adds insult to narrative injury, because a series of "mystic" coincidences invites the reader to contradict the narrator. But the reader has to be absurdly superstitious to take that invitation seriously. Suspend the reader's disbelief too much and he will disbelieve the suspense.

Herbarium of Souls is filled with references to mysterious mathematics, ancient maps, and labyrinthine libraries. The problem is that Borges has done all this before. Tasić's work can only suffer from the comparison. Why make a stand in someone else's shadow? While the collection contains traces of an elegant melancholy which deserves to be developed further, overall, these stories leave the reader mildly disappointed.

Useful Keys

Peter Hunt, ed.
Understanding Children's Literature: Key Essays from the International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature. Routledge $24.95

Anne Blades
Wolf and the Seven Little Kids: Based on a Tale from the Brothers Grimm. Groundwood-Douglas and McIntyre $15.95 pa

Lois Burdett
Hamlet for Kids. Firefly $8.95 pa.

Lois Burdett
The Tempest for Kids. Firefly $19.95; $8.95 pa

Gary Clement
The Great Poochini. Groundwood-Douglas and McIntyre $16.95 pa.

Maureen Hull
Wild Cameron Women. Illus. Judith Christine Mills. Stoddart Kids $19.95

Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

Peter Hunt, chief editor of the *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature,* has now republished fourteen essays from that work under the title *Understanding Children's Literature.* The bibliographical utility and survey of the strengths and weaknesses of various critical approaches are sure to make this an influential text in the teaching of children's literature. While scholars who marginalize children's literature may be bemused by the theoretical ambitions of the essays, Canadian children's literature scholars who are already familiar with the work of Rod McGillis in his 1996 *The Nimble Reader* and who regularly apply different critical approaches in their own scholarship and teaching will have a more ambivalent response to Hunt's collection. For as useful as the text is, whenever we recommend it to our students we will have to ask, but why do you think that there are so few Canadian references in a collection culled from an *International Companion Encyclopedia,* and

what do we really learn about "The World of Children's Literature Studies" (the title of Hunt's introductory chapter), or "The Setting of Children's Literature: History and Culture" (Tony Watkins's essay), when the only Canadian children's book cited in the entire book is by Robert Munsch?

Now Hunt does begin by quoting the Canadian McGillis; several of the contributors refer to the scholarship of Linda Hutcheon and Northrop Frye; and two of Hunt's contributors, Perry Nodelman and Lissa Paul, are Canadian (and their scholarship is cited frequently in the other essays). This is twice the number of American contributors but only half the number of those from Australia/New Zealand. The remaining six contributors are all British (Hunt is responsible for both the introduction and the essay on bibliographical studies). Does this really matter? Aren't we beyond keeping score of the national identities of scholars and texts?

Why national coverage matters has been discussed by Meena Khorana in her 1999 critique in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* of the *International Companion Encyclopedia* for its structural marginalization of international children's literature. The consequences of this structure are even more evident in *Understanding Children's Literature*, for while the larger work may contain an essay on Canadian children's literature, Hunt's "key essays" do not include any national children's literature, a structure that inevitably encourages us to conclude that to understand children's literature, we need not know much, or anything, about any national children's literatures other than those most frequently cited. For Hunt to acknowledge that "The two most obvious constructions of history are from an Anglocentric viewpoint, and from a male viewpoint" and then to reproduce that construction in his selection does little to address the marginalization.

Judging by Hunt's collection, with a few rare exceptions, Canadian children's literature scholars and children's writers are just not significant. In "From Sex-Role Stereotyping to Subjectivity: Feminist Criticism," Paul cites *The Paperbag Princess* only as "a dubious exception" to her thesis that most feminist rewritings of the seventies are no longer in print. The only Canadian scholars in her bibliography (other than herself) are Stephen Slemon and Jo-Ann Wallace. If Paul, a Canadian scholar, feels so little compelled to cite many Canadian works to advance her argument, what familiarity with Canadian work can we expect to find in the other essays? Some Canadian research is mentioned in Michael Benton's essay on reader-response criticism; Hunt in his essay on bibliographical studies praises Judith St. John's 1975 catalogue of the Osborne Collection, and includes Sheila Egoff and Judith Saltman's *The New Republic of Childhood* in his brief international bibliography. Analyzing metafictions and experimental works, Robyn McCallum cites Hutcheon but no Canadian children's books; similarly in an essay on intertextuality, Christine Wilkie mentions no Canadian books as examples of the new picture books and the new young adult novels (new in that such books break codes and provide sites for intertextual interplay). The unfortunate consequence is not just a reinforcement that Canadian children's books don't count, but that such books don't count because they are not interesting.

In "Essentials: What is Children's Literature? What is Childhood?" Karín Lesnik-Oberstein does cite the work of Canadians Egoff, Paul, and Michele Landsberg. Here Canadian critics are part of a larger group, but Lesnik-Oberstein portrays all children's literature critics as obtuse believers in an essentialized childhood, something she can only demonstrate by ignoring the approaches of critics such as Mitzi Myers. Lesnik-Oberstein asserts

that children's literature critics are universally prescriptive, convinced that children's literature means books that are good for children, that such critics believe it is their job to identify which books are good for children, and that such critics are incapable of understanding the social complexities of childhood, goodness, or literature. Nodelman's perceptive observation in his own essay that pleasurable children's books "teach children *how* to be child-like," that picture books "are enmeshed in the ideology of the culture that produced them, and the childlikeness they teach is merely what our culture views as natural in children" rises above the simplicity of Lesnik-Oberstein's argument.

Nodelman asserts that because "the words [. . .] always tells us that things are not merely as they appear in the pictures, and the pictures always show us that events are not exactly as the words describe them," we need to recognize that "[p]icture books are inherently ironic." A comment that rejects the persistent adult belief that only adults can appreciate irony, Nodelman's observation and Christine Wilkie's suggestion that we conceive of children's literature as "an intertextual sub-genre of adult literature" are both particularly useful in reading five recent Canadian children's books, all of them in some sense retellings of adult stories, yet markedly different in terms of the readers they construct and the irony that they deploy.

The first, *Wolf and the Seven Little Kids*, adapts the well-known Grimm Brothers story and makes of it a softly water-coloured and remarkably non-threatening tale. Although the kids disobey their mother and open the locked door, and the wolf finds six of the seven kids and "swallowed them down," Blades's illustrations remain pretty and peaceful. The greedy goat has swallowed the kids whole; when the mother goat frees the kids with scissors and sews the goat up, Blades makes sure that we see the stitches but no gore. If Nodelman's view of irony applies, it is in the frequent tension between what the text tells us—the miller is afraid when the wolf threatens to eat him—and the reassuring illustrations. For while the wolf may bare his teeth, the miller in both illustrations looks like any adult calmly speaking to a pet dog. The child viewer constructed by Blades's adaptation, conceived as one too young to enjoy being frightened, learns that children cannot protect themselves, the luck of the world usually falls on the youngest kid, and clever mothers always outwit evil wolves.

Wild Cameron Women shares with Blades's adaptation of Grimm the pattern in which a maternal figure outwits a wild animal. Like the protagonist in many other picture books that explore children's night time fears and locate the fear in the monster in the closet (for example, Mercer Mayer's *There's a Nightmare in My Closet*), Hull's protagonist, Kate, has "a problem with bears" who come out of her closet at night and wake her up. Kate's parents, less concerned about the fate of their daughter than about their disturbed sleep, turn for help to the grandmother, Nana Cameron, who arrives with three Cameron tartan nightgowns, and a story about the Wild Cameron Women. Although both gifts serve to help Kate, it is the maternal ancestral tale that is key. For Nana Cameron tells Kate how her ancestors come to Canada, seeking the freedom unavailable in Scotland, a freedom to "speak their own Gaelic language, and wear this Cameron tartan." Kate's seven-greats namesake has confirmed the nature of Canada as a free space when she terrifies the bear that is threatening her infant by screaming in Gaelic at him and tossing a bucket of icy water in his face. Teaching her granddaughter the same Gaelic phrase, Nana Cameron teaches not only a solution to Kate's inability to sleep at night, but also a story about

Canada in which there are no aboriginal peoples challenging the definition of the new home as empty and free space. And if Kate learns that brave solitary mothers cleverly outwit animals, and women rely on language rather than murderous violence in order to triumph, she also learns an ambiguous lesson about wildness.

For if women must be as "wild" as the animal opponents that they face, Kate must also learn to restrain that wildness. As is typical of many children's books intended for young readers, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* among them, this is reinforced by the ending. The extent to which Kate is willing to be as "wild" as her maternal ancestor proves comically problematic. When Kate, believing that she must literally imitate the wildness of her heroic ancestor, wants to practice throwing icy buckets, Nana and the parents advise her that such wildness is excessive; she only has to shout in Gaelic and show the bears that she has the bucket. By the end of the week, "all the bears in the world had heard that Kate was a Wild Cameron Woman." In this way, Hull not only acknowledges the difference between literal and symbolic truth, a difference which we imagine distinguishes how children and adults understand stories, Hull also constructs a child reader capable of distinguishing between contemporary civilized space (the bedroom where we don't throw buckets) and the wild space of the past (a Canada inhabited by immigrants and bears) where we do.

Further evidence that picture books construct a reader who appreciates irony appears in the intertextual parody and word play of *The Great Poochini*. The end papers depict posters advertising the opera singer, Poochini, previous star of *The Dalmation of Faust, Tails of Hoffman, La Nozze di Figarover,* and *The Barker of Seville*. Signor Poochini, the canine hero, is known to his human master, Hersh, as Jack. Clement never draws Jack as Signor Poochini, "the finest canine lyric tenor ever to have graced the opera stage" when Hersh is in the picture. We see Hersh from the dog's point of view—a hand, a shoulder, never a face. When the dog is drawn listening to records with his master, he appears as the dog in the RCA Victor advertisement, His Master's Voice. But as soon as Hersh goes out for the night, Poochini transforms into his true opera star self.

The problem is that Hersh, ignorant of his dog's secret life, has locked all the windows, and Poochini has no key. How will Poochini, who is supposed to debut in *Dog Giovanni* that very night, get to the Muttropolitan in time? The solution, involving a cat burglar, some strategically used opera music, and melodramatic stage business appropriate to the opera Poochini must perform, saves the day. Poochini performs, "When he reaches his high C, it is said that only dogs can hear him," and he brings the house down with his "famous duet with the beautiful and enchanting diva, Madama Barkoli." Now this is all very clever, but when Poochini and Barkoli sing, "*Là ci darem la zampa,*" the child reader's ability to recognize the extended joke requires that the reader already know the duet, "*Là ci darem la mano,*" from *Don Giovanni*, just as the earlier pictorial reference to His Master's Voice presumes a familiarity with the advertisement. The child ignorant of opera can recognize the joke when Clement's words, "The audience is all ears," are given a specifically canine meaning in the illustration. But how does the opera parody work to a reader who knows nothing about opera?

Like many of the books analyzed in *Understanding Children's Literature, The Great Poochini* refutes any naïve belief in the simplicity of children's books. If the child reader shares with the canine protagonist a presumed secret life, part of that secret is how a child reader responds to parody that presumes prior knowledge of

opera.

If it is unclear whether a parody like *The Great Poochini* actually encourages children to value opera, there is no uncertainty about the intent of Lois Burdett's adaptations of Shakespeare. Both *Hamlet for Kids* and *The Tempest for Kids* (sixth and seventh in the very successful Shakespeare Can Be Fun series) take for granted a series of linked assumptions: that Shakespeare is worth reading and performing; that very young children can appreciate Shakespeare; and that this appreciation requires that we surrender adult assumptions regarding the difficulty of Shakespeare. The logic of these assumptions collapses, however, when Burdett rewrites Shakespeare. Why do it, unless adults are actually right regarding Shakespeare's difficulty?

A reader already familiar with Shakespeare might well prefer his blank verse to Burdett's rhyming couplets, a response hard to resist when "To be or not to be" becomes

> "To be, or not to be, that is the question," he mused.
> For the meaning of life had become confused.
> The world for Hamlet had become a chore,
> "To die is to sleep and nothing more."

Yet this preference must be set beside the numerous verbal and artistic responses by real children that Burdett includes in her text. One child writes as Polonius to Ophelia: "I advise you to dump Hamlet." In *The Tempest for Kids*, a child ends her love letter to Ferdinand, "Your sweetie pie Miranda"; another child paraphrases Ariel appealing to Prospero for his freedom, "I zipped, zapped, zanged all over the ship. [. . .] So all's well that ends well." Beside such responses, the questions—but is Shakespeare in rhyming couplets still Shakespeare? And will the children who zip and zap so enthusiastically necessarily learn to enjoy a different Shakespeare when they are older?—seem inappropriate.

Although Lesnik-Oberstein berates children's literature critics for imagining an essentialized childhood, we are more likely to find such references in the casual words of those outside the professional world of children's literature. Thus Kenneth Branagh, in his Foreword to *Hamlet for Kids*, takes for granted the innocence of the child reader, the reader "in the state of blissful ignorance about Shakespeare's most famous play." To such an imagined child, the play is material to play with, and Branagh emphasizes that fun "is the key to this book." And Nodelman might add that we teach children that having fun is part of being childlike when we give them such books.

Yet even as we rely on such books to reinforce both the cultural significance of "fun" and the central place of Shakespeare in the canon, eventually all such books move from fun to the pedagogy of use. Burdett's end note to Parents and Educators for "a variety of activities" confirms Geoffrey Williams's assertion that literacy pedagogy teaches children what the real place of literature is in our culture, by emphasizing activities in which we "use" literature. We tempt children by making Shakespeare "fun"; we have to emphasize the "fun" if we are to fit his plays within the underlying definition of childhood, but even Shakespeare in the end must be useful too: "List examples of parental advice to children. Survey and tally for most frequent advice, and graph the results. Compare your examples with those of Polonius to his son, Laertes."

Handling the Past

Franca Iacovetta & Wendy Mitchinson, eds.
On the Case: Explorations in Social History.
U of Toronto P $60.00

Caren Irr
The Suburb of Dissent: Cultural Politics in the United States and Canada During the 1930s.
Duke UP $18.95

Reviewed by Tamas Dobozy

Both of these volumes deal with the inevitable complexities occasioned by the backward glance. Iacovetta, Mitchinson and Irr, each in his or her way, struggle with the historical document, in the former the case files that support the writing of social history, and in the latter the critical documentation that has obscured the diversity of 1930s social fiction. While Iacovetta and Mitchinson's selection of scholars carefully considers the case file both for its many blind spots and weaknesses, as well as its relevance, Irr rereads the primary American and Canadian authors of the 1930s as a way of contesting the critical assumptions that surround them.

On the Case is in many places an ethical consideration of the use of the case file, with each contributing author debating not only the validity of the case file as a tool for recovering history but also the ethical aims or ends that should guide the social historian. As Annalee Golz, in her essay, "Uncovering and Reconstructing Family Violence," writes, here there is always an "end" beyond the consideration of the case file in and of itself: "Reconstructing and interpreting the various meanings associated with domestic violence and the workings of patriarchal authority, however, does not end with considering the diversity and richness of the criminal case files." Indeed, for Golz, the files testifying to domestic abuse, while needing "to be approached with interpretative caution," render a lesson on the way in which institutional discourse elicits and rewards patterns of female testimony, how the procedures of law courts obstruct rather than produce a literal account of wife-battering. Golz's repeated warnings of the necessity for vigilance in examining case files call for our own vigilance in confusing the reports of courtroom proceedings with the literal truth.

Similarly, Carolyn Strange treads carefully through the vault of case files, concluding that the plethora of narratives—petitions, judges' summaries, coroners' reports, police accounts, criminal records—involved in Canadian "capital cases" often contested rather than corroborated the events surrounding the crime and the accused. Writing about remissions reports, Strange suggests that the writing of social history (whether from the nearby vantage of a first chief remissions officer or from the distant one of the 1990s social historian) is itself a "guide" to action: "Remissions officers' reports were more than summary statements: they textually reconstituted each case into a form designed to guide the minister to execute or commute." Such sensitivity to the effects of history explains the cautious handling of case files throughout *On The Case.*

Like the social historians in the Iacovetta and Mitchinson text, Irr's study scrutinises the way Cold War literary history and criticism, as well as the agenda of "the leftist subculture of the 1930s" itself, has tended to conceal the heterogeneity of literary texts produced during that decade: "Like a nation, the left is a fictive entity—or an imagined community—that, to some extent, repressed its actual heterogeneity." This repression of variance within 1930s writing, by the leftist "community" and subsequent generations of suspicious Cold War critics, allows Irr a broad scope. Since her purpose is ferreting out difference within the literature of her chosen decade, she roams widely, not only examining

canonical American "naturalists" such as Dos Passos, Richard Wright and Nathanael West, but also writers of the 1930s north of the 49th parallel such as Hugh MacLennan, Northrop Frye and Dorothy Livesay. The notion of a homogenous, "international" left gives Irr the license to step back and forth across the border and to alternate her discussions of American writers on the left with those of Canada: "The leftist subculture of the 1930s, I argue, was a cultural formation that exceeded the category of nation; it spilled out across national borders at the same time that it was marked by that border." Trans-national "spillage," then, and national "markings" form the bases of her investigation. Obviously, such a scholarly strategy allows her to do precisely what she intends: highlight difference.

Irr's project, by and large, succeeds in contesting the scholarly view of the 1930s as a kind of factory of literary solidarity and cloning. Her examination of Nathanael West, for instance, is a valuable regrounding of that author in the historical context from which his works emerged (but that it did not *transcend*... as Irr points out). Her study not only probes the variance among the social novels of the 1930s, but, more importantly, offers several means of reconnecting them, politically, socially, historically and culturally. Her asides into the social fabric of the 1930s also caution us to proceed with vigilance in constructing history.

Focusing on Diversity

Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón and Minoo Moallem, eds.
Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State. Duke U P $29.50

Françoise Vergès
Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage. Duke U P $33.95

Reviewed by Gili Bethlehem

Between Woman and Nation, papers originally presented at a conference held at the University of California at Berkeley, travels from Québec to Beirut and touches on significant subjects such as Yucatán feminism, Islamic fundamentalism, Chicana/o struggles, and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Kaplan, Alarcón, and Moallem open their introduction with a brief outline regarding the essential paradox of the question of woman and nation. It has long been accepted that the formation of nation-states has its roots in ideas of Western Enlightenment and liberalism. However, these practices that fuel the making of new nations also involve notions of "The Rights of Man" and "Rights of the Citizen," both of which are difficult to reconcile with female subjectivity. *Between Woman and Nation* sets out to explore this paradox by examining the role of gender in national projects and the practices and regulations that govern the space in which women interact with and in the nation. As the title of this collection suggests, these essays attempt to create a space, an interval, or a point in time and place in which women and nation intersect. This "spacing" is "the constitution of the present through the analysis of (non)representation of th[e] difference in the production of the critical and social text situated in that interval."

The exploration of these intersecting intervals ensues in three parts. In section one titled "Whose Imagined Community?"

Kaplan, Alarcon and Moallem propose that it is through "racialization, sexualization and genderization that the nation is able to transcend modernities" to become a timeless and homogenized entity. Woman as a monolithic category (represented either in discourses of national or in universalizing discourses of global feminism) is therefore problematized and put in crisis because of its "inability to bring into view the instability of a national or international order that transcends itself to the level of 'essence'"; and because while this category "guarantees agency to some women, it simultaneously turns others into a spectacle." Yet as Parthat Chatterjee's question "Whose Imagined Community?" reminds us, as products of Europe and the Americas, some nations are already implicated in modernity and are therefore situated as "consumers of modernity." Part two, "The Production of Nationness," examines the regulatory reading practices, located at various institutional sites, and the multiple ways (for example, consent and coercion, ordination and contestation) in which these practices operate. Section three, "Transnational Subjects of Feminism," explores the spaces or zones where a deconstruction of the monoliths of gender and nationhood can occur, thereby rendering them more historically nuanced and accountable to politics. Despite the editors' claim that "the formulation of vanguard practices of resistance are best left to neozapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico and other activists," this last section is the most innovative of the three, precisely because the essays here offer a strong resistant critique of the naturalization and essentialization of nation and woman in modernity.

Françoise Vergès clearly defines her historical postcolonial analysis of the island of Réunion as a form of strategic resistance. *Monsters and Revolutionaries* is a study of politics that focuses on the political struggle for emancipation and the reactive strategies of discipline and control developed by the French state and its representatives on the island of Réunion. This analysis is particularly fascinating as Vergès interweaves the history of the island with the personal history of her family, yet manages to maintain at the same time a strong scholarly approach.

Vergès argues that the French republican colonial rhetoric imbued the tie between France and its colony with intimate meaning, creating what Freud has called a family romance, that is, the fiction developed by children about imagined parents, *La Mère-Patrie* and her children, the colonized islanders. The perpetuation of the myth of the family romance enabled the colonial regime to deny the existence of the real parents of the colonized, the slaves, colonists, and indentured workers. Paradoxically, it was this rhetoric of the French Revolutionary community of brothers that enabled the subjugation of peoples in the name of the republican values of fraternity, liberty, and equality, for it justified colonialization as the bringing of the republican ideal to a feudalized system. The colonial family romance, as such, invented one ideal parent, *La Mère-Patrie,* whose association with whiteness denied the dimension of race in the making of a colonial identity.

Métissage, thus, encounters the family romance in Réunion. *Métissage* was developed in the colonial world as a response to European racism and the discourses of mono-ethnicism of blood and nation. Its history, therefore, is a source of anxiety and a site of rhetorical subversion, for it reveals the way in which different disciplines manipulated the signification of sexual relations in the empire. Vergès finds that *métissage* requires an acceptance of a genealogy and a heritage. Only by recognizing a past of rape, violence, and slavery, and by acknowledging complicity, can one bring about a rejection of the colonial fam-

ily romance. These two concepts, therefore, become the author's attempt to produce an alternative historical gaze. By interpreting the island's history anew, through a mode Vergès terms *reraconter* (telling again) the old narratives, Vergès hopes to initiate a process of anamnesis, rather than Fanon's *tabula rasa* or a morbid melancholic dwelling on the past. Thus, to imbue the past with the value of representing what is lacking [*ce qui fait default*] in the present will enable change. "A group can express what is still lacking, still to come, only through a redistribution of the past, of the conditions that made it such," she explains. For example, it can decide that what was lacking—freedom and equality—is still to come.

Despite its excellent methodology, the lack of attention given to women as active agents is an acutely weak point in *Monsters and Revolutionaries.* Although Vergès acknowledges this shortcoming in her introduction, it is particularly troubling in an analysis that uses the concepts of colonial family romance and *métissage* because both constitute sites where struggles of gender and race both have been appropriated in the past by national and imperial discourses.

Three Backward Glances

Patrick Lane
Selected Poems: 1977-1997. Harbour $15.95

Alden Nowlan
Road Dancers. Oberon n.p.

Al Purdy
To Paris Never Again: New Poems. Harbour $15.95

Reviewed by Paul Milton

Although it has been sixteen years since Alden Nowlan died after a lengthy battle with cancer, his image remains vivid to his poetic friends, among whom we must number the two poets under consideration here. Both Al Purdy and Patrick Lane included poems in their most recent publications which reflect on Nowlan's death and which grant these three books a common motif of retrospection, a motif consistent with the senior status of these poets. But retrospection here comes in different forms for each writer. Nowlan's volume is a selection of newspaper columns written in the final fifteen years of his life, while Lane's book offers a selection of his best poetry from the past twenty years, and Purdy's book a series of new poems which deals largely with the author's experience of grief for departed friends.

Patrick Lane's poetic career now spans four decades; this volume, *Selected Poetry: 1977-1997,* picks up where the 1978 volume *Poems: Selected and New* left off. As Stephen Spender has noted, the process of selecting poems is much more satisfying than the process of collecting because the writer does not feel constrained to include everything. He can forget the less successful and celebrate the more successful or even rewrite the course of a career. This selection represents the best of Lane's mature work during a period when he, according to Dermot McCarthy, has been in the process of renegotiating his earlier stance as poetic outlaw and reinventing himself to some degree as a more philosophical poet.

Like Nowlan, Lane develops his poetry out of realistic vignettes which provide the occasion for broader considerations of human relationships in general, or masculinity in particular. At times, these vignettes deal with violence as in "Just Living," a poem about driving to hospital with a co-worker whose hand has been severed in an accident: "It isn't just violence I told them/. . . /It's just another story I no longer know the truth of." Violence appears here to authenticate experience, although that sense of authenticity recedes in time. The poem attempts to reclaim that sense of truth through the mediation of art; else-

where he suggests that Albinoni's *adagio* conveys to a few who can understand it, the pain experienced by Nowlan "as he stumbled toward death" ("Night"). My personal favourite in this collection is "Swift Current," in which a man thinks about his wife as she attends to her dying father.

But where the Lane volume emphasizes a selection of the best, Nowlan's book seems to be a selection of what's left after the best has been shown. *Road Dancers* marks the third time that Nowlan's journalistic writing has been collected in book form. The initial collection, *Double Exposure*, appeared in 1978. The second, *White Madness*, like the current volume, was edited by Robert Gibbs for Oberon. There remains significant interest in Nowlan's work, as evidenced by the two selections of his poetry published in the last ten years (one co-edited by Lane) and the fact that two biographies are apparently in the pipeline. But the question becomes now whether we haven't seen all of Nowlan's best work.

The local newspaper column has its own particular audience, and the good columnist knows how to play to that audience. Its in-jokes are local, and its references are timely; it succeeds by playing on familiar frustrations and sources of pride that speak to people who live in a certain community at a certain time. And that success is not always transportable. Some of the pieces in this volume are downright dated. How valuable is it now to hear Nowlan's distaste for C.P. Stacey's contentious biography of William Lyon Mackenzie King? How significant to hear his comments on the LeDain Commission? Or his satires of Pierre Trudeau, Eugene Whalen, and Robert Stanfield? As timely as these might have been in their moment, they come across now as the ephemera that newspaper fare so often is and they have primarily archival interest.

There are moments when Nowlan's brand of populist satire does sparkle. Readers of Nowlan will recognize his familiar common man attacks on cant and hypocrisy. There is a Leacockian touch in his satires on taxicabs in Fredericton, and his poke at vegetarians, "Beware the New Puritan." His righteous indignation at the trivialization of the Irish famine by the Irish Rovers carries a note of sincerity. All told, it is an uneven collection with many pieces not up to the standard of Nowlan's already published *oeuvre*.

Purdy's *To Paris Never Again* includes much of what we had come to expect from Purdy over the fifty-five years of his publishing career. We have the same crusty masculine tone alternating with moments of elegant lyricism. We have the peripatetic wanderer crossing continents and the wide-ranging erudition of the autodidact. We also have Purdy's celebrations of the Eastern Ontario landscape in poems such as "My Grandfather's Country" and "Selling Apples." But as the poet was approaching his eightieth birthday, themes of retrospection and thoughts of lost friends granted his recent work an elegaic and nostalgic quality.

From the outset, the collection announces its commitment to elegy with a lament for Charles Bukowski, who "sometimes at least/. . . wrote like God with a toothache." But in Purdy's anti-elegaic stance, Bukowski comes off here as the antithesis of the great bard, a guy who courts the muse "in his undershirt scoffing/a hot dog and 6-pack/in a crummy LA bedroom." While it is a lament, in Purdyesque fashion it resists sentiment through its closing image of "Bukowski in his coffin/dead as hell/but reaching hard for a last beer/and just about making it."

But Purdy's elegaic tone can shift from the masculine irascibility guaranteed by Bukowski's body to the poignancy which accompanies the poem about the absence of old friends Alden Nowlan and Milton

Acorn. Purdy opens the poem drinking with them in a restaurant only to turn around and find them gone: "I sat there for quite a long time/thinking about the three of us/and slowly beginning to realize/that at least two of us/were dead." The vagueness suggested by "at least two of us" demonstrates the connection between the death of friends and Purdy's sense of his own mortality.

He finds the formula for dealing with grief in a childhood memory of a nine-year-old classmate whose family had to leave town in disgrace. The knowledge that his youthful feeling of grief over the loss of a friend has become "a very old emotion/the faint smell of dead flowers/at the very most," becomes a guarantee that all grief will pass. In a self-reflexive moment, in the poem "Herself," Purdy reflects on this persistent theme, noting

> a profound literary sadness
> of knowing I am using death
> too much in poems
> but turn about
> is fair play I guess and
> I expect to have it use me
> soon for its own purposes
> whatever these might be
> and it won't be for poems.

Adjacent Worlds

Elsa Linguanti, Francesco Casotti, and Carmen Concilio, eds.
Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English. Rodopi $26.00

Nurjehan Aziz, ed.
Floating the Borders: New Contexts in Canadian Criticism. TSAR $24.95

Eulalia C. Piñero Gil, Pilar Somacarrera Íñigo, eds.
Visions of Canada Approaching the Millennium. Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid n.p.

Reviewed by Neil ten Kortenaar

Coterminous Worlds is a collection of articles by Italian scholars on magic realism in postcolonial literature. Most of the articles deal with single texts from Canada, Africa, Australia, or New Zealand, plus there are articles on Rushdie and Wilson Harris. The phrase "coterminous worlds" is from Robert Bringhurst, and he is the one non-Italian represented here.

As the title suggests, magic realism is approached as a meeting of two opposed realms, the magical usually posited as more worthy than the realist because it is newer or more marginal. As a result, in too many of these articles the two realms are imagined as the conscious and the unconscious, civilization and nature, the West and the periphery, prose and poetry, male and female, cycle and line. At times these binaries line up in ways that are embarrassingly close to colonial cliché, so that "Caliban" is regarded as closer to the unconscious, to nature, and to the imagination.

The writing is uniformly strong. The readings are sound and should be consulted by researchers interested in the texts concerned. For my taste, however, there is too much Jung and too much New Age optimism, as when Elsa Linguanti writes that "cross-culturalism, mutual relations, community, alliance with the universe and

interest in the mystery of creation are the forces that will enable an oppressed and exhausted humanity to recover the human dimension." Renato Oliva argues that "the road to redemption for the African peoples, and the restoration of all oppressed peoples, must be sought in dreams and visions." There is much abstraction here and the generalizations are too large. There is also an unwelcome blurring of distinctions. Alessandro Monti goes so far as to treat Sanskrit poetics as magical because they posit another sphere of existence. But is religion the same as magic? Most of the readings offer description and celebration. There is no evaluation, and no interpretation that goes against the grain of the text. There is no sociological context and no irony. When is magic realism humourous and why? I would like to know. These articles tell us what the texts say, but there is no stylistic analysis, and so no way of recognizing differences among texts. I prefer *Midnight's Children* to *The Satanic Verses*, García Márquez to Wilson Harris, Ben Okri to Kojo Laing, but in this collection all are made to sound the same.

An exception in this regard is Tommaso Scarano's article on Spanish American magic realism, which gives more context than do the other articles, tempered by a welcome skepticism. The article I most appreciated was by Carmen Dell'Aversano about Rushdie. Her counterintuitive and suggestive argument is that *Grimus* requires a familiarity with extratextual cultural materials, while *Midnight's Children*, in spite of its obsession with history and maps, demands that the reader forget everything outside the text: "The implied reader of *Midnight's Children* is a virgin: he knows nothing about India, its history, culture, mythology, or geography. The empirical reader, on the other hand, is obliged to become a virgin, even if not one to begin with, because the ruthless propaganda of repetition has the effect of substituting the novel's own version of events for any other."

Floating the Borders is a collection of articles by eminent Canadian critics on aspects of immigrant writing, plus a collection of reviews of works by immigrant Canadians that have appeared over the last twenty years in the pages of *TSAR*. It is a useful book. The best articles do provide new contexts: I learned from a review by Amritjit Singh about Punjabi-language poetry in Canada, from Joseph Pivato about the languages that Italian-Canadian writing is written in, from Frank Birbalsingh about Indo-Caribbean Canadian writing, from Chelva Kanaganayakam about Rienzi Crusz's career. These authors are not afraid of evaluation, something neglected in the two other books under review.

I also appreciated the way that categories like postcolonialism and postmodernity were not liberally used as if they carried meaning themselves. This is the specific thrust of a fine essay by John Ball, arguing for the insufficiency of such terms to account for the mystery of Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*. I did wonder, however, if Ball's respect for the mystery in that novel does not leave the absence of politics unexamined. This is all the more strange because his review of Lawrence Hill's novel *Any Known Blood* is politically astute, more astute than Rinaldo Walcott's analysis of the same novel.

A few articles were, I thought, a little confused. In order for Lien Chao to consider both Fred Wah and Evelyn Lau as Chinese Canadians she must use different criteria. Arun Mukherjee argues that diasporan writing in Canada (black, Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian) is written within a transnational context, yet she also believes that she is arguing in favour of the nation as the privileged site of identity. I was surprised that Amin Malak discusses Rohinton Mistry's novel *A Fine Balance* as

shaped by orality much as Salman Rushdie's works are.

The book reviews were remarkable for their fairness and their honesty, a reminder of the valuable critical spirit cultivated at *TSAR*.

Visions of Canada Approaching the Millennium is a collection of papers from a conference held in Madrid in 1997. There are many annoying printing errors. Most of the scholars are Spanish, and the papers cover a wide range of disparate materials, including English and French writing (never both together), linguistics, and language education. The scattered nature of the approach means that no readers will read the collection through. When I did, I found an unusual pleasure in the outsider's perspective brought to bear on Canada. To read about "el río San Lorenzo," "los franceses y sus colonias de Nueva Francia," or "las tribus de las llanuras" is to imagine an alternative history in which Canada belongs with the other Americas or, alternatively, in which Canada is an invention of Borges or Calvino. Most of the papers were written in English or French, but even then the outsider's summary of a research field can feel like discovery. I would particularly recommend Mark Levene's plenary lecture, which presented familiar material in a way that was new, at least to me; Carlos Piera Gil's article on Northrop Frye; an article on Leonard Cohen' sexuality by Robert Shepherd; and one on Alice Munro by Maria Jesús Hernáez Lerena.

Recollections

Peter Loeffler and Jack Stewart, eds.
Michael Bullock: Selected Works 1936-1996.
Third Eye $20.00

Barry Callaghan
Hogg: The Poems and Drawings. Little, Brown $29.95

Reviewed by Alexander Forbes

Michael Bullock: Selected Works is a significant collection. It confirms Bullock's importance as a surrealist while at the same time demonstrating that this author's achievement is not limited to surrealism, as critics often have assumed. Many examples of symbolist, expressionist, and even imagist poetry and prose also appear in the collection.

Significant though the volume is, however, it might have served the needs both of general readers and of scholars more effectively than it has done. In their foreword, the editors declare that their ultimate aim "is to present the reader with the richest possible selection" of Bullock's writings, guided by the twin criteria of "rigour and fairness." Although the editors are certainly to be commended for their important accomplishment in bringing together a difficult and wide-ranging body of work, they are, unfortunately, only partially successful in realising their declared objective.

Seven of the thirty-two volumes of Bullock's poetry and prose published before 1997 are overlooked in the collection. This is a high percentage, and a source of concern when one realises that one of the works omitted is the novel *Randolph Cranstone and the Glass Thimble*—one of Bullock's most popular works, if not the most popular, since its choice in the late seventies as a British New Fiction Society Book of the Month—and that the six others are all from the 1990s. While the availability of these recently published works might have been an argument for their exclusion,

Bullock is a protean writer who can only be appreciated through an examination of the many transformations of his art. One must therefore regret the omission of these works; although selections from other volumes from the 1990's are included in the collection, a more thorough representation of recent work might indicate where Bullock is going today. A new generation of readers might have been reminded more strongly that Bullock is a contemporary writer, even if he has been publishing for over sixty years.

While some works are entirely omitted, some that are included are represented by too generous a selection. Works such as "The Cellular Cavern" (in which "bird-headed flowers / of concretized thoughts and crystallized gestures" emerge to the pulsating accompaniment of "multi-coloured lights") are sometimes preserved, with the unfortunate result that any reader new to Bullock might well stop reading before reaching a small masterpiece such as "Cold," where synaesthetic effects are achieved with the utmost economy and subtlety.

And, finally, there is one other significant editorial problem: the selections that are presented are, in every case, exhibited *au naturel.* Not even hats or shoes are permitted by the editors: no headnotes, no footnotes. Two editorial essays (surveys of Bullock's poetry and prose, respectively) prove inadequate as introductions to the individual selections, at least in the case of those removed from novels. Readers need to know something about the context of any selection that is not self-contained, if they are to appreciate it—or, in some cases, even to understand it.

A retrospective collection of a very different kind is Barry Callaghan's *Hogg: The Poems and Drawings.* Unlike the Bullock volume, the Callaghan is not so much a reprinting of selections from previous publications as a complete reworking of earlier material. What Callaghan has done, as Hayden Carruth notes in his introduction, is to combine two earlier volumes—*THE HOGG POEMS AND DRAWINGS* (1978), and *Stone Blind Love* (1988)—into one. But that is not all: some of the poems are revised, and all of the poems and drawings redefine each other within the new context(s) supplied by the new combination.

Given that many of the poems are surrealist, one cannot help but recall André Breton's speculation, in the first Manifesto of Surrealism, that all dreams—and their manifestations as surrealist poems—might well be extensions of each other. Callaghan has clearly discovered that his *Stone Blind Love* poems are, both individually and collectively, continuations of his earlier *HOGG* poems, and the new volume is his report of this discovery as much as it is an account of the pilgrimage in search of God undertaken by his protagonist, Toronto pioneer James Hogg.

The pilgrimage itself is divided into two parts. Placed by Callaghan into the twentieth-century, Hogg ventures to the holy land only to turn aside, like Jonah, from the path he should follow. Realising that God can be found closer to home, he returns to the city he helped to establish, and descends (literally as well as figuratively) to its very foundations. His Dantesque journeys through the subway tunnels of Toronto afford the reader one of the more unusual travel narratives in recent Canadian literature.

La littérature jeunesse

Édith Madore
Les 100 livres québécois pour la jeunesse qu'il faut lire. Nota bene $14.00

Chrystine Brouillet
La malédiction des opales. La courte échelle $8.95

Sylvain Trudel
Le roi qui venait du bout du monde. La courte échelle $8.95

Reviewed by Anne Scott

Les choix de la spécialiste en littérature jeunesse qu'est Édith Madore ne sauraient laisser les bibliothécaires, professeurs et parents que nous sommes indifférents. Sous la jaquette charmante et plein d'humour d'Alice Duffaud, on retrouve beaucoup des classiques de la littérature québécoise des quinze dernières années. L'introduction donne un bref historique de la littérature jeunesse du Québec depuis ses débuts; les choix et la classification, traditionnels et efficaces, sont justifiés, ainsi que la présentation de chaque fiche, claire et attrayante: indications ordinaires, notice bibliographique, prix remportés par l'ouvrage, résumé, suivi d'une analyse qui constitue l'essentiel de la fiche et enfin des suggestions de lectures chez le même auteur. Les titres sont rangés par ordre alphabétique à l'intérieur de chacune des catégories: livres d'images, romans, nouvelles, contes, fables et récits, comptines et poésies, théâtre (rubrique que l'on souhaiterait mieux fournie, mais, comme le dit l'auteure, il s'agit des pièces qui sont bien transcrites pour la lecture et non celles qui ont enchanté les jeunes spectateurs ces dernières années). La liste des BDs date un peu, étant donné les développements actuels de la bande dessinée québécoise pour la jeunesse. Enfin, une courte liste d'ouvrages documentaires achève ce panorama: quelques titres seulement, avec de grands absents, mais on y trouve cependant *Cyrus, l'encyclopédie qui raconte*, excellente collaboration de Carmen Marois et Christiane Duchesne.

On peut se demander ce qui différencie cet ouvrage du déjà ancien recueil aux éditions du Trécarré, *Romans et contes pour les 12 à 17 ans*, et surtout des deux volumes de *La bibliothèque des enfants*, aux éditions Québec/Amérique Jeunesse, sinon son caractère plus récent et plus succinct, mais quand on aime les livres jeunesse on est toujours content de mesurer ses coups de coeur à ceux d'autres amoureux de cette littérature, et l'amour d'Édith Madore pour ces ouvrages ressort clairement dans ses pages.

On ne comprend pas toujours les raisons de choix, mais le coeur a sans doute les siennes. Ainsi, une liste de titres complète la série: *Mais cela aurait pu être aussi...* et *Les regrettés*, regroupant des ouvrages de qualité, laissés de côté dans l'analyse ou épuisés chez les éditeurs. Enfin une liste fort bienvenue intitulée *Ailleurs au Canada*, qui mentionne des ouvrages excellents, publiés principalement en Acadie et au Manitoba. Du côté anglais, quelques classiques de la littérature jeunesse canadienne de langue anglaise, traduits en français, y figurent, mais pas absolument les meilleurs. Cependant on y note Janet Lunn, Lucy Maud Montgomery et Kit Pearson.

La teneur des analyses peut parfois surprendre, ainsi un long exposé sur la vie et l'œuvre de La Fontaine, qui n'a de québécois, tout comme Daudet et Edgar Poe mentionnés ailleurs, que le fait qu'il est illustré ici par Stéphane Jorish (nouveau Benjamin Rabier?). Mais l'on se plaît à lire les analyses de Madame Madore, qui, souvent par une petite phrase finale, donne le ton et l'atmosphère du livre, résume le message de façon percutante et humoristique. Un ouvrage qui constitue donc un outil de plus dans la panoplie des bibliothécaires, professeurs et prosélytes de la littérature jeunesse que nous sommes,

toujours anxieux de savoir naviguer avec les jeunes dans ces eaux, qui comme toutes celles d'une littérature vivante et en pleine expansion, contiennent du meilleur et du pire.

Et ce sont ces aspects divers de la litterature jeunesse qu'illustrent les deux romans suivants de deux auteurs qui ont depuis longtemps fait leurs preuves dans ce domaine.

Que demande-t-on d'un roman policier pour la jeunesse? Des personnages sympathiques et attachants, auxquels les jeunes peuvent s'identifier, du côté des bons s'entend. Du côté des méchants, un mystérieux inconnu, qui s'avérera d'une eau plus que turbide. Sans oublier une intrigue bien enlevée et un suspense halentant.

Depuis plus de quinze années que Chrystine Brouillet publie des romans policiers, principalement pour la jeunesse, elle sait entraîner ses lecteurs dans des enquêtes bien ficelées et son dix-neuvième essai ne dépare pas la collection. On y retrouve nos sympathiques Sherlock Holmes en herbe, Arthur et Andréa-Maria, qui ne reculent devant rien pour résoudre l'énigme qui entoure une ancienne parure d'opales. Les opales portent-elles vraiment malheur? Pas quand on est un jeune héros du vingtième siècle. Tout rentrera dans l'ordre et le méchant sera puni. La vraisemblance est quelquefois un peu malmenée dans ces pages, mais qui s'en inquiéterait quand on s'amuse si bien, avec un assassinat, un enlèvement et une peau de panthère qui cache bien son jeu.

Beaucoup plus sérieux est le ton du second roman examiné ici. De l'enfant à qui il s'adresse dans ses livres Sylvain Trudel dit: "C'est une sorte de Petit Prince." Et la délicatesse avec laquelle l'auteur du présent roman aborde les questions profondes que les enfants savent si bien poser l'apparente certainement au texte de Saint-Exupéry. (Ce n'est donc pas une coïncidence si Sylvain Trudel a obtenu le prix Saint-Exupéry en 1998.)

On est là en présence d'un véritable petit bijou, aussi profondément émouvant que son écriture est limpide et poétique. L'histoire est simple: un enfant, victime d'une catastrophe nucléaire en Ukraine (on ne nous dit pas où, mais on peut bien le deviner), vient suivre au Québec des traitements médicaux.

Il ne s'agit pas de construire une histoire bien pensante qui finirait par une victoire de la médecine nord-américaine contre le mal technologique soviétique. Non, les faits sont donnés simplement sans jugement ni grandiloquence, mais, sous la simplicité du ton, se cachent toutes les questions profondes des enfants, sur la vie, sur la mort, le souvenir, la famille, le caractère précieux de tout ce que nous prenons pour acquis. Le récit est à la première personne, mode narratif affectionné par de nombreux auteurs pour la jeunesse actuellement. Le contact s'établit mieux, l'intimité entre le narrateur et sa situation et le jeune lecteur est créée d'emblée et l'on évite ainsi toute tentation didactique ou pontifiante. La fin reste ouverte, comme la vie elle-même, mais, en chemin, les lecteurs auront vu que l'amour et l'espoir ne dépendent pas des circonstances, mais du cœur.

Les dessins de Suzanne Langlois, qui illustre les autres romans de Trudel à La courte échelle, évoquent tout en douceur le bout du monde exotique d'où vient Oleg et les rêves et paysages que l'imaginaire des petits Québécois se construit. Elle capture aussi avec délicatesse et humour la vie simple et poétisée des enfants, leurs émotions et gestes émouvants: Mathieu évaluant la taille du petit "roi" qui va venir leur rendre visite, lisant sous la courtepointe à la lueur de sa lampe de poche, Mathieu et Judith bondissant de joie comme des fusées de feux d'artifices le jour de l'arrivée d'Oleg.

Les eaux de la littérature jeunesse contin-

uent donc de nous offrir de riches trésors, et qui songerait à s'en plaindre?

Women's Writing in Québec: Then & Now

Lori Saint-Martin
Le nom de la mère: mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin. Nota bene $22.00

Marie-Claire Brosseau
Trois écrivaines de l'entre-deux-guerres: Alice Lemieux, Eva Senécal et Simone Routier. Nota bene $20.00

Reviewed by Valerie Raoul

Lori Saint-Martin has already published several articles related to the depiction of mothers by contemporary authors. *Le nom de la mère* brings a number of these together in amplified versions, as well as additional material including chapters that provide a frame for an overview of maternity in a range of works. The project is ambitious, as it includes several dimensions: a summary of the evolution of representations of motherhood in Québec literature; a discussion of both French and Anglo-American feminist psychoanalytic theories of maternity; detailed analyses of a number of works of fiction, poetry or theatre produced between 1931 and 1995; and comparative commentary on the similarities and differences between these works by women and others by men.

The earlier stages of attitudes to mothers in the Québec novel have been extensively studied by a number of critics, many of whom are amply cited. Absent in the *roman de la terre* (they are usually already dead), mothers were perceived by most male authors as allied with the clergy in pre-Quiet Revolution works, and oppressive and ultimately castrating in more recent ones. What Nicole Brossard calls the "patriarchal mother" was also denounced in works by women depicting mother-son repression. The mother-daughter relationship, the focus of Saint-Martin's study, is frequently shown as equally dominated by rivalry or hostility, the survival of one seeming to entail the demise of the other—matricide or infanticide. Such accounts tend to adopt the point of view of the daughter, rather than that of the mother, illustrating a "matriphobia" motivated by the fear of becoming like one's mother. Gabrielle Roy's autobiographical narratives were the first to present the daughter as attempting to incorporate her mother's voice into her own story. The mother is depicted as the source of the author's desire to write, but writing is still seen as incompatible with becoming a mother. The old dichotomy between creation and procreation is maintained by the daughter's decision not to have children, and to abandon (and avenge) her mother in order to fulfill her own artistic ambition.

Among works written by women before the 1970s, Jovette Bernier's 1931 novel *La chair décevante* was a notable exception because it adopts a mother's perspective and contrasts with other representations of unmarried mothers. Although the child is a boy and the mother ends up insane, the narrator's sensuality, desire for freedom and decision to keep her child (and to defend that choice) bring her closer to the feminist attitudes of writers closer to us, like Brossard and others. Their works convey the revalorization in the 70s of mother-daughter bonds as representative of the pre-Oedipal stage of non-verbal communication, and nostalgia for a pre-patriarchal state based on an ethic of caring, connection and reciprocity, rather than the aggressive competition and violence associated with stereotypical masculinity. This symbolic defense of mother-daughter symbiosis is related to the feminist psychoanalytic concept of women as inherently bisexual, oscillating between desire for the

same (the mother) and the (different) other.

The last sections of the book deal with more recent texts that innovatively depict women as both mothers and (named) individuals. Pregnancy, childbirth and mothering are reinterpreted as potential sources of satisfaction that need not exclude writing or other creative activity. In the past, the roles of mother and writer do seem to have been largely incompatible, for social and economic reasons as well as psycho-social ones. Several of the authors discussed are in search of role models in the past, of a feminine genealogy not only for the history of Québec, but for a lineage of female writers. Novels by Nicole Houde and Anne Hébert (*Le premier jardin*) illustrate attempts to bring these two together, the latter emphasizing the function of naming associated with both genealogy and autonomy.

The choice of language in which to write may also be a function of maternal loyalty (as in the case of Roy), or an individual decision to break with the past, as for the last author mentioned, Ying Chen, an immigrant from China. Her novel *L'ingratitude* (1995) closes Saint-Martin's discussion of Québec women writers' representations of maternity. Somewhat surprisingly, no mention is made of the fact that the similarities discovered in Ying Chen's depiction of a mother-daughter relationship are unlikely to be due to any factors specific to Québec. This issue is left in abeyance, along with several others, including new attitudes in women's fiction to fathers (and new attitudes in men's fiction to mothers, resulting from changing family dynamics?). There is still no doubt a lot of thinking and writing to be done on mothers and mothering; on "femininity" as it relates to the potential to be responsible for children (as opposed to bearing them) and to one's own parents; on innovation in language and form, the limits of "sense," and the value or danger of associating madness with femininity; above all, on the tendency in a number of the texts analysed to "invraisemblable" plots and extremely fragmented narration, elements which may be claimed as revolutionary but are more often designated as signs of failure in terms of the text's literary value. Saint-Martin has indicated many avenues to be pursued.

Negative judgments by influential male literary figures have often, in the past, assigned women's texts to oblivion. Marie-Claude Brosseau's *Trois écrivaines de l'entre-deux-guerres* deals with three Québécoises born around 1905 and writing in the 1920s and 30s, who all received encouragement from another young poet, Alfred Desrochers. Brosseau's comments on the lives and works of Alice Lemieux, Eva Senécal and Simone Routier are based on correspondence between them and Desrochers: the only reason that Jovette Bernier (author of the 1931 novel discussed by Saint-Martin) is not included is that no correspondence with him is available. Brosseau's modest monograph is full of fascinating details about the ways in which social background and financial considerations made all the difference to a woman's career possibilities. While all three began by writing poems, entering literary competitions and producing columns for the "feminine" pages of regional reviews, their paths ended up diverging considerably. Although all three became members of the "Société des poètes canadiens-français du Québec," none of them succeeded, as Desrochers did, in being subsequently recognized as worth including in anthologies.

Alice Lemieux engaged in a flirtatious correspondence with Desrochers, to whom she defended a "feminine" concept of poetry as inspired rather than based on formal expertise. She moved to Québec City, became President of the Poets' Society in 1929, and won a prize that enabled her to visit France. But having had TB herself in 1925, in 1932 at the age of twenty-six she

abandoned writing to become a sanatorium nurse, and eventually agreed to a marriage of convenience. Her diary for the years 1920-6 has been preserved, but will not be available to the public until 2004. Eva Senécal trained to be a teacher at the Ecole Normale in Saint-Hyacinthe (1918-24), but also contracted TB and spent time in a sanatorium in 1923. Her poems echoed an old-fashioned "mélancolie rêveuse" reminiscent of another sufferer from TB, Eugénie de Guérin. Author of two novels (*Dans les ombres*, 1930, and *Mon Jacques*, 1933), she could not manage to make a living as a journalist and experienced problems that today might be interpreted as sexual harassment. Jilted by one fiancé, she also ended up accepting a "mariage de raison."

The third in this trio, Simone Routier, though the daughter of a rich Quebec City jeweller, was nevertheless also determined to become financially independent. Having attended both the Ursulines' École Normale and the École des Beaux-Arts, she became engaged in 1922 to the poet Alain Grandbois (his penchant for married women led her to break it off). In 1929 she completed a novel, *l'immortel adolescent*, which won the prestigious Prix David, enabling her, like Lemieux, to go to Paris. Routier stayed there from 1928 until she had to leave because of the war, as recounted in *Adieu Paris! Journal d'une évacuée canadienne. 10 mai au 31 août 1940*. After her French fiancé was killed she began a successful career as a diplomat, and like Lemieux married a Franco-American.

What is most striking is that although all three of these women poets were hailed as potentially great writers at the time of their first publications, they received insufficient encouragement to continue writing, and what they did write fell very quickly into oblivion. Family expectations and financial considerations led them all to conform to a conventional model in spite of their early efforts to avoid it. They are part of the hidden female lineage discussed by Saint-Martin: literary mothers, "women of letters," whose works need to be reassessed in terms of their context. As Brosseau points out, part of that context was the ambivalent relationship of rivalry and mutual admiration that existed between them—another inviting avenue of research.

Anxieties of Influence & Allegiance

C.D. Mazoff
Anxious Allegiances: Legitimizing Identity in the Early Canadian Long Poem. McGill-Queen's UP $49.95

Michael Peterman
Susanna Moodie: A Life. ECW P $14.95

Reviewed by Mark Libin

In the introduction to his study of the early Canadian long poem, C.D. Mazoff begins by recalling Northrop Frye's summary of this genre as little more than "versified rhetoric." In so doing, Mazoff reminds us that there has been, since Frye, a great deal of critical debate over the status and function of the nineteenth-century long poem, much of it determined to evaluate the poem in the most literal sense of the word: that is, to assign a value to the poem as an aesthetic object. Much of the debate over examples of the early Canadian long poem has been based on the desire to either devalue or reify the text as worthy of study and appreciation. One need only follow the critical dialogue surrounding Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*—accepted by many as the first long poem written in Canada by a poet born in Canada—to witness this debate. I have often felt dismayed by the number of critical studies of this genre that display an overt tendency to secure or rescind a place in the "canon" for the work in question.

Although Mazoff begins by acknowledging this trend, he quickly announces his intention to sidestep this form of debate. Rather than attempting to dispute Frye's declaration that the early Canadian long poem is a genre of "versified rhetoric," as a result of the colonial mentality of its authors, Mazoff declares his desire to investigate this claim by analyzing the rhetoric of these narrative poems. By refusing to dismiss the term "rhetoric" as simply pejorative when applied to poetry, Mazoff engages with the questions of "why and how early Canadian poets adopted and adapted certain poetic forms and not others in their attempts to convey their social and political concerns and resolve the quintessential Canadian conundrum, 'Where is here?'"

This is a unique and valuable approach to the Canadian long poem, which has long been measured against the aesthetic criteria of contemporaneous British poetry. Mazoff attempts to treat the Canadian long poem of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a separate species from British poetic models. As an alternative, he uses systems of rhetorical analysis provided by Gérard Genette, Chaim Perelman, and Kenneth Burke in order to identify the complex strategies deployed in the long poem to legitimate the poet's sense of his/her national community.

The breadth of Mazoff's study is as admirable as the originality of his approach. He not only provides interesting new approaches to well-read examples of the genre, such as Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story*, and McLachlin's *The Emigrant*, but also focuses his attention on lesser-known works, such as William Kirby's *The U.E.*, George Manners's *The Conflagration*, and James Knox Liston's *Niagara Falls*. Dividing his study of the genre according to region, Mazoff examines a range of poems from Upper Canada, Lower Canada, and the Maritimes, and is effective in showing that each region demonstrates a reliance on specific rhetorical devices in order to represent a particular geographical and cultural identity.

To support his rhetorical analysis, Mazoff relies heavily on a historical contextualization of each poem. Providing detailed accounts of the specific historical, economic, and political concerns each region faced at the time, Mazoff argues that the rhetoric of the poetry reflects contemporaneous issues, either through overt acknowledgment, or, paradoxically, by denial. Mazoff succeeds best when he demonstrates how poets use the rhetoric of blame and xenophobia, as well as a reliance on the discourse of "filiopietism" towards Britain in order to inscribe their precarious identity on the map of the new world. He takes care, for example, to show how the First Nations of Canada are represented depending on the aims of the poet, either by "completely rewriting another nation's history in order to appropriate it through reliance on strategies of transvaluation and the rhetorics of blame and depravity . . . or simply expropriating that people and their history by completely ignoring them". This care in making rhetorical distinctions shows Mazoff to be a precise and scrupulous reader.

The study is careful and informative, but there are a number of minor problems. Although he takes pains to explain how his approach is not meant to undervalue the texts he examines because they are colonial, self-aggrandizing, and racist, Mazoff cannot completely escape the desire of the contemporary reader to judge texts accordingly. In his discussion of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village*, for example, Mazoff, like so many critics before him, cannot resist comparing the poem to Goldsmith's great-uncle's poem, *The Deserted Village*, and like a number of other critics, finds the

Canadian Goldsmith lacking in poetic talent when compared to his Anglo-Irish ancestor. I also lament the lack of attention paid to the *poetics* of these long poems.

Also of interest to scholars of nineteenth century Canadian literature is Michael Peterman's biography of Susanna Moodie. The biography is compact but informative, especially in detailing Moodie's earlier writing while she was still Susanna Strickland and living in England. The history of Strickland/Moodie's literary success in England, particularly in her transcription of slave narratives, adds a fascinating dimension to the better-known persona of Moodie as the Canadian autobiographical subject.

It is, no doubt, difficult to write on a subject who has gained fame for writing about herself, a dilemma exacerbated by Margaret Atwood's inescapably powerful rendering of Moodie. Peterman never really articulates these issues, however, bowing deferentially to Atwood early on instead. Because of its lucid and concise style, Peterman's biography will serve students and newcomers to the period well, but advanced scholars might wonder if the book contains any new information about Moodie and her writings.

Watching the Detectives

Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds.
Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Modernism. U of Pennsylvania P us$19.95

Andrew Pyper
Lost Girls. HarperFlamingoCanada $27.00

Reviewed by Paul Stuewe

Detecting Texts is hot in pursuit of a new genre. The "metaphysical detective story," according to co-editors Merivale and Sweeney, is comprised of "largely twentieth-century experimental fiction with a flamboyant yet decidedly complex relationship to the detective story, and a kinship to modernist and postmodernist fiction in general." While one might query the perhaps excessive jouissance of "flamboyant," and be positively suspicious of the dubious disjunction between "flamboyant" and "decidedly complex" created by "yet" (reminiscent of the "middle-aged but vibrantly dominant" character whom Morley Callaghan sketches in *A Broken Journey*), the assumptions and purposes of the collection are clear enough. Metaphysical detective fiction is viewed as a noteworthy advance upon the mundane, popular past of detective fiction, and is to be integrated into contemporary critical discourses that conflate text and reading subject.

Detecting Texts contains twelve essays that approach metaphysical detective fiction from a broad variety of methodological approaches and topical concerns, and with the exception of Robert L. Chibka's "Borges's Library of Forking Paths," a self-indulgent exercise in textual hair-splitting, all have something to recommend them. Several contributors transcend language barriers in examining the uses to which non-anglophone writers have put traditional detective fiction. Michael Sirvent's "Reader-Investigators in the Post-*Nouveau Roman:* Lahogue, Peeters, and Perec" lucidly demonstrates how his subjects have used Agatha Christie and Georges Simenon as jumping-off points from which to create intriguingly hybrid texts, and Raylene Ramsay's "Postmodernism and the Monstrous Criminal: In Robbe-Grillet's Investigative Cell" painstakingly works out the implications of a hermeneutics of suspicion for her subject's authorial practices. Umberto Eco, Witold Gombrowicz, Patrick Modiano and Georges Perec are also accorded significant attention in a collection that firmly establishes the transnational character of the cultural field of the

metaphysical detective story.

Two essays (Jeffrey T. Nealon's "Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer: Auster's *City of Glass*" and Stephen Bernstein's "'The Question is the Story Itself': Postmodernism and Intertextuality in Auster's *New York Trilogy*") focus on an author who seems to have become an exemplary figure in the nascent genre of metaphysical detective fiction. Nealon has an interesting point to make in stressing Paul Auster's postmodern play with writing space as well as reading space, but his extensive citations from Blanchot and Heidegger are not well integrated with the fruits of his close and laudably careful reading; Bernstein's postmodernist interpretation is more firmly situated in Auster's texts, and discloses a remarkable range of intertextual references in what will clearly be a rich field for future prospectors. Bernstein also, however, conceptualizes metaphysical detective fiction as hierarchically superior to its historical antecedents, and in rather crude terms at that: Auster's work "raises detective fiction to the metaphysical level," and demonstrates that "even the most predictable and formulaic of genres can be resuscitated to give urgent new voice to the postmodern condition."

The relationship between what is represented as the radiant future of metaphysical detective fiction and its embarrassing past is also problematic for several other contributors, not least because their acquaintance with traditional detective fiction often seems less than extensive. Merivale and Sweeney's notion that Simenon is "a highly influential heir" of Raymond Chandler, for example, is unsustainable (Simenon's first novel antedates Chandler's by twenty years), and John T. Irwin's observation that the name of a character in one of Chandler's short stories ("Mallory") signals a penchant for "quest romance" is seriously misleading; Chandler used "Mallory" only once, making much more frequent use of "Carmady" and "Dalmas"—make of that what you will—as surnames for his protagonists. It is also curious that in a collection anxious to affiliate with the postmodern none of the contributors mentions E.C. Bentley's landmark *Trent's Last Case*, a 1912 novel about a bungled investigation that Bentley, in this respect a postmodernist before his time, described as "not so much a detective story as an exposure of detective stories." It is also disconcerting to see Poe's "The Purloined Letter," which Lacan and others have made into a canonical text, remain unconnected to the rich tradition of detective-fiction epistles in Doyle, Christie and others; I would prescribe a reading of Sir Arthur's "A Scandal in Bohemia" and "The Adventure of the Bryce-Partington Plans," and Dame Agatha's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, for subsequent analyses of this subject. These and many other slips of nuance and emphasis raise serious doubts about the extent to which *Detecting Texts* originates in a comprehensive grasp of the history of detective fiction.

Since the need to valorize the literarily respectable, while simultaneously marginalizing the mass-cultural compost out of which it has valiantly struggled, seems to be endemic to the academic study of genre fiction, none of this is terribly surprising. Nor, given the relative dearth of serious studies of detective fiction, should it deter interested readers from sampling what is often a stimulating and valuable collection of essays. Much recent scholarly work on detective fiction has focused on Foucauldian concepts of surveillance and control, and so it is refreshing to have *Detecting Texts* open up a number of new areas to critical scrutiny. Although the notion of metaphysical detective fiction requires further interrogation and refining, as well as firmer grounding in the history of the genre from which it arises, this volume is certainly a worthwhile contribution to what seems likely to be a prolonged as

well as rewarding investigation.

Andrew Pyper's novel *Lost Girls* asserts its mastery of textual detecting by making effective use of the methods of both traditional and metaphysical detective fiction. Dispatched to a rural Ontario community where a high-school teacher appears to have murdered two of his students, Toronto lawyer Bartholomew Crane undertakes his client's defence with the postmodern-compatible conviction that "philosophy makes no difference and truth is none of my concern." In the process of learning more about the circumstances of the putative crime, however, Crane gradually becomes enmeshed in a nightmarish web of personal misadventures and recurring psychological hallucinations that threatens to shatter his sanity. This is a text in which the realm of the metaphysical harbours the decidedly evil as well as the undecidedly ambiguous, and where loss is a far more acutely and subjectively experienced phenomenon than is the postmodernist's worrying of the metaphysics of presence.

Deftly interwoven narrative strands link Crane's impending breakdown with both his own childhood trauma and with an outsider to the community's tragic history, and Pyper effectively contrasts these dramatic elements with the standard generic apparatus of courtroom and police procedure. The mingling of the mundane and the mysterious is consistently cleverly handled: Crane's inability to keep dry amid the ubiquitous rain resonates powerfully with the periodic replayings of the victims' drowning, and his apparently surreal vision of the girls' resurrection is later given a possibly real—and thus even more disturbing—explanation.

Although its ending wraps up these complicated events a bit too tidily, and the device of having the accused defer his confession in order to delay narrative closure seems in retrospect somewhat forced, *Lost Girls* is a thoroughly satisfying novel that prompts some tentative observations regarding the relationship between traditional and metaphysical detective fiction. Imagined as a binary opposition in *Detecting Texts*, as well as in much of the academic discourse regarding the pastmundane and the postmodern, the effective blending of traditional and metaphysical components in *Lost Girls* intimates that it may be time for synthesis to succeed antithesis. Along with kindred spirits such as Patricia Highsmith, Margaret Millar and Ruth Rendell, Andrew Pyper's fine novel suggests that it is at the intersection between the established and the experimental that the possibilities of detective fiction may best be realized.

Postcolonial Collections

Padmini Mongia, ed.
Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader. Arnold us$18.95

Denis Walder
Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory. Blackwell us$60.95

Deepika Bahri and Mary Vasudeva, eds.
Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality. Temple us$24.95

Reviewed by Paul Sharrad

Padmini Mongia's collection of essays comes on the tail of at least two other critical anthologies: Patrick Williams' and Laura Chrisman's *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader.* It has been followed by more recent surveys by Clive Bart-Moore, Leela Gandhi and Ania Loomba. One contemplates this plethora of publishing carrying the label "postcolonial" with a mixture of delight and suspicion—delight that some of the ideas of this very loose alliance of reformist activisms have begun to permeate general intellectual

debate; suspicion that such arrivals may well imply metropolitan reappropriation of resistant margins into theoretical squabbles over terms and territories.

Padmini Mongia provides eighteen pages of introduction, examining the possible responses to whether "postcolonial" refers to "texts or to practices, to psychological conditions or to concrete historical processes," and chooses to "see contemporary postcolonial theory as 'a sign that should be interrogated, a locus of contradictions.'" Mongia's book, like all the others, divides up its contents ("Shifting Terrains," "Disciplining Knowledge" and "Locating Practice") and provides sample essays examining the problematic overlap/distinction between feminism, postmodernism and the postcolonial. It is good to see Barbara Christian's "The Race for Theory" included, since it highlights in a literary context the tension between theorizing marginality and actually enabling marginal voices to be heard. Another plus is the inclusion of Arif Dirlik's much-quoted piece on postcolonialism arising from Third World academics gaining places in First World institutions under the late-capitalist global movement of labour.

This collection obviously tries to be manageable for the student (as compared to the hefty Williams and Chrisman book) and still relatively comprehensive. It provides nineteen complete essays and perhaps errs on the side of making the field appear more orderly than it is (although there are obvious differences of opinion when one works through the "Shifting Terrains" of Bhabha, Parry and Slemon and moves on to Ella Shohat and others in later sections). It also includes important work by Rey Chow and Paul Gilroy, extending the framework from considerations of cultural dynamics arising directly from British colonialism to contemporary issues of representing Asian-American and Black British identities.

The most significant absence in all of this material (highlighted by Chow's title—"Where have all the natives gone?"—and by Mongia's worry in the introduction that "postcolonial" increasingly comes "to define marginal constituencies in the First World") is that of any indigenous minority voice. Indeed, the collection pretty much proves Dirlik's claim. While it contains Aijaz Ahmad's critique of the neo-imperialist academic publishing industry, the book fails to include work from more than two publications outside of Britain and the United States (one from Israel, the other from Canada). The extensive bibliography usefully includes material relating to Maghreb and the Middle East, cites the influential *Kunapipi* and its Dangaroo Press, and brings Kamau Brathwaite into theorized space in a way not usually seen. It would be good to find, however, more reference to journals from Africa and India, some recognition of the publishing in places like *Span* and *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* that started theorizing the field a decade before the holy trinity of Said, Bhabha and Spivak appeared, and links to francophone (if not also hispanophone) topics.

Links between language, pedagogy, curricula and imperialist imbalances of knowledge/power (which Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin examine in their theory reader) are addressed in part in Dennis Walder's more recent *Post-Colonial Literatures in English.* Walder notes in his introduction that theories, in vogue or out, don't necessarily get creative texts into print or into the classroom. Partly also to show "the uneven pace and development of colonialism" from one place to the next, as well as the different intensities of decolonization in those places, he uses text-based case studies from West Africa, India, the West Indies and Britain, and South Africa to illustrate the common issues and different approaches across the field. The first section, "Introducing the Post-Colonial" is a very

clear outline for beginning students of how writers and critics "analyse and resist continuing colonial attitudes," and the subsequent sections emphasizing historicity and language appropriation are also straightforward explications of the model of postcolonial textuality deployed in *The Empire Writes Back.*

This book starts out very well for its intended audience (the novice student), providing a succinct and clear genealogy for post-colonial literary studies. Walder also admits that he has his own agenda, and relates this to his identity as an *émigré* white anti-apartheid South African in multi-racial England. With a very light touch, Walder manages what many arguments over postcolonial theory neglect: to see that differences arise because scholars criticize a model with their own circumstances in mind, without admitting that such models might be not viable within different social or disciplinary settings. Some of the debunking of the drive to large-scale theory is perfectly legitimate, insofar as the theorizing forgets its own limitations, but the debunkers often lose sight of their own constitutive limitations too.

In the light of the perfunctory dismissal of nationalist and other potentially essentialist "resistance" models in *The Empire Writes Back,* it is good to see Walder giving overt attention to someone like Kamau Brathwaite and to "radical" oppositional poetry in South Africa and Britain. This approach is in keeping with his upholding of Fanon's critical force in a chapter on theory that properly worries over the apparent reduction of the postcolonial to "a purely textual phenomenon as if power is simply a matter of discourse." The move to Fanon, though, is strange on two counts: first, it virtually disregards Said, Bhabha and Spivak and the "hybridity school" (despite Bhabha's work on Fanon); second, there is a contradictory move in the book to favour "migrancy" as a postcolonial critical model, and this position leads to the curious championing of writers like Nadine Gordimer and, particularly surprising, V.S. Naipaul. The claim that the latter's *The Enigma of Arrival* and other books show "that the history of the present is a history of disruption and discontinuity on a global scale" may be true, but to go on to say that "all of us, in some sense, belong to the diaspora; every nation is hybrid" is to draw attention to his own expatriation on the one hand and to the silencing, by virtue of that viewpoint, of resistant voices of indigenes from Australia, North America, even his own South Africa. Though he stresses the historical situatedness of post-colonial texts and the importance of modes of production and reception, there is an undertone in the commentary suggesting Walder really does believe that literary aesthetic value exists apart from social functional context.

A connection between Walder's book and *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* is the turn to non-print media. (Walder offers a good outline of the depoliticised film adaptation of Ondaatje's *The English Patient,* while the latter work has analyses of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, Mississippi Masala, The Mahabharata* and TV versions of *Sita.*) The other point of contact is the common focus on diaspora and migrancy. The title of the third text really refers to "South Asian humanities academics resident in North America" and the ways in which they reflect on a particular construction of postcolonial issues in the context of a specific (mainly American) debate about minority identity and rights. South Asians anywhere else—especially colleagues of the contributors in South Asia itself—are likely to have quite different ideas on postcoloniality, since they are writing between distinct lines of their own.

Besides the film and television studies, this work has a section of interviews with Meena Alexander, Gauri Viswanathan and

Gayatri Spivak. All three are valuable contributions; the last is characteristically convoluted but contains some very pertinent thoughts on pedagogy and doing work on the postcolonial in one's immediate circumstances. There are four "commentaries," a section on "Literary Criticism" and three personal reflections. In the Canadian context, readers will find M. G. Vassanji's description of life "in the thick of multiplicity" of interest. Other highlights include Amritjit Singh's connection of "migrant" issues with African American politics and Uma Parameswaran's problematising of dialogue between migrant and First-Nation identity politics.

Together these three books usefully direct us to wider issues of why postcolonial studies came into being in the first place, how they function within their various institutional and geographic locations, and how they have a relevance beyond any one specific discipline or social interest group.

English in Québec

Lianne Moyes, ed.
Ecrire en anglais au Québec: un devenir minoritaire? Quebec Studies 26 (Fall 1998/Winter 1999)

Roch Carrier
The Lament of Charlie Longsong, trans. Sheila Fischman. Penguin $29.99

Reviewed by Roseanna L. Dufault

A special dossier devoted to English-language writing in Québec opens the Fall 1998/Winter 1999 edition of *Québec Studies*. Compiled and edited by Lianne Moyes of the Université de Montréal, the dossier contains essays by three Montreal authors who write in English (Linda Leith, Robert Majzels, and Gail Scott) and three who write in French (Nicole Brossard, Gilles Marcotte, and Marco Micone), all of whom respond to the question, "What does it mean to write in English in Québec?" Marcotte begins by arguing persuasively that, for historical reasons, Québec literature is, and ought to be, understood to be written in French. In contrast, Micone asserts that conventional notions of Québec literature must be expanded to include the various languages spoken by Québec's diverse citizens.

Leith and Majzels both discuss their experience of writing in English as a minority language. Leith, on one hand, feels at home with a certain linguistic tension since she traveled extensively and learned several languages before settling in Montréal. On the other hand, Majzels, who identifies with Franz Kafka, a Jew living in Czechoslovakia and writing in German, finds his creativity enhanced through an international, or non-national affiliation. Scott points out that the equation "langue=culture" is not 100 percent symmetrical. She writes in a minority language, but her work is nonetheless impregnated with elements of the dominant franco-québécois culture. Along the same lines, Brossard claims to have been influenced by certain English-language feminist writers. Of particular interest in Brossard's piece is her emphasis on the importance of translation as a means of understanding the mythologies of francophones and anglophones who occupy the same geographical landscape. Moyes's extensive interpretive postscript enhances the usefulness of this special dossier as a reference tool for the study of Canadian literature.

Six articles treating Québec literature, film, and music follow the dossier portion of this issue. First, Carla Zecher sheds new light on the correspondence of Marie de l'Incarnation, which is usually studied in the context of seventeenth-century French epistolary and mystic genres. She demonstrates that Marie de l'Incarnation effectively documented the emergence of a new, hybrid identity, for which she coined the hyphenated expression "François-

Canadois." Isabelle Boisclair offers a fresh perspective of Claire Martin, an important, but often neglected feminist author of the 1960s. Boisclair examines Martin's work from a postmodernist perspective and identifies ways in which her characters subvert traditional gender roles. In addition, Boisclair signals a certain blurring of genres in Martin's autobiographical and fictional writings.

Although Jean-Paul Daoust earned the Governor General's Award for his work, he has received relatively little critical attention. Neil Hartlen's sensitive analysis of his 1996 collection of poetry, *111, Wooster Street*, goes a long way toward filling this lacuna. Hartlen explores the significance of urban space as a context for Daoust's expression of his homosexuality. Michele Anderson's film study underscores ways in which director Paule Baillargeon rejects Hollywood images of women, by questioning traditional gender roles and by developing female characters who are not merely objects of the male gaze. In *Le Sexe des étoiles* in particular, Baillargeon's protagonist Camille, a precocious adolescent with a telescope, offers the film viewer a uniquely female perspective.

Martin Lefebvre compares time and space relations in Robert Lepage's *Le Confessional* and Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess*, in the context of Bakhtin's notion of chronotope. Identifying certain archetypes and preoccupations that recur in Québec cinema, Lefebvre emphasizes that Lepage's film is not a remake, but rather a "québécisation" of *I Confess*, which was filmed in Québec in 1952. *Le Festival International de Jazz de Montréal* serves as a prime example of what happens when local traditions are exploited in order to promote cultural tourism on a global scale. Malcolm Cecil's incisive analysis, which includes a commentary on jazz in general and the uses of urban space, reveals that Montréal's jazz musicians actually derive little, if any, long-term gain from this event, which helps define Montréal's "city image."

Readers who appreciate Roch Carrier's consummate storytelling will not be disappointed by *The Lament of Charlie Longsong*, Sheila Fischman's translation of *Petit Homme Tornade* (1996). This truly North American novel begins "on the road" as a disaffected history professor's escape from a bad divorce takes him deep into the Arizona desert. Along the way, he meets an eccentric old Indian (the eponymous "Little Tornado Man," also known as Charlie Longsong), who happens to speak French. In a Colorado ghost town, the professor has a brilliant research idea that is later taken over by his go-getting mistress, Miss Camion (Miss Truck), and her transportation corporation. A series of delightful, if improbable, coincidences advance the intertwined story lines, which include two trans-Atlantic love affairs, the secret diary of a forgotten Québec poet, a strong anti-war message, an affirmation of First Nation cultures, and a celebration of French Canadian contributions to North American growth and development. Carrier's characteristically gentle humour and profound insight into human nature give this fast-paced novel its universal appeal.

Pitfalls of Postcolonialism

Arun Mukherjee
Postcolonialism: My Living. TSAR $21.95
Reviewed by Dieter Riemenschneider

Arun Mukherjee's book brings together sixteen of her essays written since the beginning of the 1990s, with most, if not all of them, as she says, trying "to tease out [. . .] the binaries of colonizer/colonized [. . . as] highly problematic since they constitute 'the colonized' as a singularity." Accordingly, postcolonial literature and

theory, by definition the very embodiment of the discourse of these binaries, must be read and taught by deconstructing them, "by focusing on hierarchies of class, caste and gender [. . . and reading them] in terms of their specificities of history and culture" This reading requires critical familiarity with historical and cultural contexts, for political reasons. "[M]ost important to me," she says, "[are] things such as poverty or social inequality, the political vision of the text, its engagement with local realities, and the racist or antiracist perspectives of the text." Born and brought up in India, she feels "competent to teach texts from India" rather than from other postcolonial areas, and as an academic teaching them to white students and students of colour at a Canadian university she would prefer to replace the postcolonial curricular category "by national or regional categories." It comes as no surprise, then, that with a few exceptions literary texts analysed in her essays are either from India—Dalit (or Untouchable writing) and prose by M.R. Anand, Anita Desai or Mahasweta Devi—or of South Asian Canadian origin. No less important than the critic's political awareness is the teacher's pedagogical awareness. Contextualizing a text means helping students to decode cultural references as much as to understand a "text's affiliation with the literary tradition it is part of as well as its engagement with the discourses and ideologies of the society they emerged from."

By following the publication dates of her essays in this collection we easily discern from the beginning alternations between more theoretically oriented texts, such as "Whose Postcolonialism and Whose Postmodernism" (1990), and their translation, as it were, into practical criticism, as in "The Exclusion of Postcolonial Theory and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: A Case Study" (1991). These early essays clearly outline Mukherjee's own position *vis-à-vis* postcolonial theory and its shibboleths as they had gained ascendancy during the 1980s, a critical stance that is repeatedly confirmed but also extended in subsequent essays, which variously focus on the hierarchies of class, caste and gender, to which we may add those of nation, race, and ethnicity. A chronological arrangement of her essays would permit the reader to trace Mukherjee's academic preoccupations over a decade, but she has chosen a systematic approach, which takes us from predominantly theoretical concerns through ethnic minority writing, followed by studies on "the race of gender, and the gender of race" to a reading of individual texts, or from the general to the particular, and finally back again to the general when she discusses "universals" and the relationship of the two "posts" in her seminal essay of 1990.

The most impressive feature of her writing remains her clearly spelling out her position as an Indian woman immigrant university teacher in Canada, whose concerns as a critic and a pedagogue rest in assisting her students in developing a cross-cultural understanding of non-canonical literary texts from an "outside" culture. Every one of her essays demonstrates this commitment, although the individually chosen topic will variously foreground a deconstructive reading of a particular "hierarchy." For example, Anand's *Untouchable* or various texts by Dalit writers are employed to rethink postcolonial Indian writing as literary specimens of "writing back" to the centre: quite the opposite, Mukherjee argues convincingly. *Untouchable* claims to speak for a large and suppressed social group. Yet while it succeeds in "dismantling [. . .] the unitary Indian subject" by demonstrating that the upper castes in India are themselves internal colonizers of the caste-less, the novel fails because it erases the historical fact that untouchables are not and have not been voiceless. Thus, Anand's own position can be called hegemonic. Dalit writers, on the

other hand, raise their own voices *vis-à-vis* caste Hindus and thereby deconstruct totalizing concepts such as Indianness, the Indian subject and even Indian aesthetics, by thematizing their own cultural, social and economic suppression in a language and a literary style unacceptable to the upper caste representatives of so-called Indian culture and literature.

More examples could be cited here of essays that variously focus on nation ("How Shall We Read Canadian South Asian Texts?"), race and minority ("Teaching Racial Minority Writing: Problems and Challenges"), ethnicity ("Teaching Ethnic Minority Writing: A Report from the Class Rooms"), or gender ("Of Goddesses and 'Mothers': Goddess Feminism and Mahasweta Devi's 'The Wet Nurse'"). The latter, written more recently, offers a powerful reading against the grain both of Eurocentric criticism and postcolonial theory by demonstrating Mahasweta Devi's successful dismantling of "Goddess Feminism" as well as Gayatri Spivak's neglect of "the text's critique of the cult of the Mother Goddess" in her well-known reading of the story. "Other Worlds, Other Texts: Teaching Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* to Canadian Students" is a representative example of Mukherjee's concern with pedagogical questions and her insistence on the importance of hermeneutics in postcolonial studies.

Postcolonialism: My Living proves an aptly chosen title for a book that, apart from its intellectual challenges to readers of postcolonial literature and theory, is also very much a personal testimony of a politically and pedagogically committed woman. Read individually, each essay carries its "message" convincingly; read in conjunction we may notice overlaps and repetitions. Yet this book bespeaks a dedicated mind and an important critical voice among postcolonial readers.

With Eyes Wide Open

Barbara Mulcahy
The Man with the Dancing Monkey. Wolsak and Wynn $12.00

Merike Lugus
Ophelia After Centuries of Trying. Watershed Books $11.95

Vicki Summerfeldt
Women Who Dream Tigers. Thistledown P $7.50

Reviewed by Susan Drodge

As first books, these three collections are notable for their mature, insistent voices. Each of these poets, it seems, has a heightened sense of her duty as an artist. For Mulcahy in *The Man with the Dancing Monkey* that duty appears to be the honest confrontation of desire; for Lugus in *Ophelia After Centuries of Trying* it seems to be the recovery of those who have been marginalized by their passivity; while for Summerfeldt in *Women Who Dream Tigers* it is the transformation of the commonplace. My generalizations are not meant to detract from the emotional, intellectual, and formal ranges of these poets, but rather to point to their coherent and compelling visions.

The Man with the Dancing Monkey (1997) has been recognized as an important first book, being short-listed for both the 1998 Pat Lowther Memorial Award and the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award of the same year. This is a dynamic collection with fifty-four poems ranging from the bitterly ironic "The Garden of the Man Whose Wife Has Left Him" to the humorous "My Muse is a Tramp" to the meditative "Passage" with its three poignant movements: Conception, The Second Trimester, and Miscarriage. The imagery is elemental and skillful, by turns profuse and stark, always moving deftly among the senses.

Mulcahy has the eye of a landscape artist and the soul of a naturalist. Her desire for pure or organic being is a motivating force

in many of these poems. In "Sanctuary," for instance, she writes of her desire "to lie down by the side / of the farrowing sow / enclosed in the barn / on a winter night," while later in the collection she looks forward to a more permanent synthesis of self and nature: "Bury me on a platform in the trees. / Let the birds unravel / what they can. I will / not need it." But Mulcahy also does not flinch in the face of uncomfortable truths. For her, the ideal of freedom involves shedding one's ego and materialism, while it demands facing one's desires, no matter how dark or antisocial those desires might be. In "The Hunting Knife," for example, Mulcahy confesses "there is still a part of me / that wants to be hunted— / wants to be opened, to steam / like guts into a fall day." These are raw and humble poems that express the poet's sense of her own transience and the modesty of her aspirations: as she states simply, "I don't want to hurt anything anymore."

Like Mulcahy's poems, many of the forty-two poems in *Ophelia After Centuries of Trying* explore issues of identity, particularly how we must resist scripted or static conceptions of self. In many of these poems, Lugus assumes the duty of an "unauthorized detective" who investigates what lies "far outside the margins"and illuminates the paradoxes that reside there ("The Black Cloche"). In "Daddy, Why Didn't You?" for instance, the speaker explores the potential malignancy of love and the possibility of redemption. Repeatedly, Lugus writes about human characters in their complexity and vulnerability; as she writes in "A House on a Hill," "today I want proof that we cannot be / reduced to anything comprehensible, that we are / sheer readiness / and fathomless."

As the title of this collection suggests, allusions play a role here as Lugus revisits the literary tradition to rescue certain characters from their limited characterizations, namely Ophelia and Penelope. Indeed, for Lugus, Ophelia represents the self who has been traumatized by its passivity and must finally break its silence, reject its powerlessness. In "Ophelia's Lament," the title character declares, "I am not mute," while in "Not an Epic," the mythic Penelope—finally impatient with her husband's obsessions—is (re)imaged as picking up arms against him:

> Penelope in her own home
> strung the great bow
> pulled the arrow
> (no need to amputate the breast)
> and shot the stranger
> as he entered her garden.

A unique feature of this collection is the generous author's note which follows the poems and clarifies many of her intertextual references. Here she positions her own desire to infuse Ophelia with life against the traditional "fascination with women on the verge of death" and adds her voice to the ongoing theoretical discourse on identity formation.

Another accomplished first book, *Women Who Dream Tigers* offers fifty-six poems that are first-person reflections on the intensity of daily life and the transformative power of perception. In a striking poem titled "Contemplation of a River Suicide," the speaker writes of the moment when the subject's doors of perception are finally cleansed and her "inner eyes open / to look at her own death." For the female suicide, this moment of revelation is too late in the coming, but for most of Summerfeldt's subjects, an enlightened clarity accompanies the opening of their "inner eyes." In "Repainting the Day," she acknowledges a debt to a friend who has rescued her from her own complacency and opened her eyes to "the colours [that] run into the breath of you / paint the landscape of heart / push blood into life."

Like Mulcahy and Lugus, Summerfeldt is interested in the self, though she tends to focus on relationships between self and

other. "Interlude," another memorable poem, depicts the speaker's modesty and unexpected self-consciousness when faced with her husband's desire, despite her many years of shared intimacy with him. The poems of *Women Who Dream Tigers* recurrently depict the awkwardness and missed opportunities that all too often characterize human interaction. As Summerfeldt's title suggests, grace and surety are ideals of which many of us only dream, but as she implicitly argues here, the dreaming itself is vital. Like Mulcahy and Lugus, Summerfeldt validates the integrity of the individual and the imperative of self-knowledge.

CanPop

Rob Payne, ed.
Pop Goes the Story. Canadian Fiction 95/96. Quarry n.p.

Robert J. Sawyer and David Skene-Melvin, eds.
Crossing the Line: Canadian Mysteries with a Fantastic Twist. Pottersfield n.p.

Don Hutchison, ed.
Northern Frights 5. Mosaic $18.95

Reviewed by Douglas Ivison

While these three anthologies are very different, they do have one thing in common: an engagement with popular culture. *Northern Frights 5* and *Crossing the Line* are collections of genre fiction, while *Pop Goes the Story* is an anthology of fiction that attempts to reflect the impact of popular culture on contemporary society.

Unfortunately, the most disappointing of the three anthologies, if only because it promised to be the most interesting, is *Pop Goes the Story*, an issue of *Canadian Fiction*. In his pop culture reference-filled introduction Rob Payne suggests that this collection is intended to counteract the literary community's "*popaphobia:* fear of relating to the masses on their own, widely known and identifiable terms." The result, Payne claims, is an anthology of "pop culture fiction" that would tackle and describe the "pop culture bubbling below the surface of a calm respectability, asserting itself like magma exploding through the fissures." This would have been a worthwhile, if not entirely original, project if Payne and his contributors had been able to carry it out. The problem begins, I think, with the vagueness and superficiality of Payne's brief introduction, in which he does not clarify the term "pop culture" and how it affects our daily lives (and this ambiguity isn't helped by Hal Niedziecki's similarly imprecise definition of another related term, "speed culture," in his essay). Sure, we live in an ever-changing maze of cultural referentiality, but does that profoundly affect our lives? Most of the stories collected in this anthology fail to explore adequately the issues raised by such claims.

Some of the stories are effective critiques of pop culture, such as Christopher Taylor's "Diary of a Cultural Exile," a commentary on the transformative proliferation of Western popular culture across the world; Peter Darbyshire's "Still," which illustrates the noise pop culture introduces into relationships; and Laura Lush's amusing take on female self-empowerment, "Women Who Run With Buffalo." Other stories, such as Rob Payne's story of a voyeur, "So Like Candy," or Matthew Firth's "Nostalgia," use pop culture as a background but fail to engage with pop culture on any more than a superficial level. In Payne's effectively creepy story, the litter of pop culture references adds little significance. On the other hand, Mark Jarman's "Love Is All Around Us," concerned with the ubiquity of Margaret Atwood in Canadian culture, is little more than a pop culture joke. Strangely, many of the stories, including some of the most affecting and effective—such as Ian Colford's "Stone

Temple," a disturbing tale of parental child abduction, and "Wintering," Shelley Leedahl's story of marital breakdown—have little, if anything, to do with pop culture, devoid of even the superficial pop culture references that pepper many of the other stories in this collection. While such stories were certainly worth reading they just don't seem to fit, and thus weaken the cohesion of *Pop Goes the Story.*

Crossing the Line: Canadian Mysteries with a Fantastic Twist unfortunately fails to live up to its billing. The subtitle suggests that the diverse assortment of previously published stories (some first published nearly twenty years ago) fits together because they are all mystery stories imbued with some sense of the fantastic. Certainly, there is a long tradition of blending science fiction and fantasy with mystery fiction; notable examples include the robot mysteries of Isaac Asimov, Robert J. Sawyer's courtroom mystery, *Illegal Alien,* or Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy series, which combines Holmesian detection with magic. Yet, less than half of the stories fit such a description. Tanya Huff's vampire detective story, "This Town Ain't Big Enough," is readable and entertaining though it reads more as an introduction to her vampire detective character than as a stand-alone story; Robert J. Sawyer's "The Hand You're Dealt" is a competent, if uninterestingly written, mystery dealing provocatively with genetics and cloning; and James Powell's "Dark Possessions" is an intriguing if poorly realized tale in which discarded apartment furniture solves an old murder. Other stories, such as Spider Robinson's "God is an Iron," William Gibson's brilliant "Burning Chrome" (easily accessible elsewhere), and Terence M. Green's "Barking Dogs," all of which are over a decade old, are tangentially crime stories, but their interests really lie elsewhere. The same is true of Edo van Belkom's horror tale of a carnivorous carpet, "The Rug." Robertson Davies' delightful ghost story, "The Ghost Who Vanished by Degrees," and James Alan Gardner's thought-provoking reflection on the impact of scientific discovery on the course of biological and societal evolution, "Three Hearings on the Existence of Snakes in the Human Bloodstream," have even less to do with the organizing concept of this anthology. That's unfortunate, because while *Crossing the Line* collects many excellent stories, as a whole the anthology seems slapped together and without purpose.

Northern Frights 5 is the fifth in Don Hutchison's award-winning and commercially successful collections of original Canadian dark fantasy. While the title might suggest stories filled with gore and terror, we are actually presented with seventeen stories and one poem tinged with the macabre and the supernatural; these are weird tales rather than strictly horror ones. More than anything, such stories as Rebecca Bradley's "Oak Island," a yarn about primeval, malevolent slime at the bottom of a lake in Northern Ireland, or Nalo Hopkinson's "Slow Cold Chick," which imbues what might otherwise be a mundane horror tale with the language, culture, and storytelling traditions of the Caribbean, celebrate the joy of telling and reading stories. Nearly all the stories are entertaining and highly readable, with a couple of exceptions, though most of them fail to have a lasting impact. There are a few stories that do stand out. Andrew Weiner's "Crossing," an ambiguous and atmospheric tale about dreams, memory, and reality, and Robert Charles Wilson's "Plato's Cave," a searching story of character as much as one of the supernatural, are engagingly written, affecting, and thought-provoking. Gemma Files's intriguing, grotesque "The Emperor's Old Bones" rewrites J. G. Ballard's descriptions of his boyhood experience during the Second World War in *Empire of the Sun. Northern Frights 5* is a highly readable and entertaining collection

that anyone who values storytelling will enjoy, although more stringent copy-editing to catch the excessive number of typos would have been welcome.

Telling Roy's Story

François Ricard
Gabrielle Roy: A Life. McClelland and Stewart
$39.99

Linda M. Clemente and William A. Clemente
Gabrielle Roy: Creation and Memory. ECW P
$14.95

Reviewed by Carol J. Harvey

Gabrielle Roy has been called the English-Canadians' favourite French-Canadian and judging by the appearance of recent studies in English, interest in her life and works remains strong. Linda and Bill Clemente's book *Gabrielle Roy: Creation and Memory* appeared in 1997 and François Ricard's major six-hundred page life, originally published in French in 1996, was translated into English by Patricia Claxton in 1999, under the title *Gabrielle Roy: A Life.* Both works are presented as illustrated biographies, yet they offer a striking contrast in their handling of Roy's life.

The bare facts of that life are well known. Born in St. Boniface, Manitoba, in 1909, Gabrielle was the youngest child in a large French-Canadian family. She was educated in Manitoba and spent eight years teaching in the province before leaving in 1937 to study theatre in England and France. While she did not have the physical stamina for a career on the stage, she was successful in publishing articles both in France and Canada. Back in Canada in 1939, she settled in Montréal as a journalist for various newspapers and magazines. Her first novel, *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945), published in English as *The Tin Flute*, took the literary world by storm; it garnered major awards in Canada, France and the United States and established Roy's reputation. She went on to write more than a dozen novels and collections of short stories, including three books for children and her autobiography, published shortly after her death in 1983. Many of the milestones in Roy's life are captured in the photographs and portraits illustrating both books.

Beyond the public face of the writer is a woman who took pains to keep her private life free from scrutiny. In researching and chronicling this little known personal life, Ricard and the Clementes take different approaches. Ricard, a professor at McGill University and a friend of Roy, drew extensively on material that the author entrusted to him shortly before her death. He spent thirteen years combing through these papers, letters, documents and unpublished manuscripts; he also consulted Roy's family and friends in order to piece together a full and detailed chronological account of her life. The Clementes, both teachers at colleges in the States, rely primarily on what Roy herself wrote or said: her autobiography, *La Détresse et l'enchantement* (1984), her letters to her sister Bernadette (published in French in 1988, English translation 1990), and various interviews with Roy published over the years. Consequently, their book often presents Roy's view of herself rather than the external assessment expected in a biography.

The Clementes highlight what they consider to be three pivotal phases in Roy's life and development as an author. They start with her decision at age twenty-eight to leave family, friends and career in Manitoba and focus on the two years she spent in France and England. They then go back over Roy's childhood years and her relationship with her parents and siblings. In the concluding sections, they deal briefly with her return from Europe to live in Montréal, her years as a journalist and her successful career as a writer. Consistent

with their view that Roy's life divides almost in half, the first part devoted to active engagement in the world and the second to retrospection and contemplation, they concentrate on the first as the source of inspiration for her writing during the second part.

Consideration of Roy's writing is thus interwoven throughout with the Clementes' account of her life. Roy scholars are well aware that many of the faces and places in her fiction are drawn from her life: her childhood in St. Boniface, the years she spent teaching in Manitoba during the Depression or discovering the poor neighbourhood of Saint-Henri in Montréal. The attention the Clementes pay to documenting this link between life and art, or "memory" and "creation," constitutes one of the most interesting aspects of their book. They provide a lively, knowledgeable and well-argued study, couched in clear language, devoid of the specialized terminology of literary criticism, though sometimes verging on the colloquial with expressions such as "ho-hum," "Latin lovers" and "savvy nun." In fact, in their enthusiasm for Roy's life and work, their text sometimes reads like a romantic novel in style and tone. Here is how they describe her meeting with Stephen:

> And it happened, following a script right out of the movies: she arrived one afternoon at Lady Frances's and there he sat, a stranger across a crowded room, his dark eyes drawing her closer as Lady Wells shepherded her to his table, coincidentally intent on her meeting this someone really special. Surprised, undone, astonished, afraid it was all a dream, they remained speechless, gazing at each other, wonder-struck, magnetized, energized.

By contrast, Ricard's biography is noteworthy for its sober and dispassionate tone. He probes the link between life and art more deeply than the Clementes, contrasting Roy's stories of enchanted childhood—*Street of Riches* (1955), *The Road Past Altamont* (1966)—with the bleak picture she paints in her posthumously published autobiography, disclosing her childhood poverty and feelings of insecurity and inferiority as a member of Manitoba's French-Canadian minority. Ricard's thesis is that Roy was desperate to escape the narrow confines of her poverty-stricken family background, the provincialism of St. Boniface in the thirties and the restrictions of a "woman's career" as a teacher. She wanted to discover her own identity and to succeed in life. And although she succeeded beyond her wildest dreams, Ricard shows that her independence cost her dearly. Her decision to leave St. Boniface, "abandoning" her elderly mother, led to a rift with her family; to her dying day, her sister Marie-Anna Adèle (who died in 1998) criticized Gabrielle publicly for her vanity and self-absorption.

Nor was Roy's writing always exempt from criticism. Neither *La Petite Poule d'Eau* (1950) nor *Alexandre Chenevert* (1954) met the expectations created by *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945). And with the disappointments, the ill health that dogged her from childhood often led to bouts of physical and mental prostration. Although later books earned her many honours, Roy's single-minded dedication to writing turned her into a recluse. Her marriage to St. Boniface doctor Marcel Carbotte, which started as a passionate love-match, deteriorated as she put her writing first. Ricard discloses that although the couple stayed together, Marcel had a twenty-year affair with his homosexual lover "M.C."

Despite Ricard's friendship and admiration for Roy, he recounts her life objectively, the failures as well as the successes. His thorough biography will stand as a scholarly and authoritative source for the facts of her life. Patricia Claxton, whose previous credits include Roy's autobiogra-

phy and her letters to her sister, offers a smooth and accurate translation that captures the flavour of Ricard's work. Through it, English-speaking readers can weigh Roy's story of a life lived for literature at the expense of all else. In comparison, the Clementes' book, though lively and informative, is uncritical in its use of Roy's written version of events, retelling her story as she herself told it through her fiction and her autobiography and relating events in a romantic and popular vein.

Dramatic Empathy

Djanet Sears, ed.
Tellin' It Like It Is: A Compendium of African Canadian Monologues for Actors. Playwrights Union of Canada $7.75

Margie Taylor
Murder in the Atrium: A Tale of Corporate Downsizing, in Three Acts. Robert Davies Multimedia $12.99

Vivienne Laxdal
Karla and Grif: A Play in Two Acts. Playwrights Canada P $14.95

Reviewed by Shannon Hengen

These three texts are lessons in dramatic empathy, a technique of good theatre that enables us to connect with both heroes and villains. Very often, just when we might be tempted to make a clear distinction between the ethical and the corrupt in characters or actions, the distinction breaks down, and we are drawn instead into more complex issues.

Tellin' It Like It Is, long overdue as "the first collection of monologues by African Canadian playwrights ever assembled" (to quote the editor), includes eighteen writers and covers a range of voices—male and female, angry and funny, formal and idiomatic, direct and ironic. Among the recurring themes are racism, rape, and more subtle issues of sexual politics. A passionate language seems appropriate to such themes, and appears throughout, distinguishing these monologues as particularly apt, designed to engage audiences immediately.

The omnipresent pains associated with prejudices and failures of understanding create a world of enclosure, restraint, depression, suicide, abuse, death, failed love, as well as humour, music, and word play. To survive in this world, the playwrights say, one must develop a strength and a spirit uncommon in mainstream Canada. Grand, even ornate language and flights of fancy balance hard realities of oppression. George Elliott Clarke's female character, for example, says "life's nothin but guts, muscle, nerve"; and George Boyd's male figure warns that "you better learn the survival game." From Bernadette Dyer comes this taut line: "My desire is as sharp as the salt in the air where sea birds in their ramblings mark passages across the vast wide sky." And from a vision by Donald Carr are "misguided men riding sightless horses on a blind date with knowledge." The peculiar mix of deep feeling and idiomatic speech sets these monologues apart, as in this passage from George Boyd: "I got me a blues . . . oh, a blues . . . and it play melancholy-like . . . on a soft, pluckin' guitar [. . .] and it be a blues for our children."

An African Canadian with, triumphantly, her own weekend radio show on national CBC is the central character of the three-act revenge comedy, *Murder in the Atrium.* Self-described as "one-quarter black and brought up in Oakville," Sonja Drabble moves from a heartless prima donna to a wise, peaceful human being at play's end, albeit as the resident of a psychiatric hospital, having at least witnessed if not aided in the murder referred to in the title, and having physically assaulted a male colleague. Sonja holds the play together in what is really a dramatized monologue, delivered

to a reporter, and we watch her character changes with interest in a piece described on the back cover as a play *à clef*. The translation of the story from mass media to the stage works surprisingly well, with implicit resonances developing between the subjects of Sonja's radio show—for example, a Canadian author up for Canadian literary prize—and the modes of mass communication.

A tale of cold ambition and egocentricity, of the "guile and artifice" required to succeed in "this business," according to Sonja, the play treats issues of morality, focusing on the age gap between established media stars and younger talent. Early in the play, Sonja recalls her hippie past with nostalgia, claiming starkly that she hates youth, while herself showing none of the egalitarian ideals associated with 1960s radicalism. The young characters are often hardened and cynical, drawn to darker realities, with the exception of the precocious twenty-seven year-old producer of Sonja's show, nicknamed Bouncer, who serves as the figure to whom Sonja eventually reveals herself. Bouncer also remains human, connecting emotionally with Sonja. Dramatic empathy is at its best here.

Taylor has her main figure address other issues pertaining to female aging as well, such as sexist and uninformed attitudes to menopause, and the main character's encounter with her Caribbean heritage. A wooden statuette represents that heritage and comes alive late in the play in what would seem a ridiculous strategy in any medium other than theatre, but which works well here to effect a tragic reversal of fortune in the main male character, who is white and middle-aged.

Sonja's comedy of revenge satisfies with its many funny moments and mordant observations on life at the CBC at a time when "[o]ur audience is deserting us." But it is finally the ironic statement that youth, disillusioned with the tarnished ideals of the 1960s, nevertheless exhibit those ideals and teach them to the middle-aged which so satisfies, particularly given Sonja's declaration that only irony appeals to the young. That she is supremely happy as an in-house talk show host at her hospital supplies a last, fulfilling irony.

Seldom-heard voices comprise the main characters in *Karla and Grif* as they do in *Tellin' It Like It Is*; here the voices are lesbian. The play in two acts centres on a relationship developed at summer camp and then abandoned, to be dealt with climactically in a reunion of the young women three years later. Structurally interesting, the work interweaves Karla's home life with her single-parent father, her past at the camp, and the present in Grif's apartment, showing effectively how the harshness and emotional emptiness of Karla's life have been shaped. Grif's personality is less developed but still memorable as the richer, sexier, more ambitious, and somehow tougher of the two, although Karla wields the pocket knife menacingly throughout, uses the crudest language, and tries to reclaim her ex-lover in the play's final scenes in a violent, sado-masochistic ritual.

Laxdal's language is spare and simple, appropriately for this story of loss—both young women are motherless—and muted desire. The inability of the two lead characters to connect emotionally in crucial scenes demands from them a series of short, thwarted, often less than honest exchanges and creates a sense of frustrated need. The play's culminating moments, when the need is expressed more visually than verbally, therefore seem both powerful and earned. Overall, the script is nicely taut and the drama intense.

On the book's back cover comes the statement that "*Karla and Grif* has provoked controversy for its depictions of violence between women, and for its portrayal of butch and femme lesbians." But however shocking or, perhaps to some, unbelievable

the violence between women appears, it also functions as a corrective against innumerable romanticized images of women appearing in popular culture, and as such the depictions are compelling. This play will take many audience members well beyond their conventional thinking about how women love.

Old Home/New Home

Erika de Vasconcelos
My Darling Dead Ones. Random House $16.95

Harold Rhenisch
Carnival. Porcupine's Quill $15.95

Rabindranath Maharaj
Homer in Flight. Goose Lane $18.95

Reviewed by Reinhold Kramer

For many of us, this continent feels as if it has only been recently inhabited—in the last forty years—and we make our peace less with Louis Riel than with Magdalena Fillol, Hans Rhenisch, and Mrs. Santokie. *My Darling Dead Ones* and *Carnival,* novels of return to the old country, bow, more so than the "immigrant" novel *Homer in Flight,* to these dead.

My Darling Dead Ones explores the lives of four women. Fiona, a middle-aged Canadian, becomes a medium for three Portuguese ancestors, the darling dead whose lives are sources of pain and hope: her mother Leninha, her grandmother Helena and her great-aunt Magdalena. Stories about Fiona's separation from her husband and about her subsequent life alternate with stories about her ancestors.

Some of the stories are luminous. "Sisters I (Monster Face)" details the battles between Fiona and her older, less conventional sister Laura. Laura's childhood monster faces become, in her adult art, a more homely sort of monstrosity: a series of flesh-coloured dolls hung from hooks, a punch to Fiona's stomach when she first sees the work. But despite her misgivings at what Laura has made public, the dolls are transformative: "Fiona steps towards the wall and lifts one of the dolls from its hook, easy. Outside, she tucks the doll under her coat. It is light as a feather . . . light as a bean floating in water. That baby would have taken up too much space."

Many of the stories in de Vasconcelos's quasi-novel stand alone in the style of Alice Munro. In "Half of Life" the unfaithful Fiona's hope of grand passion has to do in place of grand passion itself. The unsatisfactoriness of Fiona's love affair is somehow diminished by the echoes of Magdalena's life-long affair with a judge. Why a partial repetition of the past should make the present any less disturbing is not clear, but it does. "Sisters II (Album)" winds its way through the long marriage between Magdalena and Helena, through births, husbands and approaching death. Sea-shell gifts mutate lyrically into babies, given not by husbands or lovers, but by Magdalena to Helena.

The book is dedicated to three of de Vasconcelos's maternal ancestors, who give the names to Fiona's ancestors, and the crux of the narrative is that Fiona enters the company of these Portuguese women. When the company-of-women conceit works, it works well, but there are weaknesses. Technically fiction, *My Darling Dead Ones* nevertheless bears the problems of the memoir form: the tendency to be too dutiful in worshipping at the ancestral shrine, the tendency toward self-justification. No matter what infidelity or harshness the women commit, de Vasconcelos *will* celebrate. The men are shadowy figures, and possibly as a result of this, the conflicts sometimes lack blood.

Nevertheless, de Vasconcelos is careful of her prose and never willing to settle for cheap flash. She has sure control of her craft and a convincing sense of emotional specificity. She is also attentive to human

mystery.

A similar reverence for the anecdotal past occasionally sabotages Harold Rhenisch's otherwise brilliant *Carnival.* The genesis of the book was apparently long and arduous. In 1984 Rhenisch taped his father's troubling stories of life in a small town in Southern Germany during World War II. Rhenisch put the stories together by 1987, but did not publish them for another eleven years, learning German, traveling to Germany and slowly realizing that the original form was irretrievable. Instead, Rhenisch decided to "enter" his father to "help him understand the more difficult parts of his story," even as his father brought out the hidden roots of Rhenisch's own story.

The results are often nothing less than astounding. In a wartime town made claustrophobic by the transformation of men into uniformed "angels" and a house made claustrophobic by the split between husband and wife, young Hansel must find his way around as the darkness comes looking for him. He becomes familiar with all manner of mystery and degradation, as the police use the maid Maryushka sexually, the Moroccan soldiers rape and kill his girlfriend, and our Leader's portrait begins to weep tears. Hansel's father tells him that "the world is built out of force . . . without force you cannot make anything," and joins the Nazis in hope of a material success that never comes. His mother, who—despite her position as a physician—is stigmatized by divorce, struggles to survive, and goes so far as to marry the abusive Blaumann to put bread on the table.

According to the back cover, Rhenisch is one of Canada's master prose stylists, and that's not far off, even if you haven't heard of him: "You do not see angels going around with a bucket of glue, a mop and a bunch of handbills, plastering them on the wall: 'You Cannot Have a Bicycle'; 'God Is Not Making Any More Bicycles—God Has Guns to Make with the Steel.' What happens here is what happens with God; what happens with God happens here. It is *our* war. We have melted all our bicycles down and dropped them on London. There are many children there who do not have a mom because of our bicycles falling from the sky. It rains bicycles. The sky was so choked up with bicycles that they start to rain, a hard, hard rain!"

Rhenisch is most comfortable working in poem-length units, one paragraph to three pages. He doesn't want the rhythms of build-up and climax that one expects of larger structures, and, like de Vasconcelos, seems to include some anecdotes merely because his father told them. Most frustrating of all is the overuse of conditionals. Rhenisch wants his father's voice, but almost every "would" has a laming effect, bringing habit and stasis to moments that are unique and in motion. However, Rhenisch allows the dead to speak in profoundly affecting ways, and *Carnival* has a cumulative force that builds as Hansel witnesses greater and greater suffering, about which he is able to do less and less.

Of the three writers, Rabindranath Maharaj is the most accessible; he knows how to tell a good story. Not surprisingly *Homer in Flight* was short-listed for the Chapters/*Books in Canada* First Novel award and broadcast on CBC's "Between the Covers." If the novel doesn't quite have the emotional depth of *Carnival,* Maharaj compensates with a deft hand at comedy, tracing the stumblings of the inept filing clerk Homerwad Santokie through Toronto.

Homer hopes to trade the disorders of Trinidad for the blessed order of Canada, where even squirrels are tame and trusting. "As well they should be," Homer says, "In Trinidad they would be in somebody pot in no time." But he discovers a Canada less than eager to embrace the immigrant as he wanders into jobs, unemployment, mar-

riage, and self-published authorship. The influence of other Trinidadian expatriates—Naipaul (think of Ganesh in *The Mystic Masseur*) and the lesser-known Harold Sonny Ladoo (*Yesterdays*)—is apparent but never obtrusive, as Maharaj treads the fine line between courting the reader's sympathy and making Homer a self-obsessed satiric dupe. The novel is studded with strange and wonderful moments, such as when Homer, the resident alien, is talked into buying a New Age book which claims that humans are all mentally challenged and that the visitors from other planets are really our Special Ed. Teachers.

Maharaj deftly combines Trinidadian dialect with Canadian, tragedy with comedy. One woman advises Homer, "'You have to learn to defend yourself or you will get pulverize. Pull-verize.' She said the word with relish." Homer, whose novel begins with the lugubrious "They tried to wrest his heroism from him," is not equipped for compromises. As his madness gets thicker, he makes a pact against the world with a fellow-misfit, a racist Canadian librarian who longs for the glory days of Stephen Leacock and of the inimitable Charles Heavysege, days when Canadians apparently still knew who they were.

As one might expect, the novel of immigration is less enamoured with the old home than is the novel of return. Yet although Homer expects immigration and Canadian education to be a one-way process—"Take care them same little children who allyou catching you ass for don't turn round and land some good kick on allyou"—Maharaj repeatedly hints at another sort of vision which would marry the Trinidadian past to the Canadian present, an imaginative return of which Homer is not yet capable.

Black Emigrant in Canada

Rinaldo Walcott
Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada.
Insomniac $19.99

Dany Laferrière. Trans. David Homel
A Drifting Year. Douglas & McIntyre $16.95

Mary A. Shadd, ed. Richard Almonte
A Plea for Emigration Or, Notes of Canada West.
Mercury $16.50

Reviewed by Tracy Bains

Although they use different genres and write about different periods of Canadian history, Walcott, Laferrière and Shadd all deal with emigration and the presence of blacks in Canada.

Walcott endeavors to "articulate some grammars for thinking Canadian blackness" by critiquing black cultural production in diaspora. Seven essays on texts, films, rap lyrics, and other forms of popular expression by Canadian black artists produce an elastic definition of "blackness" and its trans-national implications. Opening with a discussion of nineteenth-century black emigrants such as Martin Robinson Delany, Walcott challenges representations of Canada as a "place of sanctuary," and suggests that "Canadian blackness is a bubbling brew of desires for elsewhere, disappointments in the nation and the pleasures of exile even for those who have resided here for many generations."

However, *Black Like Who?* pursues a thesis which is too expansive to be dealt with adequately. In the introduction, Walcott himself admits that the text is not cohesive as "the chapters in this book initially were all written as separate essays, and continue to bear the marks of their individuality." He readily acknowledges that he has focused on black cultures in Ontario. However, such forthrightness does little to excuse or alter matters. In addition, Walcott's understanding of blackness is so broad that, in the end, it signifies everything and nothing.

"Repetition, reference, citation, [and] circularity [are] all the characteristics of black diasporic cultures," but these are similar stylistic features rather than proof of an intimate understanding between black artists, filmmakers and writers.

A Drifting Year is a semi-autobiographical chronicle of day-to-day events as experienced by an Haitian immigrant during his first year in Canada; the text is presented in three hundred and sixty poetic fragments that catalogue the speaker's daily encounters and activities throughout the year. As a political exile escaping "the madness/ of a tropical dictatorship," the unnamed speaker disembarks in Montreal during the 1976 Summer Olympic Games just as athletes and spectators from all nations have converged upon the city. Figuratively, the world collapses into one metropolis and to be an outsider in Montreal means being a stranger everywhere. Once again, Canada proves to be an indifferent space of asylum where the speaker has been forced to flee to rather than towards: "I'm not a/ tourist passing through . . . I'm here to stay,/ whether I like it or not."

Although Laferrière offers a cursory documentation of the travails involved in emigration, I enjoyed following the progress of the two contradictory impulses which compel the speaker to familiarize himself with Montreal but also maintain a sense of surreal dislocation. For example, the speaker's refusal to provide names, of either people or places, contributes to the overall feeling of aimless drifting. As Walcott explains, the act of "naming is a practice of the in-between" in which under-represented members of society seek to reclaim buried histories and spaces such as Negro Creek Road, Ontario. However, Laferrière's speaker prolongs his uncertain position as an outsider by failing to disclose specific locales and identify his social circle. Likewise, his inability to find a stable living space further prolongs this state of displacement: "I told the super I/ was taking out the garbage . . . I hoped I hadn't left anything . . . My fourth move/ and it's only August." The speaker's disengagement with his surroundings is affected by his chaotic sense of time and self: "I can't tell you/ how many days/ I've been here/or how long/ I'll stay./ I know nothing of my life." He exists in a void where he lacks the volition to direct his own life, and thus strays through Montreal without pause for "the time,/ or the day, or the month/ or even the year."

In opposition to the disorienting qualities of the text, Lafferière situates the speaker's sexual liaisons in the context of sheer survival. Initially, the speaker conflates his naiveté with his limited knowledge of Montreal: "I walked all night/ in this new city./ I don't know yet/ what neighborhoods to avoid . . . I'm an innocent." Although he is "still vaguely a virgin" when he arrives in Canada, the speaker soon learns that women will help him navigate the city and provide for him through the harsh winter season. During a visit to a local bar, an older woman makes a thinly veiled proposition by offering a tour of Montreal: "'I bet no one's shown you around yet . . . I'll make it my business'" she says. While the speaker does not take advantage of this offer, the female body inevitably becomes a map as if sensual exploration doubles as a metaphor for geography; for instance, "the nape of [Julie's] neck is the center of the world," while the secretary's breasts become "broad globes/ in the pale light/ of the moon," and the fat lady from the laundromat is a "mountain of cool clean flesh." The implication is that the bodies of his lovers will assist the speaker become acquainted with the terrain of Montreal. Moreover, the speaker accepts the advice of a friend who urges him to: "'get . . . in with the women. They're rock-solid, they'll feed you, wash you, dress you and put you to bed if you get sick." While Julie and Nathalie assume the

archetypal role of eroticized virgin and whore respectively, the fat lady from the laundromat exchanges food for sexual favours. She "showed up with two big bags of groceries . . . I made love to her calmly, figuring I wouldn't starve to death this month."

While Walcott and Laferrière manifest an ambivalence towards Canada, the circumstances which prompted Mary A. Shadd to write *A Plea for Emigration* produced a more positive image. In 1850, American legislators enacted the Fugitive Slave Act, permitting slaveowners to pursue runaway slaves into the northern states and effectively rendering slaves and free blacks alike subject to arrest and recapture. As Richard Almonte adroitly explains in the introduction to the text, Shadd evaded this increasingly precarious situation by emigrating to Canada West, or modern-day Ontario. An educated and politically active member of the community, she found her destination to be a commendable refuge for blacks who were fleeing the oppressive conditions of America, and thus she wrote the book in order to encourage others to come to Canada West. In addition to providing an excellent biographical sketch of Shadd and outlining the book's historical context, Almonte situates it within a literary tradition, namely the settlement journal." While women such as Susanna Moodie and her sister Catharine Parr Traill produced journals in which they simply endured life in the backwoods of Canada, Almonte points out that Shadd's "book is written with a strict urgency; [b]lack Americans should, indeed must, move to Canada West." With this first edition of this book since its original publication in 1852, Almonte has made a significant contribution to the recovery of early black writing in Canada.

Shadd presents a utopic view of Canada West as a place where blacks can escape the American tyranny and become British subjects who might enjoy the advantages afforded by the British Empire. Although Almonte observes that Shadd's favourable representation of Canada West is the exception rather than the rule in emigrant guides, he does not comment upon the fact that Shadd transforms Canada West into a mythical site designed to compel blacks to leave behind servitude for freedom and independence. Shadd creates an idyllic landscape: "the soil [in Canada West] is unsurpassed . . . and naturally superior to the adjoining Northern States . . . [as is] the unequaled growth and size of timber on uncleared lands" and "the extent to which fruit is cultivated, and the yield, are incredible."

Shadd assures blacks that they will be supported rather than hindered by the whites: "coloured men prosecute all the different trades . . . and are not only unmolested, but sustained and encouraged in any business for which their qualifications and means fit them." She represents whites as paternal guardians who shield and promote black enterprises. The revelation that prejudice does exist would of course be counterproductive to her objective and dissuade blacks from emigration. As a result, whites are depicted as open-minded and benevolent figures while black emigrants are catechized for harbouring resentments that recall their past enslavement. An affirmed anti-segregationist, Shadd vehemently opposes the adoption of separate black institutions by those who "pertinaciously refus[e] overtures of . . . fellowship from the whites." The onus is on blacks to discard their prejudices in the interests of integration, and to become industrious members of society whose contributions will invalidate any racial intolerance that whites might exhibit.

I am fascinated by the incongruity between Shadd's efforts on behalf of the black community on the one hand and her active participation in a colonial discourse on the other. For example, in opposing the

idea of transporting free blacks to Africa, she uses tropes widely applied by European colonists: "Tropical Africa . . . teeming as she is with the breath of pestilence, a burning sun and fearful maladies, bids them welcome; she feelingly invites to moral and physical death." In the tradition of English travel narratives, Shadd represents Africa as a feminized and pathological space where extreme heat assists in the spread of disease and death. Alternatively, Canada West has a climate which is "healthy and temperate: epidemics are not of such frequency as in the United States [and Africa], owing to a more equable temperature, and local diseases are unknown." She does not question the language used by whites to oppress other ethnic communities, and, instead, she perpetuates these racist representations in her own writing.

Perpetual Beginnings

Gay Walley
Strings Attached. UP of Mississippi $20.00

Barbara Lambert
The Allegra Series. Porcépic Books $16.95

Frances Itani
Leaning, Leaning Over Water: A Novel in Ten Stories. Harper Perennial Canada $17.95

Susan Juby
Alice, I Think. Thistledown $15.95

Reviewed by Sarah Boak

In order to form a coherent comparative reading of these debut novels it is important to note that each writer begins from a different point in her career. Frances Itani and Barbara Lambert are literary veterans in comparison to Gay Walley and Susan Juby, having published prolifically in other genres, specifically poetry and short stories. They have both won awards. By contrast, Susan Juby, Managing Editor of Vancouver's Hartley & Marks Publishers, has no published works prior to *Alice, I Think*; and Gay Walley, a freelance writer, has not published any collections of her work. This is not to suggest that talented writers always get published or that being prolific is a measure of talent. However, there is a sense of self-assurance and confidence in the works of established writers.

Strings Attached tells the story of a woman whose childhood was spent with her alcoholic father, moving from bar to bar, from place to place; a vagabond way of life that fostered her independence and her need to be self-reliant. In adulthood, Charlee is trying to make her relationships work, but her ferocious autonomy makes this difficult.

This is a novel built on clichés. A young child who grows up in an unstable family later duplicates these conditions in her own attempts at founding a family. If Walley were a seasoned writer, she might be able to side-step cliché, but she doesn't manage this at all. The reader is subjected to Charlee's rambling and turgid inner monologues about the state of her relationships, with both her ageing father and her so-called partner, Peter.

As a debut novel *Strings Attached* could have been much worse. In technical terms, Walley is certainly more than proficient, with a fairly strong descriptive style and a keen eye for observation, but she doesn't really contextualise the characters. There is no clear sense of plot direction and no real insight into the main characters.

The Allegra Series also deals with the miscommunication in relationships. However, the novel vividly situates the characters in two kinds of contexts; a plot-related, fictional situation and a wider mythical and literary context. These contexts link the reader, the text and the characters, and a nexus further strengthened by the central metaphors of *The Allegra Series*—tapestry and weaving.

This is a complex story in which Allegra, the central character, is juggling a relation-

ship with Brad Lindhall, a married man, a new venture into the crafts business, and a debilitating disease that encroaches on her freedom. A narrative strand presented from the perspective of Brad's estranged wife Mona interestingly doesn't, for the most part, comment on the events between her, Brad, and Allegra. Instead the plot follows Mona's research for an installation piece, as she reads from a text *A Brief History of Cloth and Clay*, which discusses myths and legends connected to weaving. Lambert skilfully uses this text within a text, as a tool to frame the story within a mythological narrative. The characters thus seem situated, grounded but also fallible. Lambert, who writes with consummate ease, has created a wonderfully rich and luscious novel.

Leaning, Leaning Over Water also draws on a strong central image. In the 1950s three children grow up in a house on the banks of the Ottawa River. This river divides not only the spatial and physical geography of their world, but also the emotional lives of their family. Itani describes the childhoods of Eddie, Lyd, and Trude in exquisite language, every detail rendered with acute precision. As the river entices the family and draws them nearer, so this novel pulls the reader like a strong current. Itani's strength lies in her powerful depiction of a child's view of life. Like Lambert, her poetic skills are clearly visible, as a simple plot resonates with life, powered by her linguistic skills. This moving and tragic novel settles under the skin of the reader, as vivid and haunting as their own darkest memories.

Alice, I Think is a novel that is bursting with potential. Although this is no high literary feast, it is a great, funny romp of a book, dealing with the tricky subject of being a teenager. Set in diary form, the irrepressibly ironic Alice shares with us her feelings on life, her therapy sessions, and her dysfunctional family life. She is such a strongly portrayed character that every reader is bound to recognise one of her own pubescent horrors in her many descriptions. *Alice, I Think* makes you laugh out loud, but the humour is skilfully coupled with a sense of sadness for Alice and the mixed-up way in which she tries to approach her problems.

White's Mythology

Hayden White
Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect.
John Hopkins UP $15.95

Reviewed by Charles Barbour

Perhaps it is possible to locate the rise and fall of New Historicism in the pages of the influential British journal *Past and Present.* It arrived there in 1979, with the publication of Lawrence Stone's essay "The Revival of Narrative," and withdrew in 1991, with the publication of Stone's "History and Post-Modernism." The former denounced monolithic theories of historical change, and focused an entire generation of historians on the specific, the situated, and the everyday. The latter decried exclusively textual approaches to history, and insisted on the primacy of facts over interpretations. But long before historians ushered in and expunged New Historicism, Hayden White argued that historical research is never objective, that we necessarily reconstruct history as narrative, and that the relationship between an historical event and its context is not logical, but tropological. And while the New Historical caesura has probably been closed, White's mythology continues to haunt historiography.

In retrospect, New Historicism had a relatively short history. It spent a decade passing quickly though postmodern, cultural studies and postcolonial phases, each resulting, as no one needs reminding, in grave consternation among the antiquarians who feared the destruction of both

History and Truth. Today, everything that once seemed radical about New Historicism has been assimilated. Now no one feigns to write purely objective history. Every history pays some attention to reified categories such as difference or the other. And the *newest* historians—the biographers—write revisionist reconstructions of their predecessors in an attempt to prove that no important historian ever seriously believed in things like objectivity, science or progress in the first place. Hayden White, meanwhile, tirelessly plugs away at the same themes that have consumed him for three decades.

In White's latest book, *Figural Realism*, we learn, once again, that history is unavoidably discursive and textual, that rigid distinctions between historical fact and literary fiction must be collapsed, and that history is always retroactively "swerved" by tropes and "emplotted" as narrative. Unlike the New Historians who distance themselves from the unpredictable consequences of previous commitments, White vehemently defends his earlier work in all its implications. History is composed of language, White reiterates; it remains impossible to separate history's empirical content from its literary form.

Suppose White is correct. Suppose history has no reference outside the discourses known to us as "history." If so, then the most interesting and challenging historical questions do not, as the New Historians thought, involve the minute social details of everyday life, but, as White suggests, the history of historicism itself. When did historiography become anything other than a subset of rhetoric? Who first confused historicism with positivism and empiricism? How have history and historicism conspired to ridicule our belief in truthful representations of the past? And, most importantly, how might a study of the history of literature help demystify, or, to use White's word, "defetishize" our habitual conflation of written history and empirical truth?

The central essay in *Figural Realism* is "Auerbach's Literary History: Figural Causation and Modernist Historicism." According to White's reading of Auerbach, "figural causation" is a distinctly modernist approach to literary history. Figural causation views historical events, not as logically sequenced, nor as teleologically directed, but as "tropes" that are "fulfilled" in their *interpretation*. A mimetic or realistic relationship between an historical event and its interpretation is, according to White, a tropological relationship. Realism and rhetoric are not opposites. In fact, for modernist historians such as Auerbach, they are indissociable—hence White's title, *Figural Realism*.

As White repeatedly stresses in *Figural Realism*, because literary modernism acknowledges the tropological relationship between history and its interpretation, it also offers the best strategies for interpreting the traumas that characterize twentieth-century history—traumas which, in the singularity of their brutality, defy realistic representation, and render unconscionable any suggestion that history is progressive or rational. By dismantling the notion of felicitous representations of historical truth and fragmenting the coherent narratives of traditional historians and storytellers, White argues,

> [m]odernist techniques of representation provide the possibility of defetishizing both events and the fantasy accounts of them which deny the threat they pose in the very process of pretending to represent them realistically and clear the way for the process of mourning which alone can relieve the burden of history and make a more if not totally realistic perception of current problems possible.

For White's modernist historian, then, history is a *burden*. Unlike the nineteenth-century historian, the modernist knows

that history is not the progressive and rational actualization of the truth. And unlike the New Historian, the modernist does not believe that history conceals avatars of joyously transgressive resistance. History, the modernist suspects, is a nightmare from which we cannot awake. It is an incalculable trauma, a deprivation we must not fetishize, a loss we must forever mourn, a haunting we cannot exorcise.

On the other hand, for White's modernist, precisely to the extent that history is textual and discursive, spectral and insubstantial, it continues to have specific, if unpredictable, effects. History cannot end, the modernist knows, any more than it can be made anew. But it can be swerved differently, emplotted otherwise, used, as in Nietzsche's or Foucault's genealogies, to mock those who would seek to conserve history's "truth" at the expense of life.

Who's for Dinner?

Jacqueline B. Williams
The Way We Ate: Pacific Northwest Cooking, 1843-1900. Washington State UP n.p.

Donna R. Gabaccia
We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans. Harvard UP $24.95

Ruth L. Ozeki
My Year of Meats. Viking $33.95

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

Here is another collection from the recent avalanche of "food books" by writers across disciplines and genres. These volumes connect by sharing the theoretical starting point implicit in Gabaccia's title: show me your pantry, and I will tell you what you are.

For Jacqueline Williams, the question of how pioneers put food on the table resulted in the extensive survey of homesteading fare she presents in *The Way We Ate: Pacific Northwest Cooking, 1843-1900. The Way We Ate* also demonstrates the way that social forces compel nations to tell the stories that become their history. For a generation whose parents may have been too preoccupied with the Great Depression, war, and its consequent postwar plenty to value dwelling on past hardship, this descriptive compensatory history passes on lessons about food practices that would once have been taught in kitchens and pantries, dairy barns and chicken yards.

The details in *The Way We Ate* are its strongest and weakest points. Spicing the text are such lessons as an ingenious way to keep eggs for a year, how much beaver tail tastes like halibut, and a recipe for pork cake that, with its three cups of sugar, would deceive the most scrupulous of vegetarians. Yet, however entertaining these examples may be, a history of food demands more attention to socio-historical context and interpretation than Williams is prepared to give.

Region, class, gender, ethnicity, necessity and preferences all exert significant influence on the foodways of a nation. The half-century in question, "from the time the first large group of wagons rolled into Oregon country" to the completion of the Northern Pacific and Great Northern Railroads, was a period of first encounters, between strangers and with a strange land. Not surprisingly, Williams describes a pioneer breakfast that features "Indian pan cakes." However, because she has "eliminated the native diet . . . and the special foods of ethnic Americans" from her survey, such eating is rendered idiosyncratic and unexamined. Yet who, in these aboriginal territories, was more "ethnic" than the European settler cooking up Indian bread? Williams also introduces the important thesis that environmental exhaustion in the U.S. began in the early days of plenty, but resists developing her argument.

In avoiding such questions and remaining on the verge of analysis, Williams has little

choice but to draw her very readable narrative to a weak conclusion. Had Williams taken more than "a peek" at the way American settlers ate in this challenging era of their culinary history, readers might gain more understanding of how the hardships and joys of settlement in the late nineteenth century shaped the identities of American eaters.

Donna Gabaccia seizes this challenge in *We Are What We Eat.* Gabaccia characterizes her book as a "culturally sensitive, yet materialist and economic" analysis of the relationship between "ethnic" food and the making of Americans. In it she argues that the transformation of American eating habits is a pre- and postmodern process that has shaped "not a multi-ethnic nation, but a nation of multi-ethnics." With evidence of culinary blending from the time of Columbus, Gabaccia identifies two dominant influences in the shaping of this distinction: first, strong links among food, identity, and community and, second, the motivating conviction that ethnicity sells.

Gabaccia argues many points well in this recurring theme of multi-ethnic eating. Dietary nationalism emerged as a conservative, post-colonial event that is materially linked with the development of national transportation systems. "Cross-over" eating is less a matter of choice than a result of economic necessity, serendipity and racial exclusion. The multi-ethnic eating that emerged during the 1970s is another exchange in the economically viable, anti-corporate expression of "new ethnicity."

However, in her effort to show that eating habits, not citizenship, mark ethnicity, Gabaccia gives short shrift to some of the same influences that Williams minimizes. Gender and class enter only obliquely and occasionally. Gabaccia acknowledges the social and ideological connection of women, food and the transmission of culture, and cites the significance of intermarriage in this realm, but treats the topic thinly. She also compromises her thesis by identifying the ethnicity of a family or business according to sources such as business directories that employ a patriarchal system of naming.

There are other broad strokes in Gabaccia's argument. Her description of the degree to which slaves subverted the colonial food order is unrealistic. Given the force of exclusion in the shaping of "ethnic" identity, her claim that ethnic bonding accounts for the vigor of ethnic food is optimistic. Gabaccia's self-fulfilling focus on food as a "safe" method of cross-cultural exchange and her focus on the U.S. further undermine her attempts to link food with identity. At many historical moments around the world, autocratic enforcement of cross-eating has resulted in violence. Her position would be more defensible if Gabaccia explained why the U.S. is a benign exception.

An equally puzzling strategy (although this minor discussion comes late in her argument) is Gabaccia's introduction of music as another example of a cultural realm where sharing and borrowing have been "as common—and as peaceful—"as in the culinary realm. A strange example she chooses is Vanilla Ice, the singer whose "borrowing" actually initiated both law suits over copyright and sharp criticism in terms of cultural appropriation.

Cultural borrowing is also a central theme in the final offering in this collection. Ruth Ozeki bases her fiction, *My Year of Meats* on an autobiographical premise: like Ozeki, the protagonist, Jane Takagi-Little, is a Eurasian documentary filmmaker who has traveled throughout the U.S. filming with a Japanese crew. Jane receives her assignment from her boss, Joichi (John) Ueno, who swaggers about, he hopes, like his idol, John "Wayno." Jane must scout out "typical" American women to be featured in a series of television shows sponsored by the lobby group "Beef-Ex."

Beef-Ex aims to present American beef and women as wholesome alternatives to the Japanese diet and housewife.

Throughout the year of filming, Jane criticizes the Japanese for engaging with Beef-Ex in the same way they pursue other forms of internationalization, as a domestic strategy to explain and defend Japanese uniqueness. Authenticity is, then, one of the book's major preoccupations. Akiko, wife of the abusive Ueno, is Ozeki's metaphor for authentication. Akiko ponders the meaning of authenticity as she dutifully watches "My American Wife," replicates the recipes, and completes audience questionnaires for her husband. Through self-reflection and a genuine encounter with "American" ambiguity, Akiko finally abandons her initial mimicry of the authentic self for a daring flight to freedom and one of Jane's atypical, but authentic, American families.

Eurasian Jane completes this composite figure of true authenticity. In the meta-role of cultural go-between, evoking the respected *nakodo* or marital go-between, Jane critiques both sides of the authenticity debate: the philosophies of Japan's impenetrable uniqueness and the exuberant freedoms of the American melting pot. Ultimately, Ozeki's bipolar attack on these fictions of authenticity provides the framework for her vision of ethnic métissage as the inevitable and preferred global condition.

Stylistic similarities between *Makura no Soshi (The Pillowbook)* by Sei Shonagon and *My Year of Meats* are many, but it is the subversive *métissage* that connects the two writers. Jane's subversion, like Sh-nagon's in the imperial court, is that of "the thief in the house." Both are marginal, "perverse" characters whose writings challenge their worlds. Although utopic and dismissive of indigenous struggles, Jane's vision of a raceless future is a critique of any philosophy grounded in exclusivity.

In a final fusion with Shonagon, one last "Squalid Thing" slips through the cracks of this fiction. Jane dares to air episodes of "My American Wife" that feature a vegetarian lesbian couple and a grim slaughterhouse climax. Ozeki follows this section with a sustained argument about the intergenerational effects of Diethylstilbestrol, or DES, the synthetic estrogen that in the 1950s and 60s was routinely fed to livestock in order to bring them to market sooner, and to millions of pregnant women as a "vitamin." However, the bluntness of this concluding warning overwhelms an engaging tale. Had Ozeki maintained the subtler, ironic tone that she develops elsewhere, for instance in her characterizations of moral ambiguity and humble wisdom, *My Year of Meats* may have been a book that captivates as much as it educates.

Times Past Chinese Style

Frances Wood
No Dogs and Not Many Chinese. John Murray $24.95

Leo Ou-fan Lee
Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China 1930-1945. Harvard UP $38.95

Gu Xiong
The Yellow Pear. Arsenal Pulp $12.95

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

The title of Frances Wood's *No Dogs and Not Many Chinese* is an attempt at a playful deconstruction of the "stock phrase denoting the insulting existence of municipals parks" laid out for the enjoyment of westerners. Wood rightly corrects the belief that the latter were so crude as to equate the Chinese with dogs. However, the fact remains that Chinese were not allowed in these parks. The introduction sets the tone for the rest of this weighty book. The historical context of the treaty ports, that is, the imperialistic success of the western

nations over weak dynastic China and, later, an equally weak Republic is muted in favour of the difficult lives the foreign representatives had to endure while living in China from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. As Wood claims, "[I]n many of the treaty ports and foreign settlements life was difficult. . . . The only Chinese that many foreigners came into contact with were their servants. They may have been affordable . . . but they were difficult to understand and to train in Western ways." There is no acknowledgement here that, outside the walls of the foreign settlements, the Chinese were leading lives that were even worse, and that reforms were often obstructed by western interests.

Although Wood does not write the Chinese completely out of her study, their presence in her book is a subservient one. She cites "bad jokes" about Chinese servants including an account of a Chinese cook who uses an old toothbrush to ice a cake, and she recounts the many tricks Chinese servants used to cheat their employers. By contrast, westerners, especially the British, maintained their standards and some even learned to admire Chinese culture. One of the sinophiles was Harold Acton, who "went to China in search of love or uncomplicated masculine relationships," another Sir Edmund Trelawney Backhouse, who fled England after "running debts amounting to £23,000 during his three years at the University of Oxford."

In the last chapter, "The Legacy of the Treaty Ports," Wood links the westernization of Chinese youths today—"the young wear Western clothes, listen to Western pop music and curl their hair"—to the establishment of treaty ports: "Despite official condemnation of treaty port influence and of their very existence, the Western style of life that they introduced is immovably established." This is a bold statement, but not really one substantiated by reality, or even by Wood's book. The treaty-port life is gone and Chinese youths today are enamoured with western customs because popular culture is spread through the Internet. Although an engaging account of a past era, *No Dogs and Not Many Chinese* is fatally nostalgic.

In the tantalizingly brief "Epilogue" to his book, where he discusses recent cinematic recreations of the old Shanghai, Leo Ou-fan Lee also describes the treaty port as a nostalgic entity. But Lee's perspective is sinocentric rather than eurocentric. The reader is offered a description of urban Shanghai and its entertainments (a well trodden critical terrain), but Lee's book also places its analysis within the context of developments in Chinese literature.

Shanghai Modern is divided into three parts: "The Background of Urban Culture," "The Modern Literary Imagination," and "Reflection." The first part is perhaps most interesting to the general reader. Lee tells us that "the English word 'modern' (along with the French *moderne*) received its first Chinese transliteration in Shanghai itself," thus making Shanghai and the word "modern" "natural equivalents" in the Chinese popular imagination. Lee includes a chapter on the vibrant film industry in Shanghai in the 1930s. In the chapter "The Urban Milieu of Shanghai Cinema," Lee not only examines this legendary golden age of Chinese cinema—legendary because very few of the films are actually available for general viewing—but cogently compares the plot-driven melodramas with Hollywood productions in those years.

In part two, Lee addresses conjunctions between the erotic, the body and the city, the decadent and the dandy, using for his examples lesser known Chinese writers of the period. Instead of presenting chapters on Yu Dafu or Ding Ling, Lee chooses to analyse Shi Zhecun, Liu Na'ou, and Mu Shiying. The most internationally recognized name is Eileen Chang, sometimes

known as Zhang Ailing. This is exciting reading for someone studying modern Chinese literature and culture, but perhaps less so for readers not familiar with these subjects, especially since few of the writers discussed are available in translation.

A more obvious attempt at balancing two cultural viewpoints is Gu Xiong's *The Yellow Pear*, a book of short bilingual segments accompanied by illustrations. Gu Xiong, a multi-media artist, came to Canada in 1989 and was later joined by his wife and daughter. His works have been "collected by the National Gallery of Canada, the National Gallery of China, and other museums around the world." This is good news, since the reader cannot but feel sympathetic towards the changed circumstances that Gu has had to experience in order to live in Canada.

In "Garbage Bag," Gu recounts his experience as a busboy. Gu, who formerly taught at a university in China, tells the reader with all sincerity that "I picked up garbage every day, and I learned to accept myself in a different way. I slowly became closer to my inner self by working at this modest job." It would be hard for a Canadian university professor to accept this kind of reversal of fortune with such philosophical calmness. This segment also highlights the overall style of Gu's writing and illustrations. A garbage bag is represented mimetically in the illustration that accompanies the English and Chinese texts. No abstract art, no ironic reference.

There are two leitmotifs in *The Yellow Pear*: the material culture of Canadian middle-class life, and the difficulties that someone who comes from a materially less endowed culture will encounter when he tries to fit in. So, Gu writes about milk, a water fountain, the cleanliness of Canadian water, a telephone. He also writes about how his visiting parents did not eat the fruit that Gu bought for them. His parents "said that we were working every day, so we need the fruit more than they did," although they were told that fruit was cheap in Canada and there was no need for rationing.

Gu hardly mentions the kind of alienation and loneliness he must have endured, both as a newcomer to Canada and as an artist from another culture, but his wife does discuss her disappointment in Canada. At first, living in a basement and working long hours, she wanted to go back to China because "the beautiful landscapes around me were out of my reach." But now that she has begun to "learn English and other skills, and gather experiences from [her] job and [her] co-workers," she can "build up [her] life until it is shining with hope." It is certainly a very positive attitude, but, perversely, her lament is a lot more interesting than the optimistic coda. Perhaps Gu and Ge Ni want to show their acceptance of Canadian culture in a truly gracious manner, but graciousness does not always translate into scintillating literature.

Walter Benjamin in Vancouver

Kevin McNeilly

1.

At a conference some time ago, I delivered a paper on Walter Benjamin. In the few minutes before my talk, as a meagre audience began to gather, I was chatting to dispel a slight case of nerves. One kind person assured me—with all the strident humility of a doctoral candidate—that it "seems like Walter Benjamin is everywhere these days." The remark, which I'm supposing was intended nicely, did little to boost any confidence in my own originality, but it was formidably perceptive and quietly accurate. Benjamin has for the last two decades, and especially in the last two or three years, become something of an academic industry in North America, as his theorizing, an unstable amalgam of Kantian, Marxist, Messianic and late Romantic elements, has become widely, if patchily, reiterated.

I want to look at two translations that appeared recently from Harvard, *The Arcades Project* (US$39.95) and *The Complete Correspondence* (US$39.95) between Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Both publications strive to sustain, and to capitalize on, the building trend in Benjamin. The scholarship and the translation in both of these texts are first rate, and both extensively contextualize with detailed apparatus the scope, direction and even the reception of Benjamin's work. But what troubles me about academic fashion emerges from this writing itself, as we work into it—or perhaps better, toward it.

Benjamin strives to be of his own moment; the vast fabric of quotations and broken aphorisms that constitute *The Arcades Project* also reconstitute not so much an objective past as a present sense of the past. Benjamin notes the "necessity of paying heed over many years to every casual citation, every fleeting mention of a book," and might at first seem to be a completist, attempting to recover the past exactly as it was through a kind of scientific positivism, an obsessively fine gathering of data. But, as he reminds us in the third of his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," a text that emerged from his long-standing scholarly labour on the Paris Arcades, such hopes are misdirected at best, and can only obtain in a fully redeemed—that is, conjectural and utopian—temporality. What Benjamin the historian can hope to recover is not the past itself, but the ways in which that past has been meaningfully deployed and reconstituted in his own present day. By uncovering what is missed or refused or challenged in cultural memory—a memory founded, as he repeatedly reminds his readers, on what he calls barbarity, the often violent suppression of unacknowledged contributions to culture by the "masses"—that present becomes a site not of wilful blindness but of critical reflex. But because of his insistence on the historical specificity both of historical objects and of the historians objectifying them, a critique Adorno

came to characterize as micrology, Benjamin must become deliberately obsolete, a studied anachronism. He cannot really be translated out of context, which means (if you think about it) that fashion, especially intellectual fashion, exactly constitutes his critical antagonist.

Fashion, read through Benjamin, is inevitably coupled to datedness, and to a specific periodicity, as he claims in Convolute B of *The Arcades Project*: "Fashions are a collective medicament for the ravages of oblivion. The more short-lived a period, the more susceptible it is to fashion." That the present is marked by an insistent historical compression is witnessed for Benjamin in the radical foreshortening of periodized knowledge, of the means by which we might come confidently to know ourselves as a distinct generation. The Paris Arcades inaugurate a European modernity that witnesses the collapse of historical succession into an omnipresent obsolescence: "Everything new [humanity] could hope for turns out to be a reality that has always been present; and this newness will be as little capable of furnishing it with a liberating solution as a new fashion is capable of rejuvenating society." The loose plurality of the Arcades, allegorized by Benjamin in the multiplying cross-references among 44 fragmentary gatherings (or *Konvoluts* as he called them), bears witness to the dissociative character of contemporary culture; Benjamin seeks critical liberation, but does so paradoxically by immersing himself in the fluid shallows of mass-market fashion, an immersion epitomized and even aestheticized in such nineteenth-century Europeans as Charles Baudelaire. With the creation of the Arcades, essentially the first shopping malls in the Western world, writers such as Baudelaire enact an intelligence acutely responsive to the intimacies between obsolescence and newness that inform the rise of commodification and industrial capitalism. Moreover, Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire—whose *Konvolut* forms what one editor calls a book unto itself—closely allegorizes his own intellectual efforts, as he strives to interrogate historical consciousness. Benjamin characterizes his critical work as that of a rag-picker, a favourite "type" among those that shape his study, but in so far as he has been shaped or commodified retrospectively by critical fashion, he is more closely akin to his own *flâneur*, the Baudelairean dandy: "As *flâneur*, the literary man ventures into the marketplace to sell himself." While this assertion is made among remarks on journalism, and while Benjamin—a reader of newspapers but hardly a journalist—certainly did little to sell himself, he has, nonetheless, been sold. And so, we need to ask what his price was. At what cost does Benjamin enter the intellectual market?

In a letter to Adorno dated 23 February 1939, Benjamin recasts material on the *flâneur*:

> The price makes the commodity equal and identical to all those other commodities which could be purchased for the same price. The commodity . . . insinuates itself, not only and not merely with the buyer, but above all with its own price. And it is precisely in this respect that the *flâneur* accommodates himself to the commodity; he imitates it utterly; and since there is no economic demand, and therefore no market price, for him, he makes himself thoroughly at home in the world of saleable objects.

This passage amplifies slightly a draft in Convolute M, where, instead of imitation, we have "empathy," a term that gains increasing resonance each time we delve into Benjamin's notes. To empathize, for Benjamin, is to indulge in a conceptual leveling that he calls, in the passage above, "equality." In the commodity, a certain form of dehistoricizing takes place, such that the particularity of human relations is

leveled or dissipated in exchange—a principle Marx referred to as alienation. Benjamin called this equalization *das Immergleiche*, the ever-same: "The commodity economy arms that phantasmagoria of sameness which simultaneously reveals itself, as an attribute of intoxication, to be the central image of illusion." Sameness, in the ubiquity of exchange, is the seductive (Benjamin says "intoxicating," referring to Baudelaire's descriptions of hashish use in *Les paradis artificiels*) illusion of holism that commodity forms propagate, an illusion that covers over the "barbaric" injustices on which cultural "treasures" depend. Critique, to be truly viable, to be open-eyed and liberating, needs to refuse to empathize. "Forming the basis of the confrontations with conventional historicism and 'enshrinement,'" the unconsidered worship of those cultural phantasmagoria, "is the polemic against empathy." Criticism takes its stand in an ironic relation to the *flâneur*, refusing his utter accommodation with polemical steadfastness.

Still, it remains impossible not to accommodate, to empathize, in some degree; one is, after all, inevitably submerged in late capitalism, and needs to find a means of working from within. In a letter to Benjamin of 1 February 1939, Adorno cautions his friend to be wary of the naive religiosity in his tendency to "Jeremiads and polemics." What criticism can do, in Benjamin's terms, is map out "the acceptable limit of empathy." And what determines those limits, what circumscribes acceptability, he asserts, is fashion.

If price emerges as "the historical hallucination of equality," then the critic's task—whether objectified in *flâneur* or ragpicker, whore or gambler—becomes a form of "dialectical experience to dissipate the semblance of eternal sameness, and even of repetition, in history. Authentic political experience is absolutely free of this semblance." Critical theory, in so far as it travels (as Edward Said has put it), inevitably betrays the local and the situated, unknitting its own micrology. Its "authenticity," which is experimental and political, mutates into ontological delusion as it transposes itself. Martin Heidegger, Benjamin asserts, "seeks in vain to rescue history for phenomenology abstractly through 'historicity'." "To write history," he insists, "means giving dates their physiognomy." And yet there must be theoretical work, an incursion into the "identical" aspects of conceptual exchange, for that work ever to be meaningful. It must be possible to reiterate, to quote; Benjamin's whole oeuvre is, after all, an intricate montage of citations, transpositions, liftings. It is insufficient, Adorno points out in a series of notes to Benjamin on *The Arcades Project*, to rely either on the "spell" of a naive philological historicism that claims to know the past with scientific rigour or on the "wide-eyed presentation of mere facts," a naively positivist materiality. He gently rebukes Benjamin (in a letter of 10 November 1938) for trying too hard to force-fit his Arcades work to what he takes for an orthodox Marxism, "because of a superstitious tendency to attribute to mere material enumeration a power of illumination which really belongs to theoretical construction alone rather than to purely pragmatic allusions." The constellation of fragments is not simply a gathering of quotations, a philological database, but a theoretical manoeuvre, precisely because it seeks out "mediation" in what Adorno calls "the entire social process": the viability of its Marxism lies not in a simplistic materialist insistence on facticity, but in the critical recognition of historical presence, of the writer in the text.

2.

What, you might be wondering, is this discussion of Benjamin doing in *Canadian Literature?* How can Benjamin—whose

work never crossed the Atlantic, and never quite extricated itself from the modern afterlife of the nineteenth century—be transposed? How can I cite his thinking here in Vancouver without becoming a fashion victim?

Benjamin's critical manoeuvring, his politics, are at their core a poetic form, a kind of writing. And what this means, for Canadian readers, is that the transposition to our own context of his highly situated and enmeshed readings of the Paris Arcades can take place not so much at the fraught level of theorizing but in the linguistically and culturally situated language of poetry itself. For, as he points out in the introduction to his Baudelaire, "The Task of the Translator," the critical commonplace that poetry inherently resists translation, because it is directed at what is "specific, linguistic, contextual," is not an excuse for poor fidelity to an original, but instead an occasion to encounter the essential irresolution of language as such, a practice that Benjamin called "literalness" (*Wörtlichkeit*, literally "wordliness"), and for which his trope, strangely and presciently enough, is the Arcade. Poetry translates its own untranslatability, in other words. It goes where theory cannot.

In my own context, Vancouver, this critical-poetic mode emerging from *The Arcades Project* and from Benjamin's own practice enables a reading of poets whose work engages with and challenges the cultural, geographical and even conceptual situatedness of poetry. George Bowering's *Kerrisdale Elegies*, for example, seem to me an obvious example of a translation that localizes itself to the point of nearly losing translation to creative license, more of an improvisation on Rilke than a rendering of the *Duino Elegies*. But it never loses touch with what it imports, just as it never gives up on the immediateness of writing, its temporally and historically bound character: Bowering's poem inhabits precisely the dialectic that Benjamin deploys to approach exchange. Shifting between North American commercial pop culture and a highblown European aesthetic reflex, *Kerrisdale Elegies* throws formally into question, as Bowering strolls through an upscale Vancouver neighbourhood, his own historical moment. Robert Bringhurst's *Lyell Island Variations*, republished in *The Calling*, trace a trajectory I think opposed to Bowering's, as lyric documents of European (and Chilean) high modernism are recast, or "washed up" as the poet once put it, to a specifically ecological and political end: a protest against clearcutting on Lyell Island, one of the Haida Gwaii. But with one brief exception in the seven-poem sequence, there is no direct reference either to the geography or to the indigenous cultures of the West Coast, which might appear on the face of it a puzzling strategy for political engagement. But, read in a manner mindful of Benjamin's thinking, these texts use creative mistranslation as a means of resisting, directly, the commodity fetishism that has over two centuries been built into English, the lingua franca of global capitalism. Bringhurst's translations, closely attended, quietly but forcefully un-English themselves, refusing to acquiesce to the leveling push of cultural or even conceptual exchange. Lisa Robertson's *XEclogue*, republished in 1999, also bends, reappropriates, revises and undoes a set of classical (and other) sources, encountering what the poems refer to as "the interminable journal of culture" in order to produce a "tactical intervention in the official genres"; her work focuses in particular on the politics of gender, and appears to link directly Benjamin's writing on fashion, which in *The Arcades Project* deals extensively with women and ideology. (See Convolute B.) But more than thematizing Benjamin (to whom she does not explicitly refer—while Bringhurst actually does), Robertson

attempts to produce a destabilized language, an articulation embodying interstitials and in-betweens in its verbal texture and deregulated syntax. Her style, to adapt Benjamin's German, is insistently *wordly*, a weave without quotation marks.

War of Words

Susan Fisher

In the three weeks after September 11, 2001, the *Sacramento Bee* received thousands of unsolicited poems about the terrorist attacks; they came in at the rate of two dozen per hour. Nearly 12,000 poems were posted on the *Bee* website—elegies, eulogies, laments. A group of American Marines on their way to the Arabian Sea were studying poetry of the Great War; "Dulce et Decorum Est" was reportedly a favourite. Edmonton poet and songwriter Mark Kozub (*nom de plume* The Alberta Beatnik) created a series of weekly "Peace Talks" as a forum for post-September 11 poetry. And while many commentators recalled Theodor Adorno's famous pronouncement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," there were others who saw poetry as the only possible response to barbarism. W.H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" staged an astonishing comeback: Adam Gopnik quoted it in a *New Yorker* article; Rosemary Sullivan remembered its opening lines on the CBC; it appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The unobserved Icarus falling from the skies was not an exact analogy to the bodies falling from the towers, their descent played over and over on CNN, but something in the implacable tone of the Auden poem, the way it reminds those who are safe that others suffer, seemed right for the occasion. His "September 1, 1939" was even more popular, quoted and cited in periodicals and on Internet sites around the world, and its sudden ubiquity prompted critical discussion. Is it "a meretricious piece of work" full of "sentiments which are for the most part repellent," as one correspondent to the *Times Literary Supplement* declared? Auden himself was ashamed of the poem and never wanted it reprinted. Daniel Swift, writing in the *TLS*, attributed the poem's popularity to its Manhattan setting, its circular view of history, and its atmosphere of foreboding.

Even if the attacks of September 11 had never happened, there would be plenty of recent evidence that war, which is destructive of so much else, is strangely fertile for literature. Two of the twelve contributors to *Story of a Nation: Defining Moments in Our History* (Doubleday 2001) have written about World War I. Timothy Findley describes the end of the war and its terrible sequel, the influenza pandemic. David Macfarlane writes about July 1, 1916, when the Newfoundland regiment was virtually wiped out at Beaumont-Hamel. Macfarlane's interest in the Great War and its impact on Newfoundland permeates his family memoir *The Danger Tree: Memory, War, and the Search for a Family's Past* (Vintage $18.95). What begins as the history of his mother's Newfoundland clan turns into a war story, for the Great War claimed three of his mother's uncles and indelibly marked the lives of the survivors. With its strangely meandering narrative (in deliberate imitation of Newfoundland garrulousness) Macfarlane's book seems at first maddeningly oblique. But the intelligence and eccentricity of his relations prove compelling, and his evocation of the slaughter of the Somme is unforgettable. So too is the story of his great-aunt's courage in defying hospital routines in order to care for a wounded soldier. Macfarlane's book, which was first published in 1996, appeared in paperback in the US in 2001, and was named one of the best non-fiction books of the year by *Atlantic*. (Interestingly, the

Atlantic list of eleven books included another work on World War I, *To Arms*, the first volume of Hew Strachan's three-volume history.)

Jonathan F. Vance's *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and The First World War* (UBC $39.95) is another distinguished Canadian work about war. Awarded the John Wesley Dafoe prize and the Canadian Historical Association's John A Macdonald prize, it was also shortlisted for the Gelber prize. But perhaps more significantly, *Death So Noble* has won in the category of bookstore sales. It is that rare thing, a "crossover" academic book with real appeal for general readers. While Vance makes intelligent use of recent scholarship on public memory, he never descends into opaque specialism. For me, the strongest evidence of its readability (apart from the pleasure I found in it) is the testimony of my first-year students, who reported that *Death So Noble* was accessible and even compelling; they read more of it than they had to. Vance's book is an account not of the war itself, but rather of how Canadians remembered it. He describes his book as a work "about memory . . . about constructing a mythic version of the events of 1914-18 from a complex mixture of fact, wishful thinking, half-truth, and outright invention, and expressing that version in novel and play, in bronze and stone, in reunion and commemoration, in song and advertisement." *Death So Noble* is consequently of great interest to teachers and students of Canadian literature. Vance begins with a discussion of Philip Child's *God's Sparrows*, and, in every subsequent chapter, uses literary texts as primary documents. An entire chapter is devoted to "In Flanders Fields," but Vance's sources go far beyond the obvious. He considers a wide range of rarely discussed texts, from Will Bird's memoir *And We Go On* to poems by anonymous versifiers in small-town newspapers. (The notes for this book are remarkable and attest to the energy and dedication with which Vance has investigated his subject.) His discussion of Charles Yale Harrison's 1930 novel, *Generals Die in Bed*, is particularly valuable. Nowadays, Harrison's book is regarded as hard-hitting and unsparingly truthful, but in 1930, readers thought otherwise. Veterans' groups wanted it banned. Arthur Currie dismissed it as "a mass of filth, lies"; he fumed that "a more scurrilous thing was never published" and declared that it "appeals to everything base, mean and nasty." Vance usefully contrasts *Generals Die in Bed* with Bird's *And We Go On*. Bird, like Harrison, depicted gruesome death and contempt for officers, but his soldiers remain "pure"; despite the degradation of trench warfare, they are decent, clean-minded and good-hearted. This was a picture of the Canadian lad that was acceptable to veterans and the bereaved, whereas Harrison's depiction of soldiers visiting brothels, turning on their comrades, shooting prisoners, and looting a French town was not.

Vance most persuasively shows how the central elements in Canada's myth of the Great War were developed and sustained not only in literature but in painting, sculpture, memorials, honour rolls, and school texts. The parallels between the fallen soldier and the crucified Christ, the image of the Canadian soldier as an innocent farmboy or backwoodsman, the trenches of Flanders as the crucible in which a new and unified Canada was born—these notions, Vance argues, were necessary to make the terrible losses of the war acceptable to soldiers and their families.

We Wasn't Pals: Canadian Poetry and Prose of the First World War (Exile $22.95) appears to be the ideal companion to *Death So Noble*. Some of the texts Vance discusses are here: for example, excerpts from *Generals Die in Bed*, Canon Frederick G. Scott's *The Great War as I Saw It*, and

Peregrine Acland's *All Else Is Folly.* But the principle of selection is unclear. To judge from Bruce Meyer's introduction, he and his co-editor Barry Callaghan operated on a sub-Fussell interpretation of the Great War as the cultural thunderbolt that ignited the modernist revolution (a view that Vance convincingly challenges). Consequently, their selection favours writers such as Frank Prewett (the subject of an earlier collection by the same editors), W.W. E. Ross, and (to me hitherto unknown) Henry Smalley Sarson. But if literary merit was the chief criterion, why include the various examples of anonymous doggerel and exclude, say, Theodore Goodridge Roberts's "The Fifes of Valcartier"? There is good material here—good either in the sense of literary merit or in the sense of primary evidence of that mythic war so well detailed by Vance. And the editors do succeed in rescuing these works from what Callaghan calls the "great gap of unknowing" into which they were consigned by critics such as E.K. Brown and Northrop Frye. But *We Wasn't Pals* could have been much more useful. For example, the editors might have included the "ten best Canadian poems of the war"; these poems, which are discussed by Vance in some detail, represent what Canadians of the time valued in war literature. (To be fair to Callaghan and Meyer, they could only have discovered this list by reading *Death So Noble*: Vance found it in an undated, anonymous newspaper clipping stuck in a scrapbook.) Meyer and Callaghan also could have drawn from John Garvin's 1918 *Canadian Poems of the Great War.* Selections in Garvin's anthology by writers such as Lucy Maud Montgomery and Duncan Campbell Scott may not be among the finest of Canadian poems, but they do demonstrate most powerfully the operation of such mythic images as the Christ-like soldier and the war as a moment of rebirth for Canada.

Callaghan's rambling, anecdotal preface, "Notes toward a Preface That Cannot Be Written" (presumably titled in homage to Margaret Atwood's "Notes toward a Poem That Cannot Be Written") does not add much to our understanding of the works and their social context (although it is interesting to learn about Callaghan's own brushes with Robert Graves and W.W.E. Ross). Margaret Atwood's prose poem "Poppies: Three Variations" (from *Good Bones*) forms the Afterword. It begins as a rather callous *jeu d'esprit* based on "In Flanders Fields," but works its way cunningly from joke to banality to the dreadful awareness that "below thought, below memory, below everything," the guns of that distant war can still be heard. I admire the Atwood piece, but it is jarring to encounter it here. Instead of a reader's response to the poetry of the war, which is what one might expect from an afterword, we get an ironic view of remembrance. If this anthology is intended to refute the conventional view that Canadian writers produced little of merit about the war, then it ought to allow the writing of that time to emerge from its ill-deserved obscurity, and not throw it into the shadows cast by Atwood's postmodern brilliance.

Linda Granfield's *Where Poppies Grow* (Stoddart $24.95) contains fascinating visual material, including postcards and family photos, cigarette cards and children's games. Simply written text tells the story of the Great War, from Valcartier and the Salisbury Plains, to the trenches, armistice and remembrance. While the focus is predominantly on Canadian soldiers, material is included from British and American sources as well. The picture researcher (perhaps the author herself from whose personal collection many of the images are taken) has done an impressive job of assembling materials that even the most history-allergic of young people will surely not resist. The book jacket lists

some of the topics covered: "Over the Top; Warfare on the Seas; Warfare in the Air; Propaganda and Patriotism; Keep the Homefires Burning; A Child's World; Spies and Traitors; Man's Best Friend; The Budding of Remembrance; and more!" That exclamation mark signals where this book goes wrong. Although it most usefully depicts the mentality of wartime in terms young readers can understand, it does so with a disquieting zest. Everything in *Where Poppies Grow* is just too pretty. The images are fascinating, but their hand-tinted charm demonstrates how even the most horrific situations can be softened by the glow of nostalgia. Perhaps a children's picture book of World War I is simply a bad idea.

It is frequently observed that World War I exhausted the possibilities of war literature, as if the works of Owen and Sassoon and Rosenberg had told the truth about war so powerfully there was nothing left to say. In the words of Keith Douglas, the Second War was just "the same old Hell." This at least is one of the explanations proffered for the comparative poverty of poetry about World War II. Jonathan Bolton's *Personal Landscapes: British Poets in Egypt during the Second World War* (St. Martin's $39.95) quotes Douglas's dismal conclusion that "the hardships, pain and boredom, the behavior of the living and the appearance of the dead, were so accurately described by the poets of the Great War that . . . almost all that a modern poet on active service is inspired to write would be tautological." But it was not only the towering achievements of the previous generation that made the poetry of World War II less imposing. It was a different kind of war, one less congenial to the creation of a distinct literature. The Second World War did not have a single, emblematic setting like the Western Front. In the air, on the streets of London, on the seas, in the Middle East, and in the Far East, the war was prosecuted in a thousand different ways, and so the literature that arose from it constitutes not a single recognizable type of poetry (like the trench poetry of the Great War) but rather a multitude of different types: poetry of exile, poetry against the war, poetry about the Holocaust, and so forth. Bolton's particular focus is the remarkable group of poets and writers who, through the accidents of exile and military service, happened to collect in Cairo during the war. Douglas, Lawrence Durrell, Olivia Manning, G.S. Fraser, Robert Liddell, Gwyn Williams, and the Greek poet George Seferis discovered each other in the expatriate community of Cairo, and, through the journal *Personal Landscapes*, created a centre of literary activity that Fraser thought "livelier" than London. Bolton makes a convincing case that any assessment of the literature of the Second World War has to include the work published in *Personal Landscapes* from 1941 to 1945.

Mark Rawlinson's *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford $101.50) covers some of the same territory: in his chapter on the war in Africa, for example, Rawlinson discusses Douglas's poetry in some detail. His main focus, however, is prose, and most particularly "writing that circulated widely in wartime culture." Despite its title, Rawlinson's book is not a literary history, but an examination of a few particular arenas of war: the air, as epitomized by the career of the fighter pilot and writer Richard Hillary; London during the Blitz; the desert of North Africa; the social landscape of Britain itself, as it was represented in statements about the aims of the war; and, finally, the prison camps of Europe. Rawlinson appears deeply committed to certain theoretical approaches, and the result is sentences like the following: "Social space is produced by dialectical interaction or spatial practice and is determined by hegemonic represen-

tations of space (scientific, urbanist, technocratic, and we might add strategic)... Textual spaces do not overthrow represented space, they are further hypostatizations, a denial of space." The only relief comes when Rawlinson quotes from his poets and novelists.

Nothing could be farther from this style than the "curious particulars" and sensory immediacy that Samuel Hynes praises in the war dispatches collected in *Reporting World War II: Amerian Journalism 1938-1946* (Library of America $18.95US). Here is Ernie Pyle in Tunisia, noticing the Arab children "driving their little sack-laden burros" as tanks and guns clank past them; he records men's conversations, the meals they ate, the state of their uniforms, their postures in sleep. A.J.Liebling, writing from Paris in the days before the fall of France, describes the orchestras in the sidewalk cafes and the curious "hot heavy pause" in the life of the city before the Germans arrived. We encounter Martha Gellhorn at the Battle of the Bulge, Janet Flanner in Cologne in March 1945, Edward R. Murrow at Buchenwald on 15 April 1945. (In his broadcast Murrow says that if he has offended his listeners "by this rather mild account . . . I'm not at all sorry.") James Agee writes about newsreels of Iwo Jima; Brendan Gill has a *New Yorker* profile of a young American bomber pilot; Tom Lea, a *Life* artist, describes the landing on Peleliu Island. This anthology also includes the entire text of John Hersey's *Hiroshima.* Some of the writing is obviously propagandistic; Murrow, for example, ends by noting that at Buchenwald, "many men in many tongues blessed the name of Roosevelt." This side of war writing, which seems so necessary at the time, becomes odious with the passage of years. Nonetheless, the pieces collected here provide a fascinating picture of how Americans learned about the war across the seas. They also show something of how the war affected life at home: there is an article about women in munitions factories, and another on how black Americans perceived the war; there are two pieces on life in the internment camps, including one from *Fortune* magazine with remarkable drawings by Miné Okubo. This collection is not merely war writing; it is a portrait of American life and attitudes during a crucial period of the last century.

Angus Calder describes his anthology *Wars* (Penguin $35) as a book "about killing and being killed." Its focus is the battlefields of Europe (with occasional excursions to the Near East and North Africa) in the first half of the twentieth century. He has not limited himself to works in English: there are translations from Yevtushenko, Heinrich Böll, Paul Celan, to name just a few. It is hard to understand the purpose for such an anthology. It is remarkably comprehensive, but because so many of the selections are only excerpts, *Wars* feels like a sampler for some more serious investigation of one of the many arenas, period, or attitudes it covers. Calder readily acknowledges that it has been designed for "pick'n'mix" reading (his phrase), though his ideal reader is one who would read "right through in sequence." One might want to use such an anthology in a course on writing about war, but its chronological and geographical ranges are so great that it would be hard to provide the necessary context for these widely disparate materials.

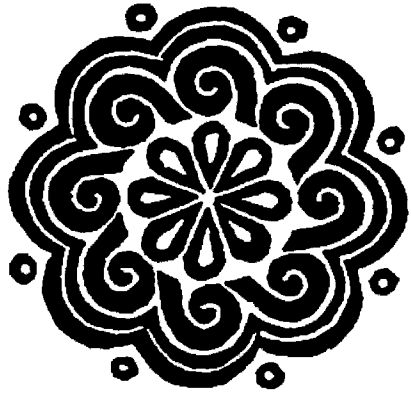
John Keegan, who is generally regarded as the foremost military historian of our day, has assembled *The Book of War: Twenty-Five Centuries of Great War Writing* (Viking $48.99). The title has an odious "greatest hits" ring to it, but Keegan's solemn, erudite introduction clarifies the purpose of this kind of anthology, in a way that Calder's introduction and his choices do not. Keegan's introduction provides a brief history of warfare, from the heroic

tradition of ancient Greece to the guerrilla wars of modern times. According to Keegan, warfare in Europe evolved within a certain code, one that focused on the battle of decision. Both sides "fought a 'clean' war, face to face, man to man, with rifle or sword on 'equal terms.'" The forms of military organization that accompanied this code, allied with the power of technology, ensured victory whenever European armies encountered non-Europeans on the battlefield. What the Europeans could not defeat, however, was the warrior spirit of tribal nations—a spirit that expressed itself in an "alternative form of warfare" that avoided face-to-face combat and fixed battles. Keegan's selection reflects this view of military history: that is, it focuses largely (though not exclusively) on European sources, and does not investigate other military traditions in much detail. For example, there is no selection from a Japanese, Chinese, or Moghul warrior. Presumably Keegan wished to focus predominantly on materials written in English; another reason for the lack of Asian selections may be that wars begun on European principles and prosecuted largely by European methods have been the most significant in recent centuries. Nonetheless, Keegan's selection strikes me as limited, particularly since the first of his three parts is intended to focus on wars between different cultures. It begins with Thucydides on the Peloponnesian War, and ranges over several centuries, from an Arabic account of attacking a Crusader fortress to Davy Crockett on stalking the Creek Indians. Keegan's objective here is to demonstrate that while "modern man sees war as a political or economic necessity," other cultures saw it as "a duty owed to the gods, or to the concept of tribal or personal honour." (One might question Keegan's implication that modern war is a matter of geopolitics and economics; religion and notions of tribal and personal honour still seem very powerful motives.) The second section "concerns the warfare of regular armies in the age of established European states." The early excerpts here deal with the Napoleonic wars, but this section also includes accounts of warfare on the edges of empire: the British against the Zulus at Isandhlwana in 1879, the relief of Lucknow, and General Custer against the Sioux. The third section contains excerpts on war in the twentieth century, a time in which warfare "has been dominated by the power of technology." Keegan's mastery of his sources is particularly evident here, for he has managed to find unfamiliar but striking accounts of well-known battles: for example, Compton Mackenzie at Gallipoli and Sidney Rogerson on the Somme.

The overwhelming impression one receives from Keegan's book is that humans are savage. His knowledgeable commentary about military codes and drill and strategy hardly alters the fact that what one is reading is tale after tale of bloodshed. Whether it is the English on the field at Agincourt or the Japanese in a prison camp, the human capacity for cruelty seems inexhaustible. War, one must conclude, is simply one of humankind's enduring pastimes. Whatever material or strategic imperatives might be invoked to justify it, there is no doubt that war satisfies some element of our nature, some unappeasable appetite for violence. (British historian Niall Ferguson has been widely criticized for suggesting in his 1998 *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* that soldiers simply "kept fighting because they wanted to.") The commonplace justification for war literature is that once we understand how horrible war is we will never want another one. But Keegan's anthology, with its entries dating back to 400 BCE, surely demonstrates the error of that view. Even if we take the modern example of World War I, the first war in which the majority of solders were literate, vast numbers of words did not ultimately

prevent the greater horrors of the second war. So why then should we read war literature? For me, the best answer appears in Pat Barker's *Another World* (1998), her fourth and presumably final novel about World War I: "you should go to the past, looking not for messages or warnings, but simply to be humbled by the weight of human experience that has preceded the brief flicker of your own few days . . . ." In these recent books on war, there is much to humble us.

Susan Fisher has joined Canadian Literature *as Associate Editor (General). Susan obtained her doctorate in Comparative Literature at the University of British Colombia, followed by a post-doctoral fellowship at UBC's Centre for Research in Women's Studies and Gender Relations. She now teaches at the University College of the Fraser Valley. Her research interests include contemporary British, Canadian and Japanese literature, animals in literature, and the literature of war, and she has edited* Nostalgic Journeys: Literary Pilgrimages between Japan and the West *(2001). Susan is currently preparing a special issue of* CL *on war in Canadian literature, and this review essay serves as an excellent introduction to the breadth of her reading and the finesse of her judgement.*



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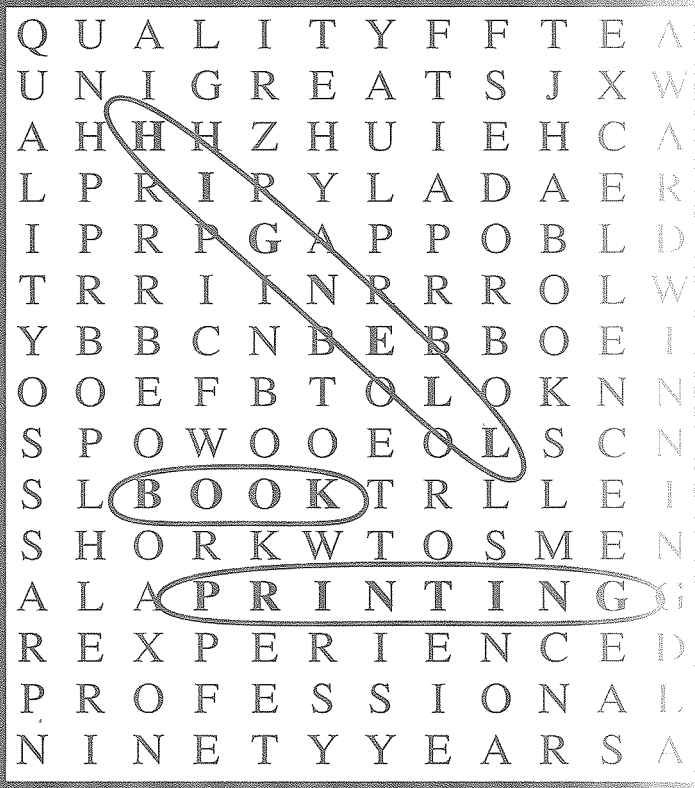

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