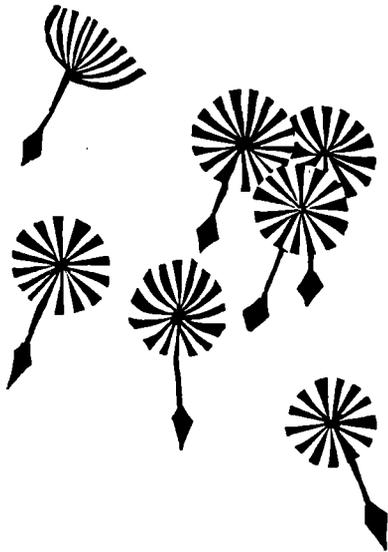


\$25.00 per copy

# CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 124 = 125

*Spring-Summer, 1990*



NATIVE WRITERS  
& CANADIAN  
LITERATURE

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1989

Several of the biographies of 1989 merit serious attention: Joan Givner's *Mazo de la Roche* (a cerebral look at the author's private sensibilities); Escott Reid's *Radical Mandarin* (a graceful memoir of diplomatic life during the governments of St. Laurent and Pearson); John English's *Shadow of Heaven: The Life of Lester Pearson*, Vol. I (a frank and engrossing study of the shaping of the young diplomat: his ambition, his delight in athletic and political games, and his relationship with Maryon); and Barbara Freeman's *Kit's Kingdom* (an instructive reminder of the work and life of the pioneering journalist, Kathleen Blake Coleman). All provided hours of reading pleasure.

The 1989 medal goes to Otto Friedrich, a senior writer for *Time*, for *Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations* (published by Lester and Orpen Dennys). A fascinating portrait of a brilliant and isolated man, this biography vividly depicts the whole person — not just the celebrated performer who excited audiences and music critics around the world or the quirky personality who delighted the press and the gossips of the gliteratti. Friedrich writes well; his account of the young prodigy is as absorbing as his discussion of the accomplished artist, composer, writer, lecturer, and documentary maker. He conveys the remarkable range of Gould's gifts beyond the concert hall, the eclecticism of his tastes, his extraordinary effect on those whose lives he touched, and the contrast between his capacity for artistic growth and change and his resistance to changes in his daily life. Friedrich reveals the private Gould — his isolation, his obsessive striving for perfection, and his uneasiness about his reputation. He does not create a national icon (though he shows how the Canadian press and the Toronto media in particular tried to do this), nor does he spare the neurotic, self-absorbed Gould who simply wore people out with his energies. What Friedrich does demonstrate is that the familiar "mad" Gould is ultimately less interesting than the private genius.

Friedrich has drawn upon extensive personal papers and letters in the National Library, printed materials, and copious interviews. While he writes that he has risen from "a characteristically American state of abysmal ignorance to one of merely woeful ignorance" about Canada, Friedrich needn't apologize: he gives a very solid sense of matters Canadian as they relate to his subject, but shows quite emphatically that Gould has slipped the border.

J.F.

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PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER

# CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 124-125,  
SPRING-SUMMER 1990

*A Quarterly of Criticism  
and Review*

EDITOR: W. H. New

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PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRIS  
PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Second Class Mail registration  
number 1375

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is  
assisted by the University of B.C. and  
the S.S.H.R.C.C.

*Unsolicited manuscripts will not be  
returned unless accompanied by  
stamped, addressed envelopes.*

*Canadian Literature* is indexed in  
*Canadian Periodical Index* and  
*Canadian Magazine Index*. It is  
available on-line in the *Canadian  
Business & Current Affairs Database*,  
and is available in microfilm from  
University Microfilm International,  
300 North Zeeb Road,  
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106

For subscriptions, back issues (as  
available), and annual and cumulative  
indexes, write: Circulation Manager,  
*Canadian Literature*, 2029 West Mall,  
University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5

SUBSCRIPTION \$25 INDIVIDUAL;  
\$35 INSTITUTIONAL; PLUS \$5 POSTAGE  
OUTSIDE CANADA

ISSN 0008-4360

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## LEARNING TO LISTEN

OUT of the silence, sound.

\*

Who utters it? Who listens? Who heard space as silence to begin with? Who turns sound into speech, and speech into meaning? Do people hear because of how they've learned to hear — or does each person listen alone?

\*

Daniel David Moses, a member of Toronto's Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster, writes in the December 1, 1989, issue of *What* about the different demands of two languages. Growing up, he understood that language constructed reality in one way; as an adult, he came to know that the language surrounding him was asking him to live in another way. Could he reconcile the two sets of expectations? Should he have to? Could he live with both? Would the division between the two make living with both unbearable? This is, he writes, "a world where Native people, Native traditions assume the existence of a spirit world as a given, a gift, and where non-Native people scoff or keep secrets." Such a division both displays and constructs a hierarchy of power. Scoffing is a refusal to listen, sometimes in case the alternative should prove to be more compelling than the convention accepted as normality. Sometimes people are willing to listen only to those voices that confirm the conventions they already know. The unfamiliar makes them fear. Or makes them condescend. Neither fear nor condescension encourages listening. And no one who does not listen learns to hear.

\*

The time is not so distant when the "Native" was a conventional figure in Canadian literature — but not a voice (or a figure allowed separate voices). If Native characters spoke, they spoke in archaisms or without articles, in the sham eloquence of florid romance or the muted syllables of deprivation. If Native characters moved, they moved according to European schedules of arrangement, as

faithful friends or savage foes, or as marginal figures the mighty could afford to ignore. Over the course of time, even historical individuals turned from persons into signs. As far as textbooks were concerned, fictions were as acceptable as fact. Shananditti became a figure of curiosity, though few admitted to start with that this position was artificially constructed. It was genocide that made her *the last of the Beothuks*, and therefore tragic. (But, says the literary echo, also “romantic”: *the last of the Mohicans* was a phrase ready to hand, ready to use to explain the “reality” away.) Pontiac and Tecumseh turned into the noble heroes of National Causes; Big Bear was cast as a suspect foe; Maquinna was generally ignored. Out of such prototypes was a Loyalist version of Canadian history confirmed. But the preponderant influence of this version of history depended on the construction of margins: the tendency it established was to deny Native communities respect for their own history, to make their own position in history contingent upon European perspectives, to displace one language of perception with a self-justifying substitute. Power declares; it doesn’t readily listen. In conventional circles, in the early years of the twentieth century, Pauline Johnson was accepted as a performer, and accepted as a poet only to the degree that the performance — complete with Mohawk “costume” — was patronizingly being praised. In retrospect, it is hard not to think that these same communities subsequently (and readily) accepted Grey Owl as an “Indian” because he was theatrical *like Johnson* — that he was praised because he fit the model that convention had made familiar. The model confirmed expectations. It nevertheless left the reality unquestioned, and therefore unmet.

\*

Joan Crate’s 1989 poem sequence, *Pale As Real Ladies*, asks in part why Johnson chose to accept the role of the performing Mohawk Princess. “To be heard at all” is one answer. The next question asks what listening to Johnson’s experience has to do with the lives of contemporary Native writers. Next answer: it helps to reconstruct a missing history. The paradigms and parallels of anthropology do not describe a single unifying tradition among the many Native cultures of northern North America; differentiating more than uniting, they look for cultural variation. But have the differences thus distinguished had any palpable effect on the paradigms of Canadian historiography? Missionary anthologies were inclined to rewrite Native myths as European fairy tales, minimizing their social function, and to seek Christian parallels, for moralistic intent, and to translate the symbolic logic of the original tales into the linear forms of “realistic” representation, thus misnaming one kind of truth as another. Elementary school textbooks sometimes still construct the “other” in terms of “quaint custom” rather than depict social practices as straightforward alternatives to those of the familiar culture. Literary histories still tend to overlook as *literature* the extensive work of Native writers: the nineteenth-century inventions of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh (George Copway), whom Donald B.

Smith drew attention to in a *Journal of Canadian Studies* article in 1988; the oratory of Chief Dan George; the power of tale-telling, as in Edward Ahenakew's *Voices of the Plains Cree*, Norval Morriseau's *Legends of My People* (Ojibway), George Clutesi's *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* (Sechelt), Chief Ken Harris's *Visitors Who Never Left* (Gitksan); the personal rhetoric of Markoosie, Duke Redbird, Anthony Apakark Thrasher, Vera Manuel, Howard Cardinal, or the Métis autobiographer and teacher Maria Campbell; the poetry, prose, and drama of Joanne Cardinal Schubert, Bernard Assiniwi, Shirley Bruised Head, Willie Dunn, Emma Lee Warrior, Jordan Wheeler, and the many writers whose works are gathered or discussed in this collection.

\*

A few anthologies have, of course, made some texts available, unavoidably "translating" some of them into the format of a different culture simply by converting them from oral to written form. Edmund Carpenter edited *Anerca* in 1959; Kent Gooderham *I Am an Indian* in 1969; David Day and Marilyn Bowering *Many Voices* in 1977; Robin Gedalof (McGrath) *Paper Stays Put* in 1980; John Robert Colombo *Poems of the Inuit* in 1981; Penny Petrone *First People, First Voices* in 1983 and *Northern Voices* in 1988. Preliminary inquiries into Native literary forms include essays in the new Yukon journal from Whitehorse, *The Northern Review*; a "native literature issue" of *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* from Brandon, Manitoba (5:2, 1985); and Brian Swann's two recent anthologies from the University of California Press: *Smoothing the Ground: Essays on Native American Oral Literature*, a series of essays (both theoretical and analytic) on linguistic features and the verbal coding of social norms, and (with Arnold Krupat) *Recovering the Word*, a collection of largely interpretive essays, including William Bright's "The Natural History of Old Man Coyote," Duane Niatum's "On Stereotypes," and Rudolf Kaiser's analysis of ways in which variant versions of Chief Seattle's nineteenth-century oratory have been made to serve political ends, including those of current ecological aspiration. Swann's bibliographies, moreover, provide access to the substantial body of commentary which now exists on Native American studies.

\*

Even the margins have margins. Herbert Schwarz's *Tales from the Smokehouse* (1972) collects erotic male stories from Native sources — which the missionaries either bowdlerized, never heard, or never retold. Beth Brant's *A Gathering of Spirit* (1984, revised 1988) collects lesbian as well as heterosexual writings by North American Indian women, including work by the Piegan writer Emilie Gallant and the Ojibway Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. But anthologies do not in and of themselves change historical attitudes. Keeshig-Tobias, editor of *Trickster* in Toronto, rejects

in principle the way non-Natives try sometimes to construct Native voices; *by speaking for the other*, she argues, *they co-opt the other*, and their subtexts remain those of the mainstream culture. Only when the margins participate more actively in the mainstream, by implication — effectively altering it — will the mainstream itself come closer to understanding native experience, native beliefs, native perspectives. Only when the margins participate more actively in the mainstream, by implication — effectively altering it — will the mainstream itself come closer to understanding Native experience, Native beliefs, Native perspectives on human relationships, the spirit world, the nature of nature.

\*

Nor does participation, all on its own, guarantee effective social change. Attitudes born of stereotypes usually reiterate stereotypes, in a cycle that tends tirelessly to reconfirm itself. Mainstream institutions seldom initiate questions about established attitudes so much as they co-opt the questions that the margins have begun relentlessly to ask. But even this development can be functional. Deliberate commitments to change, that is, sometimes construct opportunities for difference.

\*

Native speakers, writers, singers, and tale-tellers have long contributed creatively to tribal culture. Indirectly they have contributed to national culture, too, but to the degree that the nation did not, would not, listen, their activities were regarded (when acknowledged at all) as primitive, pagan, curious, quaint, and collectible rather than as intrinsically artistic. Recently, Native organizations have themselves become active agents for creative change. The En'owkin Centre in Penticton, B.C., led by Jeannette Armstrong (of Okanagan heritage), is one of several newly established creative arts schools designed to meet the needs of Native artists. The Baffin Writers' Project, now directed by Alooook Ipellie, is encouraging Inuit writers to publish and helping to arrange both publication and distribution of their works. Native publishers have come into existence: Theytus Books in Penticton, Fifth House in Saskatoon. Native journals are now available: *Ontario Indian*, *Trickster*, *Inuktitut* — as well as anthologies constructed from Native perspectives: Beth Brant (Degonwadonti), a Bay of Quinte Mohawk, records in *A Gathering of Spirit* how one of the contributors to her collection writes "You will never know how much this book means to me. *It is real. It is the truth.*" Native critics have embraced the role of cultural teacher. Thomas King (of Cherokee descent) writes a personal introduction to Canadian Native fiction as a preface to the short story anthology he assembled as a special issue of *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (no. 60, 1987). Maria Campbell's *Achimoona* (1988) provides an opportunity for new Métis writers to offer their work to readers. And Native bookstores are now in operation also. Chiefs Mask, 73 Water Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1A1, is one; Akwesasne Notes, P.O. Box 1251, Cornwall, Ontario K6H 1B3, is another. What this summary

describes is the construction of an alternative cycle of communication to the one on which the “dominant” society has long depended.

\*

But the nature of any “dominance” is that it, like the margins it defines, is a social construct, a fabrication of language and institutional design. Margins have a way of speaking back from the edges of power, of resisting those who occupy a centre by having laid claim to the terms that declare that they do occupy a centre. If they are not recognized for the creativity of the differences they bring to bear on cultural perception, margins also have a way of making the centre irrelevant, and of speaking on their own.

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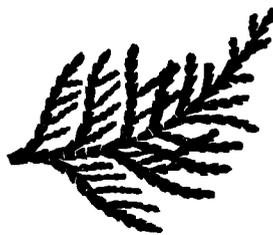
This collection of essays and poems is a speaking-place. Because boundaries are processes of interaction as much as they are lines of demarcation, it is also a series of opportunities to begin listening.

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*CANADIAN LITERATURE* is pleased to acknowledge the support of The Hamber Foundation, The Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation, The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, and the University of British Columbia 75th Anniversary Funds in the preparation of this issue. I wish also personally to thank Thomas King for his generous advice; to thank all the writers whose works appear here for their friendly collaboration in this venture; and to extend my appreciation to the Native organizations across Canada who have willingly co-operated in bringing the issue together.

W. N.

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# ARTIFACTS

*Frank Conibear*

they collect the artifacts to study the past.  
out of the bone fragment, chipped stone and delicate  
cedar weave is written a history long forgotten.

in all this where is the truth?  
what is the history?  
maybe history should not be the question,  
for history is written  
not passed on in a story at the bighouse,  
or in a lesson to the young.

yet while the archeologist's artifact  
and the historian's document  
remain important,  
too often, the record shows the history  
from the historian's own living eye.

the truth is perhaps  
in the elders who remember,  
who are living and looking to the young.  
what can be comes from  
the spirit of the past,  
the wisdom of the elder,  
and the new strength of the young.

the history is alive,  
not to be found in an old site, but  
present in the people.

and when the record changes to tell  
a more accurate "history"  
or our people, then the true  
spirit of our past, present and future  
can be given,  
and in return valued.

# ONE GENERATION FROM EXTINCTION

*Basil H. Johnston*

**W**ITHIN THE PAST FEW YEARS Gregor Keeshig, Henry Johnston, Resime Akiwenzie, Norman McLeod, and Belva Pitwaniquot died. They all spoke their tribal language, Anishinaubae (Ojibwa). When these elders passed away, so did a portion of the tribal language come to an end as a tree disintegrates by degrees and in stages until it is no more; and, though infants were born to replenish the loss of life, not any one of them will learn the language of their grandfathers or grandmothers to keep it alive and to pass it on to their descendants. Thus language dies.

In some communities there are no more Gregor Keeshigs, Henry Johnstons, Resime Akiwenzies, Norman McLeods, Belva Pitwaniquots; those remaining have no more affinity to their ancestral language than they do to Swahili or Sanskrit; in other communities the languages may not survive beyond a generation. Some tribal languages are at the edge of extinction, not expected to survive for more than a few years. There remain but three aboriginal languages out of the original fifty-three found in Canada that may survive several more generations.

There is cause to lament but it is the native peoples who have the most cause to lament the passing of their languages. They lose not only the ability to express the simplest of daily sentiments and needs but they can no longer understand the ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, rituals, ceremonies, institutions brought into being by their ancestors; and, having lost the power to understand, cannot sustain, enrich, or pass on their heritage. No longer will they think Indian or feel Indian. And though they may wear "Indian" jewellery and take part in pow-wows, they can never capture that kinship with and reverence for the sun and the moon, the sky and the water, or feel the lifebeat of Mother Earth or sense the change in her moods; no longer are the wolf, the bear and the caribou elder brothers but beasts, resources to be killed and sold. They will have lost their identity which no amount of reading can ever restore. Only language and literature can restore the "Indianness."

Now if Canadians of West European or other origin have less cause than "Indians" to lament the passing of tribal languages and cultures it is because they

may not realize that there is more to tribal languages than "ugh" or "how" or "kimu sabi." At most and at best Euro-Canadians might have read or heard about Raven and Nanabush and Thunderbirds and other "tricksters"; some may have even studied "Culture Myths," "Hero Tales," "Transformation Tales," or "Nature Myths and Beast Fables," but these accounts were never regarded as bearing any more sense than "Little Red Riding Hood" or "The Three Little Pigs." Neither language nor literature were ever considered in their natural kinship, which is the only way in which language ought to be considered were its range, depth, force and beauty to be appreciated.

Perhaps our Canadian compatriots of West European origin have more cause to lament the passing of an Indian language than they realize or care to admit. Scholars mourn that there is no one who can speak the Huron language and thus assist scholars in their pursuit of further knowledge about the tribe; scholars mourn that had the Beothuk language survived, so much more would be known about the Beothuk peoples. In mourning the extinction of the language, scholars are implicitly declaring that the knowledge derived from a study of snowshoes, shards, arrowheads, old pipes, shrunken heads and old bones, hunting, fishing, transportation, food preparation, ornamentation and sometimes ritual is limited. And so it is; material culture can yield only so much.

Language is crucial. If scholars are to increase their knowledge and if they are to add depth and width to their studies, they must study a native language and literature. It is not enough to know linguistics or to know a few words or even some phrases or to have access to the Jesuit *Relations*, Chippewa *Exercises*, Ojibwa *Texts*, or a *Dictionary of the Otchipwe Language*. Without a knowledge of the language scholars can never take for granted the accuracy of an interpretation or translation of a passage, let alone a single word; nor can they presume that their articles, tracts, treatises, essays bear the kind of accuracy that scholarship and integrity demand. They would continue to labour under the impression that the word "manitou" means spirit and that it has no other meaning. Superstitious nonsense, according to the white man. They do not know that the word bears other meanings even more fundamental than "spirit," such as, and/or pertaining to the deities; of a substance, character, nature, essence, quiddity beyond comprehension and therefore beyond explanation, a mystery; supernatural; potency, potential. What a difference such knowledge might have made in the studies conducted by Ruth Landes or Thomas B. Leekley, and others on the Anishinaubae tribe. Perhaps, instead of regarding "Indians" as superstitious for positing "spirits" in trees or in other inanimate or insensate objects, they might have credited them with insight for having perceived a vital substance or essence that imparted life, form, growth, healing, and strength in all things, beings, and places. They might have understood that the expression "manitouwan" meant that an object possessed or was infused with an element or a feature that was beyond human ken; they might have under-

stood that “w’manitouwih” meant that he or she was endowed with extraordinary talents, and that it did not mean that he or she was a spirit.

Language is essential. If scholars and writers are to know how “Indians” perceive and regard certain ideas they must study an “Indian” language. When an “Anishinaubae” says that someone is telling the truth, he says “w’daeb-awae.” But the expression is not just a mere confirmation of a speaker’s veracity. It is at the same time a philosophical proposition that, in saying, a speaker casts his words and his voice only as far as his vocabulary and his perception will enable him. In so doing the tribe was denying that there was absolute truth; that the best a speaker could achieve and a listener expect was the highest degree of accuracy. Somehow that one expression “w’daeb-awae” set the limits of a single statement as well as setting limits on all speech.

There was a special regard almost akin to reverence for speech and for the truth. Perhaps it was because words bear the tone of the speaker and may therefore be regarded as belonging to that person; perhaps it is because words have but a fleeting momentary existence in sound and are gone except in memory; perhaps it is because words have not ceased to exist but survive in echo and continue on in infinity; perhaps it is because words are medicine that can heal or injure; perhaps it is because words possess an element of the manitou that enabled them to conjure images and ideas out of nothing, and are the means by which the autissokanuk (muses) inspired men and women. It was not for nothing that the older generation did not solicit the autissokanuk to assist in the genesis of stories or in the composition of chants in seasons other than winter.

To instil respect for language the old counselled youth, “Don’t talk too much” (Kegon zaum-doongaen), for they saw a kinship between language and truth. The expression is not without its facetious aspect but in its broader application it was intended to convey to youth other notions implicit in the expression “Don’t talk too much,” for the injunction also meant “Don’t talk too often . . . Don’t talk too long . . . Don’t talk about those matters that you know nothing about.” Were a person to restrict his discourse, and measure his speech, and govern his talk by what he knew, he would earn the trust and respect of his (her) listeners. Of that man or woman they would say “w’daeb-awae.” Better still, people would want to hear the speaker again and by so doing bestow upon the speaker the opportunity to speak, for ultimately it is the people who confer the right of speech by their audience.

**L**ANGUAGE WAS A PRECIOUS HERITAGE; literature was no less precious. So precious did the tribe regard language and speech that it held those who abused language and speech and truth in contempt and ridicule and withheld from them their trust and confidence. To the tribe the man or woman who rambled

on and on, or who let his tongue range over every subject or warp the truth was said to talk in circles in a manner no different from that of a mongrel who, not knowing the source of alarm, barks in circles (w'geewi-animoh). Ever since words and sounds were reduced to written symbols and have been stripped of their mystery and magic, the regard and reverence for them have diminished in tribal life.

As rich and full of meaning as may be individual words and expression, they embody only a small portion of the entire stock and potential of tribal knowledge, wisdom, and intellectual attainment, the greater part is deposited in myths, legends, stories, and in the lyrics of chants that make up the tribe's literature. Therein will be found the essence and the substance of tribal ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, values, beliefs, theories, notions, sentiments, and accounts of their institutions and rituals and ceremonies. Without language scholars, writers, and teachers will have no access to the depth and width of tribal knowledge and understanding, but must continue to labour as they have done these many years under the impression that "Indian" stories are nothing more than fairy tales or folklore, fit only for juvenile minds. For scholars and academics Nanabush, Raven, Glooscap, Weesaukeechauk and other mythological figures will ever remain "tricksters," culture heroes, deities whose misadventures were dreamed into being only for the amusement of children. Primitive and pagan and illiterate to boot, "Indians" could not possibly address or articulate abstract ideas or themes; neither their minds nor their languages could possibly express any idea more complex than taboos, superstitions and bodily needs.

But were ethnologists, anthropologists, linguists, teachers of native children and writers of native literature — yes, even archaeologists — to learn a native language, perhaps they might learn that Nanabush and Raven are not simply "tricksters" but the caricatured representations of human nature and character in their many facets; perhaps they might give thought to the meaning and sense to be found in Weessaukeetchauk, The Bitter Soul. There is no other way except through language for scholars to learn or to validate their studies, their theories, their theses about the values, ideals or institutions or any other aspect of tribal life; there is no other way by which knowledge of native life can find increase. Not good enough is it to say in hushed tones after a reverential description of a totem pole or the lacing of a snowshoe, "My, weren't they clever."

Just consider the fate of "Indian" stories written by those who knew nothing of the language and never did hear any of the stories in their entirety or in their original version but derived everything that they knew of their subject from second, third and even fourth diluted sources. Is it any wonder then that the stories in *Indian Legends of Canada* by E. E. Clark or in *Manabozho* by T. B. Leekley are so bland and devoid of sense. Had the authors known the stories in their "Indian" sense and flavour, perhaps they might have infused their versions with more wit and substance. Had the authors known that the creation story as the Anishinaubae understood it to mean was intended to represent in the most dramatic way possible

the process of individual development from the smallest portion of talent to be retrieved from the depths of one's being and then given growth by breath of life. Thus a man and woman are to develop themselves, create their own worlds, and shape their being and give meaning to life. Had the authors known this meaning of the Creation Story, perhaps they might have written their accounts in terms more in keeping with the sense and thrust of the story. But not knowing the language nor having heard the story in its original text or state, the authors could not, despite their intentions, impart to their accounts the due weight and perspective the story deserved. The stories were demeaned.

WITH LANGUAGE DEAD and literature demeaned, "Indian" institutions are beyond understanding and restoration. Let us turn back the calendar two and a half centuries, to that period when the "Indian" languages were spoken in every home, when native literature inspired thought and when native "Indian" institutions governed native "Indian" life. It was then that a native institution caught the imagination of the newcomers to this continent. The men and women who founded a new nation to be known as the United States of America took as their model for their constitution and government the principles of government and administration embodied in The Great Tree of Peace of the Five Nations Confederacy. The institution of The Great Tree of Peace was not then too primitive nor too alien for study or emulation to the founders of the United States. In more recent years even the architects of the United Nations regarded the "Indian" institution of The Great Tree of Peace not as a primitive organization beneath their dignity and intellect, but rather as an institution of merit. There exist still "Indian" institutions that may well serve and benefit this society and this nation, not as dramatically as did The Great Tree of Peace the United States of America, but bestow some good as yet undreamed or unimagined. Just how much good such institutions may confer upon this or some future generation will not be known unless the "Indian" languages survive.

And what is it that has undermined the vitality of some of the "Indian" languages and deprived this generation and this society the promise and the benefit of the wisdom and the knowledge embodied in tribal literature?

In the case of the Beothuk and their language, the means used were simple and direct: it was the blade, the bludgeon, and the bullet that were plied in the destruction of the Beothuk in their sleep, at their table, and in their quiet passage from home to place of work, until the tribe was no more. The speakers were annihilated; no more was the Beothuk language spoken; whatever their wisdom or whatever their institutions, the whole of the Beothuk heritage was destroyed.

In other instances, instead of bullets, bludgeons, and bayonets, other means were used to put an end to the speaking of an "Indian" language. A kick with a police riding boot administered by a 175-pound man upon the person of an eight-year-old boy for uttering the language of a savage left its pain for days and its bruise upon the spirit for life. A boy once kicked was not likely to risk a second or a third. A slap in the face or a punch to the back of the head delivered even by a small man upon the person of a small boy left its sting and a humiliation not soon forgotten. And if a boot or a fist were not administered, then a lash or a yardstick was plied until the "Indian" language was beaten out. To boot and fist and lash was added ridicule. Both speaker and his language were assailed. "What's the use of that language? It isn't polite to speak another language in the presence of other people. Learn English! That's the only way you're going to get ahead. How can you learn two languages at the same time? No wonder kids can't learn anything else. It's a primitive language; hasn't the vocabulary to express abstract ideas, poor. Say 'ugh.' Say something in your language! . . . How can you get your tongue around those sounds?" On and on the comments were made, disparaging, until in too many the language was shamed into silence and disuse.

And how may the federal government assist in the restoration of the native languages to their former vigour and vitality and enable them to fulfil their promise?

The Government of Canada must finance the establishment of either provincial or regional language institutes to be affiliated with a museum or a university or a provincial native educational organization. The function of the "institute," to be headed by a native person who speaks, reads, and writes a native language, will be to foster research into language and to encourage the publication of lexicons, dictionaries, grammars, courses, guides, outlines, myths, stories, legends, genealogies, histories, religion, rituals, ceremonies, chants, prayers, and general articles; to tape stories, myths, legends, grammars, teaching guides and outlines and to build a collection of written and oral literature and to make same accessible to scholars, teachers and native institutions; and to duplicate and distribute written and oral literature to the native communities and learning institutions. The native languages deserve to be enshrined in this country's heritage as much as do snowshoes, shards, and arrowheads. Nay! More.

But unless the writings, the essays, stories, plays, the papers of scholars, academics, lexicographers, grammarians, etymologists, playwrights, poets, novelists, composers, philosophers are published and distributed, they can never nurture growth in language or literature. Taking into account the market represented by each tribe, no commercial publisher would risk publication of an "Indian" book. Hence, only the federal government has the means to sponsor publication of an "Indian text," either through a commercial publisher or through the Queen's Printer. The publication of an "Indian" book may not be a commercially profitable enterprise, but it would add to the nation's intellectual and literary heritage.

# NEGATIVE OF YOU

*Joan Crate*

It's you in the beer garden  
that seared August day  
grinning lavishly at the camera,  
the startling glint of your teeth,  
reflections fizzling in my skull  
and the sting of seltzer on my tongue.

Take the picture for Chrissakes, you said

The celluloid has the date stamped  
above your negative face, your white hair and lips,  
your skin black and transparent.  
Today there is no sun.  
It is the absence of your eyes that blinds me.

I was afraid to push the shutter, knowing  
how things captured can escape, hearing  
in that bite of metal a slamming door,  
shoes on the cement.  
In the kitchen the faucet drips hypnotically.

Take the picture

I never had the film printed and now  
it's the negative I ponder, drinking wine  
at the table, my lips a stain in the pristine winter.  
I press fingertips to the celluloid  
I once thought was you, feel  
your cloying absence again and again.



# SHAWNANDITHIT (LAST OF THE BEOTHUKS)

*Joan Crate*

White handkerchief to your mouth, Shawnandithit,  
white as your mother's fingertips, that expanding  
spot on your sister's cheek the day they came  
and took you three as you wandered hungry,  
your white ribs hooking the lifeless ice.

Except for the blood  
white as death.

Who could have imagined you'd be taken  
to a house in town with a fire and embroidered linen  
to spit into. Who would have thought death was warm  
and plump with meat and men who smile too much,  
who ask questions with pencils, wanting  
you to draw the canoes, the tents, the chasms  
dug for the winter houses. They ask you to speak  
your language so they can study its sound.  
How full of holes it is, subterranean tunnels  
echo around your failing lungs.  
Can they hear?  
Warm blood in your mouth tastes ripe  
as a lover, everything gone.

And so Shawnandithit, with Mother and sister dead  
and none of your people left beating against winter,  
it is your turn, the last Beothuk, broken  
and barren, beautiful as loose feathers on stone.  
In the whitemen's steaming kitchen, you falter, look  
to the wall, the clock you can't read, then sketch  
them stories of lingering death, marriage ceremonies  
and hunting parties, love, and your lingering death.

You cough graceful spurts of blood,  
you fly, you plunge, alone Shawnandithit,  
staining the white white pages.

# THE BLIZZARD MOANS MY NAME

*Joan Crate*

I sit here by the cookstove,  
feet pushed too close, try to quench  
the burning bark dazzle of unfreezing toes

and I will not answer

I will stay in this sultry kitchen,  
gaze outside glass at my home, the night,  
the terrible snow, and try not to hear

the howl that feeds me empty, strokes me cold

Fingers scratch at the upholstered chair,  
pull at springs. My throat parches with blood  
and I drink tea from a china cup, nod gratitude  
to the woman with skin starting to tear  
like the paper they hand me to draw on.  
No matter how many meals she cooks for me  
it is not enough to fill.  
No matter how many scented shawls she wraps  
around my shoulders, it is not enough to thaw

wordless voices splintering ice through my lungs

I chew on a chocolate biscuit, sweet  
lie in my mouth. I will stay  
in this crackling log house and hide  
from the ghosts who call my name — Shawnandithit —  
turning me to storm

and all their destined love.



# REASSESSING TRADITIONAL INUIT POETRY

*Robin McGrath*

**I**N JULY OF 1745, Dr. Samuel Johnson, as virtual editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, published a "Greenland Ode," an Eskimo-language poem with an English translation (qtd. in Sherbo 575). This ode celebrates the birthday of King Christian of Denmark, and was the first Inuit poem to be available to the English-speaking world. In the two and a half centuries since the "Greenland Ode" appeared, more and far better Inuit poetry has been published, but it has received little scholarly attention. Only Rudy Wiebe's article in *Canadian Literature*, "Songs of the Canadian Eskimo," and a handful of articles by the anthropologist Sven Frederiksen, make any attempt to examine this aspect of Inuit culture.

Canadian scholars and teachers have been curiously reluctant to approach Inuit poetry on any level, perhaps because they think they will not understand it. This paper will look at the history of Inuit poetry in English, and will examine a number of fairly typical poems in an effort to show that Inuit poems in English are not just anthropological enigmas, but are works that are accessible to anyone who brings curiosity and a little imagination to their reading of poetry.

Inuit song is immensely old, but it has only really been available to English-language readers in any quantity since 1925 when Diamond Jenness published *Songs of the Copper Eskimos* (Roberts and Jenness), an academic work with interlinear translations from the Inuinaqtung dialect. Jenness was not a poet, nor was he fluent in Inuktitut, and it is clear that he realized the limitations of his translation, yet many of the works are deeply moving and powerful. Vilhjalmur Stefansson made an attempt to popularize the works in 1929, and he arranged for a Canadian singer, Juliette Gaultier de la Verendrye, to sing them at Town Hall in New York. She performed against a backdrop of totem poles and aurora borealis, and although the *New York Times* reported that the songs were very well received, being "decidedly melodious and an entire novelty to the audience" ("Songs of the Copper Eskimos Given"), there was no sudden recognition of the joys of Inuit poetry on the part of the general reading public.

Knud Rasmussen's massive *Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition*, with its extraordinary collection of songs and legends from across 5,000 miles of Arctic

coastline, appeared in ten volumes between 1928 and 1945. Rasmussen was not just an accomplished linguist, theologian and ethnographer, but was also an Inuit poet himself. In addition, he was highly photogenic, and perhaps because of his native background he attracted considerable attention from the press; but unfortunately Rasmussen died the year after returning from the expedition, leaving his work incomplete. After a brief popularity, the poetry he translated was ignored. The translations he produced are likely never to be rivalled, and he set the standard by which all subsequent translations and collections of Inuit poetry are measured, but English readers still had not acquired a taste for work that was ambiguously labelled "primitive" even by its promoters.

In recent years, traditional Inuit song has fared somewhat better. During the 1950s, Edmund Carpenter wrote an article for Marshall McLuhan's journal, *Explorations*, in which he drew upon the Jenness material; and he followed this with *Anerca*, a small volume of Rasmussen's translations, in 1959. Inuit poems were often included in collections of Indian poetry in the 1960s, and volumes of Inuit poetry were edited by Lewis in 1971, Houston in 1972, Lowenstein in 1973, and Hoffman in 1974. In 1976, Rasmussen's ten-volume *Report* was reprinted at prohibitive cost, and in 1981 John Robert Colombo edited *Poems of the Inuit*, a compilation of some of the best of the ethnographic collections. Colombo's meticulous and sensitive editing and his discussion of Inuit poetics now make it possible to introduce these works to students at the high-school or university level.

There has been a tendency for those writing about Inuit poetry to stress the magical, ritualistic, and musical aspects of the compositions, or to assure the readers that if the poems do not make any narrative or lineal sense that is because they are not intended to. The implication is that for Inuit poets, how a thing is said is more important than what is said. There is some truth in this assertion, but it is usually taken too far. The poems are songs and in many cases the music predominates, so that when it is removed or lost, what is left is sparse and repetitive. In many of the incantations, the meaning is deliberately obscured or key words were changed when the chants were sold or given to the collectors. Sometimes an anthropological knowledge of the culture is needed for the reader to be able to decode the embedded meaning and the obscure metaphors used by Inuit poets. However, many Inuit poems, possibly even the majority, are quite straightforward and can be read and understood with very little effort by English speakers.

**R**ASMUSSEN IDENTIFIED four basic categories of Inuit poetry: songs of mood, hunting songs, charms, and songs of derision. These four categories are not mutually exclusive; it is possible for a hunting narrative to be combined with the philosophical musings of a mood poem, but identifying the dominant

thrust of the works makes it a little easier to understand them. The following four extracts from sample poems give some idea of what can be found in Inuit poetry.

The first, "Ptarmigan," is a mood poem. Mood poems are songs of reflection which do not involve a central story or action; they are like Imagist poems which try to give a visual impression which involves the perception of relationships. This particular example, by the poet Umanatsiaq, has an unexpected though typical twist:

On the top of a snowdrift  
In the tundra  
Stood a little ptarmigan  
  
Its eyelids were red,  
Its back was brown,  
And right between its buttocks  
Sat the sweetest little arse. (Lowenstein 51)

This poem has been the subject of considerable discussion among Danish scholars. Inuit poems are frequently very literal and it is all too easy to develop complex interpretations that cannot be justified. In the case of "Ptarmigan," it is best to concentrate on the almost photographic detail used to convey the mood in the poem.

The ptarmigan's brown back indicates that, despite the presence of a snowdrift, summer is finally on its way. The ptarmigan is an amusing little bird, and a fine harbinger of spring, and after a long, dark winter the sight of its back feathers turning from white to brown might very well produce one of those moments Wordsworth called "spots of time." It doesn't do to wax too lyrical, though; the poem might be better understood if you see Inuit smacking their lips over the last line. A ptarmigan's *itig* might more properly be translated into English as a "pope's nose" or a "parson's nose" rather than the cruder "arse" that is usually used. The *itig* on a ptarmigan is a sweet, literally sweet, oily morsel that is greatly appreciated by gourmets. Umanatsiaq was likely aiming a rock at the bird as he admired it and composed his song, just as William Carlos Williams reached for the plums with one hand and the pen with the other.

Charms and incantations are often fragmented, incomprehensible, or in magical language; they are similar to nonsense verse, sound poetry, or even concrete poetry, where the form the poem takes dominates its meaning. "Who Comes" is a classic; it is credited by Carpenter to Ohnainewk, who recited it on his death bed, but Colombo points out that it is a variation of a longer poem, "Against Sickness," known among the Greenland Eskimos (Colombo 113).

Who comes?  
It is the hound of death approaching  
Away!  
Or I will harness you to my team. (Colombo 100)

This poem or chant is relatively simple; it follows the traditional dialogue or question/answer sequence of the song-duel or flyting; it makes reference to the dog-husband of the sea goddess Nuliajuk (also called Sedna), who fathered the people of this world, and it pivots on the use of dogs for transportation, a cultural practice not used extensively anywhere in the world except the Arctic. But a reader needn't know any of this to appreciate this little poem. When the hound of death comes for us, be it Cerberus or some domestic mutt of our own imagining, we would all like to be able to challenge him so boldly.

Hunting songs can be reflective but are more likely to be narrative and full of incident. Success in the hunt is a favourite theme of Inuit song and for Orpingalik it is his life. The great hunter had been seriously ill and composed the poem "My Breath" during a fit of despondency. In a widely quoted remark, he explained that he called the poem "My Breath" because "it is just as necessary for me to sing as it is to breathe" (Colombo 109). Internally, however, the poem reveals a strong emotional connection between hunting and sexuality. Orpingalik sees the polar bear's attack as a challenge to his manhood, claiming that the bear "really believed / He alone was a male," and the seal he recalls harpooning is also "an old and cunning male." In his depression, he wishes his wife would go to a better man who could be her refuge. He is also surprised at his own reaction to illness:

Knowest thou thyself?  
 So little thou knowest of thyself!  
 While dawn gives place to dawn,  
 And spring is upon the village. (Colombo 39)

Derisive songs are satiric and are often monologues or dialogues; they are like Old English flyting poems in which verbal assault is part of the intellectual game. Netsit's song, "Men's Impotence," links hunting and sexuality in a derisive song. The full title, given in the literal translation Rasmussen generally provided of his interpretations, is "A Song of Men's Impotence and the Beasts They Hunted." In "Men's Impotence" we meet a hunter who cannot function at all:

Perhaps — well  
 It may not matter!  
 Perhaps — well.  
 I sing merely of him,  
 "The Boiling One,"  
 Who sat, fearful, his mouth fast closed,  
 Among women. (Colombo 31)

He is isolated, silent, not just fearful but frightful, a danger to others. His face is described in terms of male hunting implements, a mouth bent like a kayak rib, eyes shaped like horn cut into leisters, his mouth is closed fast and his eyes bode ill. Like

Wiebe's Almighty Voice, he is described as having a face like an axe. The man who cannot hunt becomes a danger to his fellows, a man who cannot sing becomes a danger to himself, and by implication, a man who cannot love women will hate them.

IT IS EVIDENT even in the four sample poems just discussed that there are thematic links between various types of Inuit poetry. The act of composition is also a major subject of Inuit poetry and is also linked to hunting. Akjartok, like Orpingalik, feels that to breathe is to sing and to sing is to recall the hunt. The poets usually recall killing male animals, which are larger and a real challenge to their prowess. Here is a typical example:

I call forth the song  
 I draw a deep breath  
 My breast breathes heavily  
 As I call forth the song.

I hear of distant villages  
 And their miserable catch  
 And draw a deep breath  
 As I call forth the song.

I forget altogether  
 The heavy breathing of my breast  
 When I call to mind the olden days  
 When I had strength enough  
 To cut up mighty bulls  
 I call forth the song.

While the sun was on his upward way  
 Across the sky  
 A song I call forth  
 As I draw a deep breath. (Colombo 44)

Sometimes, of course, the song does not come forth, just as sometimes the real refuses to surface or the fish refuses to take the hook. Ikinikik sings

I have only my song  
 Though it too is slipping from me. (Colombo 83)

Ivaluardjuk's lament is that

. . . songs  
 Call for strength  
 And I seek after words. (Colombo 43)

Piuvkaq observed that it is

A wonderful occupation  
Making songs!  
But all too often they  
Are failures. (Colombo 36)

In another poem he admits that he prefers fist fighting to singing because

Words melt away  
Like hills in fog. (Colombo 41)

Apparently, breaking someone's nose occasionally produces more lasting satisfaction than composing a poem does.

Although these works frequently explore man's sense of fragility and insecurity, images of the land in Inuit poetry provide a sense of stability and continuity. The poet may be overwhelmed by the power of nature, he may not survive his encounters with it, but the land is always there. Kaneyioq begins his chant:

My thoughts went constantly  
To the great land  
My thoughts went constantly. (Colombo 100)

Padloq's magic charm, to be recited when in sudden danger of death, says:

You earth  
Our great earth  
See, oh see  
All those heaps  
Of bleached bones. (Colombo 66)

Uvavnuk's trance song also depicts man as small and insignificant in his confrontation with the land:

The Great Sea  
Has set me adrift  
It moves me as the weed in the river  
Earth and the great weather  
Move me  
And move my inward parts with joy. (Colombo 21)

Uvavnuk might just as easily have sung Keats's

... on the shore  
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Til Love and Fame to nothingness do sink. (Abrams 1830)

Padloq, too, would have given a nod of recognition to Blake's

Oh Earth, O Earth, return  
 Arise from out the dewey grass. (Abrams 1327)

Like Wordsworth, whose mountain strode after him “with purpose of its own” (Abrams 1458), Uvunuaq, too, sees the land as reflecting her inner turmoil. When she heard that her son had killed a man, she sang

Earth became like a mountain with pointed peak  
 And I stood on the awl-like pinnacle  
 And faltered  
 And fell. (Colombo 51)

Birney’s bushed trapper was not the first Canadian to feel the great flint come singing into his heart.

Death is a frequent theme in Inuit poetry, for obvious reasons, but even this is handled much as it is in some non-Inuit works. Netsit’s “Dead Man’s Song” and Paulinaq’s “Song of Aijut After his Death” both explore fear of death and a simultaneous longing to escape life. Like Archibald Lampman, they imagine what it would be like, but the Inuit composers use stock phrases from the oral tradition and impart their own particular understanding of the experience. Netsit sings:

I am filled with joy  
 When the day peacefully dawns  
 Up over the heavens. (Colombo 96)

Paulinaq similarly sings

I am filled with joy  
 When the big sun up there  
 Rises up over the vault of the sky. (Colombo 98)

Both tell of feeling the maggots in the hollows of the collarbone, and of being buried in a snow-hut. Paulinaq, however, projects his fears onto the hunter Aijut and does not have the same need as Netsit to end with a consolation or positive statement. He ends as a corpse buried in the igloo:

And I felt horror  
 There on the freshwater ice  
 And I felt horror  
 When from the great sky out there  
 Came the loud cracking of the ice. (Colombo 99)

By dwelling on the horrors of death and his failure to enjoy life, Netsit manages to revive his interest in the new day:

Now I am filled with joy  
 For every time a dawn  
 Makes white the sky of night,

For every time the sun goes up  
Over the heavens. (Colombo 97)

Dawn seems to be a dangerous time for Inuit poets — it can mark the new day, and renewal, but sometimes Nauliajuk's dog husband is referred to as the "hound of dawn" as well as the "hound of death" (Colombo 113), so it has ambiguous implications. Netsit's version of the vision of death, with its question/answer sequence, feels more complete, a true inner-debate, an internal song duel.

The famous satiric song duels, in their purest forms, were a remarkable judicial and cultural achievement but very few examples have survived intact. Perhaps it was because every duel had a winner and a loser and nobody wanted to take the time to memorize a losing song. The satiric songs that have been transcribed and translated into English are often directed against the self. In the Ammassalik Eskimo "Song of an Old Man About His Wife," the poet reflects on the fact that his wife's face, wrinkled and blotched with age, is a mirror of his own, and they are neither of them young and handsome anymore (Lewis 84). In the traditional "Song of Longing" the poet mocks his own infatuation with other men's wives (Colombo 29). In "The Old Woman's Song," the poet mocks her own lost youth and appeal, and sings:

Virtue is only to be found in old women  
And therefore it is my sorrow  
Oh, I am so sad  
Because I am old. (Colombo 48)

The ability to laugh at one's own sexual intemperance, and to puncture one's own pretentiousness, is something the Inuit poets share with a number of contemporary Canadian poets. Al Purdy, who travelled with the people of Baffin, is one who comes immediately to mind. The composer of "The Old Man's Song," like Purdy, makes fun of his own intellectual musings:

I have grown old  
I have lived much  
Many things I understand  
But four riddles I cannot solve  
  
The sun's origin  
The moon's nature  
The minds of women  
And why people have so many lice. (Colombo 48)

Of course, Inuit poets frequently mean the opposite of what they say, and when they list all the things they cannot do they are sometimes simply making sure that people know that they are, in fact, highly accomplished men and women who are simply too polite to brag.

COMPARING INUIT POETRY to English poetry stresses the universal nature of the works; the world inhabited by the Thule people is far away in time and space, but they were expressing their responses to the human condition in ways that have been used by many other cultures in many other times. Poems about birth, work, sex, and death are bound to touch chords in everyone.

It is well to remember, though, that there is one major difference between the contemporary Canadian poetic tradition and that of the traditional Inuit. Inuit believed in the practical application of poetry. While our own poets composed verses describing their feelings about the weather, Inuit poets believed that if they got the words of their poem just right, they could actually affect the weather. If there is any one cultural element that is foreign to English-language readers, it is this. Our nearest equivalent would be a belief in the efficacy of prayer. Bad weather was more than just an inconvenience to Inuit, and the song that could improve it was often all that stood between life and death. Such a song had as much practical importance as a sharp knife or an antibiotic. When Aua sang "This is blood that flowed from a piece of wood. Dry it up!" (Colombo 59), he believed that the words, and the words alone, could actually stop a wound from bleeding.

Such a belief in the power of words must produce poems of tremendous endurance. A frequently quoted explanation comes from the Inuit explorer and poet Knud Rasmussen:

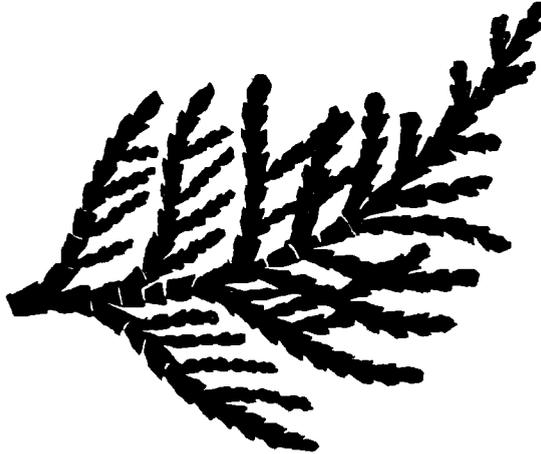
These works don't arrive like fragile orchids from the hot houses of professional poets; they have flowered like rough, weather beaten saxifrage which has taken root on rock. And they ought to matter to us. For do we not hear through them something that reminds us of the original features of our own old songs — the same teasing humour, the same quiet melancholia — and sometimes in glimpses, a simple but grandiose pathos which grips us by virtue of its immediacy. (qtd. in Lowenstein 109)

It was this sense of our own tradition that Dr. Johnson recognized when he published the "Greenland Ode," and it is this, too, that Rudy Wiebe and John Robert Colombo hope we will all recognize.

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# A PRAIRIE MUSEUM

*Jim Tallosi*

city-dwellers  
walk past leafless rose  
and snowberry bushes  
looking for crocuses  
in the dead grass

as they walk  
into its smallness  
sky and horizon grow  
buildings almost disappear

meadowlark sings  
the sun's new song

crows exchange  
their black song  
with the white song  
of seagulls

closer to the centre  
single flowers  
give way to bunches

pollen covered bees  
crawl into blue heads

*May 1 /85*



# BELUGAS

*Jim Tallosi*

four grey belugas  
swim in a blue tank  
behind the motel

they blow and suck air  
then dive  
they swim in circles  
and criss-cross

the sea has walls  
journeys  
are no longer infinite

they talk  
in long buzzing words  
or, are they short songs?

an attendant from town  
stands nearby  
silently smoking tailor-mades  
a boy throws pebbles  
over the compound fence

the sea has walls  
and on the weekend  
whales will fly

*Churchill /87*



# FOUR DANCERS

*Jim Tallosi*

the winds  
are four dancers  
that become  
many dances

they rise  
in the distance  
in a place  
that is stillness

they hear  
a heart beat  
and dance  
its rhythms

they dance  
in the distance  
and dance  
in our presence

they dance  
in our words  
they dance  
in our breathing

they dance  
our world  
they dance  
our being

the winds  
are four dancers  
that become  
many dances

*Aug. 2 /87*

# THAT ALSO IS YOU

## *Some Classics of Native Canadian Literature*

*Robert Bringhurst*

**O**NCE UPON A TIME there was one small island, nothing more. The gods were clinging to it, clustered together like bladderkelp and barnacles, so thickly they could scarcely breathe. And the Raven, tied like a baby in his cradle, was floating on the sea. A voice called out to him, and he wriggled up from his martenskin blankets and looked around. In the midst of the endless flexing and rolling of the ocean, his cradle thumped and scraped against something solid. It was tall and thin and stretched as far as he could see below the waves that broke over the top of it. It was stone, and the stone was full of faces he had never seen outside his dreams. He clambered down it into deep water. In the wet twilight in front of him stood a house, and a voice came through the doorway, saying in the Haida language, *Hala qách'i t'ak'in'gha*:<sup>1</sup> "Come inside, my grandson." *Digha dá gyasildaghásas danggha kúngagan*: "From me you will borrow, to you I will give."

In the house beneath the sea, he met an Old Man White as a Gull, who spoke to him again in Haida. But what the Old Man said to him next was something the Raven did not fully understand.

*Dí hau dang íji. Wáasing dang íji*: "I am you," the Old Man said, "and that also is you." He gestured as he said this toward something slender, blue as air and green as beachgrass, that was moving around the carved screens at the rear of the house, like a heron choosing a fishing hole.

"Bring me that box," said the Old Man, "from the corner behind you."

In the sides of the box which the Raven brought were faces, with faces in the eyes, and in the eyes of the faces in the eyes, another set of faces. Inside the box was another box, and inside that box was another. Five in all, and inside the fifth box, side by side, were two round objects, one black and one speckled. The Old Man wrapped a full five fingers around each of them and held them out to the Raven, like stones in a hawk's claws, one in each hand.

"Lay these on the water, the speckled one first," said the Old Man. "But before you lay them down, take a bite out of each one, first the black one, then the speckled.

When you lay them on the water, spit the pieces you hold in your mouth at the parts you have been holding in your hands.”

Squeezing the two round objects in his fists, the Raven climbed back to the surface of the sea. He bit the speckled object first, and then the black one, and set the black one down on the water and the speckled one beside it. And he spit out the bits he had chewed, but they bounced away. He picked up the two round objects, which were out-of-round now, and tried again. Black one first, bite, speckled one second, bite, speckled one first, float, black one, float, spit, and the speckled and black objects wrinkled and stretched across the water, becoming the Mainland and the Islands. Lichens blossomed over the rock. Forests of red cedar, spruce, hemlock and pine appeared, and blueberry bushes and cranberry bushes and ferns, and stands of wild apple and alder. And the gods swam up to make homes for themselves in the cliffs, the reefs, and the creek mouths, out of the endless expanse of the sea.

Much later on, when the Raven wanted some company at a feast, he introduced human beings onto the land. John Sky of Tanu used to say they were groping about in the darkness under the earth, and the Raven called them up to the surface by beating a drum, in the four corners of the house that belonged to his uncle Sghúlghuqúna. Others say he discovered the males and created the females by mating the males with shellfish he found on the beach at low tide. Those islands have been known since then as Haida Gwai — *Xáida Gwai*, as it is written in Haida. *Gwai* means islands, and *Xáida* has three concentric meanings. It means the Haida, as distinct from the Kwakiutl, the British, the Athabaskans, the Chinese; and it means human beings, as distinct from black bears, salmon, red-shafted flickers and killer whales. It also means the inner nature of everything living, because in the science of the Haida, not only the Raven but every creature possesses, in its inner life, beyond our superficial observations, human emotions and intelligence and form.

WHEN EUROPEANS FIRST SAILED into Haida waters, late in the eighteenth century, Haida Gwai harboured a wealthy and settled culture of mesolithic seahunters. Their language bore no obvious relationship to any other spoken anywhere on earth, but their mythology, their oral literature, their music and dance and visual art were intimately linked with those of the Tsimshian, the Tlingit, and the northern Kwakiutl, who populate the rest of the coast of northern British Columbia and southeastern Alaska. The archaeological record suggests that this pattern of life had developed in situ without radical change over some 2,500 years. The record of human habitation in the Islands extends at least 5,000 years beyond that,<sup>2</sup> and still earlier sites may exist, though they are likely to be under water.

For several decades after Europeans discovered the place, the visual art of the Haida and neighbouring cultures flared with exhilarating brightness. The primary reason was the sudden injection of wealth and new technology, in the form of metal tools; a secondary reason was the new cross-cultural market for souvenirs. While this brief light burned, silence descended. The intellectual and literary world of the Haida came abruptly to an end.

Discovery, as the word is used in American history, has taken an odd meaning little connected with learning. The corresponding verb in Haida, *gáhl*, like its counterpart in Homeric Greek, *heuriskein*, is tinged with wonder and fear. These words portend new visions, new knowledge, and with it the promise that the discoverer will be discovered in his turn: changed in ways that cannot be foreseen. In American history, these changes and their conscious realization have been repeatedly deferred and frequently aborted. To say that Haida Gwai was discovered in the eighteenth century therefore means both worse and less than it might. It means that a number of traders and entrepreneurs, Christian missionaries, naval officers, sailors and admiralty clerks learned of the Islands' existence as a source of raw materials and colonizable lands and souls, but not as a world inhabited by human beings whose knowledge and traditions differed instructively from theirs. None of the early European visitors undertook to investigate Haida culture, even for reasons of counterintelligence, as Bernardino de Sahagún had explored the culture of the Aztecs 250 years before.<sup>3</sup> The commercial, institutional and territorial frontier was discovered, while its implicit other side, the intellectual and spiritual frontier, remained unseen.

An assortment of imported names — Nova Hibernia, Washington's Isles, *Islas Infante Don Fernando* — was imposed on the Islands by competing colonial cartographers. The name that stuck is the one contributed by a British merchant seaman in 1787: the Queen Charlotte Islands. He knew, I suspect, that his name would be read as a gesture of patriotism — that he would seem to have christened the Islands in honour of England's non-English-speaking queen — when in fact he was naming them for his ship, the *Queen Charlotte*, in which, after the first season of trade, he carried away from Haida Gwai some 2,000 sea otter skins. The sea otter population of the Islands a century later could be measured not in thousands but in ones or tens. To discover, in this sense, means to strike it rich and leave it poor, and to leave the learning for later. The corresponding Haida word is not *gáhl* but *ch'is*, used of gamblers when they win.

Current maps show Haida Gwai, the Queen Charlotte Islands, as the westernmost extremity of Canada, but to some of us who live on that coast now, they are also the region's spiritual capital: nothing like Rome, and not much like Jerusalem, but something like a rainy, untouristed Cyclades, Eleusis, Delphi, Thebes.

Haida society as Europeans first encountered it was divided into two strictly exogamous sides — *g'wal* in Haida — known by their primary crests, the Eagle

and the Raven; but there is evidence in Haida mythology that this rigid bilateral structure was not the only social order the Haida had ever known. The sides were composed in turn of several dozen families or clans (*gwaigyaghang*) with names such as Qáiahllánas (Sealion People) and Q'únaqíghawai (Those Born at Q'úna), each sharing in the general body of Haida mythology and each with a tributary narrative tradition of its own. It was also a stratified culture, with *kilstl* (spokesmen or chiefs) and *ít'gha* (princes, both male and female) at the top, and at the bottom a class of humans treated as chattels: *xaldanga*, captives, or as it is usually translated, slaves.

The practice of slavery is often cited as evidence of Haida barbarism, and even as evidence that exploitation or missionization was just what they needed and deserved. I am not sorry that the institution has lapsed, and I am not promoting its revival, but I think it is worth remembering that, so far as we can tell, slavery among the Haida was never a racist phenomenon, like the slavery still practised in South Africa and formerly in the United States. Nor was it, as in feudal Europe or antebellum Georgia or the Transvaal, a structural feature of the economic system. *Xaldanga* appear in Haida literature more often in the role of trusted factors and managers than as victimized labourers. In the myths, their shamanic powers often exceed those of their masters, and they are usually treated with wary respect, like the swineherd Eúmaios in the *Odyssey*.

At the other extreme, there are also stories of slaves being publicly murdered in fits of ritual ostentation; but episodes of that kind never occur in the myths; they are confined to lesser genres — the soap operas and pop autobiographies that are also part of Haida oral literature. It is probable, on the evidence, that in Haida Gwaii in the nineteenth century the ceremonial murder of slaves was a fairly recent aberration, and clearly it was not routine, just as it was not routine for Hebrew patriarchs like Abraham and Jephthah nor Greek commanders like Agamemnon to make ceremonial offerings of their children. The captivity of most *xaldanga* was evidently temporary, and its motives were pride and greed: the social posturing of the captor, and the chance of collecting a ransom.

Power was also divided asymmetrically between the sexes in traditional Haida culture, and there were certainly cases of sexual oppression. Men frequently took precedence over their wives in daily affairs, while the underlying systems for the inheritance of wealth and worldly power were entirely matrilineal.

In short, Haida society at the moment of European contact was in several respects like ours: it was wealthy, and it was disfigured in particular by materialism, pride, and social ambition. It was not utopia, nor wilderness, nor a state of noble savagery. And it was not what Europeans have preferred to call it: a New World. Haida culture, with its foibles, cruelties, and peculiarities, had been thousands of years in the making. But its human failings — which, being little different from

ours, have few secrets to tell us — matter less in retrospect than its artistic and intellectual achievements, which differed from ours a good deal.

ONCE, IT SEEMS, there was scarcely a stream or a reef or a cove, or a species of fish or mammal or bird, that lacked its place in the multi-dimensional web, the narrative map of relations between the Haida and their world. Even now, abused as it is, the land is thick with images and stories, rich with meanings beyond the reach of history. But few of these remain in living memory.

On the heels of the fur traders and the military vessels came the missionaries, the smallpox, the whalers, then the miners, homesteaders, loggers. Each plague has had its effect. The native population was probably six or seven thousand at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the end of the same century, it was six or seven hundred.

Just at that moment, when the old culture was breathing its last, in the autumn of 1900, a young anthropologist named John Swanton arrived in Haida Gwaii. On commission from Franz Boas, curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History, Swanton spent nearly a year in the Islands, learning everything he could of Haida culture. And Swanton had a particular gift, rare among anthropologists, for putting oral poets and storytellers at ease. Like all the early anthropologists on the Northwest Coast, John Swanton was a man, and the stories he heard were told exclusively by men. The picture he gives us of Haida literature is inevitably incomplete, but most of the narratives he collected are uncommonly full and well told. He was also — so far as I can judge, after learning almost everything I know of the language from him — an extraordinarily scrupulous, graceful translator.

Franz Boas, an early refugee from German anti-Semitism and an ardent believer in racial equality, was nonetheless little interested in the contributions which individual tellers make to the tale. He repudiated the notions of Western supremacy and world progress popular among laymen, researchers, and educators alike during his time, but he was interested in art and oral literature purely as evidence for the variety and interrelations of the cultures from which they sprang. I think he found individual artistry little more than a distraction. Ambitious, impatient, proud, but relentlessly persistent, Boas nevertheless understood the rapidity with which the ancient cultures of the Northwest Coast were dying. His salvage operation, conducted with cold-blooded urgency by mail, by proxy and in person, ran from 1886, when he made his first trip to the coast, to 1942, when he collapsed in mid-sentence at the age of 84.

To Boas and to other scholars whom he provoked, promoted and funded, we owe most of our knowledge of Northwest Coast mythology: the most coherent and

intricate body of mythical thought that has been salvaged from the pre-colonial world of northern North America. To John Swanton — modest, patient, self-effacing, but similarly persistent, and a much better listener than Boas — we owe our knowledge of one crucial part of this heritage: the culture of the Haida, and in particular their oral literature. It is the most accomplished and best documented body of aboriginal oral literature from anywhere in Canada. The only other accumulations of native North American narrative which seem to me of similar breadth and intensity come from the American Southwest, where scholars like Bernard Haile, Gladys Reichard, and Ruth Bunzel have recorded the rich and durable oral literature of the Pueblo peoples and the Navajo.

There is no guarantee that the oral literature of the Haida, the Hopi and the Navajo was inherently greater than that of other groups, like the Squamish or Paiute or Tutchone. The recording of native American oral literature was necessarily haphazard. It required the coincidence of poets and storytellers — some better and some worse — with anthropologists — some interested but incompetent, some competent but impatient, and a few who were patient, well trained, and very lucky. John Swanton was one of these few, and out of the holocaust suffered by the Haida, the fruits of his skill, talent, and luck descend to us. No one of Swanton's calibre collected stories among the Squamish until Aert Kuipers's work with Louis Miranda in the 1960s — nearly a century too late. Nevertheless, on the evidence available, it seems clear that Haida oral literature had the monumentality, subtlety, gravity, restraint and the sly, involuted humour of Haida and Tlingit visual art: features far more conspicuous there than in the surviving art and literature from the interior of British Columbia or from farther south along the coast. The best of the extant Haida narratives, like the best of the extant rattles and poles, are, as the Haida say, *nágwighagwi q'itá*: they are fluently and deeply carved.

**A**MONG THE HAIDA POETS who told stories to Swanton during 1900 and 1901, two stand out as masters. They are Walter McGregor of the Qáiahllánas<sup>4</sup> and John Sky of the Q'únaqíghawai.<sup>5</sup> Both belonged to the Eagle side of the Haida, and both were probably born between 1830 and 1840. They lived at a time when European activity in the Americas was almost entirely predatory, and during their lifetimes the ancient world to which their stories belonged was destroyed. Yet those same years saw a powerful reawakening of archaic thought in Europe. Sky's and McGregor's contemporaries include Charles Darwin, Elias Lönnrot, Nietzsche and Yeats, Van Gogh and Matisse, the archaeologists Heinrich Schliemann (who excavated Troy and Mycenae) and Marcellino de Sautuola (who with the aid of his young daughter discovered Altamira), as well as anthropologists like E. B. Tylor, James Frazer, and Boas himself. Their spiritual children

include such students of the prehistoric as Carl Jung, Ezra Pound, Pablo Picasso, and Joan Miró.

We have names for very few pre-colonial Canadian poets and storytellers, and for none before the nineteenth century. Even then, their native names are almost always lost to us, like the rich sounds of their voices. We know them instead by bizarre colonial labels like Moses and Abraham, Albert and Charles, Stevens and Sydney — gifts of a missionary culture that promoted European social conventions as zealously as it promoted the Christian religion. But the names of John Sky of the Q'únaqíghawai and Walter McGregor of the Qáiahllánas should be known to students of Canadian literature as the names of Homer and Sappho, Aeschylus and Sophocles are known to all who study the literature of Europe. Yet another among their contemporaries was one of the greatest Haida visual artists, and again the earliest of the great carvers for whom we have a name: Charles Edenshaw (1839-1924).

Like all Haida of that period, Sky and McGregor led difficult, dislocated lives in a decomposing world. Soon before or after their birth, smallpox epidemics halved the Haida population. A further epidemic during their youth halved it again. As the population collapsed, villages were amalgamated or abandoned until, by 1900, only two Haida communities remained. McGregor was born at Qaisun, on the northwest coast of Moresby Island, and probably raised, with other refugees from that village, at Haina, on Maude Island, in Skidegate Inlet. John Sky came from Tanu, on Tanu Island, off the east coast of Moresby, but he probably spent the late 1880s and early 1890s at a temporary settlement called New Kloo, on the north coast of Louise Island. Like the other surviving Haida from throughout the southern archipelago, both Sky and McGregor had moved to Skidegate Mission<sup>6</sup> by 1900, when John Swanton came collecting.

Swanton published the fruits of his year with the Haida — two volumes of stories, a volume of songs, a general ethnology and a preliminary grammar — between 1905 and 1912.<sup>7</sup> He left in manuscript the rough beginnings of a very small bilingual dictionary. But he was able to publish bilingual texts of virtually all the stories told to him in the northern (Masset) dialect. He prepared his full collection of Skidegate dialect stories for bilingual publication as well, but only thirteen of the seventy were actually printed in Haida, and the others issued simply in English translation. The Haida texts of these stories survive in manuscript — except for one very important missing page — in the library of the American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia. Added to the published texts, these manuscripts double the extant body of classical Haida literature. I hope there are more of Swanton's Haida transcripts to be found, since there are many odds and ends still unaccounted for. But among the unpublished materials at Philadelphia are half a dozen stories by John Sky and nine by Walter of the Qáiahllánas. These include Sky's version of the

Raven epic, *Xúya qagángas*, and his story of the weather god of Hecate Strait, *Nangldástlas*, “the Slender One Given Away,” two masterpieces of oral literature and models of anthropological transcription. The same manuscript hoard includes the Haida text of Walter McGregor’s beguiling story *Ghángghang lanágha ghanang xilit ch’inhlgwangxhidághan*, “One Who Hunted Birds in His Father’s Village” — well known to students of native American literature in Swanton’s English translation, thanks to a book-length study by Gary Snyder.<sup>8</sup>

These titles, incidentally, are not museum tags affixed to the stories by Swanton. In literature as in visual art, the Haida distinguished between themes central to the culture and themes with which it was acceptable to mess around. Swanton’s findings suggest strongly that each important story possessed a discrete identity, a title, and at least an approximate place in an ideal, if unrealized, hierarchical order. The myths were named and seated with care, like important guests at a Haida banquet or houses in a Haida town. Lesser yarns, including those which comprised the “young man’s” portion of the Raven epic, could be strung together more haphazardly.

Much as I revere the work of some of my elders and colleagues among colonial Canadian writers, I do not see that any of us has produced anything better — anything more deserving of close contemplation, discussion, and praise — than those stories told by ancestors so close I can touch their graves, I can drink from the streams and eat from the waters and forests they knew — and yet so far away I do not even know how their friends and their children addressed them. If there is such a thing as Canadian literature, actually distinct from the literature of Europe, John Sky of the Q’únaqíghawai and Walter McGregor of the Qáiahllánas are two of its earliest and greatest classical authors.

It would be a great pleasure, therefore, to publish the unpublished texts from Swanton’s files — hundreds of pages of some of the most enigmatic, poignant and beautiful narrative I have ever encountered — but the pleasure would be tempered slightly by the knowledge that at present no one could read them.

During the early decades of this century, children from all the native nations of the Northwest Coast were forced into boarding schools, where they were generally forbidden to speak their own languages, to maintain the traditional proprieties of moiety separation and clan distinction, or to draw, carve and paint in native forms. Their elders, during the same years, risked imprisonment for celebrating traditional winter ceremonies. The law which forbade native Canadians to perform the central rituals of their culture remained in force for more than sixty years, lapsing only in 1951. What remained of traditional Haida culture, after the population had suddenly shrunk by a factor of ten, was effectively stilled by this means.

Nevertheless, about the time that the Potlatch Law expired, a few young whites and Indians were beginning to rediscover the vocabulary and grammar of the

visual art of the Northwest Coast. One artist in particular, Bill Reid of the Q'ádasghuqíghawai,<sup>9</sup> and one scholar in particular, Bill Holm of the University of Washington, have resuscitated that art, partly through contact with those who remembered it, but chiefly through study of works preserved in museums.

There is now a substantial resurgence of the traditional visual art — at least in its outward form. More recently, there has also been a political reawakening in Haida Gwaii, provoked by the threat of continued logging. But the literary legacy of the Potlatch Law, the boarding schools, the smallpox epidemics, and the white colonization of the Islands remains. There seem to be no fluent speakers of the Haida language among the young or middle-aged, and no one alive speaks the rich, archaic language in which John Sky of the Q'únaqíghawai and Walter McGregor of the Qáiahllánas sang their songs and spoke their tales.

Perhaps the art of telling the stories can be relearned, like the visual art, from library specimens. The language itself can also be studied, like Sanskrit, Latin, Greek and archaic Chinese, and I can testify that it repays the labour a thousandfold. But to rekindle it from such slender remains into living form, like Hebrew or Gaelic, would require a major miracle. A native carver can now make a living by recreating traditional forms, either in European media such as bronze, precious metal or silk-screen prints, or in the native media of red cedar, alder, argillite and abalone shell. No artist now makes a living by way of his mastery of a native Canadian language. These economic facts help to explain why Charles Edenshaw has at least one eminent successor, the sculptor Bill Reid, while Sky and McGregor, to the best of my knowledge, have none.

In some of the Algonkian and Athabaskan languages, and in Inuktitut, where the number of living speakers is much larger and their median age lower, the situation is potentially much different. In many communities, stories are still told in the native languages, and at least in Inuktitut, Cree, and Ojibwa, radio programs are broadcast, newspapers published, documents written. These are all cause for hope, because they are agents as well as signs of linguistic survival. But even where native literacy is widespread, years of religious and commercial missionization have pushed the ancestral languages to the edges of the field. In written form, they are rarely used except for ecclesiastical and Christian liturgical texts, or for journalism, public relations and administrative tasks. (I remember, for instance, that in 1987, when a Cree and Ojibwa publishing house seemed about to take form in northern Ontario, the Canada Council was persuaded to open its funding programs to writers and publishers of literature in aboriginal languages. This proved to be a false alarm, and no writer or publisher working in a native language has yet applied for the funds.) Writing is not literature, literacy is not culture, and the continuation of storytelling also does not signify the survival of an oral literature in the developed sense of the term.

WE KNOW ALMOST NOTHING about the training which myth-tellers like Sky and McGregor received, and very little about the training even of visual artists like Edenshaw. That they were trained is obvious nevertheless in the character of their imagination and the quality of their craftsmanship. The difference between the handling of sacred stories by poets like Sky and McGregor on the one hand and, on the other, the spinning of yarns or summarizing of myths by raconteurs on the margins of the tradition is a glaring and categorical difference, difficult to miss even when the style is masked by translation. In the original transcriptions, these differences are not only obvious but confirmable to skeptics by cold stylistic analysis.

How much such analysis can teach us about traditional Haida prosody still remains to be seen,<sup>10</sup> but a few lines even in silent transcription will show some of the surface features typical of traditional Haida narrative. Here the poet is John Sky, and the context is the episode from the Raven epic, *Xúya qagángas*, with which we began:

- Gyanhau l qáahlaiwas.  
 Hlqyáma qáji sq'asting hlghít l gáighaghadángdyis.  
 Gyanhau gut la qágaiyasi.  
 T'ís gyaghang qáji sting gut t'aghaní la qágyas.  
 5 Gyanhau gut la qát'álasí.  
 Sagái lághan ghíidas ghangáxan chighan'gai lághan ghíidasi.

- Gyanhau nai q'yúgi la gyáxatl'xasi.  
 Gyanhau laghan la gháguyingch'aiyaghan.  
 "Hala qách'i t'ak'ingha.  
 10 Dígha dá gyasildaghásas danggha kíngagan."  
 Gyanhau gíla qách'áasi.  
 Tajxhwá nang q'áiyaga sq'in gangáng ghída q'áuwás.

This is to say, in a fairly strict though sometimes uncertain rendering:

- Then he sat up.  
 A kelp with a double head: against it he was floating.  
 Then he stepped onto it.  
 A stone housepole with two heads: on it, you see, he was standing.  
 5 Then he descended it.  
 How it was to him above is how it was to him below.
- Then a house: in front of it he was standing.  
 Then out of it a voice came to him calling.  
 "Come inside, my grandson.  
 10 From me you will borrow, to you I will give."  
 Then he went in.  
 At the back an elder, white as a gull, was sitting.

The Haida had many kinds of song, and they borrowed or purchased lyrics freely from the Tsimshian, but their narrative poetry, so far as I can determine, was always spoken or declaimed instead of sung or chanted. The narrative verse, if we should call it that, is syntactically rather than metrically patterned — but in this, as in its terseness and laminar progression, it resembles the narrative poetry of several, possibly all, other indigenous Northwest Coast languages. By far the most common thematic unit is a short sentence or clause which begins nonchalantly with a continuative particle — usually *gyan* or *gyanhau* (“and then”) — and builds to a greater or lesser semantic crescendo in the sometimes simple, sometimes highly elaborate agglutinative verb. Many other devices, including symmetrically paired predicates (as in lines 6 and 10 above) and balanced but asymmetrical pairs constructed of noun phrase and predicate (lines 2 and 4 above), are used to vary this general texture of “verb-stopped lines.” As even this modest sample shows, in the hands of an artist like John Sky, these duple forms and other variations on the standard verse-sentence may be cunningly and closely fitted to the theme. (The two-headed kelp appears in a two-headed sentence, and so on.)

These crisp, economical clauses, like Charles Edenshaw’s ovoids and Homer’s hexameters, are the fruit of a long and well-tended tradition still urgently alive in the hands of an individual artist. The narrative language to which they belong permits continued improvisation and invention, but the fruit depends upon the vine. The reticence and formality of these narratives is as foreign to the world of bedside and campfire storytelling or impromptu reminiscence as it is to the world of the naturalistic novel or the descriptive, impressionistic first-person poem.

**N**O TRADITION OF NATIVE LITERACY ever developed in Haida Gwaii, so the question of how or whether the oral style might be adapted to written Haida never arose. But written literature had an early start among the neighbouring mainland cultures. Franz Boas, not surprisingly, served as a kind of midwife at its creation. Nevertheless, the lives of the early native writers remain almost as obscure as the lives of the oral poets — and again we know them only by substitute, acculturated names. The earliest and, I think, the most important native writers of the Northwest Coast are George Hunt, writing in Kwakwaka, and Henry Tate, writing in Tsimshian.

Hunt was born at Fort Rupert, British Columbia, in 1854 and died in 1933. His mother was Tlingit and his father Scots, but Hunt was raised among the Fort Rupert Kwakiutl and spoke Kwakwaka as his mother tongue. He was also an initiated hamatsa — a member of the Kwakiutl winter dance society. Boas met him on one of his early field trips, probably in 1888, and a few years later hired him to assemble an exhibit for the Chicago Exposition. Along with a collection of

Kwakiutl artifacts, Hunt was asked to bring to Chicago several villagers to serve as a "living ethnology exhibit."

In Chicago, therefore, in the summer of 1893, while Hunt stage-managed something between a theatrical troupe and a human zoo exhibit, Boas trained him in ethnological field techniques and linguistic transcription. Hunt then returned to the coast, where he wrote texts in Kwakwaka'wakw and supplied them to Boas, with rough interlinear English translations, for more than thirty years.

Much of Hunt's writing is published in bilingual form, edited by Boas, with collaborative translations. (Hunt is listed in each case as co-author.) Much of his work is also translated and analyzed in Boas's several studies of Kwakiutl culture and religion, but still more remains in manuscript.

Henry Tate, a contemporary of Hunt, Sky, and McGregor, was born and raised a Coast Tsimshian. I do not know the date or place of his birth, but it cannot have been much before or after 1850, and I suspect it was near Port Simpson, where he spent his later years and where he died in 1914. His people were the Gitzaklalth, whose ancestral territory centred on Dundas Island.

Tate learned to read and write his native tongue in the orthography devised by Bishop William Ridley for his Tsimshian translation of the Christian gospels, and like Hunt, he could write rough English as well. He began to sell Tsimshian stories to Boas about 1902, sending his manuscripts to New York by mail, and continued to do so until his death twelve years later. Like Hunt, he earned a steady rate of fifty cents per page.

Boas edited some of Tate's work with a Tsimshian assistant, Archie Dundas, making dialectical alterations and transliterating the texts into his usual orthography. Six stories were published bilingually in this form in 1912.<sup>11</sup> The bulk of Tate's work, however — including his version of the Raven epic, *Txamsem* — has, like most of the work of Sky and McGregor, only been published in English translation.<sup>12</sup> Not one in a hundred students of Canadian literature would recognize Tate's name, but few Canadian writers have received more scholarly attention. Boas's largest book, *Tsimshian Mythology* (1916), is nothing less and little more than a comparative study of the writings of Henry Tate. It is also, I believe, the first substantial study of the work of any Canadian writer, regardless of language.<sup>13</sup>

Boas complained that Tate suffered from Christian scruple, and his stories do sometimes seem pale. But where no overt sexuality is involved, his prose often possesses considerable verve. Hunt's work, on the other hand, suffers from cynicism. Throughout most of his writing career, Hunt also worked for the American Museum as a buyer. Overall, he purchased and shipped to New York some 2,500 works of Kwakiutl art, including some that the Kwakiutl were not anxious to part with.<sup>14</sup> There is something of this subversive disdain in his writing as well. Tate, like Hunt, consulted his elders for stories, but he had no pretensions, as Hunt did, to be an apprentice anthropologist. He did not take dictation, and he had no

ethnological training. He preferred to listen in public and write in private, as writers usually do.

I know of earlier native writers — translators and journalists for the most part — in eastern and central North America, and there is no shortage of early documents. The technology of writing, introduced by missionaries, was very widespread in native North American communities in the nineteenth century. Indigenous writing systems were introduced among the Cherokee by Sequoya in the 1820s, and among the Cree by James Evans in the 1840s, and there were missionary translators at work with the roman alphabet two centuries before that. I do not have the linguistic credentials to assess the resulting Bibles and Gospels (many at least partly by native hands) as works of literary translation. But I have begun to develop a sense of the work of Hunt and Tate, who are both aboriginal writers in the full sense of the word. They committed directly to paper works in a native Canadian language and a native Canadian tradition. They are the first such that I know of — and, to date, they are very nearly the last.

I read Sky and McGregor now in preference to Tate and Hunt, as I read Homer in preference to Virgil. But I want to see the works and the languages of all four of them studied and taught, as Greek and Latin and Anglo-Saxon language and texts are still studied and taught, at least in a few of our universities — not because that is the purpose for which they were made, but because that is the best response and acknowledgement we can now offer them. But no university in the world has yet regarded them in this way. University courses in Native Studies are scarce; courses in native Canadian languages are far scarcer. There is no Centre for the Study of Oral Literature, or Centre for the Study of Aboriginal Literature, anywhere in Canada. And nowhere in the world, so far as I know, is Canadian literature taught with more than a token aboriginal component.

Overall, it seems to me, we have tried very hard to do to ourselves what we did to the Haida. We have tried, that is, to discover everything and to learn nothing: to win big now and to leave the losses for others or save them for later. To burn up the world, and by its furious light, to make fortunes, and even great art, in prodigious quantities, leaving voicelessness, emptiness, storylessness — which is vastly worse than illiteracy — behind.

**Q**'AHLGÁW, THE LOON, is the Raven's mother and daughter. And once upon a time the Loon came up to the surface of the endless sea and gave her piercing, mournful call and went back under. The Loon lived with the Old Man White as a Gull, under the sea, and when she returned to his house the Old Man lay where she had left him, facing the wall, with his back to the fire. Without turning to look at her, the Old Man asked, "Why are you calling?"

“Not on my own account,” the Loon said. “But I hear the gods saying they have no place to live. That is why I am calling.”

“I will make something,” said the Old Man White as a Gull, but he didn’t budge. He lay there, facing the wall, with his back to the fire.

Soon thereafter, the Raven was flying over the surface of the sea. In that country, we call the sky *yán qa’án*, the bottom of the cloud, because that is what it looks like most days. But this day, overhead, the Raven saw a clear blue opening. He flew straight up, driving his beak into the luminous roof of the air. It made a sound like a musselshell knife biting into clear red cedar and stuck fast. The Raven pulled himself up over the sky’s rim and stepped onto the beach in front of a town. The sky ebbed and flowed in front of the houses just as the sea does here against the land.

In one of the houses of that town, a woman had recently borne a child. That night, the Raven entered the house and skinned the newborn child and threw his bones away and dressed himself in the skin. Then he lay down in the cradle, waiting.

Next day, he played with his new grandfather and drank from his new mother’s breast, and he cried for solid food, but they offered him none. That night he wriggled out of the cradle and walked through the town, filling his basket. Just before dawn he returned, roasted his food in the embers and ate it, quietly laughing. His food made a popping sound as he ate it, as if it were fish roe. But no one saw him or heard him except an old woman standing in the corner of the house, who never slept and never moved. Her name was *Nangt’ijihlghágas*, Halfstone. She was stone from the waist down.

Each of the sky people lost one eye that night, and the cries of their grief echoed through the village in the morning. When silence fell, the old woman coughed lightly, wiped her hand on her stone thigh, and told what she had seen.

The sky people dressed at once and gathered on the beach to dance and launch their canoes. They paddled the newborn child out to the middle of the sky, where they wrapped him in a martenskin blanket, laced him back into his cradle and dropped him over the side. He turned round and round to the right as he fell, and as they watched, one-eyed, from up above, his cradle splashed into the sea.

It was dark then, and he slept, and when he woke, he heard a voice saying, *Dang chin’gha qúnigai gwáhláng dang qách’ixalga*, “Your illustrious grandfather asks you in.” But when he looked, no one was there.

Again he heard the words and looked and saw nothing. And he heard them a third time and looked and saw nothing. Then he peeked through the hole in his martenskin blanket. This time he saw the Pied-bill Grebe come to the surface and speak the words and go under again.

He untied himself from his cradle and looked around. The cradle was washing up against something solid, slippery with kelp and sharp with barnacles, reaching up from the floor of the sea. He climbed down it into the water. You know the rest of the story.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am quoting John Sky's version of the story as recorded by John Swanton, from the unpublished Swanton manuscripts at Philadelphia, described in greater detail in the body of this essay.

There is no standard spelling for Haida, and none is likely, because of the wide dialectical differences in the extant texts and in the usage of the ever fewer surviving speakers. Franz Boas's orthography, which Swanton dutifully maintained, is too cumbersome for continued use, and its palette of vowels, as Swanton himself pointed out, is simply inaccurate. The alphabet devised for Kaigani Haida by Michael Krauss and Jeff Leer at the Alaska Native Language Center is blessedly simple, but it requires writing all the long vowels twice, which for extended texts, or even for quoting the titles of clans and mythcreatures, makes it far too greedy of space. The system I have come to use is a modified version of Krauss and Leer's.

In this system, long vowels (which more often than not carry a pitch accent as well) are marked with an acute. The sequence *ng* is a velar nasal, as it is in English, but when a plosive follows the nasalization (as in the English word *bingo*) the plosive is written as an extra letter (the Haida spelling would be *binggu* or *binggú*). When nasalization does not occur and the two phonemes remain distinct (as in English *barngate*), they are written with an apostrophe, *n'g*. Otherwise, the apostrophe following a consonant always indicates glottalization. An apostrophe after a vowel means a glottal stop. *Ch* is pronounced as in Spanish; *dl*, *hl* and *tl* are lateral affricates; *x* is a velar fricative, like the *ch* in Bach; *g* is a uvular *k*; *gh* and *xh* are pharyngeal (or uvular) *g* and *x*.

<sup>2</sup> The archaeological research is conveniently summarized in George MacDonald, *Haida Monumental Art* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Harrison's *Religion and Family Among the Haida* (Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland XXI, 1892).

<sup>4</sup> Qáiahllánas (Sealion People) is a clan of the Eagle side. Its members traced their descent from Qáilnagái, Sealion Town, near what is now called Second Beach, at the south end of the Skidegate Reserve.

<sup>5</sup> "Those Born at Q'úna," another Eagle clan. Q'úna is the Haida name for the abandoned settlement now called Skedans. Members of this clan were not necessarily themselves born at Q'úna, but all would claim ultimate descent from a house in that village.

<sup>6</sup> On the site of the old Haida village of Hlghaiulnaghái, "Pebble Town."

<sup>7</sup> Swanton's Haida publications are these:

1905a *Haida Texts and Myths: Skidegate Dialect* (Washington, DC: Bureau of American Ethnology).

1905b *Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida*. Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, vol. v.1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

1908 *Haida Texts: Masset Dialect*. Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, vol. x.2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

1910 *Haida: An Illustrative Sketch* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office).

1912 *Haida Songs*. In one volume with Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Texts (New Series)*. Publications of the American Ethnological Society, vol. III (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

The published works of Sky and McGregor appear in the first of these volumes and are summarized in the second.

- <sup>8</sup> Gary Snyder, *He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village: The Dimensions of a Haida Myth* (Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1979).
- <sup>9</sup> "Those Born at Q'ádasghu," a Raven clan. Q'ádasghu is a creek on Louise Island.
- <sup>10</sup> The pioneer in the prosodic analysis of Native American texts is Dell Hymes, who has worked primarily with texts in Clackamas Chinook. See for instance his *In Vain I Tried to Tell You* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).
- <sup>11</sup> As *Tsimshian Texts (New Series)*, in the same volume with Swanton's *Haida Songs* (Leiden: E. J. Brill).
- <sup>12</sup> As section I of Boas's *Tsimshian Mythology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916).
- <sup>13</sup> Louis Dantin published a study of the poems of Émile Nelligan in 1903, and James Cappon a study of Charles G. D. Roberts in 1905, but the former is merely an extended preface and the latter a pamphlet, not expanded to book form until 1925.
- <sup>14</sup> See Aldona Jonaitis, *From the Land of the Totem Poles: The Northwest Coast Indian Art Collection of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: AMNH, 1988).



# CHEWING THE PIECES

*David P. Reiter*

If you only dry and scrape,  
the sealskin lies tough even for ulu  
no needles prick through.

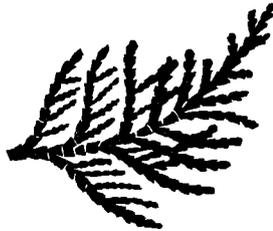
Once the foot curves are scratched on  
see how you must slice against stiffness  
to trim the edges of sole!

From toe to heel  
and a finger more for duffel —  
that's a kamik's right measure.

Then you chew. Until your jaws  
ache and your tongue feels dry  
as a ledge rasped by winter wind.

While babies lean on your hips  
by the night coals you chew until  
heavy eyes flicker you last to sleep

Sometimes the chewing goes on  
for days. Not easy for women  
to soften death to a second skin.



# "A PARCEL OF WHELPS"

## *Alexander Mackenzie among the Indians*

*Parker Duchemin*

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE'S FAMOUS VOYAGES of exploration in 1789 and 1793, in search of a commercial route to the Pacific Ocean, are part of the education of every school-child in Canada.<sup>1</sup> His account of these adventures, entitled *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence, through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans*, was an immediate success when it was published in London in 1801. It gained its author a knighthood, went through many new editions in England and America, and was quickly translated into French and German. More recently, it has been admitted to the canon of Canadian literature, in company with several other important exploration narratives, and already a body of critical literature has taken shape around it.

Two main themes have dominated the critical discussion of what is called "exploration literature" in Canada: the encounter of the European mind with the Canadian landscape, and the heroism, or supposed heroism, of the individual explorer's "quest." Explorers are doubly heroic in the eyes of critics: both as historical figures, and as protagonists in their own books. The heroic point of view on Mackenzie was expressed most vividly by Roy Daniells, who saw this North West Company fur trader both as Jason, "the adventurous far-seeker," and as

a veritable Odysseus in the skill and craft of his voyaging and his ability to endure and survive; doing better than Odysseus, in that he never lost a man, or forfeited a loyalty or harmed an Indian. Every sordid aspect of the trade withers away out of the picture; the commercial and imperial motives retire into the wings; Mackenzie's return to Athabasca is like the clasping of a necklace strung with the real and shining jewels of courage, hope, resourcefulness and fair dealing.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to reflect on the role of literary criticism in Canada which has made it possible to inflate commercial ventures like Mackenzie's to such Homeric proportions. Despite these high claims, however, there has been almost no serious attempt on the part of critics or historians to analyze Mackenzie's relationship with

the Indians he encountered on his journey.<sup>3</sup> Yet this relationship is one of the most important aspects of his narrative. Mackenzie was the first European to establish contact with many of the Indians in the regions he explored, and he left an extensive record of these encounters. His *Voyages from Montreal* played an important part in forming the public image of these peoples, both in Canada and abroad, an image which continues even to the present time.

My essay, therefore, will focus on this oddly neglected aspect of Mackenzie's writing. Because of the form usually taken by explorers' narratives, it is divided in two parts: the first examines his encounters with the Indians and his method of representing these encounters to us, and the second analyzes his attempts to describe and classify their various cultures. This division is somewhat arbitrary, since Mackenzie freely mingles his descriptions with his narrative of action, but it allows us better to understand the context of his mingled roles of explorer, trader, and writer, and to see the influences which shaped his statements about the Indians. *Voyages from Montreal* is part of a widespread and brilliantly self-validating discourse about native peoples which served the interests of the European colonial powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is also, we must remember, a narrative of action in the "real" world and part of a historical process which has had real and bitter consequences for the native people of Canada.

*Voyages from Montreal* was based entirely on Mackenzie's journals, with the exception of a "General History of the Fur Trade," which is thought to have been written by his cousin Roderic. In preparing his manuscript for the press, he sought the help of William Combe, editor of several other important British exploration narratives.<sup>4</sup> Combe polished Mackenzie's prose and improved his fluency, but wherever possible retained the wording of his original journals. This essay will treat the text as if Mackenzie, by approving the changes, were responsible for the printed words in the final version.<sup>5</sup> The complex relationship between author and editor must be borne in mind, however, and on occasions where it has been possible to compare Mackenzie's manuscript with the printed version, this has been done. Whatever different shades of meaning Combe's changes may have contributed to *Voyages from Montreal*, they do not diminish its value as a cultural document.

### I. Encounter

MACKENZIE'S FIRST ATTEMPT to reach the Pacific Ocean from Lake Athabasca in 1789 was a failure. Accompanied by a small party of voyageurs and native hunters, he travelled by canoe down Dehcho (known to most Canadians today as the Mackenzie River) through Denendeh, homeland of the

Dene nation for thousands of years, to the shores of the Arctic Ocean. He encountered different family bands and "tribes" every day, and frequently several times a day.<sup>6</sup> These included various groups known to the English as Chipewyan, Yellowknife, Dogrib, Slavey, Mountain, and Kutchin. Mackenzie was the first white man that many of them had ever seen, and although they already possessed a variety of European trade goods, they were initially quite fearful of him and his party.

On his second expedition, in 1793, he succeeded in reaching the Pacific and returning in a single season, accompanied by seven voyageurs and two native hunters and interpreters. On the eastern side of the mountains, he travelled over land inhabited from ancient times by the Beaver, already active in the fur trade, and the Sekani; in the mountain regions, he traversed the country of the Salish, the Shuswap, and the Carriers; and finally on the coast, he found himself among the Bella Coola and the Bella Bella. Most of these people were not yet familiar with white men, but they had heard about them and had already acquired some European trade goods. Mackenzie's relationships with them were significantly more complicated than before. They were present in larger numbers, exhibited greater initial hostility, and, on the whole, appeared less easy to intimidate than the Dene. The inability of his interpreters to understand their languages led to more frequent misunderstandings.

Mackenzie needed to establish peaceful relationships with all these peoples. Like most explorers, he tried to gain their confidence by distributing gifts, tempting samples of the traders' wares, and by promising lavish benefits which would come to them in the future if they helped him. As a fur trader, he also needed to gain as much information as possible about their customs, their material needs, and the state of their technology. Armed with this knowledge, future traders could supply their wants and needs more efficiently. In the process, this would create new wants and needs, and lead increasingly to dependency on British manufacturers, and their suppliers.<sup>7</sup> The large trading companies, with their headquarters in Montreal and London, could begin to formulate policies of management and control. The accumulation of knowledge was everywhere an essential element in the domination of the "subject races" by the European imperial powers, and their agents, the traders.<sup>8</sup>

Like most of the early explorers, however, Mackenzie was more dependent on the Indians than he was usually willing to acknowledge. On both expeditions he had to rely on them continually as guides, interpreters, and suppliers of food. In the mountains and the coastal regions, messengers from each village went before him to assure their neighbours that his party was not hostile. From village to village, they conducted him along their ancient trading routes. The success of his expeditions depended mainly on the goodwill of the local inhabitants, who greatly outnumbered him wherever he went. His situation was frequently precarious, but

he was confident that, as a European and hence the representative of “civilized” men among the “savages,” it was his duty to establish his authority over these peoples.<sup>9</sup>

While philosophers could debate the merits of natural man and the “savage” way of life, to most explorers and settlers the superiority of European civilization, and hence of white men, was a self-evident truth which was rarely questioned. Theories of the noble savage in the eighteenth century, concocted for the most part by European philosophers and men of letters with little first-hand knowledge of the Indians, rarely survived for long in the so-called “New World,” except in a literary context.<sup>10</sup> From the initial period of contact, the fundamental assumption in dealing with the Indians was the idea of European superiority. “It can be argued,” writes Edward Said, “that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.”<sup>11</sup> Eighteenth-century theories of social progress held that while human nature remained everywhere the same, mankind advanced historically through different levels of savagery and barbarism, from hunter, to shepherd, to farmer, until at last it attained the pinnacle of development, which was, of course, civilization — represented in its highest stage by modern Europe and its inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> These levels of development were seen as analogous to the main phases in the life cycle of an individual human, from childhood, youth, and maturity, to old age. It was widely agreed that the most immature phase in the development of mankind as a whole was represented by hunting societies like those of the North American Indians. The theory gave shape and meaning to the observations of explorers and travellers, which in turn strengthened the theory. From this firm “knowledge” of their superiority, derived the justification for their claims to authority over the Indians.

The Indians were hence intellectually relegated to the infancy of the human race, and expected to submit to the wisdom of their elders, the Europeans, who obviously knew what was best for them. The habit of addressing them as children, which resulted from this situation, persisted in treaties and speeches from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Throughout his narrative, Mackenzie employs the traditional language for dealing with natives. On the Peace River, for example, at the beginning of his second journey, he camps among a band of Eastern Beaver Indians who had, as he viewed it, misbehaved:

My tent was no sooner pitched, than I summoned the Indians together. . . . As they had been very troublesome to my predecessor, I informed them that I had heard of their misconduct, and was come among them to inquire into the truth of it. I added also that it would be an established rule with me to treat them with kindness, if their behaviour should be such as to deserve it; but, at the same time, that I should be

equally severe if they failed in those returns which I had a right to expect from them. I then presented them with a quantity of rum, which I recommended to be used with discretion. . . . They, in return, made me the fairest promises; and, having expressed the pride they felt on beholding me in their country, took their leave. (243)

Mackenzie speaks with the voice of a stern but impartial father, assuming his right to summon the Indians, to inquire into their misconduct, to administer rewards and punishments, to be kind or severe as he sees fit. They respond, as he reports the incident, like dependent children who have received a well-deserved chiding, accepting the admonitions of their self-appointed father with “the fairest promises” of good behaviour in the future. It is impossible to miss the notes of mingled pleasure and self-congratulation in this exercise of his imagined authority over them. What these people really thought about his speech, or how great was their “pride” at finding him in their country, may only be surmised, but it is probable that they carefully disguised their true feelings. They had been active in the fur trade for many years, and were by now thoroughly familiar with the language of white paternalism. Recent scholarship has proved that the Indians were by no means passive or unthinking dupes who quickly surrendered their independence to the traders.<sup>13</sup> Acquiescence was a game they were willing to play, if it seemed to satisfy the white men’s demands, and would advance their own interest.

**T**O ESTABLISH HIS AUTHORITY, Mackenzie set about trying to impress the newly encountered Indian nations with the “superiority” of white men. This was not only to ensure the success of his own mission, but to reinforce the whole trading and colonizing effort which had been undertaken by his society. There was remarkable solidarity among the British traders and explorers on this issue. Having defined their relationship with the Indians, and set its terms, the problem for the white men was to convince the Indians to see it in the same way as they did. First impressions were important. As a European, Mackenzie had the upper hand by virtue of his technology, and he needed to keep the odds of power in his favour. When a Carrier Indian raised doubts about his god-like omniscience on the second journey, he realized that an important principle was at stake, and he formulated his answer carefully. He had been interrogating them for the second day about his route, when, he wrote,

I was very much surprised by the following question from one of the Indians: “What,” demanded he, “can be the reason that you are so particular and anxious in your inquiries of us respecting a knowledge of this country: do not you white men

know every thing in the world?" This interrogatory was so very unexpected, that it occasioned some hesitation before I could answer it. At length, however, I replied, that we certainly were acquainted with the principal circumstances of every part of the world; that I knew where the sea is, and where I myself then was, but that I did not exactly understand what obstacles might interrupt me in getting to it; with which, he and his relations must be well acquainted, as they had so frequently surmounted them. Thus I fortunately preserved the impression in their minds, of the superiority of white people over themselves. (323)

Mackenzie's reply was very much to his own satisfaction, and, no doubt, it pleased most of his British or European readers in 1801. This Indian and his friends, he assumed, accepted his claim to superiority without question. The essential thing for the white man was to be — or to appear to be — master of the situation.

As new nations were encountered, Mackenzie's authority had to be established over and over again. A charade of white omniscience and omnipotence was therefore played and replayed for the benefit of the Indians. Samuel Hearne had written that it was "absolutely necessary . . . [to] profess something a little supernatural to be able to deal with those people."<sup>14</sup> Like many an explorer, Mackenzie found that the talismanic value of his scientific instruments helped to create an impression of awe, and they were therefore demonstrated to the Indians as signs of his shamanic or magical powers (378). This act contained an implied threat which the natives could not miss: the powers could obviously be used against them. Fear of iron, much to Mackenzie's joy, helped to speed him on his way among the coastal nations, because they were afraid that the salmon would be frightened away (366, 369-70). When a few articles were stolen by Carrier Indians with whom he was anxious to avoid a quarrel, he told them, "without any appearance of anger," of the white men's strange and threatening ability to control the forces of nature:

they had no idea of the mischief that would result to them from taking our property. I gravely added that the salmon, which was not only their favourite food, but absolutely necessary to their existence, came from the sea which belonged to us white men; and that as, at the entrance of the river, we could prevent those fish from coming up it, we possessed the power to starve them and their children. To avoid our anger, therefore, they must return all the articles that had been stolen from us. This finesse succeeded. Messengers were dispatched to order the restoration of every [item] that had been taken. (397)

Mackenzie's bold lie restored him to complete mastery of the situation, and he departed, with the Indians, who had no reason to doubt his claims, begging his forgiveness.

Demonstrating firearms at a dramatically chosen moment was one of the most effective means by which European explorers established their initial authority over native peoples. Very quickly during the first voyage Mackenzie discovered the effect of terror it created (206-07, 215). Among nations unfamiliar with fire-

arms he seemed to have unleashed a supernatural force. To those who understood the nature of these weapons, he had declared the brute reality of his superior technology. Mackenzie was well aware of the strategic advantage he enjoyed. A brief encounter in the second journey, with a remote nation of Carriers, shows with what skill and deliberation he played his hand:

I distributed a few presents among them, and left my guides to explain to them the object of my journey, and the friendliness of my designs, with which they had themselves been made acquainted; their fears being at length removed, I gave them a specimen of the use to which we applied our fire-arms: at the same time, I calmed their astonishment, by the assurance, that, though we could at once destroy those who did us injury, we could equally protect those who shewed us kindness. Our stay here did not exceed half an hour, and we left these people with favourable impressions of us. (317-18)

In this passage, Mackenzie's gifts and professions of friendship are reinforced with a thinly veiled warning: co-operate and we will protect you, resist and you will be destroyed. The bitter pill of domination is sweetened by an appearance of benevolence. Certainly, he had created a powerful impression in that brief half hour, but how favourably it was received must be open to doubt. Mackenzie seems to have had a well-developed capacity for self-flattery in his relations with the Indians. The real meaning of these tactics can scarcely have been lost on his audience, who could understand as well as anyone the implications of power politics.

The equivocal sense in which the Indians accepted Mackenzie's assumed superiority and authority is suggested when a newly acquired Sekani guide, from a band which had never before encountered white men, was encouraged "to maintain his fidelity to me, and not to desert in the night," as so many others had done. Flatteringly the Sekani replied: "How is it possible for me to leave the lodge of the Great Spirit! — When he tells me that he has no further occasion for me, I will then return to my children" (293). They had to take turns watching him, however, and he fled at the first opportunity, a few nights later (303). Perhaps he did believe that Mackenzie was endowed with magical or supernatural strength. Nevertheless, acceptance of the white man's authority was a role which had been thrust upon him, and which he played until he could most conveniently manage an exit.

Mackenzie's attempts to accomplish his ends by what might be called the technique of mastery required that he reveal no weakness and make no compromise. A less imperious method of dealing with the Indians, like that practised by David Thompson, his younger contemporary, would have required a more refined understanding of their way of life than Mackenzie possessed. Like many another explorer, he developed a bold method for gaining the upper hand. Mastering his own fear, he approached them with an air of complete confidence, making stylized gestures of friendship, and doing his best to ignore their signs of defiance. When this

had the effect, as it usually did, of restoring calm to the situation, he distributed "trinkets" to the adults and sometimes "treated the children with sugar" (314).

His method required, at times, great personal discipline and courage, in attempting to convey an appearance of confidence in his own safety which he did not always possess. On one occasion it had to be reinforced by means of a sniper carefully hidden in the woods (313). Mackenzie "knew," however, that he was superior to these "savages," both culturally and materially, and this "knowledge" enabled him to play his role with greater conviction. His scorn for what he called their "outrageous antics" is revealed in the language of his descriptions (285-89; 307-08; 312-16; 317-19). The effect of his performance was to establish himself, psychologically, as their master in the negotiations which followed. The Indians, who were also playing a role to disguise their fears, had been out-bluffed, and they accepted the relationship on Mackenzie's terms for the time being.

Mackenzie treated all cases of theft as a direct challenge to his authority, and in dealing with them he refused to compromise. Some of the acts which the explorers interpreted as theft resulted from a conflict in attitude between the white men, with their concept of private property, and the natives, who shared many things in common, and for whom trade took place in a complex social and ceremonial context of gift exchange.<sup>15</sup> On the West Coast this problem was compounded by the white men's unfamiliarity with customs of the potlatch.<sup>16</sup> Mackenzie had learned about the nature of gift exchanges from his work among the Cree and the Chipewyan, peoples with a long history in the fur trade and considerable knowledge of the white men's habits. Among the very different cultures of the West Coast he began to run into unexpected difficulties.

**I**N AN IMPORTANT EPISODE at a Bella Coola village, Mackenzie had been generously welcomed by the chief, feasted and supplied with food for his journey. At the moment he was about to depart, however, an axe was found to be missing.

I immediately applied to the chief, and requested its restoration; but he would not understand me till I sat myself down on a stone, with my arms in a state of preparation, and made it appear to him that I should not depart till the stolen article was restored. The village was immediately in a state of uproar, and some danger was apprehended from the confusion that prevailed in it. The axe, however, which had been hidden under the chief's canoe, was soon returned. Though this instrument was not, in itself, of sufficient value to justify a dispute with these people, I apprehended that the suffering them to keep it, after we had declared its loss, might have occasioned the loss of every thing we carried with us, and of our lives also. My people

[his French-Canadian voyageurs] were dissatisfied with me at the moment; but I thought myself right then, and, I think now, that the circumstances in which we were involved, justified the measure which I adopted. (370)

In the view of the Bella Coola, Mackenzie may not have presented them with gifts in sufficient quantity or quality to repay their hospitality or to satisfy their sophisticated code of gift exchange. Mackenzie saw the theft as a challenge, however, and he negotiated, as usual, with his own form of gunboat diplomacy. His position as a European, he assumed, had to be defended from any suspicion of weakness. His tactics, which clearly astonished the Indians and which even his crew believed to be misjudged, provoked a very frosty reception on his return a week later (387-89). Their chief, and with him the whole village, had suffered a grave indignity. Mackenzie attributed the cause of their altered mood, not to his own aggressive and calculated policy of domination, but to fundamental deficiencies in the character of the Indians themselves: "these people are of so changeable a nature . . . that there is no security with them" (388). His basic preconceptions about "savage" nature were confirmed.

The remaining weeks of his visit to the British Columbia coast were beset by encounters with a small group of natives who refused to accept his authority or to trade with him on terms which he could dictate. Mackenzie was infuriated by their show of "indifference and disdain." Among them was a man with "an air of insolence" who, by his own account, had been fired on and beaten by Captain George Vancouver earlier that year (376-77). This "troublesome" Indian and his friends appeared several times along Mackenzie's route and the explorer grew increasingly nervous and resentful of their interest in his activities. A scuffle broke out at their village and Mackenzie again resorted to the threat of firearms "to make these natives feel the impropriety of their conduct towards us" (381). Later along his route he attempted to seize one of their canoes as the owners were preparing to depart, under the mistaken impression that they were making off with his own (385). With time running out and supplies at a low ebb, Mackenzie's hostility and fear are understandable. But his aggressive actions only compounded the danger. Resistance to his authority as a white man needed to be punished, he believed, and for this reason he was even willing to risk his "darling project" (328) of demonstrating the existence of a commercial route to the Pacific. The broader colonial purpose, which required him to establish his authority clearly, was at stake.

The limits to Mackenzie's authority were demonstrated in his relationships with his guides, who usually disappeared after they had experienced a taste of his travelling methods. "The travelling day," observed W. Kaye Lamb, "usually began at three or four A.M. and lasted fifteen or sixteen hours, or more upon occasion."<sup>17</sup> To the Indians, accustomed to the more leisurely diurnal rhythms of a hunting economy and with no burning personal ambition to find a route to the Pacific, this must have appeared the sheerest madness. The normal patterns of their lives

were marked by irregular periods of intense hunting activity, with a high degree of personal independence and generous amounts of free time.<sup>18</sup> "The Indians complain much of our hard marching," Mackenzie wrote in the journal of his first expedition, "that they are not accustomed to such hard fatigue" (180). He was reduced to watching his guides day and night, to prevent them from slipping away unobserved. Sometimes, he found it so difficult to attract guides on the great river that he resorted to the technique of seizing them by force: "our Conductor deserted. Could not find him, embarked one of the others against his will, and took his paddles from the one that remained that he might not follow us, at which he that was in our Canoe got quite enraged, jumped at the Paddle threw it on shore, but we embarked it again and pacified him" (192). Such effrontery may have been one of the reasons he found the Dene so elusive on the river when he made his return. News of the white invaders spread fast among these closely related peoples.

On the second voyage Mackenzie was somewhat more tactful about using force, partly because the Indians were much more numerous and less fearful of white men. Nevertheless, most of his guides attempted to proceed at their own pace, or quickly grew uncooperative, refusing to help carry the white men's heavy packs or beat the bushes for them (340-41, 342). Mackenzie could only fulminate helplessly against their refusal to do his will. Sometimes he suspected the native interpreters he had brought with him of being in collusion with the local guides, withholding information which they feared might have prolonged the journey or have taken them into dangerous territory (214, 218, 341, 349). He complains constantly of "desertions" and of threatened desertions, of having to watch them day and night, of receiving deliberately misleading information (300, 303, 324, 325-26, 328, 333-34, 335-36, 349, 357).

Mackenzie gives no indication, however, of understanding that his high demands and imperious manner might have created this behaviour. Even his French-Canadian voyageurs were frequently driven to the limits of their endurance and to the brink of mutiny. The native guides' behaviour appeared to him as "disloyalty," "infidelity," or "desertion." These terms are significant: they indicate that in his mind he had transformed the Indians into rebellious political subjects or mutinous soldiers who owed their loyalty to him. Their desertions resulted, he believed, from such well-known defects of the "savage" character as laziness, capriciousness, and irrational love of independence.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, he remained unable to control them to his own satisfaction, no matter how cleverly he tried to impose his will on them. Although they might co-operate in certain circumstances, these Indians, who were not as yet involved in the fur trade, could see no reason to submit to his authority unless it clearly served their own interests. They were experiencing for the first time, in their contacts with men like Mackenzie, the incursions of a foreign colonial power into their country, and as a result, they were rapidly developing their own sophisticated techniques of resistance.

## II. *Ethnography*

IF MACKENZIE COULD NOT CONTROL the Indians completely to his satisfaction in reality, the pen nevertheless proved to be a valuable tool for mastering them in his journals. By writing about them, defining them and explaining them, he could assert to himself and to his readers that he, as a white man, was ultimately in control, that his authority, or, at the very least, his superiority, remained intact. Information about the Indians, as we have seen, was necessary for the development of the fur trade, and, in a broader sense, for the process of extending European hegemony into every part of the globe. The Royal Society, since its inception, had encouraged travellers to make systematic observations on the different peoples they encountered, to add to the rapidly expanding body of information about the world.<sup>20</sup> By the accumulation of such information, remote or “savage” nations could better be understood; one result of this was that their behaviour could be anticipated, policies could be formulated for dealing with them, and they could be subjected, more effectively, to whatever other agenda Europeans had in store for them. In addition to “adding new countries to the realms of British commerce” (57), as he boasted, Mackenzie hoped that his work would be “worthy the attention of the scientific geographer” (60). He made it a priority, therefore, to write down as much information as he could about the Indians, despite the limited amount of time at his disposal and the constraints of his situation.

Mackenzie usually composed his journals during the evenings or as his crew made preparations to leave in the mornings. He performed this activity in the presence of the Indians themselves, who found it strangely mystifying and probably attributed a magical significance to it. Mackenzie was fully aware of the impression he was making, and the enhanced authority his writing gave him in their eyes. At the same time, writing about them increased his own sense of the height he occupied above them as a “civilized” European. He was the possessor of a secret code which they could not understand; he “knew” them in a way in which they could never know themselves. The act of writing about people in their very presence has the distinct effect of increasing the psychological distance between the observer and the observed. Mackenzie regarded them, without much fellow-feeling, as mere specimens for study: “My men and Indians went to rest. *I sat up to observe the Natives motions.* They wanted to know why I went not to Bed, and being busy writing this they had a Curiosity to see and know the meaning of it” (207; emphasis mine). Mackenzie remains, throughout his narrative, a detached “scientific” observer, with no reason to get any closer to the “savages” than the conditions of his voyage required.

His detachment is marked by the fact that he shows almost no interest whatever in the Indians as individual men or women. The lively portraits and character

sketches which enliven Samuel Hearne's narrative are completely absent from Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal*. Even their names elude him. His text does not distinguish one from another, frequently leaving the reader in a state of confusion about what is happening. His native companions, who accompanied him from Fort Chipewyan to hunt and interpret, disappear from the reader's view almost completely. Apart from occasional use of their English nicknames, he gives no hints about their appearance, their private lives, or their character.<sup>21</sup> Mackenzie appears to regard the behaviour of Indians, in almost every case, as generic; when an individual Indian performs an action which either obstructs or advances his ends, he takes it to be characteristic of his "tribe." One effect of this is to absolve the author from responsibility in awkward situations: if the Indians persist in behaving like "savages," then he cannot be held accountable for their hostility. It is just the way the Indians *are*. Another effect is to dehumanize them, by robbing their behaviour of its individual meaning, transforming it into what we would call today instinctive or biological patterns of behaviour. This process, as Frantz Fanon has demonstrated in his classic study, *The Wretched of the Earth*, is essential both for colonizing native people, and for keeping them in their colonized position.<sup>22</sup>

**A** CHARACTERISTIC EXAMPLE of Mackenzie's observations takes place on the Parsnip River during his second expedition, when he encountered a band of Sekani who had never before seen white men. After two days of questioning them intensively about his route, his men prepared to depart, and Mackenzie began to write the following description of the Indians, coldly observed as they stood around him:

They are low in stature, not exceeding five feet six or seven inches; and they are of that meagre appearance which might be expected in a people whose life is one succession of difficulties, in procuring subsistence. Their faces are round, with high cheek bones; and their eyes, which are small, are of a dark brown colour; the cartilage of their nose is perforated, but without any ornaments suspended from it; their hair is of a dingy black, hanging loose and in disorder over their shoulders, but irregularly cut in the front, so as not to obstruct the sight; their beards are eradicated, with the exception of a few straggling hairs, and their complexion is a swarthy yellow. . . . The organs of generation they leave uncovered. . . . [The women] are in general of a more lusty make than the other sex, and taller in proportion, but infinitely their inferiors in cleanliness. A black artificial stripe crosses the face beneath the eye, from ear to ear, which I first took for scabs, from the accumulation of dirt on it. (289-90)

This description, like many others in his book, has a deceptively impartial appearance, skilfully blending a selection of "facts" and value judgments. The implied standards of measurement are, of course, Anglo-Saxon concepts of beauty and adornment. The "round faces" and "high cheekbones" of the Sekanis would have

seemed exotic, and slightly disturbing to the British reader of 1801. “Low stature,” “meagre appearance,” “small” eyes, and a “swarthy yellow” complexion are ugly and repulsive by the standards of Mackenzie’s society. However, these images do not constitute a merely aesthetic judgment: they strongly impute qualities of cunning, deceit, and treachery to the unfortunate Sekani. Even worse are the moral qualities implied in his images of their “dingy black” hair, “hanging loose and in disorder over their shoulders,” and their beards, eradicated except for “a few straggling hairs.” By European standards, women ought to be small and fastidious, but among these people, Mackenzie implies in richly suggestive imagery, the normal distinctions of gender have been inverted, the women being “of a more lusty make than the other sex,” and “infinitely their inferiors in cleanliness.” The text seems to invite the question: what can be expected of a people so “meagre,” dirty, disordered, and with such unnatural sexual differentiation? Their physical appearance (which he constructs) is a mirror of their moral condition (which he also constructs). While appearing to be neutral, Mackenzie’s language and imagery is in fact highly evaluative and judgmental. His British reader, responding to it, would conclude that a more villainous collection of “savages” was scarcely to be found anywhere.

When Mackenzie describes what are to him their more identifiably “savage” customs, his language becomes, surprisingly, more impersonal and “objective”: “the cartilage of their nose is perforated, but without any ornaments suspended from it”; “the organs of generation they leave uncovered”; “a black artificial stripe crosses the face beneath the eye, from ear to ear.” These details are calculated to provoke the scorn of his readers, violating so clearly their English notions of decorum, common sense, and reason. The careful, almost scientific, “objectivity” of his language intensifies the impact. It distances the Sekani more effectively, Mackenzie senses, than explicit outrage or moral judgment. The effect depends, to a large extent, on an agreed set of aesthetic, social, and moral standards, which Mackenzie shares with his readers. The message, assumed or implied, is that these customs are grotesque, primitive, and reprehensible. This is a judgment fully anticipated and mutually acknowledged by writer and reader; in an important sense, it exists already before it is stated, since it is, in reality, based on their shared cultural experience.

Mackenzie’s language suggests that the Sekani are not, like the English, free agents; they are fixed, by their culture and their environment, and they exist in a kind of timeless ethnographic present, where everything that he has noted about their appearance — their exposed genitals, their tatoos, their dirt, their swarthy skins, their straggly beards, their disordered hair, their small eyes — defines them for all time. They have been captured in Mackenzie’s words at a particular moment of their own complex history, but the text expresses his belief that this is what they *are*, and what they have always been. Their past and their future are equally

irrelevant. A variety of stresses could have accounted for their appearance at this instant, but whatever the reason, to Mackenzie their appearance *is* meagre and their hair *is* dirty and disordered.<sup>23</sup> These facts define and formulate their character as a people, in his mind.

Mackenzie resembles the King of Brobdingnag in the Olympian detachment with which he observes and judges these people from his own unassailable height. They appear, for the reader, like some “pernicious race of little odious vermin,” brutal and dangerous, at best to be examined, from a careful distance, as if under a glass. Although nowhere does he explicitly deny their humanity, his descriptions consistently diminish or call it into doubt. Be careful, the sub-text warns, these little creatures may bite. At the same time, their appearance and behaviour provoke laughter and scorn in a joke, at their expense, which is shared privately between writer and reader.

Like the King of Brobdingnag, Mackenzie’s own sense of moral and cultural superiority is confirmed by his observations. Unlike the King, however, he is in their own country, surrounded and outnumbered by them, and in many ways dependent on them. The stability of his crew, who are only too willing to sleep with native women, may be threatened by the dangerous allure of “savagery”; perhaps it secretly threatens even his own belief in the natural order. His only hope, for the accomplishment of his mission, and the preservation of his “civilized” values, is to remain distant, detached, and to assert, wherever possible, his authority over them.

He turns then, almost with relief, to an account of their material culture, which occupies by far the greater part of his description. The range and type of his concerns, and their mind-numbing effects, are well represented in the following quotation:

They have snares made of green skin, which they cut to the size of sturgeon twine, and twist a certain number of them together; and though when completed they do not exceed the thickness of a cod-line, their strength is sufficient to hold a moose deer: they are from one and an half to two fathoms in length. Their nets and fishing lines are made of willow-bark and nettles; those made of the latter are finer and smoother than if made with hempen thread. Their hooks are small bones, fixed in pieces of wood split for that purpose, and tied round with fine watape, which has been particularly described in the former voyage. Their kettles are also made of watape, which is so closely woven that they never leak, and they heat water in them, by putting red-hot stones into it. There is one kind of them, made of spruce-bark, which they hang over the fire, but at such a distance as to receive the heat without being within reach of the blaze; a very tedious operation. They have various dishes of wood and bark; spoons of horn and wood, and buckets; bags of leather and net-work, and baskets of bark, some of which hold their fishing-tackle, while others are contrived to be carried on the back. (291-92)

In the course of this description, and in others like it, the Indians’ tools acquire a

significance of their own while becoming oddly disconnected from the people who employ them. The people themselves, who manufacture their tools with infinite pains, and who use them to hunt, fish, cook and eat, have almost vanished from his narrative. Their possessions now appear to be the most important things about them. The sub-text is a clear message to the "civilized" English reader, furthermore, that despite the ingenuity of these devices, "savage" technology is primitive, awkward, and labour-intensive. Its inferiority to the products of European civilization is self-evident to the reader and needs little commentary beyond his telling descriptions.

This fascination with material culture frequently dominates Mackenzie's accounts of the Indians he encountered. Often he gets lost in the details: pages are devoted to describing the buildings of the Western Coastal nations, with their contents, without ever managing to convey an idea of what they looked like. A good example is his description of a Bella Coola village (366-68). The information he provides is invaluable to the modern ethnohistorian. In his own time it served the fur trade in addition to the objectives of "geographical science" and the Royal Society. An inventory of their material possessions and their technology was also a guide to their "needs," and so helped to open up their society for commercial exploitation. The Sekani, for example, described in the quotation above, are potential customers for English rope, snares, fishhooks, kettles, buckets, dishes, spoons, cloth and ironwork. Yet Mackenzie is more thorough than other explorers or traders, and he records more of this kind of information than was necessary merely for commerce. At times, he resembles one of the eighteenth-century virtuosi whose cabinets were stuffed with costumes, utensils, ornaments, and other ethnographical curiosities from around the world, divorced from their social context.<sup>24</sup> Essentially, Mackenzie is a materialist, interested in things for their own sake, seldom questioning his own assumptions about them, and preferring wherever possible to restrict his observations to what he could see, touch, and measure.

The effect of this is to lend powerful support to his textual strategies of domination. As we have seen, the Indians repeatedly found ways to resist his authority. He could not obliterate this evidence of their stubborn human complexity, but to a certain degree he could subdue it, textually, by minimalizing its importance. He defines their cultures primarily in material terms, and shows that they differ from each other in primarily material ways. This reduces them to manageable dimensions within the pages of his journal, despite their intractable behaviour in reality. The Indians may be treated, like all "savages," as essentially the same, differing from each other only in externals. Such a stratagem eases the process of knowing and understanding them. Mackenzie's terms of reference for his "ethnography," therefore, as well as his language, tend to diminish and dehumanize the objects of his description.

Consistently with these tactics, Mackenzie ignores or trivializes almost everything which suggests that the Indians may have had a meaningful life beyond the merely physical level of their existence. Almost all aspects of life for Canada's native people, for example, were infused with their spiritual beliefs; their essentially religious and spiritual understanding of reality was perhaps the most important single quality which differentiated them from the Europeans.<sup>25</sup> Throughout his narrative, however, Mackenzie shows no curiosity about native spiritual beliefs, and he tends to belittle evidence which he could not avoid.<sup>26</sup> He records nothing whatever about myths and legends, although he had ample opportunity to hear them, especially during the five months he spent among the Eastern Beaver at the beginning of his second voyage. He comments off-handedly, for example, on "a curious example of Indian superstition" which he encountered among some Beaver Indians (251), and on "an extreme superstition" held by the Bella Coola (362), but he interprets both cases merely as specimens of savage ignorance or folly. Shamanism, or "conjuring," he mentions very rarely, and always with scorn, as a cruel or foolish imposition, despite its widespread significance in native society (191, 341, 368-69). Dancing and singing, the most fundamental expressions of Indian spirituality, are described, in the first voyage, as grotesque displays of "antic shapes," "pranks," "howling," and "jumping" (183, 214). On his second voyage, with a single exception (340), he makes no mention of such activities. Simon Fraser, whose expedition fifteen years later travelled through some of the same territory, repeatedly described how his crew were entertained by singing and dancing throughout their journey.<sup>27</sup> Mackenzie, however, who must have witnessed similar displays on many occasions, omits them from his narrative.

Mackenzie finds almost nothing of beauty to admire, either in the individual lives or in the various cultures of the Indians, although on one rare occasion he goes so far as to pronounce the decorations on a dress to have "a very agreeable effect" (363). When he sees for the first time the magnificent carved and painted images of the Western Coastal nations, he neither wonders at their beauty and strangeness, nor does he speculate on their religious or social significance. They violate his preconceptions about the arts of uncivilized peoples, and as if to reassert European superiority, he proceeds immediately to pass judgment on them: "They were painted with hieroglyphics, and figures of different animals, and *with a degree of correctness that was not to be expected from such an uncultivated people. . . .* The posts, poles and figures, were painted red and black; but the sculpture of these people is superior to their painting" (367; emphasis mine). Such curiosities were not yet valuable commodities, they were not easily transportable, and they offered nothing which could be exploited in the fur trade. Without economic value, and with nothing in Mackenzie's view to recommend them intrinsically (except for the unexpected degree of artistic "correctness"), they merited little attention.

The cumulative effect is to make the Indians appear to live their lives without pattern or meaning, to reduce, in his text, the few bare remnants of their religion to superstition, and of their art to mere decoration. This strongly reinforces the fundamental belief in European superiority, shared by Mackenzie and his readers, and functions as part of the process by which European authority and power over these people were legitimated. Mackenzie, like many of his fellow traders and settlers, needed to believe in the idea of the Indians leading lives which were narrowly limited, without the complexities and enrichments which made the lives of civilized people, he believed, essentially more human and of greater value. The commercial agenda of trader and settler, in what they were pleased to call the "New World," was thereby justified, and it could take precedence over all other considerations.

MACKENZIE'S "ETHNOGRAPHY" distinguishes implicitly between two types of culture he had encountered in his travels. This distinction is based on the theory of progress which, as we have seen, underlay much of the writing about non-European societies in the eighteenth century. The nations of the Western Coastal region, Mackenzie believed, were more advanced than the nomadic Dene in the subarctic, and it is clear from his narrative that he was less contemptuous of them. They were materially richer than the Dene. They lived in villages and built large houses. Among the inhabitants of one community, which he named the "Friendly Village," he detected hereditary ownership of property. The chief also appeared to possess a degree of authority over his people which was lacking among the Athabascans. These features (390-94) suggested to him that they were advancing from the "primitive" state of equality and shared resources, so common among the hunting societies of the north, to something resembling modern European civilization, with its distinctions of rank and of property. "Of the many nations of savage people whom I have seen," he wrote, "these appear to be the most susceptible of civilization. They might soon be brought to cultivate the little ground about them which is capable of it" (394).

Learning to cultivate the soil, Mackenzie believes, is the first step in attaining civilization. This idea, which derives ultimately from the philosophy of John Locke, was already widespread throughout the English-speaking world in the eighteenth century. In North America, the programs for "civilizing" the "savages" which were emerging at this time were founded upon it.<sup>28</sup> If the Indians could be made to leave their nomadic ways and commence farming, the argument went, they would begin to value private property and material possessions like the white men and eventually make the transition from their primitive condition of savagery to the "higher" stage of civilization. "Agriculture," wrote Mackenzie's cousin Roderic

in his introductory essay on the history of the fur trade, “attaches the wandering tribe to that spot where it adds so much to their comforts; while it gives them a sense of property, and of lasting possession, instead of the uncertain hopes of the chase, and the fugitive produce of uncultivated wilds” (67). The Bella Coola, it seemed to Mackenzie, were already advanced enough, because of their stable way of life and their social institutions, to take the step. Redeemed from their “savagery,” they might also learn to accept white culture and authority without too much resistance.

The Dene, however, were beyond the pale. They had little private property and appeared utterly lacking in the sensibility which accompanied ownership. As nomadic hunters, all their wealth had to be carried with them as they followed the seasonal cycles of the game. “Mobility and property are in contradiction,” Marshall Sahlins has written; real affluence among hunters consists in having only a few, highly portable possessions.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the homeland of the Dene appeared remote to the Europeans, unsuitable for agriculture, and cursed with a cold and forbidding climate. It did not occur to Mackenzie, or to most later visitors, that they might have been living there in a meaningful human condition, content, at least for the time being, with their few possessions and well adapted to their nation’s environment.<sup>30</sup>

Mackenzie’s descriptions of them, therefore, the first in a long line of similar portraits of the Dene, are filled with reproach. He represents them as painfully eking out their wretched lives in cold and misery, lacking the barest essentials of human comfort. Everything convinces him of the barrenness of their lives. When, in their dances, they strive to imitate the animals they hunt, Mackenzie responds in language charged with scorn and loathing: “As soon as we left them they began their fav’rite and only amusement (except Jumping) Dancing in which Young & Old, Male & Female join’d & continued as [long as] they could hold out. They try to imitate the Rein Deer Bear & Wolf in their Pranks or howling” (214).<sup>31</sup> Frequent animal images suggest their lowly position in the great chain of being. A group of hungry Kutchin, without blankets to keep them from the cold, slept around the fire “like a parcel of whelps” (207). When, according to their own customs, they helped themselves to some meat which the white men were cooking over a fire, Mackenzie immediately ordered them to desist, writing, at the same time, with a sneer, that it was “the first instance I saw of any of them wishing to take what was not their own; but I suppose they think provision should be common Property among all People” (207). Sharing resources is clearly one of their “savage” notions, all too frequent, in his view, among nomadic hunters.<sup>32</sup> Physical distaste accompanies moral disapproval. He does not like their appearance, and the reason, he implies, is their own fault. The women of one band “are not very tempting objects, for they are as ugly and disagreeable Beings as can be” (215). Another group “are all an ugly meagre ill made People particularly about the Legs which are very clumsy & full of Scabs by their frequent roasting them to the fire. Many of them

appear'd very sickly owing as I imagine to their Dirty way of living" (183). Viewing them as too witless or ignorant to improve their condition, Mackenzie implies that they have only themselves to blame for their destitution and misery. They are a people without hope, degraded, in his view, below the level of the human. Their lives have been diminished, objectified, and emptied, in his text, of all happiness, dignity, and meaning.

Mackenzie's fullest "ethnographic" portrait of an Indian people is his account of the Eastern Beaver, Dene people of the Peace River district who are closely related to the Sekani and the Chipewyan. Mackenzie's opportunities to observe most of the Indians he encountered were limited by his need to complete each voyage in a single season. A few hours or days was the usual extent of his contact with individual bands or villages. Among the Beaver, however, he spent a full five months before attempting to cross the mountains on his second voyage. Closer acquaintance did not soften his judgment. Despite their hospitality, no affection for the Beaver warms his Hobbesian portrait of their lives as nasty, brutish, and short (240-57). All members of their society, according to his account, are equally to blame for their degraded condition. Anecdotes are carefully chosen to illustrate what he views as their insensitivity to the plight of women in labour, their violence and vengefulness, their superstition, and their fierce jealousy (250-53). Although Mackenzie himself was plying them with rum, he denounced their susceptibility to it: "they are passionately fond of liquor, and in the moments of their festivity will barter any thing they have in their possession for it" (253). Gambling is a passion like drink, he claims, to which they will sacrifice their families and their fortunes: "they will pursue it for a succession of days and nights, and no apprehension of ruin, nor influence of domestic affection, will restrain them from the indulgence of it" (255). Domestic and sexual relationships are especially vicious. The women are lecherous, even from "the age of eleven or twelve years," and as wives, are seldom without a lover despite the "vigilance and severity" of their husbands. The men, on the other hand, "are very subject to jealousy, and fatal consequences frequently result from the indulgence of that passion." Nevertheless, the women are "the slaves of the men," and, "except for a few small dogs, they alone perform that labour which is allotted to beasts of burthen in other countries" (254).<sup>33</sup> Their religion, he argues, is "of a very contracted nature," and completely borrowed from the Cree (254). In grief, their women "cry and howl" and mutilate themselves in a bizarre fashion. Joy seems totally absent from their lives.

**B**Y THE LATTER HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, the idea of the contradictory nature of "savages" was widely accepted among European, American and, we should add, Canadian observers.<sup>34</sup> Mackenzie emphasizes these

contradictions in an especially subversive way, by the rhetorical stratagem of allowing the Indians to have, among their vices, a few virtues, which he proceeds at once to qualify severely. Although the Beaver are “excellent hunters,” the physical demands of this activity reduce them “to a very meagre appearance” (254). They are liberal and generous when they have plenty, but when their means are exhausted “they become errant beggars.” They “appear” to be fond of their children, but they are “as careless in their mode of swaddling them as they are of their own dress” (255). The effect of these qualifications is to give an appearance of balance to his portrait while at the same time preventing it from conferring on them a full measure of humanity. He softens some of their vices, too, but in a way which keeps them firmly in the straitjacket he has constructed. They are “more vicious and warlike than the Chipewyans, from whence they sprang, though they do not possess their selfishness.” Although “they are very susceptible of anger” — one of the principal vices attributed by white men to the Indians — “they are as easily appeased.” Can anything be said, without qualification, in their favour? They are “remarkable for their honesty” (among savages, of course) and they are “a quick, lively, active people, with a keen, penetrating, dark eye” (254-55). Truly, this is damning with faint praise. The Beavers’ lives are drawn out, as Mackenzie describes them, without love, happiness, or meaning. They exist, scarcely above the level of beasts, in a world empty of spirit, governed by contradictory and repulsive customs, where drunkenness, cruelty, violence, and passion prevail.

It need hardly be said that no real people ever did — or could — exist in such conditions, or that this is an ideologically distorted picture of what life was really like among northern hunting peoples. Now that the Dene and other native groups have begun to tell their own stories in English, it is possible for Euro-Canadians to see the other side of the picture more clearly.<sup>35</sup> Mackenzie’s Indians have only slightly more humanity and social structure than Swift’s Yahoos; they are about as accurate a portrait of native people, furthermore, as Yahoos are of Europeans. Swift as satirist, however, had turned the tables on travellers like Mackenzie, who unquestioningly affirmed the values of their own society.

Like most explorers, Mackenzie found himself involved in a process, first, of attempting to establish his authority over the Indians whose lands he was invading, and then, of maintaining that supposed authority whenever it was threatened. Far from the remotest outposts of European power, his situation was precarious. Writing about the Indians — representing them as childlike, primitive, lazy, unreliable, improvident, drunken, contradictory, deceitful, jealous, treacherous, cruel, irrational — helped to assert and to validate his authority, both to himself and to his readers. It rendered the ugly side of the colonial enterprise in which he was involved more acceptable. The supposed brutality of the Indians’ natures, and the conditions in which they lived, were proof of how far Europeans have advanced since the world’s first infancy. Only their ignorance and lack of reason could explain their

frequent attempts to resist his authority. And so, systematically, the Indians were “known,” contained, and ultimately rendered powerless, in the imaginary world of his narrative.

In a sense, then, Mackenzie is indeed a “hero,” if by that term we mean someone in literature or history who is admired for representing, in an exceptionally forceful way, the fundamental impulses of his own society. Mackenzie is ruthlessly dedicated to European commercial expansionism, and with it, the colonial exploitation of the Indians in the fur trade. His caricature of native life served these processes, obviously, more effectively than sentimental or idealistic notions of the Noble Savage, or even a view of the Indians, like David Thompson’s, which would have made them more equal to Europeans as human beings. It lent strong support to traders, settlers, and administrators for their policies of intervention and control. There is nothing original, or even particularly idiosyncratic about his position. The concept of savagism is an invention of the European mind in colonial encounter, and Mackenzie is merely one of the many people who shared in its creation. What makes Mackenzie’s work particularly valuable to the critic is the single-minded consistency with which he makes his case. Many of his attitudes may be found, in greater or lesser degree, even among observers who express a more sympathetic or humanitarian point of view. Mackenzie’s narrative must be seen, in the final analysis, as a product of his own culture and the relationship which it had long before established with the natives of North America. It represents an important strand in European thinking about non-European peoples, which originated in ancient times, emerged strongly in accounts of the so-called “New World” during the earliest period of contact, and which persisted in a variety of forms until the present. Eventually, ideas of the kind we have observed here were incorporated in theories of “scientific racism,” which declared the Indians, with indigenous peoples all over the globe, to be both culturally and biologically an inferior species. Many thinkers challenged them, but in Canada, as elsewhere, they formed the politically operative point of view on native peoples throughout the nineteenth century and well into our own times. Already in Mackenzie’s day, an ominous new world was being prepared for our First Nations.

#### APPENDIX A

In his Preface, written nearly eight years after his second expedition, Mackenzie gives the impression of a vast and nearly empty country, peopled only by scattered and insignificant “tribes”:

These voyages will not, I fear, afford the variety that may be expected from them. . . . Mountains and vallies, the dreary waste, and wide-spreading forests, the lakes and rivers succeed each other in general description; and except on the coasts of the

Pacific Ocean, where the villages were permanent, and the inhabitants in a great measure stationary, small bands of wandering Indians are the only people whom I shall introduce to the acquaintance of my readers. (58)

The text of his narrative, however, quickly dispels this illusion. The frequency of his contacts with the Indians, and the sizes of the bands he encountered, make it evident that these lands were utilized to the full capacity of the native economies. Their numbers are striking to any modern non-native reader who has been taught to believe in the myth of vast uninhabited spaces in the north. Nomadic use of land, however, has not traditionally been recognized as genuine “inhabitation” in European thinking. Vattel’s *Law of Nations* (1758) argued that Europeans could justly seize Indian territory because “the peoples of those vast tracts of land rather roamed over than inhabited them.”<sup>38</sup> The inconsistency between Mackenzie’s Preface, where he was reflecting on the significance of his voyages, and his text, based on his actual travel diaries, is a good indication of how ideology colours perception. One of the purposes of Mackenzie’s voyages, as he wrote in his Preface, was to add “new countries to the realms of British commerce” (57). Thinking of native land as vacant, or under-utilized, eased the process of Empire by which it became “ours,” not “theirs.” Despite the testimony of his own diaries, in his Preface Mackenzie serves the broader colonial purpose.

## APPENDIX B

Only two of Mackenzie’s native followers are identified by name. “The English Chief,” a Chipewyan formerly of Matonabee’s band, was employed as his interpreter and hunter on the first voyage; he was accompanied by two wives and “two young Indians” who remain anonymous. On his second voyage, there were two Indian guides and hunters. One of these is anonymous, while the other is identified by his nickname, “Cancre” (“dunce”), which he had acquired from the French-Canadians for supposed idleness in his youth (257). Although these Indians were essential to the success of his expeditions, Mackenzie makes no mention of their real names, if he knew them, or of their nationality. From their ability to converse with other Athabaskan-speaking people, it is probable that all of them were, like The English Chief, Chipewyan. Most of the time, however, he refers to them collectively as “the Indians” or “my Indians,” to distinguish them from members of other tribes encountered along the way. The French-Canadian voyageurs are slightly higher on the scale of humanity than the Indians; they merit, at least on the second voyage, having their individual names recorded (257). Thereafter, they are referred to collectively as “my men,” or “my people,” an interesting unconscious distinction from “my Indians.” As a group they have a collective identity; the Indians and their families who accompanied him have none.

Despite this apparent disinterest in their identity, however, Mackenzie is not entirely without human feelings. On one occasion in the second voyage, he shows evidence of real concern when an individual, identified only as "the sick Indian," becomes incapacitated for a short time. He makes careful arrangements for the man's care, and personally carries him across a river on his back (383-84, 395). Mackenzie may have possessed somewhat more warmth, in reality, than his narrative usually reveals. On the other hand, it must be observed that a good deal of self-interest was at stake. A sick crew member was a danger to his expedition, and could reveal the weakness of his position to the local natives. Abandoning him might create cynicism and distrust among his own men as well as among the strangers.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For Mackenzie's career and the background to his voyages, see Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), 408-11; E. E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967), 178-80; W. Kaye Lamb, introduction to his ed., *The Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), 4-14.
- <sup>2</sup> Roy Daniells, "The Literary Relevance of Alexander Mackenzie," *Canadian Literature* 38 (Autumn 1968), 22-23. See also his *Alexander Mackenzie and the North West* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), and A. J. M. Smith, ed., *The Colonial Century: English-Canadian Writing before Confederation* (Toronto: Gage, 1973), xviii-xx. More balanced views of Mackenzie which nevertheless retain the idea of his heroism are presented by James K. Smith, *Alexander Mackenzie, Explorer: The Hero Who Failed* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1973); T. D. MacLulich, "The Explorer as Hero: Mackenzie and Fraser," *Canadian Literature* 75 (Winter 1978), 61-63; "Canadian Exploration as Literature," *Canadian Literature* 81 (Summer 1979), 80-81; and "Alexander Mackenzie," *Profiles in Canadian Literature*, vol. 5, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto: Dundurn, 1986), 17-24. See also Victor Hopwood, "Explorers by Land," *Literary History of Canada*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), 19-53, and Germaine Warkentin, "Exploration Literature in English," *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 242-49.
- <sup>3</sup> An exception must be made for MacLulich's brief but acute observations in *Profiles in Canadian Literature* 5: 19.
- <sup>4</sup> For the composition and publication of *Voyages from Montreal*, see Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 32-36, 47-48. A manuscript copy of the first expedition's journal has survived among the Stowe manuscripts, making it possible to study Combe's treatment of the text. This essay follows Lamb's edition, which prints Mackenzie's manuscript version of the first voyage, together with Combe's emended — and sole extant — version of the second. Page numbers in the text of the essay refer to this edition.
- <sup>5</sup> The extent and effect of Combe's editorial changes have been much discussed and debated. See Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 33-34; Franz Montgomery, "Alexander Mackenzie's literary assistant," *Canadian Historical Review* 18 (1937), 301-04; Daniells, "The Literary Relevance of Alexander Macken-

zie," 19-20; MacLulich, "The Explorer as Hero," 61-63, and *Profiles in Canadian Literature* 5: 19-20. The fullest analysis, concentrating on Mackenzie/Combe's description of the Methye Portage, is I. S. Maclaren, "Alexander Mackenzie and the Landscapes of Commerce," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 7.2 (1982), 141-50. Maclaren makes it clear that Combe's additions to the text were the result of close identification with the author's purposes.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> As Mackenzie's cousin Roderic lucidly wrote, the North West Company's "expenditure in Canada ultimately tends to the encouragement of British manufactory, for those who are employed in the different branches of this business, are enabled by their gains to purchase such British articles as they must otherwise forego" (*Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie* 82).

<sup>8</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 7-15, 31-49. Writing about Lord Cromer's essay on the "subject races," Said argues: "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (*Orientalism* 36).

<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie is treated in this essay as a representative, in the broadest sense, of European culture and its values. Obviously, this is to put in abeyance specific questions about his Scottish background on the Isle of Lewis. The term "European" was used by eighteenth-century British writers to distinguish themselves racially and culturally from the natives of North America. This essay reflects their usage.

<sup>10</sup> See Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), chap. 5 et passim; Hugh Honour, *The New Golden Land: European Images of America from the Discoveries to the Present Time* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), chaps. 5, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> In the words of William Robertson, the eighteenth-century Scottish historian, "in every part of the earth, the progress of man hath been nearly the same; and we can trace him in his career from the rude simplicity of savage life, until he attains the industry, the arts, and the elegance of polished society" (*The History of America* [1777], in *The Works of William Robertson*, vol. 6, book 4 [London 1827], 255). This discourse is the subject of Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976). See also Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 82-91; Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1978), 44-49; Ronald V. Sampson, *Progress in the Age of Reason: the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, such recent studies of the fur trade as Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1983), 166-71, et passim; Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, "Give us Good Measure": *An Economic Analysis of Relationships Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978). See also Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's Heroic Age Reconsidered* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Hearne, *A Journey to the Northern Ocean*, ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), 143n.

<sup>15</sup> Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Indian in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 66-80.

- <sup>16</sup> For Bella Coola potlatch practices see T. F. McIlwraith, *The Bella Coola Indians*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1948).
- <sup>17</sup> Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 16.
- <sup>18</sup> For the society and culture of the people of these regions, see Hugh Brody, *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier* (1981; rpt. Pelican Books, 1983), 35-37, et passim and *Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987); for work and leisure in a hunting economy, see Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society," in his *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine Atherton, 1972), 1-39.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. William Robertson: "The strongest feeling in the mind of a savage is a sense of his own independence. . . . He pursues his own career, and indulges his own fancy, without enquiring or regarding whether what he does be agreeable or offensive to others, whether they may derive benefit or receive hurt from it. Hence the ungovernable caprice of savages, their impatience under any species of restraint, their inability to suppress or moderate any inclination, their high estimation of themselves, and their contempt of other men" (*Works of William Robertson*, vol. 6, book 4, 386-87).
- <sup>20</sup> Robert Boyle's instructions to travellers were published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society in 1666. They were later printed separately under the title *General Heads for the Natural History of a Country . . . for the use of Travellers and Navigators*. See P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Dent, 1982), 45-46, 60-61, et passim.
- <sup>21</sup> See Appendix B.
- <sup>22</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (1965; rpt. Penguin, 1967), 190.
- <sup>23</sup> It was just after spring breakup, and the Sekani may have endured a winter of scarcity because of periodic fluctuations in the numbers of the game, which were becoming increasingly common as the fur trade pushed west. They were also in a state of hostility with the better armed Beaver and Cree on one side, and the Shuswap on the other, whose raids put them under considerable social pressure. On the other hand, Mackenzie may have merely encountered them, in a temporarily dishevelled state, on a protracted and difficult hunt at the worst time of the year. See Glenda Denniston, "Sekani," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 6 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981), 433-41.
- <sup>24</sup> See Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 58-60.
- <sup>25</sup> See Martin, *Keepers of the Game*, 69-93, 113-29, 150; Diamond Jenness, *The Indians of Canada*, 7th ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 167-99.
- <sup>26</sup> The "General History of the Fur Trade," which appears at the beginning of Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal*, contains descriptions of the Knisteneaux, or Cree, and the Chipewyan, and it demonstrates a much greater familiarity with the religious practices of these nations. The authorship of this chapter is in dispute; David Thompson reported that it had been written by Roderic McKenzie, Alexander's cousin, and most critics and historians have accepted this theory (Lamb, *Journals and Letters of Alexander Mackenzie*, 33). James K. Smith, however, argues that there is no reason to doubt Alexander Mackenzie's authorship (*Alexander Mackenzie, Explorer*, 2-3). Whatever its origins, the chapter treats these matters in primarily material terms, and is entirely consistent with Mackenzie's views of the Indians.
- <sup>27</sup> W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Journals and Letters of Simon Fraser, 1806-1808* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), 61-120.

- <sup>28</sup> See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 66-75.
- <sup>29</sup> Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, 12; Brody, *Maps and Dreams*, 51-55, and *Living Arctic*.
- <sup>30</sup> Recent Dene publications testify eloquently to their sense of the "affluence" of their traditional way of life, and to their deep love for a land and a climate which are neither remote nor forbidding; see, for example, Dene Nation, *Denendeh: A Dene Celebration* (Yellowknife: Dene Nation, 1984), and Margaret M. Thom and Ethel Blondin-Townsend, eds., *Nahecho Keh: Our Elders* (Fort Providence: Slavey Research Project, 1987).
- <sup>31</sup> Combe very slightly softens this and other negative judgments, in his revisions of the text. Compare entries for July 5 and July 27 (183, 214-15) with Combe's versions, in Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal*, ed. John W. Garvin (Toronto: Radisson Society, 1927), 164-65, 210-12. This does not affect the general distinctions I have made between his views of the nomadic hunters in the first voyage and the western coastal tribes in the second.
- <sup>32</sup> See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 68-74; Washburn, *The Indian in America*, 31-33.
- <sup>33</sup> The division of labour among the nomadic peoples of the north required women to perform much of the packing and hauling. This freed the men to hunt for food while the group was on the move. Mackenzie, however, like most of his fellow countrymen, believed that women were incapable of hard physical labour and fundamentally dependent on male protection. Consequently, he failed to grasp the necessity of this important custom for survival, and he poured his scorn upon it. In reality, the Indian women held more power in their own society than the protected women of Europe did in theirs. See Sylvia Van Kirk, "*Many Tender Ties*": *Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980), 17-19; Eleanor B. Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance, Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review, 1981), 163-80.
- <sup>34</sup> See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 76-104, et passim.
- <sup>35</sup> See, for example, Dene Nation, *Denendeh: A Dene Celebration*; Thom and Blondin-Townsend, eds., *Nahecho Keh: Our Elders*; and Brody, *Living Arctic*.
- <sup>36</sup> Emmerich de Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, vol. 3, trans. Charles G. Fenwick (Washington: Carnegie Inst., 1916), 37-38. The idea goes back to the period of earliest conquest. See Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization*, 66-73, and Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 119-26.

## PAKASHGOOGAN

*Denis Stokes*

Some in the village  
are calling your two sons  
dumb Indians.

They say last night  
 was long in a cold  
 that can cut limbs loose.

In the ice crust  
 a moose could bleed  
 at the ankles, drop

on its path. It lasted  
 too long, George said. Beside  
 a one match fire

they slept in turns.  
 Around Trout Lake, birches  
 molt like beige snakes. Their skins

strike the fastest flames  
 in snow. It dreams,  
 the fire formed tongues,

their fast necessary.  
 Hares are scarce. Could visions  
 have come: of arrows,

women, a name, a song  
 for Bryan, half-poet perhaps,  
 midjis at 17,

his robin wine-breast  
 bleeding out of a surrounding night  
 he refuses.

Midmorning, a wind  
 blasted from your rifle ends  
 from stars, his cry —

Pakashgoogan,  
 the stranded hunter's friend,  
 a ghost roaming darkening

snows, until good men  
 are found,  
 his rest in your relief.

# SAVAGE, DEGENERATE, AND DISPOSSESSED

*Some Sociological, Anthropological, and Legal  
Backgrounds to the Depiction of Native Peoples  
in Early Long Poems on Canada*

D. M. R. Bentley

**A**T FIRST GLANCE, the few long poems written in and about Canada during the high Georgian period (1759-1825) appear to contain little, if anything, of interest concerning the country's native peoples. In *Abram's Plains* (1789) by Thomas Cary, there are brief references to the Hurons of Lorette and to the culinary habits of the "Esquimaux," and some encouraging comments about the taming of the "savage mind."<sup>1</sup> In J. Mackay's *Quebec Hill* (1797) and Cornwall Bayley's *Canada* (w. 1805) the Indians are treated at some length and with a similarity that suggests the presence of a stereotype — the "savage" who divides his time almost exclusively between killing animals and people.<sup>2</sup> In *Talbot Road* (1818) by Adam Hood Burwell, the first native-born white poet, the native peoples are mentioned only in a passing reference to the ability of "commerce" to "tame . . . the hardy savage, rough and rude. . ."<sup>3</sup> In Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* (1825, 1834) Acadia's "woods and wilds" are inhabited by "wandering savages, and beasts of prey" which, however, soon depart the country and the poem to hunt "beneath some other sky."<sup>4</sup> With good reason, it may be felt, Terrie Goldie ignores these poems entirely in his recent *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, as do the contributors to *The Native in Literature*, the proceedings of the conference of the same name at the University of Lethbridge in 1984.<sup>5</sup> That the treatment of the native peoples in the poems of Cary, Mackay, Bayley, Burwell, and Goldsmith does provide material for fruitful study is nevertheless indicated by Leslie Monkman's *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature*, a pioneering survey which mentions each of these poets but, regrettably, discusses their works only as extensively as its comprehensive nature permits. It

will be the aim of the present discussion to consolidate and expand upon Monkman's study by placing *Abram's Plains*, *Quebec Hill*, *Canada*, *Talbot Road*, and *The Rising Village* in the sociological, anthropological, and legal contexts that governed their authors' conceptions of the characteristics, origins, and rights of Canada's native peoples. As will be seen, the legal dimension of *The Rising Village* lends to this poem in particular a contemporary relevance that is usually denied to early poetry on Canada.

SINCE IT DICTATES the sense in which the poets of Georgian Canada described the native peoples as savage(s), the critically important context for understanding their work is the so-called "four stages theory" of social development which, as Ronald L. Meek has shown in *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, was "a very common and a very important ingredient in Enlightenment thought in the field of the social sciences during the whole of the period from 1750 to 1800"<sup>6</sup> (and, it may be added, continued to be echoed in poetry on Canada and by Canadians until around the turn of the present century).<sup>7</sup> According to this theory, which Meek traces to two independent progenitors, A. R. J. Turgot in France and Adam Smith in Scotland, all societies develop through four distinct stages, each defined by the mode of subsistence of its constituent members: (1) a savage stage based on hunting; (2) a barbaric (or pastoral) stage based on herding; (3) an agricultural stage based on farming; and (4) a commercial stage based on trading. Of these four stages, the savage was, of course, held to be the most "rough and rude" (Burwell's phrase) and the commercial the most polished or refined. Two subsidiary tenets of the four stages theory are worth mentioning, not merely because of their obvious relevance to the treatment of social development in *Talbot Road* and *The Rising Village*, but also because they colour the depiction of the native peoples in the three other poems under discussion here: (a) the tenet that the great leap forward from rudeness to refinement occurs at the agricultural stage when self-sufficiency begins to give way to the superfluity that creates leisure, trade, and prosperity; and (b) the tenet, absent from Smith's theorizings, but evident in the work of several of his more moralistic successors such as the John Millar of *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* that the commercial stage of a society's development brings with it, not merely such advantages as civility, convenience, patriotism, and the arts, but also a variety of evils, most notably luxury and vice, that can lead to the ruination of individuals within a society (especially women) and, if not checked, to the decadence of an entire society or nation. From the first of these tenets, it should be evident why both Burwell and Goldsmith place great emphasis in their poems on agricultural development (indeed, why the 1825 version of *The Rising Village* contains a note praising Lord Dalhousie and the

Agricultural Societies for their efforts in introducing a better “system of cultivation” [535 n.] to Nova Scotia). From the second, it should be evident why Burwell follows the introduction of “Commerce, the first of friends to human kind, / That . . . forms society for mutual good” with visions of young couples pursuing their sophisticated courting rituals under the guidance of Christian morality and right reason,<sup>8</sup> and why Goldsmith, enthusiastic as he too is about the arrival of “Commerce” (520) in Nova Scotia, places at the centre of *The Rising Village* the cautionary tale of Flora and Albert. It is no coincidence that the descent into madness of the “refined” and “gentle manner[ed]” Flora begins when a messenger with a “ruder footstep” than she expects delivers a “treacherous” letter from Albert (317, 319, 353, 369). All too easily can a disregard for “mutual good” reintroduce savagery to a society at its commercial stage.

Goldsmith’s view that “wandering savages, and beasts of prey” once held alternating sway in the “woods and wilds” of Acadia probably derives in part at least from Thomas Chandler Haliburton<sup>9</sup> who, in turn, follows the Scottish historian and proponent of the four-stage theory, William Robertson, in viewing North American Indian civilization as the “rudest” and “least civilized”<sup>10</sup> that could be conceived. In his *General Description of Nova Scotia*, Haliburton does little more than echo Robertson when he describes “savages” as “wandering tribes, who depend upon hunting and fishing for subsistence” and, thus, “nearly resemble . . . animals.”<sup>11</sup> Apparently on the assumption that the mentality of nomadic hunters is shaped by their mode of subsistence and way of life, Robertson lists various virtues such as “dignity,” “perseverance,” and a “spirit of independence” among the qualities of North America’s Indians in *The History of America* but dwells at length on their vengeful and cruel disposition, which he sees as characteristic of savage societies: “[T]he most frequent or the most powerful motive of the incessant hostilities among rude nations,” he writes, is “the passion of revenge, which rages with such violence in the breast of savages, that earnestness to gratify it may be considered as the distinguishing characteristic of men in their uncivilized state. . . . The desire for revenge is communicated from breast to breast, and soon kindles into rage,” which, in turn, issues in cruelty.<sup>12</sup> Similar, but less elaborate, views of the Indian character can be found in the work of each of the three writers whose *Travels* lie centrally in the background of the poems on view here: Peter Kalm (a principal source for *Quebec Hill*),<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Carver (a principal source for *Quebec Hill* and *Abram’s Plains*), and Isaac Weld (a principal source for *Canada, Talbot Road*, and *The Rising Village*). As Carver succinctly puts it: a “diabolical lust for revenge . . . is the predominant passion in the breast of every individual of every tribe. . . .”<sup>14</sup> Or as Weld says, more sympathetically, “a word in the slightest degree insulting will kindle a flame in their breasts, that can only be extinguished by the blood of the offending party; and they will traverse forests for hundreds of miles . . . to gratify their revenge. . . . I fear . . . that in the opinion of many people,

all the good qualities which they possess, would but ill atone for their revengeful disposition, and for the cruelties which . . . they sometimes inflict upon . . . prisoners. . . ."<sup>15</sup> Such, then, are the sources of the stereotype of the revengeful hunter found in Mackay and Bayley:

Here, deep involv'd in woods, the Indians range  
 In quest of prey, or panting for revenge;  
 With fixt resolve, and nerves inur'd to toil,  
 The roe to vanquish, or the foe to foil. . . .  
 (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 81-84)

Mark in . . . [you wild Indian's] face what various  
 passions low'r  
 And rule his bosom with alternate power!  
 Revenge, to mercy deaf to reason blind,  
 That scorns forgiveness as beneath his mind;  
 Exulting Rage, with human tortures fed,  
 That rears the Scalp his triumph o'er the dead. . . .  
 (*Canada*, 77-82)

In other passages (and for reasons to be discussed in a few moments) Bayley presents a more sympathetic portrait of the Indian than Mackay, but nevertheless does so within the framework of the revengeful hunter stereotype.

To judge from his subsequent description of the destructive effects of alcohol — “Britain’s cherished bane” — on “the Indian” and on “savage nations” (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 236-40), Mackay shared with Goldsmith a recognition of the mixed blessings that could come with the advanced stages of social development. Yet Mackay seems also to have been convinced, as was Cary before him, that advanced (agricultural, commercial) European civilization had a great deal to offer the native peoples in their development from rudeness to refinement. Ignorant of the fact that the Hurons had practised farming for centuries in what is now Ontario, both Mackay and Cary look to Lorette for evidence of the salutary effects of agriculture and contact with European culture on Canada’s native peoples. In a footnote to the following passage, Mackay observes that the Hurons at Lorette “are now so far civilized as to cultivate their lands for their subsistence, yet many of them still retain, not a little, of the indolent roving disposition of their ancestors”:

. . . view the slope of yonder hill . . .  
 There, tam'd and staid, the Indian seeks repose,  
 Nor still imagines all the world his foes;  
 With art and care, he cultivates his lands,  
 And gathers in their fruits with willing hands.  
 Yet 'mong the few who shun the forest's gloom,  
 And Europe's garb and languages assume,  
 Still sloth and ignorance our pity claim. . . .  
 (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 225-35)

Less admirable because “less civilized” in Mackay’s view than the Hurons at Lorette are “the Indians that live in the woods around Quebec” — hunters who “long . . . the stately deer to foil” and, hence, still fall into the category of “savage” (*Quebec Hill*, 1, 63-72). Although Mackay may have read *Abram’s Plains*, the shared conceptual framework of the four-stages theory is a more likely explanation than a literary debt for the resemblance between his description of Lorette and Cary’s:

Here, of the copper-tribes, an half tam’d race,  
As villagers take up their resting place;  
Here fix’d, their household gods lay peaceful  
down,  
To learn the manners of the polish’d town.  
*(Abram’s Plains, 414-18)*

Agriculture is not mentioned in these lines, but earlier in *Abram’s Plains* Cary parallels the physical development of the Canadian terrain with the moral development of its native peoples:

How blest the task, to tame the savage soul,  
And, from the waters, bid the woods recoil!  
But oh! a task of more exalted kind,  
To arts of peace, to tame the savage mind;  
The thirst of blood, in human breasts, to shame,  
To wrest, from barb’rous vice, fair virtue’s name;  
Bid tomahawks to ploughshares yield the sway,  
And scalping-knives to pruning hooks give way;  
In Circe’s glass bid moderation reign,  
And moral virtues humanize the plain!  
*(Abram’s Plains, 54-63)*

Through the simultaneous cultivation of external and internal nature, the “savage” and “barb’rous” will be eliminated from Canada, and in their place will exist an agricultural society amply endowed with the characteristics — “moderation,” “moral virtues,” and the “arts of peace” — that will ensure its stable progress towards the high level of refinement to be expected at the commercial stage of its development and, indeed, already evident in the “polish’d town[s]” of Quebec and Montreal.<sup>16</sup> To see *Abram’s Plains* in the light of the four-stages theory is to recognize that both the “half-tamed” Hurons at Lorette and the launching of a merchant vessel on the St. Lawrence described elsewhere in the poem are part of a progress report on the development of Lower Canada from rudeness to refinement.

LESS UBIQUITOUS than the four-stages theory in shaping the responses of the early poets to Canada’s native peoples were the not unrelated

theories of the origin of the North American Indians. While many such theories were advanced in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (as well as earlier and later), by the high Georgian period one had gained widespread approval because it seemed, in Bayley's words, to be "agreeable" both to "reason" and "the truth of Revelation" (*Canada*, n. 95). This was the theory, traceable to Joseph de Acosta, that the Amerindians were descendants of Noah who had made their way across Asia after the "confusion of tongues" described in Genesis 11 and, from there, had reached the New World by way of an isthmus between present-day Russia and Alaska.<sup>17</sup> Of crucial importance in reconciling "the designs of God" with the four-stages theory was what Bruce G. Trigger in *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* calls "degenerationism" or "the theory of degeneration":<sup>18</sup> the notion that, as Noah's progeny "separate[d] and . . . spread themselves . . . over the whole earth,"<sup>19</sup> they became degenerate in proportion to their distance in space and time from their origin. (The application of the same theory to the other passengers on the Ark led to the idea, prevalent among immigrants to Canada until well into the nineteenth century, that by comparison with their European counterparts, the plants and animals of North America were degenerate — hence, for example, the "songless" birds in Alexander MacLachlan's *The Emigrant*.)<sup>20</sup> As the long Note "on the subject of the origin of native Americans" that Bayley appended to *Canada* makes quite clear, the degeneration of peoples far removed from the cradle of civilization in Mesopotamia took place in all spheres, from "manners and customs" to language and religion:

Superstition would naturally creep into their religious ceremonies; the climate and local circumstances of the regions they colonized, would alter not only their manner of living, but even their bodily appearance — The loss of literature and education would corrupt their language — and the want of proper materials and opportunities would occasion that decay of arts and sciences which must finally terminate in barbarity. (*Canada*, p. 19)

As this passage indicates, environment was frequently added to distance and isolation from civilized origins as a factor determining the degenerate and savage (or barbaric) nature of the North American Indians. No wonder Canada's native peoples were in a state of extreme degeneracy: among other things, they had been exposed for centuries to a climate in which, as Frances Brooke has Arabella Fermor observe, "[t]is sufficient employment . . . to contrive how to preserve an existence" and the cold not only "brings on a sort of stupefaction" but also "suspends the very powers of the understanding." "Genius will never mount high," says Arabella, "where the faculties of mind are benumbed half the year."<sup>21</sup>

It should now be evident why Mackay describes Canada's Indians as "yellow" (to indicate their Asian origins) and emphasizes their lack of written history and durable architecture (things not to be expected from such distant and degenerate descendants of Noah):<sup>22</sup>

No musty record can the curious trace,  
 Engross'd by annals of the savage race:  
 Involv'd in darkness their atchievements lay  
 Till fam'd Columbus sought a western way.

The Antiquarian here may search in vain  
 For walls erected in Severus' reign;  
 Or lofty tow'rs that their declension show,  
 Or cities built some thousand years ago:  
 For arts and antiquities visit Eastern ground. . . .  
 (*Quebec Hill*, I, 131, 37-45)

In his long Note to *Canada*, Bayley also alludes to the Indians' lack of "accounts or memoirs of themselves"<sup>23</sup> and, in the body of the poem, notices the absence in Canada of "marble busts," "gothic tow'rs," and "pillars glowing with Corinthian flowers" (*Canada*, 454-55). Since the Indians have no written literature or history, no "classic wreaths . . . / To swell the annals of an ancient state" (*Canada*, 35-36), their past is a *tabula rasa* on which Bayley proceeds to inscribe his own version of events, a characteristically syncretic combination of science and Christianity. In the beginning, a "long and dreary . . . night" of "Chaos" enveloped the St. Lawrence; then came nature — trees and animals (including the "Mammoth, hugest in the brutal train" and resembling the Behemoth of the Bible)—without man, but manifesting increasingly the signs of the Fall; and, finally, into a distinctly post-lapsarain world of suicidal snakes, "murd'rous" wolves, and "pilfering . . . Squirrels" come the distant ancestors of the Indians:

. . . mankind, the forest's ancient Lords,  
 Pitch'd their light tents, and told their savage hordes;  
 Of sex regardless — rushing from afar,  
 With brethren clans to wage eternal war!  
 (*Canada*, 37-68)

That these people are nomadic and uncivilized is shown by their "light tents" and disregard of sexual differences;<sup>24</sup> that they are from Asia is indicated by the word "hordes," which refers specifically to "clans" of "roving Tartars";<sup>25</sup> that they are fallen, indeed, diabolical, is suggested by Bayley's allusion to Satan's resolve to wage "eternal War" in *Paradise Lost*, I, 121.<sup>26</sup> Until the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries who began the process of making the "darted tomahawk" yield its "tribute to agriculture's throne" (*Canada*, 135-36), Canada was nothing more than a battleground for vicious animals and Satanic savages.

When Bayley turns his attention to the generic Indian of his own day, he sees a savage hunter-warrior who, while driven by such typical passions as "Rage" and a desire for "Revenge," nevertheless displays certain physical, mental, and spiritual qualities that suggest the residual presence of his original, Mesopotamian culture:

Mark you wild Indian, leaning on his bow,  
 Fatigue and labour streaming from his brow;  
 Ev'n in his wild and undomestic state,  
 In form superior and in reason great!  
 Mark how the hand of Fashion or of Pride  
 In barbarous custom decorates his side;  
 Mark the snow-sandals that support his tread,  
 The crown of Feathers waving o'er his head. . . .  
 (*Canada*, 69-76)

Since Bayley agreed with Pierre de Charlevoix, Edward Stillingfleet, and others that the "superstitions" and "notions of religion" among the Indians were, like their "arts and sciences," the degenerate vestiges of their original, biblical culture<sup>27</sup> — "the phantoms of a purer creed / That worships Heav'n in *spirit* as in deed . . ." (*Canada*, 110-11) — it may also be that in describing his generic Indian's snowshoes as "snow-sandals" and his headdress as a "crown" of Feathers, he intended these things, and perhaps also the Indian's "bow," to be recognized as the distant descendants of items developed in the cradle of civilization and referred to in the Bible. Be this as it may, and despite his "wild" and "undomestic" state, Bayley's present-day Indian still exhibits physical and mental attributes ("form superior and reason great") that characterize him as the not unworthy descendant of Noah and, beyond him, Adam. Indeed, when viewed sympathetically (as Bayley clearly intends) the Indian can be seen to possess certain innate ("self-born") and patriotic "virtues" — "Contempt of danger, and contempt of pain" — that bear the "stamp" of something "nobler" and immortal:

Yes here are form'd the mouldings of a soul,  
 Too great for ease, too lofty for controul;  
 A soul, which ripen'd by refinement's hand,  
 Had scatter'd wisdom thro' its native land;  
 A soul, which Education might have given  
 To earth an honor — and an heir to Heaven!  
 (*Canada*, 86-94)

Bayley's Indian is "nobler" than he first appears, but he is not a noble savage whose claim to admiration resides in his natural condition, his freedom from the taint of civilization. On the contrary, his admirable qualities are the residue of his original civilization and would have been strengthened, not corrupted, by "refinement" and "Education."

Bayley's subsequent speculations on the origins and present condition of Canada's Indians are a versified version of the theory of degeneration through diffusion:

Perchance there was a time (ere first  
 On Europe's plains the dawn of science burst)  
 When the forefathers of these vagrant hordes

Knew every charm that civil life affords;  
 Now may they rove, expell'd by wayward fate,  
 By mutual warfare or tyrannic hate;  
 The offspring *once*, of nations far renown'd,  
 Whom Genius cherish'd or whom Glory crown'd. . . .  
 (*Canada*, 95-102)

In Bayley's final analysis, the Indians are the benighted victims of "fate," "time," and "*nature*":

Perchance at last — when their meridian blaze  
 Had beam'd around on man's astonish'd gaze;  
 In *nature's course*, and time's declining date,  
 Perfection yielded to the hand of fate,  
 Their Sun of Science set beneath the clouds,  
 And bade the night rise, that still their glory  
 shrouds!

(*Canada*, 111-16)

Thanks to the presence of the French and the British, however, a new dawn has begun to break for the Indians of Canada, and, thus, "willing Hope perceives returning beams / Bursting from nature's long-bewildered dreams . . . And looks beyond to life's maturer blaze!" (121-24). In fact, the "darted tomahawk" has already yielded its "tribute . . . to agriculture's throne" and the "war whoop's echoes and the slave's sad throes" been "hush'd in music, pleasure, and repose!" (133-36). What diffusion darkened, refinement will cause to shine again. As well as being "agreeable" to "reason" and "Revelation," such a view demonstrated the compatibility of the degeneration and four stages theories, not merely with each other, but also with the imperial ethos. Provided that Christianity came with it, exposure to Britain's agricultural and commercial civilization could only improve the benighted and degenerate savages of Canada and other countries remote from the sources and centres of civilization. To ensure this exposure was the burden of the white man; to accept it with gratitude and grace was the lot of the native. That the St. Lawrence, the Hudson, and the "GANGES flow[ed] by EUROPEAN lands"<sup>28</sup> was surely to the benefit of all concerned. Thus ran the logic of British imperialism until well into the present century, but it was plagued by one especially nagging doubt: who really owned those "EUROPEAN lands" in Asia, Africa, America, and Australia?

**I**N *A General Description of Nova Scotia*, Haliburton furnishes several examples of the "great outrages" visited upon "the solitary and peaceable settlers" in the Maritimes by the "savage" and "ferocious" Micmacs and Richi-

buctos. In the vicinity of Halifax particularly, he observes, “[t]hese savages . . . defended with obstinacy a territory they held from nature, and it was not until after very great losses, that the English drove them out of their former hunting grounds.”<sup>29</sup> “[H]ideous yells announce the murderous band, / Whose bloody footsteps desolate the land,” run the equivalent lines in *The Rising Village*, “And now, behold! [the settler’s] bold aggressors fly, / To seek their prey beneath some other sky; / Resign the haunts they can maintain no more . . .” (85-86, 107-09). Goldsmith was, of course, much less learned in the law than the future Judge Haliburton, but he had enough legal knowledge to appreciate the force of the phrase “territory . . . held from nature” in his compatriot’s account of the Indian resistance to white settlement in Nova Scotia. One of the legal texts that Goldsmith read during his brief stint as a clerk in a “Lawyer’s Office” in Halifax during his teens was Sir William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*,<sup>30</sup> a work which, in addition to being grounded in the four-stages theory (and in this regard also, an important influence on *The Rising Village*), contains a discussion of property rights that may well have been seminal for both Haliburton and Goldsmith.

The relevant portion of the *Commentaries* is the section entitled “Of Property, in General” in the second volume, where Blackstone draws a distinction between the primeval “natural right” of “wandering” peoples to the lands that they use or need for subsistence and the “idea of a more permanent property in the soil” which, he says, was “introduced and established” through the “regular connexion and consequence” that came with “the art of agriculture.” Blackstone draws an explicit contrast between the natural law under which “American [Indian] nations” and “the first Europeans” held “transient” rights to property and the post-agricultural notion of “permanent property,” and he expresses deep misgivings about the practice of “sending colonies” into “countries already peopled, and driving out or massacring the innocent and defenceless natives. . . .” “How far such a conduct was consonant to nature, to reason, or to christianity,” he writes, “deserved well to be considered by those, who have rendered their names immortal by thus civilizing mankind.”<sup>31</sup> As Haliburton’s concessive reference to “territories . . . held from nature” by the Micmacs indicates, the question of the right of settlers to land in Canada was still being “considered” in Nova Scotia in the early 1820s. So, too, was it in the United States, as witness the landmark case of *Johnson v. M’Intosh*, which was decided in the same year (1823) as the publication of Haliburton’s *General Description* and the writing of *The Rising Village*.<sup>32</sup> In a decision that was controversial in its day, and which it still cited in American and, occasionally, Canadian land disputes involving native peoples, Chief Justice John Marshall held that, while “exclusive title” to a given area in North America had passed under the “fundamental principle” of “discovery” from its “original inhabitants” to the particular European nation that discovered it, the Indians remained “the rightful

occupants of the soil, with a legal as well as just claim to retain possession of it, and to use it according to their own discretion. . . .”<sup>33</sup> As Chief Justice Dickson writes in the seminal Supreme Court of Canada case of *Guerin v. The Queen* (which acknowledges the Indian’s right to land), Marshall “was . . . of the opinion that the rights of Indians in the lands they traditionally occupied prior to European colonization both predated and survived the claims to sovereignty made by various European nations in the territories of the North American continent.”<sup>34</sup>

Goldsmith’s response to the vexed and vexing issue of Indian rights in land seems aimed at reassuring his European readers. To justify the colonists’ claims to the land, he begins by implying that the area of Nova Scotia which was colonized by the Loyalists some “fifty Summers” earlier was at that time uninhabited. When the first “lonely settler built his home” “amid a wilderness of trees . . . / . . . not a voice upon his ear intrude[d]; / . . . [and] solemn silence all the waste pervade[d] . . .” (*The Rising Village*, 499, 59-63). In similar attempts to obviate the perception of a conflict between “aboriginal rights” and “white conceptions of ownership and possession of . . . land,”<sup>35</sup> Burwell and, later, Isabella Valancy Crawford also send their settlers into areas where, to quote *Malcolm’s Katie*, the animals have not seen “the plume or bow / Of the red hunter. . . .”<sup>36</sup> It is as if all three poets were writing with an eye on Blackstone’s argument that only the colonization and cultivation of “uninhabited countries” was in keeping with the “law of nature” (i.e., the law of God) and gave settlers to such areas the right of “first taker”<sup>37</sup> in the lands that they occupied. In *The Rising Village*, the violators of the law of nature and God, the newcomers to what Blackstone calls “countries already peopled” are therefore the “wandering savages” whose “sentence” of “death” to the European settlers thus amounts to a grotesque perversion of justice:

Behold the savage tribes in wildest strain,  
*Approach* with death and terror in their train;  
*No longer* silence o’er the forest reigns,  
*No longer* still now her power retains;  
 But hideous yells *announce* the murderous band,  
 Whose bloody footsteps desolate the land;  
 He hears them oft in sternest mood maintain,  
*Their right to rule* the mountain and the plain  
 He hears them doom the *white man’s* instant death,  
 Shrinks from the sentence, while he gasps for breath  
 Then, rousing with one effort all his might,  
 Darts from his hut, and saves himself in flight.  
 (*The Rising Village*, 81-92)

(The italics of amazement on “*white man’s*” in this passage are Goldsmith’s own; the other emphases have been added to highlight his placement in key positions of phrases which concern the arrival and claims of the Indians.) Nor are the Indians wrong merely in asserting a sovereignty — “[t]heir right to rule” — that in any case

had passed under the principle of discovery to the European discoverers and settlers of Nova Scotia. They are wrong also, and in a very specific way, for forcing the settler out of his hut and off his farm. The reason lies in Goldsmith's other major means of justifying the settler's rights in the land.

According to Locke's analysis in *Two Treatises on Government* (the key passage is quoted but disputed in a note in Blackstone's *Commentaries*), the ownership of a thing such as land devolves to the man who "hath mixed his labour with [it], . . . joined to it something that is his own," and, hence, "remove[d] [it] out of the state that nature hath provided it and left it in. . . ." <sup>38</sup> "By patient firmness and industrious toil, / . . . [the settler] still retains possession of the soil . . ." observes Goldsmith in *The Rising Village*, adding in a note that "[t]he process of clearing land, though simple, is attended with a great deal of labour" (103-04, 72 n.). By labouring mightily to clear, cultivate, and build on the land, the European settlers in Nova Scotia have established their rights to "possession of the soil." In contrast, the nomadic or, to use Goldsmith's significantly repeated adjective, "wandering" (45, 99) Indians have merely passed over the land without investing labour or accruing rights in it. Where the white settlers in *The Rising Village* are thus justified in their ownership of land by their investment of labour, by the right of "first taker," and, more remotely, by the principle of discovery, the Indians are relegated to the status of animal-like "transients" whose hunting grounds are "haunts" which they defend aggressively but, ultimately, "[r]esign" to seek "prey" and "safety" in "far distant wilds" (107-10). It is no small irony that the Indians exiled from their traditional hunting grounds by the agricultural and commercial ambitions of the white colonists of Nova Scotia are in a parallel position to those same colonists, whose exile "beyond the Western main" (*The Rising Village*, 50) as described in *The Deserted Village* provided Goldsmith with the inspiration for his chronicle of settler heroism. The difference, of course, is that while the plight of his white compatriots who were "forced . . . to quit their native plains," <sup>39</sup> excited Goldsmith's sympathy, the plight of the native peoples in similar circumstances did not. From the perspective shared more or less by all the poets discussed here, whites were the only finders and keepers, losers and weepers, who really mattered.

**I**N TREATING THE INDIANS stereotypically and collectively as savages, degenerates, and transient hunters, the poets of Georgian Canada denied them status as individual people and as a multiplicity of peoples. With the honourable exception perhaps of Bayley (who at least argued with one of the stereotypes), these poets exiled the Indians from the reality of here and now into the "far distant wilds" of abstraction and silence. Only when they seemed to be assimilating themselves to European culture in the "colony at Lorette" (*Quebec Hill*, I, 229 n.) did

they warrant anything like full approbation, and even then they were not called by their names, either personal or tribal. The explanation for these denials of status and identity lies, no doubt, in the ethos of imperialism: it is psychologically difficult to colonize and settle lands inhabited by equals, by people with names, by cultures that have their own integrity. It is not fortuitous that Adam Kidd, one of the first poets to view the Indians as equals (indeed, betters), to accord them their personal and tribal names, and to depict their culture as rich in history, tradition, and value, was also vehemently opposed to the colonial enterprise in its various religious and secular manifestations, particularly in the United States. But *The Huron Chief* also embraces with post-Romantic fervour the stereotype of the noble savage and thus in its own way, patronizes and simplifies its Indian subjects. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose?* In our own day, several poets and critics have attempted to penetrate the stereotypes and abstractions that have occluded the indigenes in Canada, but have any of them done more (this essay certainly has not) than assemble archives of misrepresentation? With all their emphasis on deconstructing meta-physical assumptions, have the practitioners of post-modernism and post-structuralism helped to reify the native peoples of Britain's ex-colonies, or have they once more denied them a real presence in the world that matters — the world, now, of words, and words, moreover, in the great imperial languages of the modern age? How much better is it to be described as an indigene rather than as a savage? The question will be real if it reaches its intended audience.

## NOTES

I am grateful to three colleagues at the University of Western Ontario, Eileen Gillese, Barry Hoffmaster, and Geoffrey Rans, for information and discussions that have been very useful in the development of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> *Abram's Plains: A Poem*, ed. D. M. R. Bentley (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1986), pp. 4-5, 8, and 14. After a preliminary reference like this, poems in the Canadian Poetry Press Series of Early Canadian Poems are cited by title and line number in the body of the essay.

<sup>2</sup> See *Quebec Hill; or, Canadian Scenery. A Poem In Two Parts*, ed. D. M. R. Bentley (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1988), p. 10, and *Canada. A Descriptive Poem, Written at Quebec, 1805 With Satires — Imitations — and Sonnets* ([Quebec:] John Neilson, n.d.), p. 7. Hereafter Bayley's poem is cited in the body of the text with line numbers altered to reflect the repetition of the couplet at lines 131-32. An edition of Bayley's poem is forthcoming in the Canadian Poetry Press series.

<sup>3</sup> "Talbot Road: A Poem by Adam Hood Burwell," ed. Michael Williams (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Western Ontario, 1988), p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> *The Rising Village*, ed. Gerald Lynch (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1989), pp. 8-13. Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent quotations are from the 1834 version of Goldsmith's poem.

- <sup>5</sup> Goldic's study was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 1989 and *The Native in Literature*, which is edited by Thomas King, Cheryl Carver, and Helen Hoy, by ECW Press in 1987.
- <sup>6</sup> *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 230. My understanding of the four-stages theory is deeply indebted to Meek.
- <sup>7</sup> See, for example, Bliss Carman, *The Poetry of Life* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1905), p. 16.
- <sup>8</sup> See *Talbot Road*, 583-642 in Williams's thesis, pp. 19-81.
- <sup>9</sup> The debt of *The Rising Village* to *A General Description* was first suggested by Desmond Pacey; see *Creative Writing in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1961), p. 12.
- <sup>10</sup> See *The History of America*, 9th ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1800), II, 30 and II, 30-214 (Book IV), *passim* and *A General Description of Nova Scotia*, 2nd ed. (Halifax, N.S.: Royal Acadian School, 1825), p. 8 for Haliburton's inclusion of Robertson's *History* among the works upon which he has heavily relied.
- <sup>11</sup> *A General Description*, pp. 46 and 52.
- <sup>12</sup> *The History of America*, II, 233 and II, 147-75.
- <sup>13</sup> See Peter Kalm, *Travels into North America . . .*, trans. John Reinhold Foster, 2nd ed. (London: T. Lowndes, 1772), I, 139-40 and II, 187-89.
- <sup>14</sup> *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America . . .*, 3rd ed. (1781; rpt. Minneapolis, Minn.: Ross and Haines, 1956), II, 328-42.
- <sup>15</sup> Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America, and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada*, 4th ed. (London: John Stockdale, 1807), II, 264-65 and 276-79.
- <sup>16</sup> See also Bayley, *Canada*, 421-23: "British sons . . . / 'Midst savage tribes . . . fix a polish'd home; / And grace with Europe's charms a dreary scene. . . ."
- <sup>17</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 19 ("Note Referred to in the Poem on Canada"). Bayley refers to the "confusion of tongues" and the likelihood that the two Continents of Asia and North America were "once united." I am indebted in this section of the essay to Lee Eldridge Huddleston, *Origins of the American Indians: European Concepts, 1492-1729*, Latin American Monographs, No. 11, Institute of Latin American Studies (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 1967).
- <sup>18</sup> *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (1985; rpt. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press; Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 51 and 406.
- <sup>19</sup> P[ierre] de Charlevoix, *Journal of a Voyage to North America . . .* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761), I, 47. Bayley refers to Charlevoix in *Canada*, 142 n.
- <sup>20</sup> See *The Poetical Works of Alexander McLachlan*, Literature of Canada: Poetry and Prose in Reprint, intro. E. Margaret Fulton (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 225 and, as another example, Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (London: Charles Knight, 1836), p. 91.
- <sup>21</sup> *The History of Emily Montague*, ed. Mary Jane Edwards (Ottawa: Carleton Univ. Press, 1985), p. 103 (Letter 49).
- <sup>22</sup> As pointed out in the Explanatory Notes to these passages in *Quebec Hill*, pp. 39-40, Mackay is here indebted to Kalm, *Travels*, II, 276-77.

- <sup>23</sup> As his authority for this observation, Bayley cites Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae; or A Rational Account on the Grounds of Christian Faith . . .* (London: Henry Mortlock, 1662), the relevant passage (from which the phrase quoted above is a quotation) being on pp. 577-78.
- <sup>24</sup> The phrase "[o]f sex regardless" may, however, refer to the lack of sexual ardour attributed to the Indians by the French naturalist Buffon, who is quoted to this effect in a work that lies centrally in the background of *Canada*: Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. See the *Notes*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1955), pp. 58-59 and, for Jefferson's use of the fact that Indian "women very frequently attend . . . the men in their parties of war and hunting" to refute Buffon's argument, p. 60. See also Robertson, *The History of America*, II, 65 f. Bayley's Mammoth is Jeffersonian.
- <sup>25</sup> Bayley, *Canada*, p. 19, and see the definition of "horde" in the *OED*.
- <sup>26</sup> John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey, 1957), p. 214.
- <sup>27</sup> See Charlevoix, *Journal*, I, 58 and Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, pp. 578-79. Bayley illustrates Indian "superstition" by citing their "dread" of thunder and their "notions of religion" by deferring to their conception of "the Elysium beyond" as a place reached by way of a "plank impending o'er the gulf beneath . . ." (*Canada*, 105-08 and 107 n.). His probable sources for these ideas are, respectively, Weld, *Travels*, II, 285-86 and Charlevoix, *Journal*, II, 153-55.
- <sup>28</sup> Henry James Pye, *The Progress of Refinement. A Poem. In Three Parts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1783), II, 706. Pye's poem appears to have exerted an influence on both Burwell and Goldsmith.
- <sup>29</sup> *A General Description*, p. 47.
- <sup>30</sup> See the *Autobiography of Oliver Goldsmith: a Chapter in Canada's Literary History*, ed. Wilfrid Myatt, 2nd ed. (Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot, 1985), p. 34: "I was directed to read and study three works, Blackstone's Commentaries, Coke upon Littleton, and Tidd's practice."
- <sup>31</sup> *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 15th ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1809), II, 7.
- <sup>32</sup> See Goldsmith's *Autobiography*, pp. 42-43.
- <sup>33</sup> Quoted in *Guerin v. The Queen*, [1984] 2 S.C.R. 335, at 378.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, at 377-78.
- <sup>35</sup> Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 133.
- <sup>36</sup> *Malcolm's Katie: A Love Story*, ed. D. M. R. Bentley (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1987), p. 9 (II, 86-87). For the area north of Lake Erie as a "desert" see *Talbot Road*, 18.
- <sup>37</sup> *Commentaries*, II, 7 and 9.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 8 n.
- <sup>39</sup> Goldsmith, *Autobiography*, p. 42.

# SHORELINE, OLD LAKE IROQUOIS

*M. T. Kelly*

Here ice melt, the mineral water,  
holds all light lacking in the sun.  
We slide under; the road,  
the forested slope becomes shoreline,  
the glacial drop of an ocean lake.  
It's so clear in the shallows —  
only the rainbow flash of a trout —  
until we go deeper; forever,  
there is nothing but dark.

Stay near the surface,  
breathe the bright water,  
all is magic: Leave  
your clothes, wet furs rotting in a pile,  
fire sharpened sticks,  
your body.  
Leave the smooth stones pushed,  
with dirty hands, into depressions,  
vision pits.  
Leave: weather that will stay bad  
for ten thousand years;  
pebble beaches, campsites,  
the violent sky, dread.



# RED & WHITE MEN; BLACK, WHITE & GREY HATS

*Literary attitudes to the interaction between  
European and Native Canadians in the  
first half of the nineteenth century*

*Mary Lu MacDonald*

**I**N THE EARLY DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY native peoples were a visible presence in the daily lives of many white residents of British North America, and it was as a part of this everyday milieu that they made their way into a number of literary works written by Canadians of European descent. With the passage of time, the original inhabitants disappeared into the remote areas “granted” to them by the newcomers in return for land cessions, and simultaneously they began to fade from literary view. As the frequency of their appearance decreased, the attitudes inherent in the roles they played in early literature also changed. At no time did any one set of attitudes to the interaction between the two races, or to their respective roles in Canadian society, operate to the exclusion of any others, but when the totality of the published literature is examined it is apparent that the dominant ideas change from decade to decade.<sup>1</sup>

Early Canadians received their attitudes to other races from a number of sources: their personal experience, the oral traditions of their communities, their theological beliefs, and, in the case of the whites, since Canadians were by no means the only representatives of Western European culture to have contact with aboriginal peoples, from the international literature they read. The following study is concerned with literature produced in Upper and Lower Canada by those of European descent and with the modifications they made in the literary traditions they absorbed from other countries in the light of their Canadian experience.<sup>2</sup>

Europeans had over three centuries of contact with North American Indians before the nineteenth century. As modern ethnographic and historical research has shown, these contacts were far more complex than earlier scholars had envisioned.<sup>3</sup>

Starting in the seventeenth century, the multiplicity of cultural interactions had sparked a considerable body of written material — scientific and theological as well as imaginative. Whether the native peoples encountered by white travellers and traders were resident in the south seas or the northern woods, the same sets of attitudes inform the descriptive literature. Much of this material was shaped to support one side or the other in the dispute over the inherent nature of aboriginal peoples: were they ordinary human beings who lacked only education and Christian conversion to become fully civilized, or were they survivors of an early stage in human development, incapable of improvement and true belief, and destined to disappear from the earth. Basic to the theses of both sides in this dispute was the assumption that Western European Christian civilization, with its accompanying ideals of progress and improvement, was the highest form of intelligent life. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries these two strands of the deeply felt scientific and theological debate were transformed in imaginative literature into a basic division in the characterization of native peoples as “good” and “bad” Indians, although some writers, conscious that these polarities were simplistic, and aware that interaction between European and native cultures had affected the original inhabitants of many lands, introduced elements of ambivalence into both interpretations.

The aboriginal traits perceived as “good” by Western European society and its writers were: harmony with nature, simplicity, hospitality, wisdom, nobility of character, military alliance, Christian conversion, and, however free and independent their past life may have been, an acceptance of present white domination. The characteristics perceived as “bad” were: violence, cruelty, following instinct rather than reason, active opposition to white control, and rejection of Christianity. Ambivalence was shown towards some groups of Indians who, as objects of pity, made whites feel both guilty and superior at the same time. In literature, this last group were those who formed part of a landless dying race, who lived in poverty, or whose drunkenness was the result of corruption by whites.

Although each social and literary attitude towards aboriginal peoples contained elements of the other, and they were by no means absolute polarities, North American Indians as portrayed in European literature tended to exhibit positive characteristics,<sup>4</sup> while in the literature of the United States they tended to exhibit negative or ambivalent ones.<sup>5</sup> European writers, who rarely had any actual contact with aboriginal peoples, found it easy to use them as a symbol, contrasting what was perceived to be their simple way of life with European decadence. Americans had much closer contact with Indians. As their settlements encroached on Indian territory the two races encountered each other on a personal basis and as opponents in war. The portrayal of Indians in early American literature goes almost in cycles. The aboriginal was a demonic and ferocious enemy in periods when whites were in process of conquering a new territory, and a noble and natural friend in periods

when there was no warfare. American writers reflected the nature of their own contacts and the circumstances of their day.<sup>8</sup>

As usual, Canadians borrowed from both traditions. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find both in the same literary work. However, before 1840 the European view generally predominated. When portrayed in the distant past, Indians were most often seen as active and independent persons, helpful to whites; passive and dependent when seen in present time. In the 1840s, as actual contacts between whites and Indians in the Canadas decreased, negative and ambivalent American-style attitudes increased. Indians were frequently depicted as violent and "savage" in the "olden days," and either drunk or nostalgic for a long-gone heroic age when described in present time. The American attitudes, more exciting, and more satisfying in a cultural sense, gained ground in the imaginative sphere until the two opposing views were virtually in balance by 1850.

In addition to the ideas received in "literary" works, popular non-fiction also stimulated the imaginations of early Canadian writers. If we could read all the eighteenth and early nineteenth century travel accounts which circulated in Europe and North America we would probably discover sources for most of what was published in the Canadas. The American, Henry Schoolcraft, for example, bears a heavy responsibility for the theme of the Indian maiden who leaps from a cliff into Lake Huron when commanded by her parents to marry an elderly chief rather than the young brave she loves. Schoolcraft is quoted by one of the writers who used this theme as remarking that "Such an instance of sentiment is rarely to be met with among barbarians, and should redeem the name of this noble-minded girl from oblivion."<sup>7</sup> Evidence of white-valued sentiment produced approval for the "barbarous" native; consequently Schoolcraft's story found its way into many literary works whose authors wished to portray Indians in a positive manner. Many other anecdotes, as well as descriptive passages, originally published in travel accounts, can be found in early Canadian literature. A short story published in French in 1827 and a poem published in English in 1840 share an identical plot-line, which the poet quotes from a writer identified only as "Coleman."<sup>8</sup> D. M. R. Bentley, in his "Explanatory Notes" to *The Huron Chief*,<sup>9</sup> has demonstrated that Adam Kidd, in both text and footnotes, owed a considerable debt to the Rev. John Heckewelder, Cadwallader Colden, G. H. Loskiel, Alexander Henry, and James Buchanan, not to mention Schoolcraft, for much of his material.

Those residents of Upper and Lower Canada who used Indians as part of the imaginative decor in their literary works before the middle of the nineteenth century were predominantly Canadian-born.<sup>10</sup> In general, immigrant authors showed little interest in the country's past, so Indians, perceived by all to be part of the past and present, but not the future, produced relatively little in the way of imaginative response in immigrant writing. Native-born authors, whether French or English, seem to have accepted their land as a separate entity with an historical past and thus

were a great deal more likely to see the original residents of the country as part of its fabric.

In order to understand the attitudes of white writers toward native peoples, we must also consider the manner in which they interpreted their own culture when placing it in conjunction or confrontation with the aboriginal. It should not be surprising to find that the most common role assigned to whites in the literature of the first half of the nineteenth century is that of a civilizing, progressive, and Christian influence, although there is no agreement as to whether this influence was perceived as beneficial or detrimental to indigenous peoples. Few saw it as having any effect whatsoever on whites. Writers in English tended to be negative or ambivalent about the effect of "civilization" on aboriginal life; writers in French tended to regard their national culture more positively — rarely describing their race as usurping, and seeing themselves as friends and protectors of the Indians.

Representatives of European culture play a number of roles in those Canadian literary works in which Indians are present. The most common role is as a soldier, fighting other whites. In only four of twenty cases are they pictured specifically as conquerors of Indians. The next most common role is as an "agent of progress," a rubric which includes missionaries, settlers, and other forces of cultural change. Although traders and explorers generally existed in about the same historical time frame as the soldiers, they do not seem to have stimulated the literary imagination to the same extent. There are only five instances of each role. At least in relation to Indians, there is little mention of the solitary white hero going off into the wilderness on journeys of trade or adventure, as in the American myths. In early nineteenth-century Canada writers found their white heroes among those whose presence is explained by some group activity.

**T**HE MAJORITY OF WORKS published in the period between 1815, when the War of 1812 came to an end, and 1830 are specific about time, place, and tribe mentioned. Indians are portrayed in a positive manner and whites are a mixed lot, depending on whether or not the writer perceived Christian civilization as good or bad for the natives. An incomplete survey of newspapers and periodicals published before 1815 reveals almost no interest in native peoples, imaginative or otherwise, in the small amount of Canadian literature published in those years. Then suddenly, between 1824 and 1830, four of the major nineteenth-century works dealing with Indians — George Longmore's and John Richardson's works on Tecumseh, Adam Kidd's "The Huron Chief," and "L'Iroquoise," the first version of a story which was to persist as a theme in French-Canadian literature for many years — were all published. Two factors may, at least in part, explain this occurrence. The first is interest in the specific individual, Tecumseh<sup>11</sup> — along

with General Brock one of the martyrs to the successful defence of Canada in the recent war, and the archetype of the brave, wise, noble savage. The second is a broader interest in the place of Indians in Canadian society generated by discussions about the land settlement treaties of the 1820s.<sup>12</sup> Those who praised Tecumseh as an important ally in the war were, as a subtext, pointing out that Indians had helped European settlers establish themselves in British North America.

Tecumseh's transformation from Indian ally in the War of 1812 into a literary legend began in 1824 when George Longmore's "Tecumthé" first appeared in the Montreal periodical, the *Canadian Review and Literary and Historical Journal*. This long poem subsequently formed part of Longmore's book *Tales of Chivalry and Romance*, published in London and Edinburgh in 1826. Longmore's work has very little to do with Indians as a race, except to describe them as a natural people in a natural setting. He portrays Tecumseh's brother, The Prophet, as a false leader, but Tecumseh himself, in accordance with the liberal perception of Indian perfectability current in Longmore's day, is a genius who lacks only education and Christianity to become the ideal man. Tecumseh's objection to the retreat which preceded the Battle of Moraviantown is treated by Longmore as an example of Tecumseh's lack of knowledge. When the facts and the strategy were explained to him, he understood the situation and accepted the decision. His genius is, of course, demonstrated by his superiority in white-valued skills and characteristics. Longmore does not portray all whites as examples to be followed. Generals Brock and Proctor are heroes, but some of their troops are cowards, and there is an ironic reference to the "savage will"<sup>13</sup> of the whites.

In John Richardson's poem, *Tecumseh, or, The Warrior of the West*, published in London in 1828, the white hero is Captain Barclay, but General Proctor, who is not criticized by name here as he is in Richardson's 1840 novel about the War of 1812, *The Canadian Brothers*, is not at all admirable. An interesting aspect of the terminology is that Richardson often uses the word "Christian" as a synonym for "white." In both the poem and the novel Richardson seems almost to idolize Tecumseh. In the poem, other Indians are not nearly as perfect: an old woman takes horrible revenge on a prisoner, and a group of warriors engage in cannibalism. Richardson's scornful attitude to General Proctor motivates him to set Tecumseh against Proctor as a contrast in both bravery and strategy, a device also used by Michel Bibaud in the Tecumseh stanzas of his poem "Les Grands Chefs." While his support is vital to the British cause, and while he is personally described as a great hero, Tecumseh is depicted in all works, in keeping with the historical record, as subordinate to the British commander. He is a leader of his own people, but he is not a leader of whites.

Adam Kidd's long poem, "The Huron Chief," published in 1830, has remained current in modern literary studies at least in part because, as the most anti-white and anti-Christian of all the early nineteenth-century works, it appeals to the guilt

feelings of twentieth-century readers. Kidd's narrator, disappointed by white civilization, "Europe's crimes, and Europe's errors,"<sup>14</sup> travels west by canoe where he encounters "a gentle sage"<sup>15</sup> Skenandow. He participates in a highly romanticized version of native life —

Oh! what a beauteous, charming scene,  
On that pure downy, tufted green,  
To see the children of the grove,  
    With hearts that felt no touch but pleasure,  
Thus linked in social, tender love,  
    Where flowing joys seemed without measure,  
Beneath a verdant maple shade,  
Which Nature's God alone had made<sup>16</sup>

— and is present when the Indians repel a sneak attack by whites. Through the intervention of Tecumseh three white prisoners taken in the raid are released, only to return with reinforcements to kill Skenandow. Even greater than the threat posed to Indian life by white usurpers of their land has been the threat posed by Christian missionaries:

The Missionary evils brought,  
By those who first Religion taught —  
Forgive the phrase — had more of hell —  
And all the crimes with it connected. . . .<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to the corrupt European Christians, the Indians' religion keeps them in harmony with nature. All the Indian tribes help each other, as well as the white man, but Europeans fight everybody. Despite his footnoted references to various travel and exploration books, Kidd's intention seems more to be the portrayal of a corrupt European civilization than an accurate and positive picture of native culture. He wants to show the beauty and harmony of Indian life so that readers will realize that their own is cruel and unnatural. He also specifically criticizes American treatment of Indians, contrasting it with the fatherly care which was part of British policy. It must be noted that Kidd, so romantically attached to European ideas of "noble savages," all-wise chiefs, and unspoiled children of nature, was the only one of those who wrote about Indians up to 1830 who can be identified as not Canadian-born.

The fourth of the major works dealing with Indians published in the period up to 1830, "L'Iroquoise," is in a number of respects an exception to the general statements made about the literature of that era — although in portraying the Iroquois tribe as cruel, treacherous and warlike it is definitely part of the mainstream. Even though the Iroquois were long-time allies of the British, they are consistently presented, in both languages, as villains. The name of the original author of the story "L'Iroquoise" is unknown. Michel Bibaud, who published it in *La Bibliothèque Canadienne* in 1827, noted that it was "librement traduit du Truth Teller," a New

York publication. Bibaud was almost certainly the translator.<sup>18</sup> A long line of French-language literary works are based on "L'Iroquoise," which is set in 1700. There are few whites in the story. The principal one is the priest whose "efforts gagnèrent quelques sauvages au christianisme et aux habitudes de la vie civilisée."<sup>19</sup> The other is Eugène Brunon, a young Frenchman who marries the Christian Indian heroine. Eugène is the first of many brave, handsome young heroes in the literature of both languages who marries an Indian woman, although "L'Iroquoise," which ends with the death of both lovers, is the exception to the happy-ever-after rule. The marriage of a white male with a native female, an obvious metaphor for the assimilation of a weak culture by a stronger one, typically met with the approval of the heroine's father, a chief, and the jealousy and opposition of the young men of her tribe. All the authors who used this device as a positive image were male, and all set the circumstances far enough in the past that they could not be interpreted as recommending integration of Indians into Canadian life through assimilation via the dominant white male culture.

Michel Bibaud demonstrated his ongoing interest in Canada's native peoples by the quantity of didactic prose material about Indians which he published in his four periodicals.<sup>20</sup> The lengthy poem "Les Grands Chefs," which appeared in the 1830 volume of his collected verse, *Epîtres, satires, chansons, épigrammes et autres pièces de vers*, lists seven chiefs whose principal virtue seems to be that they were helpful to whites: these are, in his spellings, Garakonthié, Ouréhouharé, Téganisorens, Ganihégaton, Kondiaronk, Ponthiac, and Técumsé. Bibaud's tone is laudatory, both in his general opening stanzas and with regard to each chief, leaders of "ces peuples par nous mal appelés [*sic*] sauvages":

Je vois, chez eux, briller des vertus, des talents,  
Des hommes éloquents,  
Des négociateurs, des héros et des sages.<sup>21</sup>

**I**N THE NEXT DECADE, between 1831 and 1840, about two-thirds of the published material is vague about tribal names, but most is specific about time and location. In many of the works there is no direct white presence: Indians are interacting with other Indians or are observed by an omniscient narrator. Three are descriptions of bloodthirsty wars between tribes; the remainder purport to describe the thoughts and feelings of Indian males young and old, whose responses to beautiful young women and approaching death — smitten and stoic, respectively — are stereotypical. In a further three works there are whites who are clearly superior to the Indians around them: Constance Montresor dominates "The Pride of Lorette" by her wise, Protestant Christianity; Sir Alexander Mackenzie is "friend and father" to his native companions;<sup>22</sup> and Captain Clifford

masters the Indians in James Russell's 1833 novel *Matilda; or the Indian's Captive*, by his scarlet uniform and the force of his will.

In two of the longer works of the 1830s both races have a mixed role. In Richardson's *The Canadian Brothers* (1840) at the end of the decade, whites, without regard to nationality, are a very mixed lot: perfect heroes, despicable villains, brave soldiers, cads, cheats, and honest men. Those who treat their Indian allies well are perceived as good men. A speech justifying the taking of Indian land, obviously deprecated by the author, is put in the mouth of an American officer. The Indians are an equally mixed lot who appear principally in sections having to do with the actual war. While they are brave and loyal and their leader, Tecumseh, is a hero, they are also cruel and vengeful in battle.

The 1830s saw the addition of a new theme to the genre: the treatment of aborigines as a dying race.

Thrust from his grounds, and backward forced, to seek  
Subsistence hard, in regions cold and bleak.  
Far from his once-loved haunts; with many a sigh  
He wanders forth, with broken heart, to die!<sup>23</sup>

This motif was not initially very common, but in the 1840s, mixed with nostalgic views of long-gone idyllic forest life, it was to become one of the dominant ideas in the literary presentation of native people.

Perhaps the most interesting work of this decade is W. F. Hawley's *The Unknown, or Lays of the Forest*, a novella interspersed with long poems on non-Canadian themes, published in Montreal in 1831. The novella is set in Three Rivers and on the Shawinigan River in 1622. The newly arrived whites, who have settled on Indian land, are portrayed as unable to cope in their new environment without Indian assistance. The hero, a reclusive young Frenchman, fails in his attempt to persuade Piscaret, the friendly Algonkin chief, to adopt European civilization because, as Piscaret, recognizing the fundamental separation of the two cultures, says, "the swan can never teach the eagle to forsake his path among the clouds for her own shadowy fountains!"<sup>24</sup> When the settlement is attacked by marauding Indians of an unspecified tribe and the teen-aged daughter of the central family in the story is carried away, the Algonkins find out where she is, assist in returning her to her parents, and defeat the marauders. The girl is not harmed by her captors, but is treated as a daughter and sister by the chief's family. This conduct is an example of another theme in early Canadian literature. Before 1850 no white woman, abducted by Indians, is ever physically mistreated in any way. This may say more about the supposed absence of sexuality in early nineteenth-century female literary characters, and about certain persisting characteristics of eighteenth-century "captivity" literature as a genre, than it does about Indians in the white imagination, but nonetheless the horror tales associating Indian males with sexual violence were a later development in fiction.

In the literature of the 1830s, the two examples of the portrayal of Indians as totally bad are both set in a context of wars between Indians. The period of these wars is not specifically mentioned, but it appears to pre-date white settlement in the Canadas. In the case of Charles Durand's sketch "An Indian Legend," the combatants are the Hurons and Chippewas, and their battle is waged at the junction of the Sable River and Lake Huron. The author refers to "the native wildness of the savage eye, and muttering and silent resentment of his heart" and says they "looked like so many darksome, infernal fiends."<sup>25</sup> The other work, "L'Iroquoise, Hymne de guerre," a poem purporting to be an Iroquois war song, published in *Le Canadien* in 1831, describes the treatment which will be meted out to Indian enemies.

Balancing off the "bad" Indians are the "good" ones who accompany explorers, who are peaceful, and who have been converted — conforming most closely to the roles and goals established for them by white society in the 1830s. Another group of "good" Indians are those who, because of their "nobility" and "chivalry," independent of religious sanction but conforming to romantic perceptions, are described in a positive manner. J. H. Willis's three prose sketches, published in the *Montreal Museum* and the *Montreal Gazette* in 1833, are typical of this latter genre.

As in the earlier period, it is in longer works that a variety of authorial attitudes to native peoples can be found in the same pages. In the novel *Matilda, or the Indian's Captive*, the heroine is indeed kidnapped, but the Indians who took her found the four-year-old girl wandering alone on the banks of the St. Lawrence, her parents having left her unattended for a short period of time. When confronted by a white man who insists on buying her from them, they drive a hard bargain, but make no attempt to spirit her away. Many years later the Indians' son, for whom she had been intended as a bride, turns up to claim her, but is foiled in the attempt. Ultimately, the Indian family surrenders the picture book with her name in it, which they had taken at the time of the kidnapping, thus becoming the instruments by which the heroine is enabled to find her real father. While these Indians perform "bad" acts, the acts are described matter-of-factly and mitigating circumstances are always presented, so that they are depicted as ignorant of white culture, but not as inherently "bad" people.

**I**N THE 1840S, AN EXPANDING POPULATION produced a greater quantity of literature in the Canadas, but proportionately less about Indians. Literary works in this decade were usually specific about location, but two-thirds of the sites mentioned were outside the Canadas so that the native peoples described could not be perceived as competing with immigrants for space. Overall, there is a return to the time-specificity of the 1820s. One work is dated in the sixteenth cen-

tury, three in the seventeenth, four in the eighteenth, and ten in the nineteenth. One surveys all periods, and seven are not specific. The number of works contrasting present Indian life with a happier past has increased. Just over half mention no tribe. This increasing vagueness about tribal identification is an indication of the distancing process in white attitudes. Native people were no longer described as individuals, or even as Mohawks or Algonquins; they were lumped together as a single group called "Indians" or "red men." Instead of an active, independent life in past time, they are increasingly depicted as being either passive and dependent inhabitants of present time or cruel and violent creatures in the past.

In four of the items published in the 1840s, whites are not physically present in the action, although the white author obviously shapes the view of the native presented to the reader. In six works, whites are unequivocally depicted as physically, morally, and intellectually superior. The five short stories, and a sixth story told in verse, are an exception to the tendency of the literature of their day because they are all told in terms of interpersonal, rather than inter-group, relations. Although each is different, the unnamed white hero of "Tula — or, The Ojibwa's Leap" can perhaps stand for all. He outdoes his Indian rival in both stamina and strategy. Although the young Ojibwas "were expert with the gun and spear . . . none of them were at all a match for the white man in the use of either."<sup>26</sup> Tula, the Ojibwa who leaps to his death from a cliff, is not an unhappy maiden, but the unsuccessful Indian suitor. The hero of "De Soulis, The Runner of the Woods," a story by the same author set in the sixteenth century, is not as admirable, nor physically as dominant, but he still wins the girl and saves her tribe from Indian enemies, in spite of the jealousy and treachery of its young males, through force of intelligence. In two other stories the white man stands outside the events — in one case as a morally-superior eavesdropper, in the other as someone who happens along to rescue the Indian hero from a hostile tribe and restore him to his father. In one of the remaining two works, heroic whites survive an Indian attack, and in the other, a treacherous Indian kills the noble hero because he had defended an enemy prisoner's life.

There are four literary efforts of the 1840s in which whites are mixed between perfect and pernicious. All are extended works in which the author has time and space to develop individual characters. In *Le jeune Latour* (1844), the one play of Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, roles are most stereotypical. The young hero, faithful to his sovereign the King of France, is supported, in the only instance of their positive portrayal in early Canadian literature, by his Iroquois friends. His father, who has traitorously gone over to the English side, is backed up by a group of equally traitorous Indians of an unnamed tribe. Maximilien Bibaud's book, *Biographie des Sagamos Illustres* (1848), documenting a variety of Indian experience, also documents a variety of relations with whites. The good whites recognize their need of the Indians, the bad ones usurp their lands. Since the book is in French, the French

tend to be the "good" whites and the usurpers tend to be British. In the novel *The Last of the Eries*, written in English, the racial designations are generally reversed, although the hero is French. An Iroquois chief is the villain, but the Indian heroine comes from a tribe friendly to whites and is half-white herself. Joseph Doutre's 1844 novel, *Les Fiancées de 1812*, contains one-dimensional, bad British and good French-Canadian, characters. The latter manifest a friendly, paternal, attitude in their relationship with Indians.

The conversion of native peoples to Christianity, and their acceptance of Western European culture, provides the basis for interaction between whites and Indians in a number of works in the 1840s. Generally, this conversion is seen as beneficial to the converts, and natives are positively or negatively portrayed according as they do, or do not, accept Christianity. In two works, written by missionary Anglican priests,<sup>27</sup> this concentration on religious conversion is to be expected. *The Snow Drop*, the first Canadian children's periodical, published a series of stories, based on Canadian history, in which cultural transformation of aboriginals is an important factor. The author, almost certainly a Unitarian, is less concerned with religious conversion, describing whites as bringers of progress and education. The conclusion of one instalment addresses its young readers in these terms:

How very grateful we ought all to feel for the blessings of civilization, which teaches us to cultivate thoughts and feelings of a nobler and gentler nature than those that find their way to the breast of the poor untutored savage.<sup>28</sup>

In another example, "A Poem, most particularly dedicated to our much esteemed Brother, the Rev. William Case, a British Wesleyan Preacher," a layman, "Sir" John Smyth, praises the missionary efforts of the Wesleyan Methodists. In this poem, white civilization is the standard to which Indians should aspire:

Great is their change since they embrac'd Christianity,  
And took upon them the Christian's holy name,  
No more to live and act like men of insanity,  
And ever to be liable to censure and blame.<sup>29</sup>

Denominationalism was never far from the surface where Christian conversion was concerned. The story "Françoise Brunon," derived from "L'Iroquoise," describes in very positive terms the civilizing and missionary task of the French from a Catholic point of view, while "Jacques Cartier and the Little Indian Girl," written by a Protestant, portrays Catholic missionary activity negatively by adopting the point of view of one of the unhappy Indians taken to France by Cartier. Rivalry between religious denominations has played an important role in many aspects of Canadian society, not just in the unseemly contests to convert native peoples to one Christian communion at the expense of another. As these examples suggest, nineteenth-century religious politics should always be taken into account when analyzing the presentation of missionary activity as either a positive or a negative influence in the life of North American Indians.

In most works written in the 1840s there is a shift in the manner in which Indians are described from one based on their fundamental humanity to one based on the theological and sociological theories which relegated them to the sub-human. In this literature, the original inhabitants are characterized as having been cruel and vicious, so that in consequence it was necessary that they give way to a superior culture. This position was ameliorated in several ways: some natives were acceptable because they had been, or were about to be, saved by Christian conversion; others, while not Christian, were acceptable because they were of assistance to whites. Both these aspects of white approval involve ascribing highly valued white behavioural norms to non-whites. Those who observe and interact with Indians are traders, soldiers, and missionaries, rather than settlers. In the one case involving settlers, an initial footnote describes their difficult relations with the natives:

On sait que dans les premiers tems de l'établissement du pays, nos ancêtres étaient obligés de cultiver leurs champs les armes à la main; les sauvages faisaient souvent des irruptions et l'histoire nous raconte les massacres qu'ils ont commis, surtout dans le district de Montréal.<sup>30</sup>

The cruelty of Indians is as often depicted as being turned against other Indians as it is against whites. Cruelty thus becomes a cultural characteristic, rather than a response to white incursions, so whites (it is implied) need not feel guilty about it. In "Françoise Brunon" war between Iroquois and Ottawas is as much a part of the plot as is Iroquois hatred of French Christians. In "The Chief's Last Prisoner," the Iroquois and the Hurons are the warring tribes to which the "Romeo and Juliet" Indian hero and heroine belong. Neither tribe is admirable. The two young lovers — she is half white to begin with — are described as having emotional responses generally found in the romances of the day. Powantah, the hero, "Indian as he was, and subject to the like passions and excitements of his fellow warriors, . . . possessed a heart devoid of cruelty."<sup>31</sup> While the forest is lovingly described, life in it is not idyllic. Both the Hurons and the Iroquois are cruelly vengeful. The young lovers, although the children of chiefs, are specifically described as being outside their own cultures, thus separating their romantic nobility from the inhuman ferocity of their tribes.

All but one of the seven works in which Indians are described as a dying race are narrated by Indian personae. Most are set in present time, with the narrator's nostalgia for a glorious past, for free movement over the land, and for a life integrated with the natural world directed back to the pre-settlement period. In several, inter-tribal warfare is mentioned as the cause of a decline which made the Indians more vulnerable to white incursions.

The works written in the 1840s which show Indians as helpful to whites are all in French. Maximilien Bibaud's *Biographie des Sagamos Illustres* extends and develops the positive views of Indians which his father, Michel, had expressed a

generation earlier in the poem "Les Grands Chefs." "Essai sur la littérature en Canada," an 1845 discussion of the future of French-Canadian literature by L.-A. Olivier, published in *La Revue Canadienne*, suggests that description of Indians is the only way to make Canadian literature exciting to outsiders. The author, obviously conscious that there were options available when undertaking such a description, suggests three ways of portraying Indians: as fierce warriors; as brave and hospitable smokers of the peace pipe; and as the female with "ses yeux noirs, si doux, si limpides" and "le cri naïf de sa joie, lorsqu'elle aperçut pour la première fois l'Européen."<sup>32</sup> The Indian girl Ithona in *Les Fiancées de 1812* exactly meets these last specifications. She goes on to be convent-educated, and then to marry the young white man who had rescued her from the anger of her own tribe.<sup>33</sup> In the play, *Le jeune Latour*, the Iroquois back up young Latour, notwithstanding his father's urging to desert the French cause. The French attitude is paternalistic and remains closer to the European model throughout the first half of the century. We know from the number of articles and references to Fenimore Cooper's books which appeared in French-language newspapers and periodicals<sup>34</sup> that French Canadians read his works, but it is not likely that they would have had much contact with American stories of treacherous, inhuman savages, burning with hatred for white men, which began to be borrowed by English-Canadian newspapers from American sources.

**S**LOWLY, THE ENGLISH CANADIANS seem to adopt the American stereotypes. Where there had been almost no maleficent Indians in the literature of the Canadas in the 1820s, by the 1840s almost half of the literary Indians were fierce and warlike — although they were as likely to be fighting among themselves as against whites, and they never reached the inhuman depths of the worst American material. The "drunken Indian" also begins to appear in a literary context. The tone of English-language poetry began to change as well. The laments for a vanished past focused less on the idea of a bygone heroic civilization and more on the idea of an inevitable surrender of space to a superior civilization — another common American theme. The land cessions of the 1820s and 1830s meant that fewer and fewer Canadians had ever seen an Indian, let alone a tribe leading a free life. Those whites who remembered "the old days" were dying out. Native people were physically relegated to remote areas and psychologically consigned to the shadows. As this literary distancing progressed, the American myths began to exert greater influence. With little to contradict them, it was easy for English-Canadian imaginations to be stimulated by them. Nonetheless, considerable ambivalence, particularly in works written by the Canadian-born, still showed in white writing about Indians. The variety of response depicted shows that no single

interpretation had yet been accepted, even though a shift in emphasis toward the American responses is evident.

In neither French nor English was there any attempt at an imaginative leap into a Canada which existed before the arrival of Europeans. Except for the vague, unspecific nostalgia for an aboriginal "golden age" which indicates that white writers knew the Indians had been here first and had a valid culture, it is as if native peoples had no existence until they became part of the European consciousness at the moment of first contact. Attitudes to Indians were bound up with attitudes to the colony's past and future as a white society. Immigrants found the past irrelevant, thus there was no need to incorporate a people who had been a part of that past into their writing, which most often focused on the present and future. While they may have absorbed the European myths before emigrating, the American myths, which satisfied their need to justify control of the new environment, were socially and economically more persuasive. The native-born of both language groups did attempt to integrate wars, Indians, the fur trade, and other people and events of history into their view of their homeland. Generally, they were both positive and realistic in their treatment of these elements.

Where Indians are concerned, beginning with Tecumseh, early Canadian writers seem to have been fascinated by chiefs and to focus on them more often than on the tribe as a specific cultural group. Aboriginal characters in past time, regardless of whether they were positively or negatively portrayed, were nonetheless active and independent; in present time they were melancholy, passive and dependent, although they were by no means all dead by the time the reader arrived at the last paragraph or stanza.<sup>35</sup> Indians had no role at all in any literary vision of the future. The literary images which transmit the assumption that native peoples would either fade away or assimilate in future time seems, with hindsight, to be based on naïve and wishful thinking, but these images had many parallels in the political rhetoric of the period. It was not until after Confederation that Indians became a "problem" for which "solutions" had to be devised.

A number of themes run through all the literature written about native peoples. There is the idea that, under the direction of their wise chiefs, they assisted white settlers and acted as wartime allies; there is the idea of a vague, idyllic time before white settlement, with its reverse image of inevitable displacement; there is the young white hero who marries, and integrates into his culture, the beautiful Indian maiden; and there are the evil Iroquois, as well as the more general image of the Indian as a fierce warrior — both against whites and against rival tribes. Each one of these themes is rooted in some aspect of white European philosophy, self-image, and perception of North American reality. With the exception of the concept of an idyllic life before white settlement, they seem to have been specific to the literature of the early nineteenth century. They did not persist in post-Confederation literature and are not thought of today as being "typical" ideas of the past.

Consequently, the works which transmit these attitudes are not included in anthologies, and the complex and varied responses they contain are lost to our national consciousness.

## CHRONOLOGICAL CHECKLIST

*Canadian literary works about, or referring to, Indians: 1817-1850*

- "Indian Song," *Quebec Mercury*, August 14, 1821. Poem by "V."
- "Song. For an American Indian," *Upper Canada Gazette*, May 29, 1823. Poem by "P."
- Untitled. *Niagara Gleaner*, July 26, 1823. Poem by "Linus."
- "Tecumthé," *Canadian Review and Literary and Historical Journal*, December 1824, 391-432. [Different copies have different page numeration.] Long poem by George Longmore. See also *La Bibliothèque Canadienne*, Tome III, num. 4, mars 1829 for a translation of the prose "argument."
- "The Indian's Lament," *Canadian Magazine and Literary Journal*, 4, no. 21, March 1825, 262. Poetry by "M."
- "L'Iroquoise," *La Bibliothèque Canadienne*, Tome v, num. 5, octobre 1827. Prose.
- "L'Abenakis, ou la tendresse paternelle," *La Bibliothèque Canadienne*, Tome vi, num. 1, décembre 1827, 33-34. Prose.
- Tecumseh; or, The Warrior of the West*. London: Printed for R. Glynn, 1828. Long poem by John Richardson.
- "Song of the Delaware Girl," *Kingston Chronicle*, January 9, 1830. Poem by "O.P.Q."
- "Dialogue between the Hunter and the Indian," *Upper Canada Herald*, January 20, 1830. Poetry.
- "Indian War Song," *Canadian Courant*, April 28, 1830. Poem by "H.M.C."
- "The Indian Mothers," *Montreal Gazette*, May 31, 1830. Poem by "B.C.D."
- "Les Grands Chefs," *Épîtres, Satires, etc.*, 115-21. Montreal: Ludger Duvernay, 1830. Poem by Michel Bibaud.
- "The Huron Chief," *The Huron Chief and other Poems*. Montreal: Printed at the Office of the Herald and New Gazette, 1830. Adam Kidd.
- The Unknown, or Lays of the Forest*. Montreal: J. A. Hoisington, 1831. Prose and poetry by W. F. Hawley.
- "The Red Man's Soliloquy," *Western Mercury*, March 24, 1831. Poem by "Las Cases."
- "L'Iroquoise, Hymne de guerre," *Le Canadien*, 30 juillet 1831. Poem by "Melthène."
- Untitled [Death of chief]. *Kingston Chronicle*, December 17, 1831. Poem by "Swaran."
- "On the Expulsion of the Indians from the Territories of the United States," *Kingston Chronicle*, February 4, 1832. Poem by "Justus."
- "Adaline, The Forest Girl," *Canadian Casket*, March 24, 1832. Prose.
- "An Indian Legend," *Canadian Casket*, April 7, 1832. Prose by Charles Durand.
- "The Romantic Lovers," *Canadian Garland*, October 13, 1832. Prose by Charles Durand.

- Matilda, or The Indian's Captive*. Three Rivers: Printed for the author by George Stobbs, 1833. Novel by James Russell.
- "The Doomed Chief of Pakagama. Tale of a Natche Warrior, at the Midnight Fire, on the Buffalo Plain." *Canadian Magazine*, March 1833, 219-22. Prose by "The Big Beaver."
- "An Indian Warrior's Avowal of Love," *Montreal Museum*, February 1833, 165-68. Prose by J. H. Willis.
- "The American Forest Girl," *Montreal Museum*, February 1833, 137-39. Poem.
- "Scenes from an Indian Story," *Montreal Gazette*, March 16, 1833. Prose by J. H. Willis.
- "An Indian Poet's Portrait of a Beautiful Maiden," *Montreal Gazette*, March 30, 1833. Prose by J. H. Willis.
- "Lines Written on Observing some Indian Women Praying before they Retired to Rest," *Cobourg Star*, December 24, 1834. Poem by "H.A."
- "Louise Chawinikisique," *L'Ami du Peuple*, le 23 et le 26 septembre, 1835. Prose by Georges Boucher de Boucherville.
- "The Indian's Morning Song," *Quebec Mercury*, December 29, 1835. Poem by David Chisholme.
- "The Indian's Evening Song," *Quebec Mercury*, December 31, 1835. Poem by David Chisholme.
- "Canada," *Toronto Patriot*, December 27, 1836. Poem by John Breakenridge.
- "Fragment Iroquois," *L'Aurore*, 17 août 1838. Poem by J. G. Barthe.
- "The Emigrant and the Indian," *Bytown Gazette*, October 3, 1838.
- "The Red Deer, or Chief of the lost tribe," *Poems and Fragments*. Toronto, 1838. Daniel H. Mayne.
- "The Indian's Dream," *Literary Garland*, January 1839, 61-64. Prose. "Original."
- "A Canadian Legend," *Literary Garland*, March 1839, 167-80. Prose by E. L. Cushing.
- "La Mort d'une jeune fille," *L'Aurore*, 6 septembre 1839. Prose.
- "The Indian's Farewell to Sir Alexander Mackenzie," *Literary Garland*, November 1839. Poem by David Chisholme.
- The Canadian Brothers*. Montreal: Armour and Ramsay, 1840. Novel by John Richardson.
- Hamilton and other Poems*. Toronto: Rogers and Thompson, 1840. Long poem by W. A. Stephens, contains several lengthy descriptions of Indians.
- "The Lonely Captive," *The Mourner's Tribute*. Montreal: Armour and Ramsay, 1840. Poem by M. E. Sawtell.
- "The Indian's Refusal," *The Mourner's Tribute*. Montreal: Armour and Ramsay, 1840. Poem by M. E. Sawtell.
- "Tameameah, The Indian Chief," *Quebec Mercury*, April 28, 1840. Poem.
- "The Red Hunter's Song," *Literary Garland*, July 1840, 365. Poem by "G.J."
- "The Pride of Lorette," *Literary Garland*, July 1840. Prose by E. M. Maclachlan.
- "St. Lawrence," *Literary Garland*, November 1840. Poem by "G.J."
- "Chant de mort d'un Huron," *Le Répertoire National*, 1840. Poem by Joseph Lenoir.

- "The Chief's Last Prisoner," *Bathurst Courier*, seven instalments between December 1840 and March 1841. Fiction by "H.K.F."
- "The Seminole," *Bathurst Courier*, March 26, 1841. Poem by "H.K.F."
- "A Poem, most particularly dedicated to our much esteemed Brother, the Rev. William Case, a British Wesleyan Preacher," *Select Poems*. Toronto, 1841. John Smyth.
- The Emigrant*, 66-70. Montreal: Printed for the author by John Lovell, 1842. Long poem by Standish O'Grady. Also "Indians," *Montreal Transcript*, February 3, 1842. [A different extract from the above.]
- "Le Huron et son chant de mort," *L'Aurore*, 8 février 1842. Poem by "Un Canadien."
- "Chanson des Sauvages du Canada," *L'Encyclopédie Canadienne*, Tome 1, num. 2, avril 1842. Prose.
- Niagara Falls*, 14-16. Toronto: For the author, 1843. Long poem by J. K. Liston.
- Les Fiancées de 1812*. Montreal: Louis Perrault, 1844. Novel by Joseph Doutre.
- "Françoise Brunon," *Le Castor*, 6 février 1844. Story by C. V. Dupont.
- "Le jeune Latour," *Le Journal de Québec*, le 10, 17, 21 septembre 1844. Also subsequently published separately. Play by Antoine Gérin-Lajoie.
- "Essai sur la littérature en Canada," *La Revue Canadienne*, janvier 1845, 28-29. Essay by L.-A. Olivier.
- "Le Sacrifice du sauvage," *Le Journal de Québec*, 25 février 1845. Prose by "H.L."
- "The Calumette," *Literary Garland*, November 1845. Prose by H. J. Friel.
- Songs of the Wilderness*. London: Francis and John Rivington, 1846. Poems by Bishop G. J. Mountain.
- Philip Musgrave*. London: John Murray, 1846. Fictionalized autobiography by Rev. Joseph Abbott.
- "La fleur des bois," *La Revue Canadienne*, 20 janvier 1846. Poem by Charles Levesque.
- "Tula, — or, The Ojibwa's Leap," *Barker's Canadian Monthly Magazine*, May 1846. Prose by W. B. Wells.
- "Le dernier huron," *Album Littéraire*, juin 1846. Poem by F. X. Garneau.
- "Song of Indian Life," *Montreal Transcript*, June 25, 1846. Poem by "Philander Ofalie."
- "Louise, une légende canadienne," *Album Littéraire*, juillet 1846. Poem by F. X. Garneau.
- "The Kankra. A Tale of the Indian Border," *Barker's Magazine*, September and November 1846. Long poem by W. B. Wells.
- "Rice Lake," *Literary Garland*, October 1846, 458-59. Poem by "Areskay."
- "De Soulis, The Runner of the Woods," *Barker's Magazine*, October 1846, January and April 1847. Prose by W. B. Wells.
- "The Indian Toilet," *Kingston Herald*, November 3, 1846. Poem.
- "Red Spirits," *Barker's Magazine*, December 1846.
- Biographie des sagemos illustres*. Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1848. Maximilien Bibaud.
- "The Indian. On Revisiting an Old Encampment," *Maple Leaf for 1848*.
- "A Picture of Indian Times," *Bathurst Courier*, July 18, 1848. Poem by Holmes Mair.

- "The Last of the Moheicans," *Bathurst Courier*, August 18, 1848. Poem by Holmes Mair.
- "Jacques Cartier and the Little Indian Girl," *Literary Garland*, October 1848. Prose by H. V. Cheney.
- "A Voice from the Far West," *Punch in Canada*, February 3, 1849. Poem.
- "Bush Scenery," *Literary Garland*, April 1849. Prose by H. B. MacDonald.
- The Last of the Eries*. Simcoe: At the Office of the "Standard," 1850. Novel by "H.H.B."
- "Death Song of the Grands Cheveux, a 'Slave' Chief," *Montreal Courier*, April 22, 1850. Poem by "A Northwester."
- "Conversations on History," "Early History of Canada," and "Stories from the History of Canada," *The Snow Drop*, 1848-1850. Ongoing series still incomplete when the periodical ceased publication. The former, dealing principally with British history, embodies a number of interesting comments about aboriginal peoples in various countries.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The eighty-four items in the appended Checklist — long and short poems, short stories, novels and one play — were first published in the newspapers, periodicals and books printed in French and English in Upper and Lower Canada between 1790 and 1850. A whole thesis could be written on the presence of native peoples in periodicals sponsored by religious denominations. Because this study is concerned with imaginative literature of less specific inspiration and intention, religious periodicals have been omitted, as has the extensive newspaper and periodical material printed in Canada but "borrowed," in the early nineteenth-century manner, from American, British, and French sources. *Wacousta*, which was written for a British audience and not published in Canada until late in the century, has also been omitted. Since bibliographic information appears in the Checklist, notes to the body of the text will be in brief form.
- <sup>2</sup> Literature written by Indians has been studied elsewhere. See Donald Smith, "The Life of George Copway or Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh (1819-1869) — and a review of his writings," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23 (Fall 1988), 5-38; and *Sacred Feathers* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1987).
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Cornelius Jaenen, *Friend and Foe* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); and Bruce Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1985). Chapter 1 of Trigger contains a survey of early scholarship on the subject.
- <sup>4</sup> The idea of "le bon sauvage" had a long history in French literature, beginning in 1580 with Montaigne's *Essais*. Voltaire, Diderot, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre were its principal exponents in the eighteenth century. Chateaubriand's *Attala* of 1801, whose Indian hero Chactas is the epitome of the type, influenced generations of French readers and was also well known in English translation.
- <sup>5</sup> It is hard to come by examples of this genre today because it has not been considered suitable for modern reproduction. Some examples can be found in Canadian newspapers of the period. See, for example, *Chatham Gleaner*, November 16, 1847, and August 22, 1848; *Kingston Argus*, June 12, 1846; or *Upper Canada Herald* (Kingston), December 21, 1840. When a source is given for these borrowings it is generally

- a newspaper published in the Ohio/Illinois area. Note that the dates are all in the 1840s. Even Fenimore Cooper, whom we think of today in terms of Natty Bumppo's friendship with Chingachgook and Uncas, shows us Bumppo fighting for his life against Hurons and Sioux. In the "Leatherstocking Tales" most of Cooper's villains are Indian.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Keiser, *The Indian in American Literature* (New York: Octagon Press, 1975, [1933]), 294.
- <sup>7</sup> H. R. Schoolcraft, *Narrative of Travels*, etc., quoted in author's note, *Niagara Gleaner*, July 26, 1823.
- <sup>8</sup> "L'Abenaquis, ou la tendresse paternelle," *La Bibliothèque Canadienne*, December 1827, 33-34; and M. E. Sawtell, "The Lonely Captive," *The Mourner's Tribute*, 71. I have been unable to identify "Coleman."
- <sup>9</sup> Adam Kidd, *The Huron Chief*, D. M. R. Bentley, ed. (London, Ont.: Canadian Poetry Press, 1987). First printed for the author in Montreal, 1830.
- <sup>10</sup> Of those who can be identified, twenty-three were born here, two were American, and eleven were born in Great Britain. The birthplaces of the remainder are unknown. This predominance of native-born is in marked contrast to the overall figures for this period in which, of 109 identified writers, 46 were Canadian-born and 63 others foreign-born. In other words, 42 percent of the possible authors account for almost two-thirds of those who wrote about Indians. This two-to-one distribution varies only slightly for each of the decades studied. In addition, seven of the native-born — John Richardson, Charles Durand, W. B. Wells, Holmes Mair, J. H. Willis, F. X. Garneau, and Michel Bibaud — were responsible for more than one work, while none of the immigrants wrote more than once on the subject. Statistical information derived from M. L. MacDonald, "Literature and Society in the Canadas, 1830-1850" (Ph.D. thesis, Carleton Univ., 1984).
- <sup>11</sup> See C. F. Klinck, *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice, Hall, 1961).
- <sup>12</sup> See R. J. Surtees, "Indian Land Cessions in Ontario, 1763-1862: The Evolution of a System" (Ph.D. thesis, Carleton Univ., 1982).
- <sup>13</sup> Canto III, line 530, in *Tales of Chivalry and Romance*.
- <sup>14</sup> P. 38, line 1078, in the Canadian Poetry Press edition.
- <sup>15</sup> P. 10, line 189.
- <sup>16</sup> P. 17, line 429 *et seq.*
- <sup>17</sup> P. 48, line 1371 *et seq.*
- <sup>18</sup> John Hare suggests in his introduction to the story in *Contes et Nouvelles du Canada français, tome I* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa, 1971) that Bibaud was the author. Maurice Lemire has argued in the first volume of *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires de Québec* (396-97) that the author must have been Canadian, rather than American, because of his or her knowledge of Quebec history. While the author may have been American, it should be noted that many English-Canadian writers were publishing in American periodicals in the 1820s, so it is entirely possible that the original author was an English resident of Quebec.
- <sup>19</sup> In the version published in *Le Répertoire National*, Tome I, 161.
- <sup>20</sup> *La Bibliothèque Canadienne* (1825-30), *L'Observateur* (1830-31), *Le Magasin du Bas-Canada* (1832), and *L'Encyclopédie Canadienne* (1842-43). It is also evident in the newspapers he edited, most notably *L'Aurore*.

- <sup>21</sup> *Epîtres, satires, etc.*, 115.
- <sup>22</sup> Both in the *Literary Garland*. The first, a story, July 1840, and the latter, a poem, November 1839. See Checklist.
- <sup>23</sup> "Canada" by John Breakenridge. The poem was the prize poem at Upper Canada College in 1836 and was printed in a number of newspapers at the time. The quotation here is taken from the version printed in Breakenridge's book, *The Crusades and Other Poems* (Kingston: John Rowlands, 1846), 137.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Unknown*, 225.
- <sup>25</sup> *Canadian Casket*, April 7, 1832, 82.
- <sup>26</sup> *Barker's Magazine*, May 1846, 27-28.
- <sup>27</sup> The Rev. Joseph Abbott's *Philip Musgrave* and Bishop G. J. Mountain's *Songs of the Wilderness*. Both works were published in Great Britain, the source of funding for missionary activities, but had wide circulation in the Canadas. Mountain is much more sympathetic to the Indians he encounters than Abbott.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Snow Drop*, New Series, Vol. 1 (1850), 194. Most of the "original" material in this periodical has been attributed to its proprietors, the sisters Harriet Cheney and Elizabeth Cushing, and their cousin, Elizabeth Hedge — all three, daughters of Unitarian clergymen and active members of the Montreal Unitarian community.
- <sup>29</sup> *Select Poems*, 23.
- <sup>30</sup> F. X. Garneau, "Louise," *Album Littéraire*, July 1846, 160.
- <sup>31</sup> H. K. F., "The Chief's Last Prisoner," *Bathurst Courier*, January 22, 1841. The story was printed in seven instalments between December 1840 and March 1841.
- <sup>32</sup> *La Revue Canadienne*, January 1845, 29.
- <sup>33</sup> The Indian women who marry white men in early Canadian literature are not described as sultry temptresses. They are, rather, a young male writer's fantasy of the perfect woman: close to nature, eager to marry him and live subordinate to his wishes — potential Galateas adopting the alien culture rather than seducing the man from his own.
- <sup>34</sup> See, for example, "M. Fenimore Cooper," *Album Littéraire*, August 1847, 215-19.
- <sup>35</sup> Chipman Hall in "A Survey of the Indians' Role in English Canadian Literature to 1900" (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie Univ., 1969), and Leslie Monkman in *A Native Heritage* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1981), 65, make this assertion. Monkman's thesis, while useful for the study of contemporary Canadian fiction, is not easily applied to the early nineteenth century. Among other things, he does not accept the "Indian as ally" theme which determined so much of the tone of Longmore's and Richardson's works on Tecumseh, ascribing less noble motives to the authors.



# NIGHTMARE COMFORT

*Ben Abel*

Oh wolverine  
On the dim side of you.

speaks no joy nor smiles.  
All is sad as the  
northern light.

Say wolverine  
the game you play.  
The loser disappear.  
Yet all is so full  
of shadows.  
And show no moons.

So wolverine.  
Gone is the spirit.  
And all stays  
is your shadow.  
In snarl smiling carpet.



# MOURNING DOVE'S CANADIAN RECOVERY YEARS, 1917-1919<sup>1</sup>

*Alanna Kathleen Brown*

**M**OURNING DOVE IS DESCENDED FROM TRIBES that inhabited the great Columbia River inland waterways. In her introduction to *Coyote Stories* (1933), she speaks of her paternal grandmother who was a member of the Nicola band of the Thompson River Indians of British Columbia, and of her father, Joseph Quintasket, whom she assumes is Okanogan, and who was born just outside Penticton around 1840 in what was then the Northwest Territory. Her mother, Lucy Stuiquin, a woman much younger than Joseph, was a full-blooded “Schwelpi,”<sup>2</sup> or Colville, as the U.S. government later named the tribe. It is Mourning Dove’s story that a Celt named Haines, or Haynes, who worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company, was her grandfather. Mourning Dove always stated that she was born in a canoe in the Month of the Leaves, April, 1888, while crossing the Kootenai River, near Bonner’s Ferry, Idaho.

The very limited records of her early life suggest the possibility of a more complex history which may or may not have been fully known to her. The official allotment records for Christine Quintasket, Mourning Dove’s English name, place her birth year as 1882, and then as 1887, and those records speak of that same “Haines” as her father. If this information is accurate, I cannot help but conjecture that Lucy Stuiquin, as a young woman, was either married in an “Indian” ceremony and then abandoned, or else was a victim of a far more serious exploitation. I also must note that Joseph Quintasket, as well as all the members of his family, are registered in the Lake Tribe, a band that migrated south from the Arrow Lakes region of British Columbia, rather than as Okanogan.

The differences I mention here are puzzling. It would appear from official documents, letters, and her treatment of the half-breed question in *Cogewea, The Half-Blood* (1927), that Mourning Dove was either one-quarter or one-half Caucasian. She was born between 1882 and 1888. She may be Okanogan, Colville (Schwelpi)

and/or Lake, and Irish, in descent. Whatever the blood lines, it is a mute psychological issue as to whether Joseph Quintasket was her father or stepfather. His family was her family. Those bonds were close on both the mother's and the father's side.

Five children were to follow Christine in Joseph and Lucy's marriage. Julia was born in 1891, Mary Margaret in 1892, and Louis in 1896. Two other children, John (1897) and Marie (1899), were to die before they were five. Their mother died on May 8, 1902. Three deaths in two years must have been staggeringly difficult for Christine who, as the oldest child, was the caretaker of the family during her mother's illness, but I have read no reference to this period of personal tragedy in her letters. What is clear is that Julia, Margaret, and Christine were close friends as well as sisters, and as young women they visited one another extensively to maintain those ties.

One such visit occurred in 1917 and lasted well into 1919. Christine had been critically ill in the first two months of 1917. She was at her father's in Boyds, Washington, and the family did not expect her to live. In a letter dated February 20, 1917, she wrote to her mentor and friend, L. V. McWhorter:<sup>3</sup>

Dear Big Foot.

Must answer your letter, and honest Injun. You don't know how much effort this letter took before I could write it. I am so weak and I guess lazy.

It has been over six weeks, since I got sick, and I was feeling fine but had a relapse and thought a "goner" but an Indian aunt came along and doctored me up with Indian medicines so I am now just able to sit up again and can use, and only use my arms[.] Having pneumonia and inflammatory rheumatism is no joke. The doctor thinks it is wonderful that I lived, when I was a hopeless case. Mere Injun luck and *will power*. I saw my father and brother crying at my bed side when I came to my senses and I felt sorry for them, and made up my mind I was going to live and I fought for it too. [3;345B(4)]<sup>4</sup>

By March 13, she had recovered enough to consider travel to Fairview, British Columbia, where Margaret lived with her husband and children. Margaret's family had travelled down to see her in her illness, and she felt that the weather there, a semi-arid climate, and their love, would provide a good healing ground. Margaret was the most traditional of the sisters for she had lived with an aunt who had taught her the "old" ways. Margaret also had married a traditional Indian and they lived on a Canadian Reserve which was fairly free of daily white influences. In Canada, Mourning Dove could rejuvenate her Indian spirit.

**T**HAT CANADIAN STAY from the spring of 1917 to the summer or autumn of 1919 was an extraordinary period in Mourning Dove's life. Although removed from rural society, the family was wracked by Caucasian diseases in

those two years, and once again Mourning Dove found herself to be a primary caretaker. Nonetheless, the Indian life was good for her, for her own health improved and she regained the strength to pursue her ambitions as a writer. Her letters to L. V. McWhorter reveal the pressures and triumphs of those times. It is also important to note that while Christine had lost a baby of her own in her first marriage to Hector McLeod, and was never able to have a child again, she was never to be without children.

No. I do not expect to go to hop picking this year. I cannot possible go any where[.] I have to much to look after. I have a little neice that is with me now. her papa has enlisted and gone to war and there are two children so. I took the baby which is 4 years old and left the boy who is 7 years of age. he will likely attend the mission school this year. My sister is not strong and she is not able to take care of her little ones. (September 1, 1917) [6-8; 366]

Those responsibilities dramatically expanded when measles struck her sister in late September. By October 16, 1917, she was writing to McWhorter:

All my sister's children are sick with the measles. and she has a stepson 14 years old who is now delirious. I think he had a set back. no doubt caught cold with it. I have an idea he took a cold bath[,] I am not sure tho' Because I heard him say that if any one should get sick, They bath in cold water and will always get well. he heard some Indians talking in that fashion and no doubt believed it, because one day, I was cooking dinner and he came in the kitchen and was trying to get warm and his hair was wet. and I asked him where he had been and he said, he was down to the creek. so I scold him because he was not well enough to go to the creek. But that is always the way that the Indians talks. and now it will be no doubt a death to the little orphaned boy. [12; 366]

Her next letter of October 29 reveals that the young boy is dead. The letter is rich with the significance of that death to her personally and talks about how Margaret's family purifies themselves and their property in response to that death. What is shocking is that a white doctor is charging \$50 to treat Indian patients during the midst of an epidemic:

Measles has been raging at our house now for six long weeks. My own little niece that lives with me has taken down for the last four days. and she is the last child of the bunch to have it. And I hope to goodness, I never hear of measles again. My sister had a relapse and we had to have an American doctor come up and he charged us \$50.00 for one visit. but she pulled through all right. He said she had black measles. So we had to wean the baby. while the other two kids were sick a bed too. "believe me", we had our hands full. I mean my brother in-law and I. I am in hopes he does not get the diseases. The little boy I was telling you about, my sister's step son died a few days after writing you. I am almost positive he took a cold plung in the creek.

You know how superstitious the Indians are. I had to clean house and rack the

yard and burn everything which the boy came in contract off. My sister wanted me to burn the single buggy and I wouldn't do it. So now I will only wash the thing with rose bushes. which they claim drives the evil spirits away. ofcourse I do not belive all that. but I will have to do it to satisfy them. I even had to wash the milk cow with rose bushes. so she will not fear me to milk her. Ain't that funny. but my sister is thoroughly Indian. more so than Julia and I. She is the one whom my aunt raise. I told you about her before. And the funniest part of all this deal is that I feel creepy to go outdoors alone at night.

The day that the boy died, I went to the postoffice, with the thought I would call a priest to come and see him since he is of the Catholic faith. and it was night when I was on the way home. I wasn't thinking much of anything when I saw a bright light flash up a tree, which attracted my attention and I saw a flimsy white form go up towards the heavens. and than I was so frighten. even my horse was afraid, and when I reached home, he had been dead fully half an hour and that was about the same time. I had the presentment. Ain't that strang? but it is true Big Foot. The little boy always thought so much of me. And he knew I think that I went to town for his interest. poor fellow. He was a very good boy. He was as innocent as a small child. And I think God wanted him away from this evil world and took him away. [3-5; 366]

By November 19, 1917, she could write that all was finally well, although clearly she had not yet recovered from her own near death experience:

We are all well again and say I am so happy. I was so tired and sick of it all. It made me so nervous and I feel it yet.

I am having a tent house built and have a new stove and rockers bought for it and it is so cozy. I just wish you could see it. I boarded the floor myself while my carpenter was away. ofcourse it is not as nice a job as he could make, but I am so proud of it. I cannot stand to be indoors. my lungs, pain me sharp shooting pains at times and I feel so faint. I went to an Indian family where a little boy died and it was so close in there just as I walked out of the room I was so faint I dropped close to the stove and almost got burnt badly. I don't know what ails me anyway. "I hates it like, ——." [101-102; 467]

Those pains continued off and on for a lifetime. Her poverty as a child on the reservation probably was a primary reason for that ongoing poor health. But Euro-American diseases also weakened or wiped out Native tribes. In 1917, the scourge was the measles. By the end of the next year the family was swept again, this time by the deadly flu epidemic of 1918-1919. Indians also had to survive the poor, but expensive, medical treatment they received from white doctors. In 1918, Mourning Dove had her tonsils removed because a doctor told her that the operation would cure her rheumatism. These were rough years in terms of health and so it is surprising to learn that the visit was also a very good one for Mourning Dove. In the face of discouragement and illness she once again tapped into the source root of her desire to be a writer.

WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* was not published until 1927, Mourning Dove had completed a first draft of the novel by 1914, and she had spent the winter of 1915-16 at L. V. McWhorter's home in Yakima, editing and typing the work with Big Foot, as he was affectionately called. By mid-1916, it appeared that a publisher for the work had been found, and in their enthusiasm, a lengthy article on Mourning Dove and her forthcoming novel was printed in the April 19, 1916, edition of the *Spokane Review*. But the book publication fell through and the ups and downs of thwarted publishing opportunities haunted and discouraged her.

In the midst of the measles epidemic, October 8, 1917, she wrote:

I am very sorry that "Cogeawa" has taken some more of your valuable time. I hope she can be able to repay you a little on Christmas day. You never hinted what you wish from that "squaw." she has taken so much of your time and is still delayed of being published. I am beganing to think she is an unlucky 13. Or she has caused this war, so as to save herself from getting into book form. [2; 366]

The affection and humour of that letter are gone by February 26, 1918:

I received your letter was glad to hear from an old friend as usual, but must admit I was a disappointed squaw after reading the publisher's letter, of course it was well spoken off, but somehow I was down the "throat" after reading it. I had "banked" on that little Cogewea, but somehow she is a "quiter" and will not make good I am afraid. Well let her wait till Kamrade Kaiser is beaten, before she makes another effort. Eh? [47-48; 366]

Nonetheless, while she does not explicitly say why, her own brush with death, the young nephew's dying, returning health, and good news about an eye infection that she had feared might be trecoma, appear to fill her with a renewed commitment to her chosen work. She purchases a typewriter. Exuberance also returns:

I received your letter and am answering you before it reaches that unlucky date 13th. It may have to go on that date and you see I want to be sure and keep clear of that number. Say did you notice that I could spell this month correct? I looked on the calendar to spell it right, so thought I would make good use of it while I have it in view. I am getting awfully tricky, since I got a dandy machine to write on. I feel like writing all my letters on it. It is a "pipen," only it is not as easy writing as yours[,] it makes my wrists tired in no time. I think that I will like it much better when I get accostumed to its writing and you know I am so slow typing that it makes me much slower since I get things mixed, the key board is different than yours and I am everlastingly making mistakes when I want to write my best. Savey? (February 10, 1918) [45-46; 366]

In that same letter she enthusiastically speaks of collecting "folklores," now that the eye scare is over:

Say, I have good news about my eyes and you don't know how glad I am. My little niece had it you remember I told you that she had it first and than gave them to me, when I was treat — her eyes. Well her daddy took her to Spokane to the specialists and the doctor said in Spokane that she did not have trecoma, and if she did there was no signs left to tell the effects of the eyelids. So this news releives me of much unnecessary worry. I am sure my eyes will be O.K. before long, they are better now only they get weak whenever I use them for reading or sewing. I have just stacks of sewing and writing to do but it seems that I cannot get them done. I have so busy getting things done up so I can spend more time with my folklores. I have a lot of it outlined and I am getting more among the old Indians, ofcourse they do not know that I am collecting anything and if they suspicioned me it be meaning that they would not give me any more stories without getting the cash first. You know how suspicious they are. [45-46; 366]

She had begun collecting oral narratives in her early twenties. But the activity was not a passion. Novel writing was her driving desire. It was McWhorter who believed that the legends must be recorded before the older generation died, and he pressed Mourning Dove continually to preserve the stories of her people. She trusted him as a mentor and friend, so Mourning Dove redirected her energies into collecting and recounting mythic tales. The reserve at Fairview was fertile ground for such a search. She was, however, not alone in her interest.

It was March 18, 1918. She had just learned from McWhorter that another publisher was interested in *Cogwea*:

I will take the 100 copies of the little squaw, and do not worry I shall have the money, even if I have to borrow it from some of my relatives, but I expect some money before very long, and I was thinking of buying me a saddle horse so I can get around among the Indians, to gather some more work to put in shape as soon as possible. They are such hard people to get anything out from and I am going to try my best to get a fine lot. They are some that are getting suspicious of my wanting folklores and if the Indians find out that their stories will reach print I am sure it will be hard for me to get any more legends without paying the hard cash for them, A Whiteman has spoiled my feild of work, He is a Canadian and lives at Spences-Bridge B.C. I wish you would write him and find out about his works, he claims he is a true friend to the Indians here and all of Canada but we are so suspicious of the Whiteman that to be frank with you, and I know you feel Injun so I will speak freely. I have some doubts about him. He has collected so much among the Indians in money matters and claims now he has a lawyer engaged to fight for the interest of the Indians for the rights to their land, or rather the Indian title. I have no interest in it and have not found out particulars. What I started to tell you was, that this Mr. James Tait [Teit], has collected folklores among the Indians and has been paying five dollars apiece for good Indian legends and naturally that has spoiled the natives and ofcourse they wish the same price from me whether the story is worth a nickle to me, A lot of times the same stories are told to me a little differently from one party and another will say, that is not the true fact, but I know the straight of it and will tell me with a little addition which is no help but only waste of time listening and taking

note. Savey? I think this Mr. Tait [Teit] has a book printed of this work. I wrote to him way in the fall, but no word from him, and I think he knows that I am among the Indians, I am not sure tho. He lives too far from here. [38-39; 366]

THEREIN LIES ONE OF THE CENTRAL DILEMMAS in Native American Studies. James Teit, a well-known student of Franz Boaz, was recording and shaping Indian legends from the emerging discipline of anthropology. Mourning Dove was but a marginally literate Native. The former would transcribe, the latter would recreate in imperfect English. How to learn to value each voice, to understand their limitations, their perspectives, and their achievements is still unfolding. James Teit's work has received considerable praise. It is no longer known that *Coyote Stories* (1933), Mourning Dove's work which included tales collected on this and other visits to Canada, was so successful in its first printing that a second edition came out in 1934, right at the heart of the Great Depression. A reviewer for the *Daily Oklahoman* (January 14, 1934) commented that the collection represented "a spiritual heritage which can never be replaced," and another book reviewer for the *Oregonian* (December 24, 1933) stated that the edition was more valuable than many volumes of "ethnological theorizing" in reconstructing the vivid life of Indians in the Northwest.

That is a profound achievement because Mourning Dove had to write in such a way that the preservation of an oral culture in written form did not betray its dynamic. She had to communicate the oral force of live presentation. A stunning example of that skill is reflected in Mourning Dove's story of her paternal grandmother, Pah-tah-heet-sa. It is a quintessential tale that honours a family line, a tribe, and a land we now call British Columbia and Washington:

Pah-tah-heet-sa was a "big medicine woman[.]" She was of the Nicola Indian tribe in the middle British Columbia possession of England in Canada. She had two daughters, which both married into the southren tribes of the Okanogans.

Quite frequently this old woman would pack her back loaded with dried vension and salmon and go visiting her daughters and grandchildren south. One day the Indians of her village were getting ready to go over the Nicola Trail which was infested with mean grizzle bears and cougars. Pah-tah-heet-sa while making her pack remembered that this trail had huckleberry bushes which would be about ripe with the luxurious food. She hurried and throwing her pack on her back she went ahead of all the warriors with their weapons which usually went ahead of the women and children to prevent an attack from the wild animals.

When this brave woman drew near the berry patch she saw a grizzlebear feeding, but this did not stop her, she took her whittled point stick of "dog wood" used as a camas digger, and prepared to fight if the bear meant to charge at her, which the bear did not hesitate to do. With a howl that would freeze the blood in any coward person this animal charged Pah-tah-heet-sa. She threw her pack off and drawing her stick in prepardness she challenged the brute,

"You are a mean animal, and I am a mean woman. Let us fight this out, who will get the berry patch that we both want." The bear did not answer her, but opened its mouth its widest and came at a leap. She watched her chance and drove the sharp stick into the animal's mouth, the bear fell back in pain only more angered to jump on her again. This fight continued long enough to have the warriors with weapons to approach unexpecting to see the sight which was never known to happen before. The Indians drew their arrows to shoot the bear, but Pah-tah-heet-sa commanded them.

"Don't shoot. Wait, we are fighting this to the finish. He is a mean animal, and I am a mean woman, we will see who is the strongest will conquer this battle." The woman would roar her mimic of the bear's angry growl as she would drive her sharp stick into the wide mouth each time that the bear would charge upon her, which would throw the animal back, The Indians watched them fight till the sun laid low into the western sky when the Grizzle walked away broken and bleeding, Pah-tah-heet-sa didn't have any wounds besides a few scratches. She picked her basket up and gathered the berries that the fight started from, while the Indians stood in wonderment at her.

She died a very old woman, by her buckskin horse rolling down a steep embankment near Orville Washington where she drowned with her faithful horse. They were both buried by the riverbank of the Smilkameen river. The grave is unmarked today. Thus died a brave mean woman. [24-25; 269]<sup>5</sup>

Oral literature belongs to the realm of performance and the particular art of the storyteller. It is not a well-crafted individual statement meant to be preserved verbatim from one reader to the next. It carries its own life. Because Mourning Dove survived many brushes with death, because she yearned to write, because she loved the oral tradition of her people, we have been left with a remarkable collection of letters and storytelling.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I dedicate this essay to the descendants of Margaret Quintasket and Mourning Dove's other Canadian family relations who have been so gracious to me in my research.
- <sup>2</sup> "Schwelpi" is Mourning Dove's spelling in *Coyote Stories*, p. 9. Clearly she is having difficulty with the word because she also spells it variously as "Swhee-al-puh," "Schu-ayl-pk," and "Shoyelpee," to reflect varying pronunciations (8-9).
- <sup>3</sup> Lucullus Virgil McWhorter was Mourning Dove's editor, collaborator, co-writer, and friend. Their extensive twenty-year correspondence is housed at the Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections Division of the Washington State Universities Libraries, Pullman, Washington 99164. All the quotations in this essay are from letters written to McWhorter.
- <sup>4</sup> The Mourning Dove and L. V. McWhorter correspondence is kept in individual folders and each sheet of paper with a folder is numbered. The February 20, 1917, letter is sheet 3 of file 345B which has been given the additional number of 4 [3; 345B(4)]. All further correspondence from this collection will be indicated as shown in the brackets. The quoted material will maintain Mourning Dove's original spelling and grammar with the exception that a period or comma in brackets is my

insertion in order to help reader clarity. Additional information in brackets is also my own. Such additions have been kept to a minimum.

<sup>5</sup> Mourning Dove titled this piece, "Her fight with the grizzlybear." It was first published in my article, "Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea*," *The Wicazo Sa Review*, 4.2 (Fall 1988): 2-15. That article also includes the commentary Mourning Dove attached to the end of the narrative to prove its authenticity. I wish to thank that journal for the opportunity to reprint Pah-tah-heet-sa's story.

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## KLU'SKAP-O'KOM\*

Rita Joe

I left a message to nikmaq†  
In the caves of stone  
My home.  
The message say I go away  
But someday return,  
And the sun will again shine  
Across the trails  
My people walk.

\* *Klu'skap-o'kom* — Klu'skap's home.

† *Nikmaq* — My friends or Micmac.

In Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, there are caves at a place, Kelly's Mountain, where the legend says that Klu'skap left and will return someday. The place is beautiful in the rising and setting sun, hence the legend the Micmacs passed from generation to generation. The \$46 million quarry nearby may destroy the caves, and the legend will only be a story of our past; as always this usually happens.

(Oct. 21, 1989) R.J.

# THE DREAM WAS THE ANSWER

*Rita Joe*

On the morning of August 14, 1989  
My husband Frank Joe passed away in Calais Maine.  
The thirty-five years we spent together  
A love story in itself will always be there.  
I respected the man and lost him  
Ki'su'lk weswalata!\*

The next morning on the way home  
We rested in New Brunswick.  
My grandson the driver sleeping  
While my thoughts kept me awake  
The pain so great, I conversed with Niskam†  
I tried to convince him that Frank was a good man  
He knows a lot of trades I told him  
The one of them with children  
For the Micmac Family and Children's Services  
The replacing of their loss in loving arms.

On the morning of September 14, 1989  
I received a call from North Battleford Saskatchewan  
Where our daughter Bernadette is in training  
To be a nurse  
More determined now that her father is gone.  
"I dreamt about dad," she said  
"He was holding a child,  
A child so beautiful, his hair the color of snow."  
I knew then that Frank is at peace  
The symbol of our culture is the white  
He is now working with Niskam, I know.

\* *Ki'su'lk weswalata* — Our Creator took him.

† *Niskam* — God.



# CONTEMPORARY NATIVE WOMEN'S VOICES IN LITERATURE

*Agnes Grant*

**E**LIZABETH COOK-LYNN (Crow-Creek-Sioux) writes that during her formative years she read everything from the Sears catalogue to *Faust*, from *True Confessions* to *Paradise Lost*, but she was never able to read anything about her own Native People. She recalls:

Wanting to write comes out of that deprivation, though, for we eventually have to ask, what happens to a reasonably intelligent child who sees himself or herself excluded from a world which is created and recreated with the obvious intent to declare him or her *persona non grata*? Silence is the first reaction. Then there comes the development of a mistrust of that world. And, eventually, anger.

That anger is what started me writing. Writing for me, then, is an act of defiance born out of the need to survive. I am me. I exist. . . . I write.<sup>1</sup>

Carter Revard (Osage), a Rhodes scholar, expresses the same frustration. He tells how he toured Greece with his family in an attempt to call "the Muses to Oklahoma." He was not entirely satisfied:

I expect the Muses to behave like the strong Indian women they are over here, and to sing Arcadian songs, in the Osage Hills, that Okies can follow. I'd like to bury Caesar, not keep on praising him.<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to say that not only Ovid, Virgil or Horace "set songs among the stars," so did his grandfather.

These are not isolated experiences; Native Canadians find the same void, the same frustrations when they study Canadian literature. Why does this happen? Partly, because few Native Canadians have been published, but also because our theories of criticism take a very narrow view of literature. We have an idea of what "good style" is, this idea having fixed and unchanging attributes. We use written European tradition and apply it to literature from all cultures. This effectively precludes members of other culture groups from holding influential literary positions and also ensures a continuation of existing criteria.

This written tradition often overlooks Natives because Natives are not generally considered a living, contributing factor in all facets of Canadian society. They have been used by numerous Canadian writers as subject matter, as metaphor, as social commentary, but this writing serves only to illuminate the character of non-Native Canadian Society while leaving the character of Natives largely untouched.<sup>3</sup> Virtually never do we ponder, dissect, critique, analyze, and finally incorporate as our own the words of Native writers.

“Native literature” means Native people telling their own stories, in their own ways, unfettered by criteria from another time and place.

Native literature reveals the depth and status of the culture, expresses Native wisdom and points of view familiar to other Natives, reveals the beauty of the Native world, beauty rarely recognized by non-Native writers. Native literature records oral narratives, values, beliefs, traditions, humour, and figures of speech. It emphasizes communal living and portrays a mingling and sharing; elders wait to teach Indian ways to the young who may be floundering in an alien culture or questioning traditional ways. Non-Native readers may not always recognize the strength and beauty of the literature but will recognize common themes. For Native readers, the literature is a source of strength and personal development. The void experienced by Cook-Lynn or the frustration of Revard can be avoided if a different critical theory is applied to Native literature, or at least new perspectives of existing critical theory are entertained.

Native literature often confronts readers with a history that is stark and unredeemable — because the historic treatment of Natives was callous. This may be a point of view unfamiliar to many non-Native readers. A particular difference from Western literature exists in the feeling for the land; Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) said, “We are the land”<sup>4</sup> — which may be a foreign concept to an essentially agrarian society. Native fiction is rich in stories within stories, echoes of old chants, prayers and incantations. In it, a combination of languages creates new forms of language.

A literary style, however, cannot be defined by ethnography alone. Where everything is accounted for by the writer’s “Nativeness,” imaginative freedom will be denied. There has to be an artistic identity beyond the culture. But who defines this artistic identity? Critics must also recognize how each writer adopts Western literary forms and language to his or her particular vision as a Native writer in contemporary society.

A question that must be asked about any Canadian who writes, and especially a member of a minority group with different viewpoint and heritage language, is not whether the language appears “good” according to some conventional model of textbook goodness, but whether it works to good effect, whether it communicates, whether it moves readers, whether it makes them see Canadian society through another person’s eyes.<sup>5</sup> And if it does not speak to us, may it not be speaking to

someone else in our society in a meaningful way? Is the lack of response to the work a lack of sensitivity in non-Native readers? Are conventional critical judgments depriving readers of access to a potentially moving literature? What we say and do as critics and teachers will influence who will be publishing in the future. Are we perpetuating voids?

Native Canadians are writing, but few are publishing. We lack a definition of what Native literature is, and do not agree on criteria for judging it.<sup>6</sup> It is imperative that we look more closely at Native literature and judge it not within a European cultural paradigm but from the points of view of the culture from which it springs. Examining an author's purpose, as works by three Native women indicate, provides one way to cross this cultural boundary. Maria Campbell, in *Halfbreed* (1973), Beatrice Culleton, in *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), and Lee Maracle, in *I Am Woman* (1988), have all written for different reasons; in each case, the purpose strongly influences style and content.

CAMPBELL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY is dedicated to "my Cheechum's children"; the introduction says, "I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country."<sup>7</sup> It soon becomes evident that Campbell is not writing for other Métis; she is preoccupied with telling *non-Natives* what it is like to be a Halfbreed.

A close friend of mine said, "Maria, make it a happy book. It couldn't have been so bad. We know we are guilty so don't be too harsh." I am not bitter. I have passed that stage. I only want to say: this is what it was like; this is what it is still like.<sup>8</sup>

This book is the story of Maria's life as a Métis child in northern Saskatchewan and of her life as a young woman in the city. Some of the literary qualities are immediately obvious to the readers — the very brief retelling of the history, the humour, the irony, the understatement. The oral tradition, apparent in the writer's style, assumes that the listener (or when transferred to writing, the reader) comes from the same background as the storyteller. Because of the common heritage there is no need for lengthy descriptions or wordy explanations. There is no need for elaborate display of emotions; in fact, emotion is rarely expressed because events speak for themselves. But though remarkable for its understatement, *Halfbreed* is a book choking with emotion. The author's sense of place and her dependence on that sense show up again and again in the first part of the book. Recurrent allusions to love, peace, beauty, and happiness indicate that Métis are not hopelessly caught between two cultures. But Maria's life is devoid of this warmth and sense of belonging as she leaves home. She is manipulated by people who are strangers to her and

to her way of life, and the style of the second half of the book demonstrates this distinction.

Though Maria Campbell claims she has overcome her bitterness, her anger seethes just below the surface, an anger undoubtedly justified. She makes no attempt to understand non-Native society, just as non-Native society has made no attempt to understand hers. She tells dispassionately of British war brides who were lured to Saskatchewan by Métis men:

One was a very proper Englishwoman. She had married a handsome Halfbreed soldier in England believing he was French. He came from northern Saskatchewan's wildest family and he owned nothing, not even the shack where a woman and two children were waiting for him.<sup>9</sup>

This woman promptly beat up the English bride and the community collected enough money to send her to Regina where "they were sure the government would help her." As she moved into the outside world Maria's contempt for non-Natives increased. She talks of the social action groups of the 1960s: "The whites at the meetings were the kind of people who failed to find recognition among their own people, and so had to come to mine, where they were treated with the respect they felt they deserved."<sup>10</sup> And she goes on to say, "I'd hated those nameless, faceless white masses all my life."<sup>11</sup> Such blunt comments about non-Natives and the harshness of Métis life dominate the book.

But Campbell also uses humour effectively, often remembering and lovingly describing community rituals. Much of her humour takes the form of anecdote. When the Métis parents were all called to the school for inoculations, she recalls, "Alex Vandal, the village joker, was at his best that day. He told Daddy that he was going to act retarded because the whites thought we were anyway."<sup>12</sup> The joke is not Alex Vandal's antics but the fact that the teacher took him seriously, thereby hugely entertaining the assembled Métis. But the humour in the book does much more than just entertain. Campbell uses it as a defiant gesture which accounts, in no small measure, for the popularity of the book among Métis readers. Kate Vangen (Assiniboine) points out that

indigenous peoples have undoubtedly been using humour for centuries to "make faces" at their colonizers without the latter being able to retaliate; however, Native humour has escaped most historical and literary accounts because the recorder did not perceive the gesture as humorous or because he did not appreciate the humour.<sup>13</sup>

Maria regrets being Catholic because the Anglicans have that exciting "fornicator and adulterer," Henry VIII. Maria's Indian grandparents excuse her outspoken ways because that was the "white" in her. She tells of playing Caesar and Cleopatra on the slough while non-Native passers-by shook their heads and laughed. The irony of the situation takes a double turn when we find that the cousins never

allowed Maria to be Cleopatra because she was too “black” and her hair was like a “nigger’s.”<sup>14</sup> Though the book was written for non-Natives Maria keeps them at a distance. She writes of things she knows, which she believes her readers do not know. The humour and irony are very effective in pointing out to the readers that, indeed, Maria is right. There are things that we did not know. Until she wrote the book, “halfbreed” was nothing but a common derogatory term; now it means a person living between two cultures. The ultimate irony is that her book has never been taken seriously as literature.

**B**EATRICE CULLETON’S *In Search of April Raintree* is also autobiographical but it is thinly disguised as fiction. It lacks the warmth, zest, and cultural insights of *Halfbreed* but a Native writer raised in impersonal foster homes from early childhood has no memories and teachings on which to draw. Culleton’s barren formative years are reflected in every phrase of *In Search of April Raintree*. The book is dedicated to Culleton’s two sisters, both of whom committed suicide. Through the voice of April Raintree, Beatrice Culleton begins her search.

Memories. Some memories are elusive, fleeting, like a butterfly that touches down and is caught. Others are haunting. You’d rather forget them but they won’t be forgotten. . . . Last month, April 18th, I celebrated my twenty-fourth birthday. That’s still young but I feel so old.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike Campbell, Beatrice Culleton wrote for herself. Her book served as a catharsis so that she could finally come to terms with her personal history. Through her book she comes to understand her mother’s alcoholism (though she still finds it hard to forgive a mother who prefers drink to her children). Non-Native people played a role in Culleton’s life (and hence in April Raintree’s) by making life more difficult, but Culleton’s real sorrow is caused by her own people.

In the wake of alcoholism came child neglect, foster homes, incompetent and uncaring social workers. In the book, April is placed with a particularly heartless foster mother. Readers see her as a hyperbolic figure, but sober reflection on reality should shock readers; this is no mere indulgence or literary gesture. Other scenes, too, insist on the brutality of real experience, as in the incident when April Raintree is raped and, as she fights back, her assailant laughs, “Yeah, you little savages like it rough, eh?”<sup>16</sup> Readers might initially wonder at the author’s purpose for including the rape scene; it seems somewhat contrived. It soon becomes evident that it, too, parallels reality.<sup>17</sup> Fully seven pages are devoted to straightforward description. The scene totally lacks coy allusions, titillation, or sexual excitement. Readers cringe with revulsion as the rapist yanks April’s hair and commands, “I said suck”<sup>18</sup> — and the torment, humiliation, and pain increase. Culleton shows courage in describing the rape and reporting it; and in the novel, at least, she has the satisfac-

tion of seeing the rapists convicted. The plot continues logically since the aftermath of the rape plays a prominent role in April's subsequent actions. Readers owe Culleton a considerable debt for dispassionately and competently handling a topic that is too often romanticized by writers and which becomes a debilitating crisis for many women in reality.

Though the book is popular in Canadian as well as European markets, it is rarely referred to as "Canadian literature"; at best it is called "Native literature." Why? The style is, admittedly, very simple. Beatrice Culleton writes as she, and many people like her, speak. Perhaps, too, the style is painful for those who are immersed in the skilful prose of Margaret Laurence or Gabrielle Roy. But is it just to confuse a simple style with a simplistic book? On the contrary, if this book is judged by whether it works to good effect, communicates, moves us, or makes us see, then it must stand as one of the most scathing indictments of Canadian society that has ever been written.

LEE MARACLE'S BOOK, *I Am Woman*, is a book of prose and poetry written expressly for Native people. It is, essentially, the story of one woman's search for the truth. Maracle, too, claims no animosity toward non-Natives, but she says the book is not for them. She goes on to say,

It is inevitable, Europeans, that you should find yourself reading my work. If you do not find yourself spoken too [*sic*], it is not because I intend rudeness — you just don't concern me now.<sup>19</sup>

Rather, she says her book "addresses the Native people in desperate circumstances, who need to recover the broken threads of their lives."<sup>20</sup> To write her book, she gathered stories, scribbled on paper napkins and brown bags, stories which she says come from "the people of my passion." She resisted publishing for a long time because she could not commit the "voices of the unheard" to paper or to "squeeze one's loved ones so small."<sup>21</sup> All the voices carry the same theme: "Racism is for us, not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives. The pain, the effect, the shame are all real."<sup>22</sup>

In common with other Native writers she recognizes the importance of elders. Her poem "Creation" acknowledges the vital family ties:

I know nothing  
of great mysteries  
know less of creation  
I do know  
that the farther backward  
in time that I travel  
the more grandmothers

and the farther forward  
 the more grandchildren  
 I am obligated to both.<sup>23</sup>

The words "I am woman" were liberating for Maracle, words first spoken by Sojourner Truth. Before 1961, the "woman" question did not exist for Native women — they were wards of the government, children, asexual in a world that measured white women in terms of their sexuality. Campbell and Culleton have opened windows to the "shame" of being Native and the particularly degrading position of Native women. Campbell declares, "I was skin and bones with running sores all over my body. I was bruised and battered from the beatings I got from Trapper and whoever else felt like beating me."<sup>24</sup> Culleton's assailant chortled, "Hey, you guys, we're going to have to teach this little Indian some manners. I'm trying to make her feel good and she pulls away. The ungrateful bitch."<sup>25</sup> Maracle sums it all up. Indian women, she believes, were objects of "sexual release for white males whose appetites were too gross for their own women."<sup>26</sup> However, she does not place all the blame on non-Native men. She asks,

How many times do you hear from our own brothers; Indian women don't whine and cry around, nag or complain. At least not "real" or "true" Indian women. Embodied in that kind of language is the negation of our femininity — the denial of our womanhood.<sup>27</sup>

The effect this denial had on her was that she was convinced that love and compassion were "inventions" of white folks; Indians never loved, wept, laughed, or fought.<sup>28</sup> In her book she comes to understand that

The denial of Native womanhood is the reduction of the whole people to a sub-human level. Animals beget animals. The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath Native man comes the female Native. The dictates of racism are thus that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women.<sup>29</sup>

The book is a journey of exploration, and like any journey is uneven. Style and content vary. But it grips the reader with its energy and determination. Maracle writes forcefully, angrily, passionately, sadly, and poignantly.

Separately, and together, these three Native writers speak with infinite wisdom and sadness of what it is to be a Native woman in Canada. They do not speak of the distant past but of our age, from 1940 to the present. Anger and loss pervade all three books, but there is also hope. Campbell speaks of her brothers and sisters all over the land; Culleton speaks of better family life; and when Maracle proclaims herself "woman," she equates "being" with being *sensuous, beautiful, strong, brilliant, passionate, loving*. All three writers experience difficulty in communicating with non-Native Canadians. They have written their books for different reasons. But inevitably a writer, who publishes, writes to communicate with others. The

difficulty that Native voices experience in being heard and being taken seriously is best expressed by Maracle in the following poem:

It is hard not to protest —  
not to address CanAmerican Europe  
when you are not just surrounded,  
but buried beneath the urban giant;  
reduced to a muffled voice  
by the twang and clang of machines.  
It is hard not to cry out to those  
next you 'come together . . . push up  
on the giant . . . bite his heels'  
It is easier to cry out to the unseen,  
deaf ears above for help.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers*, eds. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1987), 57.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.
- <sup>3</sup> This concept has been thoroughly explored in Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981).
- <sup>4</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective in American Indian Literature" in *Studies in American Indian Literature* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1983), 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Swann and Krupat explore this concept in greater detail in the introduction to *I Tell You Now*.
- <sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion on this dilemma see the introduction to Thomas King, ed., *Canadian Fiction Magazine* No. 60 (1987).
- <sup>7</sup> Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), 8.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.
- <sup>13</sup> Kate Vangen, *The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Thomas King, Cheryl Calver, and Helen Hoy (Oakville: ECW Press, 1987), 188.
- <sup>14</sup> Campbell, 18.
- <sup>15</sup> Beatrice Culleton, *In Search of April Raintree* (Winnipeg: Pemmican, 1983), 9.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>17</sup> Beatrice Culleton in a video produced by the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, n.d.

<sup>18</sup> *Raintree*, 144.

<sup>19</sup> Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman* (North Vancouver: Write-On Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, 124.

<sup>25</sup> Culleton, 141.

<sup>26</sup> Maracle, 18.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

## NOSTALGIA

*Emma LaRocque*

Where does it go  
the log-cabins,  
woodstoves and rabbit soups  
we know  
in our eight year old hearts?

I tried to hold it  
with my Minolta  
As Sapp stills it  
with paint and brush.

I ran out of film,  
and Sapp out of brushes.

# EQUALITY AMONG WOMEN

*Mingwôn Mingwôn (Shirley Bear)*

**W**E ARE BORN WITH A CERTAIN NUMBER of talents, emotions and needs that are developed as we grow older. Much of our development depends on the environment that we are born to or involved in as we mature. If our environment is conducive to promoting a healthy respectful view of ourselves, then there is a likelihood that we will respect other persons too. However, there are other factors and adopted attitudes that are accumulated as we develop into adults.

Much has been said and written about sexual discrimination and to illustrate the issue now would probably be somewhat boring; however, we have pretty much gone full circle. We have gone that circle but we have not managed to connect yet.

## *Circle*

Creation is female. In the beginning was thought, and her name was woman . . . to her we owe our lives (Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*).

Among the indigenous people of North America there are countless verbal documents on the female source of creation. Any written documentation of our creation as it referred to the original North Americans was always coloured by the writers to conform with their beliefs, be they religious or political. Also since most of the original research was done during colonialism, the historical documentation would basically be written with a strong paternalistic bias. Colonialism and paternalistic religions were largely responsible in devaluing the matrilineal society that they found among the people of North America. Their influence is still being felt, but because of the questions from many women throughout the whole world on the origin of creation, the theory of the god person being only male is not so valid any more. Before the male gods, there were female gods or goddesses. Maat, the great goddess, whose name is identified as the original mother symbol, was personified as the bearer of truth and justice. And according to the Pueblo legend, Thought Woman was the first person in creation, thus the first goddess. Huring Wuhti or Hard Beings Woman lives in the worlds above and owns the moon and the stars and breathes life into the male and female parents of the Hopi. Sky Woman, who lived on this Turtle Island (now known as the world), is the original

goddess of the Iroquois. There are several connections among these stories of our creation, and the point is that they are all originally female.

Paternalism was at its beginning in the religions and governments around the time of the ninth century (Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*). The evolution of the written word is largely biased towards male deities and the denigration of female power. Because nothing stays static forever, female persons, after nineteen hundred years of powerlessness, are finally gathering together enough information and understanding of themselves as well as the paternal system to start a change in the government and the religions. This change is bringing about not another one-sided sexual generation but hopefully a more equipotent society. This will be the circle. The connection of the circle of understanding is still a long way from being the total view of creation; if it took nineteen hundred years for women to understand that men are not alone in this creation (and some women still do not believe or understand this), then we have several hundred years to complete the GRAND CIRCLE towards equality and unity.

### *Men and Women*

Early writings from Egypt depict a matrilineal society, with strong clans led by women (Barbara G. Walker). All property, names, and family traced lineage through the woman. Because property meant power, and the only property holders were women, it meant that the power belonged to the women. In the pre-Columbian governments in North America, women were the power. The women were the name-givers, as well as law-makers, land-owners, healers, and spiritual leaders. There is also evidence in the oral documents to indicate that there were women warriors. Until the influx of the Europeans to this continent, women held high positions among the original North Americans.

The last evidence of a matrilineal system shows up about the ninth century in Europe. Paternalism started in the churches through acquisition of property. Paternalistic religions, in their acquisition of property, were also acquiring power, therefore in their powerful state were able to make and change laws. As the laws changed, so did the shift of equal status, attitude, and respect between men and women. The Churches made laws as though they were written by god, who by now was undeniably male. Where laws were centred on land and people before, now they were totally male-centred. Women and children had no more rights. Everything and everyone considered subservient became the property of powerful males. All the high governmental offices and religious offices were held by males. The laws were made by these religions and governments. At the height of paternal power, women held negligible power, and children even less. Over these generations, many myths, attitudes, and stereotypes about women have developed, reconfirming the image of a dominant Paternal Society ruling the subservient maternals. It isn't

difficult to understand why women are still expected to assume their husband's last name, or why children are expected to assume their father's name, or why women are assumed to be better housekeepers, babysitters, and gossips. Just about everything regarded by the dominant group as belittling or demeaning activity for them is attributed to the subservient group, most always women.

The unequal status of women and the shift in the religious leadership are largely responsible for the most recent creation story, as told in the Bible.

### *Women and Women*

Dominant personalities have always been recognized as leaders, whether they are male, female, or animal. It may be important to understand dominance as a valued trait in the society that we are living in. *Dominant* means "superior to all others in power, influence, and importance" (Merriam-Webster). The way we think of and treat others distinguishes us both as personalities and as societies.

Dominant persons regard themselves as leaders; leaders delegate work and expect those who follow them to do the work that requires the dominant person to function without hindrance of any kind. In the Paternal Society, the males work with finances, lawmaking, and enforcing. They are so important in the process of world politics and church matters that they have delegated the care of their personal needs to women — i.e., washing, cleaning, shopping, cooking — and because women are the child-bearers, the care of children has been largely delegated to women. In recent years some women have entered into the dominant circle of males and taken on leadership roles. As more women move into this area, the pressure to emulate the paternalistic personality wears heavy on them. Ironically, women have to double their responsibilities and perform both the dominant and subservient roles.

But even subservients have to dominate over someone else, and we descend and dominate over other women, or persons of colour, or children.

### *Equality*

Racial superiority expresses itself when one race of people feel that they can dominate another race of people. When people are powered over, it always results in either transferring this dominance over others less powerful than themselves or indignation on being powered over. Indignant persons realize the inequality of their situation and proceed to rectify it. But the others — those who practise dominance over others — are promoting inequality among people.

Inequality among men and women can be explained easily, based on history. Inequality among races of people can be explained by a lack of understanding of each other's languages, customs, and colour. Inequality among women is the most difficult to address or explain. The basis for any unequal situation is power. As

among races, we sometimes are not ready to admit that other women of colour make us feel uncomfortable and we view them (people of colour) as not being as intelligent as we are. Those of us who can afford to dress well will not feel equal to those women who cannot; rather, we feel superior, or think that the fact we dress well makes us more intelligent. Those of us who can articulate our feelings via Merriam-Webster also dominate over those who explain themselves with simple words. Our status in the work force or financial community always determines for us our power. Women are POWERFUL — but the total concept of our power is *equal*.

Women are powerful because they birth the whole world. We are equal. Women are born from women. We are equal.

Women's basic needs are to eat, sleep, and to love and be loved. We are equal. Because we, as women have had to endure the inequality of Paternalism, Racism, Sexism, and now Matronism, we should ask ourselves if this world is destined to continue for the next nineteen hundred years in its process of change, or if we can take charge of our attitudes and re-evaluate them and understand that history has indeed taught us that materialistic society did not work, paternal society did not work, colonialism does not work.

### *What Will Work?*

At the risk of sounding Christian in theory, individual respect for each other — regardless of sex, race, or colour — may be in order for the next millennium: for the survival not only of us as people, but also of this planet that we all profess to call OUR WORLD.

## THE RED IN WINTER

*Emma LaRocque*

The blushing river the Cree called her  
 She wears no rouge today  
 She speaks no Cree  
 I ask about her other lifetimes  
 beneath her white mask.

# "PROGRESS"

*Emma LaRocque*

Earth poet  
So busy  
weaving  
    magic  
into words

so busy  
placing  
    patterns  
quilting  
    stars

so busy  
making  
    the sun

dance  
so busy  
singing  
    your songs

in circles  
so busy  
tipping  
    moons  
in dreams

Earth poet  
so busy  
touching  
    the land  
scape  
mad modern man  
must take me  
look at  
cold steel spires  
stealing earth and sun  
    dance.

# JEANNETTE ARMSTRONG & THE COLONIAL LEGACY

*Noel Elizabeth Currie*

THE VOICES OF THE UNHEARD cannot help but be of value," states Lee Maracle on the first page of *I Am Woman*: reality is more accurately perceived from the bottom of a hierarchical society than it is from the top. Long unheard, often brutally silenced, and more often than not spoken for by white Canadians, Canadian Native women are increasingly correcting the misdefinitions and defining themselves, writing their own stories, "in which pain [does not have to be] our way of life" (Maracle, *IAW* 4). In doing so, they provide an indication of potential directions towards a world in which oppression on the basis of sex, race, or class (to mention only a few) does not have to be a given. However, Native women writers in Canada can only provide these indications of hope for the future from a particular place in time and understanding; as Lee Maracle puts it, "once we understand what kind of world they have created then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create" (*IAW* 116). This place is near the end, or the beginning of the end, of an examination of the forces of oppression. And, as Native women writers locate the roots of their oppression on the basis of race, sex, and class in Canada's colonial history, they also begin to find the means of changing the system which perpetuates that oppression.

Some of the consequences of sexism, racism, and classism for Native women in Canadian society are documented in such books as Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree*, which illustrate the truth of Maracle's assertion that, like sexism, "[r]acism is for us, not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives" (*IAW* 2). However, in *Slash*, Jeannette Armstrong (an Okanagan writer) provides a more thorough and complex description and analysis of racism, sexism, and classism as the by-products of colonialism. In addition, Armstrong identifies decolonization as the solution to the systemic oppression and as the means to defuse specific issues such as Native land claims, which are easier to deal with from a position of self-sufficiency. However, decolonization cannot be achieved, or even contemplated for that matter, without an

examination of the ways in which these oppressions affect individuals and groups. As one woman in *Slash* puts it,

‘The only way that we can really regain control is for us to really change. It means that we’re going to have to rebuild ourselves; rebuild our health, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. We’re a long way from being totally in control over our lives. In fact we can’t even talk about it, except we know that it is possible and that it is what we are moving toward.’ (*Slash* 218)

*Slash* is the story of one Indian man’s search for “a way out of this living death [caused by colonialism and the resulting oppressions] by way of prison, spiritual confirmation, and active political struggle” (Ryga 9).

“It’s clear what we are suffering from is the effects of colonization,” states *Slash*, the title character in the novel of that name; “‘One of the effects of it is the way people see themselves in relation to those who are doing the colonizing’” (221). Of course, the reverse is also true: the colonizers see themselves, as well as the colonized, in the light of the fundamentally unequal power relationships characteristic of the colonial situation. As Albert Memmi notes in *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, this situation is controlled by the colonizer so as to render the colonized inadequate, which, increasingly, provides the justification for controlling the situation further (95). Racism is therefore a material given in the lives of Native peoples in Canada, exacerbated by sexism in the lives of Native women, as a direct consequence of European colonialism.

While the causal relationship between colonialism and racism has become a truism (Europeans constructed the different ‘races’ they encountered in their colonialist and imperialist ventures as ‘inferior’ and ‘savage’ in order to exploit them economically; racism provided a justification, after the fact, for that exploitation [Memmi xxiii]), the relationship of colonialism to sexism, particularly patriarchy as institutionalized sexism, has not been as thoroughly explored. As Anita Valerio notes, it is difficult to discern whether sexism or patriarchy were part of pre-contact Native cultures or rather the result of conquest and colonization, since the period of colonization has been so long: “you can’t always trust people’s interpretations as their minds have been colored by Catholicism — t.v. etc.” (41). However, since the motive of colonialism is always profit, Lee Maracle identifies sexism, like racism and classism, as a necessary by-product of colonialism (*IAW* 20). And in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, Paula Gunn Allen makes the connection between colonialism and sexism and Native societies, and the consequences of this connection, explicit:

The physical and cultural genocide of American Indian tribes was and is mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy [woman-centred social systems]. The Puritans particularly, but also the Catholic, Quaker and other Christian missionaries, like their secular counterparts, could not tolerate peoples who allowed women to occupy prominent positions and decision-making capacity at every level of society.

The colonisers saw (and rightly) that as long as women held unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at total conquest of the continent were bound to fail.  
(3)

In addition, Gunn Allen argues, the attempts at cultural genocide of gynocratic tribal peoples were and are in part attempts to destroy gynocracy: racism and sexism are inseparable in the initial and continuing European assumptions about Native peoples.

It may be impossible to determine whether pre-conquest Native cultures were gynocratic, matriarchal, or patriarchal.<sup>1</sup> However, it is (unfortunately) all too possible to state unequivocally that the well-established European system of patriarchy became dominant as the colonizers imposed their religion(s), laws, and economies on Natives and the patriarchal denigration of women as fundamentally evil and a source of sin permeated the systems in their new-world manifestations. Therefore sexism, in addition to racism, became part of the material circumstances of Native peoples as the Americas were colonized, influencing the lives of Native men as well as women.

Of course the role of education and the Church — for over a century indistinguishable forces in the lives of Native people — cannot be underestimated in any discussion of the imposition of European ideologies and traditions on Natives.<sup>2</sup> Internalized oppression, the result of the indoctrination of the colonized in their deficiencies as defined by the colonizers — such as “laziness,” “savagery,” or “drunkenness,” for example — which allow the colonizers to justify and maintain their superior position (Memmi 79), can be more damaging than material forms of oppression. Education is a vital tool by which the colonizers put their definitions of the colonized (“homogenized into a collective ‘they’” [Pratt 139]) into the heads of the colonized. The result is that everyone ‘recognises’ the inadequacy of the colonized relative to the colonizers; the educational system, like the political and economic systems, is structured to maintain that inadequacy.

**C**OLONIALISM, THE RESULTING OPPRESSIONS, and their effects on Native people provide the background for Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*: they are the material givens of reality on *Slash*’s reserve in the Okanagan area of British Columbia and in the surrounding white communities. Although the result of oppression may be similar for individuals or groups, there are a multitude of ways to attempt to deal with that reality, and the novel explores several of them: “*Slash* comes from that inevitable fork in the road that every Native youth faces” (Maracle, “Fork” 42). Chapter One, “The Awakening,” sets the stage for what is to come: young Tommy Kelasket (later nicknamed *Slash*) describes his understanding of the differing perceptions of his family, other Natives on the reserve,

and the white “experts” who make “hard decisions for our Indians” (*S* 176) and the resulting discrimination, both active and passive. What emerges most clearly from his descriptions are the essential differences between the worldviews of his family and those of the white community.

From his family Tommy learns the history of the Okanagan and the values and traditions of his people: these lessons are designed to help him to grow into a productive member of the society and to understand how he fits into it. At the newly ‘integrated’ town school, however, the most deeply ingrained lesson for the Native students is that power is relative. Tommy explains:

there were some things we were too ashamed to tell. Like all of the white girls laughing at Tony when he asked one of them to dance at the sock-hop. He quit school after that. Also how none of the Indian girls ever got asked to dance at the sock-hops because us guys wouldn’t dance with them because the white guys didn’t. (*S* 35)

Although looked down upon as stupid and dirty Indians (according to Hollywood stereotypes) by the white administrators, teachers, and students, the Native boys learn to take advantage of the privilege offered them as males by a sexist society. Unfortunately, the girls are not so lucky; there is no more privilege attached to being female in a sexist society than there is to being Native in a racist one, and even less to being both.

The intersection of material forms of oppression (like racism and sexism) and internalized oppression due to colonialism is central to the novel. Indeed, they are so interrelated that it is almost impossible to separate them and their effects, not only in relations between Natives and whites, but also in those among Natives. “[A]s an almost man” (*S* 13), Tommy sees the divisions between those, like his family, who find strength and pride in the traditional ways and those who “want to try all kinds of new stuff and be more like white people” (*S* 42). More importantly, he sees that there are no easy solutions to the divisions. Those who feel that the traditions are useless in the twentieth century, that “development” will bring “equality,” and who use rhetoric like “We must learn to use new ideas and open up our lands to development” (*S* 43) fail to see (or choose not to see) that proposed or implemented solutions which do not account for tradition and history generally seem to benefit the development of the surrounding white community at the expense of the reserve. The issue of Indian access to alcohol provides a case in point. The assimilationist or “progressive” argument claims that giving Indians equality of access to something that white society takes for granted will “increase” their rights. However, as old Pra-cwa and Tommy’s parents know, the issue at stake is really the ability of Indians to control their own destinies, and the result of the new “rights,” as much as the old lack of them, is often assimilation or extinction.

Even though he recognizes that something very important is missing from the rhetoric, and in fact that something is terribly wrong with it, Tommy still feels its power and begins to wonder which system of values he should live by: as he

says to his friend Jimmy, “‘I don’t know who is right anymore’” (S 43). In his attempts to clear up some of the confusion, he leaves his family and reserve for the city, where his confusion only increases but where he is forced to learn some hard truths the hard way — by experience. In hospital, about to be sentenced to jail, he meets a woman named Mardi from the Indian Friendship Centre whose words change his life.

‘You see, they only give us two choices. Assimilate or get lost. A lot of us are lost. We need to make a third choice. That’s what Red Patrol is about.

‘We work in shifts on skid row. We pick up people from the streets and help them out anyway we can. We keep the pigs and others from harassing them. We help out even when there is violence. And we talk to them and we tell them to leave that place. But most of all we provide an example of pride and power in being Indian.’  
(S 70)

It is Mardi who gives Tommy the nickname ‘Slash’ and, correspondingly, whose political awareness (and resulting actions) form his: she starts him on his search for the all-important third choice against assimilation or extermination.

Although never one for assimilation himself, Slash has had a constant example of such a position in his childhood friend, Jimmy. Unlike Tommy, who was raised with “a real heavy emphasis on Indian values” (S 139), Jimmy has always tried to disassociate himself from the inadequacy he has been made to feel as an Indian. As a teenager, Jimmy wanted more than anything to fit into white society as a fully participating member, even though doing so meant that he had to negate his own family and culture.

He said, ‘All I know is, I like to feel good. I feel good when white friends of mine talk and joke with me as if I were like them. They only do that if I wear smart pants and shoes and have money to play pool with. I don’t like them to think I’m like the rest of the Indians. I wish our people were like them. . . . I hate being an Indian. I hate Indian ways.’ (S 44)

So Jimmy, who defines white people and Native people according to the terms of white society — which invariably finds Native people inadequate at best and hardly human at worst — finds his own people inadequate. To escape being tainted with that feeling of inadequacy, he tries to ‘pass’ and to succeed according to the terms of white society by becoming as much like a white man as he can: “all he talked about was how much money he had saved up to buy a really classy car. He said he was going in for accounting so he could get a good, clean job. He was going with this white girl, too” (S 83).

According to the terms set out in the novel, what distinguishes Jimmy from the other Indians is his concentration on material appearances as opposed to what lies beneath them, which is defined as a characteristic of the white middle class. Jimmy’s obsession with appearances is largely an attempt to disassociate himself from the stereotype of the “drunken Indian,” in which he believes with a passion; his assimi-

lation is evident in the way he needs to feel superior to feel successful (especially since his own escape from the inferiority he associates with being Native is a narrow one). Accordingly, he only drinks in the white businessmen's bars rather than the bar on the reserve in order to "'prove,'" as he says, that "'all of us ain't drunks'" (S 222).

However, as might be expected, very little works out as Jimmy plans: the white society he wants so much to be a part of refuses to let him in. Although he gets a degree in Business Administration, he experiences discrimination from both sides and is unable to find a job. White businesses will not hire him, assuming that he is "another lazy Indian"; at the same time, Indian organizations, made up of people who suffer from internalized oppression as much as Jimmy himself, hire "'some ex-DIA goat for the cream jobs'" (S 221). Although his own attempts to "pass" are based on his belief (which is a reflection of that of the so-called dominant society) in the "inferiority" of Indians, Jimmy is shocked and confused when these opinions are used to evaluate him, in Native as well as white communities. Slash tries to explain why:

'Everything that the colonizers do, tells the Indians they are inferior, that their lifestyle, their language, their religion, their values and even what food they eat, is somehow not as good. . . . it gets transferred in subtle ways by our own people. . . . They attempt to become the same as the colonizers in as many ways as they can, to escape being inferior, or being tainted by it. They don't want to hurt inside, you see.' (S 221)

Assimilation is an all-too-common attempt to avoid the pain of self-hatred by denying or negating that which is defined as inferior — which, paradoxically, only causes more pain: "'[y]ou never know why you feel so shitty inside and why you feel so much contempt for Indians yourself'" (S 222). Of course, as Slash notes, the biggest problem with thinking that even the stupidest white man is somehow intrinsically superior to the most intelligent and educated Indian is that it is simply not true. However, internalized oppression (whispering "'you're just a weak chicken-shit good for nothing'" [S 154]) is, by its very nature, difficult to combat and, in a colonial society, can probably never be escaped completely.

ONE WAY TO ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE the internalized oppression, of course, is to revolt against the material oppression. This method is Mardi's working definition of the necessary third choice: direct political action to change the conditions of oppression. Although her definition, which allows Slash to name the oppression he has always recognized, becomes his, as do her revolutionary vocabulary and concepts, Slash sees complexities that Mardi does not, and is therefore unsatisfied with merely material answers. Mardi's understanding is incomplete in

Slash's eyes because it arises out of her experience: "raised in settler society, divorced from [her] past and alienated from [her] history" (*IAW* 51), she has had no examples of Indians who are neither assimilated nor lost. Violence, suffering, addictions, and deprivation are the story of this Indian woman's life, so much so that the simple fact that she has survived is a victory for Mardi. Having proved her strength by saving her own life, she looks beyond herself to the larger community and commits herself to "'what's really going on in the Indian world'" (*S* 61) and to changing the personal and systemic oppression they all face, until she is "eliminated," like many other low-profile leaders, by the FBI (*S* 121).

Although Mardi's way of working for change is lacking in the spirit and understanding which are ultimately necessary to bring about that change, her importance in the novel cannot be underestimated. Not only is she the instigator of Slash's political awareness and commitment, giving him some of the intellectual tools to shake if not crack the foundations of the existing system and to begin to build a new one which does not have to be based on oppression, she also teaches him that (as Maracle writes) "[i]t is the truth of our lives that moves us to look again" (*IAW* 158) in the face of massive rationalization, not to mention cultural support, for the system of oppression. By her example, more than her words, Mardi demonstrates that Indians are the best — and only — experts on their own realities and the ways in which those realities may be changed, improved. Everything she does comes out of her knowledge of her own personal power; correspondingly, Mardi assumes that each and every Indian has the personal and communal power to make a difference. Political activism is therefore the means for overcoming internalized as well as material oppression in Mardi's experience: like the "'so-called militant Indian tribes,'" she demands respect for herself and only gives respect to those who respect her, as an Indian and as a woman (*S* 140). And, even though "[s]exism, racism's younger brother, was inherent in the character of the American Indian movement" (*IAW* 137), Mardi's value (like Maeg's) as a woman, a teacher, a leader, a friend, and a lover is an unquestionable premise of the novel and a truth so self-evident that it never needs to be stated.

Her death makes obvious the danger and necessity of political action, but also the futility: Slash knows that something very important is missing. As long as Slash continues to operate on Mardi's premises — which do not include the traditions and values of his upbringing — he is unable to see any possibilities beyond assimilation, extinction, or violent revolution. Fuelled by hate and a "destructive compulsion to make things happen" (*S* 13), Slash is quite comfortable with AIM (American Indian Movement) statements such as "'We fight for survival, we fight to stop genocide. Our war is real but our enemies are like shadows'" (*S* 184). When boiling over with bitterness and hatred, however, he tends to forget the basic premise that "AIM is a spiritual movement. . . . in order to achieve anything, we had

to do it the Indian way" (*S* 120). Slash soon assumes the correct revolutionary positions; he becomes one of "the bad guys nobody should mess with" (*S* 122).

Part of this tough-guy image of the (male) leaders involves the use, and abuse, of such indicators of status (in the mover-and-shaker white male world) as booze, drugs, and "chicks"; indeed, it seems that part of the attraction to the Movement is the access to such commodities that it offers the "Bros." There are always "chicks around to help with making food and things" (*S* 77) and while they are on the move, the "Bros" can be sure of a place to stay, of food to eat, and of "ending up with one of the chicks for company" (*S* 108). As described, the Movement itself, and indeed the whole political arena, is largely constructed as male as much as it is non-Native. The women and the "traditionalists" (as opposed to the revolutionaries and assimilationists, who are occasionally difficult to tell apart) who become involved are assigned to the periphery by the self-styled leaders. Lee Maracle is more explicit: "[c]ulturally, the worst dominant, white male traits were emphasized. Machismo and the boss mentality were the basis for choosing leaders. The idea of leadership was essentially a European one promulgated by power mongers" (*IAW* 126). Significantly, Slash is never completely accepted by these leaders because he sees that something is missing and he asks too many questions about it. Instead, clothed in "radical Indian" garb (*S* 225), he thinks of himself as a modern-day warrior and feels "'We should be treated with respect because we were ready to die, God damn it, 'for the people'" (*S* 122).

Such a highly self-conscious display of the warrior, in full battle regalia, has several purposes: to "put the scare on the honkies" (*S* 189), to keep in touch with a Native identity, and to court the attention of the "chicks," whose political action (with the exception of Mardi and Maeg) seems as a general rule to be limited to a subsidiary role: taking care of the men.<sup>3</sup> According to Slash, there is a general recognition of the traditional and practical power of women, who "had some kind of pecking order among themselves that had to be strictly respected by all. If that pecking order gets messed up by the guys and their struggle for leadership then all hell breaks loose" (*S* 153). However, the general picture is one of men on the move who are committed to ending the oppression on the grounds of race and class that they face as Natives but are at the same time willing to take the perks offered them as males by a sexist society. Of course it would be impossible for them to be unaffected by the sexism of society, but, like Jimmy, they reveal some of the self-hatred that is the result of internalized oppression in the need to be superior to somebody else.

Unfortunately, revolutionary fervour, although initially liberating, is unproductive and destructive for Slash: not only is he unable to envision how the necessary changes can possibly be brought about without violence, but he is also so full of anger and hatred that he begins to hope for the violence and bloodshed which would politicize the people like nothing else seems to be able to do. His hatred for the

colonizers who used, and continue to use, “the disadvantaged conditions as a means of control” (*S* 96) is, ultimately, more debilitating than helpful.

It was big and strong and ugly. Sometimes at night I felt it twisting inside my gut, making my stomach burn and turn sour. Them times I had to get up and find something to mellow out with. If it wasn't a chick then it was dope. I smoked a lot of dope and drank too, when there wasn't any dope or chicks. (*S* 121-22)

Slash's recognition of the injustices and oppression fuels his desire to make changes, but also his hatred, which ultimately renders him less capable of bringing those changes about. And, his feelings of bitterness and frustration due to the apparent failure to “accomplish” anything politically only reinforce the internalized oppression that tells him he is a no-account, “bad-ass Injun” (Armstrong, “Mary Old Owl”); it is only after his political ‘failures’ that he falls into binges of drugs and alcohol (and cynicism), although he knows that the partying is self-destructive.

Even when he feels strong and confident in the knowledge that the solution to both the material and internalized oppression is to be found in the traditional ways, hatred and frustration make him susceptible to self-destruction. Even in his last binge, Slash protests what white society has to say about and offer to him: he is not on the skids because he is weak and unable to kick the habits, nor because he is the product of Welfare dependence, or any of the other cultural stereotypes. Instead, he fails to see what more attractive alternatives the dominant society has to offer. He responds to the message “assimilate or get lost” by refusing to comply with either demand: he will neither transform himself to fit in nor erase himself to avoid offending any of the white middle class. Rather, he will resist in any way that he can — even to the point of self-destruction.

*Slash* makes it obvious that the “party down” attitude reflecting the “opportunistic, hustle-media politics” (*IAW* 137) of some of the “Bros” is not only basically unable to bring about any of the necessary changes, but that it is also, in effect, a form of cultural suicide. The path of booze, drugs, and chicks leads Slash to one place only: rock bottom. However, it is when he hits more or less absolute rock bottom that Slash finds the hope of a way up. In detox, when drying out is a choice between life and death, he meets a man, “deeply religious in the Indian way” (*S* 199), who profoundly changes the direction of his life — who saves his life (as simply drying out cannot) by offering a possibility beyond the options of assimilation or extermination.

‘Them ain't the only choices. There is another way. It's always been there. We just got to see it ourselves though. There are some people who help people who are looking for another way to live as an Indian person. We don't have to cop out and be drunks and losers. We don't have to join the rats either. There is another way.’ (*S* 198)

That other way is linked to traditional Native worldviews, like those of Slash's parents and old Pra-cwa, and the medicine ways, such as Uncle Joe's, which are

inseparable from the land. The examples and words of his parents and elders are that Slash and the people as a whole need to follow, as he realizes the truth that “in order to achieve anything, *we had to do it in the Indian way*” (*S* 120; my emphasis). Those words, “in the Indian way,” are almost a refrain in the novel, and although Slash is always aware of what they represent, he has long been unable to integrate that approach into his politics. The breakthrough comes for him when he sees the discrepancy between his (and Mardi’s) revolutionary activism — in the movement and continually on the move — and the work that he identifies as a priority when he settles down on the reserve: defining “Indian government” by practice rather than with words. When on the move with the “Bros,” the tension between feeling powerless and attempting to gain some power through political change filled Slash with bitterness and despair. However, when he begins to encourage rather than criticize (knowing that “respecting people and being a good teacher just by [his] actions is enough” [*S* 20]) and sets and acts upon his own priorities, he feels good about what he is doing for the first time in years — and begins to make positive changes.

The key to the future lies, paradoxically, in the past and the lessons it has to offer. Slash finds that the traditional ways, particularly the medicine ways, of his people — whom he defines as all Natives — provide the only means for him to survive and succeed as a whole person, an “Indian person,” and on his own terms. For a long time, the essential, and unanswered, question in his life asked “what does being an Indian mean?” But in all his years of searching, the only source of answers that he finds is the tradition. As he puts it, “All the questions that were unanswered for years suddenly seemed so simple . . . it wasn’t a matter of belief. It was more, it was knowing for sure” (*S* 201). The medicine clears his body of the drugs and replaces the need for them by giving him not only a sense of empowerment, but also actual power. For example, when he returns home, his father is in the hospital after a heart attack; Slash, simply by holding the sick man in his arms, can take some of the pain into his own body and in doing so has the means to heal him. The medicine, and tradition, relieve him of the burden of failure he has felt for so long by offering him the means to achieve the necessary changes — first in himself, and then in the world around him.

It is through understanding and acceptance of the traditional ways that healing can begin for the community, breaking the chains of the internalized oppression. Understanding his identity as an Indian person makes obvious for Slash what has been missing all along, an identifiable, long-range goal: “we are slowly learning decolonization” (*S* 223). In effect, the healing process that the struggle began was the real victory, since “when a people have to fight, then pride returns and with it inner strength” (*S* 133): they change their reality and their world by changing themselves. When they define the world on their own terms, when they perceive their own ability and inherent right to control their own destinies, and when they

make their ways “viable” in the twentieth century by practising them, they begin to bargain from a position of strength, so that external forces must react to them in a new and different way.

THE “INDIAN APPROACH” TO ANY ISSUE, which involves an understanding of tradition and laws, is more productive than purely political analysis or revolutionary fervour: by providing a “sense of the self and our importance to the community” (*IAW* 50), a sense of responsibility and a sense of power, it improves the analysis and proposed solutions. Slash realizes that culture and tradition will be lost if not practised — and, correspondingly, that rights also are lost if not practised. “There was no question of whether or not we should do things our way. We just had to do it or lose it” (*S* 211). His parents have, all along, provided him with the best example of traditional values, rights, and culture as they can be practised in “modern Indian lives.” Not until Slash begins to understand the traditions and their importance to the people does he begin to understand the laws, which are inseparable from tradition. The Canadian legal code prohibiting the traffic of illegal drugs did not prevent him from doing so (until he was sent to jail); only his realization that drugs contribute to the destruction of the people, and that he participated in that destruction for a profit, keeps Slash from dealing again. And, unlike his involvement in the Movement, based on European conceptions of power which legalize Indian oppression, the knowledge that Indian law “forbids our oppression” (*IAW* 47) provides an unshakeable source of strength for Slash, since it assumes not only personal worth, but also personal power.

To the Kelaskets, tradition does not mean that all Indians will return to a way of life of a hundred (or two) years ago, but it does mean that everything they do is done “in the Indian way.” The particular activity is not the issue, but rather the manner in or process by which it is done. Much of Slash’s search throughout the novel for a way to make Indian ways viable could have been avoided if he had only accepted the example of his parents. However, the years of struggle were essential and necessary.

It was as though a light was shining for my people. I felt that we were moving toward it faster and faster. There was a rightness about it that the past few years didn’t have. Yet I realized, without the past few years, I would not have made it to this point. I knew it as a certainty. (*S* 203)

The politics have provided him with an insight into the problems, a passionate desire to solve them, and exposure to the perspectives of other Indians from all over the continent, while his awakening spirituality and growing knowledge of tradition enable him, in effect, to match the solutions to the problems: the sum of his experience on the move has led him to the “place from which to stand erect”

(Maracle, “Fork”). Since the future is informed by the past, he will not repeat his mistakes; the memory of the losses will keep him honest and prevent him from falling into hypocrisy. Slash is not a “reformed alkie, . . . jumpy and over-happy. . . . desperate . . . to prove that being sober was just hunky-dory” (*S* 199), nor has he become “‘pious and full of the spirit’” (*S* 238) in such a way as to trivialize the traditions and medicine as some kind of weird cult. His previous feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness arose out of his recognition that something was missing: having identified and incorporated that missing element, Slash becomes part of a community “rebuilding a worldview that had to work in this century, keeping the values of the old Indian ways. . . . through this way there was no bullshit that could get through for very long” (*S* 232). Self-sufficiency and an Indian approach are the keys to the solution on any issue, the most basic of which, of course, is land.

Interestingly, the people who share this view — that the solution can only be based on Indian ways, knowledge, and definitions — are the elders, the traditionalists, and, in Slash’s own generation, the women. These are the people who open his eyes politically and whose words and example lead him to the insights which help him to integrate spirituality and politics. This integration is best expressed and clarified when Maeg speaks at a meeting, putting the whole task, and process, into a nutshell:

‘We are not aggressors. We must simply resist for as long as we can the kind of destruction we are talking about here. . . . If we are to be successful to any measure then we will have to be sure that we see the whole question we are faced with and deal with all of it in an Indian way. It is the resistance of our forefathers and the continued resistance of our fathers that has left us with something to call ours. It was not negotiating on our rights to this land. They can pass any legislations they want but they know and we know that the land belongs to us unless we sell it out for money. As long as we don’t sell it out we still own the land, and we shall retain the right to resist destruction of it and of the people and things on it.’ (*S* 225)

Slash’s ability (not shared by many of the “Bros”) to listen with respect to the words and learn with love from the examples of women like Mardi and Maeg, without appropriating or taking credit, is an indication that healing, decolonization, is possible: a continual struggle, but possible. His geographic distance from (yet emotional and intellectual closeness to) Mardi was representative of his recognition of the gaps in his understanding and his desire for complete understanding. In the same way, his relationship with Maeg, which is not based on power differentials and the subordination of one (woman) to the other (man), is symbolic of his fuller understanding and his commitment to the future. Together, they work to make the changes they see as necessary; through that work, which includes protecting the rights of their child (who is, like the land, their stake in the future), they plant the seeds which can make revolutionary changes in the future.

“Through the word, both spoken and written,” change begins to occur: the word is powerful because it makes manifest thought and is the medium through which understanding is transferred (Armstrong, “Voices”). Breaking generations of silence — of being silenced — by naming the oppressors, the process of oppression, and the effects of that oppression is part of the political and spiritual path to healing and change. Slash moves beyond purely political activism to end the material oppression in the lives of his people to spirituality, which provides him with the understanding of connections that makes change — even in systemic and institutionalized oppression — possible: his is the kind of faith which believes “that we have the power to change our lives, save our lives” and acts accordingly (Moraga, xvii). Based on a people’s own definition of their priorities and integrated with political analysis and activism, this faith is the foundation for pro-action rather than re-action.

As Lee Maracle has written, *Slash* is about the fork in the road and the choices it represents: about perspectives as much as colonialism, about solutions as much as problems. The kinds of solutions which lead to hopelessness and frustration — Jimmy’s attempts to assimilate and Slash’s involvement with the “Bros” — do so because they are not based on an Indian approach. As Jimmy learns, trying to ‘pass’ puts too much of his personal power in the hands of the colonizers, who can therefore choose to let him through or not according to their whim: by accepting their terms, he gives them the power to shape his future. And, since they created the standards which find him inadequate, it is not surprising that they dash his hopes. Mardi’s definition of the necessary third choice, and correspondingly that of Slash, defines itself so much against the externally determined options of assimilation or extermination that it is generally limited to reaction: by defining itself negatively, it has some difficulty in achieving positive results. The fact that the circles Slash moved in were often modelled on confrontational-style (Euro-American) politics and discussions of violence for its own sake (a concept completely alien to tradition as defined by Armstrong) is definitely related to the political “failures.” The alternative “third choice” of traditional approaches to any issue or problem, however, has virtually nothing to do with the white oppressors and everything to do with Native people actively determining their own futures. It offers them the opportunity — forces them, even — to set their own agendas and gather the strength of self-sufficiency.

It is this kind of approach — the “Indian way” — which has the potential to alter the future. This solution is neither easy nor naïve, but one which provides the means to continue the struggle by ensuring the survival of the people in the face of genocide. The road leading up to the fork is presented and understood via Armstrong’s unflinching analysis of “political realities, even when such observations are painful” (Ryga 11) and her clear understanding of the colonial legacy. A return to tradition and spirituality does not isolate and disconnect Slash from the physical

world and those painful political realities; rather, it connects him to himself and his community. Recognizing that Native people “stand at a pivot point at this time in history,” each having the responsibility of “deciding for our descendants how their world shall be affected and what shall be their heritage” (S 13), traditional approaches which inform modern solutions provide a source of strength and truth to combat generations of misinformation. The Canadian colonial story is an old one and it has remained relatively unchanged in many ways, as the blusterings and evasions of federal government officials during the 1989 hunger strike of Native students (to name only one example) made obvious. In *Slash*, however, Jeannette Armstrong has envisioned “the survival of what is human in an inhuman world” (S 251) and presented the possibility of a new ending to the story.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> It is important to note here that many Native women writing in North America, of whom Gunn Allen is one, suggest or state that sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny followed conquest and colonization and did not exist prior to them — that in pre-contact Native societies, women enjoyed actual and not just symbolic power in the life of the people.
- <sup>2</sup> Celia Haig-Brown’s *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Vancouver: Tillacum, 1988) provides an excellent study of the goals, realities, and effects of the residential school, as seen by students who attended the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Assimilation, on the settlers’ terms of course, was the stated goal of Indian education; however, that “assimilation was to take place under conditions which could cause no threat to the surrounding business and farming community” (67). In particular, the racist and sexist European assumptions perpetuated by the schools, designed to beat the Indian out of the children in order to create Europeans, the elimination of language as part of the process of cultural genocide, and their effects on Native individuals and communities are well documented.
- <sup>3</sup> *Slash* is, apparently, the exception that proves the rule: unlike the other couples, in which “the women aligned themselves with their champions” (S 153), Mardi is his ticket to political credibility.

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# EARTH NITES

*Wayne Keon*

i've been away so long  
away from this land  
and home

i called a single  
silver band of  
circles

where the moon  
climbs on to  
the brite

side of the sun she  
wore a mask and  
saw

the ancient ones  
spinning away the  
lites

i see her there jupiter  
can i ever see  
her

again she said there's  
no need to hurry  
now

i see the raven man  
i won't  
need

to get the story told  
around fires late  
at nite

and want the blazing  
trail between  
the stars

earth i've been away  
from her too  
long

the planet jupiter star  
is closer  
than

you think it's  
all beyond  
you

i can see that i  
can see that  
i can

see there's no more rest now

## I'M NOT IN CHARGE OF THIS RITUAL

*Wayne Keon*

i'm not in charge of this  
sun dance anymore  
i'm hangin here  
completely out of it  
the lawyers nd therapists  
have taken over  
my breasts are pierced  
nd writhing in the blood  
nd pain  
i'm not that brave you know  
that's why my children  
nd woman were  
taken from me  
that's why i'm takin it on alone again

i never did any of those purification rituals  
that's probably why this isn't working  
nd hallucinations start sneakin  
into my work, i can't say home  
because i don't have a home  
i live in a room  
making medicine bags nd  
wonderin if the silver strands  
nd gems i'm puttin in them will do the trick  
i escape temporarily at nite catching  
my breath at donut & pizza shops  
where nobody talks nd everyone just eats  
munchin nd chewin nd swallowin down  
hunger in the nite  
hah ! despair wouldn't have the nerve to come  
waltzin through the door here  
it would be devoured whole  
in one fat gulp  
they're all lookin at me wonderin why  
i'm so skinny nd still losin weight  
they know i'm not one of them  
but i'm there every nite  
shakin over another cup of coffee  
tired nd numb from another day of torture  
i'm glad when the sun goes down  
nd the crazy cool of dark comes  
b'cos there's hardly anywhere left to hide  
nd they'll find me in the morning  
nd drag me back to the dance  
in front of the sun  
i wish i knew how long this was gonna take  
but there's always tonite  
nd ah ! there's always linda  
always linda waitin in the nite  
with smokey topaz eyes  
with smokin lips nd thighs  
pressed like a gem  
from the earth  
into mine  
but even she's started lockin  
her door at nite now

# YIN CHIN

*Lee Maracle*

*(For Sharon Lee, whose real name is Sky, and Jim Wong Chu)*

she is tough,  
she is verbose,  
she has lived a thousand lives

she is sweet,  
she is not,  
she is blossoming  
and dying every moment

a flower  
unsweetened by rain  
untarnished by simpering  
uncuckolded by men  
not coquettish enough  
for say the gals  
who make a career of shopping  
at the Pacific Centre Mall

PACIFIC CENTRE, my gawd  
do North Americans never tire  
of claiming the centre  
of the universe, the pacific and  
everywhere else . . .

I am weary  
of North Americans  
so I listen to SKY.

**S**TANDING IN THE CROWDED DINING HALL, coffee in hand, my face is drawn to a noisy group of Chinese youth; I mentally cancel them out. No place to sit — no place meaning there aren't any Indians in the room. It is a reflexive action on my part to assume that any company that isn't Indian company is generally unacceptable, but there it was, the absence of Indians not chairs determined the absence of a space for me. The soft of heart, guilt-ridden liberals might

argue defensively that that sweeping judgement is not different from any other generalization made about us. So be it; after all it is not their humanity I am calling to question. It is mine. Along with that thought dances another. I have lived in this city in the same neighbourhood as Chinese people for twenty-two years now and don't know a single Chinese person.

It scares me just a little. It wasn't always that way. The memory of a skinny little waif drops into the frame of moving pictures rolling across my mind. Unabashed she stands next the door of Mad Sam's market across from Powell Street grounds surveilling 'chinamen' with accusatory eyes. Once a month on Saturday the process repeated itself; the little girl of noble heart studied the old men. Not once in all her childhood years had she ever seen an old man steal a little kid. She gave up, not because she became convinced that the accusation was unfounded, but because she got too big to worry about it.

"Cun-a-muck-ah-you-da-puppy-shaw, that's Chinee for how are you," and the old pa'pa-y-ah would laugh. "Don't wander around town or the old Chinamen will get you, steal you" . . . Chinkee, chinkee chinamen went down town, turned around the corner and his pants fell down" and other such truck had been buried somewhere in the caverns of the useless information file tucked in the basement of her mind, but the shape of her social life was frighteningly influenced by those absurd sounds. The movie was just starting to lag and the literary theme of the pictures was coming into focus when a small breath of air, a gentle touch of a small woman's hand invited me to sit. How embarrassing. I'd been gaping and gawking at a table-load of Hans long enough for my coffee to cool.

It didn't take long. Invariably, when people of colour get together they discuss white people. They are the butt of our jokes, the fountain of our bitterness and pain and the infinite well-spring of every dilemma life ever presented to us. The humour eases the pain, but always whites figure front and centre of our joint communication. If I had a dollar for every word ever said about them instead of to them I'd be the richest welfare bum in the country. No wonder they suffer from inflated egoism.

I sat at the table-load of Chinese people and toward the end of the hour I wanted to tell them about Mad Sam's, Powell Street and old men. I didn't. Wisely, I think now. Our sense of humour was different then. In the face of a crass white world we had erased so much of ourselves and sketched so many cartoon characters of white people over-top the emptiness inside, that it would have been too much for us to face that we really did feel just like them. I sat at that table more than a dozen times but not once did it occur to any of us that we were friends. Eventually, the usual march of a relentless clock, my hasty departure from college the following semester and my failure to return for fifteen years took its toll — now even their names escape me.

Last Saturday (seems like a hundred years later) was different. The table-load of people was Asian/Native. We laughed at ourselves and spoke very seriously about

our writing. We really believe we are writers, someone had said, and the room shook with the hysteria of it all. We ran on and on about our growth and development and not once did the white man ever enter the room. It just seemed all too incredible that a dozen Hans and Natives could sit and discuss all things under heaven, including racism, and not talk about white people. It only took a half-dozen revolutions in the Third World, seventeen riots in America, one hundred demonstrations against racism in Canada and thirty-seven dead Native youth in my life to become. (For grammar fanatics I am aware that the preceding is not 'gutt Inkish.') I could have told them about the waif but it didn't seem relevant. We had crossed a millennium of bridges the rivers of which were swollen with the floodwaters of dark humanity's tenacious struggle to extricate themselves from oppression and we knew it.

We were born during the first sword wound that the Third World swung at imperialism. We were children of that wound, invincible, conscious and movin' on up. We could laugh because we were no longer a joke. But somewhere along the line we forgot to tell the others, the thousands of our folks that still tell their kids about old chinamen.

It's Tuesday and I'm circling the block at Gore and Powell trying to find a parking space, windows open, driving like I belong here. A sharp "Don't come near me, why you bother me?" jars me loose. An old Chinese woman swings a ratty old umbrella at a Native man who is pushing her, cursing her and otherwise giving her a hard time. I lean toward the passenger side and shout at him from the safety of my car: "Leave her alone, asshole."

"Shut-up you f'ck'n' rag-head." I jump out of the car, without bothering to park it — no one honks, they just stare at me. He sees my face and my cowichan, bends deeply and says very sarcastically that he didn't know I was a squaw. Well, I am no pacifist; I admit, I belted him, gave him what for and the coward left. I helped the old woman across the street, then returned to park my car. She was still there where I left her, shaking, so I stopped to try and quell her fear.

She wasn't afraid. She was ashamed of her own people, men who had passed her by, walking around her or crossing the street to avoid trying to rescue her from the taunts of one of my people. The world raged around inside me while she copiously described every Chinese man who had seen her and kept walking. I listened to her in silence and thought of me and old Sam again.

Mad Sam was a pioneer of discount foods. Slightly over-ripe bananas (great for peanut butter bannock sandwiches), bruised apples and day-old bread were always available at half the cost of Safeway and we shopped there regularly for years. I am not sure if he sold meat, in any case we never bought meat; we were fish-eaters then. I doubt very much that Sam knew we called him "Mad" but I know now the mad was intended for the low prices and the crowds in his little store, not him. In the fifties, there were storeowners that concerned themselves with their

customers, established relationships with them, exchanged gossip and shared a few laughs. Sam was good to us.

If you press your nose up against the window to the left of the door you can still see me standing there, ghostlike skinny brown body with huge eyes riveted on the street and Powell Street grounds. Sometimes my eyes take a slow shift from left to right, right to left. I'm watchin' ol' chinamen, makin' sure they don't grab little kids. Once a month for several years I assume my post and keep my private vigil. No one on the street seems to know what I'm doing or why, but it doesn't matter. The object of my vigil is not appreciation but catchin' the old chinamen in the act.

My nose is pressed up against the window pane, the cold circles the end of my flattened nose; it feels good. Outside, the window pane was freckled with crystal water drops; inside, it was smooth and dry, but for a little wisp of fog from my breath. Round 'o's' of water splotched onto the clear glass. Not perfectly round, but just the right amount of roundness that allows you to call them 'o's.' Each 'o' was different as on the page at school when you first print 'o's' for the teacher. On the paper are lots of them. They are all kind of wobbly and different, but still 'o's.'

I could see the rain-distorted street scene at the park through the round 'o's' of water. There are no flowers or grass in this park. No elaborate floral themes or landscape designs, just a dozen or so benches around a wasteland of gravel, sand and comfrey root — weeds — and a softball backstop at one end. What a bloody long time ago that was, mama.

Blat. A raindrop hit the window, scrunching up the park bench I was looking at. The round 'o' of rain made the park bench wiggle toward my corner of the store. I giggled.

"Mad Sam's . . . Mad Sam's . . . Mad Sam's?" What began as a senseless repetition of a household phrase ended as a question. She knew that Mad Sam was a chinaman . . . Chinee, the old people called them . . . but, then, the old people can't speak 'goot Inklisk' — know what I mean? But what in the world made him mad? I breathed at the window. It fogged up. The only kind of mad I know is when everyone runs aroun' hollering and kicking up dust.

I rocked back and forth while my finger traced out a large circle which my hand had cleared. Two old men on the bench across the street broke my thoughts of Sam's madness. One of them rose. He was wearing one of those grey tweed wool hats that people think of as English and associate with sports cars. He had a cane, a light beige cane. He half bent at the waist before he left the bench, turned and, with his arms stretched out from his shoulders and flailing back and forth a few times, accentuated his words to the other old man seated there.

It would have looked funny if pa'pa-y-ah had done it, or ol' Mike, but I was acutely aware that this was a chinaman. Ol' chinamen are not funny. They are serious, and the words of the world echoed violently in my ears . . . "don't wander

off or the ol' chinamen will get you and eat you." I pouted about the fact that mama had never warned me about them. "She doesn't care."

A woman with a black car coat and a white pill-box hat disturbed the scene. Screeek, the door of her old Buick opened. Squeak, slam, it banged shut. There is something humorously inelegant about a white lady with spiked heels, tight skirt and a pill-box hat cranking up a '39 Buick. Thanx, mama, for having me soon enough to have seen it.

Gawd, I am so glad I remember this: there she be, blonde as all get out, slightly hippy, heaving her bare leg, that is partially constrained by her skirt, onto the bumper of her car and cranking at the whatever had to be cranked to make the damn thing go. All of this wonderfulness came squiggling through a little puddle of clear rain. The Buick finally took off and from the tail end of its departure I could see the little old man still shuffling his way across the street. Funny, all the cars stopped for him. Odd, the little Chinese boy talked to him, unafraid.

Shuffle, shuffle, plunk of his cane, shuffle, shuffle, plunk; on he trudged. The breath from the corner near my window came out in shorter and louder gasps. It punctuated the window with an on-again, off-again choo-choo rhythm of clarity. Breath and fog, shuffle, shuffle, plunk, breath and fog. BOOM! And the old man's face was right on mine. My scream was indelicate. Mad Sam and mama came running.

"Whatsa matter?"

"Whah iss it," from Sam and mama respectively.

Half hesitating I pointed out the window. "The chinaman was looking at me." I could see that that was not the right answer. Mama's eyes yelled 'for pete's sake' and her cheeks shone red with shame, not embarrassment, shame. Sam's face was clear. Definably hurt. Not the kind of hurt that shows when adults burn themselves or something but the kind of hurt you can sometimes see in the eyes of people who have been cheated. The total picture spelled something I could not define.

Grandmothers you said if I was ever caught doing nothing you would take me away for all eternity. . . . The silence was thick, cloying and paralyzing. It stopped my brain and stilled my emotion. It deafened my ears to the rain. I could not look out to see if the old man was still there. No grannies came to spare me.

My eyes fell unseeing on a parsnip just exactly in front of my face. They rested there not to stray until everyone stopped looking at my treacherous little body and resumed talking about whatever they were talking about before I had brought the world to a momentary halt with my astounding stupidity. What surprises me now is that they did eventually carry on as though nothing was wrong.

The floor swayed beneath me, while I tried hard to make it swallow me and carry out my wish, but I didn't quite make it. A hand loaded with a pear in front of my face jarred my eyes loose from the parsnip.

“Here,” the small, pained smile on Sam’s face stilled the floor but the memory remained a moving moment in my life.

The old woman was holding my hands saying she felt better now. All that time, I did not speak or think about what she said. I just nodded my head back and forth and relived my memory of Mad Sam’s.

“How unkind of the world to school us in ignorance” was all I said, and I made my way back to the car.

## BIG STEVE

*Wayne Keon*

rubs his hands  
together  
for

the forty fifth  
time enough  
for

one more deal  
before the  
store

closes man i’m in  
for this round  
of carpet

sweeping nd all the  
city cleaners  
going out

of business after  
this has been  
run thru

the bay street  
slop pail  
one

more time more time more time

# DOWN ON THE YUCATÁN

*Wayne Keon*

down on the yucatan  
that's where  
i

met some 40,000 years  
of confidence  
i

thought was only a  
hallucination  
i

could see it in his  
nite brown  
i

could see it on the face  
of that old mayan  
i

could tell you he knew sean  
was my only child  
i

almost laffed at when  
he told me  
i

was seven kids  
behind him  
i

could feel his mournful  
feeling in my  
i

was really something  
special when  
i

saw the jungle lion  
nd i saw that she  
was flyin nd  
i

saw the eagle  
cryin nd  
i

saw her way up flyin  
in the sky  
i

could see her i could  
feel her  
i

could see that he was  
seein nd  
i

had his hand in mine  
he wasn't dyin  
i

went down to the  
old yucatan  
i

couldn't catch her  
beauty in my  
i

just took her power  
in me  
i

took her power in me  
nd i fly  
i

don't know why he spoke  
no english  
i

don't know why he spoke  
no spanish  
i

just guess he woudn't speak  
outside his mother  
tongue  
i

told him i refused to speak  
any of that old mayan  
i

saw down on the yucatan  
nd that's where  
i

said i just come  
down here  
i

just come on down to yucatan  
nd watch the deer nd pheasant  
i

just come on down alone here  
i just come on down  
alone here nd  
i fly



# SHAMAN AND THE RAVEN

*Wayne Keon*

that sideways glance  
you happen to  
notice

over yer shoulder  
when yer not  
really

noticin her lowered eye  
level stare thats  
not direct

except when you try to look  
her in the left  
eye

payin attention to  
what it is  
she's

sayin to everyone  
reachin out  
to

get the spirit nd the feel  
of the east wind  
blowin

comin in under  
the door nd  
alley

while the whole auditorium  
gets that  
feelin

feelin that she's gonna  
do it again nd  
the lites

sorta start poppin for  
everyone to see  
if

they're gonna be recognized  
almost right  
away

nd then you start gettin  
scared nd kinda  
stretch

eyed lookin around  
even she's  
been

shocked by the outrage  
of such old  
tricks

nd all of a sudden he's  
there too the  
black

raven himself walkin  
nd talkin kinda  
almost

too low for anyone  
to hear what  
he's

sayin nd now she's prayin  
nd sayin her verses  
to the bear

nd protection altho it's not  
really needed anymore  
cos it's

too late to start over he's  
holding on to her arm  
nd feelin

the power of long ago nd  
old time ways  
now

she knows she's not the only  
one seein the blue  
flashes

as it's all explained but  
not explained  
enough

to make you wonder what  
the score is then  
the

shaman searches the room  
again nd again  
with

her brown eyes  
twitchin nd  
burnin

nd searchin for that  
whispy feelin  
hiding

between conversations nd coughs  
knowing it's the  
trickster

watchin words nd breath  
get mixed up nd  
delivered

kind of gently into every  
unsuspecting ear  
nd mouth

# UPSETTING FAKE IDEAS

*Jeannette Armstrong's "Slash" and  
Beatrice Culleton's "April Raintree"*

*Margery Fee*

**J**UST AS HAROLD CARDINAL'S *The Unjust Society* (1969) resisted Trudeau's vision of the "Just Society," so Jeannette Armstrong's narrator, Slash, resists John F. Kennedy's concept of the "Great Society": "he said 'to reject any among us who seek to reopen old wounds and rekindle hatreds.' . . . I knew he talked about the blacks or any people that upset the fake idea about a 'Great Society.' I thought about all the history books and stuff at school and in movies. How it was all like that, a fake, while really the white people wished we would all either be just like them or stay out of sight" (36). What Slash calls "fake ideas" — the ideology conveyed through social institutions and the language and practices of everyday life — are not always obviously fake to those subjected to them, even though they cause confusion and frustration in those for whom they do not seem "natural" or "commonsense." And even when Slash has "seen through" the fake idea that society must be built on the repression of dissent, he is still faced with the simplistic choice offered to him by the dominant discourse: to assimilate or vanish. Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree* (1983/1984)<sup>1</sup> and Jeannette C. Armstrong's *Slash* (1985) expose the fake ideas and debunk the "choices" that white acculturation has forced on Native peoples in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Slash has figured out that there is something wrong with the dominant "liberal" ideology's promise that western democratic society offers equality for all, a consultative and just political process and free choice to minority group members. He quickly discovers that the Native peoples are not seen or treated as equals, that their opinions are not valued in the political world, and that the promise of "free choice" applies to whites only. At first, to the naïve, it might seem like a choice, albeit a limited one: assimilate or vanish. In practice, because of the combination of institutionalized racism and economic marginalization, even those who "choose" assimilation are usually unable to succeed on white terms. And to do so they usually have to repudiate their past, their culture and even, as Culleton's novel makes clear,

their family. The brutal reality imposed by structural racism (see Bolaria and Li 14) means that for a “visible minority” even those that do attempt assimilation rarely succeed: “assimilate or vanish” becomes, except for a token few, simply “vanish”: into the wilderness, into death, the slums and skid row, into the economic and social margin, the margin whose major purpose is to affirm the centrality and superiority of white culture.

In an analysis of imperial-colonial cultural relations, Abdul R. JanMohamed talks of a “manichean aesthetic” that sets up a system of oppositions — white/black, good/evil, civilized/barbaric — invariably privileging the dominant power. The model of colonization has been applied to white-indigenous relations in Canada at the social and economic levels (for example, see Frideres), but it works at the ideological and literary levels as well. JanMohamed explains:

The dominant model of power- and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist literary representation. (Jan-Mohamed 82)

To decentre this model is not easy; however, indigenous activists have made progress in forming a collectivity strong enough to promote its own interests and have been actively constructing a counter-discourse. The narrowness of the white stereotype links these works, since, like Cardinal, all set up, either overtly or covertly, an oppositional discourse that struggles with the dominant one: “discourse is not the individual’s way of inhabiting the language, a kind of self-expression. The language takes on meaning and discourses are constructed through struggles” (Macdonell 47). Recently, creative works have begun to join the early political and educational writing. Those that put the issue on the table, at least in literary terms, were Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1973) and George Ryga’s *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (first performed in 1967, published in 1970 and alluded to in *Slash*, for which Ryga wrote a foreword). More recent works are not so much aimed at educating white audiences as at strengthening Native readers’ sense that there must be a better way to think about themselves than that presented by the dominant discourse.

Dierdre F. Jordan notes the difficulties facing those who struggle to “formulate an ideology and a program of action” coherent enough to require government response, but flexible enough to allow for local differences:

This coherent view must be projected not only to outsiders. If the next generation is to be socialized into the customs and language of the indigenous group, then there must be projected a “world-of-meaning” which is plausible not only to contemporary adult members of the group but also to the youth. Certain cultural attributes from the past, which can still have currency today, must be selected and emphasized as distinctive of the group. The problem, however, is to find both a *mode* of theorizing that does not mythologize the group’s past in a way that prevents contemporary development and a commonly accepted *site* for theorizing. (281)

Slash, speaking of changes in the late 1970s, puts it this way: "There were young people who were very aware of what was Indian in approach and what wasn't. They were rebuilding a worldview that had to work in this century, keeping the values of the old Indian ways. To me that was more important right then than anything else. I thought that through this way, there was no bullshit that could get through for very long" (232). Fiction provides both a mode and a site for theorizing in a way that will reach these young people.

Although both *Slash* and *April Raintree* work through many fake ideas, the need to undermine the "manichean aesthetic" is at the heart of each. Despite their differences then, these novels are trying to open up a space between the negative stereotype of the Indian and the romanticized popular view — Paula Gunn Allen calls the two sides the "howling savage and the noble savage" (4) — or the even more depressing dichotomy resulting from enforced acculturation, that between those April calls "gutter creatures" (115) and the assimilated Indian: the "brown, white men" (Armstrong 69). And how is that space opened up? And what is to be inserted in that space? A simple answer to these questions from these writers is "our way" and "whatever we work out." A comprehensive answer is impossible (since the "working-out" process will continue indefinitely), but some generalizations can be made.

**T**O JUDGE THE DEGREE to which these novels disrupt the stereotypical dichotomies, it is worth remembering Umberto Eco's point about Ian Fleming: "Fleming is not reactionary because he puts a Russian or a Jew in the slot marked 'evil' in his schema; he is reactionary because he proceeds by schemas; Manichean role distribution is always dogmatic and intolerant" (cited Cros 6). To simply invert the hierarchy may be a useful polemical or political move, but ultimately it simply reinforces the power of such schemas. April valorizes being "white" and the belief rebounds on her; Slash's hatred of white oppression starts him drinking again rather than solving the problem (121-22).

The incredible pain, anger, confusion and frustration that Slash suffers is the result of his inability to accept either of the only choices offered by the dominant discourse: "join the rats" or "cop out and be drunks and losers" (198). As Catherine Belsey points out, "the attempt to locate a single and coherent subject-position within . . . contradictory discourses and in consequence to find a noncontradictory pattern of behaviour, can create intolerable pressures," and can lead to a retreat into madness, drugs, suicide, or into attacks on the discourse (65-66). Slash finds some outlet in politics, where a new radical political discourse of Native activism is being constituted; when the politics lead nowhere, he retreats into alcohol and drugs: "Same old conferences, same old bitch sessions, same old resolutions, same

old speeches. Same old problems growing worse and worse . . ." (195). *Slash* is full of scenes where the focus is not on *events* — it scarcely matters which roadblock, which occupation, which march — but on talk. So far, *Slash* can't see the value of "bitching" that does not lead to action or to concessions from Ottawa. He does not yet realize how gradual, painful and repetitive the process of forming a counter-discourse can be.

Culleton's main tactic in undermining the dichotomy is to use characterization to represent the "choice" of assimilation or oblivion. The novel is the story of two Métis sisters taken from their parents and sent, for much of the time, to separate foster homes, although they remain emotionally close. The elder, April, succeeds in making it to the pinnacle of "success," married to a rich white man, living in the mansion of her dreams, while Cheryl, like *Slash*, starts out doing well at school, strongly identifies with Métis ways, but, after struggling with the problems of urban Indians for a long time, finally ends up "vanishing." Isolated by white social welfare policies from their Métis cultural context and from their family, they fantasize: Cheryl, too young to remember her parents' drinking, romanticizes her past; April, old enough to remember it, but not to comprehend it, overreacts, basing her fantasies of the future on the ads in magazines.

All three have been forced into the manichean schema, and the subsequent unfolding of the novels describes their attempts to get out of its trap. Just as the white version of equality has ignored differences in power, *Slash*'s version of equality has ignored cultural difference. Gradually he realizes that he "had spent a lot of time convincing [him]self that we were the same as non-Indians in every way, except that we were oppressed and were angry" (180-81). He realizes that he has to articulate that difference for himself, that culture consists not of rights and definitions and laws on paper, but of practices: "There was no question of whether or not we should or should not do things our way. We just had to do it or lose it" (211). April sees cultural difference, although she rejects everything Native, but does not recognize the role of power in constructing her belief in the superiority of white culture or in the creation of the demoralization that is all she can see of Métis culture. She is nearly assimilated, while Cheryl nearly succeeds in making it as a Métis activist; however, Cheryl has developed a romanticized view of her own parents. When she is confronted with the emotional desertion of her only sister and the completely demoralized reality of her alcoholic father, she follows her mother in committing suicide.

The use of the first-person narrator in each novel is a primary tactic used against the dominant discourse. In providing the illusion of a coherent and unproblematic subject this form of narration has traditionally worked to "suppress the role of language in the construction of the subject, and its own role in the interpellation of the subject, and to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity" (Belsey 67). However, to present as a whole that which has always been seen

as fragmented, the construction of a Native "I" performs a shift from that which has always been constituted as Other to Self. This may not be a subversive tactic in the classic realist text or in the popular novel, but it is within the literary discourse of Canada. Native readers finally will find what white Canadians take for granted — a first-person voice that does not implicitly exclude them. These novels hold out hope to young Native readers, many suffering from more than the "typical adolescent identity crisis," for a less contradictory subject position. The novels give a voice directly to those who generally are silenced. April tells her story directly; her sister Cheryl's letters and school essays give her more political perspective its own freedom. *Slash* consists not only of Slash's first-person narrative but also of the direct speech of many different characters, most of them disagreeing with Slash. These narrators are constituted as speaking for themselves. Although, given what we know of discourse, this promotes the illusion that individuals speak for themselves, rather than out of a discursively constructed subject position, the illusion is compensatory.

These texts, in Althusser's terms "interpellate" or "hail" the Native subject, "always-already" a subject of the dominant discourse (162-63), on behalf of the counter-discourse. Both contain within them occasions where the elders "hail" the younger generation: "many of you are talking about losing out to the white man. You talk about losing your culture. I will tell you something about that. It is not the culture that is lost. It is you. The culture that belongs to us is handed down to us in the sacred medicine ways of our people" (Armstrong 191). April's "hailing," her only positive encounter with a Native person other than her family, occurs in complete silence. Cheryl takes her to the Friendship Centre and they meet some old people: "I knew that Cheryl saw their quiet beauty, their simple wisdom. All I could see were watery eyes, leathery, brown skin, aged, uneducated natives" (173/139). Then an old woman comes and takes her hand: "her fingers were swollen at the joints, disfigured, the veins stood out and it took everything I had not to withdraw my hand from hers. . . . I waited for her to take her hand away. I looked at her questioningly but she didn't say anything. . . . Without speaking a word the woman had imparted her message with her eyes. She had seen something in me that was special, something that was deserving of her respect" (175/140).

They both learn that they have been hailed as part of a generation, not just as individuals. Slash says, "I was important as one person but more important as a part of everything else. That being so, I realized, I carried the weight of all my people as we each did. . . . I saw then that each one of us who faltered, was irreplaceable and a loss to all. In that way, I learned how important and how precious my existence was" (203). Instead of being interpellated as subjects by "a society that neither loved us nor wanted us to be a part of it" as "second class citizens" (249) the characters in these novels *and* their Native readers, are hailed as precious members of a threatened group. Both novels end with the vision of a child who represents the next generation: Slash and Meg's son Marlon "Little Chief" and

Cheryl's son Henry Liberty Lee. Slash addresses Marlon: "You are our hope. You are an Indian of a special generation. Your world will be hard but you will grow up proud to be Indian. . . . You will be the generation to help them white men change because you won't be filled with hate . . ." (250).

**E**ACH TEXT NOT ONLY DESCRIBES the experience of having been interpellated by the dominant discourse as "second-class citizens" and then by the counter-discourse, but also moves on to interpellate the next generation as counter-discursive subject. Given Althusser's account of how the dominant discourse "subjects" us to the rule of the powerful, one might see this process as highly dubious. However, human beings cannot live outside ideology or speak from outside a subject position: "Because ideology has the role of constituting concrete individuals as subjects, because it is produced in the identification with the 'I' of discourse, and is thus the condition of action, we cannot simply step outside it. To do so would be to refuse to act or speak, and even to make such a refusal, to say 'I refuse,' is to accept the condition of subjectivity" (Belsey 62). However, as the Native counter-discourse to which *April Raintree* and *Slash* belong affirms, "while no society can exist without ideology . . . and while it is impossible to break with ideology in the general sense, nonetheless it is possible to constitute a discourse which breaks with the specific ideology (or ideologies) of the contemporary social formation" (Belsey 62-63).

Culleton focuses her account on the psychological, Armstrong on the political aspects of the Native experience, although there is considerable overlap. *Slash* not only gives a condensed and fictionalized historical account of the rise of Native activism in Canada and the United States since the 1960s, but also as it does so shows Slash working his way through his experience of endless debates, meetings, marches, occupations, and demonstrations, some peaceful, some brutally repressed by police, to a political position. Importantly, neither the Native subject position nor this political position is presented as obvious, or as a *fait accompli*, but as the result of a continuing process of struggle. As Partha Chatterjee notes,

nationalism seeks to assert the feasibility of entirely new political possibilities. These are its political claims which colonialist discourse haughtily denies. Only a vulgar reductionist can insist that these new possibilities simply 'emerge' out of a social structure or out of the supposedly objective workings of a world-historical process, that they do not need to be thought out, formulated, propagated and defended in the battlefield of politics. . . . the polemical content of nationalist ideology is its politics. (40)

Slash decides there is no point in having special status in the Constitution if those given the special status cannot reproduce their culture, and comes to see that

moral and literal ownership of the land is all that provides a base for that cultural reproduction: "We don't need anybody's constitution, what we have is our own already. We hold rights to the land and to nationhood. . . . We want to keep it. They are trying to make us hand it over by telling us that we have no choice. That's a lot of bull" (214). It does not seem surprising that shortly after coming to these insights, Slash settles down, marries Maeg and they have a child. Nor does it seem surprising that he develops the position that the settlement of land claims to get economic power is dangerous without recognizing the need to remedy the effects of cultural dispossession: "Not too many realize the biggest victories won't be in politics and deals made, but in the putting back together of the shambles of our people in their thinking and attitudes. . . . Even if one-quarter of the people come out stronger about being Indian, it would be worthwhile. The heck with what happens in politics. We would grow in numbers because we would pass it on to our kids, and someday there would be better days for our people in the new world" (148-49). A faith that process and struggle are more important than conclusive settlements or final answers pervades the novel. When aboriginal rights are recognized in the Constitution Slash is appalled: "Many of our leaders would be lining up to get compensation on their lands. That would be the worst devastation of all. Our rights would be empty words on paper that had no compassion for what is human on the land. . . . We would no longer know freedom as a people" (249).

**A**LTHOUGH THIS POSITION has the privileged place at the conclusion of the book and of Slash's long struggle, it is shown in contention with other views. Even Slash's wife Maeg voices her feeling that to refuse to negotiate on land claims is simply too hard: "your way guarantees years of bitter struggle" (243), and she gets actively involved in the campaign to include aboriginal peoples in the patriation process and in the Constitution. Slash comes to many insights, but he also understands how hard they were to reach for him: "It was as though a light was shining for my people. I felt that we were moving toward it faster and faster. There was a rightness about it that the past few years didn't have. Yet I realized, without the past few years [of confusion and suffering], I would not have made it to this point. I knew that as a certainty" (203). Therefore he can leave room open for others to find their own way. His friend Jimmy, who has attempted to assimilate, gradually realizes what went wrong: "He was all gung-ho on the same things I had been into a couple of years before that. I saw that he had to do that" (234). Although a teleology is implied here — that everyone eventually "gets to" where Slash is — in another instance Slash agrees with his cousin that people can use spirituality for the wrong reasons, but adds, "everybody's got to approach it from different angles, though" (239). Even the traditional Okanagan leader, Pra-Cwa,

admits that those who push towards white ways might “Need a new way all their own to be able to live good again” (48).

Consistently the position is expressed that people have reasons for their behaviour, that different experiences lead to different reactions, and that these need to be accommodated. Solidarity becomes a paramount value: “we can all support each other on whatever position each of us takes. It doesn’t mean each has to take the same position. The government weakens us by making us fight each other to take one position, as each one wants their position to win out. Each position is important and each has the right to try for it. We should all back each other up. That’s what I think” (235). However, *Slash*’s determined defence of his own final position means that he is not simply advocating pluralism, which Gayatri Spivak has described this way: “Pluralism is the method employed by the *central* authorities to neutralize opposition by seeming to accept it. The gesture of pluralism on the part of the *marginal* can only mean capitulation to the centre” (cited in Barrett 45).

While *Slash* grows up in an “old-fashioned” Okanagan-speaking family whose support leads him to his final position, Culleton writes the story of children much more seriously dispossessed. April and Cheryl are born in the city, and taken from their parents very young. Already scarred by what she sees as her parents’ desertion, April, when her new “family” calls her “half-breed” and “squaw” and uses her as a servant, quickly decides she wants to be white:

And when I grew up, I wouldn’t be poor, I’d be rich. Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people. And giving your children to white people to look after. . . . When I got free of this place, when I got free from being a foster child, then I would live just like a real white person. (49/34)

This “decision” is consistently reinforced by her experiences at school and in her daily life, but nonetheless she confesses: “I felt torn in different directions and often changed my mind regarding my parents” (53/37). Since unlike her sister Cheryl, she doesn’t look Indian, April is able not only to internalize the white position, but also to live it, at least for awhile. Her decision is very much like that of Jimmy, in *Slash*, who also declares, “I hate being an Indian. I hate Indian ways” (44) and decides he is going to be “just like the people on T.V.” (46). However, neither of them succeeds. April’s attempt to live as a “real white” fails and her failure reveals the unbalanced system on which the majority/minority split works. Only one feature distinguished her from the majority — significantly, given the importance of family in Native culture and the ubiquity of racism in ours, it is her sister Cheryl’s appearance and April’s refusal to hide her sister from her white in-laws. April overhears her mother-in-law talking to a friend: “Didn’t you notice her sister? . . . And they’re not half-sisters. . . . That’s the trouble with mixed races, you never know how they’re going to turn out and I would simply dread being grandmother to a bunch of snivelling little half-breeds” (126/99-100). Finding a

mansion insufficient compensation for living with this, April walks out and returns to Winnipeg to find Cheryl hospitalized, having been found beaten, intoxicated and suffering from hypothermia. Cheryl has become symbolic of April's split-off "Indianness."

When April goes to Cheryl's apartment to pick up some clothes to take to the hospital, she is dragged into a car and raped. Afterwards, April "began wondering for the hundredth time why they had kept calling me squaw [that which April has always defined as Other] . . . that really puzzled me. Except for my long black hair, I really didn't think I could be mistaken as a native person. Mistaken? There's that shame again. Okay, identified" (161/129). Here April "thinks white," before catching herself. She has, in fact, been mistaken for Cheryl, but the point is that she has "mistaken" her place in the racist society around her and is punished for her "innocence" about Native oppression.

Culleton is writing a novel about the forcible construction of Native as Other. For April, this forcing is symbolized by her rape as a "squaw" and by her sister's suicide. This violence is analogous, in Gayatri Spivak's words, to "the epistemic violence that constituted/effaced a subject that was obliged to cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the Imperialist's self-consolidating Other" (209). April finally constructs her identity, like so many colonized people, through a reaction. She is not allowed to be white; she refuses to be that Native constructed for her by white discourse. Angry and frustrated by her failure to communicate with her sister, she finds an empty bottle in Cheryl's room and smashes it, yelling "I hate you for what you've done to my people! Our people!" (214/172). In these last two words — our people — she has opened up a new identity and a new community for herself, opening up the space between the two "authorized" possibilities — white and the drunken Indian Other, both isolated from any community. She chooses, like Slash, to give her loyalty to a people, a community and a future that stands against the imposition of the dichotomy.

What saves this resolution from simply imposing a different, but equally fraudulent dichotomy on the reader is that April has been through the process of internalizing both the oppressor role and that of the oppressed. Just before Cheryl's suicide, their relationship deteriorates because of Cheryl's drinking. April's boyfriend points out to her that during this period not only did Cheryl see April as "in a superior white role" but that April played that role, using the money from her divorce settlement: "You've stressed that she can depend on you, right? . . . Maybe you could have told her that you needed her help from her" (205). In a sense, then, the relationship between the sisters shows what goes on within someone crammed into the stereotype: she becomes her own best oppressor, or in terms of ideology, she internalizes the belief in her own "Native" nature as inferior in a way that maintains and reproduces the power of the dominant elite. Shortly after smashing the whisky bottle, April finds a suicide note, revealing that Cheryl has had a baby but hadn't

been able to tell April about him. April gets a second chance to communicate with her sister by raising her baby, a symbol of a new generation that will grow up with a new perspective because of his mother's comprehension of how the dominant ideology can harm him.

That both novels end looking at the potential of the future rather than at the bleakness and pain of the past is only the simplest of the ways, too many to recount here, that they open up possibility rather than dogmatically closing it down. But even that vision of the future, for peoples that, as Emma LaRoque says, are typically perceived as "frozen" in the past "as if Indians cannot change and adapt with the rest of humanity" (11), is liberating. Both show that people can and do change, although the process is as much the result of large-scale social changes as of individual will. Both show how the dominant discourse functions so clearly that some readers may find the demonstration too "obvious" or explicit to be aesthetically pleasing. Instead of simply saying "You are and must be Indian" they show what it means to work that out, to construct a new place from which to think and speak.

MOST WHITE ACCOUNTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE have simply reinscribed the oppressive dichotomy these novels are trying to displace, as demonstrated most recently by Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literature*, 1989, and by Gilles Thérien for Quebec in "L'Indien Imaginaire: Une Hypothèse" (1987). Thus it is worth pondering the extent to which any account of these novels published in a journal called *Canadian Literature* is in itself an act of colonization. Obviously, the construction of a national literature serves the ideological interests of the state. As Harold Cardinal points out, Indian people have trouble dealing with the response of white people that if they are not satisfied with their place in Canada, they don't want to be Canadian: "In Canada there is no . . . universally accepted definition of the concept of Canadianism. There is no easy, sure national identity for Canada or for Canadians. When the question, 'You do want to be a Canadian, you don't want to be something else?' is asked it's always immensely difficult for an individual or a group to answer, because so much depends on the questioner's concept of Canadianism" (9). Canadians in the "normal" sense of "real white people" have defined themselves reactively, for the most part, as neither Indian nor American, which gives this interchange at a cocktail party in *April Raintree* its point:

"Oh, I've read about Indians. Beautiful people they are. But you're not exactly Indians are you? What is the proper word for people like you?" one [white guest] asked.

"Women," Cheryl replied instantly.

“No, no, I mean nationality?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. We’re Canadians,” Cheryl smiled sweetly. (116/91)

Here Cheryl resists a label which in other contexts she would be proud to adopt in order to resist its exclusionary thrust. First she asserts a common humanity, and when that doesn’t work, she asserts a common nationality — one that has been implicitly denied by the line of questioning. But in other circumstances, that assertion might be to fall into the trap of acquiescing in the denial of one’s own difference. Sometimes the struggle will be to enter the Canadian literature that is published, read, reviewed, canonized, taught; sometimes the struggle will be to fight it, to rewrite it, to undermine the very assumption that such a simplistic concept can survive at all.

The construct/stereotype of the Indian, in fact, has been crucial to both the definition of English Canadian, of Québécois, and of their literatures, as Thérien points out: “En effet, l’Européen qui décide de s’installer sur le territoire de la Nouvelle-France se trouve placé dans une situation de perte d’identité. En devenant ‘canadien’, nom antérieurement attribué aux seuls Indiens habitants du Canada, le colon pose l’Indien comme nouveau pôle de référence” (4). [In fact, the European who occupies the territory of New France finds himself in danger of losing his identity. To become Canadian, a name formerly attributed to the Native inhabitants of Canada, the colonial situates the Indian as a new point of reference.] Both Goldie and Thérien argue that white Canadians have consolidated their identity through means of a symbolic transaction with the constructed figure of the Imaginary Indian. To change the terms of that construction is to threaten our own identity: to quote myself, “we are afraid that if we don’t believe in Indians, we will have to become Americans” (30). So far, the way we have dealt with “our” identity problem and the related fear of colonization is by colonizing the indigenous people, both ideologically and economically. Now, unless we want to identify ourselves as imperialists, we must struggle to answer Maria Campbell’s question: “Why can’t I be *me*, with my bag of stuff, *within* what’s supposed to be *our* society?” (Hillis 58)

Given the depressing record of past writing about Native peoples and the power of the dominant discourse, this article is despite my best intentions at least as likely to oppress as to liberate. So why am I writing? Because like Armstrong and Culleton, I believe that writing can escape, if only transiently, the traps of ideology. Beatrice Culleton satirizes the usual approach, using the setting of a party in an upper middle-class white home: “Then two men came over and one asked Cheryl what it was like being an Indian. Before she could reply, the other man voiced his opinion and the two soon walked away, discussing their concepts of native life without having allowed Cheryl to say one thing” (116-17/91). This process goes on in academic writing, as various “experts” carry on discussing their ideas without reference to the ideas, opinions and feelings of their “subject(s)”; I cannot believe that my writing is immune. But to say I can’t write about Native writing for fear

of automatically and inadvertently oppressing them is to fall for another of those impossible "choices": shut up or be an oppressor. Silence can be "oppressive" too. And because of my institutional subject position and the audience of this journal, I can hope to shift the institutional discourse a little. Michel Pêcheux, in *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious* (1982), talks of "fleeting forms of appearance of something 'of a different order,' minute victories that for a flash thwart the ruling ideology by taking advantage of its faltering" (218). Helen Tiffin, in "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," paraphrases Wilson Harris: "'Genuine change,' Wilson Harris suggests, proceeds (as does his own fiction) through a series of 'infinite rehearsals' whereby counter-discourses seek not just to expose and 'consume' the biases of the dominant, but to erode their own biases" (32). Ultimately, with *Slash*, we have to learn "them ain't the only choices. There is another way. We just got to see it ourselves, though . . ." (198).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I have given page numbers for both *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) and *April Raintree* (1984) after quotations, that for the earlier edition first; the text is that of the 1984 edition.
- <sup>2</sup> I am using the convention laid out by Brand and Bhaggyiyadatta to lower-case "white" and upper-case "Native," because the latter is a designation of a cultural heritage, while whites "do not claim their colour as a distinctive heritage; as the dominant race it is not necessary" (iii). Using lower-case "native" may also cause needless confusion. I use Native as a general term to cover status and non-status Indians, Métis, Inuit, although usage varies. Government practice has complicated the problem; see Frideres, *Native*, 2-13. The general term Native can be liberating in some contexts and oppressive in others; see the discussion of "Canadian" above.

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## THE WET

*Bruce Chester*

It is morning.  
It rains.  
The rains that  
have been absent for  
so long  
have returned again  
making up time  
running down the mountain  
rushing and tumbling  
to their feet.  
There has been a drought  
for three years  
I never noticed it,  
just turned on the tap.  
There were no salmon  
in it, but it ran and  
filled my glass.

## WORKING ON TITLES

*Bruce Chester*

She gave me  
a perfect poetic image  
in passing  
from one thought  
to another  
'cutting  
cutting at a vein  
but it's like there's  
no blood  
inside  
to set it  
flowing'  
her hair in swirls  
of red  
from black

to copper pennies  
her eyes open smiling  
aspen grey  
then trembling  
green  
long lashes  
over a freckle dusting  
a light wash of pink  
slipped through her cheeks  
as she sat wrapped  
in earth's colours  
talking of titles  
false alarms  
and broken Toyotas.

## EAGLES CAUGHT SALMON

*Bruce Chester*

There are eagles tracing  
figure 8's  
in the ice grey plane  
of the sky  
above the valley.  
"Here long ago,  
eagles caught salmon  
on the green grass  
roosted in the trees  
that line up like  
broken matchsticks  
broken soldiers  
on the bare ridge  
the broken mountains'  
back."  
I talk with a raven.  
She is wise but has fallen  
silent  
I trace her throat  
with the inverse curve  
of a finger  
asking to hear more  
knowing I will if patient.

# THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

*Some Native Canadian Women Writers*

*Barbara Godard*

**N**ATIVE CANADIAN CULTURE had never before received such public attention as it did in Toronto in the spring of 1989.<sup>1</sup> At the Theatre Passe Muraille, *Dry Lips Oughta Go to Kapuskasing*, the latest play by Manitoba Cree Tomson Highway, played to packed houses and critical acclaim. Like its complement, *The Rez Sisters* (1986-87), which also — though from women's perspectives — explored Reserve life, the traditional culture of the trickster, and gender politics, *Dry Lips* won the annual Dora award for the best production on the Toronto stage. Incidentally, this was Highway's *third* play to première in Toronto this year, *The Sage, the Fool and the Dancer* having played to equally full houses at the Native Centre in February. A play for young people had more limited exposure at a branch of the Toronto Public Library during National Book Week. Over at the Cumberland, the audience mixed in the lobby to see Gary Farmer in another leading role, a fine comic performance by this Mohawk actor from the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, in *Powwow Highway*, the latest version of the on-the-road-quest — Native style. There was a strong Native presence in the visual arts as well. Rebecca Belmore's (Ojibwa) "Ihkwewak ka-ayamiwhat: Means Women Who are Speaking" was featured in the issue of *Parallelogramme* that reproduced the texts from the 1987 exhibition, "Locations: Feminism, Art, Racism, Region — Writings and Artworks."<sup>2</sup> This was a prelude to her summer appearance in the Harbourfront show of "Contemporary Art By Women of Native Ancestry," which followed an exhibit of art by the First Nations and "Indian Territory," the work of Ed Poitras at Powerplant.<sup>3</sup>

Later in May, Native Earth Performing Arts invited everyone back to the Passe Muraille for "Weegageechak Begins to Dance," a festival showcasing Native plays and playwrights including, among others, *Deep Shit City*, a new text by playwright Daniel David Moses (Mohawk), and *Princess Pocahontas & the Blue Spots* by the gifted actress and performance artist Monique Mojica.<sup>4</sup> Soon after, poet Alanis Obamsawin's (Abenaki) new film, *No Address*, was among those featured on the

opening weekend of the Euclid Cinema established by DEC to screen politically engaged films. For many of the writers, these events climaxed a season of intensive workshops in Native cultural production organized by the Committee to Re-establish the Trickster. The publication of the first number of *The Trickster* has in itself been an augury, a testimony to the variety and vitality, the quantity and quality, of cultural productions by Native artists. All signs would seem to herald the emergence of Native culture as a forceful presence in the literary institution.<sup>5</sup>

Inscribing this cultural activity under the sign of *The Trickster* indexes the ambiguities of this interruption, however. Like the many manifestations of this cultural divinity, Native culture is both destructive and creative, Coyote's "double hook" of darkness and light. Participants in the creative workshops run by *The Trickster* would focus on reviving traditional storytelling techniques in new forms.<sup>6</sup> Under David MacLean's guidance, storytelling for "television" explored the "creation of new conventions" as, indeed, would the workshops under Highway on "Storytelling for the Stage" while that on "Adapting Storytelling for the Written Page" promised to intensively explore the oral traditions and why they should be translated into written genres. Such intersemiotic "translation" will inevitably work upon them, dis/placing and hybridizing conventions. More explicitly enunciated in a workshop under the direction of poet Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Ojibwa) entitled "Re-establishing the Voice: Oral and Written Literature into Performance," was the kind of challenge to the Canadian literary institution posed by this emergent literature: it posits the word as a process of knowing, provisional and partial, rather than as revealed knowledge itself, and aims to produce texts in performance that would create truth as interpretation rather than those in the Western mimetic tradition that reveal truth as pre-established knowledge.

Challenge to the Canadian literary tradition was overtly signalled in two of the sessions organized by Keeshig-Tobias and Daniel David Moses. The one entitled "The Missing Voice in Canadian Literature" proposed an "alternative orientation to the study of Canadian Literature" and looked at the role of Native metaphors and Tricksters. Framed in this way, however, it drew attention to the absence of Native texts in the Canadian canon and advanced an alternate canon from what has been an "invisible" visible minority. In this, it contests the claims to comprehension and universality of "Canadian Literature," in the spirit of an aesthetic of difference, where Native cultural producers join the denunciation of the politics of the canon by a number of others in favour of greater recognition of the differentiation of a variety of groups whose race, ethnicity, gender, or class has hitherto marginalized them in the literary field. In this challenge, however, the Native writer is situating herself or himself not just as the Other, an author of radically different texts from an entirely different mode of production. Those following *The Trickster* constitute a contestatory discourse that positions itself as a literature of resistance within the conventions, though marginally so, of the dominant discourse. The final

workshop aimed to confront directly the question of cultural appropriation, the strategies whereby Native creative productions have been marginalized by the literary institution. As its particular focus it took the issue of intellectual property exploring the different concepts of property in Native and mainstream cultures — anonymous communal texts versus signed texts — in a seminar with the resonant title “Whose Story is it Anyway?”<sup>7</sup>

As this title announces, questions of property are imbricated in issues of the proper name and of propriety, of those tangled concepts of the authorial signature, of *authority*, and of decorum or convention, both social and literary. Who has the right to speak or write? What are the appropriate forms for their utterance to take? These, as Michel Foucault has taught us, are the important questions to ask in order to unravel the knotted interconnections of knowledge and power: who is speaking, to whom, on whose behalf, in what context? The ideological significance of conventions is part of that “political unconscious” of literature analyzed by Fredric Jameson. As he writes: “genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact.”<sup>8</sup> The relation between texts and institutions is emerging as the common project of the humanities and the social sciences, according to Dominick La Capra. Genres and intellectual disciplines — discursive practices all — determine through their constraints the specific language uses of texts. “And discursive practices always have a significant relation to sociopolitical institutions — a relation that becomes obvious and subject to sanctions once intellectual pursuits are formally organized in institutionalized disciplines.”<sup>9</sup> Whether a perfection of a genre or a disconcerting text that rewrites a genre, texts test and contest the limits of a genre or discursive practice.

“Appropriate form” or appropriation? This is an issue of great contention within the Canadian literary institution at the moment and the intervention of the Trickster workshop was confrontational, strategically oppositional, a deliberate interruption of the canonical norm. Moreover, it occurred in the midst of an intense debate in the Toronto papers which indicated that the emergence of Native culture has been neither assured nor easy. What has been played out in the press, at the same time as this cultural flowering has been moving audiences in the theatre, has been an enactment of the systemic racism through which this cultural production has been rendered “invisible” over the years. The “strategies of reproduction” — the economic strategies that agents use to maintain or improve their social position, the conditions of access through education, affiliative groups, etc. — whereby the literary institution reproduces itself in its existing norms and confers legitimacy on “authors” is exposed in this debate. Generally, such reproduction which is the work of institutions conveying “know-how,” is to ensure the mastery of its “practice” and consequently “a reproduction of subjection to the ruling ideology,”<sup>10</sup> the repetition of the same.

THIS "REPRODUCTION OF THE RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION" (128) is carried out through representations, whereby individuals are constituted as subjects in their imaginary relationships to their real conditions of existence, that is, in and through ideology. As Althusser reiterates, ideology always has a material existence in that it is a practice (155). Moreover, "there is no ideology except by and for subjects" (159), that is, ideology "constitutes concrete individuals as subjects" (160) through representations which offer subject-positions wherein the individual as subject is made to identify with the Subject of that specific institutional representation or discursive practice. In this case, the literary institution interpellates individuals with representations of the Author-function which subject-position individuals are invited to occupy.<sup>11</sup> As Althusser points out, within a class society, relations of production are "relations of exploitation" between antagonistic groups. In the present instance of the Canadian literary institution, the relationships between ethnically different groups constitute agonistic relations within an apparatus of struggle ensuring the oppression of certain groups and guaranteeing the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction. That the literary institution and the representations through which it is reproduced are sites of struggle is, however, camouflaged in the narrative of the hegemonic discourse which affirms its authority monologically by refusing to engage in dialogue with these alternate discourses, refuses in fact to acknowledge their existence as contestatory practices and hence to legitimate them as interlocutors.

What is at stake in the struggle is the production of value under competing modes of production. What is that "good" book that merits publication and constructs the author as subject? The representations of the author-position offered by the dominant literary institution were challenged for their systemic racism at the 16th annual general meeting of the Writers' Union of Canada (Waterloo, May 1989). Racism in writing was the subject of a panel discussion which involved McClelland & Stewart publisher Douglas Gibson and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. The narratives of this encounter differ according to the narrator and his or her representations of the debate. In one account, Sheelagh Conway, dissident feminist writer, quotes Keeshig-Tobias in support of her view that the Canadian literary institution determines value (i.e., literary "quality") according to the "values of Canada's male-dominant, middle-class white culture. Anything else is viewed as ancillary or, at worst, an aberration."<sup>12</sup>

Publishers say they are interested in "quality" work, not an author's gender or race. . . . Juxtapose sexism with racism and the problem is compounded. Makeda Silvera, co-founder of Sister Vision, Canada's only press for women of color, estimates that fewer than 1 per cent of such writers are published because Canadian publishers are unwilling to understand or acknowledge Canada's diverse cultures. Leonore Keeshig-Tobias, a native writer, says publishers have returned manuscripts

submitted by natives with “too Indian” or “not Indian enough” scrawled across them. (Conway)

This editorial practice, wherein a “good” book is an ideologically correct book and the author-position is determined by racist norms, is corroborated by Marlene Nourbese Philip, a Toronto black woman writer, who describes the publication history of her prize-winning novel, *Harriet's Daughter*, as it was rejected by Toronto publishers using similar phrases. “Not marketable” was a “euphemism for their concern about the race of the characters.” Only after a British editor agreed to publish it did Women's Press bring out a Canadian co-edition.<sup>13</sup>

Once published, books must still find their way to reviewers and readers. Most of the publications of writers of “visible” racial minorities are the work of publishers themselves marginal to the literary institution. That this relationship is ideological, an oppressive relationship, is suggested by the relative fortunes of two women's presses in obtaining the University of Toronto Press as agent for distribution. Second Story Press, a new feminist press run by white women born of the split at Women's Press over this very issue of racism, though it has yet to produce any books, has been signed on by the prestigious university press on the strength of the editors' reputation<sup>14</sup> while Williams-Wallace, another small press which publishes literary manuscripts by women and writers of racial and ethnic minorities, despite a most respectable back list of writers like Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, and Nourbese Philip, could not obtain this agency service.<sup>15</sup>

The other narrative in *The Globe and Mail* also characterizes the encounter as a dialogue of the deaf, representing it, though, not as a site of struggle but as theatre of the absurd. It is not my intention to abuse *The Globe and Mail*, but it advertises itself as Canada's only “national” newspaper. Given these claims to universality, its literary pronouncements function as canonical fiats. It is these claims to speak for “everyone” which constitute the monologic discourse of hegemonic formations and which must be interrogated for their politics of inclusion. In this second narrative, Gibson and Keeshig-Tobias “address[ed] the same issue without ever talking about the same things; they barely seemed to be addressing each other.”<sup>16</sup>

It was hard to say which was the more outrageous, Keeshig-Tobias's claim that non-native writers should not tell native stories or Gibson's unequivocal statement that there is no racism in Canadian publishing. (It should be added, by the way, that Keeshig-Tobias's recollections of native-produced manuscripts being rejected and heavily edited by mainstream publishers cut little ice with a roomful of writers, few of whom are strangers to either rejection or editing.)

In his article, Kirchhoff frames this stychomythia with an account of the defeat of Judith Merrill's motion proposing a task force to examine the relationship of cultural minorities to the Canadian publishing industry, defeated because it seemed “patronizing,” according to one East Indian-born writer, and to bear little relation to the bread and butter issues proper to the activities of a trade union in the eyes of the

majority. As Kirchhoff suggests: "The matters of race did not detract noticeably from the other business of the AGM, such as reports from the regional committees, plans to get more Canadian literature into Canadian schools, discussions of contracts and copyrights, and the status of the Public Lending Right program." That this business-as-usual attitude was itself a manifestation of systemic racism, an example of the trivialization and blindness that renders invisible the demands of the minority, for whom this question of access to the editor's approval, this mark of value, is indeed a vital bread and butter issue — the one without which contracts are phantasmagoric — is made clear in the rest of the article. Under the guise of the seemingly neutral prose of the reporter stating the facts, Kirchhoff re-marks in his parentheses and asides the profound racism of Canadian society which is manifest in its jokes that make fun of the very fact of racism and so conceal the work of reproduction of this racist mode of production within the institution. This is the key tactic of ideology, as Barthes understands it, the naturalization of belief as fact, the presentation as that which goes without saying, as a system of facts, what is in actuality a semiological system, that is a system of *values*.<sup>17</sup> The jokes of the union members offer representations of "colour" which Kirchhoff reports — and supports — that serve to efface the different hues of skin, colour which marks permanent differences among people, in favour of differences in the colours of clothes worn by individuals, a mere surface difference of choice and costume. These jokes turn the protestations of racism by writers of visible minorities into the games of the clown, laughable, and hence, no threat to the majority. As Kirchhoff compounds the racism of his reportage: "None of this was malicious, but it was always there." The failure to treat another's claims seriously as those of an equal is the strategy of the oppressor who hereby denies value and subjectivity to the other. In these jokes, the person of colour is cast as an object of amusement for the white person who alone is constituted as author-subject in these representations.<sup>18</sup>

In this article, there is also a report of a quarrel between a B.C. writer working on a novel set in the Queen Charlotte Islands and the Haida who refused him authorization to visit their land without him according them the reciprocal right to vet what he should write about them. This is the other facet of this question of the political struggle over representation, over who has the right to speak and what is the appropriate form for this utterance to take. This question of the right to represent individuals or topics belonging to a minority culture has been a contentious issue in Canadian literary circles in the last year. It was over just this problem that Women's Press in Toronto split into two groups over an anthology which included narratives about minority groups (Indians of South America) written by white Canadian women. What emerged as the group in control defined racism as the use by a member of a dominant group of the experience of a disadvantaged culture or the use of culturally-laden devalued language as, for example, the term "black" in a negative context. This attempt to formulate an anti-racist policy, one which

moved beyond a liberal non-racist policy based on rejecting overt discriminatory remarks to develop a more systemic analysis of racism, did not, however, entail an affirmative action policy for promoting the self-representations of women of visible minorities. Moreover, the nostalgia for purity, as we shall see, inverted the reigning discourse but did nothing to challenge its values nor the fact of hierarchization itself. It was a call by Keeshig-Tobias for an affirmative action policy with regards to Native writers that was dismissed by Kirchoff as “outrageous” and subversive of the existing political arrangements.

This was not a startlingly new claim by Keeshig-Tobias. It has been reiterated on many occasions by women of colour, most pointedly in the introduction to a special issue of *Fireweed* wherein the guest editors speak of the difficulty they experience in having their work published because they are not “saying it right” according to the norms of the dominant culture. “[S]o if you don’t fit into that [one way of ‘saying’ that counts], then as far as they’re concerned, you’re not saying anything.”<sup>19</sup> For Native women this poses a particular difficulty since “the princess” and “the squaw” constitute the semiotic valences within which Native women have long been represented in the dominant literature of North America. In the allegories of empire, the Indian Queen figured in the celebrated “Four Continents” illustrations of the early sixteenth century as the “familiar Mother-Goddess figure, full-bodied, powerful, nurturing but dangerous — embodying the wealth and danger of the New World.”<sup>20</sup> Her daughter, the Princess, as Britannia’s daughter, the Carib Queen, or the Statue of Liberty, leaner and more Caucasian, figures in the allegories of nationalism as the colonies move towards independence. In these configurations, the Native woman as sign was called on to represent both American liberty and European classical virtue. But in a semiotic field configured through relations of substitution, as well as those of contiguity,<sup>21</sup> the Native woman also figured all that was different from the Queen. As the savage Squaw, she configured the dark side of the Mother-Queen, the witch-healer medicine woman, the seductive whore, the drunken, stupid, thieving Natives living in shacks on the edge of town, not in a woodland paradise (Greene 21). No Roman sandals grace her feet; her complexion is dark and primitive. She is the despised object of conquest. That an “image of the squaw” produced by the dominant culture would become a literary norm that would determine the value of all subsequent cultural productions by Native women which would be measured against it, is a fear expressed by Native writers Beth Cuthand, Jeannette Armstrong, and Maria Campbell, who see in the strong interest white women writers have expressed in their culture, the mechanism whereby their self-representations will be excluded from the literary institution.<sup>22</sup> Within the semiotic field of the Native, these representations constitute one valence in relation to the white women’s long expressed dream of “going squaw.”

That this exclusion has already happened, however, has also been demonstrated. One of the high canonical forms of Canadian fiction is the vision quest, or shamanic

initiation, wherein the Native woman (or man) initiates a white woman into various Native religious practices through which she attains her creative and personal “identity.” Here the Native woman is configured as Queen, as Mother-Goddess, fount of all wisdom and ruler of a natural paradise. This has resulted in a vogue within feminist circles for narratives of women’s spiritual transformation, fiction in the form of the vision quest of romance using all the fictional devices of reference to produce a strong effect of the real in the form of a fully psychologized heroine seeking freedom from patriarchy in the “green world.”<sup>23</sup> In contrast, Native women’s narratives have adopted entirely different formal strategies, discontinuous tales rather than coherently plotted quests, symbolic events rather than psychologized reactions. Moreover, they write miscellanies — hybrid genres — mixtures of sermons, narratives, poetry, ethnographical treatises.<sup>24</sup>

A NUMBER OF RECENT ESSAYS have analyzed the “imaginary Indian,” the Native as sign within Canadian discourse, an empty sign and consequently weighed down with what Gordon Johnston terms “an intolerable burden of meaning” (King 65) in that the Native has come to bear the burden of the Other, all that the modern white person is lacking. Identity for this white person is acquired through this encounter with alterity, knowledge of the self attained through the wisdom of the not-I, an identity both personal and national. For it is through this encounter with the Other who is Native to this land, that a “totem transfer” occurs and the stranger in North America “goes native” to possess the land, to be Native. Conveniently, as Margery Fee points out, this figure of mediation, the token or empty sign in the discourse between white men, that is, the Native, dies or disappears (King 20-21). This leaves the white man in undisputed possession of the land: “The simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of the Native people in our literature can be explained to some extent, then, by our desire to naturalize our appropriation of their land.”<sup>25</sup> This impossible necessity for incorporating the Other, for becoming indigenous in order to belong in the land they have conquered, has been termed the process of “indigenization” by Terry Goldie, who articulates the valences of the semiotic field for this transference of the desiring subject, those of fear and temptation, which encompass a gamut of codes: those of orality, mysticism, soul, nature, violence, sexuality, etc. (Goldie, in King 67-79, especially 73).

Despite the critique of Native women writers and the recent attempts at demystification by scholars of Canadian literature, the Native woman has maintained her mythical status within the dominant culture. Indeed, she even seems to be consolidating it in collaboration with the Writers’ Union and in explicit opposition to the denunciations of such a practice as “structurally racist.” I refer here specifi-

cally to the new novel *Bone Bird* by Darlene Barry Quaife and the writer's description/defence of her project in an interview. Under the heading "Celebrating Native Spirituality: Writer feels society can learn from native ways," Quaife argues that writing about different cultures is the work of the imagination and that any attempt to limit this freedom is an act of censorship and the promotion of racism. The novel she is defending in these familiar terms of the esemplastic power of a disembodied imagination, follows the highly conventional plot of the "coming of age" of a Métis woman on Vancouver Island through the influence of her grandmother, "a native medicine woman, who is the spiritual centre of the book."<sup>26</sup> Quaife pictures herself as a missionary to her readers, desiring to share with them the "sense of spirituality" that white culture has lost but which she has found in her research into shamanism. In this, Quaife reiterates all the codes of indigenization: lack, desire, mystical purity, possession. All the while she maintains the benevolence of her appropriation which is 'for the good of the Natives.'

What's important is how a writer approaches their material. I didn't approach [*Bone Bird*] with the idea of exploitation. I wanted to celebrate what I have learned with my readership. I wanted to open up the audiences for native writers.

She continues, ironically contradicting herself and thus demonstrating the constraints of discursive conventions in this ideological production of representations:

I wanted to be accurate, but not record native spirituality. I wanted to *make it my own* because what's important is the *synthesis* — *the writer creating the myth*.

If I had come to the material with the idea of exploitation, then I would deserve to be censored, she said. (my emphasis)

Intention is ineffective in the face of discursive practice, however. Though Quaife is seemingly innocent (ignorant) of them, she faithfully manipulates the conventions of "indigenization," though camouflaging their normative and exclusive character behind Romantic appeals to the originality of the artist and the freedom of imagination which are decontextualized and universalized, "mythologized," hence ideological, according to Barthes. Quaife's desire to help Native culture find expression is meaningless in face of her blindness to the context of her utterance at the present point in history where the Native peoples in Canada are forcefully calling for an end to benevolent paternalism and colonialism and the settlement of their land claims, the acknowledgement of their ancient rights to the possession of the land. In this enunciative instance, Quaife's desire to "make [native spirituality] my own" by "creating myth" is, in its denial of history, an exemplary instance of the perpetuation of colonial exploitation. The grounds on which Quaife claims her authority to do so are the familiar liberal humanist grounds of our common humanity and consequent "empathy," not an acknowledgement of the justice of the Natives' struggle. For this would undermine the universality of "Truth." As Quaife asserts, an emphasis on differences stirs up dissidence. The function of the writer

is to respond to the “shared view of the world” she has with the Natives. “After all, we all bleed the same colour.” This indifference to the many socio-political differences with respect to their relative access to the literary institutions that separate her from the Native writers exemplifies the rhetorical violence with which the dominant discourse denies the legitimacy of the minority of conflating relations of ideological domination with those of economic exploitation.

The irony of Quaife’s position is further compounded when she reveals that this spirituality she wishes to share is her imaginative re-creation: “In order to evoke a very vivid sense of spirituality and recreate native rituals, Quaife did a lot of research into shamanism. While she concedes that she *fabricated* most of the native rituals in the *Bone Bird*, she nevertheless believes that her interpretation of native spirituality is valid” (my emphasis). Valid, it most certainly is, since it reworks the codes of the discourse of British (and French) imperialism and the Canadian development of this discourse as indigenization, and finds its validation in the literary institution as demonstrated in the action of the Writers’ Union on the question of racism. Since it has numerous literary antecedents, it must also be true as revealed knowledge grounded in the authority of the text and the Word. But is it real?

This too is a moot point, since reality is determined by its representations and they are signifying systems, sites not for the production of beautiful things evoking beautiful feelings, but for the production of meanings and positions from which those meanings are consumed, meanings that are defined in a hierarchy systematically ordered within social formations between the dominant and dominated. These conflicts and contradictions are negotiated within social formations in which subjects are interpellated so that the cultural practices through which we make sense of the social process, and the means by which we are caught up and produced by it, are sites of struggle and confusion over partial and conditioned knowledges. The danger is when, like Quaife, we take our fabrications, our partial knowledges for the Truth, and generalize to make it a Truth-for-all. Such a speaking on behalf of, a magisterial discourse *on* another, effectively precludes the circulation of its different partial knowledges as interlocutors.<sup>27</sup>

This struggle over the politics of representation on the issue of race is part of a much larger theoretical debate on relations of power to knowledge: can men theorize feminism, can the bourgeois theorize revolution? Because of the power alignments in the current discursive configuration, any statement of a white on the question of racism will be positioned by that discourse as an utterance on racism rather than as a contestatory utterance, because it perpetuates the discourse of white *on* red, or white *on* black, reinforcing the dominant discourse by blocking the emergence of an emancipatory discourse *of/for* red and/or black and/or brown, yellow, etc. Such discursive practices become oppressive when the group in power monopolizes the theoretical scene and there is no counter-discourse, that is no debate among

differing discourses. To claim that only a woman can write about women or a Native person about Native culture, is to make claims for essentialism that involve the confusion of an analogy between ontology and epistemology, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has pointed out (253). “Resisting ‘elite’ methodology for ‘subaltern’ material involves an epistemological/ontological confusion. The confusion is held in an unacknowledged analogy: just as the subaltern *is* not elite (ontology), so must the historian not *know* through elite method (epistemology).”<sup>28</sup> To maintain these essentialist positions with regards to race and knowledge is to maintain the dominant discourse, albeit in simple inversion, rather than to challenge or change its norms and practices. “If the woman/black/subaltern, possessed through struggle some of the structures previously metonymic as men/white/elite, continues to exercise a self-marginalized purism, and if the benevolent members of the man/white/elite participate in the marginalization and thus legitimate the bad old days, we have a caricature of correct politics that leaves alone the field of continuing subalternization” (253).

Underpinning this inversion is the recognition by the subaltern or dominated that his or her idiom within the dominant discursive formation has not allowed him or her to “*know* his struggle so that he [*sic*] could articulate himself as a subject” (253). Within this hegemonic order, s/he was constituted as object of the knowledge of subjects. However, through struggle, acquiring some of the strategies and structures of the dominant, the subaltern rises “into hegemony,” this process constituting a *dis/placement* of the dominant discourse and strategies of hybridization that undermine its monolithic position of power. Both speaking marginality and speaking against it, exploiting the ambiguity of their within/without position with respect to power, these emerging subjects destabilize institutional practices. That this is beginning to happen within the culture of Native Canadians is, as I shall argue, visible in the recent books *I Am Woman* by Lee Maracle and *Slash* by Jeannette Armstrong, both written from within the political activity of the Okanagan as they challenge dominant institutions and their representations of Native concerns.

While there are many continuities with the earlier cultural productions of Native women, notably in the strategic use of the miscellany, of traditional oral narrative forms, these texts contest their inscription within the symbolic position of mystical orality and Maternal spirituality of the dominant discourse by explicitly situating their texts discursively, as writing of resistance, and historically, within the project of the contemporary Indian movement. Moreover, they are located within new instances challenging the hegemony of the dominant literary institution, within publishing projects run by Natives to diffuse their self-representations. No longer locked into “silence” as a singular oral event or within the confines of a Native language, these texts in English take as their interlocutor the dominant tradition in a polemic which is overtly signalled within the texts. Moreover, although the

dominant discourse clearly reigns supreme, as witnessed by its deployment in support of systemic racism in *The Globe and Mail*, there is emerging in the interruptions of *The Trickster* and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias the beginning of a theorization of the marginalization of Native culture. The theory finds a more sustained development within the texts of Maracle and Armstrong which both extensively analyze the situation of the Native within the context of a politics of decolonization and demonstrate how marginality has been constructed by the hegemonic forces of imperialism and capitalism. But the emergence of this counter-discourse on internal colonialism as a contestatory politics of representation is signalled in the change of form developed by these writers, the romance vision quest of the dominant tradition into autobiographical and confessional modes respectively, as Maracle and Armstrong imitate — and displace — the dominant genres in which the “imaginary Native” has been represented. For critical here, is that these are pre-eminently “historical” narratives.

**B**EFORE ANALYZING THESE TWO TEXTS in more detail, there is an important question that needs to be explored: the power/knowledge nexus as articulated within different theoretical models of discursive formations. If the interpellative powers of representations and discourses are so coercive that one is always subject under the discursive norm, how can it be possible to elaborate alternate practices? How can the subject under the law become a resisting subject? Subjectivity as the subject-position within a discourse is synonymous with subjection, in Althusserian terms.<sup>29</sup> In the clash of values which is played out as a clash of representations how can the totalizing force of power be circumscribed? Where is there a space for knowledges of oppressed minorities that make no claim to universality? The problematics of resisting subjects in subjection is a complex one involving considerations of the potentials for agency exercised within a situation of constraint and of the different models for conceptualizing the interaction of discourses. For this involves the pressing question of the relations between orthodoxy and heterodoxies in the interaction among the hegemonic culture(s) of dominant classes, popular culture(s), and high culture(s). Is the cultural field configured globally as successive levels in a hierarchy from dominant to subordinate classes, as a circulation of reciprocal influences between subordinate and ruling classes, or as cultural dichotomy with absolute autonomy between the cultures of dominant and subordinate cultures? Or, to phrase this problem in another way, how can what is positioned as object “inside” discourse take up a position as subject “outside” discourse? How can there be a position “outside” what is a hegemonic, and hence totalizing, field?

It is in such a double-bind, in such a self-contradictory and ambivalent instance of enunciation that the subordinate “subject” is positioned. But it is by exploring the fissures and cracks which paradox opens in the claims of the dominant discourse that an alternate logic may be constructed, a logic grounded not on the binary codes of the law of the excluded middle, but in the logics of relativity or catastrophe theory with their serial or multiple interactions, their theorizing of chaos. This will open up a view of discourse as a field of contesting knowledges rather than as monolithic, totalitarian imposition of the Law. The time has come, as Chandra Mohanty writes, “to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.”<sup>30</sup>

That one is never “outside” power, because it is “always already there,” does not entail the acceptance of inescapable domination of absolute privilege, maintains Foucault, whose model for analyzing the institutional operations of power in the constitution of knowledges has been a non-Marxist theorization of ideology dominant in literary studies. “To say that one can never be ‘outside’ power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what.”<sup>31</sup> The response of oppressed groups to hegemonic culture is complex and frequently contradictory: accepted, forceably perhaps, in some ways, it is resisted in others. The hegemonic discourse itself may be “marked by tensions and even contradictions” (LaCapra 78). As Foucault conceptualizes the discursive field, it is structured through a number of systems of control and distribution that function as “discursive police” to exclude such contradictions. It is a “system of subjection,” characterized by its dissymmetry.<sup>32</sup> Power functions within systems that produce polymorphous power-effects operative in micro-political climates. Each society, however, has a “general political economy” of truth, “that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, *Power* 130) that induce “effects of power.” Although he argues against a “binary structure” of “dominators” against “dominated” (*Power* 142), Foucault’s focus is on the strategies and techniques of exclusion through which discourses consolidate their power, rather than on the exploration of the conditions for the possible elaboration of new discursive formations. His theory of discourse has as its centre the workings of power, of the global economy — the “system of systems.”<sup>33</sup>

Instead of locating resistance as merely a counter-effect of the networks of power, one may also begin to theorize from a situation of struggle, from the position of the subordinate engaged in lateral as well as vertical struggles. Michel Pêcheux develops the concept of discursive field and argues that no practice or discourse exists in itself; on whatever side, it is ultimately shaped and preceded by what it is opposing and so can never simply dictate its own terms. Meaning exists agonistically: it comes from positions in struggle so that “words . . . change their meaning according to the ‘positions’ from which they are used within the ‘discursive process.’”<sup>34</sup> What is thought within one discourse is related to what is unthought there but thought

elsewhere in another. In this way, “red” means something different in the dominant discourse from what it does in the Native’s discourse of resistance. Institutional and social constraints act through the ordering of words and expressions within discourses. What is at stake in discursive struggles is this ordering and combining of words.

Pêcheux focuses on the processes of imbrication of discourses, their embedding effects and articulations, the structure of “interdiscourse” (Pêcheux 113). Each discourse interpellates individuals as subjects of this discourse. But this subordination-subjection is realized in the subject “in the form of autonomy” (Pêcheux 114). The identification of the subject with him or herself, “the subject-effect,” is coeval with the “inter-subjectivity-effect,” an identification with the subject of another discourse (Pêcheux 118). There are no *a priori* dominant and revolutionary vectors. However, within a given ideological instance under given historical conditions these discursive formations are asymmetrically related to one another. They are, however, “sites of a work of reconfiguration” which may be, variously, a work of “recuperation-reproduction” or a politically “productive” work (Pêcheux 155): they may reinscribe the same and support the reigning discourse or work for change and displacement, redistributions in the discursive field, depending on whether the subject is positioned by the interdiscourse in identification or counter-identification with a discursive formation (158). Significantly, Pêcheux also theorizes a third position not caught up in binary relations of identity/negation. Displacement produces the “disidentification effect” (162) articulated in counter-discourses.

This formulation of a concept of counter-discourse or counter-hegemonic discourse,<sup>35</sup> is important in conceptualizing a vari-directional system. But other theorists have more specifically analyzed literary discourse as a field of centrifugal forces. Most significant among these is Bakhtin, whose conceptualization of the discursive field as one of competing languages of different social groups or “heteroglossia” (“polyglossia” being a competing field of foreign languages within a single national language) is developed through an analysis of fictional forms. Ideology, as Bakhtin/Medvedev outline the grounds for a Marxist study of discourse, would study both the “forms of organized ideological material as meaningful material” and the “forms of the social intercourse by which this meaning is realized.”<sup>36</sup> It is Bakhtin’s initiative towards the classification of these forms of exchange among discourses which develops in greater detail the complexities of “interdiscourse,” the characteristics and forms of imbrication, important for the theorization of counter-discourses. Bakhtin’s work on the interface of signification and communication helps elaborate theoretical models of textual exchanges wherein discourses are displaced and destabilized. Interdiscursive (or intertextual) relations are played out in relations within and between texts, genres and practices. These are contradictory movements of and between discursive sites within what is a “structural model of *uneven* development.”<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin asserts an open and future-oriented poetics, one that would

rethink claims to the mastery of knowledge, and consequently “formulates the conflictual dimension, as the realm of the social determination of the weight and value of discursive elements.”<sup>38</sup> In this, he sets out a materialist theory of discourse in which ideological creation, the production of meanings and values, is realized in historically specific things and actions. “Every ideological product (ideologeme) is a part of the material social reality surrounding man [*sic*], an aspect of the materialized ideological horizon” (Bakhtin/Medvedev, *Formal* 8).

This is central to Bakhtin’s elaboration of the dialogue, a double-voiced discourse which is oriented towards someone else’s discourse. Dialogic interrelationships among signifying discourses within a single context — “relationships of agreement/disagreement, affirmation/supplementation, question/answer, etc. — are purely dialogic relationships, although not of course between words, sentences, or other elements of a single utterance, but between whole utterances.”<sup>39</sup> Intersecting within the double-voicedness are two voices, two accents, two socially distinct practices. These voices may be subjected to re-evaluation when introduced into the first discourse, or even clash with hostility. Sometimes, the other’s word is not incorporated into the discourse, but remains outside though it is taken into account. This is a “hidden polemic” in which “a polemical blow is struck at the other’s discourse on the same theme, at the other’s statement about the same object.” “[T]he other’s words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less than the very topic being discussed, is what determines the author’s discourse” (195). This is an especially significant element of literary discourse which, as Bakhtin says, not only anticipates in advance the objections of its readers and critics, but reacts to a preceding literary style as an “anti-stylization” of it (196).

As well, there is “internally polemical discourse — the word with a sideward glance at someone else’s hostile word” (196). The dialogic or double-voiced discourse — whether parody, irony, parallax, imitation (with a difference), stylization — re-marks convention by incorporating the word of another within it. The characteristic stance of the dialogic text is the one-within-the-other. Points of antagonism overlap, collide and explode. They interrogate boundaries, challenge the hierarchy of sites of discourse, force the threshold and move into the liminal, working the in-between, site of movement and change. In response to the desire for purity of the dominant discourse with its mechanisms of exclusion, they offer textual contamination, ambiguity. For the complexity of their double articulation arises from the fact that the discursive practices are both connected and disassociated: the logic of subject-identity that posits one subject for one discourse for one site or practice is confounded in this concept of discourse as a network of intersecting discourses or intertextuality wherein inside and outside are relational positions with respect to specific discourses not in subjection to a singular power. What such heterogeneity and hybridization effect through permutations and instabilities is the possibility of “shifting the very terms of the [semiotic] system itself” (White 58) by dispersing

and displacing the very possibility of hierarchization. Here the importance of the dialogic for discourses of resistance becomes clear. It establishes a theory of a transformative practice grounded in critique and resistance. For the focus of the dialogic is on change, on bodies and social formulations as s(c)ites of instability and displacement. In these terms, the project of Native writers is not merely inscribed within the dominant discourse as opposition, but is a destabilizing movement in the field of power relationships.

**H**ETEROGENEITY," fractured genres, "polymorphous" subjects, "borderland" sites — these are the marks of "resistance writing" especially as practised by Native North Americans under "métissage" in their within/without relation to the dominant social formations.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, embedded within the historical and material conditions of their production as a politicized challenge to conventional literary standards, resistance narratives are examples of "'heteroglossia,' in their composite forms as historical document, ideological analysis and visions of future possibilities" (Harlow 75, 99). This is indeed a "Manichean Aesthetics," as Abdul JanMohamed has termed it:

Even though an African may adopt the formal characteristics of English fiction, his rendition of colonial experience will vary drastically from that of a European, not only because of the actual differences in experience, but also because of his antagonistic attitude toward colonialist literature. (quoted in Harlow 106)

Like "minor literature," resistance writing draws attention to itself and to literature in general as a political and politicized activity. Immediate and direct involvement in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production is the task it stakes out for itself (Harlow 28). But, as JanMohamed's observation makes clear, this political engagement is co-terminous with "formal experimentation" (96). This is not, however, a formalist project. Rather, experimentation or the exploration of the formal limitations of the literary codes "imposes *historical* demands and responsibilities on a reader" (Harlow 95; my emphasis). Narrative is a way of exploring history and questioning the historical narratives of the colonizer which have violently interposed themselves in place of the history of the colonized. Experimentation, especially with structures of chronology, is part of this challenge, a radical questioning of historiographical versions of the past as developed in the "master narratives," in order to rewrite the historical ending (Harlow 85-86). Archaeology is undertaken for Utopian aims. This results in a-grammatical texts whose palimpsestic mode produces mediations and/or contradictions. Given the ideological function of forms, when they are reappropriated and refashioned in different social and cultural contexts, the generic message of earlier social formations persists, thus producing sedimented structures, complicating the

pressure on the genre for ideological change (Jameson 141). Exhibiting the dis-identification of counter-discourse in their hybridity, these forms constitute “new objects of knowledge” (Said, in Harlow 116) that require new discursive practices in order to analyze them.

A third characteristic of resistance literature is that it be produced within a struggle for decolonization. Contemporary history, Jacques Berque has suggested, is the history of decolonization, the struggle to rewrite history by those without a history (Harlow 4). History as it has unfolded has been the story of what the white man did, histories of colonialism written by imperialists. The struggle over the historical record is seen by all parties as no less crucial than armed struggle. As Frantz Fanon has described this struggle:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its chains and emptying the native's head of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.<sup>41</sup>

This awareness of the dialectical relations of the role of culture and cultural resistance as part of a larger struggle for liberation has involved theorizing differential subject positions for the author. S/he may write from opposing discursive formations and aesthetics: an “aesthetic of oppression and exploitation and of acquiescence with imperialism; and that of human struggle for total liberation.”<sup>42</sup> This struggle for liberation may itself be conducted from different sites with respect to power, each with its own strategies and techniques, from positions of “exile” or “under occupation.”<sup>43</sup> This latter is the more complex, setting up a within/without posture for the writer in struggle under “cultural siege.” In this, as Fanon suggests, the writer must resist both the temptation to universalize and de-historicize the struggle, that is, adopting the perspective of the imperialist, which functions as a strategy of containment for the contestatory culture, and the inverse posture of a “return to the source,” a fetishizing of traditional Native culture as though the relation to the inherited past and cultural legacy had not been rendered problematic by the violent interruption of colonial and imperial history. In this inversion, culture is transformed into artifacts, museum pieces.

Resistance literature, in contradistinction, takes up a position of dis-identification which explores the interference of a struggle for power on the transmission of a cultural tradition. It takes as its starting point the radical fact of its present situation as the culture of a colony. This insistence on the “‘here-and-now’ of historical reality and its conditions of possibility,” is the *sine qua non* of resistance literature (Harlow 16). Indeed, distance, “scientific dispassion,” “academic objectivity,” are rejected by such writers and critics as Kanafani, as postures of isolation and universalization (Harlow 3-4). Central to the struggle is not just an attempt to reconstruct the history of the relations of power between those groups in struggle, by giving access to “history” for those who have been denied an active role in history and its making,

but to transform historiography itself on the contested terrain of (re)writing “history” from the grounds of a “genealogy of ‘filiation’ based on ties of kinship, ethnicity, race or religion, to those of an ‘affiliative’ secular order” (Harlow 22). In the process, however, the objectivity and distance of imperial “affiliative” historiography is “contaminated” by “filiative” genealogies. What is foregrounded is history as narrative, history as telling, history as a process of unfolding of local stories, or provisional truths — narratives that make no claims to universal Truth.

Such an emphasis on the discursive constitution of truth effects a change in value that results from a critical parallax or shift in perspective, one which introduces into a singular discourse a rhetorical plurality or heteroglossia, the introduction of protocols of critique. Change in perspective inflects a disjunction in the relations of perception between the seer and the seen, the subjective “eye”/I and the represented world, as they are related to each other, but also as they relate to the source of perceiving consciousness “outside.”<sup>44</sup> This shift in frames of perception and reference keys different discursive conventions and produces an instability, a confounding of several representations, in what the theory of perspective had taught us to be a hierarchical and fixed mode of relation. Such a functional change in a sign system is, as Gayatri Spivak writes, “a violent event” (In other, 197), a riposte to the “rhetorical violence” (de Lauretis 10) of the dominant sign systems with their positioning of the Native as Other, as token of exchange.

In turn, the disjunction in perception destabilizes the fixity of one’s place in the structure, and consequently opens up “the entire problematic of *representing the other*” (Terdiman 28), the ideological inflection of all representation. Representations are practices, signifying systems, Griselda Pollock reminds us.<sup>45</sup> Representation in its most common sense stresses that images and texts (of trees or persons, for instance) are ordered according to pictorial and/or literary conventions. But representation in a second sense signifies the articulation of the political processes, practices and effects both determining and affected by representational practices. Understood here is Marx’s distinction between “vertreten” where the Subject of Power “speaks for” in the political arena, through a proxy, an orator, the law, and representation or “darstellen,” representation as re-presentation, as in art or philosophy where in writing or on the stage, by portraits or actors, the subjects of the oppressed speak for themselves. This third inflection of representation signifies something represented to, addressed to a reader/viewer/consumer and foregrounds the relations of seer and seen to the economic and political networks which constitute the “outside.”<sup>46</sup> Here the rhetoric-as-persuasion of “vertreten” is displaced by the rhetoric-as-trope of “darstellen”: representation, it is made clear, is always re-presentation, something staged for a specific audience. Although the two modes of representation are unstable and constantly colliding — “the relationship between the imperialist subject and the subject of imperialism is at least ambiguous” (297) — it is important, Spivak contends, to pay attention to “the double session” (279),

to the enunciative instance with its power valences inflecting all presentations of the other. When history presents itself as narrative, as telling, it foregrounds this act of enunciation and thematizes those important questions: who is speaking, to whom, under what conditions. Representation as re-presentation, as narrative *staging*.

**T**HIS INTERRUPTION IN THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION to dissimulate itself is analyzed in slightly different terms by Bakhtin in the contrast he develops between “monologic” speech, totalizing and authoritative which “cannot be represented — it is only transmitted” and dialogism, characteristic of the novel as genre, which is represented speech. The words of others are put into quotation marks, “qualified” and “externalized,” both represented and representing. In this clash of many speech genres, the word is shown as “incomplete” and “conditional.”<sup>47</sup> Such hybridization “appropriates” and “reworks” the other’s discourse redistributively in a mode of “symbolic dissidence” (White 25) or resistance, a mode of “disidentification” (Pécheux). In this double articulation, discursive practices are both connected and disassociated: the logic of subject-identity that posits one subject for one discourse for one site or practice is confounded in this heterogeneity and hybridization.

In different ways, *Slash* and *I Am Woman* thematize this representation as re-presentation or “re-accentuation,” in Bakhtin’s term, by re-writing the conventions of representing the Native. Through her autobiographical “I,” Lee Maracle narrates herself as a political representative for women and for Métis. But this is a complex intertextual game, for interpellated in her title is *I Am an Indian*, an anthology of some of the first Native writing to emerge from the Indian Movement in the sixties.<sup>48</sup> Indirectly, then, she also represents Indianness. Métissage is both theme and narrative mode in Maracle’s text. The hybridization of Armstrong’s text develops through the strategies of fiction writing where, deploying the techniques of the genre for represented speech, Armstrong re-presents the autobiographical narrative of a Native man in quotation marks, interrogated and provisional, staged within an ironic frame produced by the silences and repetitions of this represented speaker.

But the force of their political dis/placement of conventional representational practices is most immediately evident in the contestatory politics thematized in their texts. Indeed the specific frame of their discursive intervention, their critical parallax, is the elaboration of Native Canadian rights within the context of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist politics, both at the local micro-political level, in the discussion of aboriginal land claims as it had become a matter for occupations of cabinet ministers’ offices by participants in a “Youth Conference” (Armstrong 125-28), and as it had become the subject of debate over the extent of these claims among the Okanagan whose reserves, not covered by the Proclamation of 1763,

are not legal (Armstrong 134), but also on a continent-wide level in the emergent political force of AIM (American Indian Movement) whose history and activities during the 1960s and 1970s are outlined through the eyes of Tommy Kelasket in *Slash* and in “The Rebel,” a chapter in *I Am Woman*. Both, indirectly in the first, explicitly in the second, record important events, whether these be the Okanagan tribe’s hard-won moratorium on uranium mining (Maracle 120, Armstrong 235) or the confrontation at Wounded Knee (Armstrong 111-18, Maracle 126).

Both, moreover, explicitly ground this re-visionary historiography in a struggle for decolonialization. One of Tommy’s key insights which he offers to his childhood friend Jimmy, a business administration graduate who can’t find a job, regards the subtle effects of colonization: “Everything that the colonizers do, tells the Indians they are inferior, that their lifestyle, their language, their religion, their values and even what food they eat, is somehow not as good” (221). To avoid “feel[ing] so shitty inside” (222), they admire and imitate the colonizer. What Tommy doesn’t state, though the novel reveals ironically through his silence and his gestures, is that the colonized also lashes out in inexplicable violence which is self-violence. In one of his many outbursts of rage, Tommy earns his nickname “Slash.” Both his violence and his constant movement are the effects of self-hatred. His agitation to “DO SOMETHING” (120) leads him to chafe at directives to do things the “Indian Way”: instead of “peaceful occupation[s], . . . I wanted violence” (126). The framework of decolonization theory allows Tommy (and Armstrong) to view the Native’s situation of powerlessness within a systemic analysis of power relations. Understanding that his problems are not just “personal,” or rather that the “personal is political,” is the political education Tommy painfully and slowly undergoes.

Maracle makes these points about the politics of personal and communal self-destruction more directly:

The busting up of communities, families, and the loss of the sense of nationhood and the spirit of cooperation among the colonized, are the aims of the colonizer. A sense of powerlessness is the legacy handed down to the colonized people for achievement of the aim of the colonizer. LOSS OF POWER — the negation of choice, legal and cultural victimization, is the hoped for result. (120)

It is this powerlessness which produces violence, she argues. That she belongs to a conquered people who are “spiritually dead” is both the effect and the determinant of sexual violence. That an entire culture has been “raped,” has made it impossible for them to love themselves, for Native men to cherish Native women. Admiring the dominant white culture, they adopt its values, seeing only “dark-skinned sensuality” in Native women as Other — the Squaw, not the Princess — raping them and beating them up (52-73, especially 71). Rage against the colonizer is deflected and turned inward on the colonized’s own culture in a process of self-destruction.

Despite the extent of this oppression, this self-division from identifying against the self as Other, Natives have resisted and continue to resist. Indeed, as Maracle

points out, there is a history of resistance parallel to the history of colonization. It is a history which inspires the struggle against destruction of homelands as on Meares Island in the Queen Charlotte Islands (Maracle 120) or in AIM's retracing of the "Trail of Tears" of 1838 when Tribes in the southeastern United States were forced to move to Oklahoma and leave their land for white settlers (Armstrong 96). But resistance comes also through the knowledge of resistance. As Maracle writes: "There is power in knowing" (123). Against the "destruction and expropriation of knowledge," that is, against the practice of colonialism (Maracle 120), Maracle proposes the strategies of de-colonization: "re-writing of history," which is not "betrayal" as it seems to the "elite," but is the rebel altering her conditions, "re-writ[ing] her life onto the pages of a *new history*" (Maracle 121; emphasis added). This is the "re-accentuation" of the dominant discourse in the "hidden polemic," as Bakhtin characterizes the agonistic (dialogic) positioning of utterances and speaking subjects within the discursive system. In Armstrong's novel, the focus of Slash's travels across the continent with the Indian Movement is to reclaim this expropriated knowledge of his history: "I hadn't even heard of it," he says of the "Trail of Tears," "but then I guess that was the point of this whole trip: to educate" (Armstrong 95). His narration is re-presented as an alternate history, a history of struggle, the story of the "many things" that he has seen which, even though he is young, make him feel old in experience. "Few [of his people] have accepted this teacher and taken her gifts." Consequently, he feels compelled to offer his particular view, his "story" for his son "and those like him" (Armstrong 253). Slash justifies his narrative in the framing "Epilogue," which thematizes the instance of enunciation of his personal (hi)story that is representative of his tribal history.

The importance of these two books to re-visionary historiography is that they document the struggle of Natives today within a history of resistance. Writing from a position of "cultural siege," "under occupation," Armstrong and Maracle analyze their position within an active struggle of decolonialization. This is an epistemic break, as we shall see, both with respect to the semiotic field engendering the "imaginary Indian" in white writing on the Native — s/he is historicized not mythologized — nor is it history as timeless myth as in traditional Native "historical" narratives of mystical orality which reify an "original source." Rather it is a new history and historiography different from both, the history of struggle in the 1960s and 1970s in a hybrid narrative mode. This is history as narrating, as telling, in traditional native fashion, but within recognizable dates and events and the conventions of "colonial" history. The narrative conventions of genealogical and affiliative orders of historiography are both operative. Nonetheless, these historical narratives make great demands on the reader for different historical knowledge, one not taught in schools. In this, they foreground their partial — fragmented and interested — knowledges. Examining their challenge to Knowledge and necessarily,

as they forcefully claim, to power, I shall try to identify crucial locations in the texts where they stutter in the articulation of conventions, using these as levers to open out the ideology of colonialist and racist discourse in an act of explication. This will emerge as several fragments that will be read speculatively.

**T**O READ THE SPINE OF THE COVER OF *Slash* and *I Am Woman* is to locate one such disruption of convention, one within the literary institution which mediates the meaning produced by these texts in the field of “Canadian” literature. Generally, along with the writer’s signature and title of the book is labelled the publishing house which has produced the text. On Maracle’s book there is a blank space. While the other textual apparatus of ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is to be found inside on the back of the title page, we are directed there only to “Write-on Press Publishers 1988,” which further investigation reveals to be a publisher set up for the occasion. *I Am Woman* is a self-published book. In this gesture, Maracle takes charge of the mediation of her text so as to overcome the coercive powers of the dominant literary institution which would make her “speak it right,” “speak white” either by refusing to publish her text or by shaping it through the editorial process to fit the conventions of Native life-writing, as happened to Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*.<sup>49</sup> In this gap, and in the acknowledgements where she expresses her debt to “Native people, Palestinians, Chileans, Philipinos [*sic*], Eritreans, Ethiopians, El Salvadorans, Anti-apartheid activists and Black Canadian and American people” (Maracle iv) and dedicates her text “To my children,” Maracle foregrounds the discursive formation in which her text is positioned as one of anti-imperialist resistance to the dominant white, Westernized literary institutions.

Armstrong’s text is also positioned on the margins of the Canadian publishing institution, though its interlocutors are not those engaged in international decolonialization movements, but her tribe, the Okanagans, engaged in struggle over land claims, a fight against “internal colonialism.”<sup>50</sup> On the spine of *Slash*, alongside the author’s signature, is printed “Theytus Books.” This, we learn from the publisher’s catalogue is “Canada’s First Native Indian Owned and Operated Publishing House,” a publishing project with which Armstrong has been closely associated as writer of books for children, *Enwhisteetka* and *Neekna and Chemai*. “Theytus,” so the catalogue informs us, is a Coast Salish word that “translates as ‘preserving for the purpose of handing down.’” With a variety of texts ranging from trivia games on Native lore, to videos, archeological treatises, plays, traditional stories and fiction, Theytus seeks to enlarge the concept of “education” and to produce new knowledge for/by Natives. This too is self-publishing, circumventing the domi-

nant literary institution, in a way, however, with well-produced texts and catalogues, that mimics the dominant institutions. Armstrong's self-description is, in this sense, revealing:

I've never really thought about being a Canadian writer; I've always thought of myself as a Native writer. . . . In terms of Native writers, Leslie Silko and N. Scott Momaday, both Americans, have influenced me. Maria Campbell, who has shown so much endurance, has given me the courage to write. I recently was fortunate to meet Beatrice Culleton who wrote *In Search of April Raintree*. I really have a lot of respect for those two women, who have produced novels of real significance in terms of Native literature in Canada.<sup>51</sup>

Like Maracle, Armstrong is less concerned with writing "authentically," "like a Native," within the semiotic field of the indigene or even within its negation, but in taking up a third position both within and without to create a new cultural community. She is not preoccupied with "Truth," but with good storytelling, with producing the tale to be told over and over.

The emergence of such Native publishing ventures in the 1980s, which has produced the category of "Native Literature in Canada," is the result of the political activism of Native peoples in the 1960s with the founding of such organizations as the National Indian Brotherhood (1968) and the subsequent advocacy of a policy of "Indian Control of Indian Education," as enunciated in a position paper of 1972. The need to establish course materials for such initiatives has resulted in a proliferation of curriculum-related materials, books and tapes. Most of these cultural productions are specific to a Native language group, locality, or Indian Band, and do not trespass on the terrain of the dominant publishing industry. In this way, they figure as negation of the dominant paradigm. Theytus Books and Pemmican Press (in Winnipeg) have adopted a more ambiguous and contestatory position, however, aiming to produce books for the larger Canadian market. Like other publishers operating on this scale, they receive block grants from the Canada Council. Unlike them, however, Theytus is not a capitalist enterprise operated for profit, but is run by the Nicola Valley Indian Administration and the Okanagan Tribal Council under the Okanagan Indian Educational Resources Society.<sup>52</sup> It is primarily, but not exclusively, interested in publishing the works of Native authors and has plans to help such writers through their apprenticeship at the newly established "En'owkin International School of Writing" run in conjunction with Okanagan College and the University of Victoria.<sup>53</sup> In this attempt to open up a space for Native literature within the dominant literary institution, aiming for a general Canadian market, the press has been only partially successful: its audience has been primarily Native people. Moreover, the efforts to reach that audience through educational material for schools has suffered in competition with larger publishing houses such as UBC Press which publish materials with native content. In its

ambiguous material conditions both within and without the dominant economic institutions of publishing, Theytus enters into the hybridization produced also in its texts directed at a dual audience.

Such heterogeneity marks the texts with respect to gender politics as well. It is here that Armstrong and Maracle have developed the most effective interruption into the semiotic field of the Native, have most forcefully resisted being the Other through whom the anglophone Canadian can “go native,” and find her cultural identity. Armstrong especially refuses the binary positions of Princess and Squaw available to her as a woman. Both reject the representation of Native women offered them in the dominant institution as women writers in that they refuse to develop portraits of the powerful Mother-Goddess, source of all wisdom, accessible through Shamanic initiation. Indeed, Armstrong centres her narrative on the retrospective vision of a young man. That this constitutes an open challenge to the Canadian feminist movement which has invested so heavily in representations of Native women as it develops a “radical” feminism, is made clear in the reviews of *Slash* in the feminist press. Typical is the one which, favourable in its recommendation of the book as both “powerful and easy,” a book which offers a “glimpse” at the differing political perspectives of Indian and white politicians, concludes:

One of the puzzling things about *Slash* is why Armstrong, a strong Indian woman, chose to write the story entirely from the viewpoint of a man. We don't get to know any of the women in the novel and the interesting things they are doing politically are glimpsed only through Tom's eyes. I found this somewhat frustrating, but not enough to distract me from the story.<sup>54</sup>

Armstrong has engaged in a hidden polemic with the discourse of white feminists. To the demand of the women's movement in the white community for representations of strong women as the primordial focus of “good” women's writing, Armstrong has replied in a way that foregrounds the complexity of the Native women's political engagement on several fronts, where the struggle against racism is as important as that against gender oppression. That writing is a powerful tool for her as a woman, she is quick to admit:

Men have easier access to other avenues for getting some of their understanding across — politics is one way that they express their resistance and are trying to make change. For Native women that hasn't been available, because of sexism; writing has been one of the only tools available to them. (Freeman 38)

As she points out, to adopt this masculine perspective was a hard choice, but was dictated by the fact that she was writing a historical novel. She is not writing the dominant “romance quest,” though the confessional form fissures the generic purity of the historical novel, dis/placing it toward the mode of self-realization central to the quest genre. This is a quest not for a mythic Origin, but for historical

(f)acts. Though there were some women, like Nova Scotia Micmac Anna Mae Aquash, who played leadership roles in the American Indian Movement, “it was the young Native male who was at the forefront of that movement” (Freeman 36). This is a text which took Armstrong more than a year to research, a chronicle designed to show the change over the past twenty years in Native politics from the strong militancy of the early Seventies to the “more positive approach” today (Freeman 36).

Nonetheless, though no longer the mystical, oracular wise woman, the Native woman remains a strong presence in Armstrong’s fiction. Indeed, the constant quest of Tommy which seems directionless, without *dénouement* in its repetition and perpetual loss, is punctuated by his encounters with strong women who, for a time, give him an education in politics which reorients and centres his life. Crucial here is his meeting with Mardi when he comes out of prison following the fight in which he earned both his symbolic scars and his nickname. Like a will-o’-the-wisp, always somewhere ahead of him in the thick of conflict, her actions reported to him in the rumours and stories of other activists, Mardi introduces him to the Indian Movement and acts as a model of political activity. Later, Maeg, the mother of his son, fulfils the same role as teacher and source of inspiration within the Okanagan community. “A soft intensity” in her presence is what first attracts him to her (Armstrong 225), that and the power in her mother’s words which she speaks to the meeting, words encouraging the group to a position of resistance in continuation of the ways of their forefathers on this question of land rights which they have continuously refused to abrogate in a treaty. Like Mardi, Maeg dies violently in an accident through her engagement in political activity. One way of reading Tommy’s story would be as the narrative of his aimless wandering in the absence of a strong feminine presence: violence rules his life without the power of the grandmothers. This would be to read Armstrong’s fiction as an idealization of the feminine as inspiration and muse. Though there are traces of this narrative, it has been dis/placed, de-mythologized. These are not goddesses, nor medicine women with oracular powers. Indeed, Armstrong forcefully counters such representations of the Native woman as Shaman in her description of Maeg through Tommy’s eyes:

Her hair was thick, brown and wavy. It hung past her shoulder and her skin was smooth and light brown. She hadn’t worn any choker of beads or braids. In fact her clothes were just plain, not the usual ‘radical Indian’ or ‘office Indian’ garb. I hadn’t been able to tell where she stood from her clothes. She was dressed too plain to have been one of those people who were ‘into’ Indian medicine ways, in a cult kind of attitude. (Armstrong 225)

Armstrong here is re/writing the sign of the “imaginary Indian,” in a process of “*making history*” (Maracle 120).

MARACLE'S MAJOR INTERLOCUTOR is the mainstream women's movement which she hails in her title by foregrounding the question of gender in her political analysis. In this, the intersection of struggles over race and gender power alignments appears to be different in her work than in Armstrong's. Nonetheless, Maracle explicitly thanks Jeannette Armstrong and her family for introducing her to the "teachings of our ancient ones, . . . of my grandmothers" (Maracle 43), and to an understanding of spirituality and traditional Native ways. These are located not on an a-temporal, mythological plane, in some pure moment of Origin, but in specific historical and material practices. What is "sacred" is the will of the people, democracy. It is important not only for the Native to practise democracy (Maracle 49) but also to share it with the rest of Canadian society. This European "settler society" has laws which legalize the oppression of the Native, whereas the laws of the Native forbid oppression (Maracle 47). Like Armstrong, who also argues for the importance of Native theories of democracy (Freeman 38), Maracle proclaims the importance of the political in Native spirituality against the "Traditionalism" which has "become the newest coat to cloak their hidden agenda" (Maracle 47). She explicitly rejects an inversion of the semiotic values of the indigene and a fetishizing of tradition that fails to take into account the interruption of imperialist history and the resulting conflict. Here, too, the inexplicable violence of the Native within this semiotic field is shown to be the effect of imperial desire, not something "natural" in the indigene. The importance of the grandmothers in giving love and discipline to help develop self-respect in Native children and interrupt the cycle of self-hatred and self-destruction that is the legacy of colonialism for the Natives, is both human and political, devoid of the transcendentalism and magic of the Grandmother in the semiotic field of the indigene. There are none of the metamorphoses of Copper Woman and her daughters in the activities of Maracle's grandmothers!

Indeed, Maracle attacks head-on the values of mysticism, attributing them to the dominant culture rather than to the Native.

I think that white people who indulgently refer to us as a spiritual people are unable to escape the chains of a parasitic culture. Parasites need a host to sustain them. They cannot sustain themselves. White people produce the stuff of life for white folks. Even in their own land, the majority of farm labor is non-whites or children. Since they rarely work at productive labor that is physical, they cannot conceive of laboriously unravelling their bodily person and discovering their spirit within. (Maracle 149)

As she points out, the way to discover a "spiritual being" is through hard physical exercise: "There is no easy route to spiritual re-birth" (Maracle 150).

Maracle interrupts the semiotic field by exposing the production of its values within specific social practices of exploitation. In this, she analyzes the operations

of symmetrization and inversion operative in the Imaginary relations of White and Native, wherein the former, operating from lack and desire, mis-recognizes itself in an other, which becomes the Other, the absent full presence or plenitude of identity. In the Imaginary, this is represented as a relationship of I/you, of subject/object, which excludes the important social relationships. The contexts of relations of power are objectified and obscured, so that exploitation and oppression are masked when subjects are treated as floating atoms, as objects. These strategies of scapegoating through which a single discourse becomes the dominant discourse are exposed in Maracle's narrative through analysis of their processes. She also disrupts the dominant codes by hybridizing them.

This is especially evident in the case of spirituality which she frames within the transformative process of translation. Discussing the practices of native spirituality, of healing through purification, she interrupts to define the word "Prayer," as begging, pleading. Contrasting Native practices in this regard as being closer to "putting our minds together to heal" (Maracle 148), she outlines the slippage in meaning between Native languages and English. "That is not the equivalent of prayer. However, there is no word for this process in the English language" (Maracle 148). Rather than advocating a return to source and to the "purity" of these languages, she argues for the invention of a hybrid spirituality.

We then must make one up or integrate our own word into the language. English does not express the process of ceremony. Yet, we are forced to communicate within its limits. We must differentiate and define our sense of spirituality in English. (Maracle 148)

The result, however, will be to dis/place the concept of spirituality and prayer in English where instead of a unitary definition it will be polysemic. The translation effect is a "dis-identification effect," the politically productive work of polyglossia functioning here as heteroglossia which disrupts the hierarchization of discourses, English over Native.

While Maracle's text could be said to present the analytical framework for concepts that *Slash* re-presents, it adds an extra dimension, however, in its explicit analysis of the interlocking oppressions of sex and gender. Foregrounding the question of gender in the second chapter, "I Am Woman," Maracle charts the evolution in her thinking on this question as she moves from a belief that "it was irrelevant that I was a woman" (Maracle 16) to her present understanding of the centrality of this denial of womanhood to the imperialist project. Here Maracle also engages in a hidden polemic with Native politics and its effacement of gender. A feminist analysis is central to her theorizing of racial oppression. In refusing a place for women and for love, the Native has played out the colonialist reduction of a people to "a sub-human level" (Maracle 20). Through her analysis she hopes to infuse love into Native communities again and so increase self-respect. This is one of several strategies of "empowerment" (Maracle 113) she advocates which would

re-align the binary axes of this semiotic field so that the Native no longer functions as negative, as Other, for White identity politics.

“Racism is recent, patriarchy is old” (Maracle 23). This is the position from which Maracle now views these as interlocking oppressions. She attacks Native men for standing up to recognize white women when they come into the room and accepting their word as final arbiter while they demand that Native women make written submissions to meetings. Native women are denied the opportunity granted men of defending their opinions in public debate and honing their reasoning skills (Maracle 25). To both white and Native men, women are considered mere “vessels of biological release for men” (Maracle 27). Interrupting the semiotic values of sexuality ascribed to the indigene as “Squaw,” Maracle discusses the strategic importance of interrogating men in public meetings on their sexual activities (Maracle 29). Important in her feminist analysis here is making a distinction between sex and love.

But in raising this issue, Maracle contests the feminist movement too which, she says, has been embarrassed by the word “love” (Maracle 31). While Maracle’s discussion of Native spirituality and her insistence on the primacy of patriarchy as oppression, would seem to make her arguments appealing to North American feminists, as, indeed, its future publication by Women’s Press implies, *I Am Woman* is no text for easy consumption. Maracle challenges the assumptions of dominant feminism, as of left-wing and Native movements, with regards to their attempts to limit and contain the truth claims of Native women. In this frame, the title of Maracle’s book is an ironic staking out of claims to generalize about the oppression of women in face of the women’s movement’s refusal to recognize these truth claims:

No one makes the mistake of referring to us as women either. White women invite us to speak if the issue is racism or Native people in general. We are there to ‘teach’, to ‘sensitize them’, or to serve them in some other way. We are expected to retain our position well below them as their servants. We are not, as a matter of course, invited as an integral part of ‘their movement’ — the women’s movement. (Maracle 20-21)

In this regard, Maracle’s self-presentation also functions as a critical intervention into the discursive formation: she positions herself as the unspeakable, as paradox confounding discursive norms, as Native woman *intellectual*, one, moreover, who is a school drop-out, but who quotes T. S. Eliot (Maracle 88) and writes her text in poetry. “I here, now confess, I am an intellectual . . . I am lonely” (Maracle 130). The second statement is a direct consequence of the first, since Maracle’s position violates all the discursive norms for the category “intellectual.” She has none of the semiotic values that would grant her word claims to Truth. As she writes:

There is nothing worse than being a woman who is dark, brilliant and declassé. Darkness is the absence of natural (normal?) class polish. Admit this, all of you. I laugh too loud, can't hold my brownie properly in polite company and am apt to call shit, 'shit'. I can't be trusted to be loyal to my class. In fact, the very clever among the elite know that I am opposed to the very existence of an elite among us. (Maracle 131)

It is this heterogeneity of Maracle's discourse which disrupts decorum. While her analysis of politics is conducted at times in lucid logic and eloquent, balanced statements, at others it is conveyed in the vulgarity of slang, when she addresses men about "getting your rocks off" (Maracle 29). Analysis alternates with anecdote in embedded stories of many troubled Natives. These in turn are continually broken up by poems which in condensed form probe the contradictory emotions, varying from rage to love, which are expressed in this text.

These violations of decorum are more striking in that they disrupt the unity of tone characteristic of written genres. That Maracle presents her insights and theories in writing is in itself a major intervention in the discursive norm of orality within which are positioned the utterances of the Native. Introducing her text, Maracle self-reflexively focuses on the hybridity of her text as "scraps," "scribble[ing]" on what most people would consider "garbage" — "paper napkins, brown bags and other deadwood paraphernalia" (Maracle 1). Central though is the opposition between orality and writing, developed here not as the privileging of the former, as in the dominant discourse on Native cultural forms, but as a compulsion toward the latter: "writing when I should have been mothering," as she pointedly contrasts (Maracle 9). Although the text is presented as first-person narration, the textual marker of oral narration, this is not presentation, but representation. For the text is a compilation of stories, a miscellany: although they give the illusion of truth, the anecdotes are fictional.

It is the practice of writers to fictionalize reality and prostitute the product of their licentious fantasies. "Artistic license," they call it. (Whoever 'they' are.) Being not different, I have taken both the stories of my life, the stories of other's lives and some pure fabrications of my imagination and re-written them as my own. . . . Usually, when one writes of oneself it is called non-fiction — I dis-believe that. Hindsight is always slightly fictitious. (Maracle 3-4)

Self-reflexively framing her exposition and narrative in this reflection on the displacement of writing, on writing as trace and *différance*, on writing as the construction of fictions of identity, Maracle foregrounds these representations of the Native as re-presentations where rhetoric is trope — the staging of Natives speaking for themselves.

This thematization of the instance of enunciation is central to Maracle's quarrel with the institutions of knowledge which she contests from her position as "intellectual." Writing, especially the writing of history, is a terrain which for her is mined

with the racist texts of the settler society. It is the educational system which valorizes and propagates writing. But it is the educational system where the dehumanizing gaze of the colonizer is most present, teaching the Native child that s/he is a “cannibal” (Maracle 103), effacing her history and replacing it with a mimicry of the colonizer’s narrative. The educational scene as staged by Maracle is a scene of mindless repetition, the Native parroting the anthropologist’s discourse without understanding the language (Maracle 47-48). Here is the “translation effect” of heteroglossia engaged in its most productive work of dis-identification when translation is staged, is re-presented, as a crucial strategy in the colonialist struggle over discursive authority. This scene is also the child reading out of the history book, an “asinine practice” designed to “integrate” the child into European society.

The teacher called my turn. I glanced at the clean white page with black characters all over it. ‘Louis Riel was a madman, that was hanged . . .’. I could not buy that anymore than I could the ‘cannibalism’ fairy tale of fifth grade. I could not forsake my ancestors for all your students to see. (Maracle 111)

Education is the primary thrust of racism, Maracle argues, “[s]chools have showed themselves to be ideological processing plants” (Maracle 113). Rather than abandoning the scene of writing to the settler education system, however, Maracle has taken up the pen to disrupt those representations of the Native as cannibal, as madman, to expose the ideological foundations that are re-produced through such representations. In this, she stakes out a claim for alternate forms of truth: “your knowledge is not the only knowledge we seek” (Maracle 112). These are knowledges that make no claims to the universal since they are elaborated in polemical relation to the settler knowledge which does make claims to be singular Truth. Consequently, they acknowledge their provisionality and partiality.

Maracle’s intervention in the disciplinary norms of historiography effects the dis/placement of bilingualism, the heteroglossia of the translation effect. Running the danger of becoming a “crippled two-tongued slave” as her grandmother warned her (Maracle 85, 109), Maracle is still engaged in addressing the colonizer, trying to explain herself in his logic. But, as she makes clear, the implications of this will disrupt the fixed assumptions of this settler’s language. More than “prayer” will have shifted its meaning: “knowledge,” as we have seen, “intellect” are opening up their semantic fields to include desire, as both passion and engagement. Knowledge, Maracle contends, is always interested, always a site of struggle for contending views. As she comments in conclusion in “last word,” literature is such a field of contesting knowledges. Justifying the emotional range of her writing, Maracle takes issue with the common definitions of “anger” and “sadness” as used by a Native man to characterize Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. In doing so, he was making a case for not displaying such negative emotions since they sell well to “white folks” and perpetuate negative stereotypes of Natives.

To Maracle, Walker's novel is not a "sad story full of hate" (Maracle 189): to hide the rage and madness created by the colonial process is to collaborate in maintaining an equally powerful mythology of the Native as untouched by imperialism whether in an "originary" tribal state or in peaceful assimilation to settler society. These are the "Truth" on the Native which Maracle seeks to disrupt by foregrounding the struggle for decolonization and the elaboration of a hybrid culture. Maracle will no longer collaborate in "whitewashing" history, in "writing r(w)ight." She will not keep silent about the oppression she has suffered. Nor, however, will she collude in the norms of the dominant discourse which values struggle negatively and privileges narratives which work toward unity and harmony in (Romantic) resolution. She will write neither a "long sweet book," nor a "short sad book." Nostalgia has been dis/placed in struggle. Exclusion has not yielded to Utopia, but to the dialectics of history.

**A**RMSTRONG, TOO, SETS OUT TO CHALLENGE disciplinary truths and to question the facts of history as they have been fixed in writing. Like Maracle, she refuses the binary opposition of a mystical orality as guarantor of Truth and stages her challenge to the dominant knowledge in the arenas of education and narrativity. The two are intertwined as they are in Maracle's text, for Armstrong also troubles the easy oppositions of orality/writing even as she denounces the latter as an instrument of oppression when wielded by the dominant educational system.

Significantly, the first narrative scene in *Slash* is situated in a school where Tommy is fooling around in the line-up for vitamins with his fellow grade sixer, Jimmy. This is a one-room school that goes only to grade six. But it is different from the residential school which offers the higher grades in that, as his cousin Joe says, kids there were "beat up for talking Indian" (Armstrong 17). The following year, the Native children are sent to school in town: at once they confront racism. The principal separates the Native children from the whites to talk to them about the rules:

"You Indians are lucky to be here. We'll get along just fine as long as you don't steal from the other kids. I want you all to wait here while the nurse comes to check your heads and ask you some questions. Then I will assign you to classes." (Armstrong 23-24)

Soon the white children in the school are calling them "frigging Injuns . . . nothing but thieves, full of lice" (Armstrong 24). Armstrong outlines the way in which this stereotypical representation of the dirty, thieving savage is produced through institutional practices. The practice of scapegoating, of constructing the Native as

imaginary Other, is analyzed step by step. She also exposes the destabilizing effects this has on the young people as perceived by Tommy's grandfather, Pra-cwa, who comments on the way they have become "ashamed of everything Indian" since they began going to school in town (Armstrong 25).

But the effects of this colonial alienation are extremely varied and complex. Armstrong deliberately eschews easy binary oppositions between the purity of traditional mores and the abasement of assimilation. Some of the Natives live in modern houses with TV's (Armstrong 25), others live more traditionally spending their evenings in storytelling, singing the Coyote Song or in the sweats (Armstrong 22, 37). Commodification and ritualization co-exist as social values. So, too, Natives both attend the Catholic church and are attentive to the teachings of the Creator of Indian spirituality (Armstrong 30).

This heterogeneity of response is especially true of the narrator, Tommy, who comes from a more traditional home where his family speak Okanagan — indeed his grandfather speaks no English — and spend their evenings telling oral tales to which Tommy enjoys listening. But Tommy is also an excellent student at school, learns English easily and is a good reader. The dichotomy between Okanagan/English, between oral/written modes of knowledge is dis/placed in Tommy's narrative as he moves easily back and forth between both modes of cultural production. He offers the dates, facts and analytical mode of imperial history as he recounts the events of the 1960s and 1970s, including the confrontation at Wounded Knee and the march on Ottawa. But these are presented in a disjointed manner with many repetitions, empty moments and embedded "oral anecdotes." Indeed, the circular form of the narrative with its opening and closing sections situated self-reflexively in the narrating instance, when Tommy explains his narrative goals and strategies, foregrounds this narrative as an oral performance that is paradoxically represented in writing. This framing device, however, introduces quotation marks to distance the reader from the tale unfolding in that its status as artifact is exposed. This is a staged representation, history as narrative, history as telling. Like Maracle's personal narrative, this too is a mixture of genres, not the ethnographical autobiography told to the white man, but the Native confessional mode developed in the Indian Movement crossed with the oral anecdote, and framed as self-reflexive written fiction foregrounding its narrative strategies. While on the one hand the text might be seen to develop generic links with postmodern historiographic metafiction, to adopt Linda Hutcheon's terminology, on the other, it shares generic features with a Native genre Armstrong much admires, "political oratory" (Freeman 37).

This hybridization is self-reflexively staged in the opening chapter in the oral tale (cautionary fable?) told by Tommy's cousin Joe, who is both a medicine man and a gifted tale-teller. The tale of "Hightuned Polly" and her dog that she "babied like some white woman do [*sic*]" (Armstrong 19) is a tragi-comic tale about the

perils of imitating the ways of the colonizer. At a stampede, Polly's dog is in heat so that she is followed by a crowd of dogs wherever she walks carrying her dog. To stop this, Polly sews a buckskin pant for her dog. The following morning she finds her dog, a hole chewed in the pants, and a crowd of visitors surrounding her. But this narrative may also be read as a fable of the dis/placement produced by cultural heterogeneity, a *mise en abyme* of Armstrong's own narrative. For the blending of cultural conventions here, the pampering of the dog but the failure to limit its fertility through neutering produces in/appropriate effects. These frustrate appropriation, however. The unbridled fertility of Polly's dog, despite the attempts to limit and constrain sexuality, reinforces, even as it counters the stereotype of the promiscuous savage. For there is both nothing and everything "natural" about this promiscuity. This is a translation-effect of laughter-producing heteroglossia: repetition with a difference works here to dis/place the identity politics of verisimilitude and mimesis by emphasizing contradiction and paradox, the heterogeneous truths of *mimesis tekhné*, of mimicry. While this is presented as an oral tale, one of the "good stories [which] came out towards morning" (Armstrong 19), and as performance disrupts the economy of the trace, of writing, this is no "traditional" oral tale related to religious beliefs like the myths collected in so many anthologies of Native stories, but a contemporary carnivalesque anecdote which deals with the dilemmas of colonialism. Still, it invites allegorical reading and, in this, offers truth as interpretation, fiction as the way to (f)act.

While this anecdote, strategically placed in the first chapter, "The Awakening," emphasizes the historical importance of narrative truth in Armstrong's novel, the fiction/fact opposition is undercut along with the oral/written binary by the positioning of this story in the middle of an all-night conversation where the main issue is the problem of assimilation and the principal narrative strategy is dialogue and political debate. Tommy's family is trying to decide what position to adopt at a meeting in Kamloops of all the Indian tribes in B.C. where a decision is to be taken on voting for "who was going to be the white man's leader," Diefenbaker, in this case. Tommy's grandfather, Pra-cwa, a "headman," argues against suffrage on the grounds that they wouldn't want the white people voting for their Chief. "We live different than them and they live different than us." On the contrary, as Tommy's uncle reports, "some Indians think it's okay. Some of them in the North American Indian Brotherhood want to vote. They say it'll do some good. They say we would get a better deal on our lands." However, Pra-cwa fears they "could be getting ready to sell us out of our reserves and make us like white people" (Armstrong 18). Against this cultural interpellation which comes through "paper laws" — all the apparati of the state and its educational institutions — the opening chapter sets out a coded system of oppositional values from Native culture. But the narrative refuses to draw an imaginary boundary between the two antagonistic

cultural codes, deploying them instead in such political debates and carnivalesque parody which serve to collapse differences.

Though they are made to seem similar, these cultural codes produce different subject positions for the Native. Through policies such as enfranchisement (18), taxation (19), regulation of alcohol distribution (20) and the “white paper” (28), the state enforces Native assimilation through dependency. Cultural stereotypes are another source of infantilization and consequent racism, as in Hollywood representations which come through the television and educational systems: “Like one teacher, who explained what she wanted in slow Hollywood talk. She said, ‘You fix’um little story, Tommy, about how you live.’ To the other kids she had asked, ‘Please prepare a short biographical sketch of yourself’” (Armstrong 38-39). This rhetorical violence produces subjective violence for the Native interpellated into this discourse. But should he identify against himself with the white culture and opt for assimilation, he still faces alienation. Consequently, the narrative line of this apprenticeship story is feathered, divided. Tommy is offered a choice that is a non-choice as he advances in chapter 2 to “Trying It On.”

Whether “it” is embracing the materialism of white culture and becoming assimilated to its master narrative of development and progress or opting for the pastoral containment of the “old ways” of traditional Native culture is ambiguous. Instead, Tommy’s growth is measured by his increased skill in reading, in interpretation. When he was a child, he could decode the English words of the “white paper” to read to his father and grandfather (Armstrong 18). As he grows older, his hermeneutical skills develop through learning to read cultural codes for their ideology of racism. Increasingly, this places him in a difficult position with respect to his people, seeing more than many, unable to steer a clear course of action between two alternatives which seem more and more similar, equally dubious. In the final pages of the novel, this brings him into conflict even with his wife Maeg over the issue of Native rights in the Constitution. Maeg argues: “This is a people’s mission. We care for our rights and our land and we have a child. Maybe more than that, we have to clear the future for him. Nobody is looking out for our rights so we all have to do what we can. . . . That’s why I’ll go on that express and carry a sign that says, ‘CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS FOR OUR CHILDREN’” (Armstrong 236). With its focus on the future, Maeg’s position entails a narrative of progress. While he acknowledges the importance of their rights to practise their ways and the need to alert public opinion to do something to protect them, Tommy is “uncomfortable about the whole thing” and reserves judgement till he can talk things over with the old people. By the time the trip is half over, he has managed to articulate his nagging doubt. He has perceived a split between the Indian politicians who are leading the caravan and the people who are singing to a different tune, one called the “Constitution Song”: “We don’t need your Constitution, B.C. is all Indian land. We don’t need your Constitution, hey yeah hey. . . . How much clearer

can it be?" he asks. "We don't need anybody's constitution, what we have is our own already. We hold rights to the land and to nationhood. We just need to have it recognized. We want to keep it" (Armstrong 241).

What he has recognized are the racist strategies of the state bullying the Natives into ceding all their land rights by threatening to leave them out of the constitution unless they "negotiate." Power is in the Natives' hands though, if they can just wait, for their bargaining power is ownership of the land. They are a sovereign people, not colonized Indians. But Slash's attempt to convince the leaders of the strength of their position and the danger of negotiation is met with ridicule. They laugh at him and treat him as though he were crazy (Armstrong 242). His wife Maeg continues to argue with him that Canada will not go away and that his way will only cause more hardship, "strife and bitterness" for the people (243). She also continues to work with the "Constitution Express." Her initial joy at their success in having aboriginal rights recognized later evaporates and she comes to share Tommy's view with others. For him, the agreement promises a dark future, one with the Natives as "second class citizens instead of first class Indians" because without land they would be nothing.

Many of our leaders would be lining up to get compensation on their lands. That would be the worst devastation of all. Our rights would be empty words on paper that had no compassion for what is human on the land. I saw what money and power could do to our gentle people and I felt deep despair. Nothing much would remain after that to fight for. Nothing to heal our wounds in the fighting. We would no longer know freedom as a people. We would be in bondage to a society that neither loved us nor wanted us to be part of it. (Armstrong 248-49)

In this conclusion to the novel, in the chapter "We Are a People," it is clear that no "resolution" has occurred between the antagonistic discursive formations of the opening chapters. No progress has been achieved in advancing the Native cause. Natives still remain divided within themselves and, more strategically, as this political novel demonstrates, among themselves. The most devastating impact of racism has been to divide Native peoples in order to assimilate them more easily. For the seeming opposition between white cultural codes and Native ones turns out to offer no choice at all. The choice to assimilate into progress or to fetishize tradition is ultimately the same choice: to remain caught in a binary antagonism between a hegemonic discourse and its inverse, a counter-hegemonic discourse. What Armstrong's novel does, through the represented speech of Tommy, however, is to show the necessity for a third way, for a position of dis-identification where one may signify otherness yet refuse the trope of subordination.

There are all kinds of us from the Native Alliance for Red Power working on this. The Beothucks are a symbol to us. They were a tribe of Indians on the east coast that were wiped out so the land could be open for settlement. You see, there was a bounty placed on them by the government and they were hunted down to the last

one. That's how we fit into this society. They just want us out of the way, no matter how. It's called genocide. It's what's happening to our people right now. We are dying off because we can't fit in. Help is progressive. The ones that are just brown white men. The ones that fit in. Soon there will be no more true red men, with their own beliefs and ways. There is nothing wrong with our ways. Just because our people hate to be grabby, just because they don't knock themselves out like robots at nine-to-five jobs, and they don't get too excited about fancy stuff or what I call luxuries, they are looked down on and treated as outcasts and called lazy. Or else they get like us. They get angry inside and fight back somehow. Usually they end up dead, in prison or drunk. All of these lead to genocide of our people. You see they only give us two choices. Assimilate or get lost. A lot of us are lost. We need to make a third choice. That's what Red Patrol is about. (69-70)

Though Red Patrol is no longer an answer to the problem by the end of the novel, the necessity for a third position, one not established by the dominant discourse as its negation, is sited in a discourse of critique. Grounded in the interpretation of discourses, in the reading of codes, this hermeneutical activity is similar to the discourse of the analyst, attentive to desire in knowledge, the antithesis of the discourse of mastery.<sup>55</sup> As such, it foregrounds the passionately engaged nature of knowledge, implicitly criticizing the totalizing Truth claims of the discourse of mastery. Critique as the terrain of resistance.

There is no "solution" to the political problem, no binding moment of illumination in this novel, only continual struggle to find a third position, constant questioning of assumptions. Similarly, there is no fictional closure, no re-solution, for the narrative circles around in its end to the beginning, that is, to the instance of enunciation where the narrator explains his need to tell his life story in order to provide a permanent record of the history of struggle. Whereas the Prologue opens with a focus on the act of narrating ("As I begin to write this story") and on the narrative as feigning ("The characters in this novel are fictitious. . . . The events are based on actual events but are not meant to be portrayed as historically accurate [13]), it ends with a poem, a lyric on the evanescence of nature, and so poses a problem in interpretation for the reader. Between historical fiction and the wind's displacement of all signs, there has been no progress, no development and almost no action: the narrative is composed mainly of reported speech. In short, this has been a "flat" book not likely to make the best-seller list in Canada. Repetition is an important rhetorical feature in Native oral narrative. Indeed, a-chronological ordering of material is a characteristic feature of Native "autobiography." But such repetition is routinely removed by white editors of such autobiographies to align them with the dominant codes of self-representation.<sup>56</sup> The formal experimentation of Armstrong and Maracle with structures of chronology challenges the limitations of the generic codes of the white colonizer's master historical narratives, not as formalist project, but to re-write the ending of the historical record. That the major challenge of the Native is to make the settler society understand that s/he has a history, that

Native culture has undergone development and change over time and is not “‘primitive’ and therefore without a ‘history,’ is necessary before Native culture can be perceived to have ‘art history,’” and therefore be part of the movements in art that have produced “‘high art.’”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the Native must challenge the codes of settler society to show that there is time, and consequently, meaning in her/his narratives. The fact that there is a Native history must be established in order to decentre the values of origin, primitivism, and mysticism that have configured the Native in the discourse of indigenization. “It is crucial,” we have read in the opening lines, that the narrating “I am an Indian person” (13), crucial, we come to realize, because the cultural discourse legitimates fictional form.

**F**ORM, AS BAKHTIN HAS SHOWN US, is always a message in a specific socio-historic configuration. Moreover, as he suggests, the inherited canons and modes of representation of the Western literary tradition do not permit an aesthetic based on performative values. Its high canonical genres are known “in their completed aspect” (*Dialogic* 3). The novel alone is developing in history. In this, it provides a critique of the fixity of genres by exposing the conventionality of their forms through parody. *Slash* re-accentuates the plot of growth and development characteristic of both the bildungsroman of the cultural hero and the histories of new nations (“Canada: the Building of a Nation”): both its lack of change and its palimpsestic mode are hidden polemics with the myth of progress, an implicit critique of this trope of imperialism.

But Armstrong’s historical narrative challenges historiography on yet another ground, that of its truth claims. Knowledge is not Truth hidden in pre-existent facts to be discovered and reconstructed in language, but truth to be staged, constructed in the telling, “true simply as a consequence of being stated.”<sup>58</sup> The two types of truth, historical truth and narrative truth, are established on different grounds, in contrasting criteria of accuracy and adequacy, and deployed in different narrative modes, “plain” as contrasted to “significant.” In the former, observation language, description, is important, for it enables the verification of the logical connection between events. In the latter, these connections are outwardly invisible, present as “narrative fit,” that is, the narrative account seems to provide a coherent explanation of the events in question. Nothing relevant is omitted, everything irrelevant is excluded. The pieces fit into an “understandable Gestalt” (Spence 182). Narrative may be thought of as a kind of theory that “represents an interpretation of a particular meaning,” a meaning “dependent on the observer’s system of interpretation” (Spence 292). The problem of establishing general rules is great, for when interpretations are narrative rather than veridical, the hermeneut functions more as pattern maker than pattern finder (Spence 293). Interpretation is “crea-

tive" (Spence 177). As Maracle wrote about Native historiography as narrative: it is "re-writ[ing] history . . . re-writ[ing] her life onto the pages of a new history." This is the rebel "mak[ing] history" (Maracle 120-21).

Critical to this shift in frames of perspective in historiography is the narrative strategy of the fictionalized participant focalizer. For unlike the conventional historical narrative of knowledge as verifiable, pre-existent Truth, written from the distant, objectified position of a non-participant observer, both these narratives are the representations in quotation marks of political presentations by partisan narrators. The shift in frames of perception from outside to inside, from the eye to the I, inflects a disjunction in the relations of perception and representation, which establishes the grounds for this process of unfolding local stories, provisional truths. But such autobiographical narratives are a double challenge to discursive formations. As well as confronting and exposing the codes of settler historiography, these autobiographies break with the codes of Native "tradition." Autobiographies are "not a traditional form among Native peoples but the consequence of contact with the white invader-settlers, and the product of a limited collaboration with them."<sup>59</sup> The first Native autobiographies were "told-to" narratives, the joint "collaboration" of an ethnographer or missionary and a Native. As such, their very textualization is a function of Euramerican pressure. They are, moreover, more properly "scientific" or "factual," than "literary," as is the case of autobiography in the canon of English literature. In this, they are the narrative of a "representative" of their culture, their story emphasizing the individual only in relation to her/his social roles, not as distinctive individual. The Native autobiography is consequently in its formation a double-voiced discourse, the collaboration of two persons of different cultures, modes of production and languages. In this, the Native autobiography is a heterogeneous, hybridized form. Consequently, it stands in opposition to the settler society with its literary norms of "ego-centric individualism, historicism, and writing" (Krupat 29). When the written autobiography is utilized by a living person to present her/his Native voice not as vanished and silent, but as living and able to articulate her/his differences, it presents itself as contradiction. Consequently, the autobiography holds potentials for challenging the discursive norms of the discourse on the indigene while dis/placing the fetishizing of Tradition.

For in the telling of an autobiographical narrative, a speaker posits herself/himself as the subject of a history, as the subject of a sentence, as "I." As Benveniste has shown, subjectivity is linguistically and discursively produced. "I," though, cannot be conceived without the conception of the "non-I," "you." Consciousness of self is possible only through contrast, through differentiation. Dialogue, the fundamental condition of language, implies a reversible polarity between "I" and "you" which are empty positions, shifters, marking the difference between now and then, here and there. "Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself [*sic*] as a *subject* by referring to himself as I in his discourse."<sup>60</sup> But since language

is a system of differences with no positive terms, "I" designates only the subject of a specific utterance.

The basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language. "If one really thinks about it, one will see that there is no other objective testimony to the identity of the subject except that which he himself thus gives about himself" (Benveniste 226). Since language itself differentiates between concepts, offering the possibility of meaning, it is by adopting the position of subject within language that the individual is able to produce meaning. When learning to speak, one learns to differentiate between "I" and "you," and to identify with the first-person subject-position. Subsequently, one learns to recognize oneself in a series of subject-positions (boy or girl, white or red, writer or reader, etc.), which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to itself and others. Subjectivity is thus a matrix of subject-positions which may be inconsistent or even in contradiction with each other.

For this movement across the bar of language from signifier to signified occurs, as Lacan has shown, in the Imaginary, when the subject recognizes itself in a misrecognition of the self as other, in contradiction. By cross-identifying in this way with the Subject, the subject is constituted as subject in ideology, according to Althusser, positioned within the social discourses available to the subject. Given that the coherence of the sign and of the predicate synthesis are the guarantors of the unity of the speaking subject, as Kristeva argues, any attack against the sign — or syntax — is the mark of a re-evaluation process vis-à-vis the speaking subject's unity.<sup>61</sup> Writing history from the perspective of the subject in the process of making herself a subject through the constitution of an interlocutor, a community of readers, the "you" who bring her into being as subject, is to enact such a sign crime that destabilizes the unity of the subject of the dominant discourse of history, constructing a different subject of (hi)story, a critical subject, the Native storyteller as "storian." Rather than offering a historical product, these fictions unfold an epistemological process, a way of knowing through telling and reading, and an existential process, a way of forming an identity through discourse.

It is through such strategies of dis/placement and decentering of available subject-positions that these two Native writers have challenged established canons of address and representation. Through their re-presentation of their political agenda as feminists and Natives, framed and staged as provisional narrative truths, Maracle and Armstrong have signified their otherness in the very act of refusing the trope of subordination. By locating interlocutors both within and without the Native community, by writing hybrid texts that address both audiences as "you," they have constructed a complex subject-position for themselves, frequently contradictory, as Slash and Maracle's narrator knows well, but one that allows for the creation of a third position, a transformative practice, one of analysis and critique of the dominant binary discourses on the indigene. They are self-consciously entering the dialogical fray surrounding the "silenced" subject of racism. Quite literally, Maracle

and Armstrong are storytelling for their lives. To write the story that will be told over and over, to create that community of "yous" to respond to their narratives, this "writing re(a)d" will discursively constitute both themselves as authors and their critiques of racism as provisional truths. In this, they will have begun to write the other, otherwise. Other, that is, from the perspective of the *dominant* discourse within which I write.

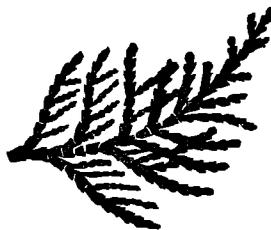
## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Thanks to Richard Dellamora and Julia Emberley for their dialogue on this question during the spring.
- <sup>2</sup> Rebecca Belmore, "Ihkewhak Ka-ayamihwat: Means Women Who are Speaking," *Parallelogramme*, 14.4 (Spring 1989), 10-11.
- <sup>3</sup> "Contemporary Art By Women of Native Ancestry," York Quay Gallery, 1-30 September 1989, "Edward Poitras: Indian Territory," Powerplant, 1 June-10 September 1989.
- <sup>4</sup> This play will receive full-scale production by Nightwood Theatre and Passe Muraille in the 1989-90 season.
- <sup>5</sup> There is promise of continuity too, with two projects underway to produce anthologies of Native women's writing, Sylvia Vance and Jeanne Perreault collecting for a NeWest collection (1990) as well as the Ts'eku collective in Vancouver producing "Native Women: Celebrating Our Survival" with Press Gang.
- <sup>6</sup> I quote here from the posters and application forms for the series of workshops 14 January to 19 June 1989, Committee to Reestablish the Trickster, 9 St. Joseph Street, Toronto.
- <sup>7</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the Native copyright system where the right to tell a story is exchanged within a context of the acquisition of ritual knowledges, see my *Talking About Ourselves: The Literary Productions of the Native Women of Canada* (Ottawa: CRIAW, 1985).
- <sup>8</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as A Social Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 106.
- <sup>9</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 140.
- <sup>10</sup> Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 128. Representations, it should be remembered, are signs, a relationship of a signifier to a signifier within a system of differences, as Saussure formulated the process of signification. Meaning is produced in a network of differences not through reference to a "real Indian." As Peirce affirms, a sign can only be received by another sign, an interpretant, in a chain of semiosis.
- <sup>11</sup> The literary institution also offers many more subject-positions as reader, as teacher, as historian, etc. As well as the individual genres, texts offer different subject-positions for authors and readers.
- <sup>12</sup> Sheelagh Conway, "Women writers in Canada: 'a bleak picture,'" *The Globe and Mail*, 26 May 1989. Conway's statistics come largely from Anne Innis Dagg's book, *The 50% Solution: Why Should Women Pay for Men's Culture* (Waterloo, 1986).

- <sup>13</sup> Marlene Nourbese Philip, Letter to the Editor, *The Globe and Mail*, 17 June 1989, D7.
- <sup>14</sup> H. J. Kirchoff, "Second Story publishes fiction that caused friction," *The Globe and Mail*, 31 July 1989, C7.
- <sup>15</sup> Ann Wallace states that they were told the University of Toronto Press had too many accounts and would be adding no new presses. Subsequently, Second Story joined them.
- <sup>16</sup> H. J. Kirchoff, "Writers reject bid to study plight of minorities in publishing," *The Globe and Mail*, 30 May 1989, A19. This title in itself signals the slant of the article to the dominant group under the aegis of *noblesse oblige*.
- <sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), 131.
- <sup>18</sup> To reproduce these jokes would be to reinscribe this racist discourse. The interested reader may find them in the newspaper.
- <sup>19</sup> Himani Bannerji, Prahba Khosla, et al., "We Appear Silent to People Who Are Deaf to What We Say," *Fireweed*, 16 (1983), 11.
- <sup>20</sup> Rayna Greene, "The Pochahantas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," *Sweetgrass*, 1 (July/August 1984), 19.
- <sup>21</sup> As Saussure has shown, meaning and value are produced in a differential network of binary oppositions through the logical operations of selection and combination.
- <sup>22</sup> Jeannette Armstrong, Maria Campbell, and Beth Cuthand, "Writing from a Native Woman's Perspective," *Women and Words*, Vancouver, July 1983.
- <sup>23</sup> For further discussion of these archetypal patterns using Native Canadian material see the texts by Annis Pratt, "Affairs with Bears," and by Gloria Orenstein, "Jovette Marchessault: The Ecstatic Vision-Quest of the New Feminist Shaman" in *Gynocritics/Gynocritiques: Feminist Approaches to the Writing of Canadian and Quebec Women* (Toronto: ECW, 1987).
- <sup>24</sup> For a fuller discussion of the clash between white and Native "images of the squaw" see my "Listening for the Silence: Native Women's Traditional Narratives," in *The Native in Literature: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Thomas King, Helen Hoy and Cheryl Calver (Toronto: ECW, 1987), 133-73.
- <sup>25</sup> Fee, in King 24. For further analysis of the Native as sign of Canadian nationalism in the making, see my analysis of the search for a Canadian language as Anglo-Ojibwa in "The Oral Tradition and National Literatures," *Comparison*, 12 (1981).
- <sup>26</sup> Isabel Vincent, "Celebrating native spirituality: Writer feels society can learn from native ways," *The Globe and Mail*, 10 June 1989, C9.
- <sup>27</sup> As Lacan outlines this discourse of mastery, it is the "tyranny of the all-knowing and exclusion of fantasy," a discourse which "gives primacy to the signifier (S1), retreat of subjectivity beneath its bar (S), producing knowledge as object (S2), which stands over and against the lost object of desire (a)," *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982), 161.
- <sup>28</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 253.
- <sup>29</sup> For a detailed examination of the predominance of models of the subjected subject see Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- <sup>30</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," *Boundary 2*, 12.3-13.1 (1984), 354.

- <sup>81</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon, et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 141-42.
- <sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), especially pp. 37, 43, 47.
- <sup>83</sup> Ironically, he describes these operations of exclusion within the dominant discourse of eurocentric racism: the place of disciplinary Truth is contrasted with the place of non-Truth, "une exteriorité *sauvage*" (Foucault, *Ordre* 37; my emphasis).
- <sup>84</sup> Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics, and Ideology*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 112.
- <sup>85</sup> The first term is that of Pêcheux, 157. The second is the formulation of Abdul R. JanMohamed, "Colonialism and Minority Literature: Toward a Definition of Counter-Hegemonic Discourse," *Boundary 2*, 1984, 281-99. The term originated with Gramsci, "counter-hegemonic ideological production," quoted in Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 14.
- <sup>86</sup> M. M. Bakhtin and P. M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method of Literary Scholarship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 9.
- <sup>87</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 196 (emphasis added).
- <sup>88</sup> Wlad Godzich, "Introduction," *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, M. M. Bakhtin and P. M. Medvedev (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), xiii.
- <sup>89</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 188.
- <sup>90</sup> Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 98; Paula Gunn Allen, *Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 78; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987), 4.
- <sup>91</sup> Frantz Fanon, "Sur la culture nationale," *Les damnés de la terre*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Maspero, 1968), 144 (my translation).
- <sup>92</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Literature in Schools" (1981), quoted in Harlow 8.
- <sup>93</sup> Ghassan Kanafani, *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*, quoted in Harlow 2-3.
- <sup>94</sup> Richard Terdiman, "Ideological Voyages: Concerning Flaubertian Dis-orientation," in Francis Barker, *Europe and Its Others* (Colchester: Univ. of Essex, 1985), 28.
- <sup>95</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 6.
- <sup>96</sup> Pollock (6) elaborates here on K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852). An analysis of Marx on two modes of representation is also to be found in Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 271-313. Helpful in my formulation of this discussion of the double scene of representation was an unpublished text by Sarah Harasym.
- <sup>97</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), 344 and 45.
- <sup>98</sup> *I Am an Indian*, ed. Kent Gooderham (Toronto: Dent, 1969).

- <sup>49</sup> Campbell describes the reshaping activities of an editor in debate at Women and Words, July 1983. "Writing from a Native Woman's Perspective," tape. Maracle's book is soon to be republished by Women's Press.
- <sup>50</sup> This concept has been used in Canadian political analysis to explore the inferior economic situation of Québécois and, more recently, as a model for the position of Native peoples in Canada in a state of "cultural siege." Kenneth McRoberts, "Internal Colonialism: the Case of Quebec," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2.3 (July 1979), 293-318.
- <sup>51</sup> Victoria Freeman, "Rights on Paper: An Interview," *Fuse*, March-April 1988, 37.
- <sup>52</sup> Information on the history and practices of Theytus Books in Iris Loewen, "Native Publishing in Canada" (unpublished paper, 1987). For this and other relevant material, I thank Viola Thomas of Theytus Books.
- <sup>53</sup> H. J. Kirchoff, "Wanted: native Canadians who want to learn to write," *The Globe and Mail*, 6 July 1989, C10.
- <sup>54</sup> Sally MacKenzie, "Glimpsing the Native View," *Images: West Kootenay Women's Paper* (Summer 1987), 12.
- <sup>55</sup> As Lacan formulates it, the discourse of the analyst focuses on the question of desire, gives primacy to the object of desire (a), over and against knowledge as such (S<sub>2</sub>), which produces the subject in its division as the structure of fantasy (S), over the signifier through which it is constituted and from which it is divided (S<sub>1</sub>) (Lacan 161).
- <sup>56</sup> H. David Brumble III, *American Indian Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 11.
- <sup>57</sup> Joan M. Vastokas, "Native Art as Art History: Meaning and Time from Unwritten Sources," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21.4 (1986-87), 7-35, especially p. 8.
- <sup>58</sup> Donald P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 177.
- <sup>59</sup> Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), xi.
- <sup>60</sup> Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary E. Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), 225.
- <sup>61</sup> Julia Kristeva, "The Speaking Subject," in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1985), 215.



# SONG ON STARLING STREET

*Daniel David Moses*

**The blizzard  
flies into the face of the rush  
hour.**

Headlights, streetlights  
blink  
on but do no good. The night

comes to ground  
with talons. It takes too  
long to get

home  
through such cold. The world  
is slush where no one lives

to grow old. Push in  
to a side  
street where a dark

untenanted department  
store provides  
a lee.

How it spreads out  
over your head  
like a wing. Snow

comes  
down like bright  
down around you under the one

streetlight here. Cries  
also descend  
from that starling

flock that contends along  
the sills.  
In your palm, storm

turns clear, turns calm  
and in your ears argument  
sings:

*Come  
take your rest here  
in the nest of Charity!*

## BREAKDOWN MOON

*Daniel David Moses*

So you say Goodbye  
to the Moon instead.  
That's easier done.  
She loses her head  
right on schedule.

You know just when to  
expect the last bit  
of light going out  
of her profile. You  
know not to expect

expression there for  
a little while. You  
know how soon she'll set.  
But who could predict  
your sister doing

this similar thing,  
the bad news ringing  
at midnight and you  
ending up up and  
talking to the Moon?

*Grandmother, you say.  
What can I do? What's  
left of your daughter's  
full face is falling  
through my arms like snow.*

Then the Moon's does too,  
through the arms of some  
hickory tree. Why  
do you even try  
to hold on to them?

By now you should know  
how their faces go,  
how the Moon renews,  
how soon your sister  
should manage Hello.

## BLUE MOON

*Daniel David Moses*

Look, Mom, how the second full moon this month rises  
through its purpler side of the dusk not quite a ghost

because of the colour of its face — purplish now  
as if it has had as hard a time breathing as

Granpa did. Oh I know you can't sit down beside  
the moon on its bed, hold its hand, feel its forehead

— not while riding along the highway on the way  
to the bus I'll catch back to the city. Perhaps

that's good. Perhaps we should keep away from the way  
the moon's also losing its colour. But it's much

prettier than the way Granpa lost his — and no  
need to worry about burying it. See how

it rises without all that, how its face gets pink  
as the blanket Granpa had on his bed the last

time I visited. You know how he always said  
*What can I do you for?* You know how it put you

at ease? Well tonight, Mom, the moon's here, easily  
breathing a similar light out into the air.

# BORDER WORK

*Celia Haig-Brown*

“We take the explanations we produce to be the grounds of our action; they are endowed with coherence in terms of our explanation of a self.” — GAYATRI SPIVAK<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction*

In a recent interview, Clifford Geertz says, “Some younger anthropologists have become so determined to expose all their potential biases, ideological or rhetorical, that their writings resemble confessionals, revealing far more about the author than about the putative subject.”<sup>2</sup> In this paper I present some important personal details reflecting the conflict inherent in a particularly sensitive situation. For close to fifteen years, I have been working in First Nations education. I have taught First Nations adolescents in public schools. I co-ordinated a Native teacher training centre for the better part of a decade, and taught methods courses to First Nations prospective teachers. I have also taught educational anthropology to non-Native students enrolled in a multicultural program.

More recently I have been combining teaching with ethnography. My research like my teaching focuses on First Nations education and the ways those involved make sense of their lives. The struggle for control of education is at the borders between the oppressed First Nations and the dominant Canadian society. Most First Nations people work in this border area and a number of non-Natives like myself work there primarily by choice. I am a white woman of bourgeois English origins working among First Nations peoples, and this paper provides some insight into the particular tensions arising from this work. It is more than a confessional. As it traces my own story from initiation into the border world to serving as an active agent between nations, it may stir signs of recognition amongst those engaged in similar work and provide insight for those who are curious about such work.

## *I. Defining border work*

I can feel the tension even as I begin to write. I remember Verna Kirkness, the Director of UBC’s First Nations House of Learning, saying: “Every time a white person talks about Indians I get knots in my stomach.” But I want to present some understandings about working with First Nations people as a representative of a society that continues its historical oppression of those people. This is about my experience and my attempts to problematize these understandings. This is not about Indians.

The First Nations struggle for land, sovereignty, and self-government is pervasive in the border area. This struggle for control takes place on the borders between nations: the many First Nations whose peoples are indigenous, and Canada, a nation of immigrants and their offspring. The nations are complex and dynamic. The peoples are immediately and simultaneously diverse and unified in histories and cultures. In British Columbia where few treaties were ever negotiated and aboriginal title never extinguished, First Nations, federal and provincial governments have struggled in a variety of ways. The fight, generation after generation, has been between groups claiming possession of the same lands; the numbers of casualties rank with those in countless wars over land that have been more openly fought throughout the world. While the dead and wounded do not always have bullet holes, cultural invasions have brought alcoholism, disease, and frightening community disruption. Struggles for control shape and daily reshape the borders of this world.

Control of education is one aspect of this struggle. Almost no children are taught the histories of the current struggles nor the bases of the persevering battles over aboriginal rights in schools. For years, First Nations peoples have been condemning the culturally abusive education systems. They seek one built on respect for differences which legitimates their places in these lands, their histories and their dynamic cultures.<sup>3</sup>

Those who have been invisible in existing social structures such as school systems struggle for recognition in two main ways. They establish new and separate structures (feeling that involvement with the old can only subvert change), or they choose to work within and around existing structures to change them (first by their presence, then through their increasing interaction with others). In the industrialized world, complete separation is virtually impossible. There is always contact and often compromise with the structures of the dominant society. Many First Nations people today seek access to and acceptance within mainstream Canadian educational structures while maintaining and developing their heritage cultures. They seek change in both the process and the content of schooling. By necessity and design, they become involved with non-Native people. In this meeting place, the border world, non-Natives feel the ever-present tension between being useful and being undesirable.

## *II. Border workers*

Three categories of people engage in border work. First Nations people are border workers by the nature of their aboriginal claims and their persisting marginalization by Canadian society; non-Native people visit the border for a variety of reasons; and some non-Native people choose to remain in the border area.

The first group of workers includes those First Nations people who spend a part of their lives engaged in direct or indirect battle in the border world of education.<sup>4</sup>

To a greater or lesser extent, they identify themselves and are identified by members of the dominant society as different from and yet a part of mainstream society. Many spend a great deal of time working to syncretize their experiences with the dominant culture's education system with other aspects of their personal histories. These workers have their predecessors. In 1810, a report focused on the concerns of some elders of the Six Nations about the quality and usefulness of formal education: "Many of the old men are not certain whether this school is of use or not. . . ."<sup>5</sup> In 1913, in the infamous MacKenna-MacBride commission transcripts, many chiefs expressed concern about residential schools. Chief Louis of Kamloops commented, "I expected to see my people improve when they first went to Industrial School, but I have not seen anything of it."<sup>6</sup> In 1947, the Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons Appointed to Examine the Indian Act listened to Andrew Paull<sup>7</sup> and others condemn residential schools and, as a result, began to phase them out.

More recently, in 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood (renamed the Assembly of First Nations) produced the policy statement *Indian Control of Indian Education*.<sup>8</sup> This remains the definitive statement on control. Produced partly in response to a 1969 federal government White Paper on disbanding the Department of Indian Affairs, and partly in response to the failure of efforts at integrating many First Nations children into public schools, it points out that it is the children who are expected to make all the changes while the schools remain oriented to white bourgeois society. *Indian Control* calls for more Native teachers to serve as role models for the children and to work in ways sensitive to the children's backgrounds. It also recommends training non-Native teachers to be sensitive to the needs of First Nations children.

Native teachers and counsellors who have an intimate understanding of Indian traditions . . . [and] way of life and language, are best able to create the learning environment suited to the habits and interests of the Indian child.<sup>9</sup>

In the development of an understanding of "Indian control of Indian education" a number of questions arise. First Nations people are diverse and hold a wide variety of views on education. The construction of Indian control, like so many social constructs, is a process of negotiation, not some absolute to strive for. Indian control of mainstream education as opposed to Indian education is almost always an aspect of the process. For this reason, I have come to understand it is often appropriate and valuable that non-Native people immersed in the culture of mainstream education be involved in the process.

I am constantly aware of the tension this involvement creates for First Nations people. Mainstream education remains less than successful for many First Nations students. Fewer than 20 per cent complete Grade Twelve. While high school graduation is an important goal, many First Nations educators and families are calling

for more than success in mainstream terms. They want school experiences that “reinforce and contribute to the image [the child] has of himself as an Indian.”<sup>10</sup> They want First Nations instructors as role models. The continued acceptance of non-Native people into First Nations education occurs because a person has something special to offer or because there simply are not enough First Nations people deemed acceptably qualified by those in control. Increasingly, non-Native people are expected to be training First Nations replacements as part of their jobs. In these cases, a non-Native person’s sign of success in a program controlled by First Nations people is to work herself out of a job.

Many First Nations professionals in education operate from this perspective. At a recent program evaluation workshop which I led, prospective First Nations administrators had an opportunity to fantasize a perfect program. Their dream and that of the First Nations staff included all First Nations instructors. Later, some non-Native instructors appeared hurt by this. The students were amazed. They explained this was their fantasy and that they recognized the importance of including non-Native instructors in the current program. They meant no insult to the instructors. In most First Nations education programs, there are non-Native people involved in instructing, administering or funding. This is the nature of working on the borders. This involvement of non-Natives at least for the time being is essential to the struggle for control within the existing social context.

Self-selection, desperation, invitation, and happenstance — in these ways non-Native people first visit the border world. The missionaries, romantics, and scientists select themselves. The missionaries, touting a variety of panaceas in addition to those associated with organized religion, come as they always have to impose their views on the people, to save souls and to “lift” people to some level of an arbitrary, pre-determined hierarchy. The romantics, sensing a “better” way of life, come to save themselves. The scientists come to view the “bug under the microscope” as one border worker put it. They come for the joy of “pure research,” create change, and leave changed, for better or worse, by their experience. Those who come in desperation include people who are misfits in their own world. Often jobless in mainstream society, they come for basic survival — for the salaries. They hope that their lives on the border will be easier than they were in the worlds they come from. The third group comes by invitation. They possess something which people in the border zone see as valuable. Preferably, a First Nations person issues the invitation. The final category are those who find themselves in the border zone by chance. The teacher or professor accepts a job and just happens to have First Nations students in her class. As one person I interviewed commented, “I arrived at my first job to see all these cute little brown children.” No matter how they come, all these border workers influence and are transformed by their social interaction during what amounts to a visit.

When I first began border work I thought invitation was the only acceptable

entry. While invitation does involve choice in that a person can refuse to accept, in some ways it addressed a hesitation I felt. I did not want to associate myself with the patronizing experts who came to work with First Nations people ultimately as servants of the colonizers. The idea of invitation helped justify my presence to myself. This need to justify raised itself even before I became involved in border work as I had experienced some hostility of First Nations people to members of the dominant society. I knew some of the history which grounded these attitudes.

My family history reveals an important component of my work in First Nations education. My parents, through example, taught me to respect the Kwalguelth people on whose traditional lands we lived. During my childhood, I was aware the Kwalguelth had made the breakwater in the small river bay where we left our canoe. My father, although perhaps carrying a somewhat romantic vision, recognized the history and the power of the cultures and, as a conservationist, honoured traditional First Nations respect for the independence of land, life and waters.<sup>11</sup> He explicitly taught his children this same respect. My brother, who chose work in Native education after an initial career with his Kwalguelth father-in-law on a seine boat, drew me into this border work.

In addition, I identify strongly with my generation's idea of schools in which students are treated respectfully as human beings rather than as vessels to be filled or clay to be moulded. I came to work in First Nations teacher training valuing these ideas and with an appreciation of the need for a teacher to provide direction while listening carefully to and negotiating with the students.

In 1975, after five years teaching in secondary schools in Kamloops, B.C., I was caught up in what I now recognize as the networking system around First Nations education. My brother, then Co-ordinator of Native Education in Williams Lake, asked me to teach for a month at an alternative school for First Nations teenagers "back in the bush." As a result of this month the co-ordinator of the Native teacher training program encouraged me to apply for a job with the program in Kamloops. I was not sure I was qualified for the job, but assumed those encouraging me were better judges than I. By invitation I had become a visitor in the border area, but I got the job and chose border work as a career.

### *III. The Agents: Choosing to stay in the border world*

A third category is composed of people, both First Nations and non-Native, who decide to remain working in the border world of First Nations education. They come initially in any of the ways described, but the work "gets in their guts" as one person described it, and they decide to stay as long as they feel that they may contribute to the struggle. These people serve as active agents between the warring nations.

I no longer think that invitation is the only legitimate entry to border work. Three

times now, I have decided to participate in the border world without invitation. Each time, I thought I had something to contribute to the First Nations struggle for control, although I recognized that I could never assume the perspective of a First Nations person. I saw the contradictions of the work as I tried to change the inequitable system while being in some ways a part of it. I reconsidered Paulo Freire's notion of "class suicide" in which a member of an oppressing group, upon reflection, recognizes the role her people have played and commits herself to fight at the side of the oppressed.

I had resigned from co-ordinating the Native teacher training program when I had two small babies. Two years later, the position was open again and I needed and wanted a job. For the first time I applied without invitation. In my letter of application, I acknowledged that this had been the most challenging job I had ever held and I wanted another opportunity. When I mentioned my decision to the First Nations person in charge she responded very coolly. At that point, I felt unsure but persisted. I had decided that I could do the job well. I sought the encouragement of First Nations and non-Native friends and faculty with whom I had worked.

Five First Nations people interviewed me. When I got the job, I felt for the first time confirmation for the work I had done before. Simultaneously, I knew that several people were disappointed that the job was again filled by a non-Native person. My sense of accomplishment was tempered by a sense that, as a non-Native, I was the "right" person for the job only in a limited and temporary way. I remained very sensitive to this concern and knew my time in the position was limited.

In order to continue my work on the border, I had to clarify my perspective. I could no longer rely primarily on the judgment of others. I had to know that I had a significant contribution to make always acknowledging the tentative nature of that acceptance and recognizing that as the context of the struggle changed, my usefulness or uselessness would also change.

When I decided to pursue a graduate degree, I wanted to reflect on the work I was doing primarily with First Nations adults. Development and expansion of First Nation educational programs were occurring at a time of funding cutbacks everywhere else. As a counsellor, I had been intimately involved in the personal histories of many of the people. I tried to understand how a strong commitment to education comes out of the racist trials of integration and before that the cultural invasion of residential schools. Every person I know who attended residential school had stories to tell: stories of laughter, learning and maturation, and stories of hardship, pain and abuse. One of the ways I could make sense of First Nations education was to understand this history more clearly. I focused on the residential school for my thesis and, for the second time, ventured into an area of the border world without invitation. I felt I had gained much from the time I spent working there and hoped that the work I was about to do, in addition to satisfying my curiosity, would in some way reciprocate.

#### *IV. Border working*

In 1975, during my first visit to the border area, teachers in training taught me how to listen carefully and led me to see more about stereotypes than I knew existed. One taught me the limitations of the land-bridge theories which say that First Nations peoples are just more groups of immigrants. For people whose creation theories put them on these lands since time immemorial, land-bridge theories approach heresy. I had expected too that during practice teaching in schools, the student teachers would notice the quiet students in the back, often Native students. Instead, like most student teachers, they thought primarily of themselves, their next steps, their plans, maintaining order. I was forced to recognize my romantic assumption. Their need to meet the requirements of the dominant society's education system became paramount at these times.

In this job, I learned to speak in an informed way of aspects of First Nations histories which, like so many of the students, I had never learned in school. I revelled in a special brand of humour. I came to see the frequency of the pain with which so many oppressed people live. And I began to understand the nature of border work for First Nations people: to see the contradictions students continually resolved as they struggled to maintain and develop connection to and knowledge of their heritage cultures while participating in a university program, a clear manifestation of the dominant culture.

When I turned to research and what became publishing, I sought a way to communicate the strength of the stories I had heard. Interviewing, recording, and transcribing verbatim the words of former students seemed the best way to re-present the stories which had moved me so deeply. Coincidentally, unstructured interviewing — asking lots of questions and engaging in dialogue — allowed me to research in a way which was already integral to the way I made sense of my life. I had read enough ethnography to know that this was an acceptable, although perhaps not mainstream, way of conducting educational research. Again I found myself on a border, this time trying to balance my everyday life with the demands of academic research and to do research in a way that made sense to First Nations people, to academics and to myself.

I began my interviews with people I knew and then expanded to include some of their relatives and friends. When I felt really brave, I approached one person to whom I introduced myself at a conference. When people hesitated or responded negatively, I did not approach them again. Some would sooner leave memories in the past. Previous exploitation by non-Native researchers working in the Kamloops area, as has happened so frequently throughout the country, made others reluctant to become involved.

Throughout, the work was a joint venture. I never really felt like an author, but fell back on the trite but nevertheless appropriate image of the quiltmaker. The

people provided the substance of the work while I provided some concepts lifted from radical educators, the interest, and the time to stitch the accounts together. Every interview was filled with emotion and often we cried. But the people wanted to speak their piece and asserted that they wanted others to hear what they had to say. When I completed my draft, I returned to most of the people and asked them to read what I had written — to see that they had said what they meant, to affirm that I had heard and transcribed appropriately and to view the words which I had chosen in the context in which I had placed them. Without exception, people approved of what I had written. I was pleased but later wondered if they were only being polite to me, or if their respect for the written word inhibited suggestions for change. One man refused to look, but sent me a message through his wife: “What I have said, I said.”

The first publisher I approached, an academic press, was concerned that the book did not represent the views of the teachers and supervisors at the school. She said she had a friend who taught there who was not a bad person. I got a curt rejection from the second publisher and moved to a third, the Native-controlled imprint of a small publisher. In striking contrast, Randy Fred, a member of the Nuuchah Nulth Nation and the publisher of Pulp Press’s Tillacum Library, responded most favourably. About the same time, Secwepemc Cultural Education Society in Kamloops also indicated interest. The mainstream response was repeated when Pulp applied for a grant to help with the publishing. The first application was turned down with this comment, “A history of a period or event should explain the whole story, not just one side.” Concern for a balanced view was not one which had guided previous publishing on residential school, and Fred pointed out to me that this trust fund had recently helped publish the diary of a sea captain which clearly represented a single person’s perspective.

I arranged to split the royalties with the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society as the main representative of the people whom I had interviewed. The book was launched in Kamloops in a celebration organized by the Society. Three of those interviewed spoke and acknowledged their participation in the work. Others were there and celebrated anonymously. Throughout this time, despite the fact that these and other First Nations people were offering clear support of my work, I was aware that I would be seen by many as an inappropriate collaborator in this work based on Native people’s experiences. It was much later that I found a satisfactory answer for myself. A Métis friend introduced me as another one of those non-Native people who had written a book about Indians. I said the residential school was a white institution, clearly on the borders, and it was most appropriate that I write about it.

But the book did create controversy, partly because a non-Native person had written it. There was also disagreement about the stories I included. Some First Nations people said I had made the school look worse than it had been for them; others said I had been too gentle — that actual conditions were much worse.

A First Nations friend suggested that her experience in the school was not represented in the collection. She was not like the people I had written about. She focused on her perception of First Nations belief in non-interference: that the people themselves will work through the necessary experiences and reflections. From that I inferred that she saw my work as a kind of interference. I agree and believe this kind of interference contributes to change. I wanted my work to produce, in this case, different accounts of residential school than those in most existing literature, and ultimately lead to a more complete view of an aspect of Canadian history.

I told her of another discussion with a Kutenai woman who told of her appreciation of the book. She had attended school in the Kootenays and said, "I thought we were the only ones who went through that." She found the book had many incidents similar to her experience, but felt that it did not have the "really bad stories." She stated clearly that her experiences had been much worse than most of what I had included. After hearing this second woman's story, my friend acknowledged that she could not speak for all First Nations people, but must present her reaction as a personal but legitimate one.

The conflict I felt participating in border work without invitation is reiterated in the conflict many people feel about my work. I sought criticism and found it. In one review, a First Nations person comments "that Haig-Brown does not really understand what our cultures are because she is an outsider."<sup>12</sup> A non-Native former residential school supervisor, in another review, echoes the words of the first publisher: "there is no attempt to balance the author's interpretations of events with opinions from anyone who might have a different opinion or interpretation such as former teachers or supervisors."<sup>13</sup> He discounts the range of views expressed in extensive quotations from First Nations people.

And I got some support. A First Nations woman involved in writing her own book about residential school wrote to say, "I see now how the residential school system fitted into the larger scheme which I didn't fully understand before reading your book. Our book should have a better impact if I can show this."<sup>14</sup>

I was asked to do a workshop in Kamloops on the strength of Native culture. Both non-Native and First Nations people attended the workshop. For the first time in my border work, I met First Nations people who trusted me before they met me because they had read the book. At the same time, there were some who came to say the school wasn't that bad. In response, one of the people whom I had interviewed and for whom the school had been an excruciating experience, made it clear to all in the workshop that for some people it was a time of great pain, one which she was only beginning to come to grips with.

Most non-Natives are amazed at hearing the stories in the book. "The work you do is for us. We need to know of these things you are writing about," said one. A few were aware of the existence of the schools, but had not known that the goals of the schools were to have First Nations cultures disappear. Very few know the

extent of the cultural invasion in the border zones by the residential school and the resistance of First Nations people which defeated these efforts.

As I was dealing with the ramifications of the publication of the book, I began work in a doctoral program. Again I agonized over the suitability of centring my research in First Nations education. Recent developments in experimental ethnography<sup>15</sup> played an important role in my eventual decision. Through reading and discussion of the current soul searching going on in the field of ethnography, I came to understand that no individual can adequately represent the experience of any other. An ethnographer, while acknowledging that she can never come to a full understanding of an other's existence, must try. This intense work in the halls of academe brought hope for and clarity to the work I was doing among people whose social and personal histories and cultures diverged greatly from my own.

I have learned to take risks. As a non-Native person focusing on First Nations education, I have come to accept myself and the work I do as a part of what has become my culture — a culture of the border. The next phase of my research focuses on the process of taking control in a First Nations educational centre. I asked permission to conduct my study. I was not invited. I originally approached two places and was turned down by one. The sentiment expressed by the majority of the board at the first was that they wanted to reserve this area of research for First Nations people. This is an increasingly articulated perspective of many indigenous peoples. In the second place, I was given opportunity to explain my work to board, staff, and students. Ultimately, I was accepted and even welcomed by some.

My brother gave me a metaphor which captures some of the process which accompanies work in the border worlds. He said:

You have a cultural window. . . . If you use the window for interaction with another culture, its frame will expand. This expansion is not infinite and is controlled by your cultural self. If you really concentrate on another culture . . . you get a pretty broad window. But at some point, if you're stretching over on the left hand side, you pull the right hand side over a little bit. You either forget things or, more significantly, you don't develop things you might otherwise have developed. Just some routine cultural skills and knowledge. That is where the dominant society people will look at you and say, "Hey, hey, he's sure gone Indian, sure got bushed." (Alan 1987)

"Going Indian" is a term of mainstream culture which banishes a member to marginal status. Members of the dominant society may use this label for a non-Native person who becomes deeply involved in First Nations work and who expresses this commitment openly. At this point, the non-Native person becomes a full-fledged member of the border world in that members of her original culture see her as an outsider and she feels she belongs nowhere else. A non-Native person talked about her life changes as she works with First Nations people:

I am becoming a social misfit. . . . I've become less and less tolerant of my own social group because of the frivolousness of their lives, a lot of them. . . . A lot of people in my social life, in my family life have pretty strong racial biases. . . . Where does that lead for a person like me? I feel totally alienated from all kinds of people that I never felt alienated from before.

There is always tension in this border work: the tension between members of different cultures, between the researcher and the other study participants as they negotiate reality, and between the text and those who read it. How can one tell the whole story when we all have different stories to tell? Overall is the goal as a non-Native to be able to hear clearly and portray clearly what aboriginal people are saying. Sometimes, when I wonder about this work I have done, I remember a friend's father I had interviewed. She visited home and found that he had marked all the spots in the book in which he was quoted. He read them to her and discussed each one. For me, this demonstrated that I had managed to represent his stories in a way that was acceptable to him, in a way that he felt was appropriate to share with his children.

The border work continues. I have been asked to facilitate occasional workshops involving First Nations and non-Native people. I have been asked to develop curriculum for First Nations adult education and to write articles such as this. I remain in contact with many of the students I have come to know in my teacher training work. They kindly include me in many events. We visit often.

An increasing proportion of my time is spent in mainstream education. Anti-racist work has become an important focus for me. In classrooms of predominantly non-Native people, I present my understandings and find some people shocked and fascinated with histories they have not heard before. As I wonder who I am to do this work, I hear the words of a Latin-American Jewish feminist, Judit Moschkovich, "It is not the duty of the oppressed to educate the oppressor."<sup>16</sup> In all my work, while I include the words of First Nations people, I never presume to speak for anyone other than myself.

## *V. Concluding*

Within the border world, I think, grow, and learn. I am affected by my time here as I affect those around me. I am not the same person I was when I first visited by invitation. I cannot forget my past, the choices I have made, and go on as if nothing has happened. As I have shown in this paper, I have come to see a role for myself as an agent between the warring nations, although it is of course always a transitory role and dependent on others' acceptance. I have found justification for my work in terms of efforts to work by the side of the oppressed to combat racism. My increasing experience with those subjected to racism and its effects on a daily basis has led me to address racism directly in all the work I do. This border world has become my home.

In research, my project is to get as close as possible to another's life experience, and to present that experience in a way acceptable and useful to the other study participants and myself. Our reality is mutually constructed in the border world we inhabit. My role in the construction of this reality has an impact on it, as do the roles of the people with whom I work. Always a tension exists between a researcher and the other study participants as they mutually create reality in their intersecting worlds. I have a responsibility to conduct more than an academic exercise. At the very least, I must produce a document which can be used by the people with whom I work.

Because of my ethnicity, class background, and personal history, some of which I have re-presented in this paper, I occupy the border world by choice. Many of the First Nations people with whom I work recognize the tenuous nature of my choice. At any time, I can choose to leave the struggle for a more comfortable existence. I hope my work in conjunction with that of so many others will ultimately reduce the injustices immigrant people and their offspring have wrought against First Nations peoples in the five centuries non-Natives have been in North America. I feel strongly that no matter where I choose to work in the future, all my work will acknowledge the ever-present struggle for control in which First Nations people continue to engage. Their struggle mirrors the efforts of oppressed people and their supporters throughout the world. There is one struggle; there are many fronts. Critically or uncritically, as academics, as politicians, and as active agents in the world, we choose to act on this knowledge or to deny it.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), 104.
- <sup>2</sup> John Horgan, "Profile: Ethnography as Art," *Scientific American*, 261.1 (July 1989).
- <sup>3</sup> The definition of culture, for the purposes of this paper, lies somewhere between conventional anthropology and contemporary sociology. Random House gives the anthropological definition as "the sum total ways of living built up by a group of human beings transmitted from one generation to another" (2nd ed., 1987). Aspects of contemporary sociology incorporate the notion of dynamism into culture. The ways of living people build up are subject to change as the social and physical environment changes. Lawrence Stenhouse, in *Culture and Education* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967), 13, says that it is important "to assert not what culture is but what it does. Culture serves as a medium through which individual human minds interact with one another in communication. . . . [It] is a dynamic field within and through which individuals make contact with one another. It lies, as it were, between people and is shared by them. . . . [T]o live within culture is to be able to understand, albeit in a partial way, the experience of those around us."
- <sup>4</sup> In the current Canadian context, one could argue that all First Nations people live on the borders. At the same time, there are unilingual speakers whose interaction with the dominant culture remains minimal. It takes place primarily with offspring serving as go-betweens.

- <sup>5</sup> J. Donald Wilson, "No Blanket to be Worn in School': The Education of Indians in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," in Jean Barman et al., *Indian Education in Canada Volume 1: The Legacy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), 66.
- <sup>6</sup> British Columbia, Royal Commission on Indian Affairs. Evidence submitted to the Royal Commission. Kamloops Agency 1913: 75.
- <sup>7</sup> Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons Appointed to Examine and Consider the Indian Act. *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* No. 1 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1947).
- <sup>8</sup> National Indian Brotherhood, *Indian Control of Indian Education* (Ottawa: National Indian Brotherhood, 1973).
- <sup>9</sup> National Indian Brotherhood, 18.
- <sup>10</sup> National Indian Brotherhood, 9.
- <sup>11</sup> In many First Nations, rivers are living beings with all the characteristics and projects of human beings at the same time as they are rivers.
- <sup>12</sup> Bill Mussell, "Schools were multi-national," *New Directions*, 4.4 (January/February 1989), 41.
- <sup>13</sup> Colin Kelly, "There was no such thing as Native culture," *New Directions*, 4.4 (January/February 1989), 40.
- <sup>14</sup> Ruth Smith, 14 November 1988, personal correspondence.
- <sup>15</sup> See James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
- <sup>16</sup> Judit Moschkovich, "'— But I Know You, American Woman,'" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds., Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981), 79.
- <sup>17</sup> I wish to thank those who read and commented on earlier versions of this paper: Shauna Butterwick, Ann Cvetkovich, Jane Gaskell, Alan Haig-Brown, Rita Jack, Michael Law, Bill Maciejko, Maria Myers, Bob Smith, and Joann Watson. I am also grateful to the Radical Educators Breakfast Group for giving me the opportunity to present the ideas in their raw form and for their supportive discussion.

## INUKSHUK

*Daniel David Moses*

You were built up from stones,  
they say, and positioned  
alone against the sky  
here so that they might take  
you for something human

checking the migrations.  
That's how you manage this,  
standing upright despite

the blue wind that snow is  
this close to Polaris.

Still the wind does worry  
you some. It's your niches  
which ought to be empty.  
Nothing but lichen grows  
there usually. Now

they're home to dreams. Most came  
from the south, a few from  
farther north — but what comes  
out of their mouths comes from  
nowhere you know about.

They keep singing about  
the Great Blue Whale the world  
is, how it swims through space  
having nightmares about  
hunters who hunt only

each other — each after  
the other's snow white face.  
*How beautiful frozen  
flesh is! Like ivory,  
like carved bone, like the light*

*of Polaris in hand.*  
So it goes on and on,  
the hunters' refrain. Dead  
silence would be better,  
the Pole Star overhead.

The wind wants at them — at  
least to stop each niche up.  
How long can you stand it,  
that song, the cold, the stones  
that no longer hold you

up now that they hold you  
down? Soon the migrations  
recommence. How steady  
are you? Dreams, so they say,  
also sing on the wing.

# A DOUBLE-BLADED KNIFE

*Subversive Laughter in Two Stories*

by Thomas King

Margaret Atwood

“When *Brebeuf and His Brethren* first came out, a friend of mine said that the thing to do now was to write the same story from the Iroquois point of view.”

— JAMES REANEY, “The Canadian Poet’s Predicament”

**O**NCE UPON A TIME LONG AGO, in 1972 to be exact, I wrote a book called *Survival*, which was about Canadian literature; an eccentric subject in those days, when many denied there was any. In this book, there was a chapter entitled *First People: Indians and Eskimos as Symbols*. What this chapter examined was the uses made by non-Native writers of Native characters and motifs, over the centuries and for their own purposes. This chapter did not examine poetry and fiction written by Native writers in English, for the simple reason that I could not at that time find any; although I was able to recommend a small list of non-fiction titles. The closest thing to “imaginative” writing by Natives were “translations” of Native myths and poetry, which might turn up at the beginnings of anthologies, or be offered as a species of indigenous fairy tale in grade-school readers. (Why did I overlook Pauline Johnson? Perhaps because, being half-white, she somehow didn’t rate as the real thing, even among Natives; although she is undergoing reclamation today.)

The figures in the stories and poems I analyzed ran the gamut. There were Indians and Eskimos seen as closer to Nature and therefore more noble, as closer to Nature and therefore *less* noble, as savage victimizers of whites and as victims of savage whites. There was a strong tendency among younger writers to claim Natives as kin, or as their “true” ancestors (which may have something to it, since all people on earth are descended from hunter-gatherer societies). There were a lot of adjectives.

Lacking among them was *funny*. Savage irony and morbid humour did sometimes enter the picture as a kind of self-flagellation device for whites, but on the whole Natives were treated by almost everyone with the utmost gravity, as if they were either too awe-inspiring as blood-curdling savages or too sacrosanct in their

status of holy victim to allow of any comic reactions either to them or by them. Furthermore, nobody ever seems to have asked them what if anything *they* found funny. The Native as presented in non-Native writing was singularly lacking in a sense of humour; sort of like the “good” woman of Victorian fiction, who acquired at the hands of male writers the same kind of tragic-eyed, long-suffering solemnity.

Things are changing. Natives are now writing fiction, poetry and plays, and some of the literature being produced by them is both vulgar and hilarious. A good many stereotypes are hitting the dust, a few sensibilities are in the process of being outraged. The comfortable thing about a people who do not have a literary voice, or at least not one you can hear or understand, is that you never have to listen to what they are saying about *you*. Men found it very disconcerting when women started writing the truth about the kinds of things women say about them behind their backs. In particular, they did not appreciate having the more trivial of their human foibles revealed, nor did they appreciate being laughed at. Nobody does, really. But when I heard that the nickname given to a certain priest by the Indians was “Father Crotchface,” because of his beard, it caused me to reflect. For instance, *Father Crotchface and His Brethren* would have altogether a different ring to it, no?

RECENTLY I READ, in separate “little” magazines, two outstanding stories by the same author, Thomas King.<sup>1</sup> They seem to me to be “perfect” stories — by which I mean that as narrations they are exquisitely timed, that everything in them appears to be there by right, and that there is nothing you would want to change or edit out. Another way of saying this is that they are beautifully written. But apart from these aesthetic qualities, which they share with other stories, they impressed me in quite different ways.

They ambush the reader. They get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their own moral righteousness, but by being funny. Humour can be aggressive and oppressive, as in keep-'em-in-their-place sexist and racist jokes. But it can also be a subversive weapon, as it has often been for people who find themselves in a fairly tight spot without other, more physical, weapons.

As these two stories have not yet appeared in a collection (although they will soon), you'll forgive me for summarizing.

The first one I'd like to discuss is called *Joe The Painter and the Deer Island Massacre*. It's set in a small coastal town north of San Francisco. The narrator is an Indian man; the subject of his narration is a white man called “Joe the Painter.” Nobody in the town except the narrator really likes Joe. He's loud and overly-friendly, and has the disconcerting habit of blowing his nose into the gutter, one nostril at a time: “Whenever he felt a clog in his ‘breathing-trap,’ as he called it, he'd step to the curb, lean over so as not to get his shoes dirty, hold one nostril shut

with his thumb, snort, and blow out the other one.” But the thing that really gets people about Joe is his honesty. He knows everyone’s dirty-underwear business, and announces it at the top of his lungs in the form of friendly questions, such as, “‘Howdy, Mrs. Secord, how’s the girls? Looks like you been living off pudding. Say, you pregnant again?’” or, “‘Howdy, Connie, how’s the boil doing?’”

The action gets going when Joe finds out that the town is planning to have a pageant contest in celebration of its own centennial, and that there’s some grant money available to those who wish to get up a pageant. Joe is overflowing with civic spirit, and decides to enter the contest. His entry is to be about the town’s founder, one Matthew Larson, and a long-ago incident called “The Deer Island Massacre,” involving a local band of Indians. Joe describes the event as follows: “‘Yes, a massacre. Larson’s two brothers were killed, but Larson survived and built the town. That’s how this place was started. Make a good pageant, huh?’”

At this point the narrator — whom we know only as “Chief,” because that’s what Joe calls him — assumes that the massacre is the usual movie kind, that is, instigated by treacherous Indians, with heavy losses but with eventual triumph for the whites. He’s been asked by Joe to recruit the Indians for this affair, but he isn’t so sure his friends and relations will like the idea. However, he’s overwhelmed by Joe: “‘What’s to like? It’s all history. You can’t muck around with history. It ain’t always the way we’d like it to be, but there it is. Can’t change it.’”

Before the pageant, the Indians congregate on Deer Island — “‘Just like the old days,’” as the narrator’s father says — and begin rehearsing. Joe decides they don’t look enough like Indians, and rounds up some wigs and some black yarn braids from the town. The day for the pageant arrives, and Joe introduces it in proper fashion. It is being presented, he says, by the Native Son Players. The narrator likes this. “‘Damn, that Joe was creative! Sounded professional,’” he thinks. (We, the readers, like it because it’s a really vicious touch, and because it twists on a couple of levels. It’s the kind of kitschy phrasing Joe would come up with; it plays on “Native”; and these *are* the Native Sons, although white Americans have often appropriated the designation for themselves alone.)

The first act recounts the arrival of Larson, played by Joe, who is greeted by Redbird, played by the narrator. The second act dramatizes the growing friction between Indians and whites as the latter encroach on Deer Island and want to build things on it. The third is the massacre itself, and here is where we all get a jolt, audience and readers alike — because the massacre is not perpetrated by the Indians. It’s done by the whites, sneaking up in the dead of night and butchering the Indians as they lie asleep. The Indians playing the whites open fire, making *Bang bang* noises. The Indians playing the Indians leap about, slapping little plastic restaurant ketchup packets on themselves for blood. “‘Protect the women and children,’” cries Redbird — a line straight from the wagon side of many a Western-movie Indian-and-wagon-train sequence.

The Indian actors thoroughly enjoy themselves. Soon they are all lying “dead,” while flies buzz around the ketchup and Joe soliloquizes over their bodies: “I abhor the taking of a human life, but civilization needs a strong arm to open the frontier. Farewell, Redman. Know that from your bones will spring a new and stronger community forever.”

The audience is paralyzed by Joe’s pageant. This is not what they had in mind at all! It seems, somehow, to be in the most outrageous bad taste. It has mentioned — as is Joe’s habit — something that has been deemed unmentionable. And it does so with a childlike straightforwardness and honesty that is infuriating. (As the town bartender has said earlier, “‘Honesty makes most people nervous.’”) The town is scandalized. But, after all, what has Joe done? All he has done is to re-enact history, the part of it that is not usually celebrated; and this has called the notion of “history” itself into question.

Joe’s pageant does not win. It is termed “inappropriate” by the mayor. The pageant that does win — about the founding of the first city council — is entirely “appropriate,” and entirely boring. “History,” the history we choose to recount, is what we find “appropriate.” The Indians go home, saying that if Joe ever needs some Indians again just give them a call.

The story ends where it begins: the narrator is still the only person in town who likes Joe.

WELL NOW, WE SAY. What are we to make of this apparently artless but secretly designing story? And why are we left sitting, like the audience, with our mouths open? Why do we feel so *sandbagged*? And — because he’s never told us — just why *does* the narrator like Joe?

I think the answers will be somewhat different, depending on — for instance — whether the reader is a white person or a Native person. But I assume that the narrator likes Joe for a couple of reasons. First, Joe is entirely although tactlessly honest, and for this reason he is the only white in the town who can look back at the town’s founding, see that it was based on the ruthless massacre of the earlier incumbents, and say it out loud. Second, Joe is not sentimental over this. He does not romanticize the slaughtered Indians, or weep crocodile tears over them now that they are no longer the main competition. He deals with history in the same practical, unselfconscious way he blows his nose. He doesn’t feel any sanctimonious guilt, either. He lays the actions out and lets them speak for themselves.

Third, Joe has a high opinion of the narrator. The title “Chief” is not a joke for him. He knows the narrator is not a Chief, but he thinks of him as one anyway. Joe and the “Chief” each possess qualities that the other one values.

Read in the light of the long North American tradition of Indians-as-characters-

in-white-fiction, this wonderfully satiric but deadpan story could be seen as a kind of parody-in-miniature of Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, or of the Lone Ranger and Tonto — the fearless white leader with a penchant for straight speaking and for seeing justice done, the loyal Indian sidekick who comes up with the manpower and the sound effects. It would not work nearly so well as ambush if our minds had not already been lulled into somnolence by a great deal of storytelling in which things were seen far otherwise.

THE SECOND STORY GIVES US an even more radical departure from the expected. It's called *One Good Story, That One*, and in it Thomas King invents, not just a new slant on an old story, but a new kind of narrative voice. The "Chief" in *Joe The Painter and the Deer Island Massacre* lived in a white-folks' town and was familiar with its vocabulary and ways. Not so the narrator of *One Good Story*, an older Indian who appears to spend most of his time in the Canadian bush, although he has been to Yellowknife. It's clear from the outset that English is far from being either his mother-tongue or his language of first choice. It's more like a language of last resort. However, as he uses it to tell his story, it becomes strangely eloquent. King employs this created, truncated voice to suggest, among other things, the pacing of a Native narrator. This storyteller will take his time, will repeat himself, sometimes for emphasis, sometimes for rhythm, sometimes as a delaying tactic, sometimes to get things straight.

His story is about telling a story, and about the kinds of stories that are expected of him, and about the kinds that have been told to him; it's also a story about refusing to tell a story, but we don't know that until the end of the story.

His is minding his own business at his "summer place" when his friend Napaio arrives with three white men:

Three men come to my summer place, also my friend Napaio. Pretty loud talkers, those ones. One is big. I tell him maybe looks like Big Joe. Maybe not.

Anyway.

They come and Napaio too. Bring greetings, how are you, many nice things they bring to says. Three.

All white.

Too bad, those.

What do these three want? It turns out they are anthropologists, and they want a story. At first the narrator tries to put them off with stories about people he knows: Jimmy who runs the store, Billy Frank and the dead-river pig. But this will not do.

Those ones like old story, says my friend, maybe how the world was put together. Good Indian story like that, Napaio says. Those ones have tape recorders, he says.

Okay, I says.  
 Have some tea.  
 Stay awake.  
 Once upon a time.  
 Those stories start like that, pretty much, those ones, start on time.

THE STORY HE PROCEEDS TO RELATE is not what the anthropologists were looking for at all. Instead it is a hilarious version of the Book of Genesis, a white-folk story played back to them in an Indian key, with the narrator's own commentary.

"There was nothing," he begins. "Pretty hard to believe that, maybe." Enter the creator. "Only one person walk around. Call him god." God gets tired of walking around, so he begins to create. "Maybe that one says, we will get some stars. So he does. And then he says, maybe we should get a moon. So, they get one of them too. Someone writes all this down, I don't know. Lots of things left to get."

The narrator launches into a long list of things god now "gets," a list which he narrates both in his own language and in English, and which includes several animals, a flint, a television set and a "grocery story." God then creates the Garden of "Evening," and two human beings, Evening herself — the garden is clearly hers — and a man, "Ah-damn." "Ah-damn and Evening real happy, those ones. No clothes, those, you know. Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha. But they pretty dumb, then. New, you know."

Evening discovers the famous tree, which has a lot of things growing on it, such as potatoes, pumpkins and corn. It also has some "mee-so," apples. Evening has it in mind to eat some of them, but "that one, god" re-enters the picture. He has a bad temper and shouts, and is compared by the narrator to a man called Harley James who used to beat up his wife. "God" orders Evening to leave the apples alone. He is selfish, and will not share.

However, Evening eats an apple, and being a good woman, takes some to share with Ah-damn. The latter is busy writing down the names of the animals as they parade by. "Pretty boring that," says the narrator. Writing down does not interest him.

Again, we get a long list of the animals, in two languages. But now the story goes even further off the biblical beaten track, because Coyote comes by a lot of times, in different disguises. "Gets dressed up, fool around."

And now the narrator shifts entirely into his own language, which we paleface readers can't follow at all. He even tells a joke, which is presumably about Coyote, but how are we to know? *What kind of a story is this anyway?* Well, it's changing into a story about the coyote. "Tricky one, that coyote. Walks in circles. Sneaky."

Evening recognizes immediately, from the tracks on the floor, that the coyote has been around more than once. But she feeds Ah-damn anyway, dumb bunny that he is, like “white man.” She herself is pointedly identified as an Indian woman, which accounts for her intelligence.

God comes along and is cheesed off because the apples have been eaten. Evening tells him to “calm down, watch some television,” but god wants to kick Evening and Ah-damn out of the garden, “go somewhere else. Just like Indian today.”

Evening says that’s fine with her, there’s lots of other good places around, but Ah-damn lies about how many apples he ate, and whines as well. It avails him nothing and he gets thrown out, “right on those rocks. Ouch, ouch, ouch, that one says.” Evening has to come back and fix him up.

What about the snake? He’s been forgotten by the narrator, but is stuck back in at the end. He’s in the tree along with the apples, but there’s not much to tell about him. The reason he hisses is that Evening stuck an apple in his mouth for trying to get too friendly.

The narrator’s story ends with Ah-damn and Evening coming “out here” and having a bunch of kids. “That’s all. It is ended.”

But Thomas King’s story ends another way. The white anthropologists pack up, none too pleased but putting a good face on it. “All of those ones smile. Nod their head around. Look out window. Make happy noises. Say goodbyes, see you later. Leave pretty quick.” The narrator’s last gloss is, “I clean up all the coyote tracks on the floor.”

If the narrator has a “good Indian story” to tell, he’s kept it to himself. He certainly isn’t going to tell it to the white anthropologists, who are seen as sneaky coyotes, mischief-makers, indulging in disguises and fooling around. Instead he’s fed them one of their own stories back, but he’s changed the moral. No secondary creation of Eve from a rib, no original sin, no temptation by Satan, no guilt, no “sweat of your brow” curse. The bad behaviour displayed is displayed by “god,” who is greedy, selfish, loud-mouthed and violent. Adam is stupid, and Eve, who is generous, level-headed, peace-loving and nurturing, comes out the hero of the story. In the course of his tale, the Indian narrator is able to convey to the whites more or less what he thinks of white behaviour in general. Nor can they do anything about it, as this is a situation they themselves have sought out — for their own benefit, since, we assume, they wish to use the Indian’s story as “material” — and the etiquette of storytelling prevents them from intervening in the story to protest either its form or its content.

*One Good Story* could be seen as a variant of the Wise Peasant motif, or “putting one over on the city slicker” by pretending to be a lot dumber than you really are; although, in this case, the city slicker category includes any white reader. We feel “taken” by the story, in several ways: we get taken in by it, because this narrative voice has considerable charm and straight-faced subtlety; but we also get taken

for a ride, just as the three anthropologists are. Perhaps we have been taken for even more of a ride than we realize. How do we know what all those Indian words *really* mean? We don't, and that is very much one of the points. The narrator himself doesn't know what "Saint Merry" means. Tit for tat. Another tit for tat is that we are forced to experience first hand how it must feel to have your own religious stories retold in a version that neither "understands" nor particularly reverences them. The biblical Fall of Man has seldom been recounted with such insouciance.

At the same time, and in the midst of our cross-cultural nervousness, we sympathize with the narrator rather than the anthropologists, just as, in *Joe The Painter*, we have taken the side of the odd men out, Joe and the "Chief," as against the conventional townspeople. Thomas King knows exactly what he's doing.

Both of these stories are about Indians who are expected to "play Indian," to enact some white man's version of themselves, to serve a symbolic agenda other than their own. Both narrators, in their own ways, refuse: the first by participating in a farcical pageant that undermines the whole "How-the-West-Was-Won" myth, the second by withholding his authentic "Indian" tales and hilariously subverting a central and sacrosanct "white" story.

What other inventive twists of narrative and alarming shifts of viewpoint are in store for us from this author? Time, which begins all stories, will tell.

## NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas King has published the following works: ed., with Cheryl Calver and Helen Hoy, *The Native in Literature* (Toronto: ECW, 1985); ed., Native Fiction issue of *Canadian Fiction Magazine* No. 60 (1987); *Medicine River* (novel) (Toronto: Penguin, 1990); ed., "*All My Relations*": *An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Prose* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990); *One Good Story, That One* (story cycle, in progress).

## COYOTE LEARNS TO WHISTLE

*Thomas King*

Coyote tied Weasel's tail in a knot.  
 And when Weasel found that tail, she  
 knew who did  
 THAT.

But she says NOTHING.  
 She WHISTLED.  
 And Coyote came over to see what all that  
 WHISTLING  
 was about.

Your TAIL is tied in a knot  
 Coyote says this to Weasel.

Yes, says Weasel. It helps me to  
 WHISTLE.

Well, says Coyote, I can SEE that  
 It does.  
 And he tied his tail in a knot  
 and BLEW air out his mouth.

But it SOUNDED like a fart.

You got to pull that KNOT tighter  
 says Weasel.  
 So Coyote did that and tried again.

JUST farting.

Pull it tighter, says Weasel.  
 so, Coyote thanked Weasel, gave her some  
 tobacco for the ADVICE  
 and pulled the knot so tight that HIS  
 tail BROKE and fell off.

Elwood told that STORY to the Rotary Club  
 in town  
 and everyone laughed and says what  
 a STUPID Coyote.

And that's the problem, you know,  
 seeing the DIFFERENCE between stupidity  
 and greed.

# COYOTE SEES THE PRIME MINISTER

*Thomas King*

Coyote went east to see the  
PRIME Minister.

I wouldn't make this up.

And the PRIME Minister was so HAPPY  
to see Coyote  
that he made HIM a member of  
cabinet.

Maybe YOU can HELP us solve the  
Indian problem.

Sure, says that Coyote,  
WHAT's the problem?

When Elwood tells this story, he  
always LAUGHS and spoils  
the ending.

# COYOTE GOES TO TORONTO

*Thomas King*

Coyote went to Toronto  
to become famous.  
It's TRUE  
that's what she said.

She walked up and down those  
FAMOUS streets.  
And she stood on those  
FAMOUS corners.

Waiting.

But nothing happened.

SO.

Coyote got hungry and went  
into a restaurant  
to EAT.

But there was a long line  
and Coyote could see it was  
because the restaurant was  
painted a BEAUTIFUL green.

SO.

Coyote painted herself GREEN  
and she went back to the rez  
to show the people what an  
UP-TO-DATE Coyote she was.

And she STOOD on the rez  
and waited.  
So that RAIN came along.  
So that WIND came along.  
So that HAIL came along.  
So that SNOW came along.

And that PAINT began to peel  
and pretty soon the people  
came along and says,  
HEY, that's Coyote, by golly  
she's not looking too good.

And the women brought her FOOD.  
And the men brushed her COAT  
until it was shiney.  
And the children PLAYED with  
their friend.

I been to Toronto Coyote tells  
the people.  
Yes, everybody says,  
We can SEE that.

# LINES AND CIRCLES

## *The “Rez” Plays of Tomson Highway*

Denis W. Johnston

WITHOUT QUESTION, the most important new Canadian playwright to emerge in the latter half of the 1980s has been Tomson Highway. In less than three years, and with only two major plays, Highway has joined a select group of playwrights whose new plays, sight unseen, are treated as significant cultural events by Canadian critics, scholars, and audiences. The two plays, *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, both won the coveted Dora Mavor Moore award for the best new play produced in Toronto, the former for the 1986-87 season and the latter for 1988-89. Tomson Highway says his ambition in life, and therefore presumably in his plays, is “to make ‘the rez’ [reserve] cool, to show and celebrate what funky folk Canada’s Indian people really are.”<sup>1</sup> In this, *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* have been wildly successful, attracting enthusiastic audiences, both white and Native, far beyond the real-life reserve where *The Rez Sisters* was conceived and first performed.

To non-Native critics, myself included, Tomson Highway is an exotic new figure in Canadian theatre. Born on his father’s trap-line in northern Manitoba, he spoke only Cree until going to a Catholic boarding school at age six. In high school in Winnipeg he became a musical prodigy, eventually earning university degrees in English and music while studying to be a concert pianist. After graduation, however, Highway abruptly jettisoned his musical career and spent the ensuing seven years working with various Native support organizations. Then, he says, he wished to begin integrating all these experiences:

So I started writing plays, where I put together my knowledge of Indian reality in this country with classical structure, artistic language. It amounted to applying sonata form to the spiritual and mental situation of a street drunk, say, at the corner of Queen and Bathurst.<sup>2</sup>

Highway is perhaps the first Canadian member of the international tradition of accomplished writers who work in their second language. Among playwrights, this tradition includes Samuel Beckett in French and Tom Stoppard in English. Like them, Highway delights in linguistic estrangements and paradoxes. Furthermore, the fact that Highway's first language is Cree contributes to his unusual dramatic style. As Highway points out, Cree differs from English in three obvious ways. First, he says, "[it] is hilarious. When you talk Cree, you laugh constantly."<sup>3</sup> Second, it is visceral, in the sense that bodily functions are discussed openly and casually. Finally, words in Cree have no gender. The impact of these three qualities on Highway's plays goes beyond language to their mythopoeic core; for inevitably, the qualities of Native language reflect Native cultural values, values which stand diametrically opposite some Christian European ones: in this case risible, sensual, genderless articulation as opposed to sombre, abstract, patriarchal discourse. This must be why, although we can understand what Highway's characters say, we can scarcely believe what we're hearing.

The character of Nanabush is vital in presenting these un-European values in both *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. "The Trickster," known by different names in different languages, is a central figure in Native mythology. Indeed, says Highway, the Trickster is as important to Cree culture as Christ is to Western culture.<sup>4</sup> Embodying qualities of Native language and values, Nanabush is funny, visceral, and may be of either gender. Because Nanabush is also mischievous and fallible, unlike Christ in the European tradition, the Native listener must exercise his own judgment to learn from Nanabush's adventures, whereas Christ's followers need only obey precept and example. To further demonstrate the divergence of the Native and Christian traditions, Highway draws a circle on a piece of paper and explains:

This is the way the Cree look at life. A continuous cycle. A self-rejuvenating force. By comparison, Christian theology is a straight line. Birth, suffering, and then the apocalypse. . . . Human existence isn't a struggle for redemption to the Trickster. It's fun, a joyous celebration.<sup>5</sup>

In the Euro-Christian dramatic tradition, a cyclical structure tends to connote stagnation and failure. For example, while Samuel Beckett's famous tramps survive to continue waiting for Godot, their existence seems pointless; by contrast, Hamlet dies at the end of his long linear story, yet passes forward some hope for a new beginning. What makes Highway's plays so striking is the tension created between the two cultural traditions: while he writes in Euro-Christian dramatic form, he accepts Native values as a hypothetical position. In *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, linear elements generally show characters becoming lost by stubbornly following a straight line, while circular elements signal regeneration.

**S**TRUCTURALLY, the two plays are very similar. Both are set on the fictional Indian reserve of Wasaychigan Hill, on Manitoulin Island in Ontario. Both take place in the present. Both mention characters which appear in the other play. *The Rez Sisters* involves seven characters, all women, plus the trickster Nanabush who is played by a man; *Dry Lips* involves seven characters, all men, plus the trickster Nanabush who is played by a woman. What structural differences exist between the two plays are more of degree than of kind: *Dry Lips*, for example, is more episodic and more free in the use of non-realistic elements. The difference in tone between the two plays, however, is as extreme as it can be.

*The Rez Sisters* begins at the house of 53-year-old Pelajia Patchnose, who is reshingling her roof with the amiable but inept assistance of her sister Philomena Moosetail. Pelajia is fed up with life in "plain, dusty, boring old Wasaychigan Hill." The only excitement in the lives of these women comes from the small-stakes bingo games in the local church and nearby towns; but even that pleasure has become stale, flat, and unprofitable to the melancholy Pelajia. However, the indolent August haze over these women begins to lift in the second scene, in the yard of their half-sister Marie-Adele Starblanket, when a rumour begins to circulate about THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD coming to Toronto. (This phrase is capitalized every time it occurs.) Like a "Wasy" version of Chicken Little, Marie-Adele's excitable sister Annie Cook leads the pursuit and confirmation of this rumour, collecting on the way another sister, Emily Dictionary; a sister-in-law, Veronique St. Pierre; and Veronique's mentally disabled adopted daughter, Zha-boonigan Peterson. After a slapstick argument among the group in the Wasy general store, all seven women march to the Band Office to demand funding for their trip to the bingo in Toronto. The first act ends with the (unseen) chief rejecting this oddball delegation.

The second act opens with the women taking affirmative action on the matter. Collectively they have a wide range of skills, all of which they employ to raise the necessary \$1,400 for the trip: cleaning, harvesting, baking, recycling, entertaining, home maintenance, and entrepreneurial acumen are all put to use in a raucously funny "fundraising" collage. In an accomplished display of dramatic pacing, Highway follows this frantic scene with a series of quiet, introspective encounters among the women as they drive their borrowed van through the night to Toronto. He then raises the play to a climax of tempo and energy with the bingo event itself. In the grand-prize game for \$500,000, THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD disintegrates into more slapstick, with the Wasy women finally storming the podium and making off with the bingo machine. At the same time, the meaning of the game is raised to another level: Marie-Adele, sick with abdominal cancer, literally waltzes from this world to the next in the arms of the resplendent Bingo Master,

moving peacefully into a spiritual realm while worldly chaos rages around her. Following this climax, back at Wasaychigan Hill, we see the remaining “rez sisters” bury Marie-Adele, and we observe how the events of the play have changed their lives.

WHILE THE PLOT IS SIMPLE AND LINEAR, the play is not. Its complexity lies not in the plot, but in a sophisticated pattern of character revelation and development which entwines the plot. A reading of some of the women’s individual stories — a character’s “through-line” in theatrical terminology — will help to demonstrate how the strength of the play depends on cyclical character journeys rather than on the plot line.

Philomena’s story, for example, is a victory of simple needs and simple dreams. During the course of the play, she moves from contentment in the present, to despondency rooted in past sorrows, to return with greater contentment to concerns of the present. In the opening scene, while Pelajia wrestles with her existential angst, Philomena dreams only of winning “every [bingo] jackpot between here and Espanola,” so that she might build for herself a new ultra-modern bathroom. This dream is evidently inspired by a bowel problem: her “sisters” tease her about her frequency of visits to the toilet, and in the hubbub of the general store scene she adds her comments imperiously from a sitting position in the john.

Later in the play, however, we learn that Philomena’s bluff good cheer is to some extent an act of will. In the long drive in the van, she reveals that the date of THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD holds special significance: it is the birthday of her lost child. Almost thirty years earlier, while working as a secretary in Toronto’s garment district, she had an affair with a married white man. After he broke it off, Philomena gave up her newborn baby for adoption without even learning if it was a boy or a girl. This revelation is a low point for Philomena, normally a cheerful caring busybody to her “rez sisters.” But she is not the sort to stay low for very long. As it happens, she is the only one of the group to win any money at the bingo in Toronto, and on her return she uses her modest winnings to realize her worldly dream: a grand new bathroom with, as centrepiece, a large toilet, “spirit white . . . [and] so comfortable you could just sit on it right up until the day you die!” Her other dream, that of finding her lost child, is forgotten. A key ingredient of Philomena’s contentment, apparently, is to choose attainable dreams.

The dreams of her sister Pelajia are much more difficult to fulfil. She is the natural leader of the group, a stern father-figure in coveralls brandishing her ever-present hammer. A sense of her own powerlessness and aimlessness in the community have brought on her current malaise, to the point where she wants to abandon this society and move to Toronto. For Pelajia, the huge prizes in THE

BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD re-animate her dream of paving the roads on the reserve, which would empower her leadership by demonstrating the wisdom of her proposals.

Pelajia's story is that of learning how to lead, of developing her latent talent into a positive force. She is at her weakest when she uses her hammer to threaten people, even if it is for their own good. She gains stature when she uses it constructively (shingling roofs in the fund-raising scene) or shares it with others (allowing Emily to use it as a gavel in the trip-planning scene). When she dispenses with her hammer entirely, calming a terrified Marie-Adele in the darkened van, Pelajia demonstrates that she is truly a constructive leader. Later, speaking at Marie-Adele's funeral, Pelajia shares some acquired wisdom with her sisters to help mitigate their grief: Marie-Adele made the most of her life while she was here, and now Pelajia promises to do the same. By the end of the play, Pelajia has accepted her own talent for leadership, and determines to use it to genuinely improve conditions on the reserve rather than just to complain about them. She is back on her roof where she began the play, but her hammer has become a badge of purpose rather than just a physical tool.

The mainspring of the play is Marie-Adele, whose fear, suffering, and final ascension into the spirit world drive its events and character journeys. Marie-Adele does not love bingo for its own sake, as Annie and Philomena do, but for the dream which the grand prize might buy: an idyllic island home in Georgian Bay for her husband Eugene and their fourteen children. This dream is doomed, alas, pushed aside by Marie-Adele's growing concerns for her family in the event of her death. As if this worry weren't hard enough, her illness is also driving a wedge between her and her beloved Eugene, as she confides to Pelajia on their way to Toronto:

He doesn't talk, when something goes wrong with him, he doesn't talk, shuts me out, just disappears. Last night he didn't come home. Again, it happened. . . . I can't even have him inside me anymore. It's still growing there. The cancer. Pelajia, een-pay-see-see-yan. [Pelajia, I'm scared to death.]

The figure of Nanabush haunts Marie-Adele throughout the play. In fact, the terminally ill Marie-Adele and the feeble-minded Zhaboonigan are the only characters aware of Nanabush in his various guises. He first appears in Marie-Adele's yard as a white seagull, playfully threatening to foul her laundry and disconcerting her with his stares. Then, on the road to Toronto, Nanabush appears to her as a black nighthawk, driving her into hysterics with her fears for herself and her family. Marie-Adele is due to take further tests in Toronto, two days after the gigantic bingo there, but she doesn't live that long. As she waltzes with Nanabush in the guise of the Bingo Master, he begins to transform into the nighthawk, in effect an Ojibway angel of death. After having resisted for so long, in this scene Marie-Adele comes to accept her own death in the same way that she accepted life, gently and

with love: "Oh. It's you, so that's who you are. . . . Come . . . don't be afraid. . . . Come to me . . . ever soft wings."

The death of Marie-Adele creates regenerative ripples through most of the cast of characters. Up to this point, for example, Veronique St. Pierre has shown herself to be a small-minded gossip frustrated by her own childlessness. After Marie-Adele dies, Veronique breathes life into her own dream by moving into the Starblanket home to take care of Marie-Adele's family. The hard-working widower Eugene can provide all the things that Veronique's alcoholic husband cannot: a huge roast to cook, a good stove to cook it in, and a ready-made family that needs her love and care. The cycle is completed; and Veronique's small-mindedness, we finally understand, was a symptom not of having too little love to bestow, but rather of having too few people on whom to bestow it. Similarly, Emily Dictionary seems an unappealing character when we first meet her: a coarse, tough, foul-mouthed young woman recently come home to "the rez" from California. On the trip to Toronto, however, we learn that Emily's present hard-bitten persona may be just one stage in a long process of healing. Her former husband beat her viciously for ten years, and her lesbian lover in California committed suicide. The latent love in Emily is brought out by Marie-Adele's fear and by Zhaboonigan's fragility. So is it, oddly, by Emily's current affair with Big Joey, Wasaychigan Hill's most notorious stud, for at the end of the play we learn that Emily is pregnant. A new life completes the cycle, to compensate somehow for the loss of Marie-Adele, as Emily is beautifully transformed into a loving sister to Zhaboonigan and a loving mother to her baby.

As playwright Carol Bolt puts it, watching *The Rez Sisters* makes the audience feel part of "an extraordinary, exuberant, life-affirming family."<sup>6</sup> It is not a play about social problems, but about people and their dreams and their fears. That these people happen to be Native women, reflecting some of the problems of their particular place in contemporary society, asserts one feature only of the play's appeal. As Tomson Highway has observed, "I'm sure some people went to *Rez* expecting crying and moaning and plenty of misery, reflecting everything they've heard about or witnessed on reserves. They must have been surprised. All that humour and love and optimism, plus the positive values taught by Indian mythology."<sup>7</sup> The oddity is that he should be so proud of avoiding negative responses in his first major play, when he provokes them so relentlessly in his second.

**I**N HIS EPIGRAPH TO *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, Highway quotes a contemporary Native leader: "Before the healing can take place, the poison must be exposed." This goal is a lot less fun than the one he expresses for *The Rez Sisters*, that of celebrating Canada's "funky" Indian people. One must admit, however, that Highway achieves this goal no less successfully. *Dry Lips* is

intended as a “flip side” sequel to *The Rez Sisters*; in fact, a few of the men are familiar names from the earlier play, notably Veronique’s alcoholic husband Pierre St. Pierre and the sexual athlete Big Joey. It is a “flip side” in another way: in contrast to the life-affirming impulse of *The Rez Sisters*, we find in *Dry Lips* a litany of disturbing and violent events, set within a thin frame of hopefulness which is ultimately unconvincing.

As in *The Rez Sisters*, Highway gives each of the seven men in *Dry Lips* an easily identifiable preoccupation. Indeed, much of the humour of the play occurs when these preoccupations work at cross-purposes to each other. Zachary, the nearest thing to a lead character in the play, wishes to open a bakery on the reserve, and is about to present a budget proposal to the Band Council. But his project is jeopardized in the first scene when he is caught in sexually compromising circumstances by Big Joey, who is sponsoring a rival proposal for a local radio station to broadcast hockey games from the reserve’s arena. Big Joey threatens to show incriminating photos to Zachary’s wife, unless the bakery proposal is withdrawn in favour of the radio station.

The supporting characters of *Dry Lips* are not so interesting as those in *The Rez Sisters*, nor are their preoccupations. One is Creature Nataways, a garrulous simpleton who is Big Joey’s adoring sidekick. Late in the play we learn that his love for Big Joey probably has a homosexual basis, but by then the reason behind his devotion does not seem very important. Another is Spooky Lacroix, a reformed alcoholic who has become a fanatical Roman Catholic. Spooky spends much of the play knitting little garments for the baby his (offstage) wife is expecting at any moment. A third is Pierre St. Pierre, at fifty-three a decade or so older than the other men, a beer-swilling alcoholic and bootlegger. Pierre’s obsession is with the new women’s ice hockey team on the reserve, the “Wasy Wailerettes,” for which he’s been asked to referee. Like Annie Cook in *The Rez Sisters*, Pierre rushes from house to house spreading the news. Unlike bingo among the Wasy women, however, this report sparks no interest among the men, except some ironic musings that such an unnatural phenomenon as women playing hockey may portend apocalyptic changes lurking over the horizon.

Neither are the playwright’s premises for these characters so clever dramatically as in *The Rez Sisters*, because in general they do not compel the characters to take action. Thus, in *Dry Lips*, more of the action is imposed on the characters and less arises organically from their own needs. That much of the initiating action emanates from the two youngest characters in the play perhaps reflects the playwright’s concerns for the next generation of Native men. If so, the bleakness of his vision, as shown through the events which befall these two characters, is very discouraging.

One of the young men is 20-year-old Simon Starblanket, who appears to represent the hope of the next generation. We first meet him dancing and chanting in the forest under a full moon, dressed in a traditional costume made by his fiancée

Patsy. Patsy's stepmother, a medicine woman and midwife, is one of the few elders on the reserve concerned with preserving traditional Native values. "We've got to learn to dance again," says Simon. "I'm the one who has to bring the drum back. And it's Patsy's medicine power, that stuff she's learning from her step-mother . . . [that] helps me." As protégé, Simon seems just the man to lead a rebirth in Native values. And in his planned marriage with Patsy, who is pregnant with his child, Simon's potential to enrich the Wasy society seems fruitful indeed.

The other young man is 17-year-old Dickie Bird Halked, whom Simon has asked to be his best man. Dickie Bird's story, in contrast to Simon's, represents the hopelessness of the future for young Native people. Dickie Bird's mother gave birth to him, leaning against a lurid jukebox, in the Dickie Bird Tavern after which he was named. Her severe bouts of drinking resulted in the fetal alcohol syndrome which left Dickie Bird both mute and emotionally unstable. Rumours have reached him that his biological father was not his mother's husband, but rather Big Joey. In a series of flashbacks, the circumstances of his birth are re-enacted for the audience — perhaps taking place in Dickie Bird's own mind — and he begins to confuse Spooky's theological ramblings and Christ's agony on the cross with his mother's sordid labour, his own sense of abandonment, and Simon and Patsy's rejection of Christian dogma in favour of traditional Native spiritual values. In the play's horrifying climax, Patsy finds the disturbed boy wandering in his forest wilderness, and he brutally rapes her with a crucifix he's been carrying.

In contrast to the rather trivial searchings of the older men in the play — Zachary for his missing undershorts, Pierre for his missing ice skates — Simon and Dickie Bird are preoccupied with searches which have enormous human value attached to them: Simon for spiritual parameters, Dickie Bird for his natural father. The rape, however, ruptures the fragile bond between them, and destroys Simon's optimism as well. He gets a bottle and a gun, drinks himself into oblivion, and accidentally shoots himself just as Zachary is managing to talk him back to his proper senses. Furious, Zachary rages at the callousness of a God that could allow such a senseless tragedy to happen:

God! God of the Indian! God of the Whiteman! God-Al-fucking-mighty! Whatever the fuck your name is. Why are you doing this to us? Why are you doing this to us? Are you up there at all? Or are you some stupid, drunken shit, out-of-your-mind-passed out under some great beer table up there in your stupid fucking clouds? . . . I dare you to come down from your high-falutin' fuckin' shit-throne up there, come down and show us you got the guts to stop this stupid, stupid, stupid way of living. It's got to stop. It's got to stop. It's got to stop. It's got to stop. It's got to stop.

Before the healing takes place, says Highway, the poison must first be exposed. It is not a pleasant sight, but it is riveting.

During the rape scene, Big Joey is transformed from a harmless bully to a representative of weakness and evil in modern Native society. Before this scene, we

learned not only that Big Joey was Dickie Bird's father, but also that he fled from the jukebox birth seventeen years earlier. Now we see Big Joey witness the rape, take no action to stop it, and actively prevent Creature from interfering. Glimmers of explanation at first suggest some mystery and complexity to these unnatural acts: at Dickie Bird's birth, for instance, Big Joey "ran away and puked over on the other side of the bar, the sight of all that women's blood just scared the shit right out of him." That same year, Big Joey was one of a group of Natives beaten severely by FBI agents at a demonstration at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. "Ever since that spring," he says, "I've had these dreams where blood is spillin' out from my groin, nothin' there but blood and emptiness." But Big Joey's monstrous behaviour, we finally learn, is simply due to these two traumas being entangled in his mind. When Zachary demands an answer to the most perplexing question of the play — why did Big Joey allow his son to perpetrate this vicious rape? — Big Joey replies, "Because I hate them . . . I hate them fuckin' bitches. Because they — our own women — took the fuckin' power away from us faster than the FBI ever did." Perhaps most terrible crimes are committed for similarly prosaic reasons.

**H**IGHWAY'S FLUENCY WITH THEATRICAL IMAGERY makes his plays much stronger on the stage than on the page. This is also true of two other playwrights whom he credits as influences: James Reaney and Michel Tremblay. While *The Rez Sisters* and Tremblay's *Les Belles Soeurs* both revolve around women obsessed with bingo, however, there is no case to be made for derivativeness: the similarity is evidently due to common observable situations in real life rather than to any imitation. More intriguing is the influence of Reaney, in whose play-development workshops Highway participated while a student in London, Ontario, in the mid-1970s.<sup>8</sup> Highway himself acknowledges a debt to Reaney's use of poetic metaphor and mythological scale in the Donnelly trilogy.<sup>9</sup> But his stage imagery in these "rez" plays is all his own, particularly in his highly theatrical use of Nanabush. In *The Rez Sisters*, Nanabush is a mime and a dancer, always present but barely corporeal as the seagull, nighthawk, and Bingo Master. In *Dry Lips*, the "flip side," Nanabush is corporeality personified, appearing as grotesque versions of the women in these men's daily lives: Gazelle Nataways, the temptress who compromises Zachary's happy marriage; Black Lady Halked, Big Joey's alcoholic mistress and Dickie Bird's slattern mother; and Patsy, the hope of new life and new spiritual awareness for Simon, whose rape unbalances the fragile equilibrium of the men's interrelationships. Perhaps to emphasize the larger-than-life sexual importance that these women have for the Wasy men, Nanabush dons oversized prosthetic devices for their sexual characteristics: huge rubberized breasts for Gazelle, big buttocks for Patsy, and a full-term belly for Black Lady Halked, naked and reeling in the

Dickie Bird Tavern. The specifics of this theatrical imagery owe little to Tremblay and Reaney, but much to Highway's own explorations of his Native mythological heritage.

The tragedy of *Dry Lips* is of the men keeping on in their straight lines, absurdly reiterating their preoccupations instead of responding to the events around themselves. They participate in tragedy, but they do not seem to learn from it as the women of *The Rez Sisters* do. That we ultimately feel less involved with the men of *Dry Lips* may have to do with the "poison" that permeates their play. Are Native men more susceptible to the poison of their modern social context, of surviving in a Euro-Christian society, than Native women are? Highway avoids an answer, and weakens the credibility of his indictment in *Dry Lips*, with a palliative "dream" ending which seems gratuitous. Zachary awakens on his couch, naked, in exactly the same position as he was at the beginning of the play. There is no women's hockey team, no death, no consequences to the "stupid life" the men have been leading. Or are there? Was that way of life part of the bad dream as well? Or does there exist a mute Dickie Bird still looking for his father? We don't know. If it was all just a dream, we ought to resent being manipulated into caring about the victims of the play. But if the tragic conditions are real, then the upbeat tag ending, with Zachary joyfully lifting his infant daughter, undermines the issues which the play has raised.

Tomson Highway plans to write a cycle of "rez" plays, seven in all. Seven women in *The Rez Sisters*, seven men in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. It is a mystical number in Cree mythology, as in European. Highway explains:

Legend has it that the shamans, who predicted the arrival of the white man and the near-destruction of the Indian people, also foretold the resurgence of the native people seven lifetimes after Columbus. We are that seventh generation.<sup>10</sup>

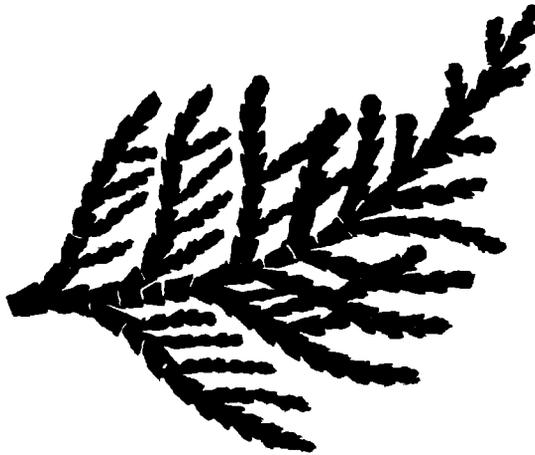
White society ought to watch carefully for this Native resurgence, because we need to learn from it. Our spiritual values have withered from neglect in our linear pursuit of progress. We are beginning to realize that we are poisoning ourselves physically as well, and we are not at all sure of our regenerative powers. We yearn for a society more in tune with that of Nanabush: more humorous, more visceral, less gender-bound. In this seventh lifetime, we must hope that Native values can regenerate themselves from their rape at the hands of white man's material objects. We will certainly listen to the next play from Tomson Highway. Not only will it be a cultural event, it may also be a play from which we can learn.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *The Rez Sisters* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Nancy Wigston, "Nanabush in the City," *Books in Canada*, 18.2 (March 1989), 8.

- <sup>3</sup> Quoted by Wigston, p. 8. Highway summarizes the qualities of the Cree language in this article.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted by Nigel Hunt, "Tracking the Trickster," *Brick*, 37 (Autumn 1989), 59.
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted by Ted Ferguson, "Native Son," *Imperial Oil Review*, 73-395 (Winter 1989), 18, 20.
- <sup>6</sup> Carol Bolt, "No Wings, Yet," *Books in Canada*, 18.2 (March 1989), 26.
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted by Ferguson, p. 22.
- <sup>8</sup> Highway's name is mentioned several times in the diary of the "Wacousta Workshops" published in Reaney's *Wacousta!* (Toronto and Victoria: Press Porcépic, 1979). Another future playwright involved in these workshops was Allan Stratton.
- <sup>9</sup> See Wigston, p. 9, and Ferguson, p. 22.
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted by Wigston, p. 9.



# THE CITY ON THE HILL

*Thomas King*

My uncle savages the streets  
skates figure eights  
around the meters  
drums the cars.

He gimmes change from laughing people  
wrapped in tight, white skins and  
and sheepy coats,  
round dances round the block  
in red-face  
clown-crows out the words he carries  
on his cuffs.

Until the cops come by  
and chauffeur him away  
with Marvin and the rest  
to Burger King.  
A break.  
Union rules.

Tough job, he says to Marvin  
over fries,  
but, hey,  
we got to hold the middle class  
in line,  
and keep them from the woods.



# THE BAFFIN WRITERS' PROJECT

*Victoria Freeman*

**S**INCE THE 1940s, a massive cultural, technological and military invasion from the South has irrevocably changed the Inuit way of life. Only fifty years ago, the Inuit of Baffin Island lived pretty much as their ancestors had for countless generations, except for the addition of a few trade goods and the Bible. Then came American airbases during World War II, the Cold War DEW-Line radar stations, and widespread oil and gas exploration. The federal government encouraged permanent settlement to ease the task of administering southern-style health and education services; this policy transformed self-sufficient nomadic hunters into largely unemployed town dwellers in little more than a generation. Today, TV plays a major role in shaping the cultural landscape of Inuit children.

Inuit people know what has to be done if Inuit culture is to survive and develop into the twenty-first century. In addition to maintaining control over their lands, they must keep speaking their language; quickly develop high-level literacy skills in Inuktitut and English; preserve existing knowledge and stories from the threatened oral tradition for future generations; ensure that their own concerns and culture are articulated in the books or magazines they read, the TV shows they watch, and materials they study; and educate other Canadians about Inuit culture, perspectives and concerns. For all of these activities, writing is an essential tool.

But until very recently, books published in Inuktitut were almost non-existent. The situation with newspapers and magazines in the North has not been much better, with most articles written in English and only a few translated into Inuktitut, often poorly. While many books have been written about the Arctic or about Inuit people, very little of what has been written has reflected an Inuit viewpoint: Inuit and non-Inuit alike have seen Inuit culture reflected through southern eyes. Similarly, in northern schools, curriculum materials have been in English and have reflected a southern perspective, though on Baffin Island this is now changing due to innovative curriculum development on the part of the Inuit-run Baffin Divisional Board of Education. Because of the relative isolation of the North, the

resulting short period of colonization, and the large number of native Inuktitut speakers, Inuktitut is one of the few aboriginal languages in Canada given a fair chance of survival, but its future is by no means secure. It is in this context that the Baffin Writers' Project has developed.

**T**HE PROJECT WAS FOUNDED IN 1988. Its aim is to encourage Inuit people to write in their own language and out of their own concerns, and to enable others, both Inuit and non-Inuit, to read what they have written. Through writing workshops for adults and students, the launching of new publications and awards, and the introduction of desktop publishing facilities into participating communities, we hope to nurture Inuit creative writing as well as encourage the recording of traditional stories, skills, and oral history.

Twice a year, in co-operation with the Baffin Divisional Board of Education, the project sends writers for two-week visits to five participating communities on Baffin Island — Cape Dorset, Clyde River, Igloolik, Iqaluit, and Pond Inlet — where they conduct writing workshops in schools and for community and adult education groups, give public readings, speak on the radio, and work with interested local writers on a one-to-one basis. The writers' visits involve all segments of the community — children, adults, and elders. The visits are co-ordinated in each community by a local facilitator; the latter are also beginning to work year round to support local writing and publishing by establishing ongoing writing groups, acting as contacts for writers seeking publication or other writing-related information, and working with other organizations within the communities.

Inuit and Native writers are the project's main resource; so far, thirteen of the seventeen visiting writers have been aboriginal. Participating writers have included Minnie Freeman, Alooook Ipellie, Alice French, Maria Campbell, Salli Benedict, Jordan Wheeler, Jeannette Armstrong, Dennis Lee, and Rudy Wiebe. Writers scheduled for the next round of visits in early February 1990 include Inuit writers Michael Kusugak and Sam Metcalfe, and Native writers Joy Asham Fedorick and Jordan Wheeler.

The project's history reflects the contributions made by Inuit, Native, and white participants as well as their willingness to work together to develop an appropriate structure. The project was initiated by southern writer David Young, who originally envisaged the project as a writer-in-residence program bringing southern writers into northern schools. This focus changed with my involvement, since I had had more contact with aboriginal writers, and with the subsequent participation of Native writers Jeannette Armstrong and Maria Campbell in the pilot project; we felt strongly that aboriginal, and particularly Inuit, writers should be the backbone of the project.

For the first year, David and I co-ordinated the project, along with Sandy McAuley of the Baffin Divisional Board of Education. In September of 1989, the project reached a watershed with the transfer of control to an Inuit co-ordinator and board of directors and with the decision to expand the project to include a circumpolar literary magazine and writing awards. The project is now an Inuit-run organization; the qallunaat (Inuktitut term for whites — it actually means “bushy eyebrows”) have become the fundraisers. The present co-ordinator, Alooook Ipellie, is a prolific and widely published Inuit writer as well as a gifted artist and cartoonist; for many years he edited Inuit magazines, notably *Inuit* and *Inuit Today*.

In the fall of 1989, the project’s original Inuit Advisory Board was formally replaced by a board of directors consisting of six Inuit with expertise in the broad field of writing, including members of the Baffin Divisional Board of Education’s children’s publishing program, an executive producer for the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation in Iqaluit, a television reporter for CBC’s northern network, a member of the Toonooniq theatre group in Pond Inlet, and a literacy specialist from the Arctic College teacher education program.

The November 1989 visits marked the first time that the visits were conducted entirely by Inuit writers, and their reception confirmed that Inuit writers are uniquely able to inspire the students and adult learners the project has targeted.

In the first year of the project, students in the participating schools compiled three issues of *Titirausivut*, a student literary magazine, with increasing proportions of writing in Inuktitut in each issue. The magazine was compiled alternately by students in Pond Inlet, Igloodik, and Cape Dorset and Clyde River, and was published in Pond Inlet using desktop publishing equipment donated to the project by the Apple Canada Educational Foundation. Other publications included the *Inuktionary*, an Inuktitut dictionary for novices produced with the assistance of poet Fred Wah; *Anuri*, a collection of poetry produced by students in Pond Inlet; and numerous small hand-illustrated books in all four communities. These publications have been placed in school libraries, some of which are open to the community, and are actively used for teaching purposes.

Visiting writers were also able to assist local teachers, as Jeannette Armstrong reported from Cape Dorset:

I do a workshop for the staff of the Pitseolak school. . . . I cover how culture is transmitted through communication. How communication contains metaphor and symbols which are culturally defined. I cover how stories, legends, myths, stories, songs, etc. contain various forms of metaphors and symbols. I talk about archetypes in literature and how these are cultural constructs. I speak about the importance of maintaining cultural integrity through language in translation and the importance of correctness of the use of metaphor and interpretation of symbols and archetypes for teaching purposes. I speak of the cultural value systems contained in the literature of a people. I speak of the need for Inuit people themselves to tell their own stories

for the continued health of their people. I explain how identity loss and culture shock occur and result in the conditions apparent in many Native communities. I speak of how education can turn that around with the use of culturally relevant and appropriate materials and how the literature of Inuit people is integral to that.

**B**UT THE PROJECT WAS NOT LIMITED to in-school activities, and in fact, we are putting more and more emphasis on writing activities which involve the community. In this respect, the project has been particularly successful in Igloodik, where last year Inuit writer Alice French initiated a writing group of older women. In November 1989, when French returned for a second visit, she discovered that the group she had founded had continued to meet throughout the year, was just completing a first book on traditional caribou clothing, and was busy making plans for a second. Also in November, French brought together students and a group of older men, so that the students could write down the elders' stories; this group appears to be flourishing, especially since the community co-ordinator, Rhoda Qanatsiaq (who just published her own first book), is now meeting regularly with its members.

Rudy Wiebe had this to say after his stay in Igloodik:

Some of them needed encouragement to begin writing their stories (invariably they have exciting life-stories to tell, but many are now thinking of actually recording them for the first time); others had already done some things tentatively and their mss. needed careful reading and discussion; others were working on book-length mss. and needed editorial advice and/or suggestions regarding, organization, style, possible publishers and their idiosyncracies. All in all, for a community of about 1000 people there seemed to be an extraordinary amount of serious writing going on, and even more to develop.

In addition to this grassroots work in the communities (I wonder if there is an Arctic equivalent to the word "grassroots"?) the project has also begun to develop various networks which further the aims of the project. First and foremost, Inuit writers, who have often worked in isolation in the past, are getting to know each other and are working together. The project is gradually making this network circumpolar, with its decision to send a delegate to the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in the summer of 1989, and the inclusion of an Alaskan Yupik writer in the last round of writers' visits. In future, we hope to invite writers from northern Quebec, the western Arctic, and Greenland.

As aboriginal writers, Native and Inuit writers share many of the same concerns: for example, using writing as a tool for community development, the issue of aboriginal copyright and cultural appropriation, the lack of publishing outlets, and the need for aboriginal editors. Recognizing this commonality, the Baffin Writers' Project has drawn upon the expertise of those involved in other projects attempting

to develop aboriginal literature, such as the En'Owkin International School of Writing, Earthtones North, and the Committee to Reinvent the Trickster. This sharing has occurred in both directions; Inuit writer Minnie Freeman, for example, is on the board of the En'Owkin International School of Writing.

Links were also forged between the Baffin Writers' Project and the writing community in the South. The project put the Baffin Divisional Board of Education in touch with a southern publisher who wanted to explore the feasibility of publishing some of the BDBE's titles for a southern market. In addition, those southern writers who visited northern communities have continued to support the Inuit writers they met through writing grant appraisals, helping writers find publishers, and offering editorial assistance.

In September of 1989, project co-ordinator Alootook Ipellie gave a reading at the international PEN Congress. During a panel discussion, he spoke about the problems faced by Inuit writers. Eighteen writers from around the world who were attending the Congress visited the North as guests of the project, met Inuit writers, were briefed about the project's activities, and visited northern communities to learn about northern issues.

At the time of writing, the project's organizers are busy developing two new initiatives — a new literary magazine and writing awards. The project is launching an international Inuit literary periodical, which will accept submissions from adults and children all over the circumpolar Arctic. The magazine will emphasize writing in Inuktitut, though English submissions will also be accepted, particularly from international contributors. The magazine will be an independent forum for Inuit and will be published twice a year, with the aim of eventually becoming a quarterly.

While the emphasis of the writers' visits is on writing as an everyday skill, an outlet for self-expression, and a way to pass on Inuit culture, the writing awards will recognize and encourage those Inuit who have the talent to be professional writers and who have already made a significant contribution to the development of Inuit literature. In the spring of 1990 the Baffin Writers' Project will, for the first time, honour literary achievement in the Baffin region; substantial prizes will be awarded for excellence in a number of categories. The emphasis will be on writing in Inuktitut, though some awards will be open to writing in English as well.

So far, we've birthed the baby and have been pleased with the results. But these are only beginnings — often tentative, exploratory, or fragile. While we have been reasonably lucky with our funding (after an unbelievable amount of bureaucracy, at least some of the money eventually arrives), it is by no means assured. And everything involving the North is expensive. This doesn't stop us from dreaming about other things we'd like to see in the future: an intensive summer writing workshop, translation projects (for translating books on the North into Inuktitut), the sponsoring of a conference bringing together writers from the circumpolar Arctic, and an Inuit-run publishing house.

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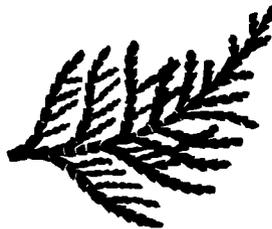
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# THE DANCING SUN

*Alootook Ipellie*

There were times in the Inuit land  
When the sun danced for us.  
All the Inuit stopped their daily routines at work  
And sat to watch the sun dance in the Inuit way.

The Inuit would sit and admire the smiling sun.  
The animals, too, it's been known, would do the same.  
"I am a happy sun," he would say. "Come dance with me."  
All the Inuit would join hands and dance, and dance, and dance . . .

The dance would enlighten the minds of the people  
And prepare them to face the day in joy.  
It was great to have a sun who danced for you,  
Make you laugh and have a wonderful time.

Sometimes the clouds would come and cover the sky  
So we couldn't see the dancing sun for several days.  
But as soon as the clouds were gone with the wind,  
The sun would appear again and say,

"Come dance with me!"  
All the Inuit would come and dance in joy  
With the dancing sun who danced in the Inuit way  
In the Inuit land.

# THE WATER MOVED AN INSTANT BEFORE

*Alootook Ipellie*

They appeared out of the blue!  
These beautiful beasts are  
Feast to our eyes!  
They never fail to hasten our blood!  
These providers of food,  
Of spearheads and oil,  
We have reached their domain at last!

# CULTURES IN CONFLICT

## *The Problem of Discourse*

*Robin Ridington*

**O**N JANUARY 12, 1987, Mr. Justice George Addy of the Federal Court of Canada began hearing a breach of trust suit against the federal government. The suit had been initiated by Chiefs Joseph Apsassin and Gerry Attachie, representing the Blueberry River and Doig River bands of Cree and Dunne-za Indians, who live in the north Peace River area of British Columbia. The case is referred to as *Apsassin v. The Queen*. The Indians claimed that the Government of Canada had failed to honour its fiduciary responsibility, as required by the Indian Act, in negotiating the surrender of IR-172, land reserved to the bands under the terms of Treaty 8, signed in 1899.

Lawyers for the two bands asked the judge to review evidence relating to a meeting called by the Indian agent which took place on September 22, 1945. Following that meeting, documents authorizing the land surrender were submitted to a justice of the peace in Rose Prairie, British Columbia, for authentication. The government then transferred title from the Department of Indian Affairs to the Veterans' Land Administration and made land available to veterans through a "soldier's settlement" program. In the 1950s and 1960s, substantial quantities of oil were discovered beneath the former reserve lands.

The trial lasted forty days. As it opened, the plaintiffs' lawyers, Leslie Pinder and Arthur Pape, explained the issues upon which their clients sought judgment. Leslie Pinder summarized the central issue as follows:

The lawsuit was based on the fact that the Federal Crown, having a fiduciary obligation to understand these People, breached that obligation, and failed to obtain the consent to this transaction . . . failed to act as a proper fiduciary ought to have acted in fact, gave away the estate of these People (their inheritance), to itself, sold the land to itself in a conflict of interest, and robbed these People of an adequate future and a proper land base.

Arthur Pape pointed out that Mr. Justice Dixon of the Supreme Court of Canada had ruled in a related case to the effect that

The purpose of this Surrender requirement in the Indian Act is clearly to interpose the Crown between the Indians and prospective purchasers or leasees of their land so as to prevent the Indians from being exploited. . . . The fiduciary obligation is the law's blunt tool for the control of this discretion.

Pape identified the issue of communication between cultures as being central to a decision about whether the surrender was taken as a responsible exercise of the government's trust responsibility.

Did the fiduciary give prudent advice to the person owed the duty, and was the transaction, in fact, a prudent one in the best interest of the person to whom the duty was owed? . . . The Court must first understand who those People were and how they would have come to such a Surrender gathering, with what assumptions and knowledge, and then to look at what the Crown Agent did and ask whether that would have fulfilled the duty of explaining to these People what their rights and possibilities are, and explaining to them whether such a thing might be a prudent thing for them to do. . . . The Court has to find out in the Eighties who those People had been 40 years before, and that involves both the Elders giving evidence and experts like Hugh Brody giving evidence, trying to assist the Court to understand that.

Pinder and Pape explained in their opening statement that "the problem of discourse" was central to the case. They argued that, in order to judge whether the surrender was valid under the terms of the Indian Act, Mr. Justice Addy would have to understand the ways in which hunting peoples of the Canadian subarctic make decisions in matters of vital concern to them. He would have to understand Dunne-za/Cree discourse and how it relates to the discourse of his own legal tradition. The trial ended on March 27, 1987. On November 4, 1987, Mr. Justice Addy gave his decision. He dismissed the claim of the Indians. His decision is under appeal. In his judgment he wrote that

[The Dunne-za/Cree] had no organized system of government or real law makers. They also lacked to a great extent the ability to plan or manage, with any degree of success, activities or undertakings other than fishing, hunting and trapping. It seems that many of their decisions even regarding these activities, could better be described as spontaneous or instinctive rather than deliberately planned.

Regarding his assessment of the testimony elders gave at the trial, he wrote:

Due to the manner in which these witnesses testified and in the light of the evidence from witnesses from the defense and certain documentary evidence . . . I am forced to the conclusion that their testimony was founded (and, in most cases, perhaps unconsciously) on the fact that oil was discovered on the reserve some thirty years later, rather than on a true recollection and description of what actually took place at, and previous to, the surrender meeting in 1945. It is perhaps a case of the wish being father to the thought.

They were certainly not what might be termed disinterested witnesses since some 324 million dollars was being claimed on behalf of the Band which now numbers about 300 members. It is of some significance also that none of these witnesses stated

that they or anyone else had actually informed either Mr. Grew or Mr. Gallibois that they were not consenting nor did they state that they had publicly spoken out against the surrender in the presence of Mr. Grew or Mr. Gallibois.

The judge evaluated the testimony of anthropologist Hugh Brody about Dunne-za/Cree culture as follows:

[Brody] impressed me as an informed champion and an enthusiastic supporter of the native [*sic*] peoples' cause generally and of the Dunne-za Cree in particular but, by the same token, as a person who conspicuously lacked the objectivity required of an expert witness on the subject of whether informed consent was obtained in 1945 as well as on the actual importance to the plaintiff Band of IR-172 at that time.

In August 1988, I organized a conference within the International Summer Institute for Structural and Semiotic Studies (ISISSS) at the University of British Columbia entitled "Cultures in Conflict: The Problem of Discourse." One session within that conference brought together people who had been involved in the Dunne-za/Cree case. I was particularly anxious to review this problem of discourse, because I have known the Indians who were plaintiffs in this case over a period of thirty years and was puzzled by the conclusions Mr. Justice Addy drew from the evidence presented to him. I have written extensively about the Dunne-za in the form of scholarly papers and most recently in a narrative ethnography, *Trail to Heaven*. I attended nearly every day of the court proceedings and took extensive fieldnotes.

**I**T MAY SEEM ODD for issues heard before a federal court judge to appear in an issue of *Canadian Literature*, but perhaps the judge thought it odd to be asked to consider the problem of discourse in his courtroom. A central issue of the trial was both anthropological and literary in that it focused critical attention on conflicting modes of discourse. The Indians asked us to listen to them. They asked us to understand the way they arrive at decisions. They asked us to accept their decisions regarding IR-172, a piece of land they call "the Place Where Happiness Dwells."

Discourse is a problem, but it is also, and more fundamentally, a powerful and enabling form of human communication. Human communication is more than the simple transfer of objective information between impartial and interchangeable intelligences. Humans do not just copy and transmit information in the way that one computer communicates with another. Human communication also creates a point of view or a context within which information becomes imbued with meaning. Human communication is a cultural accomplishment and a means of defining cultural identity. As Nuu-Chah-Nulth elder Simon Lucas said in a speech at a benefit for Meares Island, from which I quoted at the beginning of the conference:

“It’s important that we remain different. That way, you and I will get to know the meaning of understanding. What it means to understand another man’s culture.”

Through our discourse with one another we negotiate a world in which we can understand our differences. Discourse establishes the syntax we use to create meaning and comprehension. It uses metaphors that layer one set of meanings on top of another for synergistic effect. Two speakers, or two cultures, are more than the sum of their parts. Discourse is only a problem when we talk past one another or, worse, use talk to suppress another person’s ability to express himself or herself freely. Discourse is as old as language. It is as fundamental to human experience as is culture. It is also as new and as fragile as each new breath of life. We create our culture in the act of speech and in the intersubjectivity of discourse. We negotiate and perform our cultural reality in communication with one another. We create shared but separate realities through the discourse of our conversations with one another.

The original Latin meaning of discourse is “a running to and fro.” We run to and fro with ideas and understandings in the ongoing discursive intersubjectivity that pervades normal everyday life. Discourse is essential to the typically human, dynamic interaction and feedback between culture and experience which first evolved within the cultures that hunting and gathering people negotiated with one another thousands of years ago. Discourse is the form that enables people to communicate freely while at the same time living responsibly within a nourishing and sustaining social order. Discourse connects people of different generations as well as those who are in face-to-face contact.

The oral traditions of people who are native to this land are a form of discourse that connects them to the land and to the generations that have gone before. Their discourse has given them a highly developed form of government that is different from our own. Their discourse honours individual intelligence rather than that of the state. Their discourse also demands a responsibility to past generations, to the land, and to generations as yet unborn. Their discourse honours and enables both individuality and social responsibility.

The discourse of Native people takes place within real time, but it is meaningful in relation to a time of mind, a mythic time. Performer and listener share both a common time frame and a complementary knowledge of that mythic world. They share a common responsibility to the names that are fabulous in their lands. Their relationship to the names and to one another is conversational. The “running to and fro” of their conversation takes place in the same time as their common experience, but it also takes place in the time of their ancestors. The names of these ancestors and their lands are parties to the conversation. The discourse of Native people is meaningful because they share a common and complementary point of view, a common time and place in the world, a common or complementary set of ideas

about how to interpret experience, and a common responsibility to the land and its government.

Discourse is essential to the typically human, dynamic interaction and feedback between culture and experience that first evolved within the cultures that hunting and gathering people negotiated with one another thousands of years ago. The oral traditions of these people allowed them to be remarkably flexible, adaptable, and ready to take advantage of variations in the resource potential of their environments. We know from contemporary ethnography (see Ridington 1988a for a review of this literature) that knowledge necessary for informed decision making is widely distributed among adult members of small-scale hunting and gathering communities. The egalitarianism found in these communities functions successfully because individuals are expected to be in possession of essential information about their natural and cultural environment. Discourse within such oral cultures is highly contexted and based on complex, mutually understood (but often unstated) knowledge.

Hunting and gathering people typically live in kin-based communities where most social relations take place between people who know one another well. Because people share knowledge of one another's lives, they code information about their world differently from those of us whose discourse is conditioned by written documents. They know their world as a totality. They know it through the authority of experience. They live within a community of shared knowledge about the resource potential of a shared environment. They communicate knowledge through oral tradition. They organize information through the metaphors of a mythic language. They reference experience to mutually understood information. They communicate with considerable subtlety and economy.

Hunting and gathering people code information in a way that is analogous to the distribution of visual information in a holographic image. If you take a small scrap of a hologram and look at it carefully, you can reconstruct the entire image it represents. In contrast, if you take a small scrap of an ordinary photograph, all you have is that portion of the visual field represented by the scrap. A hologram codes information differently from a photograph. Its image gets grainier and grainier as the sample is reduced, but it remains an image of the totality.

People like the Dunne-za/Cree live storied lives. You are a character in every other person's story. You know the stories of every person's life. You retain an image or model of the entire system of which you are a part. Each person is responsible for acting autonomously and with intelligence in relation to that knowledge of the whole. Each person knows how to place his or her experience within the model's meaningful pattern. Each person knows the stories that connect a single life to every other life. People experience the stories of their lives as small wholes, not as small *parts* of the whole. The stories of lives are not meaningless components of a

coded message analogous to phonemes; rather, they are metonyms, small examples of a meaningful totality.

Oral performance in a small-scale hunting and gathering culture plays creatively upon a mutually understood totality. Each performer's speech evokes and is meaningful in relation to everything that is known but, for the moment, unstated. Each story contains every other story. Each person's life is an example of the mythic stories that people know to exist in a time out of time. Experience within a closely contexted oral culture is meaningful in relation to a totality that is taken for granted. Storied speech is an example of that totality, not simply a part of it. Storied speech makes subtle and esoteric references to common history, common knowledge, common myth. Each person is, therefore, responsible for acting autonomously and with intelligence in relation to that knowledge of the whole. From within the familiarity of shared, culturally constructed metaphors and assumptions, the essentially creative and transactional quality of human communication may not be obvious. It is only when we attempt discourse with people who are unwilling to listen to our words, to understand our experiences, that we find ourselves talking at cross purposes. Attempted discourse between different cultures may create conflict, ambiguity, even oppression. The "cultures in conflict" conference looked at examples of discourse between cultures and peoples who have found themselves in conflict with one another. It also looked at the possibility for communication that Simon Lucas articulated, the discovery of "what it means to understand another man's culture."

### *The Conference*

THE FOLLOWING IS AN ACCOUNT of the trial as discussed in the "Cultures in Conflict" conference. Participants in the session in order of their appearance were as follows:

- Robin Ridington, anthropologist and convenor of session;
- Gerry Attachie, plaintiff and chief of the Doig River band;
- Hugh Brody, anthropologist and expert witness at the trial;
- Arthur Pape, counsel for the Dunne-za/Cree;
- Leslie Pinder, counsel for the Dunne-za/Cree.

The following narrative combines excerpts from the 1988 conference, field-notes I took at the 1987 trial, and my own interpretations of the texts created in this discourse. Chief Gerry Attachie of the Doig River band described his understanding of issues raised by the case following my introduction to the session.

GERRY ATTACHIE: Yeah, OK, I guess. What happened was, we, back in 1945 we lost a good land there. Just about eight miles north of Fort St. John. We, seven

bands that signed a treaty back in 1899. Seven bands in Fort St. John area. And, we, we had eighteen section of land there, just north of Fort St. John, about seven miles. And we live there all our lives, and up until 1945, we lost it and then, the government promise our people that time they could get lot of money, and then, so they give up the good land and then, later on, they been promise that they could get lot of money every year and then for a couple of years they receive, I believe, ten dollars apiece each person.

Later on money stop coming in so they kind of wonder why they don't get anymore, and then, I remember, ever since I remember back about in the late fifty, people were, they could get together lot of times, just amongst themselves our people, and then they said that, "I wonder what happen," they say. "We don't get any more money," and then, but just amongst themselves they discuss this problem, and then, off and on we could mention that they been promise that they could get a lot of money every year a long time. I don't know how long. Finally, uh, I got involved with the band way back in 1974 and I try to find out what happen to IR-172 and then, one day I pick up a, I borrow a book from the library and it's called *Peacemaker*, which was written in Peace River country there in the Fort St. John area. And, I come across one, like, story about IR-172, Fort St. John. They call us Fort St. John Beaver band, about that time. They still call us today Fort St. John Beaver band. And, I read in that paper, in the book, it says that the land been sold 1945 and then later they discover that the mineral rights which up to that IR-172 were forgotten here.

Then, there's lot of oil over there, and gas. Then, I remember what people were complaining about like, before. And, one day, I sat down with some elders, and then they told me exactly what happen, and then, about that time, my grandmother was still alive, and then every time I take her to town and then she said, this was, "We lost a good land," she said. And then, then she tell me a story about how people get together there every year. They celebrate and then people all have a good time together there. And, but after 1945 when the land been sold and then people never get together again. Even relatives. They don't see each other again and then some of them died. Like, I just talk to some farmers around there, just recently. They said, one time there were about four or five hundred tipis, they say, and then they could hear drums about twenty miles away. People were having a pow-wow in there. Our people.

Anyway, I — after I found out what happen to IR-172 — I set a meeting with Indian Affairs superintendent that work in Fort St. John. His name was Johnny Watson, and then I told him that, we set a date and then we sat down and we talk about IR-172 and then he said, "There's something wrong in here," he said. "Something happen in here." And, so, he brings out all the documents. About three feet high papers. And, oh boy [he laughs] then was how it's all started, and we got a lawyer and then we hire a local lawyer there. His name is Gary Collison and then he start

doing some research and then, came to Vancouver, I believe up in here. And, he done some work on that about a week, I guess. And then, later on, we got another lawyer, which is Art and Leslie and Rick, Rick Salter, too. And we start this case about back in about 1977, and '78, and then we finally went to court 1987, January, January out here, and we bring our elders, too. We bring some people that were there that time when the Surrender took place, and we, we learn a lot in court and then we went through pretty, pretty rough, rough, hard time and took us forty days, I believe.

We were in court for forty days, and after, we had some elders there and then later on they were pretty they were disappointed because what happen was they believe that the judge and the justice lawyer didn't believe them, when they have their testimony. They, they think the elders were lying and then they, they felt bad about it. Like, our, our people you know, you ask them, if you ask them too many question and then they might you know, sometime they get upset. One question over and over again and then like John Davis. When we're, we're doing discovery and then, one of the elders, name of John Davis, that, we going to meet again I told him one morning and then he said, "How many meetings we have to go through," he said, and then, he's getting tired. When, like our people, you know, if they say something, you know, they don't want to repeat things over and over again, 'cause. Anyway, we done a lot of work in here and then hopefully we'll get something out of this in the end. And, well.

Yeah, I just want to say another thing. We, we had people that were at the 1945 Surrender. We had people that, still around. They were, they're still alive, and hopefully that they could settle this while they were, while they're still alive and we also, last few years, when we start working on this case, a lot of people were want to get involve. The people that were there. That time. And just, just recently there's some farmers, local people in Fort St. John that, when they heard about this case that we lost the first round and then they, they, they really feel, they were upset. They said that, you know, they told me that we were beat and then, they say that hopefully you people get something out of this cause, you know, they, they felt really bad, and we, we had some people that were involve that time. Some people from outside, like teachers and some priest, Catholic priest. They, they had good testimony, and we tape some of them and then we, what I believe is we should have these people before the court case, and then would have been different too.

ONE OF THE PEOPLE Gerry mentioned was an elder named John Davis. The following are excerpts from his testimony as led by lawyer Arthur Pape.

A.P.: John Davis, I want you to tell the judge stories about when you were a little

boy and no whitemen were in your country. Tell the judge where you and your family lived when you were a little boy, before the whitemen came.

J.D.: Long time ago, when there was no whitepeople, there were two stores. One of the storekeeper's name was Davis. What I can remember I will say. What I do not remember, I will not say. I cannot read and write. I only can remember. Before the whitemen came, we were bush people. When they came, where we live, they said, "This my land," and we have no more. We can't read or write. We only can remember it. Since not too long ago that my people started to go to school.

A.P.: Tell the judge when you saw the whitepeople come in big boats up the river.

JUDGE: When he's going into a long answer, ask him to stop so she [the translator] can repeat.

A.P.: John Davis. Try and say your stories a little bit at a time so Lana [Lana Wolf, the translator] can tell us what you are saying. Please tell us again about the boats because we didn't understand it all.

J.D.: Big boat come. People started having things that they didn't have.

A.P.: What did the boat look like?

J.D.: White boat. In the back of it there was a wheel, like a wagon wheel.

A.P.: Did the boat have a pipe on it like a stovepipe?

J.D.: Yes, two. One is used for horn.

A.P.: What did it sound like when it made its noise?

J.D.: It made a sound like a cow.

A.P.: When whitepeople came, what did they do on the land?

J.D.: First time two men came and they started building cabins.

JUDGE: We should know how old you are.

A.P.: The judge wants to know how old you are. Can you tell him?

J.D.: I don't know my age.

JUDGE: For the record, let's say he looks old to me. He's not a teen-ager.

A.P.: When those whitepeople came, what was the place where your family lived in the summer?

J.D.: Place we call, Indian Lands.

[*break*]

A.P.: John Davis. When Dr. Brown [former Indian agent] talked to [Chief] Succona, was there an interpreter to tell Succona what Dr. Brown was saying?

J.D.: A guy named Johnny Beatton.

A.P.: When Johnny Beatton talked for Dr. Brown, could the Indians understand what Dr. Brown was saying?

J.D.: Johnny Beatton could speak a little bit of Beaver.

A.P.: Did you sometimes hear Johnny Beatton speak for Dr. Brown?

J.D.: No, I can't understand English.

A.P.: Did you understand Johnny Beatton when he spoke Beaver?

J.D.: Yes.

A.P.: Can you tell some things that Johnny Beatton said in your language for Dr. Brown?

J.D.: About the land. People don't want to sell, but it was still sold.

A.P.: What did Johnny Beatton tell Succona for Dr. Brown when he talked to him about the land?

J.D.: Indian Boss wants to sell the land.

A.P.: What did Johnny Beatton say in your language would happen after you sold the land?

J.D.: Before he translate that for Dr. Brown, that person wasn't alive.

A.P.: I don't understand, John Davis. Could you say that again?

J.D.: Johnny Beatton was speaking for people. He was helping the Indian people for long time. The Small Indian Boss wasn't helping.

A.P.: Do you know the name of the Small Indian Boss?

J.D.: Gallibois. Yes, Gallibois.

JUDGE: Is Gallibois the Small Indian Boss?

J.D.: He was the Indian Boss but he never help Indians.

[break]

A.P.: John Davis. What did Johnny Beatton say to Succona about selling the land?

J.D.: He told him not to sell it. The Indians are poor.

JUDGE: Did he hear Johnny Beatton say anything to Succona?

A.P.: The story you have just told about Johnny Beatton. Did you hear him say that to Chief Succona?

J.D.: I was there. I hear.

A.P.: Did Johnny Beatton say those things in your language when he talked to Succona?

J.D.: He speak a bit Beaver.

A.P.: Where was the place you were when you heard Johnny Beatton talk about that to Succona?

J.D.: Moose Creek, Moose River.

A.P.: What time of year? What season?

J.D.: Summertime.

A.P.: What did Succona want to do when he talked to Johnny Beatton about the land?

J.D.: He told him not to move, that he should stay where he is and build cabins.

JUDGE: Not sure. What did Succona say?

J.D.: Johnny Beatton told him but he didn't want to.

JUDGE: What did Succona say?

J.D.: He just want to go out hunting and he sold the land.

A.P.: Why did he want to sell the land?

J.D.: "Gonna be lots of money," the Indian Boss told him. They just took it. They never saw nothing.

**F**OLLOWING GERRY'S DESCRIPTION of his experience as plaintiff in the case, anthropologist Hugh Brody told the story of being an "expert witness."

HUGH BRODY: Well, I'll begin. I think I'll just tell the story of the trial as I experienced it, and a very awful experience it was, too. First of all, I think it's really important to say that trials, that court procedures, public hearings, are very seductive for persons like me. I've spent fifteen, twenty years having the extraordinary privilege of living with, working with, Native peoples in northern Canada, and all the time, there is this growing sense of doubt about what on earth it is that really I'm up to, and whether really I should be doing it, and to what extent it's exploitative. The doubt, I'm sure as in all anthropologists, grew and grew in me, grows and grows in me, so when a court case comes along, it's seductive because it seems to allay the doubt. Here at last is something the people themselves have initiated. It was Gerry and his fellow chiefs and elders who wanted this action. Their lawyers and they themselves say there's something I can do to help with this action. So here at last is a place to put all this anthropology. A place where it might actually do something, where it might right a wrong a wrong which in the course of my work I've heard a lot about. A chance to explain, in a place where it needs to be explained, some of what I've been lucky enough to learn about.

Leslie and Art came to me and said they wanted an opinion for the court case which touched on many things, including the nature of leadership and decision making in Dunne-za/Cree society, an opinion which touched also on the nature of the use to which IR-172 had been put over the years and the place it had in the Dunne-za/Cree economy in the 1940s. Here were subjects which the people themselves had wanted to get across to the outside world, and I think parenthetically it's terribly important to know that many Dunne-za and other northern Native

peoples that I've met feel that if only the white world knew more, it would be a juster world. They equate knowledge with justice, and I've often been pressed by people I've worked with to make the information available as publicly as I can, to write accessible books, to make films, so as others will know, and if they know, they'll treat aboriginal people better.

So, the motivation for writing the opinion was very strong for me, and I was very optimistic about doing it. I wrote an opinion in which I try to describe the complicated nature of decision making in Dunne-za/Cree society, the complexity of the authority and lack of authority system; the richness and subtlety of an economy that required that reserve land in the 1940s as a summer gathering place; the spiritual dimensions to that summer gathering place; why those drums were heard twenty miles away (that Gerry was talking about); what those drums really meant not just as music, but as metaphor, as stories, as knowledge, as economic reality, all intertwining in that very complex way that they do in northern hunting systems. And I wrote an opinion which also explained something about the use of the lands in the economy as a whole. It's a short opinion, about forty pages long.

Prior to giving evidence, I went to the Court to sit in on some of the elders giving evidence. Elders like John Davis, whom Gerry mentioned, but others, and some of the young people giving evidence. And I was confronted by the extreme unpleasantness (for me, and I speak for myself), the extreme unpleasantness of the setup.

The judge represents that world to whom they have to tell it. Elders who are interrupted, not only by the judge's manner, but also by the lawyers for the Crown. Elders whom I'm sure have never been interrupted, as Robin was saying [in my introduction to the conference], when telling these stories being interrupted every second sentence. The interpreter struggling to make sense of what's being said. An atmosphere in which nothing can stand as a fact, and yet the people speaking in the court believing in facts more, perhaps, than any other peoples in the world, peoples for whom truth is always the objective, constantly being accused of untruthfulness either directly or in implication.

You have a sense of the impossibility of it that's hard to communicate. And sometimes a sense of the hopelessness of it. And you can't — I found it almost impossible to stop wondering, "What really should be done in this court?" When I got on the stand, I was led by Art, very skillfully, through what it was I had to say about leadership and decision making, and as always, when talking about these things, I got excited about it. Enthusiastic. And I remember in particular two things that I think serve as illustrations of the whole problem of the procedure, at least from my point of view, and perhaps more generally than that.

First, I tried to convey to the judge what it was like to be at the receiving end of Dunne-za decision making. So, you come into a Dunne-za community, or you're living in a Dunne-za community, and you're trying to plan your life. And the

people whom you're dependent upon don't make decisions in a way with which people like us are familiar. So I tried to take him, as it were, through a hunting trip. I tried to take him out hunting by telling him a typical hunting trip story, and as I remember it, I told it very fully, and at considerable length, and with a great deal of excitement.

The judge's reaction to all the stuff I, and of course others, had told him about decision making, was to say, in effect, "Well, it seems to me that there isn't a society there. I mean, if they don't make decisions coherently, if there isn't someone responsible for making a decision, if there isn't a leader who says, 'Well we're going to do X' and others who follow, then there isn't a society. Sounds like chaos, and I find it very hard to believe." And in fact, at one point, as I understood it (though Art and Leslie can correct me if I'm wrong), what I said about decision making seemed to dispose him towards dismissing the whole action. I mean, if there isn't any society that's coherent and makes decisions the way ours does, then how can they be bringing an action to the courts?

So, far from managing to take the judge on a hunting trip, far from succeeding in bringing him into some sort of connection with Dunne-za culture and thinking, I managed to alienate him, I think very deeply. And when I read his judgment, that suspicion was somewhat confirmed. I mean, he dismissed my evidence, sort of out of hand.

The second example that might attempt to explain the use to which IR-172 (the land that was stolen, or taken) had been put in the 1940s, it was, as I said earlier, as a summer gathering place. In these documents to which Gerry referred, it's many times noted that it was only used for the odd few weeks of the year, but, of course, hunter-gatherer culture requires places you use for an odd few weeks of the year as part of an annual system which exists as a whole, and if you pluck out one segment of the annual system, you can threaten the whole system. If you pluck out the summer gathering place, which is the one spot where all the various bands, and indeed other groups, meet, in order to exchange crucial information and goods, then you are really mounting a fairly direct assault against the system as a whole.

I tried to explain all this (led by Art) again quite fully and talked about the difference between summer uses and winter uses, which, in relatively modern times, reduces to a difference between summer hunting and winter trapping. This was done very carefully and it's very concrete evidence which, you would think, no one would have too much difficulty with. Under cross-examination, the lawyer, one of the lawyers for the Crown, produced a map which had been made as part of a research project which I had helped coordinate in the late seventies, a map which showed all the trapping areas of all the Dunne-za/Cree People and he pointed out with some satisfaction that on this map IR-172, the lands in question, didn't seem to figure, and therefore appeared to show to the Court that IR-172 wasn't an important place, and somehow, and this is where we again come to the problem

of discourse, I didn't seem able to be able to show him that his map was of trapping, which is, of course, the autumn-winter-and-early-spring part of the seasonal round and not the summer part of the round, so that IR-172's absence from a trapping map was exactly what we should have expected!

There's something about the legal procedure that is terribly at odds with Dunne-za/Cree and other hunter-gatherer and probably all other Indian cultures, and it's the nature — let me say that again: it's the extent to which the court procedure is a game. We met earlier this morning, Gerry and Leslie and Art and I, and someone was saying (I think that's Gerry) that John Davis, one of the elders who gave evidence, didn't seem to be taken seriously, or didn't seem to be trusted by the lawyer for the Crown. And it struck me suddenly that lawyers for the Crown, when cross-examining, or all lawyers when cross-examining, neither trust nor mistrust. It hasn't anything to do with believing or not believing. It's simply a game that's being played with facts — with arguments. The job of a cross-examining lawyer is to discomfort, to unsettle, to confuse.

Elders from the Dunne-za/Cree bring their case to the Court because they believe there's some direct relationship between knowledge and justice, but that cross-examining procedure, and perhaps the whole court procedure, actually breaks any such simple equation. As you experience it on the stand, you don't feel a relationship between knowledge and justice. What you feel is someone playing games with you. And elders (and I can just about cope with that), but elders in the Dunne-za/Cree *can't* cope with it. They sense that they're being played with in some way, and they might come to the conclusion that they're being mistrusted, disliked, doubted by the cross-examining lawyer. And that will, in fact, cause them to fall silent and that happened several times in the case that if somebody doesn't believe what you're saying, you shut up. That's the dignified thing to do. But of course that's failing to play the game completely. That's the thought I think I want to leave everyone with. [applause from the audience]

**G**ERRY HAD BEEN LISTENING attentively as Hugh Brody told his story. He asked to conclude with a few further thoughts:

**GERRY ATTACHIE:** Yeah. I just want to say one thing before we leave here. In the early, in the late 1800, in Peace River country (they call that Peace River cause Beaver Indians made peace with Cree Indians, so they call it Peace River), anyway, in the early 1800, late 1800, the Hudson's Bay Company had a trading post at Peace River. I guess by that time they were, they were starving, and our people were supporting them. Like, they hunt for them. Make drymeat for them. Grease. And I had a, this guy named Johnny? Johnny Beatton? [question put to Robin Ridington who responds, "Frank Beatton"]

Frank Beaton, yeah, Frank Beaton. I had his diary here; I had it at Robin's place here. It's his diary from 1860 to 1923. He, he's running the Hudson's Bay, Hudson's Bay Company. He's working for Hudson's Bay Company. In the late 1800, our people were hunting for them. They that's how they survive. But nothing been, you don't read it in the paper. I found a diary after that court court case, and then, when I mention, when I was reading the diary to our elders, I took them back, way back and then, they, they remember, when our people were hunting for early traders.

And, I just want to say one thing. We, we had treaty rights. We had rights, but we have to fight for it all the time. Every time you turn around, you got to fight. And then I was in the AFN [Assembly of First Nations] meeting in Edmonton, early this spring and then I talk to some of the elders and they told me that, "We always going to be small," they told me, "'cause Government they have power in a piece of paper." That's how we lost first round in this case. They believe the papers more than the elders' testimony. It's, it's pretty sad, you know. Thank you.

### *Conclusion*

**G**ERRY MADE FOUR IMPORTANT and related points in his concluding remarks:

1. The Dunne-za and Cree established peaceful relations with one another long ago. They did so as sovereign nations.
2. When the whitemen came, Indians provided for them from the store of their accumulated knowledge. "They were starving, and our people were supporting them. . . . they hunt for them."
3. Although he did not say so explicitly, the indirect and intended implication of Gerry's discourse was to remind us all that Indians who feed one another and live in peace feel responsible to one another. When you feed someone you expect that person to feed you, if and when he or she is able.
4. Gerry's experience in court confirmed what he and the elders had learned when they lost their land in the first place. Whitemen believe paper over the testimony of people who speak from experience. "'Government they have power in a piece of paper.' That's how we lost first round in this case. They believe the papers more than the elders' testimony. It's, it's pretty sad, you know. Thank you." It's pretty sad, you know. John Davis said:

What I can remember, I will say.  
 What I do not remember, I will not say.  
 I cannot read and write.  
 I can only remember.  
 Before the whitemen came, we were bush people.  
 When they came, where we live they said,  
 "this my land."  
 And we have no more.  
 We can't read and write.  
 We only can remember it.  
 Since not too long ago  
 that my people started to go to school.

**Y**OU ARE READING THE WORDS of John Davis in a journal called *Canadian Literature*. You can read and write. It is quite some time ago that our people started to go to school. You can read and write, but you can also remember. You can remember that John Davis is a man of knowledge. He is a man who gained knowledge through his experience of life in the bush. You can remember that his people helped the early fur traders. He and the Dunne-za who went before him took care of the whitepeople when they were new to the country. They fed the strangers from their knowledge of the land. They fed them as people with whom discourse was possible. They expect a return of that consideration. Reading his words brings you into his world. Reading his words begins a return of the discourse. John Davis understands his life in relation to the world as a whole. Gerry Attachie understands what his grandmother told him about the Place Where Happiness Dwells. He does not understand why the government should hold power over him from a piece of paper. He does not accept something that is unintelligible to him or his people.

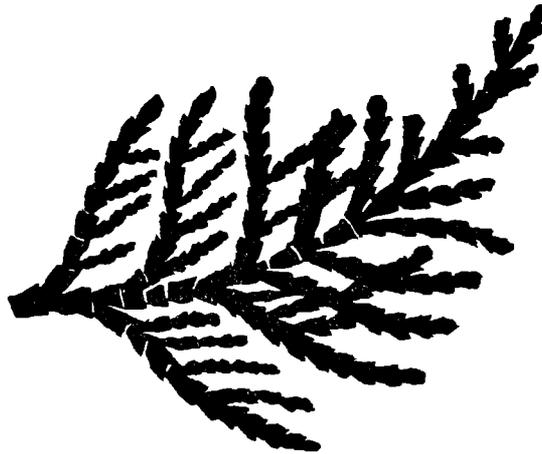
Canadian literature begins in the discourse that Native people have with one another and with the sentient persons of their environment. It begins in the highly contexted language of their myth. It begins in the discourse of oral tradition. Literary critics need not be as literal-minded as judges. We can understand that people like John Davis make decisions on the basis of knowledge, not instinct. We understand that paper can carry lies as well as truth. We need not be constrained by our culture's privileging of paper so as to "believe the papers more than the elders' testimony." The problem of discourse is more general than any problematic of literary criticism. It is a human problem. It is also a human glory.

You have read what I have written from my knowledge of Dunne-za/Cree life. You have attended to the words of Gerry Attachie, John Davis, and Hugh Brody. I will leave you with a question. How can we know what happened on September 22, 1945? How can we know what it meant to the people who were there?

Did the Dunne-za/Cree knowingly surrender the Place Where Happiness Dwells?  
Did the trial resolve the problem of discourse or merely reproduce it? You be the  
judge.

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APRIL 2-3 1985  
ABORIGINAL RIGHTS CONFERENCE

*Mingwôn Mingwôn (Shirley Bear)*

BON ACCORD            MES AMIS  
I AGREE TO AGREE, ON MY ACCORD  
I AGREE, TO AGREE, ON MY AGREEMENT WITH YOU.  
I AGREE ON MY AGREEMENT ON THE AGREEMENT TO  
AGREE.

MAISE  
OUI?

TO WHAT DEGREE ????

YOU AGREE WITH MY AGREEMENT TO AGREE?  
YOU AGREE

THAT WE SHOULD AGREE ???

YOU AGREE!

THAT I AGREE!

TO AGREE!

TO AGREE!

TO WHAT DEGREE!!!!

!!!!!

!!!!!

!!!!!!!

!!!!!

!!!!!!!

# THE PROPHECY

*Basil H. Johnston*

“**T**ONIGHT I’M GOING TO TELL YOU a very different kind of story. . . . It’s not really a story because it has not yet taken place; but it will take place just as the events in the past have occurred.” Daebaudjimoot paused to fill his pipe. “And even though what I’m about to tell you has not yet come to pass, it is as true as if it has already happened because the auttissookaunuk told me in a dream.”

They, the men, women and children from the neighbouring lodges who had come, waited for Daebaudjimoot to begin. The adults had long ceased to believe the tribal storyteller. Still they came, as they had done so for years, to relive the delight and faith of childhood which moved some of the old to say, “he makes me feel like a child again sitting at my grandparent’s feet.” But unlike the children present who believed Daebaudjimoot, the adults spoke slightly of the storyteller but not without affection. “W’zaumaudjimoh” (he exaggerates), they said of him. But there was not a man, woman or child in the village who was not enriched in some way, either in mind or happier in spirit, once having heard Daebaudjimoot.

“Tonight I’m going to tell you about white people.” There was a moment of silence, astounded silence, and then an outburst of laughter as the audience perceived the incongruity of the notion. An albino caribou; an albino beaver, yes! but albino people? Who ever heard of White People? Even Daebaudjimoot had to laugh. The laughter gradually subsided.

“Are they like the macmaegawachnsuk [little people like leprechauns, elves]?” a man asked, inciting another wave of laughter.

“Are they like the Weendigoes,” an old woman enquired, igniting more guffaws. The old laughed at such notions; the young laughed to hear the adults giggle, roar, snigger and to see them twist their mouths and cheeks into a hundred shapes. At the same time the young wondered what beings in addition to the Weendigoes, macmaegawachnsuk, pauhechnsuk, zauwobeekumook, and Pauguk lurked in the forests and roamed about at night.

“What do these White People look like?” another old lady asked when she dried her eyes.

“The men and women that I speak of are all white, face, bodies, arms, hands and legs, pale as the rabbits of winter. And . . . they are hairy . . . hair growing on their arms, legs, chests, backs and arm-pits . . . and some men grow hair upon their faces around their mouths, drooping down from their chins, like moose beards.” Daebaudjimoot had to interrupt his narrative again for the nervous titters and embarrassed cackles that set off another uproar. The children chuckled and chorled as they imagined their playmates, maybe brothers and sisters, goateed like moose. Daebaudjimoot continued, “different too is the colour of their hair; some yellow as goldenrod; a few red as cranberries, and others black as our hair. In old age the white people’s hair turns white; on some men the hair falls off entirely so that their heads are as smooth and shiny as are pumpkins.

“Their eyes too are unlike ours; round . . . quite round . . . like the eyes of racoons . . . and blue like the colour of blueberries.”

There was more laughter but by now the men, women and children were nursing aching bellies and paining sides.

“And their dress too is as quaint as their appearance. For one thing, they cover their bodies completely, day and night, summer and winter; only their faces being visible. On their heads are head-winders that they wear indoors and out-of-doors, in sunshine and in rain. The men and boys wear a peculiar garment which is a loin cloth and leggings made of one piece to cover their hams but the garment is so tight that the men walk like mud-hens. Each time that they go to toilet even to drain their bladders they must unfurl these rump binders down to their ankles. The women’s garments are not much better than those of their men. The women wear a robe that covers them from their wrists and neck down to their very ankles. Underneath these loose bad-hangers the women wear tit flatteners and belly compressors. Their moccasins are made of a very hard substance, almost like wood, and cover their legs up to their very knee caps. It is only at night that the White People remove some of these garments.”

“Are they ashamed of their hair? of their organs?” an old woman quipped, rousing tired laughter.

Daebaudjimoot resumed his narrative. Hours later he predicted, “when they come, they will come from the east across a great body of salt water; and they will arrive on board great wooden canoes five times the length of one of our own canoes. At either end of these long canoes are tall timbers. From the limbs of these timbers are suspended blankets for catching the wind to drive the canoes without the aid of paddles.”

“Are they ash or maple? Fresh wood or dead? They go against the wind?” voices asked and made remarks ridiculing the idea of an oversized canoe with trees at either end.

“You laugh because you cannot picture men and women with white skins or hair upon their faces; and you think it funny that a canoe would be moved by the wind

across great open seas. But it won't be funny to our grandchildren and their great-grandchildren.

"In the beginning the first few to arrive will appear to be weak by virtue of their numbers, and they will look as if they are no more than harmless passers-by on their way to visit another people in another land who need a little rest and direction before resuming their journey. But in reality they will be spies for those in quest for lands. After them will come countless others like flocks of geese in their migratory flights. Flock after flock they will arrive. There will be no turning them back.

"Some of our grandchildren will stand up to these strangers but when they do, it will have been too late and their bows and arrows, war-clubs and medicines will be as nothing against the weapons of these white people whose warriors will be armed with sticks that burst like thunder-claps. A warrior has to do no more than point a fire stick at another warrior and that man will fall dead the instant the bolt strikes him.

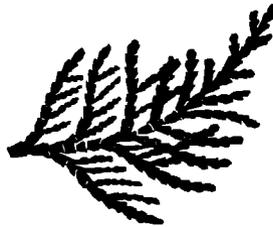
"It is with weapons such as these that the white people will drive our people from their homes and hunting grounds to desolate territories where game can scarce find food for their own needs and where corn can bare take root. The white people will take possession of all the rest and they will build immense villages upon them. Over the years the white people will prosper, and though the Anishinaubaeg may forsake their own traditions to adopt the ways of the white people, it will do them little good. It will not be until our grandchildren and their grandchildren return to the ways of their ancestors that they will regain strength of spirit and heart.

"There! I have told you my dream in its entirety. I have nothing more to say."

"Daebaudjimoot! Are these white people manitous or are they beings like us?"

"I don't know."

As the men, women and children went out, a young man who had lingered behind remarked: "It's good to listen to you, but I don't believe you."



## NO WRITING AT ALL HERE

### *Review Notes on Writing Native*

L. R. Ricou

JAMES AGEE BEGINS his portrait of three families of Alabama tenant farmers with a painstakingly honest and lyrically contorted self-analysis. How do you write about what you are so evidently and impossibly unequipped to write about?

I realize that, with even so much involvement in explanations as this, I am liable seriously, and perhaps irretrievably, to obscure what would at best be hard enough to give its appropriate clarity and intensity; and what seems to me most important of all: namely, that these I will write of are human beings, living in this world, innocent of such twistings as these which are taking place over their heads; and that they were dwelt among, investigated, spied on, revered, and loved, by other quite monstrously alien human beings, in the employment of others still more alien; and that they are now being looked into by still others, who have picked up their living as casually as if it were a book, and who were actuated toward this reading by various possible reflexes of sympathy, curiosity, idleness, et cetera, and almost certainly in a lack of consciousness, and conscience, remotely appropriate to the enormity of what they are doing. (Agee 12-13)

"If I could do it," Agee tells himself, "I'd do no writing at all here" (13). What he does write seeks consciousness and conscience by constantly varying the forms, styles, and sources of his expression, by making his own problem of speaking responsibly a constant subject, by incor-

porating what might be taken as irrelevant digressions, by affixing the reverent and ironic title *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941).

All the permutations of Agee's dilemma surface again as I contemplate some of the dozens of books dealing with native peoples past and present which have arrived at *Canadian Literature* while we were developing this special issue. A single sentence from Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982) sums up the problem: "Try to imagine a culture where no one has ever 'looked up' anything" (31). The enormous difficulty of cross-cultural communication here suggested derives, in part, from conceiving of a 'post' primary oral culture not of "human beings, living in *this* world," a dilemma which some of the books I will discuss here address more directly than others.

Little cross-cultural imagining appears, for example, in the sanitized vision created by the elementary school series "Native People and Explorers of Canada" (Prentice-Hall, \$6.25 ea.). For all the good intentions, and limitations of designing a series for Grade 4 (and up), where "the reading level is carefully controlled," I could not help noticing how in the booklet *Henry Kelsey and the People of the Plains*, for example, nothing is hinted

about the limitations of the informer, while the Assiniboine woman is imagined to speak in the same idiom as her respondent: "During your stay with us we will use the buffalo to provide you with everything you need to live the way we do on the plains" (43). Elsewhere earnest questions strain after empathy: "The governor's wife needed to learn quickly about living on Hudson Bay. What advice would you give her?" (20). Alan D. McMillan's *Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada: An Anthropological Overview* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$19.95), a textbook directed to the college and university market, displays the chronological and geographical organization, and concise bibliography of a helpful reference work, but its cramped illustrations, uncritical adjectives and lumpy passives dull the intensity one would hope for in an introductory survey of native cultures. History is, by definition, written, and based on what seems worthy of recording by those educated and wealthy enough to take time to write; McMillan might have created a more dynamic book by engaging more extensively the problem of writing a history where, ultimately, nothing exists to 'look up.' J. R. Miller's title *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Univ. of Toronto Press, \$35.00), borrowed from the Micmac poet Rita Joe, promises more. Miller's objective, to emphasize the native peoples as economic activists rather than passive victims, is welcome, but again a conception of history as mechanical summary of "differing purposes and assumptions" seems to work against the subject. Miller's argument is crucial, but the supporting detail drifts and blurs in repetitive summary. Here I found little of the energetic discovery of Bruce Trigger's *Natives and Newcomers* (1985) nor the rolling colours of Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams* (1981).

A much more satisfactory 'history' for the general reader is *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* (McClelland & Stewart/Glenbow Museum, \$60.00) the elaborately illustrated book which accompanied the exhibition at the 1988 Calgary Olympics. The book is not a catalogue but a series of generously illustrated essays: hence it responds to the variety of its subject through the varied approaches of different authors writing on each of the six area groupings: Atlantic, Northern Woodlands, Northern Plains, Arctic, Western Subarctic and Northwest Coast. This approach allows Ruth Holmes Whitehead to range from puzzled meditation on the few Beothuk bone and ivory pendants which have been preserved to celebration of the bright quillwork tea cosies Micmac women made for the tourist market, all framed again by Rita Joe's poetry. Bernadette Driscoll focuses her fascinating essay very specifically on "Pretending to Be Caribou: The Inuit Parka as an Artistic Tradition." Of course, few Canadians will read this book without remembering the unmentioned context of the Lubicon land-claims case and their stunning call for a worldwide boycott of the exhibition. (We try to provide a context of the language and politics of native land claims in Robin Ridington's contribution to this issue.) The continuing Lubicon struggle reminds us that in *The Spirit Sings*, or any of these books, as Agee might have put it, the first peoples and their artifacts have only the most limited of their meanings: their "true meaning is much huger" (12). At the same time, one must be grateful for another context of the book, the resulting archive of some 5,000 photos (from over 150 museums in more than twenty countries) indexing the artifacts of Canada's first peoples held around the world.

However necessary the introductory overview in its various guises, its limitations quickly become evident in a collec-

tion such as Wayne Suttles' *Coast Salish Essays* (Talonbooks/Univ. of Washington Press, \$29.95/\$15.95), a collection of sixteen essays written by the dean of contemporary Northwest Coast ethnographers. Suttles claims two emphases which seem still more crucial in the 1990s: the necessity for anyone working in the tradition of Franz Boas to link linguistic and ethnographic study, and the importance of a people's integration with their environment, so-called "ecological anthropology." Of particular interest to a student of literature is a paper speculating on the relation between Musqueam terms for daily and seasonal variations in the tides and the economics of fishing and shellfish gathering on a tidal river, the Fraser. Suttles' detailed linguistic analysis of terms for Sasquatch tells us not only about the phenomenon, but about world views as well. So, for all our current awareness of the ethnocentric limitations of the informers, I find myself — self-consciously at a desk, *writing* — amazed at how extensive and patient has been the attempt to understand the first peoples' cultures. No book among the present group is so likely to leave that impression as Gilbert Malcolm Sproat's *The Nootka: Scenes and Studies of Savage Life* (Sono Nis, \$18.95), a reprint, edited and annotated by Charles Lillard, of an 1868 title. Sproat, "a busy executive" in charge of a sawmill and trading business at Alberni, incongruously found time to write this patiently detailed record of Vancouver Island people as he knew and misunderstood them. Yes, he notes that Nootka is a completely inappropriate appellation for these people, a fact which 120 years later is just beginning to penetrate the public consciousness; indeed he gives sensitive (if now, superseded) attention to the native language throughout. Sproat's account of his discussion with the natives as he tries to settle near Alberni deserves to be cited

with all its absurdity and contemporary irony:

"... more King George men are coming & they will soon be here; but your land will be bought at a fair price."

"We do not wish to sell our land nor our water; let your friends stay in their own country."

To which I rejoined: "My great chief, the high chief of the King George men, seeing that you do not work your land, orders that you shall sell it. It is of no use to you. The trees you do not need; you will fish and hunt as you do now, and collect firewood, planks for your houses, and cedar for your canoes. The white man will give you work, and buy your fish and oil." (4-5)

The bizarre mixture in Sproat of a patient appreciation of cooking whale at a native feast and unselfconsciously arguing "the trees you do not need," makes a neat summary of the dilemma found everywhere in Canadian literature (and throughout this number of *Canadian Literature*) that appropriation, or appreciation, is another strategy of assimilation. The books which seem less complicated by this ambivalence are also those least accessible to the general reader. I think of books like Marianne Boelscher's *The Curtain Within: Haida Social and Mythical Discourse* (Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$27.95) or *Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots and Affixes* (Univ. of Toronto Press, \$60.00) by Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell. Boelscher's book is often difficult reading for someone not familiar with the Haida language, but its focus on "doing things with words," on styles of discourse and their expression of power, should interest many readers. "Haida humour," we discover, "is always self-deprecating. . . . Jokes or humorous anecdotes told during speeches at doings always refer to the speaker as the object of the joke" (87). Not surprisingly in a study of how communication embodies a "negotiation of one's standing," Boelscher turns in her afterthoughts to the rights to land, and the trees on it: "the notion of material

ownership is embedded in a whole scheme of knowledge which finds expression in the [Haida] style of narrative. . . . It relates present resource ownership to the mythical creatures that brought the land into existence, to those creatures that still populate it, to the ancestors that fished, hunted, and gathered in it, and to the names and crests that link the present to the past" (200). The *Blackfoot Dictionary* does have an English index, which allows an ignorant reader some access to the Blackfoot terminology. Literal definitions provide graphic illustrations. The word for a Chinese person means, literally, "braid-in-back"; the word for a pileated woodpecker literally means "rawhead." The word "isskihta," meaning "east," also means "toward the open prairie," a nice expression of the homeland and geographic orientation of the Blackfoot people.

Among relevant historical documents recently published are *They Call Me Father: Memoirs of Father Nicolas Coccola* (Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$29.95) edited by Margaret Whitehead. Coccola, an Oblate missionary from Corsica, worked in B.C. native communities for sixty-three years from 1880. His often clumsy autobiographical notes, apparently written to oblige his bishop, are remarkable, particularly if we recall Sproat's record, for the absence of detailed descriptions of the native people who were his life. When Coccola travels with two natives to Ottawa in 1906, he does recount at length his meeting with an abrupt Minister of the Interior: in this scene the ethnocentric churchman emerges as an awkward champion of "my people": "since the many canneries have started at the mouth of the River, fish is getting less, much of the salmon brought to the canneries is thrown back in the water because they cannot handle it at once and it get spoiled or because they have not canning material on hand; for many other reasons

fish is destroyed" (146). A more valuable book, as far as the revelation of native culture is concerned, is "*The Orders of the Dreamed*": *George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823* (Univ. of Manitoba Press, \$24.95) by Jennifer S. H. Brown and Robert Brightman. The book publishes for the first time the letter-journal of George Nelson, Hudson's Bay Company clerk at Lac la Ronge in 1823 (from the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, Manuscript Collection). But the book also brings us back to James Agee's strategy, by its insistence on framing the 'same' subject in different ways, by providing alternative ways of reading one writer's writing. The editors provide a thorough biographical introduction, and a sixty-page postscript in which they establish contexts for Nelson's preoccupations with the scholarship on Northern Algonquian religion. The section on Windigo provides a solid summary of the literature on this elusive figure, and a concise outline of the symbolic structure of the Windigo complex. The book ends with two short pieces — a personal memoir by Stan Cuthand on growing up Cree in the 1930s and 1940s, and Emma Larocque's essay on the "entrenched ethnocentrism" of Nelson's journal, and on the ethics of the publication itself. This polyphonic format, which we are seeing increasingly in contemporary publishing, while not a "solution," and not an "escape," seems to me a significant improvement when it comes to presenting in print the "texts" of peoples without writing. The approach shapes Oliver N. Wells' *The Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors* (Talonbooks, \$14.95). Wells was a latter-day Sproat, a farmer and rancher who found time to be an amateur ethnographer, recording interviews with the Chilliwack people which amount to over 1,000 transcribed pages. Included in this montage of interviews, edited by Ralph Maud, Brent Galloway, and Wells'

daughter Marie Weeden, are newspaper articles about Wells, an essay on "The Significance of the Halkomelem Language Material," transcribed songs with music, many photos, and ample footnotes. Before his death, Wells conceived of his book as an anthology of many perspectives on the Chilliwacks, a vision to which the editors have responded with zest.

Included as epilogue to *The Chilliwacks and Their Neighbors* is Wells' article "Return of the Salish Loom," his tribute to the revival of a traditional female art form. Cheryl Samuel's *The Raven's Tail* (Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$45.00/\$24.95) is a loving study of the patterns, and the implicit cultural constructions, of the unique Raven's Tail robes (tribal origin uncertain) woven on the Northwest Coast some 200 years ago. Again an 'anthology' seemed appropriate; Samuel weaves the narrative of her own search for the eleven robes which still exist, with photographs, original sketches, detailed descriptions of each blanket, and excerpts from a nineteenth-century explorer's journals. She also tells of weaving robes herself from photographs and drawings. From George Emmons and others, Samuel puts together a "vocabulary" to "read" the various patterns in the blankets. Each figure is, not surprisingly, drawn from the world of nature, "the mouth track of the woodworm," the "teeth of the killer whale," etc. In their abstract designs lies the sense of being *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, the title of *A History of the Yukon Indians* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$40.00) by Catharine McClellan. The montage also appeals to McClellan. A representative of the Council for Yukon Indians helped explain the project in each community; whatever the local Indians wanted to say was taped and written down, and, if possible, pictures were taken of the narrators and of the village or fish camp where they were living. A reader will follow through

an ancient legend, then shift to a diagram showing how the verb "pick up" in Northern Tutchone shifts depending on the nature of the object being picked up. McClellan assembles a generous and diverse selection which builds toward the contemporary stories of the Yukon Indians, including this resonant conclusion from Virginia Smarch: "*And a lot of them worked by signs. . . . I don't know what they call them, the scientists nowadays. But these older people [read the signs]. I think 'signs' is the closest I can come to it, because I've tried . . .*" (322).

Not so varied a montage of voices as these, but surely the most unusual book among these titles, is *Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer* (Univ. of Toronto Press, \$19.95) by David E. Young, Grant C. Ingram, and Lise Swartz. The authors write different chapters as they attempt various voices to represent the world as it might be spoken by Russell Willier, Woods Cree medicine man from northern Alberta — much of the material, as, for example, the directions on how to "split" a thunderstorm, evokes spoken voice by using direct quotation. Because they see Willier as a cultural broker, the authors turn variations on the problems of straddling two cultures: a speaking for the silent, a book about academic concerns, by academics, for a non-academic audience, the anthropology of *an individual*. In addition to accounts of the medicine man's beliefs, procedures and environment, the most mesmerizing chapters summarize two case histories, one of a woman whose clinical diagnosis of cancer Willier disagrees with, and the other of author David Young's own wife. A narrative of the possibilities of cross-cultural interchange, *Cry of the Eagle*, is as mysterious as it is compelling.

Compelling because "strange" this book poses most obviously the familiar challenge of what James L. Clifford describes as exotocism, our predilection for "fixing"

other cultures (either negatively as savage, or positively as a photograph of a mask in a coffee-table book) so that it doesn't have shadow, or fluidity, or complexity, or changeability, or . . . A little book such as *Tyendinaga Tales* (McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, \$15.95), collected by Rona Rustige, conveys this disposition. As Rustige explains, the book preserves the Mohawk folklore from the Tyendinaga Reserve on the Bay of Quinte, a lore which has otherwise not been recorded or published, and I cannot deny the appeal of some of the delicate little nature fables printed here. But the "delicacy" and the "little-ness" exuded by the large typeface in octavo format, and the polished austere English into which they are edited, leave the feeling that the tales are remote. In this packaging, they do not read as if they might have been *told*, often hesitantly, and repetitively, and rhythmically, as do those in the *Chilliwacks* or *Part of the Land*.

The same feelings of an insecure critical perspective perplexed me as I read Don Sawyer's young adult's novel *Where the Rivers Meet* (Pemmican, n.p.). Sawyer tells the story of Nancy Antoine, teetering, symbolically and often literally, on a bridge between "two countries, two realities" — Shuswap reserve and white world. Shaken by the suicide of a friend, Nancy leaves school for the tutelage of Shuswap elder Grandma Antoine, and eventually a spirit quest from which she returns to lead a revolution in the education system of her community. The neatness of this plot summary is consistent with the tenor of the novel, which screams THESIS on every page: "When Indian students looked around they saw failure for themselves and success for the handful of white students." Perhaps the potted sociology is not in itself the problem, but that Sawyer tries to filter the analysis through Nancy's point of view. *Where the Rivers Meet* is a novel one hardly wants to criticize, partly

because of three or four nice bits of humour, and a zesty surprise near the end, but especially because the subject is so important, and the research so sincerely intended.

The inclination to be 'nice' about a book like this, an inclination I would not feel so strongly if it were about a white teenager going to school in Toronto, is curbed by reading a series of deftly edited and sensitively organized interviews with an American native writer, *Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* (Univ. of Nebraska Press, US\$19.95). Because it is not unusual these days to find both anthropologists and literary scholars claiming "one must ultimately abandon written codes since language is itself a form of organizing reality and imposing a structure upon nature," it is gratifying to hear Momaday so positive about the power of the word, both spoken and written. "Words are original and originate. . . Everything proceeds from the word" (125). More relevant to Sawyer's novel is the sense of the books and cultures in Momaday's life — not only *An Ethnologic Dictionary of the Navajo Language* (which, like the *Blackfoot Dictionary*, you can thumb through for its "wonderful lore") but also Emily Dickinson's 'telling it slant.' Momaday speaks at length about his unlikely obsession with Billy the Kid, an interest reflected in several of his paintings reproduced in the book: "Billy the Kid is opposed to one part of my experience — to the Indian side of me. He's diametrically opposed to that, but at the same time he's very much a reflection of the world I love" (22). That sort of irony, and shading, and potential depth are the levels of fiction that Sawyer can not yet reach to.

*Seventh Generation: Contemporary Native Writing*, edited by Heather Hodgson (Theytus Books, \$11.95), is welcome not the least because so little material by contemporary native writers is available

in this country. Penny Petrone did edit *First People, First Voices*, a valuable sampling of the historical (i.e., post-contact) tradition of native writing; that collection is now amply complemented by *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (Univ. of Toronto Press, \$27.50). Here we can read a devout letter about love by the first Inuk woman to take religious orders, and excerpts from the diary of Lydia Campbell, native of Hamilton Inlet — thanks to the St. John's *Evening Herald*, which did not see the need to 'correct' her unschooled but lyrical English when it first published the material in 1893-94. Bernard Irgugaqtuq's "The Song of the Aircraft" is a good example of the 'tradition' Petrone makes accessible. Although the poem is obviously set in type, and translated, as a reader detects the shifting intonations of the Inuit chant translating the cries of the airplane engine, the sense emerges of two forms altering one another. The Momadays and Silkos and James Welchs will only emerge with the support of such exposure as in Petrone's and Hodgson's collections.

In an essay entitled "Traditional and Individual Talents in Modern Indian Writing" Jarold Ramsey describes teaching some modern native poets and novelists since 1971, a venture which would have been scarcely possible in Canada if one were looking for 'Canadian' examples. Ramsey describes the "conflict of interest" among "teachers and critical well-wishers of native writing" whose own interest in "Indianness" will cause them to "draw a tight ethnographic circle around the meaning and value of an Indian writer's work." I recognize this conflict reading *Seventh Generation* when I am inclined to prefer A. Garnet Ruffo's "Chant for Mother and Child," which seems to me to approach the form of a traditional Indian song, to the facing poem which has no explicit ethnic content. In the event, the poets I found worth attention in

this anthology were those whose language, not their overt politics, showed a concern for nuance and ambiguity and verbal echo: Charles Ministsoos for the calculated confusion of his dramatic monologue (dialogue?) "Phone Call at Mom's"; the growing metaphors of Kateri Damn's "Slate Water Bottles" or "At the Fair"; the clever interplay of the near-haiku and the prose poem in Jeannette C. Armstrong's "Mary Old Owl," and Tracey Bonneau's saucy circular narrative of a prostitute titled "White Magic." As Momaday says, although he once refused to believe it, ultimately if you are going to write poetry in English you need to know something about poetry in English — "Where it begins. How it develops. Make sure that you master the forms before you say that you're writing poetry." These poets seem to have made a very sound beginning.

None comes close, however, to Joan Crate's superb serial poem *Pale as Real Ladies: Poems for Pauline Johnson* (Brick Books/Coldstream, n.p.). The sequence is framed by a vignette in which the poet imagines the face of Pauline Johnson reflected in a bus window at night. The doubling of Pauline and Tekahionwake matches the doubling of Crate and Johnson — "half-blood" is a metaphor for one woman poet trying to hear and recreate the voice of another woman poet. As the sequence builds, the reader gets more involved in the family interconnections (extended to Pauline's own half-brothers and half-sisters) as well as in the intricately paced verbal interconnections: the resonance of *white* and *black*, the reiterated colours (pink, blue, grey, maroon) seemingly picked from the "pale bruises" early in the book, the sound of bone china, and the puzzle of jigsaws. Crate creates the verbal contexts in which even the clichés are revitalized; each poem turns back to challenge a re-reading of an earlier poem. In *Pale as Real Ladies* we "climb words

back to a beginning" and a poet, and poetry, which were fixed as 'exotics' move hauntingly, challengingly into contemporary literary life.

When Jack Shadbolt paints a Southern Kwagiutl Sun Mask, Marjorie Halpin notes in *Jack Shadbolt and the Coastal Indian Image* (Univ. of British Columbia Press/UBC Museum of Anthropology, \$15.95). he "transcribe[s] the forms of the mask with care" but "narrow[s] the eyes to a squinting and sorrowful gaze, an amendment that both adds personality and emotion." Halpin shrewdly describes the appeal of the painting — Shadbolt's

strategy "locate[s] the images in time" and reminds us that we deny emotion, personality, individuality to the native faces around us by denying their existence in time. To transform is not to destroy but to change alive. Halpin summarizes Shadbolt's impact with a quotation from Clifford Geertz: "The problem of cultural integration becomes one of making it possible for people inhabiting different worlds to have a genuine, and reciprocal, impact on one another." The challenge is to read the books, yet not "pick up their living as casually as if it were a book."

Laurie Ricou

## SUCKING KUMARAS\*

Gary Boire

TERRY GOLDIE'S *Fear and Temptation* (McGill-Queen's, \$29.95) is an ambitious book that sets out to cover a vast terrain. "A wide-ranging examination of over 350 texts," it studies the inescapable, unchanging, and oppressive semiosis of native peoples in "white" writing from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. As a synchronic theorist Goldie argues that this semiosis has remained relatively unvaried since the earliest settler accounts and is virtually identical in the three literatures under consideration. Goldie's mission is to expose the *political* ramifications of this semiotic process; his aim, like Pierre Macherey's, is to decentre/disclose the power relations implicit in semiosis: "[to seek] the concealed but omnipresent ideology controlling the text."

To cover such a monumental agenda Goldie marshals an equally monumental

number of authorities — all politically credible (and currently fashionable) — to both sustain and develop his descriptive commentary. Semioticians, deconstructionists, Marxists, post-structuralists, cultural anthropologists, and psycho-linguists are herded together into what must be one of the most eclectic theoretical homogeneities. Paramount are Foucault, Said, Todorov, Ong, Berger, Elam, and Lévi-Strauss (with inevitable cameo appearances by Freud, Lacan, Derrida, and of course Paul de Man). With Foucault in hand Goldie anatomizes what he sees as the uniform economy of the semiotic field surrounding the Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand indigene. The standard recurrent commodities of this economy are: nature, form, sexuality, violence, orality, mysticism, and historicity. He then traces the intricacies of each in individual chapters which, while returning to a basic core of about a dozen texts, refer to a myriad number of titles. In Chapter 9

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\*"To suck a kumara": (N.Z., colloquial) to blunder.

we have a quick plot summary of numerous plays through this forced theoretical grid. Chapter 10 deconstructs the ideological agendas of Rudy Wiebe and Patrick White, and the book ends explosively with "a polemical conclusion."

Already touted by the distinguished *Globe and Mail*, the book promises to be something of a new touchstone, a starting point for continued re-theorizing and re-thinking of not only Canadian and Australasian literatures, but also of much post-colonial representation. What remains moot is just how useful or beneficial this glibly written and thinly stretched touchstone will be. I state unequivocally that this book demands respect, especially given its generous invitation to the reader. As Goldie ingenuously states in his foreword, "It is the purpose of my writing here to convince you to search for the same episteme, and thus to perceive the same semiosis, and the same political value of that semiosis." It is the purpose of my writing here to accept this invitation; in the process I want to explore a number of my chief reservations, notably the notion of a uni-directional and totalizing semiosis and the "political" value of this particular episteme/conclusion.

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Parts of *Fear and Temptation* are, without exaggeration, quite simply brilliant. By fragmenting a specific semiosis into constitutive parts, Goldie opens for himself and his readers multiple starting points from which to execute a truly archeological form of reading. Within each "commodity" Goldie itemizes the numerous substructures which commingle to form a powerful ideological formula. The vast reach of the study intimates the almost overwhelming nature of the imperialist agenda. This formula, in turn, provides a genuinely useful springboard from which to launch new re-readings of canonical texts; e.g., much of chapter 6,

on "orality," is useful to deconstruct George Ryga's sentimental division of *Rita Joe* into written forms of control and oral glorifications/representations of the indigene. Likewise, chapter 8, on "historicity," is analytically incomparable where Goldie explores the colonialist's political benefit in both dehistoricizing and pre-historicizing indigenous groups. Parts of this book, moreover, are extraordinarily shrewd; e.g., Goldie's analysis of the colonialist's need for the colonized as a self-referential point; this leads to a revealing consideration of the Jindyworobak project in Australia. These obvious strengths notwithstanding, however, the book rankles; for all its resounding achievement it begs rather than answers a number of crucial questions.

Three of Goldie's quirkiest (yet most metonymic) characteristics are: (1) his fragmentation of vast amounts of writing into significant titles and important "bits"; (2) his almost anachronistic affection for Latin tags (*ubi sunt, terra incognita, terra hostilis*, and so on); and (3) his passion for automatic referral to any theorist, regardless of critical orientation, who happens to fit the bill. All three are initially merely irritating. A plethora of titles does not a breadth and depth make; it mesmerizes while implying superficiality. The tags are by now blank stamps of archaic authority. Endless eclectic quotation results in a sophomoric and ultimately liberalish argument. What intrigues me is that while such habits may do little to strengthen Goldie's self-proclaimed revolutionary project, they do, on the contrary, subvert it. And they do so by disclosing "the concealed but omnipresent ideology" controlling his own text: an ideology identical to the hegemonic, univocal, and totalizing colonialist processes being described.

The whirlwind tour of titles blurs the distinct literatures of distinct countries with distinct histories into a distorting

homogeneity (a denial of pluralism crucial to the colonial tourist). The cannibalized bits of texts — like the fragments of native bodies — are fetishized to contain the whole. The fragments of an object of desire do little for the object, but much to fulfil the (theoretical) need of the fragmenter. Only a few titles are examined in any depth, only a few given the chance to reveal their separate whole personalities within a network that seeks to totalize them. After awhile all these texts begin to look the same. At this point the Latin tags partially re-enact that colonialist search for a controlling language, a discourse “authorized” by virtue of historical sanctification and imperialistic sway. Goldie’s fondness for such élitist archaisms not only jars in a discussion of post-coloniality, it also discloses a failed search for an appropriate discourse.

All claims to the contrary, this is a language that continually digresses to a master idiom, one firmly entrenched within an academic and literary ideology. That liberal eclectic ideology is re-enacted in the uncomfortable yoking of disparate theoretical methodologies — a yoking that places Goldie everywhere and nowhere at the same time. One result is a ubiquitous tentativeness, a dipping into multiple possible readings (“It is tempting to employ the orientation known as gynocriticism . . .”). Not only is the diction and condescension revealing, the conclusion is inconclusive. This is best exemplified on page 145: “one *could* follow Lacan and proclaim . . .”; what follows is a tortuous *possible* reading of the “white need” for indigenous commodities which Goldie then lightly sets aside in favour of “a simpler explanation.” This kind of theoretical self-ungrounding decentres more than the texts under examination.

As metonymic, moreover, these whimsical critical/writerly habits point to a more profound contradiction underpinning (and undermining) *Fear and Tempta-*

*tion’s* project. Consider, for example, one of Goldie’s many cosy populist images, the sub-text of which governs both his strategy of inquiry and his exclusionist conception of the “semiotic field.” Prefaced by a ritual invocation of Foucault’s “subjugated knowledges,” Goldie comments:

The indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker. And yet the individual signmaker, the individual player, the individual writer, can move these pawns only within certain prescribed areas. Whether the context is Canada, New Zealand, or Australia becomes a minor issue since the game, the signmaking, is all happening on one form of board, within one field of discourse, that of British imperialism. Terms such as “war dance”, “war whoop”, “tomahawk”, and “dusky” are immediately suggestive everywhere of the indigene. To a North American, at least the first three would seem to be obvious Indianisms, but they are also common in works on the Maori and the Aborigine.

Aside from a naïve understanding of chess, the passage reveals a peculiarly one-sided interpretation of power, all the more peculiar given its misunderstanding of Foucault the mentor himself. Whatever else it might be, power is not an object handled by oppressors against oppressed. The “site” of power, as Foucault has incessantly shown (sharing the insights of E. P. Thompson), constitutes a dialectical interchange of capability. There is no oppression without resistance.

Within Goldie’s own analogy, then, power is something *shared* (albeit unequally) by both sets of pawns. The *whole* semiotic chessboard is never controlled by one side. Chess (like novels or plays or sonnets in English) may well have been invented by white signmakers, but the *game* involves a constantly shifting capability of movement open to and necessarily shared by both sides. The *game*, moreover, may be the same in Canada, Australia, or New Zealand, but there exists not only an infinite number of different players, but virtually an infinite set of pos-

sible combinations. To continue with Goldie's own ethnicity-based distinctions, given the vastly intricate variations in *both* blackness *and* whiteness in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, the interchange could never be identical. To concentrate, then, on only one side of the "field," which itself hegemonically incorporates other but similar confrontations, gives a distorted and ultimately inaccurate "image" of the semiosis at work. All of which results in a series of classic mis-assumptions, misinterpretations, and mis-informations.

Most glaring is the middle-class *pakeha* notion that texts should be approached in terms predicated on the fixity of ethnicity, colour, or social definition. Keri Hulme from New Zealand is a case in point. Goldie discusses *the bone people* in the context of the "indigenization" of literary form, conveniently skirting the issue of whether or not it constitutes a "white" text. Puzzling, since a text's colour in this study dictates whether or not it makes it into the semiotizing élite; interesting because the discussion at this point deals with white writers incorporating indigenous forms. The fact that Hulme, who is biologically only one-eighth Maori, but considers herself (and is accepted politically and socially) as simply "Maori" and therefore "indigenous," is overlooked. The silence at this point not only foregrounds the bizarre bases of definition, but more importantly Goldie's "outsidedness" from the subtly convoluted archeologies of New Zealand culture. Where, for example, would he "fit" Albert Wendt, a German-descended Samoan who lives in New Zealand?

This kind of mis-assumption underscores Goldie's untenable blanketing of *the* image of *the* indigene into a one-way homogeneous semiosis. Admittedly he is correct when he argues that certain features of the image of North American natives have been universalized *in white con-*

*structions*. In the 1970s in New Zealand an infamous national party hired North American advertising agencies to exploit the law and order issue. The result was a grotesque political cartoon in which lone white women faced undefinable dark-skinned thugs who could have been Maori, Indian, Black, Aboriginal, or Martian. As Goldie would rightly observe, the point was that such thugs were "other."

But not all features of all indigenes are universalized, nor is the semiotic field surrounding them constituted solely of the white side. The whole site of semiotizing is one of continual interpenetrations, cross-overs, and symbioses (as Goldie himself argues in his exploration of the white need *for* dark others). To portray "white" words as the complete, constitutive whole of the semiotic field gives a distorted, one-sided picture of the entire collision. "War-whoop," arrows, and canoes may immediately and internationally conjure up the "alien within" in white racist minds, but "coconuts," "utu," "pakeha" and "haka" do not. They are specific to New Zealand and different from Canada and Australia. Moreover the Maori semioses have infiltrated official discourses of white New Zealand culture, constantly engaging in the dialectical struggle within the site of discursive power (and paradoxically occasionally taking over as in the white use of *Maori* semiosis to define themselves: *pakeha*). It is a mis-assumption that the images of Maori, like Haida, like Cree, like any one Aboriginal tribe, are passively accepted and left uninterrogated.

It is curious that Goldie should choose so smugly to ignore this side of the field, this vast subversive body of counter-writing. He comments in his "polemical conclusion" (which magnanimously argues that we all have to pull together to achieve the impossible — an *apolitical* solution if ever there was one) :

The search for "an aboriginal genius" is often a response to the stereotypes perceived

in white texts: if the image is controlled by an indigene text, all will be well. But is it possible for the Maori writer to take a European form such as the novel and use it successfully to describe his or her own people? When this question has been addressed to me my usual reaction has been to deflect it. Regardless of Arnoldian claims for the freedom of the disinterested liberal critic, I question the right of any person to judge another's representation of his or her own culture. . . . The situation is not unlike that when whites comment on African literatures: it is not for them to tell the Africans whether or not they are getting it right.

That criticism must be an act of condescending judgment speaks volumes about this text's own "hidden ideologies." But presumably it has been perfectly in order for a Canadian to "judge" New Zealand and Australian writers — "in order" because they are white? The impudent liberalism is not the only infuriating sub-text of this comment. I take the point that Eurocentric Judeo-Christian-minded critics must jettison much baggage in any approach to "other" literatures, but to refuse to comment point blank constitutes the worst form of liberal side-stepping imaginable. This abnegation of political/literary responsibility is straightforward nonsense — a comfortable middle-class liberal perspective that blinds itself to the existence and continuation of struggle. Rhetorical flourishes aside, Goldie's unanswered question articulates precisely that half of the semiotic field excluded from his study. In a curious re-enactment of domineering imperialist policies to peripheralize the indigenous, Goldie blithely ignores the flurry of subversive semiotizing that makes up the indigenous counter-statement. As David Dabydeen has recently remarked in *Landfall 170*: "nigger talk" must be examined as a "re-deconstructive" process with a decidedly political counter-agenda. In Goldie, then, not only are all white images of the indigene identical, so too apparently are all black reactions.

This kind of procrustean mis-assumption filters throughout various misinterpretations and conspicuous misinformations that mar Goldie's overarching thesis. A minor point is his curiously humourless reading of Kroetsch's *Badlands*, a novel that uproariously and subtly deconstructs not only Atwood's *Surfacing*, but also the kinds of stereotyping that Goldie identifies in this latter novel. To Goldie, Kroetsch's portrayal of Anna Yellowbird and William Dawe "having sex" is a sombre reminder of miscegenation and the imaging of the indigene as "a gate to indigenization." Surely even a drop of ironic sense reveals the scene to be a delicious subversion of precisely those semioses (not to mention a parodic equivalent to Atwood's rejuvenating *jouissances* in *Surfacing*). Such an insensitivity to the ironic nuance, the subtle subversion, seriously jeopardizes the accuracy and blanket application of uniform theses.

This singular neglect of the subversive potential of both irony and parody (in both white and black pawn-writing) underlines a much more disquieting and unforgivable oversight, one which quite seriously undermines Goldie's claims to thoroughness and reliability. And that is the exclusion of a white New Zealand writer who has spent the better part of his career portraying and interrogating the semiosis of the indigene in New Zealand: the playwright, Mervyn Thompson. More specifically, his best-known play, *Songs to the Judges*, was first performed in Auckland in 1980 and published in *Selected Plays* in 1984. In one sense *Judges'* sentimentalizations incontrovertibly place Thompson inside of Goldie's inescapable semiosis, and this strengthens the appeal of the argument. It appears that even the best intentions can operate only within a tightly circumscribed field. But the fact that Thompson continually interrogates his own semiosis, deliberately discloses in a Brechtian fashion that these representa-

tions are, in fact, artificial constructions, that self-reflexive irony severely questions the unassailability of the semiosis itself.

Likewise, *Judges* not only continually interrogates notions of indigenous naturalness, sexuality, orality, and mysticism, it actively sets out to examine the violent legacy of imperialism. Like Ryga's *Rita Joe* (which meticulously explores Jaimie Paul's attempts to reclaim labour power from a capitalist/imperialist employer), the play demands a readjustment of Goldie's cool assertion that white texts rarely if ever "recognize that this violence is, regardless of how analyzed, a direct and unavoidable product of imperial invasion. They seldom consider the economy which creates the violence." Neither Thompson nor any of his plays appear in *Fear and Temptation*. This exclusion is decidedly unfortunate because these parodic instances might well have been that litmus test which could have refocused both Goldie's theses and argument.

\* \* \*

In one sense *Fear and Temptation* participates in what was the Grand New Project of the sixties: to establish the validity and importance of "commonwealth literature," a project that set out self-consciously to displace the hegemony and fossilized power base of *English* literature. Critics heroically began to and still rightly note the astonishing similarities and points of connection amongst the "other" literatures — a solidarity of the oppressed (both literary and critical). But now, as always, the strongest critics (New and Killam in Canada; Tiffin, Edwards, and Lawson in Australia; Black, Neill, and Williams in

New Zealand) implicitly recognized two facts: (1) solidarity was a temporary measure; and (2) power, as a literary/political nexus, is always dialectical. Any "semiotic field," as a site of power relations, must be perceived as a collision between opposing powers, *not* simplistically as the active disintegrating of a passive victim.

Consequently what underpins pluralist critical enterprises since then has been the desire to: (1) distinguish precise differences between, amongst, and within the various similarities; and (2) foreground the premise that although one side of the colonizing dialectic may well have remained constant, the antithesis (and after all, they *do* constitute half of the equation) vary considerably and as such alter the equation immensely. The superficial crime of superimposition may have been the same in all colonies, but given the specificities of history, ethnicity, gender, culture, and geography, there are significant and subtle variations between each repetition and amongst the multiple reactions to it.

These subtleties of variation dissolve in Goldie's own unidirectional processes of homogenization. The eclectic theorist is here unconsciously implicated by and participates in the activities he seeks to dismantle: activities of univocalization, hegemony, and totalization. Sadly so, too, because much of this book — as the first step in a two-part study of similarity *and* difference — is superb. Rather than progressing self-consciously through a deliberate process of contradiction and dislocation, *Fear and Temptation* collapses into the gaps of its own ideology, resulting in a misconstrued, incomplete study.

## IMAGINING NATIVE

THOMAS KING, CHERYL CALVER & HELEN HOY,  
eds., *The Native in Literature: Canadian  
and Comparative Perspectives*. ECW Press,  
\$25.00/\$15.00.

THIS COLLECTION OF twelve essays based on papers given at a 1985 conference at the University of Lethbridge forms an important contribution to the rapidly developing area of academic research concerned with ethnicity and native Indian cultures. It should be considered in the context of the magnificent 1988 Glenbow Museum exhibition 'The Spirit Sings' and Terrence Craig's *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction 1905-1980* (1987), for most of these essays are concerned with Canadian writing. There are also references to literature of the United States, Australia and New Zealand which situate this collection in the wider context of comparative criticism in post-colonial literary studies. The essays engage issues of the representation of the Native (Indians, Inuit, Australian Aborigines) in colonial and post-colonial discourse, the majority of them exploring images of natives and native cultures encoded in white writing (from explorers' narratives to post-modernist fiction) although several focus on native storytelling traditions and one on contemporary Inuit literature.

These essays do much to clarify the issues of nationalist ideology, history and myth which are interwoven in literary discourse about indigenous peoples, and the most interesting ones expose the underlying cultural assumptions through which narratives about "the Native" are constructed. To my mind the best essay is Eli Mandel's "Imagining Natives: White Perspectives on Native Peoples," which

elegantly spells out the difficulties of translation from the conceptual framework of one culture to another. This is what the whole collection is really about, and Mandel focuses on the dilemmas and doubleness, indeed the dimensions of artifice, within any non-native writing which seeks to accommodate images of native peoples. Deftly exposing the inauthenticities within myths of primitivism, of origin, of the frontier and of marginality, Mandel makes us aware of the extent to which our recognitions are culturally determined, ending with his celebration of Rudy Wiebe's fiction. This is itself a celebration of ambiguity and blindness (or deafness perhaps, given Wiebe's emphasis on voice). As Wiebe recognizes in his story "Where Is the Voice Coming From," "I could be more accurate if I had a reliable interpreter who would make a reliable interpretation. For I do not, of course, understand the Cree myself." It is the signal in "of course" that Mandel picks up, leaving us with several unanswered questions: Where are reliable interpreters to be found? and how does a writer give voice to marginal/minority groups when one is not of those cultures?

Several essays read like answers to these questions, notably Terry Goldie's essay on images of indigenous people in Australian, Canadian and New Zealand literature which adheres to the notion that the Native in literature is always a symbolic presentation of an "unreachable signified," and Barbara Godard's "Listening for the Silence" which approaches the problem from her continuing work on oral traditions and native women's narratives. Not surprisingly, both these essays, focusing as they do on gaps and blanks, broach more questions than they go on to answer, but their speculativeness is far more satisfactory than the discussions of representations by George Johnston and Terrence Craig, both of which are marred by a commitment to realism surely not sustainable

by all the texts from which they draw their evidence. Angelika Maeser-Lemieux's reading of "The Métis in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence: From Outcast to Consort" is partial in a different way, for her Jungian-feminist-theological argument about the crucial role of the Métis in retrieving repressed areas of the self works coherently for only two of the Manawaka novels, *The Fire-Dwellers* and *The Diviners*.

The last four essays are written within the frame of reference of native literature, and suggest an interesting division between critics who emphasize difference and those who lay stress on *différance*. The essay by George Cornell (Chippewa) foregrounds the literary imperialism of the European fascination with native culture and oral narrative traditions, angrily drawing attention to generic definitions of "Native" which make invisible the particularities of Indian culture. His examination of a Shawnee legend reminds us of that very deafness of the European translator to Indian historical context and symbolism which Wiebe had warned about. The essay by Kate Vangen (Assiniboine), "Making Faces: Defiance and Humour in Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Welch's *Winter in the Blood*" treating humour as strategy both of narrative and of cultural survival, works in a similar way to reveal the eyes behind the "native" mask and the distorting impositions of that mask. On the other hand, both Robin McGrath's and Jarold Ramsey's essays explore the processes of intercultural relations, in contemporary Inuit literature (McGrath) and more broadly "North American Indian" oral traditions (Ramsey), suggesting the degree to which native traditions have been infiltrated by European cultural and literary patterns.

Clarification is balanced by dilemma and instability, as Mandel's essay signalled. As if in confirmation of Mandel's thesis, Leslie Monkman's distinguished

essay "Visions and Revisions: Contemporary Writers and Exploration Accounts of Indigenous Peoples" investigates white postmodernist discourses about European-Amerindian encounters which foreground the constraints imposed by cultural determinism. His analysis of George Bowering's *Burning Water* as a narrative about the failure to engage with a vision appropriate to the North American continent emphasizes, as a complement to Mandel's essay, the absence of a bridging discourse between the Old and the New World and the fact that there are no reassuring models of intercultural translation. Arguably deconstruction with its awareness of blindness and insights is as important as nationalist ideology in providing an appropriate context in which to be looking at/looking for vestigial or vanished native traditions as encoded in Canadian and other post-colonial literatures.

CORAL ANN HOWELLS

## ANISHONI PLAY

BARBARA SMITH, *Renewal: The Prophecy of Manu*. Theyus Books, \$9.95.

BARBARA SMITH, *Renewal: Teoni's Giveaway*. Theyus Books, \$10.95.

IF YOU ARE ONE of those people who cannot read a paperback without cracking the spine, then rest assured that these two books pass the abuse test with flying colours. You can crack the spines with unusual ferocity, drop either (or both) volumes in the bath, ram them half-read into bag or pocket, time and time again, or fling them in frustration across a room. The sturdy bindings will survive, the beautiful cover art will continue to catch your eye, and if you are lucky, the large and legible print will lure you back until eventually you finish both books.

*Renewal* comes in two volumes, but it is actually one hefty science-fiction fantasy,

arbitrarily divided in half. It chronicles approximately sixteen years in the history of the Anishoni, sea-creatures whose attitudes and social structures resemble those of traditional native people. As their underwater way of life becomes threatened by commercial fishing and industrial pollution, the Anishoni break their self-imposed isolation and attempt to contact their "half-brothers" on the land. Toni, a young native woman who is making a last-ditch effort to escape the canneries and alcoholism of Seatown, is telepathically tumbled from the deck of a coastal boat by an enraged Anishoni hunter; renamed Teoni, she becomes the link between sea and land, Anishoni and man.

Barbara Smith, an expatriate American, has found fruitful soil for her Cherokee roots among the Dene and Pacific Coast Indians of Canada. She tells us in her Preface that her literary inspiration came from the oral legends of Amerindian life and the writings of LeGuin, Tolkien, and Frank Herbert. If only she were as good as her predecessors in either tradition, but unfortunately she is not. The narrative voice is uneven, the sentiments which should seem fresh and honest are simplistic and predictable, and the reader's hard-won suspension of disbelief is shattered too often. However, unmitigated bad writing does not produce the sense of frustration that this novel does; it's just good enough to make you wish it were better.

As a social document, *Renewal* is almost unique in that it is a fictional depiction of native life by a native person. The fantasy element releases the author from the confines of anthropological veracity and allows her to try, albeit with only limited success, to describe the feelings rather than the facts of native life. When the aboriginal voice tries to make itself heard in a language and structure non-natives can understand, then the least we can do is try to listen to the message.

The Anishoni, predictably enough, have a great reverence for life, and their spiritual connection with the natural world is what we would expect from a people who communicate by telepathy, but Smith also tries to integrate less familiar aspects of native life into her fiction. For example, she makes a real attempt to convey the purpose of "play" in native society. Physical play is often the only thing left to unite a nomadic hunting group when boredom, hunger and cold threaten to pull people a dozen different ways. The Anishoni adults tag, splash, and "play" in a totally convincing way. Smith's attempt to depict the sexual joking that is common among natives is less successful; she is so determined to avoid locker room vulgarity that the tasteful teasing seems a bit pointless. Nevertheless, the wit and humour of such behaviour has been so frequently misunderstood by outsiders that any effort by a native to convey something of its essence is interesting.

One is left wondering where the editors were when these books were being prepared for publication. Barbara Smith is not a terrible writer; she has enthusiasm, imagination, and ability, and these are, after all, her apprentice works. Obviously someone cared enough about her material to see that it appeared in enviably attractive format, but the same care was not given to the content. The use of the word "munch" to describe fish being eaten is both tiresome and incorrect; you can munch fish that is dried or frozen, but taken raw and filleted as the Anishoni prefer it, it hasn't the substance or resistance required by the word's meaning. A description of a plate falling off an underwater shelf and crashing to the sea floor in pieces is unlikely; newspaper photographs of bone china salvaged from the *Titanic* remind us that water resists in a way air does not. Dozens and dozens of minor errors, improbabilities, and near-misses in word choice could have been

easily identified for revision or at least reconsideration.

Too often, in the past, native stories and autobiographies have suffered from bad editing. European structures were imposed, non-native motivations were added, and the works were brutally censored or drastically rewritten. Recently, publishers have become more sensitive to the integrity of their authors' cultural values and literary heritage when dealing with minorities. But this does not mean that the normal editing process should not proceed. Smith, who is legally blind, admits that the long hours of writing put a great strain on the little vision she has; surely she deserved editorial help. Should Barbara Smith decide to write another novel, and I for one hope that she does, she should find someone who will give as much attention to the content as to the binding. *Renewal* could have been a terrific book, but instead it's just a book that can survive being read in the bath.

ROBIN MCGRATH

## TRIPARTITE

RON PAULSON, DANIEL DAVID MOSES & DANIEL JALOWICA, *First Person Plural*. ed. Judith Fitzgerald, Black Moss Press, \$9.95.

RON PAULSON IS A POET of caring, even self-effacing sensibility. His poems make slanted and slender observations, built on spare details that break through, occasionally, to full frontal enlightenment. It is almost as though Paulson trusts the common occurrences he documents to fall into poetic pattern, virtually unaided. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't. When they don't, little bits of Paulson's life studies are left scattered uncomfortably on the page. "Intercoastal Highway" is a good example of Paulson's unobtrusive arranging, itemizing "Exact fare. / Toll ahead . . . / Fat people in skimpy /

clothes." The technique is there but the impression, too slim.

Daniel David Moses is a myth-maker. He is not a formal moulder of story, rather an exposé of angle and colour and character. A bit of a trickster. His opening poem, "Admonition to an Ice-Skating Child," perceives the frozen river's life — how lovely it is "under its white sky. With fish eyes frozen / it sees only bubbles of dark," but "If the river hears you . . . You'll slide off its smile into black / kisses, forgetting you need to grow old." In the world of Moses, everything is animated. Each night the sun cools off far down in the ocean, looking up at you through black waves, "jealously, shivering like the moon"; as for that moon, she is "somnambulant and shoeless," dropping her hair ("An offering of frost") "like handkerchiefs along the garden path." A flake of snow is "the wind's lost tooth / or the ghost of an eye." Occasionally Moses' predilection for unusual animation can be dizzying. The temper of his poetic imagination lies somewhere between the surreal and the primitive. At his best, Moses carries energetic animism forward to mature poetic vision, as in "The End of Night," where dawn comes with imagistic intimations of death's very transcendence. His most remarkable achievement in this selection, "The Line," is a witty and profound tour de force on the creative process itself that begins by feeding the reader a line, casting it way out there, "while something like a snout starts / nudging at your ear." Here speaks the trickster wisdom of a true poet.

Daniel Jalowska is a breathtaking phrase-maker. In poem after poem, his lovely language stops you. Far above the city, "satellites hum / satisfied"; we live in a "land of splintered souls," or "Shadow-clad stones / accrue in caches of memory and dust." In the best pieces, these singing words also accrue, in meaningful forms. The body of woman as

mythic force of love (perhaps almost a Gaca figure) takes this poet to illuminating places ("A Promise") but can also leave him foundering, adrift in his own intriguing language: morning's "moody and dignified deliverance from sanctified pain." However, when this masterful technician gets the formula right between craft and real insight, he produces fine poems, such as "Homage to Patience" or "The Beach."

Each poet in this tripartite anthology is of merit. Together they exhibit probing sensitivity, exuberant imagination and alluring verbal skills. For all three, this is a promising first book.

PATRICIA KEENEY

## RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

BASIL JOHNSTON, *Indian School Days*. Key Porter Books, \$24.95.

THIS BOOK IS an autobiographical account of the author's experiences as a student at an "Indian school." It begins in 1949 and covers eight years of his school life from Grades 5 through 12. The dust jacket describes the book as "a unique portrait of Indian life and a telling commentary on a Canadian government policy that removed native children from their parents with sad sometimes even tragic results." The Canadian government policy to which the blurb alludes was rooted in racism and ethnocentrism. It empowered the Indian agent, one of Ottawa's minions, to remove Indian children from their homes at a tender age and transport them to distant residential schools. Most would not see their parents again until the summer break, if then.

Basil Johnston was a victim of this government policy. But, contrary to the claims of the publisher, Johnston does not view his experience in the framework of government policy. There is no analysis

of tyranny and oppression. He does not meditate on the meaning or consequence of government policy for his people or himself. The Indian school experience described by Johnston does not symbolize a consequential political issue nor is it linked to the present condition of Canada's Indian people. Johnston's first-person narrative begins with a description of how one day, when he was 10 years old, the Indian agent came to his grandmother's house on the Cape Croker Reserve and without regard to the wishes of his mother removed him and his four-year-old sister to St. Peter Claver's School, a Catholic residential school in Spanish, Ontario. This shocking, traumatic event in the lives of two young Indian children is presented as a brief explanation of how the author came to be in the Indian school. From this he moves directly into a narrative description of day-to-day life in St. Peter Claver School.

In a series of free-standing tales speckled with interesting and amusing anecdotes, Johnston provides a feel for the school life, its rituals, routines, discipline, monotony, restrictions. He provides us with an insight into the subculture of the school: the students' desire for freedom, their contempt for institutional food, their moods of frustration and rebellion, their hijinks. He is successful in evoking the atmosphere, the sounds, smells and moods of the school. His narrative is at times engrossing, at times amusing, at times moving, and often tinged with bitterness.

Johnston writes noticeably better about student frustrations and adventures than he does about characters. There simply is no portrayal of three-dimensional characters, imaginative or otherwise. His narrative is frequently interrupted by purposeless listings of names. One has the impression every student, priest and staff member is mentioned at one time or another. Just names, without personality or character. His mother, sister, and other kin remain

shadowy figures. The priests are drawn in fleeting images as cranky, nagging and harassing. We have only a vague portrait of the author as a young boy.

Johnston does not catch the unique flavour of Indian students and Jesuit priests interacting in a distinctive social-cultural confrontation. Most of the experiences he describes could have occurred in the dormitories, classrooms and playgrounds of any boy's residential school. Conflicts in understandings of personal autonomy and authority are not cast as cultural conflicts but as generic conflicts between adolescent boys and school authorities. He fails to convey the ambiance of an *Indian* school.

To this reviewer it seems the author has evaded or repressed the true meaning of his experience. He gives the impression that the harshest reality of the students' lives was the frustration of monotonous routines, rigid discipline and restrictions, bad food and unpleasant chores. This theme defines the limits of his experience and he rarely transcends it. He conveys very little sense of the emotional and mental pain incurred by separation from family and home or of the cultural dislocation involved in being turned into "a white kid." Occasional sentences hint at such pain but this experience, which one would think to be a central part of the story, are treated as incidental and glossed over.

It is not obligatory that a book about Indian school days must contain social and political analysis and commentary. But, one's reaction to the book is conditioned by one's expectations. The reader expects more from a book that starts out with an account of two small children involuntarily removed from their home. As a general assessment one can say our gain is an entertaining story. Our loss is the story Basil Johnston might have told.

MENNO BOLDT

## OF THE PEOPLE

*wâskahikanîwîyîniw-âcimowîna: Stories of the House People*, told by Peter Vandall & Joe Douquette; ed., trans., Freda Ahenakew, Univ. of Manitoba Press, \$24.95.

*Tyendinaga Tales*, comp. Rona Rustige, McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, \$15.95.

THESE TWO COLLECTIONS have almost nothing in common and will be of interest to quite different audiences. What they share is that they are narratives told by native people, one a collection of anecdotes intending to reflect Indianness, the other the remnants of the once rich folklore of the Mohawk.

*Stories of the House People* consists of ten "stories" in Plains Cree and English: four are on themes of traditional Cree life, three are humorous anecdotes, and three are (auto)biographical. The longest is only a little over six pages long, the shortest a single page. With no more than about 250 words per page, these are short stories indeed. They are not intended to be literary compositions, and they are not traditional tales; rather, they are reminiscences about earlier times intending to impart some notions about being Cree and separate from the continually encroaching White Man's world. They were narrated in Cree (as spoken 50-60 miles north of Saskatoon) and transcribed, edited, and translated by Freda Ahenakew.

The value of these stories to non-Indians lies not in their literary quality. That would be hard to judge, and would have to be set in a Cree narrative context, by comparing the rendering of traditional myth and tale with more casual, anecdotal stories; neither genre is well represented in printed form. Where this volume will serve a useful purpose is in the classroom where Cree is taught, to provide reading material. They will also be of interest to anyone studying Cree as a language, thanks to the format of the book. The stories are printed first — and hand-

somely — in Cree syllabics. Then they are repeated in romanized Cree in a phonemic transcription with the English translation on facing pages. The second half of the book consists of several appendices. First come thirteen pages explaining the orthography used and the structure of the glossaries, written by Ahenakew and H. C. Wolfart, a linguist with years of experience studying Cree. These notes are extremely useful and clear. They are followed by a handful of references to other writing on and in Cree. Then come the glossaries: first Cree to English, and last English to Cree. Between the two is what might seem rather strange — an inverse stem index, where stems are alphabetized working from right to left in the word, and classified according to the type of noun, verb, or particle and their gender and transitivity. This glossary is important to study of the language itself, since Cree is heavily inflected and knowledge of these categories is essential to create words correctly.

*Tyendinaga Tales* is a collection of nineteen Mohawk folktales. The versions given are so reduced and fragmentary, however, that it is difficult to understand why they are published. The tales take up fewer than seventy large-print pages (with fourteen illustrations by Jeri Maracle Van Der Vlag — three full-page — interspersed), and in English only. The work is apparently a labour of love, and is intended to document what little traditional Mohawk literature is remembered on the Tyendinaga Indian Reserve; this would not be a bad thing in itself if some comparison were made with fuller versions of the stories. We are told that these stories are not much heard any longer, and are not widely remembered. Given the long period of efforts by school, church, and government throughout North America to denigrate and eradicate native languages and cultures, this is not surprising. What remains of the literature may be primarily

of interest in documenting what portions of a society's folklore survive longest, but here we do not get much feeling for the earlier literary wealth, and the reader interested in Mohawk (and other Iroquoian) folklore would do better to consult the standard sources, which are given in the Bibliography of this volume.

Apparently no effort was made to record these tales in Mohawk as well as English, so we cannot even judge the quality of the original Mohawk narrative style. In my experience Native Americans who can still tell stories in their original language do not do them justice in English — they are abbreviated, less attention is given to traditional stylistic devices and patternings, and usually (as here) heavily bowdlerized so as not to offend non-native audiences. *Tyendinaga Tales* can serve to introduce readers to Iroquoian folklore, but to appreciate the wealth of either the style or breadth of that literature it will be necessary to go elsewhere.

M. DALE KINKADE

## FIRST WORDS

ANNE CAMERON, *Dzellarhons: Myths of the Northwest Coast*. Harbour, \$8.95.

ANNE CAMERON, *The Annie Poems*. Harbour, \$8.98.

ANNE CAMERON, *Raven Returns the Water*. Harbour, \$4.95.

ANNE CAMERON, *Orca's Song*. Harbour, \$4.95.

IN AUGUST 1988, Canada's largest feminist publishing house, The Women's Press, went into a state of crisis over the publication of three pieces in an anthology called *Imagining Women*. The Policy and Publishing Group of the Press overruled publication of the pieces, saying that they were "structurally" racist. At issue were white authors writing about Latin American and African cultures, "sometimes adopting the voices of people of colour."

A militant group in the Press, calling itself the Popular Front-of-the-Bus Caucus, asserted that whites do not have the right to assume the voices of women of colour in literature. Their position was denounced by the Writers Union of Canada on the basis of freedom of expression and imagination (*The Globe and Mail*, August 9, 1988).

The crisis this story illustrates is widespread and growing because those for whom members of the dominant culture have long presumed to speak are speaking out more frequently and more forcefully in their own voices and from their own experience. It is especially acute in my discipline, anthropology, but is erupting everywhere in the social sciences and humanities as the recognition of plural realities becomes more widely realized. It is referred to in the scholarly literature as a crisis of representation, and no West Coast writer's work reveals it more clearly than Anne Cameron's.

Cameron adopts the voices of Native women in her fiction, although not in her poetry. Since much of the fiction is aimed at children and those who buy for children, and the poetry is adult, the distinction is relevant. In two of the books under review, *Raven Returns the Water* and *Orca's Song*, she includes the following introduction:

When I was growing up on Vancouver Island I met a woman who was a storyteller. She shared many stories with me, and later, gave me permission to share them with others.

This woman's name was KLOPINUM. In English her name means "Keeper of the River of Copper." It is to her this book is dedicated, and it is in the spirit of sharing, which she taught me, these stories are offered to all small children, I hope you will enjoy them as much as I did.

[Cameron seems to be referring to a holder of the name Klapiṇap (or, more accurately, *T'lapinap*), who died years ago in a Nanaimo hospital. The name is owned

by an Opetchesah family, and can be translated as "Warm hostess to all," according to Ron Hamilton, a member of that family.] In a third book, *Dzellarhons: Myths of the Northwest Coast*, she tells the story of her relationship with Klopinum in a twelve-page introduction, and describes meeting her as a child growing up near an Indian reserve in Nanaimo. She describes the old woman, whom she calls "Auntie," as giving her permission to write the stories then. The implied reason? "I'm just an old klooch. . . . Who listens to me? Who listens to us? Who listens? Anyway, I can't read and I can't write, and I never went to school and writers go to university." In her dedication to an earlier book, *Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981), Cameron wrote "with gratitude to Nootka people of the village of Ahousat who share their stories and their lives with me." In the Preface she tells us, quite specifically, that she was given permission to "tell what I knew" by a "few loving women who are members of a secret society whose roots go back beyond recorded history to the dawn of Time itself. . . . These women prefer not to be publicly named or honoured. They prefer that their identity, and the rituals of their society, be kept a secret. I respect their wishes."

A large and growing public accepts what Cameron is writing as "myths of the Northwest Coast," as she subtitled *Dzellarhons*. There are two issues here. One is that the appropriation (or even, in the more radical view, the interpretation) of an Other's reality is now regarded as an act of cultural violence; the other is that Cameron's appropriations are, for the most part, more fictional than faithful to her declared source. While I can recognize some of the stories, especially in *Dzellarhons*, as based upon Native stories (the story "Muddlehead," for example, includes incidents of the famous Bear Mother story that is widely known and

told), they are radically altered and, I would say, dis-authenticated, by Cameron's telling, and some of them are so different from Native stories that they must be her own inventions from start to finish. Such fictions, by the way, would be fine, if they were acknowledged. [Even though *Dzellarhons* is technically published as Fiction, and the children's books as Juvenile Literature, I doubt that many readers notice such details. Indeed, both Cameron's and James Houston's fictional accounts of West Coast People's (formerly known as Nootka — after a mistake made by Captain Cook) life were cited as ethnographic authorities in a term paper by an anthropology student in one of my classes this past year.] Cameron has known Native people all her life, and certainly has stories to tell from her own experience.

A telling misrepresentation of the Native voice, at the level of plot, is in *Orca's Song* (published also as a story in *Dzellarhons*), when a female osprey and a female whale fall in love. "And one day, as Osprey swooped towards the waves, Orca leaped into the air, and their love was shown." The accompanying drawing by Nellie Olsen shows the two female animals clasped in a mid-air embrace while rays of energy shoot out from their bodies. The next page begins as follows: "When their child was born, she was black like Orca, but with white on her body, like the head and belly of Osprey, and she could make piping sounds like the bird did, and she giggled." Gender distinctions are strong in Native cultures; two females making a baby would be unthinkable.

We know from *The Annie Poems* that Cameron's ideology is that of a radical lesbian feminist, one who regards her sexual minority status as somehow linked to that of women of colour. The contradiction that her two voices or literary personas present is revealed in the following excerpt from the poem "Sometimes I Read Magazines":

I want to hear directly from the black women  
directly from the native  
women  
directly from the sisters  
who are not a minority  
because they are not  
minor.

The contradiction is that, as one who wants to hear *directly* from Native women, Cameron presumes to speak for them (of which more below).

In another children's book, *Raven Returns the Water*, she feminizes the trickster character, Raven, which is fine — Raven occasionally transforms into a female body in Native narratives — but in Cameron's tale the Raven character is made to fit another of her ideological perspectives, environmentalism. The Indian Raven is a glutton whose actions are motivated by his/her greed for sex and food. That the results of Raven's acts sometimes benefit humankind is irrelevant to him/her. Jarold Ramsey, in *Reading the Fire* (1983), observes: "As Franz Boas first pointed out, what Far Western tricksters do as transformers they do *not* do from lofty promethean motives; rather, they characteristically fix up reality by whim or accident (as with their supererogatory powers), or in the pursuit of selfish, not altruistic ends, and certainly not in a spirit of self-sacrifice." Cameron transforms Raven into an altruistic heroine, one who "knew she had to find water or the entire world would die." She flies to the last green valley on earth, where she finds it. "That is MY water you are drinking," the frog croaked. . . . 'It is NOT your water,' Raven contradicted. 'Water belongs to everybody and everything. . . . Water belongs to the trees, too, Raven said firmly. And to the flowers who will die without it.'" I have not encountered a Native story about Raven rescuing water from a greedy frog (who croaks "sor-ry, sor-ry" in the end "and all of creation forgave her") but the real problem here is the transformation of Raven

into a white environmentalist (see Duane Niatum's poem, "Raven and the Fear of Growing White" in *Songs for the Harvester of Dreams*, 1981).

I was told about an elder who said in a 1987 potlatch, "The proudest thing we have is to speak without a book." Expressing the same sentiment, Tom Peters, an Inland Tlingit of Teslin, is quoted in Catharine McClellan's *Part of the Land, Part of the Water* (1987):

In the old days . . . those oldtimers were smart. They never had a pencil like you got in your hand. They never had it — just a mind that's all. If someone is going to speak about some trouble, well, an old guy like me, we going to sit down. And the first words they are going to speak, I'm going to catch what he really is speaking about. That's how it used to be. They never take a paper and look at the paper first. Just our minds. In this country we know a lot of things, right from the beginning.

Native culture is an oral culture, and is still transmitted that way. That is not to say that Native people do not themselves use the literate tradition, but they transmit orally their own realities to themselves. What disturbs me the most about Cameron's mission to tell things from the Native women's point of view is the assumption that *they* need her to do this. Auntie's statement, quoted above, "Anyway, I can't read and I can't write . . ." is used both to disempower the reality of Native cultures, and to empower and to mystify Cameron's assumption of the literate storytellers' role.

Since rescuing and telling the Native's stories has long been a rationale for the work of anthropologists, we are especially sensitive to its abuse, and our professional literature is replete with self-reflexivity in the matter (see, for example, James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture*, 1986). We are also increasingly aware of the power relationships that Telling the Native's Story are based on. Simply put, to speak for those whom one

assumes have no voice is to take their voice away. Fortunately, a vigorous Native American literature, one informed by Native experience, is also emerging in our time, as one begins to realize reading Chapter Eleven, "Tradition and Individual Talents in Modern Indian Writing," in Ramsey's *Reading the Fire*, or Lorelei Cederstrom's "Myth and Ceremony in Contemporary North American Native Fiction," in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* (1983).

In summary, my problems with Cameron's Indian books are that she mystifies her right to tell Native stories, she uses Native stories to promote her own ideologies, and the Native in these Native stories has turned white.

MARJORIE M. HALPIN

## NATIVE GROUND

JOAN CLARK, *The Victory of Geraldine Gull*. Macmillan, \$19.95.

DON GUTTERIDGE, *Shaman's Ground*. Drumlin Books, \$12.95.

THE NON-NATIVE writer of the 1980's who chooses native character as fictional subject is running some risks. A growing number of Native authors are making their voices heard, are insisting on telling their own stories, and by doing so, are challenging the white man's fictional Indian. By now, too, literary critics are well aware that from John Richardson's *Wacousta* to a host of works by contemporary authors, the Indian has long served as a projection of white values, standards and aspirations. While in its early stages, white culture in Canada fictionalized the native-enemy as inferior and uncivilized, in later stages, having conquered the aborigine, it romantically eulogized him as dead or dying. As a white author, then, weaving a novel of a community of Swampy Cree on the shore of Hudson

Bay, Joan Clark is venturing into a mythic territory which invites the fixing of the Indian in postures acceptable to a collective non-native imagination.

Typical of white writing about Natives, the central theme in *The Victory of Geraldine Gull* is the conflict between whites and Indians, in this case between "civilization" embodied in the Roman Catholic Church and its priest, and the Hudson's Bay Store and its manager — and a more natural Native lifestyle espoused by a young, educated Native leader, Patrick Eagle, who wants to get the isolated Native community in Niksa to move ground, to take charge of their own destiny, to begin anew in a fresh unspoiled frontier site. Clark is sympathetic to this vision, as have been many white writers before her who invest the Native with Utopian possibility. Typically, the re-claimed Indian will be situated close to nature, worshipping his own Gods, but somehow assimilated in his isolation. He will be schooled in white education, run his own co-op to control white goods, possibly even build his own fur factory and sawmill, laundromats and sewers. Clearly, Clark's dream is of making some kind of "peace" between Native and white ways. In the words of Patrick, as he envisions the community's buildings, "The houses will probably be a mixture of log and clapboard. The main thing is to make it look connected, like it's . . . integrated. . . ."

Clark's desire for cultural connection is also represented on a symbolic level, largely through the Genesis myth of Christian belief. The possibility of renewal is occasioned, literally, by the flooding of the Hudson Bay Lowlands which forces the Natives to move. Unfortunately, this mythic grafting and what seems a possible but vague social plan for integration-in-separateness do not quite "take" in the fiction. The reader is left with an uncomfortable feeling of disbelief about a Better Life After the Flood, a probable sense of

continuing cultural discord and white authorial manipulation of Indian affairs.

Atypical of white authoring about Natives, however, is Clark's feminist choice of two women, a white art teacher, Willa, who is teaching native children, and Geraldine Gull, the village troublemaker, as major protagonists. Reading the subtext here for white bias also reveals some problems though. While one applauds the creation of Geraldine Gull as a tough, self-reliant, disputatious, even unlikeable warrior woman — certainly a new image of the Indian in fiction — her interior life is not fully realized and, more importantly, her victory is no victory at all. In fact, one worries that the standard white historical drama (based on the assumption that the best Indian is a dead one) is being replayed once again as Geraldine drowns in a black romantic moment, beaten psychologically by her own Indian mythology ("A Mishipashoo swims past. It flicks its serpent tail against her head. She's slammed against a rock"), an ending which is traditional in the white "undertaking" of the Native in fiction.

Despite a problem with structural focus, particularly evident in a short epilogue that does little justice to the developing multiple narratives, the novel is something of a fictional feat. Clark captures the ambiance of Northern Ontario, the texture and realities of bush life, the moods and eccentricities of northern characters. Geraldine Gull is a particularly strong creation in that she is more than her "Indianness": she is the "take it or leave it" female newsie on the C.N.R.; she is Boxcar Annie, a living legend in Thunder Bay, a champion log sawyer recently immortalized by bpNichol in the poem "Hips."

Geraldine is also the mother of an artist, Alexander Bear, and in this sub-theme Clark does develop a fresh and modern look at the Native in literature. While Clark does not focus on Geraldine and

Bear's relationship, nor explore Bear's plight and psychology in any depth, she does open a fictional window on the life of the Indian as he lives it today, one that can be treated reasonably free of the static images of the Indian in the literary past. The native artist is a modern cultural phenomenon, particularly in Ontario where Norval Morrisseau, the Ojibway painter, led the way for other artists. This fictional interest adds to the credibility of the northern contemporary world Clark is recreating.

*Shaman's Ground* is most remarkable, not as a fiction about Native life which the title implies and which it is not, but as literature carefully situated in region. Sixth in a series of works — in poetry and prose — set in Lambton County on the southern tip of Lake Huron, this volume is part two in the story of Lily, a character whose life span (begun in *St. Vitus Dance*) covers the period from 1879 to 1922. Described by Gutteridge as "part history and part fable" Lily's story is a fictionalized documentary of one woman's life, including the lives of her ancestors and her progeny. Rooted in the community of Point Edward, Lily and her offspring are shaped by the historical events of the period. With a great deal of attention to regional and historical truths, including the intermix of native and white blood, the dominance of Irish ethnicity, the importance of the railroad and railwaying, the *idea* of nationhood that was current at the time, the impact of war, Gutteridge moulds his characters and their destinies and convincingly reconstructs a period, a place and its people.

From a feminist point of view, the female protagonist is a heroine in an epoch/epic of paternal authority; while she is a convincing character in her own right, she functions passively as both a historical filter for a male-centred world and as a record of the suffering, ambiguous role of

womanhood. Lily's identity unfolds in chameleon-like dependency throughout her life, her sense of self emanating from her husbands, lovers, sons and grandchildren. Hers is the role of the Great Mother, who, as maternal source, gives birth, who faithfully, unceasingly nurtures, only to be abandoned by men and to see the fruits of her womb wither and die because of male folly, because of a masculine penchant for war.

Although her odyssey is Everyperson's struggle for survival, Lily is also the mythic feminine force of traditional masculine imagination. As Granny, she is ultimately even a memorial for all her dead men and a symbol of "home." While the author is pointing out the "mockeries" of the role of "nurse and angel," nurse and angel is the essential Lily in a naturalistic chronicle of a thoroughly depressing female life. The author attempts to relieve the gloom at the novel's end by introducing, in rather forced melodramatic style, a lost heir. But the solution of a recovered female child cannot satisfy the feminist reader who is seeking a New Fiction where the mythology of female questing includes something more, or other than, generation.

Nonetheless, Gutteridge's technical talent for fusing fable and historical reality is considerable. Lyrical passages mingling dream and memory are synthesized with more prosaic passages documenting external realities. The subjects, I, Lily, and her offspring, and the "objective" world of historical event meet and merge on an elusive, thought-provoking social, psychological, mythic and actual shaman's ground, one that Gutteridge believes humanity longs to call "home." "Home" is certainly strongly coloured and felt here through a credible depiction of Ontario region and Canadian nation-building based on recorded social history.

BEVERLY RASPORICH

## STEREOTYPES

GILLES THÉRIEN, ed., *Les Figures de l'Indien*. UQAM, n.p.

THIS IS A STRANGE book, the product of a conference held in 1985 on stereotypical images of the North American native peoples in European historiography. It is strange because of a gnawing question the organizers do not seem to have considered in planning the conference: *For whose benefit?* The question now arises with the publication of the conference's proceedings and the editor's statement in a foreword that the study of the "real" Indian was no more the object of the conference than it is of the present book. As he says: "L'Indien d'ici, l'Indien d'Amérique ne se retrouvera donc pas comme objet d'études dans les pages qui suivent."

What the conference amounted to, judging from the total absence of Amerindian participation, was group therapy for two dozen academics predominantly from Europe, in a restricted ("entre nous"?) setting. Again, in the editor's own words: "C'est en fait l'évolution mentale des Blancs qui est ici analysée, nos préjugés, nos volontés ethnocentriques mais aussi notre désir, au-delà des figures, de rejoindre l'Indien, notre ancêtre d'Amérique."

One would have thought that, even since 1985, the oddity of holding a conference on the Amerindian, using a narrow European focus and in the absence of the subject (although the site, Université du Québec à Montréal, is only a half-hour drive from a large Indian reservation, Kahnawake), would have dawned on the organizers. If, in retrospect, little could be done to correct the initial blunders — ones that, perhaps, inadvertently but not deliberately grew out of the specialized interests of a group of scholars — common sense should have suggested the inadvisability of giving them published and per-

manent form; especially as they are prefaced by a hollow claim ("the Indian, our American ancestor") that is implicitly dishonest.

Unfortunately, the proceedings now exist and they offer proof positive of the uselessness of specious scholarly pursuits divorced from social implications. Sadly, but for one exception (Jean Morisset), a group of otherwise estimable scholars show themselves wallowing in a slough of dubious moral aims and questionable scientific methodology.

The reading of papers such as "Les maudits Sauvages et les Saints Martyrs Canadiens"; "Jouer le Sauvage"; "La perception du geste sauvage et de ses enjeux"; "Le sauvage, le colon et le paysan," etc., offers, *ad nauseam*, painful confirmation of the editor's disclaimer as to the object of study (signalled in the unbracketed use of a slur in the above titles). The relentlessness and singleness of approach displaying European phantasms, neuroses and delusions on the subject of native peoples, in paper after paper, blunt the most patient reader's attention while exacerbating a silent rejoinder to the editor's confident admission: Why is the "real" Indian *not* the object of study? Even as one defers to the proclaimed result of self-serving group therapy, a major flaw in the argument nonetheless stands out in the absence of any reference to Bernard Arcand and Sylvie Vincent's *L'Image de l'Amérindien dans les manuels scolaires du Québec* (1979). Surely the implications of not studying the "real" Indian are obvious when the two books are juxtaposed: Arcand and Vincent analyze stereotypical images of the Indians in a concrete pedagogical setting and, in the process, document areas for change; Thérien's is an invitation to a narcissistic exercise, beneficial to a select few.

The omission of Arcand and Vincent's text is but a signal to further question the methodology at work. Thus one looks in

vain for scholarly familiarity with the writings of Vine Deloria, Bernard Assinwi, Duke Redbird, George Clutesi, Louise Erdrich and other authors of Amerindian descent. Would it not have been legitimate to consider these writings, at the very least for the purpose of contrasting the native self-image with the stereotypical images rampant in European historiography? Admittedly, a historical perspective largely foreign to North America, and pre-modern, might explain this absence. One understands, then, the weight given to Cartier's and Champlain's journals, as well as to the Jesuits' *Relations*; equally understandable are the repeated references to Rousseau, Chateaubriand and, to a lesser extent, Voltaire and Diderot. As these names or sources suggest, however, the cultural slant is primarily French: Las Casas, Defoe, Dr. Johnson are nowhere cited, let alone such moderns as Lawrence or Lowry.

In the end, the problem with *Les Figures de l'Indien* is one of flawed methodology, especially from the point of view of comparative literature, the field of study which supports (or, rather, should have supported) the iconographic research. The very texts I have mentioned, supplemented by others (one thinks of Carlyle, Mme de Staël, Nietzsche, Montesquieu, and De Tocqueville), all of which are concerned with cross-cultural or cross-national images, and have sustained emergent research in what (in North America) is called stereotyping. In France, for instance, works on that subject by Van Tieghem, Hazard, Etiemble, Sartre, Fanon, Memmi and others have yielded valuable theoretical and methodological strictures. At their best, a common denominator characterizes their approach: as stated by Etiemble, in *Comparaison n'est pas raison* (1963), analysis of international literary phenomena should be rooted in the ethics of the comparatist who must steer clear of any form

of "chauvinism" and "provincialism." None of these theorists and critics appears in *Les Figures de l'Indien*, even where they might simply temper a quest for therapy.

MAX DORSINVILLE

## SPIRIT LANDSCAPE

RUDY WIEBE, *Playing Dead, a Contemplation Concerning the Arctic*. NeWest Publishers, \$12.95.

*Do you know yourself?  
So little you know of yourself!  
While dawn gives place to dawn,  
And spring is upon the village.  
Unaya — unaya.*

SO ENDS A POEM by a man named Orpinalik of the Netsilik Inuit from Pelly Bay. This poem is quoted in full by the author of *Playing Dead* at the very end of his book. The song (for the poem is to be sung) illustrates what seems to be the main theme of this wonderful collection of three essays on Canada's North now collected by NeWest Press: that we do not know our own North. Nor do we know how significant the northern environment and cultures are to the business of being Canadian.

These essays began as the Larkin-Stuart Lectures at Trinity College, University of Toronto, which Rudy Wiebe presented in November of 1987 (then titled "The Arctic: Landscape of the Spirit"). Now they have been rewritten and presented as a unified "Contemplation Concerning the Arctic" in three segments. The three essays are titled, in order, "Exercising Reflection," "On Being Motionless," and "In Your Own Head." As these headings indicate, the author, in journeying about the northern territories, is involved in a spiritual as well as a physical (geographic, climatologic, anthropologic) search for understanding. He wants to know more about the North, and in acquiring knowl-

edge of the northern cultures and peoples and landscapes (or rather waterscapes, as he shows), he will be wiser about himself as well. It is a noble quest, and one that should receive far more attention than it does.

The themes of these three essays follow each other in a remarkably subtle way. Wiebe begins by laying down the parameters of his entire discussion in the first essay, "Exercising Reflection." Viewing the country from above (an aerial view), he reflects how water, in its various forms (fog, cloud, ice, ocean, river, rain) determines the nature of the land and its life. What he notices about water is that it constantly changes: water moves from one form to another. From that observation, he notices how the Inuit express spatial concepts in two ways: something is either "areal" (meaning of equal dimensions all around, such as a ball), or "linear" (meaning of unequal dimensions, such as a stick).

Conceptualizing the world in this two-dimensional way is significant to the landscape of the North and has implications for a spiritual understanding both of the North and the self as well. The spatiality expressed in these concepts has everything to do with motion. An areal object is not in motion (note the title of Wiebe's second essay, "On Being Motionless") while a linear object may be an areal thing in motion. A linear thing could be the line drawn by the tracks of that which is moving.

The crucial point Wiebe makes about this concerns the central idea of the whole book: the North keeps its *secrets* from view — "Secrets; secrets everywhere." The peculiar thing about the northern landscape, and its dangers, is that as soon as you stop moving, you are lost. So long as you keep moving, you can be found. If you want to hide, the best thing to do is stop. If you want to be found, the best thing you can do is keep moving. In the

second essay, Wiebe ties the notions of movement and secrecy to the sense of the northern landscape he began with: that he sees it more in terms of water than land. Water is constantly moving.

Aside from the slightly metaphysical reflections posed by the above concerns, *Playing Dead* treats two other subjects which serve to illustrate or fasten the main *drift* of its argument: which is that the author is expressing a desire to unfasten, loosen, put in motion, the *secrets* of the North. The other two topics, of no small interest, are the history of the northern environment, and the author himself in relation to both the landscape (waterscape) and history of the place. Wiebe has written about northern history before. In "On Being Motionless" he mentions again Albert Johnson, buried in Aklavik on March 9, 1932, about whom he has written before. What Albert Johnson did wrong, since he was trying to get away from his pursuers, was to run. There are extensive examples given in this book of the foolishness of the first explorers of the North, especially those who came from Britain. Much of that is well-known history already, but in this book the discussion of the various expeditions onto the ice by this and that group (he discusses the Franklin expeditions, Back, King, the Yellowknives, Green Stockings, Albert Johnson and his pursuers, Tony Thrasher) serves as a reminder that we know precious little of what has gone on there. We know so little northern history partly because it is hard to research (witness the author's own difficulties in finding out anything conclusive about Albert Johnson), and partly because there is not enough interest in the northern environment, or energy to discover it, in southern Canada.

There is also Rudy Wiebe's personal relationship to the people of the North and his own affinity with them. During readings in the Yukon — Old Crow or

Aklavik — he describes sometimes unexpected discussions, conversations with natives in his audience or at their homes. Wiebe is not necessarily looking for specific things, legends, stories or modes of behaviour, but he is listening and watching. Something about his attitude is very attractive: there is no arrogance, no predisposition to knowledge or wisdom, no flaunting of learning, no sense of superiority. Just a man watching and listening. He notices how stories are told; how information is expressed. He puts away his own (southern) mask and makes himself vulnerable in the face of the stupendous natural forces of the territory he is in. In the final, and perhaps the best, essay, "In Your Own Head," he writes that after all his searching in the North, the best he can come up with is silence:

But I am moving, and what I encounter here in the North, where I have of necessity come to look, are secrets; enigmas; mysteries. Not mysteries in the fine New Testament sense of a secret once hidden and then inexplicably revealed through the mercy of divine revelation. No, not that; at least not yet . . . walking alone in this enormous landscape where I am all eyes and no sight, it is not only surrounding me but the image of it from the air is playing doubled, trebled through every sense of my awareness, I am steadily rendered more and more word-less. One could so easily, perhaps one must of necessity become a motionless dot of stillness. Experience the day and night and moon and sun and the imperceptible turn of the stars.

I believe that the North will not unlock its "secrets" unless a person is willing and able to put aside what has been learned elsewhere and the masks that learning has created. It is necessary to start from scratch when entering that landscape: to be "all eyes and no sight." The same might be said for an encounter with the desert. This is why the third Franklin expedition, for example, was not a success. This is also why Vilhjalmur Stefansson's expeditions were more successful. Stefansson was apparently willing to go along with the en-

vironment, to adopt its ways, rather than to struggle against it. That kind of wisdom is something Wiebe himself is seeking at the end of his book: the wisdom to learn in strange and different ways, knowledge that comes directly from the environment, without intermediaries.

To become "a motionless dot of stillness" is, in a sense, to "play dead" (Wiebe also mentions the arctic mode of comporting yourself in the absence of firearms: "If a bear happens to come along I will have to play dead, though I am not at all sure it is a game I know how to play. Or want to"). Perhaps it is a way of becoming passive and allowing influences from outside to work their way in. It is a kind of negative capability in life rather than just in writing, but the notion has everything to do with writing. This is why, I suppose, Wiebe quotes Aritha van Herk's suggestion that he find the North "in his own head" as well as in physical terms. There is a spiritual search going on throughout, but the North is almost taken as a metaphor for that which has remained locked in the mind. If one is able to unfasten, or loosen, a still point into movement, the point may be found and a "secret" has been unlocked.

But Wiebe himself does not feel that he has reached the point of "stillness" needed. Rather, he acknowledges that his discussion of (fluctuating) waterscapes and of his own vision of the land/water from an airplane (in motion) have for the most part been his "way to understanding." He marvels at the inability of some early explorers to yield to the environment they are in, and to learn from it. When he discusses Vilhjalmur Stefansson, however, Wiebe's prose sparkles. It seems apparent that Stefansson's story (stories) is of much keener interest to him. He writes of Stefansson that

he learned to speak Inuktitut fluently and he tried to think like an Inuit and he lived like one; his greatness as an arctic scientist

and explorer was rooted in exactly such behaviour. Nevertheless, he remained "white" enough to try and maintain all his life a (the most typical?) white arctic secret.

That secret had to do with intimate relations with an Inuit woman during his travels, and a child she had which was presumably his. But keeping secrets is not necessarily a "white" thing to do. Non-white peoples have secrets too. But the noticeable thing about Stefansson's conduct is that North and South call for different codes of behaviour. Stefansson reacted to the place he was in and did not necessarily want to transfer those codes from one region to another. Wiebe, however, does, and that is the difference. It does not appear that Stefansson was so concerned with what we in the South could learn about life and its mysteries from the North. He was concerned about treating the North on its own terms and using it.

To close I would like to bring in a rather devastating comment on Canada from south of the border which I find typical. Tom Wolfe, in the epilogue of his book *The Painted Word* (Bantam, 1976), writes about movements in the arts in the U.S.:

For about six years now, realistic painters of all sorts, real nineteenth century types included, with 3-d and all the other old forbidden sweets, have been creeping out of their Stalags, crawl spaces, D.P. camps, deserter communes, and other places of exile, other Canadas of the soul — and have begun bravely exhibiting.

That comment, "Canadas of the soul," struck me for what it shows about how Canadian culture is viewed south of the border: as a forbiddingly barren and empty experience. I would think that unless Canadians do exactly what Rudy Wiebe is suggesting — discovering their *real* identity in their *real* landscape, which is a northern one rather than a southern one — Canadian culture will remain invisible for many and we will continue, to

own own embarrassment, to go "whoring," as he says, for the South.

KRISTJANA GUNNARS

## HALFWAY TALES

WAYLAND DREW, *Halfway Man*. Oberon Press, \$29.95/\$19.95.

WILLIAM C. MCCONNELL, *Raise No Memorial*. Orca Books, \$26.95/\$14.95.

IN *Halfway Man*, Wayland Drew tells the place and people of Neyashing into being. Neyashing has a problem. It does not officially exist. Nor do its occupants have any legal title to their land. Trouble starts when surveyors and lawyers from the giant Aspen Corporation arrive, with their blueprints for a huge, luxurious, environmentally devastating holiday resort. The legal question of land ownership and usage depends on a prior question: who controls the mythologies of place? Through Travis Niskigwun, his Ojibwe narrator and protagonist, Drew defends a mysterious, spiritual region of earth, mind and story, a region outside the purview of science, psychology, law, cartography, history or commercial discourse. Neyashing "is not substance but story." Conversely, Drew's text comprises "narrative and landscape both."

Drew's prose is as clean and limpid as the landscapes it depicts. The story has "as many beginnings as the lake." It winds through a maze of "river-curves and lake-circles," subverting unilinearity to move around and around the conflict, exploring it from several different angles. Drew's text evokes the randomness and spontaneity of oral narrative, yet every element fits into a larger dramatic and rhetorical design. Throughout, the voice of Travis Niskigwun guides the reader. It binds together the many tales within tales within the text, infusing them with feeling, and modulating the pace and intensity of the

action. Travis's sense of humour and personal integrity inspire trust, while the rhythms and momentum of his speech impel us forward through the text.

Drew's optimism is unusual amongst the environmentally concerned. He consciously articulates a position outside the "shadow world," the humourless world of gloom-and-doom constructed by conservationists who try to scare people into saving the earth. Through the Shadow Man episode and through Jenny's initial fear of bringing a child into the world, Drew highlights the potential for scare campaigns to backfire. The fear, anger and despair which pollute the mind are as dangerous to life as the toxins polluting the earth. *Halfway Man* participates in the struggle it depicts. Drew attempts to give a "magic arrow" of hope to those who, like White Bear in the Story of the West Wind, are paralyzed by feelings of impotence, fear and despair.

My only reservation about *Halfway Man* concerns Aja, the ancient Ojibwe conjurer who personifies good fortune and functions as an artificial *deus ex machina*. What would Travis have done without the uncanny good luck of Michael Gardner's breakdown or without his special bond with the local police officer? Drew's favourable prognosis for the world depends on "Too much faith . . . Too much trust. Too much Aja." I make this charge recognizing its cultural and historical contingency: *Halfway Man* certainly relativises but does not permanently annul that version of reality against which readers customarily measure the plausibility of stories. The eloquence, humour and intelligence of Drew's dramatic exposition of the conflict far outweigh his rather disappointing plot resolution. *Halfway Man* dramatizes clearly and succinctly the social, psychological and discursive questions underlying the problem of environmental destruction.

*Raise No Memorial* spans William Mc-

Connell's writing over some five decades, beginning with "Coastal Images" of life in British Columbia, and extending farthest afield in "Images of War." McConnell's fragments, sketches, suites and fully fledged short stories cover a variety of subjects. They are also rather uneven in quality.

McConnell's writing is strongest when the speech of characters dominates the text. He successfully captures a variety of social dialects: a young boy's shout, "DIDJA FIND ANY BODIES?"; an Indian woman's "Swelling is all gone . . . Men stupid"; a West Indian Londoner's "You really know where you is? Anybody? Anybody really knows where he is? . . . Don' shove." But in early works such as "Love in the Park" and "Kaleidoscope," as the voice of the aspiring young writer strives to create poetical effects, dense thickets of adjectives and metaphors frequently stop the narrative in its tracks, as in "His tinned-topped shack scraping on mud-bottom, half-hidden by the rain-misted shadow of the bulked warehouse that sulked on its stilts, was kinder to him." When each minor detail is so lavishly embellished ("there were red paint-covered varicoses of never used stairs," and "purred roads asthmatic with mist," it becomes difficult to discern the contours of the story as a whole. Readers who enjoy the type of short story which climbs briskly up to the single peak of its climax may feel frustrated at having to toil across the plateaus of McConnell's early, self-consciously poetical prose.

PENNY VAN TOORN



## LE MÉTIS CANADIEN

MARCEL GIRAUD, *Le Métis canadien*. Son rôle dans l'histoire des provinces de l'Ouest. Institut d'ethnologie de l'Université de Paris, n.p.

MARCEL GIRAUD, *Le Métis canadien*. Son rôle dans l'histoire des provinces de l'Ouest. Les Éditions du Blé, n.p.

MARCEL GIRAUD, *The Metis in the Canadian West*. Trans. George Woodcock, The University of Alberta Press, n.p.

*Le Métis canadien. Son rôle dans les provinces de l'Ouest*: tel est le titre complet de l'ouvrage bien connu de Marcel Giraud, professeur honoraire au Collège de France. Publié à Paris, en novembre 1945, quelques mois après la fin de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale (1939-1945), il figure dans les Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'ethnologie (N° 44) de l'Université de Paris. C'est avec le double concours du Conseil des Arts du Canada et du Conseil des Arts du Manitoba qu'il fut réimprimé par les Éditions du Blé, à Saint-Boniface, en 1984, soit une quarantaine d'années après l'édition originale. Deux ans plus tard, en 1986, l'ouvrage parut en traduction anglaise à Edmonton, aux Presses de l'Université de l'Alberta; le traducteur de cette étude exhaustive d'environ 1 400 pages est nul autre que George Woodcock, éminent homme de lettres canadien.

*Le Métis canadien* (1945) comprend l'avant-propos et la préface, la bibliographie et les sources (LVI p.), puis quatre grandes cartes géographiques portant sur le milieu, les douze familles linguistiques et l'emplacement des tribus, la pénétration canadienne et la pénétration britannique. Il est divisé en six parties respectivement intitulées: I – L'Ouest canadien. Le milieu primitif. II – La pénétration de la race blanche. III – La naissance du groupe métis. IV – L'éveil d'une conscience nationale. V – La maturité du groupe métis (1818-1869). VI – La désagrégation du groupe métis. Ce vaste ensemble, structuré

un peu comme une épopée ou une tragédie, est subdivisé en 37 chapitres. Il serait vain de prétendre le résumer en un paragraphe. Tout au plus peut-on essayer d'en cerner les grandes lignes, uniquement pour le bénéfice du lecteur profane, peu familier avec cette partie de l'histoire du Canada.

Après avoir décrit le milieu physique et humain, l'auteur aborde les divers courants de pénétration de la race blanche au sud et au nord, puis les premiers conflits entre les entreprises canadiennes et les entreprises britanniques. Il étudie ensuite la naissance, l'apparition du groupe métis et le premier statut des Métis canadiens. Tels sont les thèmes majeurs des trois premières parties. Les trois autres portent d'abord sur la colonie d'Assiniboia et la dislocation de la nation métisse, puis sur les années d'incertitude des Métis de la Rivière Rouge (1818-1827) et les années de stabilisation (1828-1869), et les Métis de l'Ouest, en dernier lieu sur la désagrégation progressive (1870-1885) du groupe métis, sur Louis Riel, l'insurrection de 1885, les Métis de la Rivière Rouge. En gros, les trois premières parties sont plutôt descriptives, les trois dernières, narratives. Soit dit en passant, l'auteur ne raconte pas les insurrections de 1869-70 et de 1885; il analyse plutôt l'effet de ces dernières sur les Métis.

Exemplaire est la conscience professionnelle ou l'esprit scientifique de Marcel Giraud, né archiviste-historien. Chacune de ses assertions est accompagnée d'une note, si bien que le relevé des innombrables références remplit souvent presque la moitié d'une page. Il ne cite que des documents de première main, empruntés aux archives de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, à celles de la Société historique du Manitoba, du Collège de France, de la Congrégation des Pères Oblats, de l'Archevêché de Saint-Boniface, du Dominion, des universités de Columbia, du Minnesota et de Toronto. Sans parler de

relations de voyages et d'explorations antérieures à la formation de ce qu'on a appelé "la nation métisse." Il va sans dire que l'auteur a vécu dans l'Ouest et y a observé de près les Métis dans les années 30.

Il s'agit ici du Métis canadien à la fois d'expression française et d'expression anglaise, car ce sont d'abord des Français et des Canadiens français, puis des Anglais, des Écossais et des Irlandais qui ont épousé des Indiennes dans l'Ouest et y ont constitué le Métis canadien. Si les trois premières parties du volume de Marcel Giraud visent à le peindre et à décrire le milieu dans lequel il s'est formé et s'est donné un mode d'existence, les trois dernières rapportent les faits qui ont mené "la nation métisse" à la désagrégation. L'introduction de colons par Lord Selkirk, au début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans l'habitat séculaire des chasseurs et des trappeurs de bisons, fut, tel un présage, l'événement déclencheur du refoulement graduel et systématique des Indiens et des Métis en dehors de leurs territoires ancestraux; les colons, naturellement sédentaires, allaient créer une économie agricole et urbaine, donnant ainsi, pour ainsi dire, le premier coup de grâce aux nomades à la poursuite de leurs troupeaux. La venue de missionnaires et la fondation de paroisses ne manquèrent point de favoriser les colons et le sédentarisme; elles donnèrent aussi naissance à une morale qui ne cadrerait pas parfaitement avec celle qui avait présidé à la formation de "la nation métisse," laquelle n'était point toujours réfractaire à l'anthropophagie et à l'infanticide et tenait la femme pour un instrument de travail ardu indispensable au transport des fardeaux et à la confection des articles et objets nécessaires à la subsistance.

La Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, fondée par des traiteurs de la Nouvelle-France, contribua, dans une large mesure, à créer la misère en décuplant les postes de traite et en multipliant les demandes de four-

tures et de viande de bison, ce qui devait conduire éventuellement à l'extinction du gros gibier. Avant de disparaître elle-même, elle incita sa vieille concurrente, la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, à vendre ses franchises royales à la jeune Confédération canadienne. Celle-ci, à son tour, s'empressa de favoriser l'immigration de colons en provenance surtout de l'Ontario. La présence d'arpenteurs canadiens dans la vallée de la Rivière Rouge indisposa les Métis qui s'y étaient installés et s'étaient même donné un gouvernement provisoire. Autant dire que l'installation de ces colons se fit souvent aux dépens des premiers occupants.

La construction du chemin de fer Transcontinental eut pour effet d'accélérer l'arrivée de nouveaux colons et la fondation de villes à travers l'immense espace connu sous le nom de Territoires du Nord-Ouest, entre le Manitoba et les Montagnes Rocheuses. Indiens et Métis furent alors refoulés sans répit et sans vergogne. Pareille violation du droit des gens amena insurrections et révoltes, surtout la fameuse bataille de Batoche, en Saskatchewan, sous les ordres de l'"excommunié" Louis Riel — aujourd'hui complètement réhabilité au pays, témoin le timbre-poste canadien à son effigie — bataille qui marqua le point culminant de la résistance indienne et métis, voire la débandade finale des vaincus, les uns passant aux États-Unis, les autres se dispersant ici et là dans l'Ouest. Ils y seraient aujourd'hui environ 90 000.

Les Éditions du Blé ont réimprimé, en 1984, l'ouvrage de Marcel Giraud en deux volumes, en y ajoutant cependant, tout à fait au début, une introduction bilingue et seize notes bilingues, non paginées, soit huit pages. Celles-ci ne manquent certes ni d'intérêt ni d'utilité. Tout en soulignant la haute valeur scientifique de l'étude exhaustive qu'est *Le Métis canadien* et le fait que sa parution déclencha une série d'études sur les Métis de l'Ouest, elles sou-

lèvent un point fort important au sujet de l'explication de la régression du groupe métis. Deux écoles de pensée, aussi divisées que les Blancs et les Indiens, avancent depuis quarante ans de nouvelles interprétations. La double origine des Métis, européenne et indienne, leur habitat ou leur milieu, leur vie de chasseurs et de trappeurs, leur histoire depuis deux siècles et demi expliqueraient tout. Grâce à ce double héritage de traditions indiennes et de traditions euro-canadiennes, ils ont pu, aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, s'identifier aux habitudes et aux moeurs des indigènes.

Mais reste à savoir s'ils pourraient faire face aux colons qui inondèrent leurs terres ancestrales au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. De 1820 à 1870, ils réussirent à se donner une identité politique, trouvant les moyens et les ressources nécessaires pour arriver à cette fin. Et cela grâce, en grande partie, à leur héritage européen et à leur attachement aux institutions traditionnelles. Cuthbert Grant et Louis Riel auraient beaucoup aimé voir les Métis s'identifier à leur héritage euro-canadien, bien que l'un et l'autre fussent tiraillés entre le respect d'un passé primitif et la nouveauté des objectifs culturels des colons. Les changements qui se produisaient autour d'eux furent si nombreux à partir de la Confédération que, pris de court par les événements, ils ne purent réagir et s'adapter assez vite aux conditions nouvelles. Ils sont depuis partagés entre deux cultures, entre deux mondes, entre la stabilité rassurante d'une vie sédentaire et l'attrait séduisant d'une vie primitive indépendante et libre. Leur destin tragique est de n'appartenir ni à l'un ni à l'autre.

Depuis une quarantaine d'années, des chercheurs attribuent à un gouvernement antipathique et impérialiste le comportement des Métis et leur débandade. La politique d'expansion du gouvernement canadien vers l'Ouest serait responsable des faits et de leurs conséquences. L'évolution

des Métis en tant que groupe socio-culturel émanant de la traite des fourrures ne pourrait à elle seule expliquer les événements bien connus de l'histoire des Métis. D'autres esprits étudient aujourd'hui la traite des fourrures favorables à l'établissement de foyers de métis et à leur maintien comme groupe distinct. Il en est d'autres aussi qui s'intéressent davantage aux modes d'adaptation propres à une époque et à un endroit en vue de l'accroissement et de la survivance des Métis. En bref, l'ouvrage magistral de Marcel Giraud a stimulé les recherches et les publications sur les Métis; il a même contribué à leur donner une nouvelle orientation.

Évident est le conflit des cultures dans un pays bilingue, voire pluraliste, comme le Canada. Sont moins patents les conflits de cultures entre races de différent niveau au Canada, comme entre les Amérindiens et les Blancs, entre les Amérindiens et les Métis, entre les Blancs et les Métis, entre les Amérindiens eux-mêmes, une tribu voulant l'emporter sur l'autre parce qu'elle se croit supérieure à elle. De même, les conflits en Afrique du Sud où je les ai moi-même observés de près entre les Noirs, par exemple, entre les Bantous et les Zoulous, pour me limiter à deux tribus, il en est une dizaine d'autres. Mieux vaut faire face à la réalité et voir les humains tels qu'ils sont, parler de différence et de variété, et non d'infériorité ou de supériorité, encore moins d'égalité. Pour ma part, plus on me parle d'égalité, plus je vois de différence entre les êtres; c'est même leur différence qui m'attire au plus haut point.

On ne gagne rien à exalter le degré d'élévation des indigènes ou des Métis, comme les Blancs ne gagnent rien à se dénigrer. Si les Métis possèdent un tel degré d'élévation, pourquoi les Blancs cherchent-ils alors à les assimiler? En fait, nous avons tellement dépossédé et exploité les Amérindiens et les Métis que le gouvernement du Canada et les Canadiens

eux-mêmes seraient pour le moins hypocrites, ignorants ou outrecuidants, s'ils voulaient faire la leçon à Pretoria. Les conflits de cultures entre races de différent niveau existent encore au pays; notre devoir est de les résoudre le mieux possible à la satisfaction des divers partis en présence. Ainsi, les Métis de l'Ouest, groupés en quatre associations provinciales et parfaitement conscients de leur identité propre, n'ont pas encore réussi à faire reconnaître leurs droits et leur identité par les politiciens et le gouvernement du Canada. Depuis 1970, ils luttent pour la reconnaissance de leurs droits, une vingtaine: territoire, richesses naturelles, langue et communication, développement économique et social, statut social particulier, etc.

George Woodcock n'a certes pas uni à leur cause en coiffant ainsi sa traduction: *The Metis in the Canadian West*. Titre laconique et saisissant, beaucoup plus court que celui de l'édition originale, plus large et moins précis. Mais il a fait beaucoup plus, je me hâte de le dire, que traduire de main de maître l'ouvrage incomparable de Marcel Giraud. Il en a rajeuni, pour ainsi dire, la présentation en le divisant en deux solides Volumes d'environ 600 pages chacun, en rejetant les notes à la fin de chaque Volume, ainsi celles des chapitres 1 à 12 à la fin du Volume I, celles des chapitres 13 à 37 à la fin du Volume II. Le matériel bibliographique qui suivait l'introduction dans l'édition originale, figure maintenant à la fin du second volume; cette façon de reléguer à la fin les Sources et la bibliographie de chaque chapitre correspond davantage à la pratique courante. Suit un volumineux Index analytique fort utile. Cet ouvrage de 1 362 pages se lit donc d'affiliée. Il a paru avec le concours du Conseil des Arts du Canada, de la Fondation Emil Skarin et des Presses de l'Université de l'Alberta.

Ce qui distingue aussi la traduction de l'édition originale, c'est que Marcel Giraud y a réduit sa Préface en son In-

troduction au strict minimum. George Woodcock, qui était admirablement préparé par sa longue, riche et vaste connaissance de l'Ouest canadien, a non seulement composé une Introduction bien rendue et bien sentie, remarquable de pénétration et de plénitude, de limpidité et de précision, mais aussi a fait de multiples additions à la Bibliographie, souvent accompagnées de critiques constructives et pertinentes. Il y rend hommage à Marcel Giraud dont il brosse la carrière et résume l'oeuvre, précise l'emploi de certains termes de préférence à d'autres et rappelle l'évolution du concept de l'histoire au cours des quatre dernières décennies; les historiens ont considérablement changé leurs façons de voir et d'expliquer, leurs méthodes d'approche et de traitement depuis quarante ans, ce qui est tout à fait normal et dans l'ordre des choses. De même, tout écrivain dont l'oeuvre s'étend sur un demi-siècle change naturellement de point de vue et de style.

La traduction et la présentation de cet ouvrage sont de haute qualité et constituent une contribution majeure à une tranche fort importante de l'histoire du Canada. *The Metis in the Canadian West* ajoute un fleuron à l'oeuvre abondante et variée du fondateur et directeur (1959-1977) de la revue *Canadian Literature*, polyglotte averti et traducteur de renom, essayiste, biographe, historien, auteur dramatique et poète, conférencier recherché et grand voyageur devant l'Éternel. Marcel Giraud n'aurait pu être mieux traité.

En un mot, *The Metis in the Canadian West* fait honneur à Marcel Giraud, à George Woodcock et aux Presses de l'Université de l'Alberta.

MAURICE LEBEL



## COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

DARLENE QUAIFE, *Bone Bird*. Turnstone Press, \$10.95.

BRENDA ZEMAN, *To Run with Longboat*. GMS [2] Ventures Inc, \$16.95.

THIS IS A NOVEL that asks a lot of its readers. It contains mystical passages that are half-dream, half-reality, to which readers must pay close attention in order to know what the novel is about. Writer Darlene Quaife has written a novel based on the assumption that there is a collective unconscious into which 'conscious' people of all races can tap. This collective unconscious manifests itself in recurring images or motifs which have been and continue to be particularly significant among Native people. To this end, Darlene Quaife has centred the story on Aislinn Cleary, a young woman whose paternal grandmother, Teodora, now living on the west coast island settlement of Tanis Bay, is a Yaqui Indian who left Mexico after the revolution. Teodora's closest friends are an elderly Klaskish Island couple: Augusta and Wil Charlie. Also to this end, Quaife has Aislinn meet an aspiring photographer, Hugh Chan, who looks for and finds evidence of these cultural motifs to photograph. At the conclusion of the novel we are left with Aislinn joining Hugh on a film-making voyage of discovery in various parts of the world. The tension in the novel comes from the reader's growing awareness that another Carlos Castaneda type of reality exists side by side with the violent, hard-drinking life of loggers soon threatened to lose their jobs, a mother suffering from Parkinson's disease and two aging grandparents. All of this turmoil is worked out against a backdrop of a remote and wooded logging town that in all respects is never far from the wilderness.

The bush knew its time was near. It would creep in the moment they rolled down island on holiday. It would begin on the company side of town: the bush reclaiming the town, turning the dead wood of the loggers' houses to dirt where new trees could take root. . . . The stone path would disappear at night.

It is in passages like this that Darlene Quaife really shines. The novel tumbles with vivid imagery. Occasionally, the description strays into the overblown.

She liked the jumble of crackerjack words and suds in her heads, the beer foamed and kept everything bubbling. The crystalline words she missed went into the sky and cracked in starfire like burnt sugar. She watched the stars brighten on the sweet fuel. Caught up in her private circus, she didn't hear Tim step through the door.

For the most part, however, the writer has weeded out overwritten passages. Her evocative, sensual descriptions provide the texture of the real place, as well as the mystical. They also build the strong sense of femaleness permeating this novel which, besides being about the tension between two different realities and cultures, is about the power and powerlessness of being female. This is an ambitious novel, not recommended for those who prefer a 'quick read,' but rather for those who enjoy books that are quietly and unobtrusively provocative.

Refreshing is the word that first comes to mind when describing *To Run with Longboat* by Brenda Zeman. Much of the book's success comes from the author's energy and enthusiasm for the people about whom and with whom this book was written. It could be said that writing this book was a labour of love since Brenda Zeman required a good deal of tenacity and persistence to track down the people who, one way and another, are involved in the stories which are about Indian athletes who have distinguished themselves in sports: Tom Longboat, Jimmy Rattlesnake, Freddie Sasakamoose, Jim Gladstone, Roger Adolph, Sharon and Shirley

Firth, Steve Collins, Ross Powless, Jack Jacobs, Everett Sanipass, Alwyn Morris, Paul Acoose. Brenda Zeman uses a variety of techniques to tell the stories. Often she has the athletes speaking for themselves. Where this hasn't been possible, she has assembled the points of view of those who knew the athlete or filled in the stories herself in the manner of a literary journalist. In one case, the author or authors, since the book is very much a collaboration, tells the story through an exchange of letters; in another she relies on a dramatic script. This latter way of telling the story did not work for me as well as the others. It struck me as contrived whereas in the rest of the book there was great naturalness in the telling. Each section features an athlete (in one case twins), and begins with a beautiful painting by Wilton Littlechild and ends with a page of snapshots, mostly from family albums.

This is an inspiring book. In every case the athletes show enormous determination as they struggle against odds that would have defeated others. The strong sense of community is evident throughout the book, community meaning not only the athletes' cultural history but also the support of family and friends. The sense of loss, of separation, of longing is everywhere in these stories. The reader feels the dislocation of an athlete competing in Chicago or Oslo, trying to shut out, but never quite able to do so, the pull of the land, the family left at home. In several cases the pull is so strong that the athlete forgoes the career and returns to the reserve. There is a good deal of humour in the stories, a down-to-earth sanity and rootedness that reassures. Although there is sometimes the regret of missed opportunities and lost chances, the overall mood of the book is not one of bitterness but of the pride of accomplishment. In that sense the book is a celebration. Brenda Zeman deserves much credit for putting

together a book which, thanks to David Williams's editing, reads well and gives so much to the reader.

JOAN CLARK

## TWOFOLD HERITAGE

JACQUES POULIN, *Volkswagen Blues*. trans. Sheila Fischman, McClelland & Stewart, \$22.95.

MCCLELLAND & STEWART have wisely reprinted two judgments on the original French version of *Volkswagen Blues* (1987) on the jacket of the present edition. Readers of Sheila Fischman's excellent English translation will heartily subscribe to François Hébert's observation in *Le Devoir* that "Poulin's writing is precise, lively, suggestive. . . . Mainly it is discreet: what you read is the visible part of the iceberg." Graham Fraser, writing in *The Globe and Mail*, described Poulin's novels as "modest, taut . . . highly crafted," and *Volkswagen Blues* as a "beautiful and subtle reminder that Quebec's past and its imagination are not limited to the banks of the St. Lawrence, but reach to the edge of the continent." Both critics were right to stress this novel's stylistic simplicity: it has only two main characters, a traditional omniscient narrator relating his narrative in the third person, and a mostly linear plot with few prolepses. There are major exceptions to this linearity: the frequent external analepses referring to history, especially the history of French exploration in North America. This fact justifies Fraser's comment regarding Quebec's past and imagination.

Why does *Volkswagen Blues* deliberately evoke such history? A partial explanation is furnished by Emmet Grogan's sentence from *Ringolevio*, quoted in epigraph: "We are no longer the heroes of history." Yet if *Volkswagen Blues* were

read as nothing more than an expression of nostalgia for the "heroic" periods of New France, much of the book's importance would be missed. It expresses less nostalgia than questioning, on two main points:

How is it that the French/French-Canadians, who — as the novel repeatedly emphasizes — treated the Amerindians so much better than did the Spanish and English/Americans, to such an extent that one could speak as much of the Amerindianization of the French as of the Frenchification of the native peoples, how is it that these French/French-Canadians fared so much less well in terms of establishing a lasting influence? The fact that the parts of North America explored by the French are now largely dominated by Anglo-American civilization seems to fly in the face of both justice and common sense: the novel seems to ask whether befriending the Indians, giving rise to the new Métis people, might not have justified a better destiny for francophone colonization in North America.

What shall henceforth be the relationships between French-Canadians on the one hand and, on the other, a) ethnically heterogeneous elements in Quebec society (its native peoples, Métis, and immigrants); b) anglophone North America?

In response to these questions, the novel offers the rich symbolism of its characters, their quests, and actions. The hero, Jack Waterman, begins his quest for his brother Théo, near Gaspé, whence came the last message Théo had sent him, a postcard bearing the text of a passage from Jacques Cartier's narration of his voyages of exploration to Canada. Near Gaspé Jack picks up a hitch-hiker, "La Grande Sauterelle," a Métis woman. Her sympathies definitely lie with the Indians, but she admits the French behaved better towards them than did the Spaniards or Americans. Théo seems to be following the paths

of French explorers. Jack and La Grande Sauterelle finally catch up with him in San Francisco: he has become mentally and physically handicapped with creeping paralysis. La Grande Sauterelle decides to stay awhile in San Francisco, for "she thought that city, where the races seemed to live in harmony, was a good place to try to come to terms with her own twofold heritage, to become reconciled with herself." Jack? He feels it best to return to (fortress?) Quebec. What is the significance of all this, including the trip across North America? Surely it is best to let readers ponder on that themselves. Suffice it here to suggest that the very omnipresence of people able to speak French, along the route travelled by Jack and La Grande Sauterelle, indicates that not all is lost (cf. reports indicating how impressed Jacques Godbout was by the number of students studying French in a California university which invited him there).

May this novel have many readers, for — while its attempt to transform cliché into myth do not always succeed — it is a well-constructed, deeply moving tale of great significance. Its initial stylistic simplicity is misleading; its external analepses, rich use of intertextuality, and powerfully thought-provoking treatment of the theme of heterogeneity in Quebec society make it fully modern — and not a little postmodern. Yet its lexical and stylistic simplicity make it a work that can be studied in introductory Canadian literature courses, whose students could thus be introduced to technical questions such as narrative temporality and intertextuality and to some of the basic facts of Canadian history, which are indispensable to the study of Canadian literatures, but which students rarely seem to have heard of prior to their first Can Lit course.

NEIL BISHOP

## LA DIFFÉRENCE

MADELEINE OUELLETTE-MITCHALSKA, *L'Amour de la carte postale*. Québec/Amérique, \$17.95.

CET ESSAI DE Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, dont on connaît déjà les romans et la poésie (notamment: *Le Plat de lentilles*, 1979; *Entre le souffle et l'aine*, 1981 et *La Maison Trestler*, 1984), correspond de façon remarquable à la pensée de notre temps jusqu'il se propose d'examiner les questions d'universalisme et d'altérité. D'où le sens du titre: la carte postale incarne diverses manifestations de l'Autre, de cette altérité qui séduit par la voie de l'exotisme. Plus précisément, la carte postale représente le monde améri-dien vu par la littérature française et québécoise, la littérature québécoise vue par la littérature française et la littérature des femmes jugée par l'institution littéraire. Le sous-titre, *Impérialisme culturel et différence*, laisse entendre d'emblée que ce livre fait le procès de la notion d'impérialisme culturel. C'est là, en fait, que réside le propos principal de l'auteure: examiner comment la différence se crée et comment elle se perpétue dans les relations du centre et de la périphérie.

Dans les trois premiers chapitres, Ouellette-Michalska examine les fondements philosophiques et sociaux des notions d'universalité, d'impérialisme et du discours de la nature. En montrant que ces notions servent à légitimer la marginalisation de la différence, elle en fait sévèrement le procès. Universel, nous rappelle-t-elle, est "synonyme d'*occidental*, et *mondial* signifie d'abord *européen* ou *nord-américain*." Sur cette base, qui valorise le centre, s'appuie l'impérialisme culturel: "l'art d'imposer la différence et d'en tirer profit après avoir décrété qui ou quoi est universel." Quant au discours de la nature développé dans les oeuvres philosophiques de Platon, Socrate et Aristote, il mène, se-

lon l'auteure, au racisme, à la marginalisation de la femme et à la supériorité des groupes dominants.

C'est en fonction de cette discussion, qui expose les failles dangereuses des systèmes culturels, sociaux et philosophiques fondés sur les notions de centre et de périphérie, que Ouellette-Michalska examine certaines manifestations de la différence. Ainsi, par exemple, elle montre dans un excellent chapitre que le dictionnaire fonctionne essentiellement comme un instrument idéologique par le traitement normatif des régionalismes et des genres: "La stigmatisation des régionalismes, de même que la péjoration des mots, leur répartition en formes, genres et catégories affectées d'indices négatifs, traduit une résistance au pluralisme." Ou encore, l'auteure révèle comment les petites littératures sont marginalisées par la puissance du centre: "Les sous-littératures, les contre-littératures et les petites littératures sont hors de l'histoire. . . . Elles énoncent un monde fragile, incertain." En suivant ce même genre d'argument, toujours sensible au statut de la différence, Ouellette-Michalska démontre enfin qu'une attitude paternaliste et condescendante gouverne la représentation des Indiens dans la littérature, la vision du roman québécois en France et la marginalisation des écrivaines dans la société.

En s'attachant à des domaines variés, *L'Amour de la carte postale* pose des questions passionnantes et importantes au sujet du discours universaliste et du statut de la différence dans notre société; questions importantes parce qu'elles touchent aux notions du savoir, du pouvoir et de leur légitimation. Si ce livre est indéniablement enrichissant et stimulant, il présente cependant plusieurs problèmes. On se demande souvent pourquoi l'auteure ne tient pas compte de certains changements importants dans notre société postmoderne au sujet précisément des questions du centre et de la périphérie. Sur le plan

philosophique, peut-on discuter la problématique du centre uniquement en fonction des écrits d'Aristote et de Platon sans pour autant parler de Lyotard, Derrida et Foucault? Par ailleurs, au sujet de la femme, est-il légitime de ne parler que de dépendance économique (l'homme au travail et la femme à la maison) puisque cette situation s'est sensiblement modifiée dans le monde occidental? Pourquoi ne pas examiner les nouvelles formes d'exploitation des femmes? Des femmes qui combinent des rôles professionnels et maternels, ou bien d'autres, les *nannies*, presque entièrement du tiers monde, qui jouent un rôle de plus en plus important dans la cellule familiale sans jamais, pour autant, accéder aux privilèges du centre? Quant à la question d'impérialisme, croit-on toujours à la puissance culturelle, sociale et économique de la France, comme le laisse entendre l'auteure? En parlant des dictionnaires, Ouellette-Michalska avoue que le vent a tourné puisque des changements d'attitude font reconsidérer certaines positions. Pourquoi ne pas reconnaître également qu'à la suite des transformations effectuées par la société post-industrielle, le vent a tourné dans de nombreux autres domaines, à savoir ceux du rôle de la femme dans la société, de l'importance croissante des littératures dites 'marginales' et de la perception des Amérédiens par le centre? Les positions du centre et de la périphérie ne sont pas renversées dans ces sphères mais elles sont certainement modifiées. En dépit de ces lacunes dans l'argumentation, le livre de Ouellette-Michalska contribue incontestablement à une des grandes questions de notre fin de siècle — celle de l'altérité.

JANET M. PATERSON



## HORS QUÉBEC

*Les autres littératures d'expression française en Amérique du Nord.* Jules Tessier & Pierre-Louis Vaillancourt, eds., Editions de l'Univ. d'Ottawa, n.p.

ANNETTE SAINTE-PIERRE, *Sans bon sang.* Les Editions des Plaines, \$8.95.

pour qu'ils témoignent de notre existence et de notre vitalité. MELVIN GALLANT

VOILÀ UN DE ces livres qui arrive à propos pour tous ceux qui, un peu partout dans le monde ces temps-ci, s'intéressent de près ou de loin aux choses francophones. Ils trouveront de quoi se nourrir dans l'excellent recueil d'articles que publient dans les Cahiers du CRCCF les Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa. Dans ce volume ont été repris, à quelques exceptions près, les communications faites lors d'un colloque sur "Les autres littératures d'expression française en Amérique du Nord."

Ce colloque, qui s'est déroulé en mars 1984 à Cornwall, était le point culminant d'une grande manifestation culturelle de la francophonie minoritaire en Amérique du Nord. Certes, il s'agissait principalement d'une réunion de famille, lors de laquelle des spécialistes parlaient au nom des différentes communautés d'expression française "hors Québec." Or, grâce à ce volume précieux, le cercle des invités s'élargit considérablement, et ceci pour notre plus grand plaisir.

Dès la première contribution, qui sert d'entrée en matière, on se sent en excellente compagnie. Éric Waddell met avec pertinence en lumière le profond clivage qui, à la suite de la révolution tranquille, s'est opéré entre les "majoritaires" et les "minoritaires" du monde francophone nord-américain. Néanmoins, il a bon espoir de voir se réaliser des retrouvailles sur les bases d'une plus large intercompréhension. Le climat de méfiance réciproque entre membres d'une même famille de francophones ne devrait pas, en effet,

pouvoir s'installer pour de bon. En fin de volume, les perspectives globales relatives aux littératures minoritaires et régionalistes dans l'ensemble du monde francophone, dont se charge Robert Cornevin, président de l'Association des écrivains de langue française, sont quelque peu noyées dans l'abondance des informations que l'auteur nous apporte en supplément.

Le dosage équilibré du programme que les organisateurs ont réussi à établir, permet à chacune des régions d'avoir son dû. Abstraction faite de ces particularités régionales, les communications se divisent en deux groupes. Il y a, d'une part, celui où il est principalement question de survie ou de renouveau pour les communautés francophones les plus menacées, et, d'autre part, celui que se rattache aux régions où les bases des activités littéraires en français sont si assurées que le critique littéraire peut légitimement entretenir de plus grandes ambitions. Les auteurs qui se rangent dans la première de ces catégories se tiennent tout naturellement sur la défensive, et à l'arrière-plan de leurs exposés se dessinent bien des inquiétudes. Il n'empêche que tous ces textes qui nous initient d'une manière si directe et sincère à la réalité dans les régions les plus exposées, sont dignes de notre intérêt et de notre sympathie. Les différents spécialistes qui sont au rendez-vous traitent tous avec compétence et conscience professionnelle leurs sujets souvent délicats : Roger Motut nous parle de la littérature en Alberta et Annette Saint-Pierre de celle de l'Ouest, Barry Jean Ancelet et Mathé Allain traitent de questions louisianaises, Bryant C. Freeman présente la situation dans le Mid-West et Armand-B. Chartier évoque un fait de journalisme littéraire franco-américain.

Ceux qui aiment une littérature spécifiquement moderne, où les perspectives universelles ont pour une bonne part remplacées celles du passé et du terroir, se tourneront avec la plus grande curiosité

vers le deuxième groupe de textes, celui où il est question de littérature acadienne et ontarienne. Melvin Gallant et Hans R. Runte mettent tous les deux en évidence, de façon convaincante, le cheminement lent et difficile de la littérature acadienne. Abandonnant son traditionalisme foncier, elle se lance progressivement dans une hardiesse salutaire de discours et de techniques narratives. Les deux critiques se complètent de façon heureuse, le premier mettant l'accent sur la continuité, le dernier se concentrant principalement sur les signes d'un changement prometteur en cours.

Les couleurs ontariennes sont valeureusement défendues par Yolande Grisé, qui se charge de l'interprétation d'un conte local, ainsi que par Robert Dickson et Pierre Paul Karch. Ces deux derniers exploitent avec bonheur le riche filon de la nouvelle poésie ontarienne, où prédomine face à "l'autre" les besoins de communication et de reconnaissance, sans que soient absentes pour autant les innovations formelles. Le tout étant complété par des renseignements bibliographiques très utiles, il ne nous reste que de féliciter Jules Tessier et Pierre-Louis Vaillancourt, en tant que responsables de la publication, d'un travail utile et bien fait qui rendra sûrement de grands services au public directement visé, auquel se joint, il ne faut pas l'oublier, un grand nombre de canadienistes à travers le monde.

Le récit d'Annette Saint-Pierre intitulé *Sans bon sang*, se lit comme un supplément à sa communication sur "L'écriture dans l'Ouest canadien." Au centre de cette histoire en milieu pluriculturel se place une histoire sentimentale entre une jeune métisse manitobaine, Marthe, et le fils d'une famille bourgeoise de Winnipeg. Dans cette famille, Marthe fait oeuvre de bon Samaritain auprès de la mère veuve menacée d'invalidité. Comme intrigue secondaire, il y a l'histoire du père de Marthe, l'Indien qui, après avoir manqué

son intégration sociale, risque de rater complètement sa vie. Les deux fils de l'intrigue seront reliés grâce au père Indien mourant, qui, révélant sur le tard ses dons de génial artiste, facilite l'intégration sociale de sa fille dans le monde des Blancs. Pour comble de bonheur, celle-ci se consacrera dorénavant à l'éducation des enfants indiens.

Il faut savoir gré à l'écrivaine d'évoquer pour nous ce monde d'un exotisme certain — et surtout Hecla Island et les alentours — mais comme son objectif n'est pas la description réaliste, nous restons à cet égard sur notre faim. Elle ne s'est pas beaucoup appliquée non plus à créer des personnages psychologiquement convaincants, ou à faire oeuvre d'artiste du langage. C'est que son but est principalement d'ordre moralisateur. A travers ses personnages — surtout Marthe elle-même et son père indien, mais encore le jeune amoureux qui se découvre aussi des racines indiennes — se révèle comme réalisable la quête d'une identité et d'une reconnaissance par les Blancs pour ceux qui le méritent. C'est un dénouement auquel nous sommes sensibles, et qui n'est pas fait pour nous surprendre. Car c'est un monde où règnent au suprême degré les bonnes intentions et les anciennes valeurs. Une telle vision du monde attire, certes, notre sympathie, mais on s'y sent un peu à l'étroit.

LEIF TUFTE

## ALL MY LIFE

JOHN OUGHTON, *Mata Hari's Lost Words*. Ragweed, n.p.

BRUCE TAYLOR, *Getting on with the Era*. Villeneuve, n.p.

MARIANNE BLUGER, *Gathering Wild*. Brick Books, \$8.50.

JOHN OUGHTON, in *Mata Hari's Lost Words*, joins a list of Canadian poets, such as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje,

Stephen Scobie, and Gwendolen MacEwan, who have attempted, in poetry, fictional autobiographies of historical figures. These poets have all written essentially extended dramatic monologues or series of dramatic monologues. The success or failure of such works depends to a large extent on the historical figure himself or herself, for the poet relies primarily on published biographical information. Oughton himself, in his Introduction, admits to having been obsessed with Mata Hari for several years, and says that the poems, based largely on information provided in prose biographies of this dancer, courtesan, and spy, are an attempt to "evoke and exorcise that obsession." But while it is understandable that Oughton should want to write about such an alluring subject, he has not managed to make Mata Hari come alive in his pages.

One of the problems may be that, in ordering the poems chronologically beginning with Mata Hari's childhood, Oughton has at first limited himself to the most elementary biographical information and presented it in a way suitable to the most conventional form of encyclopedia entry. But a more serious problem is that Mata Hari's voice is given no dramatic context. She *tells* us about herself without *revealing* her character, and at times she speaks to no one in particular in no particular setting. The use of the present tense is not enough, even when Mata Hari is speaking of something as important as her marriage:

This man can get me out of here  
After that we'll see

In six days he proposes: yes  
In three months we're married  
Six months later, I give birth  
by May we board the Java steamer

The poems do get stronger as Mata Hari becomes involved in political and sexual intrigues, but the interest lies in the subject herself, not in the presentation; con-



ries attests to the superior crafting skills she demonstrates in each story. Her method appears conventionally mimetic, her economic prose and third-person narration suited to characters who are "ordinary," low-keyed, inarticulate, and as one admits in an unusual outburst "tired of being so good all the time." Only on re-reading the stories does one start to discover the subversions in method and vision that give depth and mystery to Harvor's fictive world.

The stories, unconnected by characters or situation, gain intensity as a whole from metaphorical linkages that act as strong, unvoiced centres of meaning. The image associated with the title, that of night journey, recurs throughout, and reflects Harvor's ambivalence. The lives she documents are lived in the tension of loneliness and uncertainty, and yet with the active courage born of intense and erotic relatedness. The momentary peace that gives rise to the apparently hopeful longing of the title comes in a fleeting and silent communion Yvonne experiences. Yvonne, a newly divorced mother, and her son are being driven back to their motel in the bush by the unnamed pilot who has ferried Yvonne to her son's summer camp to fulfil the broken promise that the boy's father would come to take him home. The story ends with mother and son, in daylight and in a bus "hurtling" south to a meeting with the "smiling" father, a ghost face beyond the window. The title reads now as a cry of pain. The disjunction between the dominating reality and the security in the car heightens one's awareness of the protagonist's isolation despite her growing bond with her son, a bond secured in the wilderness but at risk in the urban and patriarchal "real" world. In this title story, as in many of the others, is a vision of nature as a woman sees it — threatening woods, restorative waters, a Mother Nature dangerous yet at times "a good-hearted soul, dreaming up thou-

sands of amazing clues for a great medical treasure-hunt in the forest."

The forest of the self, however, is where the search for health in each story occurs. The problem of unexorcised ghosts of personal pasts and silent rages is objectified in the recurrent medical settings and symptoms of physical illness. Such symptoms afflict Maria in "Heart Trouble" most clearly and comically, but the story ends with no cure forthcoming except for the voiced recognition that she is tired of being good.

Silence filled by inarticulate speech, unspoken memory and sensation dominates Harvor's world as if she fears that woman's voice is not only not understood when it is heard but has ceased to be heard. The potential moral maturity of that unheard voice is strikingly like that which Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1982) identifies with the ethic of care as a different mode of language and thought that she shows has been in conflict in Western society with the language of rights. Gilligan's hoped-for dialogue between the voices of fairness and care has not yet been recovered in Harvor's fictive world.

Throughout the collection bodily metaphors and erotic undercurrents interweave with the precise, realistic details to evoke a world distinctly female where males remain threats as husbands, yet the source of sexual ecstasy and especially of the delight of motherhood, the supreme experience for Harvor's women. Thus, in "The Age of Unreason," a complex study of two generations of family relationships, Ingrid decides to marry since "if I don't marry him what will become of me?" But her decision is not related to social or economic conditioning. Instead, it arises, as Kathryn's similar choice, from a bodily imperative. In "A Sweetheart," Kathryn feels "her body changing its mind for her . . . making a claim for itself, wanting what it wanted." And Kathryn senses that "all the trees were nodding their heads in

agreement." That the trees may have tricked her is apparent in "The Teller's Cage." Kathryn has exchanged her teller's cage for a home where she lives now alone with her two children, her "hostages to fate." Though unable to free herself from a cage of caring for an ex-husband whom she exposes through a handwriting analyst as a man for whom relationships are impossible, Kathryn's greatest pleasure, and the story's climax, is her memory of the serenity of the nuclear family the night after the birth of Deborah, her first child.

Motherhood, like nature, however, is not romanticized. As ambivalent as the attitude toward nature is that toward the mother. Often, as for Kathryn and Ingrid, the mother represents a threat, in league with the daughter's husband against her daughter and yet representative of what to all these women remains the climactic experience of a woman's life, the birth of a child. Since there are no model mothers in these stories, the challenge is to become the good mother without help from a matriarchal continuity or from a husband. Again and again, however, the mother-child bond stabilizes and strengthens the protagonists, all of whom are conscious of living in an "age of unreason," associated in the opening story, "To Supper in the Morning and to Bed at Noon," with a King Lear upside-down world. The protagonists are, in their own visions, Cordelia, while to their divorced spouses and often to their own mothers they seem Goneril or Regan.

For all their pain and unresolved anxieties, these stories do not dissolve into bleak, solipsistic, repetitive bitterness or self-pity for Harvor's narrative voice is both distanced and fair and also warm, wise, witty and loving. Harvor evidently cares for her people and this reader does too, though perhaps she no more than I understands why, in the terms of the title story, the moon and the fox are not more easily reconciled.

NANCY BAILEY

## ISLAND SCHOLAR

AUSTIN CLARKE, *Proud Empires*. Viking, \$19.95.

AUSTIN CLARKE's latest book returns to the world of his earliest fiction, *Survivors of the Crossing* and *Amongst Thistles and Thorns*. It is set for the most part in a rural village in the island of Barbados where Clarke was born and where he went to school. The first part of the novel, entitled "The Village," takes up more than three-quarters of the book. It is not only the longest, but also the most vivid and engrossing section. The other two parts, entitled "Snow" and "Triumph" respectively, deal with the departure for Canada of Boy, whom Clarke seems to intend as the central character, and with his eventual return to Barbados. Both the information and the experience in these two parts are filtered through the perception of Boy who is a bewildered and confused observer in Canada, and who is somewhat apprehensive about the plans being made for his return to Barbados, but who nevertheless rather passively allows himself to be drawn into this future.

In *Amongst Thistles and Thorns*, Clarke had used a young character, Milton Sobers, as his central consciousness, and one of the issues of that novel was the growth of Milton's personality as it engaged itself with the Barbadian community in which it lived. In *Proud Empires*, there is no such engagement. Instead, Michael William Wilberforce Thorne, nicknamed Boy, lives for three-quarters of the book on the fringes of its world. We know that his mother is a "poor white" from the Scotland district of Barbados, and that his father is a black fisherman. We know that he is a brilliant student in Classics — a Latin fool — at that island's most prestigious school, Harrison College. As a matter of fact, he is expected to win the Island Scholarship which will take

him to Oxford. We know that he lives in a small island of a village, surrounded, as are so many Barbadian villages, by the sea on one side and the sugar-cane fields on the other. We know that in that village he is drawn to the shop of the local tailor and aspiring politician, Seabert Mascoll Nathaniel Marshal. (Clarke delights in the Barbadian fondness for impressive names. In a weekly column he once wrote for *The Nation*, a Barbadian paper, he often made fun of the long list of names of J. M. G. M. Adams, the late Prime Minister, who was popularly known as Tom, but whom Clarke preferred to refer to as Manningheim, one of his middle names. Indeed, it may be significant that the maiden names of the mothers of both Tom Adams and of Boy, the central character of this novel, are Thorne.) In the tailor's shop, Boy listens to the men talk politics, and he looks at the pictures of famous black men that Seabert has pinned on his walls. The world of the tailor's shop is a fascinating one, but we never know why Boy is drawn to it. Perhaps he is looking for clues about his racial identity, which Seabert's pictures might provide. Perhaps he is looking for a genuinely Barbadian experience, one that contrasts with the world of "Harsun" College where he reads Latin and Greek.

The answers to these questions are never given because, for most of this long section, Clarke seems to forget Boy and chooses instead to revel in the flamboyance and outrageousness of certain Barbadian personalities. He delights in the ability of Seabert and his friends to talk with conviction about matters of which they are almost completely ignorant. Their conversations about politics are, at the same time, both hilarious and frightening. Much of the interest of this part of the novel derives from Clarke's simultaneous enjoyment of and horror at what passes for politics in Barbados. The politicians and pseudo-politicians who con-

gregate in Seabert's shop are struggling to take possession of a world from which they have been excluded by the colonialists, and their struggle is full of energy and flamboyance. Because, however, they have not been prepared to assume control of their lives and their society, their struggle is also appallingly brutal, duplicitous and ignorant. These candidates earn their votes by attending every funeral in their constituencies, and by sleeping with as many potential voters as possible. Bribery is their most common tactic, and they do not draw the line at murder. Boy lives on the edge of all this shocking activity; he observes it, but it seems to have no effect on him, and he expresses no opinions about it.

When, therefore, he wins the Island Scholarship and goes abroad to study, he seems out of place at the centre of the narrative. Perhaps his decision to study in Toronto instead of at Oxford or Cambridge, the traditional universities for Barbadian scholars, is meant to suggest a new maturity and sense of independence, but, if that is the case, these qualities do not accompany him to Toronto where he is as peripheral as he was in his own village, and ever more bewildered. Clarke relies too heavily on "Snow," the title of the second part of the novel, to characterize Canada. The brutal scene of a man beating a woman and spilling her blood on the snow seems to be inserted merely to indicate that violence and brutality happen in this antiseptic world just as they do in Barbados. Boy observes the scene, passes it by, and realizes he "must find his own way now, without assistance of any kind." The section of the novel that is set in Canada occupies only twenty pages.

It is rather surprising, therefore, in the last section to see Boy being welcomed back to Barbados in triumph, and to see him hailed as a political messiah and a future prime minister of his country. Nothing in his personality qualifies him

for this adulation. Is Clarke making a comment on the kind of politician who has risen to power in Barbados? Is he suggesting that Barbados picks its leaders because of their reputations for brilliance at school and university but pays no attention to their experience or preparation for leadership? Is he suggesting that the quality of people in public life in Barbados is so poor that people grasp at straws, like Boy, to find candidates for political leadership? It is possible that some or all of these are part of Clarke's intention. If that is the case, the novel expects too much of the character of Boy, which is without the substance that would make such readings plausible.

*Proud Empires* captures the atmosphere of life in a part of Barbados, and illustrates how, in spite of great disadvantages, poor and ignorant people struggle to express their personalities and to control their lives. It is not, however, a particularly effective political novel, and Boy, the future Prime Minister, is too vacuous to provide it with an adequate centre.

ANTHONY BOXILL

## SINGED WINGS

FREDELLE BRUSER MAYNARD, *The Tree of Life*. Viking, \$22.95.

BY THE END of her second volume of memoirs the best thing Fredelle Maynard can say about her life is that she has survived it, that she is "still here." Ordinarily this would seem a dispiriting conclusion, but considering the emotional devastation described in her book mere survival is almost triumph by another name.

Written in her mid-sixties *The Tree of Life* is a deeply introspective work that is chiefly concerned with Maynard's private life rather than her professional and public careers. Except for a chapter on her

work as a feature writer on family issues for women's magazines, and a piercing account of the victimization of a young teaching colleague, Maynard largely ignores the "run faster, farther" dimension of her life. She concentrates instead on her marriage to an alcoholic painter and failed academic, and on her efforts, following their divorce, to cope with independence, loneliness and a fear of dénouement.

Precisely because the focus of her memoir is intensely private, the story which Maynard tells is one with which many women will probably identify for it is permeated with a sense of loss and frustration at a life miscarried. Despite her ambitions and the benefits of an outstanding education, Maynard's life never unfolded as she imagined it would. Following marriage she quickly became tied to the "habitual rhythms" of domesticity, and found her life increasingly circumscribed by the social roles of wife, mother and daughter. Although she is careful to point out that there were many positive elements to her situation, Maynard's main concern is to figure out how she fell within, and pushed against, those family boundaries.

The results of this investigation are both revealing and painful. At one level, they bring Maynard face to face with the manipulateness of those around her, especially her husband and her mother. At another they force her to confront her own vulnerability, and to explore the extent to which, through astonishing naïveté, she became an accomplice in her exploitation. The disturbing feelings of inadequacy and lingering fears of estrangement that fill this memoir suggest the depths of anguish which Maynard has tried to overcome.

Time and again, moreover, those doubts revolve around the issue of Maynard's femininity. Anxieties about her relationships with her daughters contrast with the fully maternal image of her domineering

mother who, even in her dying moments, becomes like "a woman in labour, giving birth to death." And there are several awkward moments, too, when Maynard confronts the issue of her sexuality, only awakening to its pleasures in middle age. But the most damaging moment in the book occurs when she realizes that her husband's estrangement from her signified his "fundamental rejection of me as a woman."

Considering the nature of these revelations it is to Maynard's credit that she does not indulge in sensationalism or self-pity. Instead of being marked by anger and recrimination, this memoir is, almost to a fault, imbued with a spirit of fairness and reconciliation. While the scars of the past remain vivid, an overriding purpose of the book is to heal whatever wounds remain. Maynard's attempts to understand her sister better, memorialize her mother, and reach out to her adult daughters are all examples of this approach.

But nowhere is the scope of her generosity more apparent than in the treatment her debauched and self-centred ex-husband, Max, receives. The man who "singd my wings" and forced Maynard to deny her "essential" self is nevertheless remembered, forgivingly, as the person who taught her to "see the trees and the sky differently" too. Indeed, so capacious is Maynard's goodwill that, in the midst of describing her own sacrifices, she can ask what Max must have given up, too. In the end, she even goes so far as to conclude that the marital crackup was really "no one's fault."

Comforting as all this tolerance may be, some readers will find it hard to believe that anyone could emerge so optimistic from such a troubled life. Therefore, it is worth pointing out that a clue to Maynard's outlook lies in the book's title, which is a metaphor for the Torah and a symbol of "pleasantness" and "peace" to a people who have endured great suf-

fering. Although Maynard admits to not being particularly "attached to the Jewish religion," she makes it clear on several occasions that, culturally, her Jewishness remains central to her world view.

Finally, the genuineness of Maynard's outlook is reflected in the honesty of her prose. Simple, direct and unpretentious her style reflects her consciousness at "having two voices": an inner one that is a "gift of life" and which she cannot "control"; and a writer's voice which is "cool, cheerful, practical," which she can.

Yet regardless of the narrative authority and emotional integrity of this memoir, there is one sense in which it disappoints. For while Maynard explores her individual experiences candidly and in detail, she fails to examine them critically in a social context, or to connect them to a wider feminine reality. Considering her expertise in family and women's issues it is perplexing that Maynard ignores the cultural, economic or political implications of her condition. While *The Tree of Life* makes good and, at times, compelling reading, it is not clear that it has a larger social message to convey. But then again this was a quest for self-understanding and by surviving her own self-security Fredelle Maynard has gained more than her readers could hope to anyway.

GRAHAM CARR

## TRANSCITION

ROY MIKI, ed., *Tracing the Paths: Reading ≠ Writing The Martyrology*. Line/Talonbooks, \$14.95.

"A LIFE / MEASURED out in part": bp-Nichol's recent early death, so difficult to comprehend and accept, forces readers of *The Martyrology* to look anew at the project of the life-long or continuing poem. In retrospect, references to time,

change and death in Nichol's poem seem sadly ironic:

death you enter the poem as you always do  
— disruptor

whatever the order or structure  
we must reckon you in

Five months before Nichol died, Roy Miki brought out *Tracing the Paths: Reading ≠ Writing The Martyrology*, a useful collaboration by poets and critics, all friends of Nichol, that brings up to date the discussion of his life-work. The volume is divided into five sections, plus an Introduction by Miki. The first three sections include articles on form, self, and meaning in *The Martyrology*. The fourth section contains poems and prose pieces inspired by Nichol's poem, while the fifth section contains new writing from *The Martyrology*, plus a chronology.

In a short letter included in the volume, Nichol remarks: "[O]ne of the main compositional principles i've always used in *The M* is . . . the notion that i'm improvising." Composition as improvisation involves the writer and his readers in choreographic "leaps of mind," catching meaning as it flies. Indeed, this very (im)provisionality of meaning — the issue of *how*, not *what*, *The Martyrology* means — preoccupies most of the contributors to *Tracing the Paths*.

In his Introduction, Roy Miki suggests that readers (including the critics in this book) are writers endlessly (re)writing *The Martyrology*, constructing and discarding provisional paths of meaning. Ann Munton in "Coming to a Head . . . : Connecting with Book 5" picks up on this identity of composition and reading in the moment of connection and disruption, "deconstruction and re-construction" of meaning. Frank Davey's reading path in "Exegesis / Eggs à Jesus" also leads to the issue of meaning: Davey suggests that a dialectic "between exegesis and play, between revealed and constructed significa-

tion" characterizes *The Martyrology*. The poem "sings the lay / Ur of meaning" even as it playfully dissolves such discovered meaning from leap to leap of its improvisation.

Discussions of meaning in *The Martyrology* often rely on a surface/depth metaphor; indeed, aiming for deeper things, Nichol trusts that "the flood'll bring the bottom to the top." Pauline Butling in "bpNichol's Gestures in 'Book 6 Books'" suggests that Nichol's formal "gestures" of wordplay both generate the surface of the poem and "draw out the depths." Similarly, Shirley Neuman in "'Making in a universe of making' in *The Martyrology*" suggests that Nichol and his readers seek "mystery" by "moving behind signs into the process of language use." However characterized, contradictory impulses guide the composition and reading of the poem. Steve McCaffery discusses these contradictions in "In Tention": *The Martyrology* unfolds in a state of "textual compromise" between "errant semantic . . . [and] orthodox semantic formations." McCaffery asks *why* Nichol sustains this "controlled orchestration . . . [or] immense accumulation of opposing forces," his drive to discover meaning riding on the surface flux of the improvisational process. Finally, still tracing unstable meaning in *The Martyrology*, Smaro Kamboureli and Douglas Barbour focus on the issue of the self and the omnipresent pronoun "i," exploring how, as Barbour puts it, a "play of the i's" creates semantic plurality and uncertainty in Nichol's poem.

Meaning in *The Martyrology* is thus generated in purposeful play; "purpose is a porpoise," leaping but leading us on. As Stephen Scobie suggests in his oddly prescient contribution, "On Dangerous Ground," meaning involves a mourning for something absent; desire for a missing other (lost family members, Nichol's "Lord" or stable locus of meaning) shapes the poem's "insistence on death." Fred

Wah also senses Nichol's drive for martyred meaning in his *Martyrology*-inspired pieces from *Music at the Heart of Thinking*: "Wounded, wounded. Parents and God, how hungry. / Hounded into the signifier ship, into the vessel, into the mouth." Drifting on this ship of language, Nichol seeks "to contact . . . another level of the reality that we live in" ("Talking about the Sacred in Writing"). This process is both passive and active — improvisational, in a word.

*The Martyrology* is a long poem about writing as reading, opening the "longing door, the maybe mystery." Meaning is discovered, lost, pieced back together again. The poem can offer the final word on this (de)composition of meaning, a motif drawing together the diverse and challenging readings in *Tracing the Paths*:

the letters let him glimpse a truth  
 none of which they meant  
  
 me ant  
  
 (tiny flick amidst the constant din  
 . . . . .  
 murmurs merge at the margins of meaning  
 skew

Ultimately, meaning is generated in the leaps or links between improvisational moments (between "meant" and "meant," "merge" and "skew"), ". . . in the instance of the instant / / trance/ition in which our vision's spoken." The value of Roy Miki's volume is that it gathers together contributors who largely agree on the dialectic of purpose and play, structure and flux, in *The Martyrology*. Their vital readings contribute to the continuing life of Nichol's work.

HILARY CLARK



## DUALITIES

ELYSE YATES ST. GEORGE, *White Lions in the Afternoon: Poems, Etchings, & Paintings*. Coteau, \$7.00.

ELIAS LETELIER-RUZ, *Symphony*. trans. Ken Norris, Muses' Co., \$10.00.

YOLANDE VILLEMAIRE, *Quartz and Mica*. trans. Judith Cowan, Guernica, \$7.95.

TWO OF THESE VOLUMES, *White Lions in the Afternoon* and *Symphony*, are the authors' first books. Both are handsomely produced and, although unlike in their aesthetic concerns and goals, both explore their subjects with subtlety and depth of feeling. Elyse Yates St. George is best known as a visual artist, her work having appeared in numerous North American exhibitions. In *White Lions in the Afternoon* she interweaves visual and poetic configurations to evoke a landscape that is designedly polysemous. The text is divided into four sections — "Women and Children"; "Ghosts"; "Rhymes"; and "The Animals" — followed by a lively autobiographical account in which the author describes her enduring fascination with duality, "a thread" linking her "life and work." In *White Lions* duality is expressed in the way verbal and figurative structures influence one another; the drawings are not merely illustrations but intrinsic and dynamic aspects of the poems. A painting will create a poem, and a poem will "change the painting."

The art work has been taken from St. George's collection of intaglio prints and from "neglected etchings" dating back to 1971. "For years," she writes, "the poems lay unawares in these early works." The interaction between visual and linguistic forms is particularly effective structurally, the bold linear nature of the drawings complementing both the printed page and the poems' compression of detail. The volume's aesthetic breadth is captured in "I Draw," a poem celebrating the synthesis (of poetry and painting, and of the hu-

man and natural worlds) which underwrites St. George's art:

muskox facing  
each other in profile.  
Notice how the negative spaces  
shape a woman's form

with horns  
riding on her shoulders  
that might be hair to plait,  
or a yoke for burdens.

The autobiographical commentary and Patrick Lane's laudatory introduction, however, make the collection appear more groundbreaking than it is. Noting that "verbal structures have been used in visual forms for many centuries," Lane cites as examples Eastern "hieroglyphic and ideogrammatic languages," the Phoenician and Aramaic alphabets, the "iconic art" and "illustrated manuscripts" of the Middle Ages, and the Dadaists' integration of "visual and plastic structures." He does not locate the practice closer to home: I am thinking particularly of Barry Callahan's *The Hogg Poems and Drawings*; Jane Urquhart's *The Little Flowers of Madame de Montespan*, which is enriched by Jennifer Dickson's photographs, and Robert Marteau's *Interlude*, which eludes classification in its interlarding of poetry, prose and drawings.

Elias Letelier-Ruz was former Director General of cultural events at the Cultural Institute of the State Bank of Chile and is now living in exile in Canada. *Symphony*, a bilingual text, is a testament both to the dictatorship which has blighted his country and to the heroic spirit of those who have fought for its freedom. As Endre Farkas notes in his Preface, "Letelier-Ruz's work reminds us that poetry can be a political weapon as well as an aesthetic experience." All of the thirty-six poems in the collection underscore the poet's moral duty to witness and record the atrocities engendered by a dehumanizing ideology. To his credit, Letelier-Ruz avoids the prosaic and polemical out-

bursts which his subject often provokes. The best of his poetry recalls that of Pablo Neruda, poetry which is politically engaged but which evades facile cynicism, which is vivid in metaphor and rooted in personal experience.

The collection is well balanced in technique and tone, the poems ranging from caustic satirical tableaux to lyrics exalting human love, nature, and everyday experience. Some, like "Los Ultimos Serán los Primeros/The Last Will Be First," derive their black humour from a terse surrealist word-play linking the ordinary with the grotesque:

The cat jumped onto the table,  
ate the bread and licked the tablecloth.  
Then we sat down at the table  
and ate the cat.

Although the bulk of the text focuses on the tragic and absurd consequences of political oppression, there are also moments of quiet transcendence. In "Ronda para Genevieve Hoüet/Round for Genevieve Hoüet," the surrealist images of "The Last Will Be First" become the earthly things in which the poet rejoices. Among these are "free men / near their tables / before the rites of bread," a ritual which this time invests the ordinary bread and table with spiritual significance.

Among the most evocative poems are the elegies for those who have died fighting for the resistance movement. The first of these, "Canicón Para un Mirista Muerto (elegía) / Song for a Dead Mirista (elegy)," is dedicated to Jorge Eduardo Muñoz, an "exemplary fighter," and narrated by Muñoz himself. The diction is typically simple and elevated, and the syntax fluent, upholding the poet's responsibility to instruct and persuade the reader:

I feel the pain  
that cursed the frontiers,  
and I am like a statue  
forgotten beneath the snow,  
with my black attaché case

full of black poetry,  
crying on the street.

Ken Norris's experience as a poet and translator of Neruda's odes is felt in the careful lyricism of his translations, which combine explication with creativity.

Judith Cowan's translation of Yolande Villemaire's *Quatrz et mica* (1985) is equally deft. My only objection is to the design of the book. With the exception of the elegant book jacket, the layout is notable for its insufficiency. Since the volume consists of only forty-four lyrics, none of which exceeds ten lines, there is no apparent justification for the exclusion of the French text, which would have been welcomed by bilingual readers. Also lacking are a table of contents and prefatory information on the author and translator.

The epigraph is an excerpt from Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*. Like Whitman, the speaker, referred to as "I" throughout, sets out to "celebrate" and "sing" the multifaceted self, a theme which informs much of Villemaire's earlier fiction and poetry. The translation is faithful to the sensuous texture and resonance of Villemaire's imagery. Journeying through New York, a mesmerizing city of "ten thousand images ten thousand works falling in a shower of meteors" and collapsing in "flakes of mica" for the poet to forge, the speaker searches for selves that are capable of transcending temporal boundaries:

In the elevator I ask him what country he  
comes from  
and he smiles "Israel"

.....

he tells of crossing the bridge which leads to  
Canada  
at Niagara Falls  
and asks me if I am Jewish  
I say no but that in an earlier life I was  
he says he was a cat

Paradoxically, an obsession with time and language propels the journey forward. Both action and language are locked into

the present tense — "I wander," "I see," "I paint," "I invent," "I shape." And in the speaker's attempt to transcend the here and now, the unexpected stasis which results is communicated through anaphora, one of numerous examples of stylized language which attest to a fascination with tradition:

I no longer know what they mean  
I no longer recognize anything  
I no longer know who I am  
nor in what time I am.

The poetry is never self-indulgent. Irony and humour are constant companions on the journey, which ends with the recognition that the world of the angels co-exists with that of "time and space."

VIVIANA COMENSOLI

## ANCIEN CANADIEN

*A Man of Sentiment: The Memoirs of Philippe-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé 1786-1871.* trans. Jane Brierley, Véhicule, \$15.00.

WHAT IS AUTOBIOGRAPHY? It once seemed so simple: a literary form in which someone recounted his/her life in more or less chronological form, where the self gave its history. But things have changed. The notions of self, history and genre have come under severe scrutiny and been found wanting. As Jacques Derrida might put it: are the conditions of autobiography ever determinable? is there a rigorous and scientific concept of autobiography? or does the notion of autobiography conceal, behind a certain confusion, presuppositions of a very determinate nature? In a nutshell, isn't it likely that autobiography is never absolutely determinable, its determination never entirely certain or saturated? Well, yes. But so what?

Hasn't autobiography always quite openly shown the dispersed nature of the self, the messed-up chronology of remem-

bered personal history along with a sneaky tendency to wander into another genre, fiction? And isn't it because of this unruly behaviour that we turn instead to biography when we want to come to some conclusion about a person? Autobiography is closer to the clutter and mess of collected letters or posthumously published diaries. It does not try to cohere and therefore explain, in the way that a biography does. Biography, for which there may be a rigorous and scientific concept and quite determinable conditions, is a ripe area for Derridean work. Autobiography has always existed in a state of deconstruction.

This past summer I visited a friend's relatives in eastern Quebec. One evening we had dinner with his aunt, an Ursuline working nun. She arrived with a six-pack of beer, had two and took control of the conversation. She talked about her youth before she entered the convent. She remembered clearly and formed her memories into stories that led effortlessly and by association to other stories. She remembered her aunts, uncles, grandparents, great-uncles and great-aunts, and recounted stories (often "in voices") they had told her when she was a small girl. She gave dates and details that some of the older people at the table could occasionally confirm. But, for the most part, the older people had forgotten the past she was telling about. She had held on to it by transforming her memories into stories. These stories she had told to the nuns she worked with in the convent, stories about a world ended by her arrival there. There was a glint of the golden age about them.

Philippe-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé (1786-1871) was a similar storyteller. He is best known for his historical novel, *Les anciens canadiens* (1863). In French Canada the *Mémoires* (1866) have always been treated as a companion volume to the novel. In Jane Brierley's good translation these memoirs are now available to

anglophone readers. She provides an introductory essay on de Gaspé's life in which she suggests literary models for the memoirs: Rousseau and Sterne. Her argument for a Shandyan style in the confessional mode is intriguing, but difficult to sustain. Nothing in the memoirs approaches Rousseau's attempt to understand himself, and de Gaspé's constant associationism is that of the storyteller, not the philosophical novelist. He often runs out of steam and bores the reader in a way that Sterne never does. Far more interesting is his resemblance to my friend's aunt.

De Gaspé came from the seigneurial class and led a comfortable life under the English regime in Quebec. He held official positions in government, married an English wife and lived in the capital, Quebec City. In 1822, however, he was accused in polite terms of embezzlement from the Crown and lived in disgrace (and ultimately prison) for twenty years. His memoirs say nothing of this disgrace. They tell us many things, but not about his financial problems. Over his childhood, adolescence and early manhood, and the years just before his birth, is a golden glow. But of the years spent far from Quebec City in voluntary exile or in prison, next to nothing is said. All that matters, all that gets into the memoirs, is the world before de Gaspé's fall.

On his return to Quebec City in the 1840's, de Gaspé established himself as a man who told stories about the past to the young in literary clubs. The memoirs are the product of many years of talk. And that is their weakness. De Gaspé goes on and on, relentlessly talking about people who are not interesting for any other reason than their position in society. He exhausts his modern reader in a way that he likely never did the young men listening to him. We constantly fall back on Brierley's good annotation. In the end it is an interesting book, but not, as Brierley sug-

gests, one of the great Canadian autobiographical legacies. Such a work does not exist.

LORNE ELLASCHUK

## HISTORY & ADVENTURE

CAROL MATAS, *Lisa*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$9.95.

SHARON SIAMON, *Fishing for Trouble*. James Lorimer & Company, \$5.95.

IN *Lisa*, an account of a young girl who is propelled into an early maturity through the horrors of the Nazi occupation of Denmark in World War II, Winnipeg writer Carol Matas succeeds in meeting two essential criteria for recasting history for children. First, she makes the story compelling by judiciously blending setting, character, and action, and second, she imparts to the reader a vivid sense of time and place. That time is 1940, and while Lisa is preoccupied with the universal challenges of puberty, she is also living in Copenhagen when the city is overrun by the Nazis, and to compound the obvious dangers of any occupation, she is Jewish as well.

In some ways, Lisa and the other primary characters in the story symbolize Denmark's historical reaction to the Nazi invasion. Lisa's older brother is at first angry with his country's rulers for their capitulation the day of the invasion, but then channels his anger against the Germans by becoming involved in the resistance movement. Lisa's cousin blithely attempts to live his life as he had before the occupation, until he is engulfed in a cataclysmic breakdown when he can no longer deny the truth. And Lisa, who can be seen as the strongest representative of the Danish people, and especially of the Jews of Denmark, strives for understanding and personal freedom in the face of what seem

to be insuperable odds. Lisa is understandably frightened under the siege, but also, she is confused by what she instinctively knows to be the utter irrationality of Hitler's persecution of the Jews. Here Matas's history becomes effectively and unobtrusively didactic with the young reader. Lisa is shown to be an ordinary young girl growing up in a family setting that in this case happens to be Jewish, and when she rebels against the inherent injustice of the situation, she carries the young reader into an unforced but profound appreciation of the Jewish plight in Denmark and other European countries under the Nazi regime.

Matas is careful not to underplay the seriousness and tragedy of the situation for Jews in the war years by representing Lisa's story as a romanticized caper. Friends of Lisa's father are murdered, and the parents of her best friend are blown up in an explosion. Lisa herself is aware of being dragged down to the level of the Nazi invaders, and reaches a moral nadir when she is forced to shoot a German soldier after she too joins the resistance. In the end, however, through courage and resourcefulness, Lisa and her family help engineer their escape and that of countless Danish Jews to Sweden, and although there is no easy release from the pain and suffering, there is some hope expressed through the primary characters' resolution to press on in the face of mindless oppression. Ultimately then, Matas's *Lisa* is a rewarding book for children. It teaches, to be sure, but does so on a subject of which no generation should be ignorant.

As with many realistic stories written for younger readers, the immediate attraction of Sharon Siamon's *Fishing for Trouble* is a fast-paced, action-filled plot. Kiff Kokatow, the book's central figure, lives at his parent's tourist camp at Big Pickle Lake, and he and his best friend, Odie, have determined to win the chil-

dren's prize at the annual fish derby. Here then is the traditional quest story, albeit a quest simplified to appeal to Canadian youngsters. Enter Josie Moon, a very capable young girl who also lives on Big Pickle Lake, and, more to the point, also has resolved to win the fish derby. To complicate matters further, a rich guest arrives, possessing both an ultra-modern fishing boat equipped with an alarmingly efficient, electronic fish-finder, and a sophisticated son who has won every fish derby he has ever entered. Protagonist — quest — obstacle — all is in place as Kiff stumbles through minor disaster after disaster in pursuit of his goals. As the action proceeds, the child reader is willingly dragged along, with the full awareness that in some way or other Kiff will achieve his ends (as all questing heroes must). As critical as this vigorous action is in Siamon's story, it is the characterization of Kiff Kokatow which brings the book to life.

Kiff is a likeable sort, who is plagued by a childhood curse with which most young readers instantly empathize: in spite of his best intentions, he is constantly getting into trouble. The usual authority figures police Kiff's scrapes with the gremlins of pre-adolescent existence — his teacher, his parents, and his aggravatingly perfect classmate and nemesis, Josie Moon. Kiff's activities are a litany of childhood disasters: he nauseates his class by producing rotten fish at a show-and-tell session; he sinks his father's boats at their tourist camp just as a new group of clients are arriving; he very nearly poisons his schoolmates and teacher by contributing to a class lunch a meatloaf which he accidentally spikes with a powerful insect repellent. And yet, as his literary type will, Kiff faces his challenges with admirable aplomb and stoicism (like a transplanted Tom Sawyer, he invariably bluffs his way out of trouble), and rises from each difficulty a wiser and commensurately more attractive figure. Siamon does not weigh

down this entertaining read with heavy morals, and the major theme which emerges at the book's end — co-operation, respect, and friendship are worthy values for children — does so naturally.

JIM GELLERT

## WOODCOCK

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Beyond the Blue Mountains: An Autobiography*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, \$24.95.

GEORGE WOODCOCK is a reincarnation of that wonderful nineteenth-century phenomenon, the man of letters. Erudite, insatiably curious, capable of speaking authoritatively on almost any subject, there is also something of the conquistador about him. What makes him particularly impressive in his extraordinary career is the courageous way in which he has tackled any challenge that has come to hand, from building his own house to travelling to remote parts of the world. Single-handedly he launched this literary journal, a major catalyst in the promotion of writing in Canada.

The second volume of his autobiography, *Beyond the Blue Mountains*, opens with the arrival of Woodcock and his young Austrian wife on Vancouver Island in the spring of 1949. Behind him in England was an intellectual milieu of which George Orwell had been one of his closest friends. Ahead of him lay the unknown — an uncertain future and financial insecurity. Nothing daunted, as a complete tyro he set about building a house in Sooke. Gradually new literary friends were made — first Earle Birney who in turn introduced him to the artistic community on the west coast. It is clear that Woodcock has a genius for friendship. His book is a testament to his passion for art and artists, his love of good companionship, and concern for the welfare of his friends.

He can be sharp in his judgments too. He makes no bones about his contempt for pompous academics or bureaucratic mandarins, especially in his battle in recent years with the "democratization" or anti-intellectualism of the CBC. His connections with the CBC began early. I well remember, when living on Vancouver Island, turning on "Critically Speaking" every Sunday afternoon in the early 1950's. I was absolutely enchanted by his sophisticated commentaries on writers like Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark, and I can say without qualification that his broadcasts directed my wide-ranging reading in those years. I was dumbfounded to learn that he earned \$35 for those pieces of fine judgment.

Woodcock's life has contained infinite variety. Apart from the novel, there seems no area of writing to which he has not turned his hand. He seems especially attached to his book on Proudhon, like himself an anarchist and an autodidact. His book on the art critic, Herbert Read, displays sensitive empathy but, as a good friend, he is not blind to his human flaws. Known as a gifted teacher, he was associated loosely with the University of British Columbia (the sponsor of *Canadian Literature*) but his heart attack in 1966 convinced him that he had to give up the stress it entailed.

Some reviewers complained that he did not reveal enough of himself in the first part of his autobiography, *Letter to the Past*. Here we are more aware of what a complex man he is. Apparently from time to time he has had to struggle through debilitating depressions. His attitude towards his poetry is tantalizing. His poetic voice dried up with the death of a close woman friend in 1949. Then in the summer of 1974 through his friendship with a woman of "dark and daunting beauty," whose son was suffering from cancer, the "tenderness / of touching solitudes" re-

awakened his muse and a flood of poetry flowed from him.

He needs a solid base and, fortunately for us, Canada has provided this for him. Something of a recluse, he is also a *bon vivant*. A lover of wild nature, he cannot live far from a city. A man driven to write, he is also driven by restlessness to explore the far corners of the earth. For years he and his wife Inge worked to raise help for Tibetan refugees and more recently they have been involved in aid to Indian villages. Old age does not deter him. In his mid-seventies, he speaks confidently of re-translating Proust. The man is a national treasure.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

## SHORT ANATOMIES

CRAD KILODNEY, *Malignant Humors: Selected Stories*. Black Moss, \$12.95.

ALLY MCKAY, *Human Bones*. Oberon, n.p.

THESE TWO COLLECTIONS of short fiction are components of that "remarkable phenomenon" on which (at the risk of communicating "irrelevant, if not downright subversive information") James Doyle commented in a recent *Canadian Literature* review: the swelling of English-Canadian literary ranks since the 1960's with transplanted Americans (No. 116). Although it may be subversive, the issue of national origins is by no means irrelevant to the Kilodney and McKay collections, since they both address the question.

Kilodney and McKay are contemporaries who came to Canada from the United States at approximately the same time (1973 and 1972 respectively). Their origin is an important element in their work, but there the similarities end. Kilodney writes satiric, surrealistic, often acerbic mini-fictions, well characterized by the title *Malignant Humors*. Bile colours Kilodney's vision of life in the second half

of the twentieth century, and American society and culture typify that life. Kilodney's is a world dominated by American pop culture, by soap operas and Hollywood movies. It is a world of grotesques and monsters, a world in which deformity is normal and beauty abnormal ("West Quaco"), fish preside over commerce ("Fish Story"), and farting reforms humanity ("The Poem that Changed the World"). One could argue, of course, that this description fits the Canadian context as well as the American. Kilodney's references, however, are primarily to the United States. Canada is either assimilated into the general North American (read U.S.) milieu or figures as a kind of double negative that does not, in this case, operate as a positive.

Kilodney's most extended and telling portrayal of Canada and Canadians is "The Last Interview of Crad Kilodney." Here a Toronto high school student interviews the author on his death bed. Kilodney is "answering his fan mail, which came mostly from the United States." When asked what the importance of his work is for Canadian literature the author replies, "I don't know." "What makes your work Canadian then?" the student pursues. "I'm dying in Canada" is the response. The student, one Phil Miasma, wears a team jacket emblazoned "GOLIATHS." This provides the dying author with his best words for posterity. With the lack of subtlety characteristic of his author, the fictional Kilodney informs Phil that "Goliath was a Philistine, you know."

In the twelve other pieces that constitute the body of *Malignant Humors*, Canada enters only allusively: in the "Canada Packers Institute" study on pain caused by "socks pulling on foot hairs" ("The Discovery of Bismuth"), the slighting glance at the Yukon in the "Upward Mobility" vignette of "Office Worker's Dreams," and the mention, in the last paragraph of the book, of red maple leaves

falling in an anonymous "large North American city" outside the basement where sits "K," the "poor and unknown" author of the "advanced oboe problem," "Autumnal Melancholy."

Kilodney has assumed a degree of "Canadian-ness" (even advertising his self-published books on the streets under deprecating banners like "Dull Stories for Average Canadians" and "Rotten Canadian Literature"). His orientation remains American, however, and he writes as an outsider who has not come to terms with his new country. Ally McKay, on the other hand, has achieved a good measure of success in reconciling her origins with her new home. She neither clings to a limited American perspective, nor assumes a false Canadian mantle. Like her character Lila in "The Loyalist," McKay's work straddles the border, "one foot each side of the line." Her stories are rooted in her dual experience. McKay draws her settings and characters from both sides of the forty-ninth parallel and sends her people back and forth across the border. In "The Loyalist" she specifically explores reactions to border-hoppers.

For McKay, however, the situation of the emigrant/immigrant is only the surface concern, a symbol of a much broader contemporary condition, alienation. Her stories all involve displaced people: girls and women who exist in their own private limbos. Some — like Claire, who "cannot commit," and Ellen, the globe-trotting archaeologist — are more or less responsible for their own displacement. Others have had it thrust upon them. These include the reluctant "snowbird," Violet, holidaying in Florida against her will, and the young girl in "The Storms are on the Ocean" who "felt stifled and forgotten" between two siblings.

McKay's is not a happily-ever-after fairy tale vision. The current blizzard may end and the sun shine for her characters but, as Ellen's cabdriver warns on the

way to the airport, "Sometimes there are little storms way up there in the hemisphere. Can't be seen with the naked eye." Still, most of McKay's characters come to a quiet accommodation, achieve small but significant triumphs, or at least experience an epiphany that brings some satisfaction. Even Violet who, we assume, is eaten by a crocodile, ironically gains cool respite from her pre-menopausal anxieties and hot flushes in the croc's "trickling creek."

The McKay collection is much more appealing and of more consequence than Kilodney's. McKay writes with sensitivity about significant relationships, while Kilodney treats trivia in a heavy-handed fashion. His humour is of the "groaner" school of punning jokes.

MARY G. HAMILTON

## CLOTH & SELF

ROBERT ALLEN, *Magellan's Clouds: Poems, 1971-1986*. Signal Editions/Véhicule, \$10.95.

KENNETH SHERMAN, *The Book of Salt*. Oberon, n.p.

JOHN TERPSTRA, *Forty Days & Forty Nights*. Netherlandic Press, n.p.

CAROLYN ZONAILO, *Zen Forest*. Caitlin Press, \$8.95.

READING THROUGH AN assortment of newly published books of verse designated as poetry provokes the reflection that while these are obviously some kind of writing which does not conform to the rules of prose, they are hardly poetry! The lyric impulse translated into language which suggests the art, "beyond the reach of craft," has become so rare an avis in the plethora of small and some large presses that it is virtually an endangered species. It is, therefore, reassuring to find that of the four books under review here, each has a genuine feel for and flavour of lyric poetry. Of the four, Robert Allen's is the

most substantial collection, Carolyn Zonailo's the most innovative, while Kenneth Sherman and John Terpstra are both in their individual ways promising.

Sherman's, *The Book of Salt*, a re-evocation and restatement of Biblical material begins with a fresh and vital probing of ancient well-worn myths. He writes of a God who is, "a blind and burning / eye." Whose name is "unsayable" and "whose questions send the advisers questioning." His book frames both the questions and attempts to give some answer to the "advisers." Poetry is one of the answers. Adam's naming of the beasts, the giving of significance to objects, by implication conferring meaning to experience is the equivalence of imaginative expression, "First the flesh, he says, / then the language." An equally unequivocal comparison is made in "Salt," which states, "This must be / Where all the poems begin, / with this punishment / for the rebellion of looking back." As good a definition of the motive for metaphor in language as any. "New Job" voices query and restless speculation: "and you Job, your boil studded back / bent into the shape / of a question." One of Sherman's most successful lyrics blends speculation with promise. "Nebuchadnezzar" dedicated to Phyllis Webb serves as an anti-poem to her justly celebrated "I Daniel."

There is much to commend in *The Book of Salt*: a lyrical voice, craft and care with language, serious and engaging themes, and a fresh response to mythic Biblical elements. Myth, however, is a two-edged sword. For while it articulates what is universal, it also abstracts and de-personalizes. The final pages of Sherman's volume lose immediacy, something of the personal is diminished, reduced by the constant use of a mythic persona. "Adam Kadmon," "Luria," and "Busts" suffer in this regard. To be vital a book of poetry needs a variety of voice and style. Even myth formalized becomes a deadening de-

vice. This is, however, a small dissatisfaction with what is on the whole an imaginative projection of promise.

*Forty Days & Forty Nights* by John Terpstra also has its imaginative sources nourished by Biblical text. The specifically Calvinist context is well illustrated by "Clouds," where the poet meditates on cloud formations, ponders the "clouds of conscience, clouds / of stone, Calvin's clouds" as set against "God's clouds frayed by petitions." These are the responsive clouds of a new horizon offering liberation, hope. Dutch syntax as well as Dutch Calvinism shapes the intellectual texture of Terpstra's work which combines narrative and lyrical qualities. The immigrant experience is amplified and clarified by the Christian reference. The long documentary title poem indicates an affinity in style to Daphne Marlatt which the poet acknowledges. The final poem, a baptismal prayer, distils a rich devotional essence, as does the image of wilderness in Manitoa. Here, "a way in the wilderness" is "prepared on paper." An apt final comment on the impact of Terpstra's work.

Robert Allen's *Magellan's Clouds* is a generously allusive book. Deft literary echoes, some overt, others more subtle and hidden, give his work the texture of a well-woven tapestry. Occasionally the anorexic mannerisms of postmodernist colloquialism creep in, the trite use of "guy" and some sentimental excursions, "The White Cat" and "New York, New York" intrude. Otherwise there is considerable variety of both theme and style. The opening section with its animal poems reminds the reader of Ted Hughes and occasionally Margaret Atwood. This, however, does not detract from the individual merit of the poems, rather it expands their crisp niceties. Two poems encapsulate Allen's themes — these are "Magellan's Clouds" and "Wild Flowers." The first contemplates the mysteries of cosmic creation. The second celebrates the beauty of the

natural world. Each speculates on the enigmatic structure of phenomena:

If we could understand the smallest share  
of bare tangled roots as they darkly map sky  
I think we could fly.

Allen's most successful poems focus on "time" and "thinking," "the bottomless well time goes and comes from." Without them his world does not move.

The very ambitious final sequence, "Voyage to the Encantadae," owes much to Melville and possibly to Dylan Thomas. But why not? What are poets for if not to provide good copy? Although the use of an authentic individual voice has also much to recommend.

Carolyn Zonailo is the most innovative, if at time uneven of the poets under discussion here. She is more than a poet of promise, she is already a poet of some achievement. Her work is distinguished by a diligent commitment to imaginative growth. "Journey to the Sybil," a long poem in a previous volume, *The Wide Arable Land*, is a sustained exploration of interior space, a remarkable mapping of a spiritual journey toward moral and imaginative awareness whose ultimate goal is wisdom. In *Zen Forest*, Zonailo sets herself a difficult task. She moves past exploration of interior, inward space to a contemplation of exterior physical locale. She strives to document and clarify what place means. It is obviously the intention of the poet to use documentation of landscape to create a metaphor of the enduring and permanent which lies beyond the palpably physical.

Duncan Campbell Scott, in "The Height of Land," uses accurate documentation of wilderness landscape to create with great effect a sense of heightened consciousness. His detail is a lyrically cumulative evocation of a moment of insight which casts a spell that is "Golden and inappellable." The Chinese poet, Wang Wei does much the same:

Light cloud, on the pavillon on a small rain  
 Remote cloister, at noon still shut  
 Sit and regard the colour of the green moss  
 That seems it will merge into cloth and self.

These four lines present the difference between distillation and description. Landscape as place is rendered while the ineffables of mood, of interior nuance, suggest the mystery of cosmic harmony.

Such mastery of form, language, and concept is difficult to achieve. Miss Zonailo should be commended for trying. "Third Beach" and "Spanish Banks" are two such attempts. They almost succeed in suggesting the numinous present in the pedestrian and the ordinary. They falter, and in places fail because of language, the poet's inability to maintain control of diction and thus sustain consistent tone. Both poems suffer from stanzas which surrender entirely to the prosaic and to the banal, as the following lines from *Third Beach* fail because of the uninspired use of the trite colloquial:

This sunfilled afternoon  
 is every afternoon;  
 that gorgeous  
 suntanned, muscled body  
 is everybody

"Gorgeous" is both trite and imprecise, while a "suntanned, muscled body" is advertising copy. By the nature of its imprecision, vague colloquialisms are inadequate to suggest the transcendental.

I suspect the minimalist style the poet adopts in these poems does her sensibility a disservice. Zonailo's use of minimalism is not unlike a brilliant coloratura voice forced to sing contralto. We miss the dazzle of the top notes and at the same time are robbed of the natural grace and richness of the lower register. "Moments of Everyday Enlightenment" presents as a final sequence poems which aim at but miss epiphany. The photographic eye is accurate but the aim uncertain. The target, that metamorphosis where the ordinary world of sense reveals the extraor-

dinary world of perception, is missed. This is all the more unfortunate, because at her best Carolyn Zonailo is a poet of wit and aphorism with a keen sense of the incongruous and paradoxical. She delights in the whimsical and the absurd. Her Romance Series — Lilac, Arthurium, Mutual Attraction — conveys a delicate erotic presence as well as a metaphysical élan that plays adroitly with language.

I would also single out as poems of fully realized potential "The Geese," "Meditation for My Stepson" and the two elegies "Woman Walking Dog" and "Cyclist in Spring Rain." *Zen Forest* is the work of a poet of substance who, once recovered from minimal malaise, may find her reach does not exceed her grasp, but rather articulates a writer who in "making and meditation" becomes a continuous remaker of her garden of experience.

MARYA FIAMENGO

## HOMES WE KNOW

JOHN STEFFLER, *The Wreckage of Play*. McClelland & Stewart, \$12.95.

KATE VAN DUSEN, *Not Noir*. Coach House, \$9.95.

ENDRE FARKAS, *How To*. The Muses' Company/La Compagnie des Muses, \$10.00.

MICHAEL BULLOCK, *Poems on Green Paper*. third eye, \$10.00.

JOHN STEFFLER's latest collection of poems is a refreshing departure from the egocentric focus of much contemporary poetry. His poetry expresses concern for relationships as much as for individuals, and a recognition that the persona of the poet is not necessarily central to the poetic vision. Indeed, in the often close examination of relationships, Steffler suggests that individuality itself may be dubious. Not only does he respect the other in its own validity, but also he recognizes self as the other in a fluid connection that

supersedes individuality. Interestingly, this idea is clearest in some of the more personal poems, those relating directly to family life. The generations are tied together with a complexity that scarcely permits a separation into individuals. Paradoxically, both detachment and alienation seem necessary parts of the complex relationship:

and I  
instantly am my own father, struck  
by the strange inevitability;  
.....  
and knowing I looked precisely as my father  
had  
in our games, when the magic became too  
strong  
and I broke, seeing him change,  
desert me so easily  
  
to let a stranger look through his eyes.

The strengthening of such connections leads to the possibility that relationships may be of more immediate significance than poems, that communities may be more important than high art. Within the culture of the plumber-poet Sullivan White (that is, within the context of ordinary life), Steffler, by applying the techniques of poetry to objects and observations normally outside its conventions, but very much inside common experience, is able to detach symbolism from its usual portentousness, and bring it into the realm of the functional. In "On this Day of Sun and Showers," for instance, the plumber, caught in a familiar enough domestic dilemma, is able both to identify the problem and to neutralize it by investing it with a symbolic, yet humorous, significance. The poetic reference is literary, but it is also attractively down-to-earth.

In contrast, the determined power of Kate Van Dusen's *Not Noir* seems much more dubious. The woman in her thirties may be relatively rare as a poetic subject, but this one seems no less inward-looking than any other poetic persona, and her experience, her ambiance, are those of a

small, cliquish, whisky-drinking literary group, replete with allusions and in-group references. Here the reader is the outsider looking in. Not, of course, that the limitations of such experience are necessarily bad, and certainly many of these poems are attractive in their lucid imagery, but it is hard to see quite where they are leading. The continual word play smoothes over with cleverness what might have been a meaningful lyricism. There is no real discussion of the subtle absurdities of linguistic ambiguity, but an essentially superficial verbal game.

Van Dusen's genuine power resides in some of the early poems in the collection. The woman, faced with high art, must see herself not as subject, but as object. What this leads to, although this is scarcely a new idea, is a questioning of the values of high art itself. The male sculptor, apparently seeking the highest art, succeeds only in destroying life and the real value of objects:

a kind of reverse  
alchemy.  
                  turning real women  
into stone and making gold  
or anything  
leaden.

Many of the images in these poems are images of light, but like the sculpture they are static. And there are even more references to darkness and blackness; a pervasive gloom that makes the explicit depression of many poems only too easy to understand.

The justification for all this darkness and depression is perhaps to be found in Endre Farkas's *How To*. This collection differs from the others in that it has a concrete central image that operates throughout the book — not just the reference to "How-To" books, but their specific application in the building or renovating of a house. In a way, this image should suggest similarities to Steffler's work, and Steffler certainly proves, with

his plumber Sullivan White, that a mundane concern of this kind can work as a poetic image. However, for Farkas, the poetic persona is the central focus, with all else existing only to be objectified, reified, symbolized. Poems such as "Man Made," while they suggest that Farkas is aware of the objections to his point of view, and is not merely adopting it without understanding its implications, nevertheless offer no alternative. The woman cannot exist except as the fabrication of the male; even in old age, she can achieve no separate reality: "your fading beauty evokes disgust / becomes my symbol for decaying lust."

The poet, as builder and renovator of the house, learns something of life itself — that it is forever changing, that it is never really finished. But the role of builder emphasizes the separation of the poet from the rest of society within an alienation of his own making. The poems dealing with his relationship with his daughter, despite their detailed observation of the child's behaviour, return to the father. Creator, fabricator: this is the only valid point of view.

After all of this, Michael Bullock's *Poems on Green Paper* is restful, as the poet obviously intends it to be, a retreat into the green peace of nature, where "Invading human voices / are harsh and cold." Even the pale green of the paper, not quite glaucous, suggests images of shade, of calm seas, of restfulness. This is nature in a Japanese garden, the "Meditation Garden," where meditation is the only human activity, and where the only natural activities are those that lead to meditation. It is attractive, hinting of meanings beyond those observed, but it leaves nothing very tangible. Resting on the edge of dreams, its pellucid vision is scraped altogether clear, the "palimpsest sky" of its final word.

MARGARET HARRY

## FUSION INCONSCIENTE

MAURICE HARVEY, *Une Amitié fabuleuse*. Québec/Amérique, \$24.95.

MAURICE HARVEY'S FIRST novel is presumably to be read in the context of the new *lisibilité* that has been emerging in Quebec fiction (and elsewhere) in the past few years, marked perhaps most strongly by the appearance of Yves Beauchemin's *Le Matou* in 1981. But Harvey's novel lacks both the ideological provocativeness and the mystification attributed to Beauchemin's work. *Une Amitié fabuleuse*, in spite of its fantastic-sounding title, turns out in fact to be an ecological *roman didactique*.

The main issue is the survival of whales, long victims of a ruthless whaling industry, and now additionally threatened by marine pollution and the potential danger of nuclear submarines. The "fabulous" element occurs in the form of the intimate friendship that develops between humans and cetaceans, initiated by several encounters between Marc Lavoie, a psychologist at loose ends in his personal and professional life, who is sailing around rather aimlessly in a small boat (called *PsychoLoch*), and a whale whom Marc subsequently names Pontos.

While Marc is terrified the first time the whale approaches his *PsychoLoch* — this occurs near Quebec's Îles de Mingan — by the second encounter they become friends and can even communicate through telepathy. Marc reads up on whales (the fruits of his research constitute long segments of the novel) and quickly arrives at the conclusion that cetaceans are a thinking species whose intelligence, however, is "different" from that of humans. Having become an ardent whale advocate, Marc, with the help of Pontos, undertakes to wreck a Greek shipping magnate's yacht, stranding the

passengers and crew. He himself escapes unscathed, having first communicated the motives for his act to his victims: the Greek shipping magnate is known to be not only a fraudulent insurance claimant but also a polluter of the seas. In the wake of their successful first subversive action, Marc and Pontos decide to wage war against whalers, oil tankers and nuclear submarines. Bound first of all for the Côte d'Azur, they are unaware that Yarkis, the Greek shipper, has hired a hit man called Jim Buchanan to deal with Marc, and that Buchanan is hot on Marc's trail. By the time Marc and Pontos arrive in Nice, they have enlisted a network of accomplices made up of dolphins, who are to act as couriers, and whales, who are to be the attackers. In Nice Marc also gains some human allies, among them Jacques Cousteau, a girl named Françoise, and, inevitably, Jim Buchanan, who, on hearing Marc's passionate pleas on behalf of the whales, desists from killing him and henceforth works for the cause.

In subsequent actions telephone cables are cut in the Caribbean, and the cetaceans wreck numerous whaling ships in the Antarctic by crushing them between blocks of ice. The whereabouts of nuclear submarines snooping in waters around the globe are exposed, and, in a less confrontational action (dubbed *opération charme*), whales and dolphins frolic near American beaches, revealing their human-like intelligence, to the delight of the bathers, henceforth avid cetacean lovers.

While all these successful missions are carried out without loss of life, human or cetacean, indeed without a hitch, a brief epilogue reveals that the *PsychoLoch*, with Marc and Françoise on board, is blown up (near the Îles de Mingan, where the novel begins) by an American Air Force fighter, covered by a Soviet submarine, the motive of the military of both superpowers being the ridicule to which their countries would be exposed if they

opted for any other form of response or retaliation.

The novel's most serious flaw lies in its naïve and heavy-handed didactic strategies. Marc's naming of Pontos, for instance, is pedantically explained:

Et d'abord, où a-t-il trouvé ce nom de Pontos? Il dirait aujourd'hui que c'est le résultat d'une fusion inconsciente entre l'idée de messenger et celle de mythologie. Le roqual n'est-il pas venu jeter un pont entre les siens et les humains par l'intermédiaire de Marc? Quant à la finale, c'est la plus fréquente pour les dieux grecs. Lorsque des recherches plus poussées lui firent découvrir un réel Pontos, mythologique, il exulta. Il s'agissait d'un des premiers dieux et qui représentait la Mer!

This unrelenting didacticism manifests itself throughout the novel, whether it be information concerning whales or historical or geographical data that are to be imparted to the reader. Nor is this didacticism restricted to factual information: dialogue, narrative, interior monologue and, above all, the *communiqués* released by the save-the-whales network ensure that the position to be taken by the reader concerning environmental issues is explicitly designated. The characters remain, without exception, schematic and undifferentiated. Their *raison d'être* (in the case of the male figures) seems to be purely logistical or (in the case of the female figures) to create a love interest. None of them, not even Marc, is given more than a vague, hastily sketched-in past.

The potentially powerful and suggestive theme, the friendship between the "two only thinking species on this planet," as the author puts it, fails to redeem the novel. For in addition to presenting the reader with didactic explication, schematic characterization and a fanciful plot, weaknesses common enough in first novels, this work also systematically resists any attempt to be read symbolically or indeed in any way but literally (intertextual in-

vocation, of *Moby Dick*, for instance, having been explicitly ruled out by both hero and narrator). Given this rather large restriction, the reader is forced to raise the awkward question of verisimilitude.

These problems with the novel as a work of fiction have to do essentially with genre. Harvey offers detailed accounts of nautical operations and subversive missions. The cetaceans' actions, particularly, are meticulously described. As a non-fiction book recounting the author's adventures with whales and dolphins, *Une Amitié fabuleuse* might have made fascinating reading. As it is, its quasi-documentary character and didactic message make it tedious reading as a novel.

ROSMARIN HEIDENREICH

## THRESHOLDS

JANICE DOANE & DEVON HODGES, *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism*. Methuen, \$14.95.

DOROTHY E. SMITH, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$35.00/\$14.95.

RHEA TREGEBOV, ed., *Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture*. The Women's Press, \$12.95.

JANICE DOANE and Devon Hodges aim to demonstrate "how poststructuralist theory can empower feminists by providing them with a way to analyze the strategies of representation." Poststructuralist theory emerges in this book as a method of keeping definitions open, a method of resisting the "nostalgia" for clearly defined cultural roles.

Doane and Hodges criticize the tendency of contemporary feminist thought to valorize traditionally "female" characteristics. Such a strategy, they argue, works only to a point. The intent to counter false representations of *woman* may lead to a search for the "true" identity of *woman*. In the movement away

from a negative, objectified sense of *woman* toward a more positive self-definition, the essentialization of sexual difference remains intact. Doane and Hodges interrupt this movement and insert into it the poststructuralist concept that identity cannot be fixed in any essential sense. They also make very clear, through their readings of nostalgic texts, how easily such an essentialization can be used as an anti-feminist weapon.

Their first move is to perform a rapid deconstruction of the nature/culture opposition. From here, they go on to show how, in the search for "natural" sexual difference, nostalgic writers tend to view contemporary writing with suspicion. Self-reflexive writing is a menace because it cannot produce a stable referent, and feminist writing, with its vast diversity, threatens to subvert any notion of fixed sexual identity. Nostalgic writers hold up the image of the "natural" woman as the norm against which contemporary feminists are found lacking. At the same time, they hold up the dream of a transparent language, "plain English" as they sometimes call it, as the ideal against which to measure contemporary writing.

Doane and Hodges cover a wide range of "nostalgic" works, including the fiction of Thomas Berger, George Stade, Dan Greenburg, Ishmael Reed and John Irving; the cultural criticism of Christopher Lasch, Ivan Illich and Brigitte and Peter Berger; and the literary theory of Harold Bloom. Some of these works, through their blatant opposition to contemporary language theory and feminism, serve to strengthen the authors' argument that nostalgic writers are struggling for control over discourse, for power. Such pieces serve mainly as evidence, and do not require rigorous analysis — the most obvious of these is the sociological work of Brigitte and Peter Berger which, as a target, seems a little too easy to hit. Others, whose strategies are less overt, provide an

opportunity for the authors to show how powerful their method of reading can be. For example, in their intelligent analysis of John Irving's *The World According to Garp*, the authors demonstrate that nostalgia, while never directly expressed, is built into the narrative structure of the novel. Although Irving presents a world of seemingly androgynous cultural roles and strong women, Doane and Hodges look to the presentation of writing and writers in the novel to expose a narrative strategy which appears, once recognized, highly nostalgic and anti-feminist. Whether this was Irving's "intent" is certainly arguable, but the authors' criticism of this apparently feminist novel is of greater value than their critiques of the more obviously anti-feminist works they include here.

The books by Smith and Tregobov both deal with the re-writing of cultural history from a feminist perspective — one through sociology, one through the arts. Both are very aware that they are working *toward* such a re-writing, that they are standing on the threshold of the feminization of their disciplines. They are also both very aware of the problem of definitions — how to re-write without simply re-prescribing, from a different point of view, the role of women.

In Dorothy E. Smith's *The Everyday World as Problematic*, the phrase "everyday world" is somewhat problematic in itself. Gradually, the reader understands that Smith means to seek out the social relations and the economic and political implications of seemingly "everyday" events such as a mother helping her children with their schoolwork. In practice, as illustrated by Smith's research into this topic, her method is successful in its ability to uncover the unspoken assumptions about women's work in our society. In theory, however, Smith's approach is a little difficult to grasp. A feminist approach, according to Smith, begins with direct, "actual" experience, not "textual"

or ideologically mediated expression. Yet she ignores the problematics of this dichotomy. It is true, as she argues, that women have been excluded from the production of ideological expressions throughout history, but Smith implies that this exclusion has somehow given women direct access to experience. This conclusion remains unsubstantiated throughout the book.

And what is the "everyday world"? Smith describes it at one point as including such elements as an eighteenth-century mahogany chair and a personal computer, both of which are surely ideological expressions and highly "textual" in their own way. Smith's suggestions for research into the lives of women and how they fit into the socio-economic system are commendable. Her theorizing, however, is marked by a confusion about the separation between the "actual" and the "ideological." Consequently, she ends up defining the "actual" world through her own experience. Smith is concerned to create a sociology which is sensitive to differences of race and class as well as gender. But as long as the "everyday" world of privilege remains the norm, the task seems impossible.

*Work in Progress* makes an excellent start at "building feminist culture." It contains some very valuable information about practising artists and their works, including several photographs and a list of Canadian distributors of video art. The book sacrifices in-depth analysis of individual works in order to give the reader an idea of the broad spectrum of feminist art in Canada. It contains one essay each on writing, video, theatre, visual arts, architecture and film. The seventh essay is a commissioned article on "Black women's writing," by Marlene Nourbese Philip which eloquently brings home the feminist message that "the personal is the political."

Each of the essays celebrates the widely

disparate nature of feminist art in Canada, but they do identify a common goal: feminist artists react against patriarchal dominance in the arts. There are a multitude of "strategies for subversion," as Wendy Waring puts it, but the direction is always away from the established norms. In Philip's "Journal Entries Against Reaction," she problematizes this whole direction, asking, "if we consistently write from a reactive position, are we not still responding to someone else's agenda?" Philip responds to the editor's request for an article on black women's writing by documenting her personal reaction to the marginalization implicit in the request. It is a moving, honest and very generous response. The insights of this self-described "Caucasianist" into the white women's point of view are illuminating and one hopes that they will be carefully read.

It is clear from these books that the feminization of culture is moving in exciting and energetic directions. It is also clear that the process will involve a lot of hard work and theoretical dissent — and that it will demand minds and hearts which are open to difference of all kinds.

CATHERINE HUNTER

## W. W. CAMPBELL

LAUREL BOONE, ed., *William Wilfred Campbell: Selected Poetry and Essays*. Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, \$19.95.

JUDGING FROM THIS edition of William Wilfred Campbell's selected poetry and prose, I suspect that he is destined to remain the least engaging of the Confederation poets, even though this welcome selection argues that he has been unfairly dismissed for his bad poems, mistakenly appreciated for only his Lake Lyrics, and is unjustifiably neglected. Campbell will remain the least engaging because his aesthetic was muscle-bound on the instruct

side of the Horatian dictum. It is to be hoped, nonetheless, that when the dust of the Canadian modernist reaction settles, or is blown away, the whole of Campbell will be recovered, as the reputations of Crawford, Roberts, Lampman, Scott, and now Carman are undergoing extensive and encouraging recuperation.

But who dares anticipate the business of even the academic, let alone the more popular, reputation mills? As I write, an essay in the current issue of *Books In Canada* asserts that there was no "modern" (read "good") Canadian fiction before 1960. (I imagine Sara Jeanette Duncan, D. C. Scott, and Leacock spinning in their graves like quasars, not to mention the insult to such writers as Callaghan, Ross, Richler, *et al.*, whose reputations were established before 1960.) In an apparently enduring cultural climate of scorched-earth tactics (our version of the flame that burns but does not consume), it will take much perseverance and vision from those of our scholars and scholarly presses interested in nineteenth-century Canadian literature (those such as Tecumseh, Canadian Poetry Press, Carleton University Press, and now Wilfrid Laurier University Press) to penetrate the smoky dawn. I am not suggesting that the availability of such useful editions as Boone's will inspire a critic who will convince us that Campbell was even a good poet of a minor order — except in those relentlessly sombre and occasionally sublime Lake Lyrics, and a few other poems — only that I believe a just appreciation of his writings in their cultural-historical and biographical contexts can teach us much about Canadian cultural history — about how we got here from there. Should we not be interested in how Darwin "played" in the New World, in how he played in the mind and life of an intelligent and talented Canadian poet, or in what happens emotionally and intellectually in the shift of allegiance from God to Imperialism? Such a study

might make us consider further what happened when Imperialism itself became — and what will happen if “the Canadian identity” becomes (I do not think it has yet) — an intellectual embarrassment. Campbell’s development and demise as a writer argue that moments of extreme doubt, crises of identity, can be the most creative, that, as Harold Innis argued on the large scale, that is when Minerva’s Owl takes flight. To borrow from the late George Grant’s prose elegy, editions such as Laurel Boone’s *Campbell* offer us in their unpretentious way the opportunity to study at least what we are lamenting here.

What did I learn from *William Wilfred Campbell: Selected Poetry and Essays*? That Campbell’s early poems display promising talent and much charm, and could stand up to a closer reading; that with “The Call of the Open” he convincingly participated in Carman’s and Hovey’s vagabondia phase (and consequently stands in a Canadian line that reaches to Al Purdy and David McFadden); that the first line of “England” is “England, England, England” (without exclamation marks, but with illustrative proof that patriotic verse is bad poetry, whatever we might say about the exigencies of conventions); that Campbell masterfully uses repetition in such poems as “The Dread Voyage” and such Lake Lyrics as “The Winter Lakes” and “How One Winter Came in the Lake Region”; that “Pan the Fallen” is a successful ballad expressing Campbell’s *devolutionary* philosophy; that that philosophy is weird in the extreme, as even Boone’s account of it shows: “For Campbell, the Genesis account of creation remedied most of the deficiencies of Darwinism. To account for both the physical and the spiritual and imaginative components of human nature, Campbell postulated that modern humans are the issue of a union between a semi-divine race and an evolved earth race. In

his view, humankind did not ascend, but descended.” (This makes Carman’s Unitarianism seem intellectually rigorous, Lampman’s tamer, Pound’s facism . . . but perhaps a poet’s good poetry should not be held ransom to his bad philosophy); that Campbell (the “Rev. W. W. Campbell,” as the editor of the *Toronto Globe* was quick to point out in an apology to his readers) was either being disingenuous in his reaction to the outrage provoked by, or remarkably naïve in writing, his “At the Mermaid Inn” column of 27 February 1892: “The Story of the Cross itself is one of the most remarkable myths in the history of humanity. Connected with the old phallic worship of some of our most remote ancestors”; that his elegy for Lampman, “Bereavement of the Fields,” must have given as false a currency to — or at least as one-sided — an image of Lampman as Shelley’s “Adonais” gave to Keats; and that it is good to have all this in one volume.

Boone’s scholarship appears to be meticulous. She more than compensates for the failings of her introduction (she is too sympathetic/sentimental towards her subject; but then, who else would do such thankless work?) by providing a useful chronology of Campbell’s life, a good index to the volume, and thoroughly researched notes to the poems. Unfortunately these notes, though corresponding to the order of the poems, are not preceded by page numbers, so ready reference is impossible. Also, it is bothersome to have to consult the notes to see in what volume a poem first appeared. Finally, though I noticed but a couple of typographical errors, the typeface itself is too small, to the point of strain. This said, Boone’s *Campbell* contains all the ingredients of a good selected poetry and prose: reliable texts, footnotes that give variant readings, a useful (if sketchy on the essays) bibliography, and a hard-cover

price that makes it a practical acquisition for specialists and students alike.

GERALD LYNCH

## LIKE GARDENS

SHARON STEVENSON, *Gold Earrings: Selected Poetry*. Pulp Press, \$7.95.

DOUG BEARDSLEY, *A Dancing Star*. Thistle-down, \$8.95.

ELIZABETH BREWSTER, *Entertaining Angels*. Oberon, n.p.

OF THE THREE volumes reviewed here, Brewster's is the most rewarding. The competition is, however, tough: both Beardsley's wit and lyricism, and Stevenson's angry and compelling vision are engaging — but are not without their respective faults. *Gold Earrings* comes with a useful introduction which draws attention to Stevenson's working-class roots as well as to her struggle to integrate her socialist, feminist and poetic selves. Although most of Stevenson's poetry is political, and angry, at times she lets escape a sensitive lyric, as in "Your Spanish Jewels," "Skin of Must," or "L'arbre de St Malo":

When you leave  
     I am caught  
 in fragments of journeys  
     with perils around my hands  
         at night  
 when they lie inert  
     outside the sheet  
 without you to touch.

Stevenson's strength lies in her ability to write powerful poetry about the working-class experience in Canada, as in "Mother Tells Stories," for example, an epic poem about women's wartime immigrant experience. Or she rails against those who can afford "2 hours more abed at morning than you or I — / in inebriated haze of illusion," as well as against the male poetic tradition, which she feels must be "weeded out of the garden" if the revo-

lution is to succeed. But when she asks "Who needs / sensual violets & queen anne's lace among ripe squash & beans & corn?" she goes a bit too far. If Stevenson herself is unable to know where to draw the line between her politics and her aesthetics, how is the reader expected to do so?

The result of Beardsley's self-proclaimed desire "to leave behind / something" before chance strikes him down, *A Dancing Star* is provoking and witty ("The Oracle," "The Perfect Poem"), while the language is, for the most part, exquisite: "passion's claws descend / like a hawk's from the high heavens / and we squeal for forgiveness." Gustafson's influence is readily perceptible in the lyrical, cryptic self-reflexivity which infuses the subject matter of the volume — Nietzsche, music, travel, eroticism, and altogether too much self-pity.

The three sections of *A Dancing Star* are permeated by a fear of death that becomes in turn a fear of life: life as concerto played against the rush of time — life as presence always already absent; art as copula; poetry as music/silence. Beardsley's deconstruction of his own poetic process is highly entertaining. I, for one, find his eroticism overly sexist; woman is either Mother/Gorgon/Death, or "goddess with a boy's / bum who bends her / beautiful body over." Perhaps most telling are "The House Beneath the Surface of Things," where although the narrator cannot remember the gender of the child he has fathered, he has no problem remembering the breasts of the woman who bore it, and "Nature's Beauty," where yet again the "classical" image of woman as landscape and the vagina as the portal to heaven is foisted upon an unsuspecting reader.

For the musically literate the last section proves quite enjoyable: Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" becomes the accompaniment to our apocalypse — the horns, the

sound of the "hunter"; the violin, the sound of silence. The series of poems on Richard Strauss focuses on the relation of intention and morality to art and includes an intricate triptych based upon the legend of Daphne and Strauss's *Metamorphosen*. For those who enjoy a good puzzle, "The Death of Schubert" brings together the spirits of Haydn (St. Stephen's), Mendelssohn (Hebrew night), Wagner (ring) and others in a tribute to one of the world's truly great poets.

*Entertaining Angels* is a delightful collection of poems largely about women for women, as well as about poetry for poets, that I would highly recommend. The strength of this volume lies in its wit, rhythm, rhetoric and control. The poems are to a large part "written conversations" between Brewster and poets both past and future:

the poems knowing  
the old should be explorers,  
the poems knowing  
that what matters is  
to care and not to care.

Brewster's sense of humour reveals itself in "Hilda Doolittle Analyzes Sigmund Freud" where H. D. out-Freuds a Freud portrayed as "a Hercules / cleansing the Victorian stables." Also of note is "For Dorothy Wordsworth" where everything you ever really wanted to know about the Romantics but were afraid to ask is revealed: Coleridge's boils, Wordsworth's toothaches and the probability that it was Dorothy alone who *lived* what her brother could only imagine.

Brewster develops an unequivocal voice for, and on behalf of, women. She focuses upon the difference of the female vision which, like Mary Pratt's paintings, gives life to an otherwise "still life." Perhaps if there is one image at work throughout the volume it is that of the poem as a place haunted by memories. *Entertaining Angels* thus takes on many meanings: the poet/poem is a home, an I-land/Island;

the angels are memories, influence — family both genetic and poetic. This intimate relationship with her work is perhaps best expressed in Brewster's "Poetry," which, like *Entertaining Angels*, "some of us had rather not do without":

Poetry's like children  
I might say to her;  
it's like gardens,  
containing radishes and roses.  
not all of it is admirable,  
You can't say it accomplishes much.  
(But neither, for that matter,  
do many people's children.)  
. . . Nevertheless  
it's something, like love or bread,  
some of us had rather not do without.

C. D. MAZOFF

## CONNECTEDNESS

MARION FOSTER, *The Monarchs are Flying*.  
Women's Press, \$8.95.

ELIZABETH GOURLAY, *The Celluloid Barrette*.  
Caitlin Press, \$12.95.

IT BECOMES INCREASINGLY difficult to say what is "Canadian" about English-Canadian literature. How are we to map a terrain that extends from Robertson Davies's nostalgic little kingdom to William Gibson's cyberpunk fantasmagoria, from Margaret Atwood's dystopia to Harlequin happy-ever-after-land? It may be that the only defining characteristic of current fiction is its continuing challenge to borders and boundaries — thematic, stylistic, generic — and its wide range of reference and cross-reference. The result is works interesting both for their intrinsic density and their strong sense of situation.

Elizabeth Gourlay's *The Celluloid Barrette* is a fine first volume of short stories exemplary of this temporal and topical richness. The loosely linked short story collection or short story novel is a distinctively (although not uniquely) "Canadian" structure which has served writers as diverse as Laurence, Gallant, Munro and Mukherjee. It seems especially suited

to the telling of lives of girls and women, whether because of the flexibility of its format for publication, its fit to the busy (and often interrupted) schedules of authors and readers, or its structural suitability to the exploration of affiliation, inter-connectivity, and separation. "Relationship" in all its forms is the sustained subject of Gourlay's stories — between and among people, places, words, things, past, present.

A fragmented female *künstlerroman*, told at times in the first and at times in the third person, is interleaved with scenes from contemporary motherhood and sisterhood. In this respect the opening story seems anomalous, for it details an episode in the life of "Gordon Stacey," a "poet and sometime novelist" living abroad in 1907, who encounters the ghost of a little girl in his Paris hotel room. The child, he learns, committed suicide upon the death of her father; the novelist finds a barrette much like one worn by the daughter he has left behind in an unnamed town in the Maritimes. This story (from which the collection takes its title) establishes concerns and motifs which will recur throughout the volume — father-daughter relationships, the pains and puzzles of childhood, and the doubly uncanny recurrence of recurrence itself, in dream, *déjà vu*, and the persistence of memory.

"The Celluloid Barrette" sets up further correspondences, for the story of "Gordon Stacey" is recognizably an episode from the life of Charles G. D. Roberts, as recounted in Elsie Pomeroy's biography. The back-cover biographical sketch of Gourlay informs us that she was raised in a "small town in the Maritimes" and is making the transition to fiction-writing with this collection; the female writer protagonist also grows up in the Maritimes; Charles G. D. Roberts was himself a writer of such strange tales as "The Perdu." Thus the fictionalized "Roberts" functions as a point of both

connection and contrast in an examination of woman's writing life, and locates *The Celluloid Barrette* firmly in the evolving traditions of English-Canadian fiction.

For the feminist critical-creative project, the rethinking of "popular" culture is equally as important as the redeployment of the traditionally "literary." This work is undertaken in a variety of ways, from the re-evaluation of works and genres often considered "trivial" (and often, not coincidentally, written by and for women), to analysis of the received distinction between "high" and "low" cultures, to examination of the aesthetics and ethics of literary accessibility, to the creation of new and non-sexist (non-racist, non-heterosexist) forms of recreational reading.

Marion Foster's *The Monarchs are Flying* both feminizes and lesbianizes the novel of courtroom drama and intrigue, in the story of a woman ostensibly under suspicion for the murder of a former lover but in fact on trial for her life and lifestyle. The prose is crisp, the action quick, and the character development economical; there is a convincing handling of forensic and judicial matters; and a romance between the two protagonists, accused and lawyer, evolves as a parallel plot. For both characters, the public emergence of the "truth" is accompanied by personal processes of coming-out and self-discovery. The courtroom drama, like the murder mystery, satisfies readers by establishing a just social order in the closing pages, and by asserting the ultimate triumph of reason and morality. Such popular genres are therefore available to the woman author both for their entertainment and their ethics. And here, as in more "literary" rewritings, what is added is the importance of the relational, through a sense of personal, social, and cultural connectedness.

HEATHER MURRAY

## OPENINGS

ROBIN SKELTON, *Openings*. Sono Nis, \$7.95.  
CHRISTOPHER WISEMAN, *Postcards Home*. Sono Nis, \$7.95.

ROBIN SKELTON IS certainly possessed of prodigious energies. I read somewhere recently the suggestion that if a Canadian poet laureate were to be named there could be few contenders as fit for the office as Skelton himself. During a variously productive literary life he has demonstrated a sustained and graceful ability to turn a poem to any number of occasions and stratagems. He informs us that *Openings* "completes the phase of my poetry which began with *Limits* (1981) and continued in *Distances* (1985)," and it becomes interesting to see how the present collection develops and extends his writing.

There was some discomfort expressed at Skelton's previous volume on account of the rather insistent self-referentiality of many of its poems, and on initial reading the first dozen or so included in *Openings* share an apparently narcissistic self-indulgence with their own processes of inscription. As a recurrent theme, poetry is often the subject of the poem. Sometimes the tone achieved is one of arch-playfulness bordering on the evanescent — as with "Confidential":

This is a poem  
I do not want you to read.  
  
I want to read it myself.  
Turn over the page.

But more often, as with "Moving Right Along," there are other concerns, to which the image of Sylvia standing by her parked car praying that she will find her lost keys and cheque-book alerts us:

There is nothing random.  
The girl that smiles at me  
is the girl that smiles.  
  
The poem that speaks itself  
is the poem that speaks.

The knowing omission being, of course, the random reader, and "Thinking it Out" acknowledges "that I am thinking out / as someone thinks / along with me. Who thinks / along with me?" This reaching out, into the shaping structure of a shared language, as well as to the individually unknown reader, prompts its own response to inscription as discovery:

In thinking  
  
out these lines I think  
that I am thinking  
  
less and less and finding  
more and more.

Then, "Don't Get me Wrong" conjures into existence "the other poem / (which isn't printed here)," and in "The Reception," an account of being recognized by a woman the speaker cannot place, the notion of persona itself is comically reformulated. The ways in which Skelton derives his ruminative uncertainties from quotidian encounters is one of the most attractive features of his verse. As he dignifies the ordinary, he elicits from it the rhythms of his own particular resonance, thereby inviting us towards different dimensions of thought and feeling. As this proceeds, shifting relationships between poetic inscription and material factuality are opened for discursive inspection. Whereas "The Land" begins,

After a time  
the land is not  
outside you,  
but a part of where  
you deeply breathe  
and firmly walk  
the dark interiors  
of your bones,

"Outside" acknowledges the relentless exteriority of things as they are, including the production of language itself. Within a shaped simplicity, plural possibilities of perception are adumbrated, with a consequently always incipient chaos held at bay by the ordering of achieved and cadenced

utterance. Characteristically, Skelton makes it all seem so easy. His unassuming, invitational and studied diffidence of address, a democratic affability, produces a modest voice for a far from modest achievement.

The structural design of *Openings* blooms quietly in the reader's mind. From the welcoming threshold of its "Proem," in six sections — a writing voice, a peopled household, a sequence of "Friends and Strangers," a series of snapshots and reflections, a set of known "Localities" and a closing pattern of "Openings" — we are offered the measures of a man in his sixties for whom transience, time and space (also recurrent themes) assume intriguing and at times unsettling signification. I may be reading Skelton through Scotch myths, of course, but what holds the imagination in several of these poems is the territorial exploration of individual purpose and place. "Locations" is a case in point, a gently mocking domestication of doubts and paranoias concerning grandiose elaborations of national identity:

Where is what I am.  
The heart is local,  
pumps to local breath,  
is shocked by sudden  
deaths of neighbours.

"In The Woods," though, picking up phrasal echoes from Robert Frost on the way, plays subtle variations upon the idea, touching upon worrying senses of isolation, even of alienation: "Why is there no-one else? / I peer through trees."

Perhaps Skelton's most finished formulation of this aspect of the world he inhabits is to be found in "Personally" which begins

Personally, I discover history  
first in my bones, then in the bones of the  
land

and ends

We are how we've grown  
into this place and how this place has grown,

and history is the way we reach our hands  
into the past and take it personally.

But I reserve the palm for the eponymous final poem where a Canadian landscape of the mind is tellingly registered, the personal impulse structurally functional, and change and permanence, human as well as geographic, fittingly expressed. *Openings* is a book containing mindful pleasures.

Skelton dedicates one of his poems to Christopher Wiseman who in turn acknowledges Skelton's editorial help in shaping the retrospective selection *Postcards Home*. The concerns of these two adoptive Canadians cross-weave and separate to differing effects. With Wiseman, though, a sentimental sophistication is the dominant tone in a ranging collection of memories and associations. A Yorkshire childhood during the Second World War is a favoured *topoi* here, and a childlike intensity is often achieved for these early emotions not always tranquilly recollected. "Honesty," remarks the poet Donald Justice on the dust jacket, "is one of the great and surprisingly rare possibilities open to art . . . and it would be hard to imagine poems more beautifully honest than these. A strong, clear, truth-telling voice."

I have nothing to oppose to that, only perhaps to add that in Wiseman's enjoyment of the poetic role of a man speaking to the rest of us, there is often a regretful anger rung upon the changes of time and circumstance. Whether killing rabbits as a child during "Harvest, 1943" on a "sunlit day of murder," remembering the Vietnam War, "Elvis Dead," or American celluloid icons as in "Elegy for Bing and the Duke," a compassionate tolerance vies in the process of recall with more acidic registrations:

now goodbye to you both,  
Dying as the script intended —  
Cancer and heart-attack —  
All-American to the end.

The collocations of *Postcards Home* also conspire to produce teasingly uneasy senses of identity and relationship. "Hotel Dining Room, London" ends

We are alone  
At this odd junction of time and place,  
Strangers at the hub of Empire

contrasting yet connecting with the dead-beat (and dead-end) "East End Hotel, Calgary":

The air itself feels full of loss,  
of loneliness turning round and round itself,  
Being discovered, explored, exhausted.  
This is the place where lives leak away.

And in "Two Rivers," the "slow / Reluctant flatland river" Avon in England opposes the river Bow whose "primitive ravings and roar, / deafens the pastures." In a striking image Wiseman is left standing on the banks of the English river to

wait and hope for balance  
While the Bow and all Canada  
Tears and slices at the banks of my mind.

COLIN NICHOLSON

## WINDMILLS

VICTOR CARL FRIESEN, *The Windmill Turning: Nursery Rhymes, Maxims, and Other Expressions of Western Canadian Mennonites*. Univ. of Alberta Press, \$24.95.

JACK HODGINS, *Left Behind in Squabble Bay*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p.

AT FIRST, THESE two books seem to have exactly nothing in common — as the editor pointed out when he asked me to review them. But having been foolhardy enough to accept the challenge of considering them together, I have concluded that there are surprising similarities between them. There are two possible explanations for that. A satisfyingly intellectual explanation is that the similarities reveal something important — about the Canadian psyche, perhaps, or about chil-

dren's literature, or maybe even about both. More practical minds might conclude that the boundless ingenuity of a human mind hellbent upon an act of literary criticism could find similarities between *Mein Kampf* and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*.

So what does the Jack Hodgins of *Left Behind in Squabble Bay* share with the generations of anonymous Mennonites who spoke Plautdietsch (Low German) and made up the nursery rhymes and singing games recorded in *The Windmill Turning*? Nothing obvious, that's for sure. Some of the rhymes exhibit a robust sense of humour that might surprise those unfamiliar enough with the Mennonites now settled in Western Canada to think of them as exclusively dour; but the rhymes still express enough Mennonite practicality and spiritual fervour to place them directly at odds with Hodgins's delight in eccentricity and praise of joyful exuberance — qualities which he expresses in this children's book no less than he did in his earlier writing for adults. As in Hodgins's other books, just about every character in *Left Behind in Squabble Bay* is a potential *Reader's Digest* "Most Unforgettable Character I Have Ever Met." And just about any of them would be righteously derisive of the uptightness of your average traditional Mennonite — who would in turn consign all Hodgins's swearing, hard-drinking, violence-prone characters to the deepest depths of Hell.

Nevertheless, as a first-time writer for children, Hodgins significantly varies the technique he has used in his earlier writing, in a way that reminds me of my own response to the Mennonite rhymes. The similarity I noticed is less between the books themselves than between the structure of one of them and my own response to the other.

In his writing for adults, Hodgins has merely taken his zanies for granted, and allowed them to take each other for

granted; a good part of a reader's pleasure in his work derives from the matter-of-fact cool, the utter lack of surprise with which these adorably and/or terrifyingly odd people pursue their peculiar and surprising lives. But Hodgins seems to have felt that something so odd would confuse or even terrify young readers; for in *Left Behind in Squabble Bay*, we see the zanies from the viewpoint of a "normal" boy, a stranger from back east dropped into a Vancouver Island village whose inhabitants first strike him as being frighteningly alien — something like Dorothy going to Oz, or Maurice Sendak's Max going to Where the Wild Things Are.

Hodgins's Alex eventually learns to love the adorable eccentrics, to tolerate the terrifying ones, and to glory in his own eccentricity. But for a reader who started out viewing eccentricity from the viewpoint of a normal outsider, the effect is still unsettling; seen with the detachment of normalcy, Hodgins's West Coast freaks are something like exotic circus animals, their lives a weird show they are putting on for our entertainment. Despite the typographical eccentricity of his name, Victor GAD's cute cartoon illustrations merely confirm the gulf between a reader and the eccentrics; they dissipate the intensity of a reader's involvement with the book even more than Hodgins does himself.

Meanwhile, back at the *Wintmal* (that's Plautdietsch for "windmill"): while I'm not myself a Mennonite, the university I work at is a centre of Mennonite studies; it is literally true that some of my best friends are Mennonites, and I know enough about the history of this strong-minded and belligerently idealistic group to know that they were never as all-fired cute and charming as this book implies. I had the feeling as I read *The Windmill Turning* that traditional Mennonite culture was also being turned into a painlessly entertaining circus act.

Perhaps that's because I'm not the right

reader for the book — even though it contains nursery rhymes and I'm a specialist in children's literature, it's not a book I would have bought for myself. But as I thought about it, I realized that I couldn't figure out who the right reader might be.

At first, it seemed to be an outsider like myself — the book begins with a history of the Mennonite movement so general that an outsider would surely know it all already. But what sort of outsider would be interested in the folklore of another culture? A folklorist, obviously; but as folklore, *The Windmill Turning* is grossly inadequate. While Friesen insists there are significant distinctions between Mennonites who came to Canada from different parts of Russia at different times in the past, he does not identify the specific background of his informants; indeed, while there is a general acknowledgement of his own mother's contributions, he does not record who specifically told him any given rhyme, or on what occasion or where he heard them. Not only is this shoddy scholarship, but the implication is that, despite significant differences in lifestyle and history, all Mennonites told exactly the same versions of the same rhymes; not surprisingly, a friend of Mennonite background has told me that the versions of these rhymes common in her own family were substantially different from the ones Friesen records.

Furthermore, Friesen seems to have done no research into the roots of these rhymes. Given the Dutch origin of Mennonitism, are there Dutch equivalents? Given the centuries the Mennonites spent in Poland and then in Russia, do some of the rhymes have Polish or Russian roots? Are they exclusively Mennonite, as Friesen's silence on this subject implies, or variations of other traditions, which seems more likely?

Since these rhymes were originally spoken to give pleasure to children, the audience for the book might be children.

But the serious scholarly aura created by the various prefaces and discussions of the history of the Plautdietsch language and appendices describing Plautdietsch grammar and such make that unlikely; and in any case, I cannot imagine how I might communicate these materials to children. Friesen provides the original Plautdietsch and two translations of each rhyme, one meant to represent the literal meaning and the other an attempt to capture the rhythms of the original. But the literal rhymes are often hardly recognizable as English, and the poetic ones so distort the meaning that the original is hardly recognizable — and they are weak poetry to boot. So there is no point in reading these bad translations to children — and despite the pronunciation guide included, the effort of trying to read the original Plautdietsch to them as a sort of pleasurable nonsense would hardly be worth the small return.

So maybe the intended audience is insiders after all, Mennonites interested in the folklore of their heritage. Indeed, both Victor Carl Friesen and Al Reimer in his “Foreword” offer the preservation of that heritage as a reason for the book. But interestingly, both suggest that the Mennonite readers they have in mind will need the book because they have lost contact with the heritage. Plautdietsch is almost a dead language, and Friesen says, “if this colourful, down-to-earth speech is to endure at all, then its wealth of substance, in song and story, must be published now — hence this collection of folklore.” Even more revealingly, Reimer says, “It is my personal hope that Mennonite mothers of today will be inspired enough by this fine collection to teach their children some of the rhymes and games in it.” If these Mennonite mothers don’t already know and speak these rhymes, then even the Mennonite audience for the book is an audience of outsiders like myself — people

who would in fact need an outline of the history they have forgotten.

In Winnipeg, where I and many Mennonites live, there is an annual festival called Folklorama, at which perfectly ordinary Canadians replace their blue jeans with traditional ethnic costumes, leave their TVs and the suburban bungalows, and come together to celebrate the wonderful way we all get along together despite our differences from each other. The participants seem not to notice that by now the differences are mostly in the costumes. *The Windmill Turning* exudes this sort of folklorama culture; it is a book for ordinary middle-class Canadians who want to take pride in a lifestyle they no longer live, and who therefore require a safely sanitized version of the culture of their forebears. This celebration of what Reimer calls the “sense of fun, playful wit and sheer frivolity of expression” of the Mennonites makes their past palatable for contemporary young urban Mennonites by divesting the tradition of its by-now distasteful spiritual fervour and its rejection of worldly attitudes — such as the ones implied by a glossy four-colour cover, the presence of numerous drawings, and a hefty price-tag. This is a book for outsiders whose desire to think of themselves as insiders means they need a version of the inside which makes it just a slightly more glamorous version of the outside.

But so is *Left Behind in Squabble Bay*. Hodgins’s peculiar point of view makes it clear that we can accept the eccentrics of Squabble Bay only after we learn they have normal fears and desires, just like the rest of us. While Hodgins claims to be saying that we are all normal, he does so by pointing out how recognizably normal his theoretically abnormal characters actually are. Like the Mennonite culture as described in *The Windmill Turning*, this children’s novel is a folklorama version of the truly eccentric and truly different

world that Hodgins invented and has described with more conviction elsewhere.

I said earlier that the similarities of these books might reveal matters of profound intellectual significance regarding both children's literature and the Canadian psyche. As promised, then, what they reveal about children's literature is how our conviction of the timidity and vulnerability of children prevents us from ever actually offering them new or different experiences; they can have eccentricity only if it is normal, Mennonite culture only if it has been divested of its alien singularity. About the Canadian psyche, meanwhile, these books reveal a paradoxical fascination with and fear of being different — a coolly detached celebration of intensity that leeches away the intensity in the very act of praising it, and that we recognize in writers as varied as Irving Layton and Pierre Berton and Margaret Atwood.

As for *Mein Kampf* and *Rebecca* — well, that's easy: what those two mercilessly frenzied and doggedly committed books have in common is that their main characters are too intense and too self-assured to be as Canadian as Jack Hodgins's Alex or Victor Carl Friesen's folklorama Mennonites.

PERRY NODELMAN

## LOVE'S TRIALS

DON COLES, *K. in Love*. Véhicule/Signal, \$9.95.

IRVING LAYTON, *Final Reckoning: Poems 1982-1986*. Mosaic, \$9.95.

DON COLES'S *K. in Love* consists of fragmentary poem-letters from the narrator-writer to his lover. The "K." of the title is Kafka, as we learn from the author's note, which tells us that these poems "owe their coming-into-being to a concentrated several weeks' reading of the letters and journals of Franz Kafka." For Kafka —

with his deep misgivings about marriage and his often visceral revulsion towards physical intimacy — being in love was seldom without its trials. Coles chooses not to dwell in any obvious way on those aspects of Kafka's relationships with women. What Coles does depict is the struggle of his narrator-writer, "overwhelmed" by the thought of his lover, to compose himself and his world. Coles renders this struggle deftly and subtly, in ways which scarcely disrupt the often charmingly simple and lyrical surface of the poems.

The title, *K. in Love*, reflects the volume's almost unswerving focus on K.: we see little of the woman; instead we see K. as he reacts to the deepening relationship. While the volume does not, in any narrative sense, chart the progress of the affair, it does seem to move towards a resolution, to register a quiet triumph even, as K. gains a measure of control over himself. At the start of the volume, K. feels "overwhelmed" by his lover and frightened because he is "Showing so much need." He confesses: "It's so lonely here / Without you. I try / To write cheerfully and / Every word on the page / Bursts into tears." In the closing poem-letter, K. does not flounder as desperately as he does at the start. "I send you a last embrace," he writes, "And now for another interminable day / Am alone. Well, / Not just yet. I / Don't see why I can't / Write again in a few minutes." Tellingly, the K. who, at the start of the volume, felt overwhelmed by the thought of his lover can now encircle her in his embrace. Between the opening confession and the closing gesture, K. appears variously humble, whimsical, fearful, tentative, eager, exhilarated, possessed by a sense of wonder about his love, and almost, at times, confident about their future.

Profoundly ill-at-ease in the world, unable to believe that the world he knows can accommodate his love — the "abom-

inable world / Grunts just off the page" — K. wishes to live in a world shaped to and by his dreams of happy union with his lover. Allusions to imagined "places" and "geographies" punctuate his letters. "In every look I get from you / There is some place beyond my reach," K. writes, adding "although I / Cannot imagine myself being / In any of those places, if I *were* / I would think it was wonderful, and / I would do various small tasks, / Not changing or improving anything / But being very happy." In K.'s hands and mind, even photographs of his lover become worlds into which he would, if he could, enter and then "lean" towards her, "Fainting with happiness." "Lean" captures nicely the fundamental ambivalence of K.'s desire, suggesting at once his deep longing to join his lover and his inability, finally, to enter into any world she inhabits. K.'s dream of domesticity, touchingly simple, remains unrealized and unrealizable. For, characteristically, K. moves in his letters towards a gentle irony or understatement which imposes and maintains a distance between the lovers — an at times almost imperceptible distance but an unbridgeable distance nevertheless.

It is K.'s distancing, finally, of his lover from him and of himself from his lover that makes possible his composure at the end of the volume. He gains a measure of control, to be sure, but at the cost of any possible union. The closing embrace, with its suggestions of comfortable intimacy, is, after all, sent in a letter. Earlier in the volume, K. approaches an imagined moment of physical intimacy, writing: "This one's just for me: *your naked / White breasts.*" The separation of "naked" from "white breasts" betrays the tentativeness of K.'s approach; moreover, almost immediately, K. moves away from the image into a consideration of erotic writing: "I shouldn't write that, it's self-indulgent. / But since it's just for me / I can write it exactly as

I / Want to, there's no call to be / Original." Although K. returns, at the close of the poem, to the imagined physical presence of his lover, the intervening digression has emptied the fantasy of its immediacy and intimacy. Again and again in the volume, we find K. drawing away, if ever so slightly, from his lover. He speaks of the sight of her arm, of remembering it when it was "years too young for [him] to meet it," of his certainty that it has been "releasing meaning to [him] / Ever since," concluding that she need not even show it to him, that "Mentioning's enough." While the conclusion points to the acuteness of K.'s imagination, it marks as well a retreat from the physical presence of his lover. When K. "dares" to imagine a meeting between the lovers, he writes first that his lover "smiled frequently when / [He] spoke [her] name" only to change her expression to the more distant and impenetrable "a far-off look." When K. does speak of a longing to caress something, it is of his desire to "Run my hand over this old wooden table-top / Which my forearms, puzzling out poems, / Have warmed late at night for years!"

K. does not, cannot, finally, bridge the distance, cannot yield himself — whole, flawed, and open — to his lover: he can give her only a circumscribed version of himself, discarding "previous selves, / Most of them dissatisfied," dreaming that "Photographs of my earlier selves / Flutter down into the Limmets' waves" to be "borne off." K. needs and welcomes the "nice" feeling of carrying his letters in "sealed envelopes" to the mailbox, pleased that there is a "goodhearted fellow gone off / In each of them / Who will come into your house with / Every word decided, and without having looked at anybody / Along the way."

Besides giving us the figure of K., charmingly and consistently and movingly realized, Coles raises questions about the manner in which "self" is a fiction, and

questions about the extent to which a writer relies on absence, in this instance, the absence of the beloved, and the extent to which writing becomes the necessary vital presence. K. recognizes that writing his letters is what "allows" him to exist: alone, he writes himself, as it were; in the presence of his lover, he fears that by turning from him she will "efface [him] altogether."

Irving Layton's *Final Reckoning: Poems 1982-1986* marks his 75th birthday and, as the occasion and the title might suggest, the volume asks to be read as a summation, a marshalling of some of Layton's characteristic concerns and themes. Layton remains, as he puts it in the Acknowledgement, an "unsparing critic of his society's cultural values," sounding indictments — against complacency, self-deception, mediocrity — in voices which range from the wry to the peevish to the scornful to the reflective. He remains, too, the celebrant, rejoicing in passion and creativity, delighting in love. He contemplates the "comedy" of life, with its death masks, its "weavings of weddings and holocausts," its forebodings of doomsday, striking, by turns, postures of defiance or detachment, even equanimity.

Although the volume shows no encompassing design or structure, the poems follow a careful ordering, forming groups and pairs of poems which comment on one another. The volume opens, for example, with "Dionysians in a Bad Time," a poem tracing the decline of two writers, Strindberg and Kazantzakis, into guilt and angst and a Christianity which kills heart, spirit, and desire: "At the end," one closed his eyes and "mumbled pieties"; the other "crowed once and fell silent, / numbed by the stellar chill, the vacuity / human swarms make / beneath immense star clusters moving in empty space." These artists admit defeat and defeat themselves by closing their eyes and falling silent. In the next poem, "Carmen,"

Layton sets Carmen's passion, "lawless, always off-limits," against fear and rage and the murderous repression of desire which, in the end, "translates" Carmen's "insolent lust / into the chill perfection of death." Until that happens, says the poet, "let fair Carmen prance and dance." Carmen's triumph, however, her life-affirming dance, remains provisional, destined to end in her murder at each performance, and her spiritedness remains an unthinking, instinctual resistance to all that would stifle and suppress. The next poem reflects upon the first two by suggesting that the artist can resist wittingly and so, perhaps, enduringly. In "For Ettore, With Love and Admiration," Layton speaks of an artist whose religious vision is far removed from conventional pieties, and whose landscapes acknowledge nature's indifference, nature as "primal terrorist," but who does not, so to speak, fall silent in the face of vacuity: "above the gloom and doom of your dark lawns," says Layton, rises the "laughter of your wild white roses, / your hollyhock and thistle and chickory." "Dear friend," Layton concludes, "one day you will bury [death] in one of your landscapes." An artist like this can triumph, as Carmen cannot, as the artists described in the first two poems emphatically do not, and as the artist in the next poem, "Tristezza," fails to do. Not without skill or discipline, this artist, who paints "canvas after canvas after canvas" of the Po and "of the same young woman whose hair / he colored differently, each time / doing some altering thing / to her neck or mouth," does not see into the life of things, does not see what the narrator sees, that "the river could be the woman's unshed tears." Most tellingly, his art has no resonance; it engenders only silence.

Such a vision of what constitutes an adequate artistic response implicitly makes large claims for art's enduring vitality and efficacy. At other moments,

Layton adopts a stance which renders human endeavour transitory, and resistance meaningless. In "Etruscan Tombs," the poet visits ancient tombs with a friend who spent his "best years" in a concentration camp, "menaced . . . with gun and whip / . . . made [to] slaver for crusts / urine-soiled and stale; / . . . made to kneel in shit." The poet draws away from that grimly particularized image of suffering and here at "this remote scene" draws comfort — and abstractions — from the perspective afforded by the tombs:

these blank eyes sculpted  
from grove and hill and rock  
before which the centuries have passed  
unseen  
comfort me; inuring me, I say,  
to the sorrows our humanity  
compels us to inflict on each other.  
They teach me to live the free hours with  
gusto.

The poem closes on a balanced note which forges an equivalence between the friend's pain and the poet's pleasure: "Nothing endures for ever. / Your pain, my pleasure, the seconds bear away." That the poet, near the start of the poem, asks his friend's "pardon" for his "abstracted gaze," suggests that he perceives something sinful in reducing to "seconds" the "years" of his friend's pain, in retreating from grimly immediate detail to the abstract diction which permits him to contemplate sorrow from an unfeeling distance. In its own way, the poet's "abstracted gaze" signals a retreat from any messianic mission, a retreat as marked as that of Strindberg and Kazantzakis.

In "Twentieth Century Gothic," Layton returns to the stance of a messianic poet — he's "God's recording angel loosed in a roaring desert" — but he is reduced to silence, dismayed by the fanaticism of holy men who "beseech the deaf walls," dismayed even more by fanaticism's opposite, by the sensibility which "turns everything commonplace, / diminishes the

most barbarous event into a happening / in search of a camera." Faced with such imperviousness, the poet-prophet can only "gape at the blind lens."

For Layton, love remains a source of strength. At the centre of the volume are three love poems standing like a kind of sanctuary for the poet, celebrating love's power to recreate him, first as man, then as god, and finally as poet. The series traces, too, a shifting sense of the relationship between this sanctuary and the world beyond. The first of the poems, "A Madrigal for Anna," celebrates love's power to humanize, but it does so in stanzas carefully structured to suggest the nearly overwhelming force of the world's destructive powers. The first stanza exemplifies this:

The lioness leaps upon her prey.  
The tyrant's teeth are white and strong.  
The Apocalypse is on its way.  
Saintliness keeps no one safe from wrong.  
I, knowing the unloved man's a clod,  
Let a woman's kisses warm my blood.

The first four lines, strongly end-stopped and moving from natural through moral and spiritual destruction to the inadequacy of human response, weigh heavily upon the lyrical, amatory moment at the end of the stanza. In the next poem, love makes of the poet's world an Eden, while in the third poem of the series, the outside world attends joyously upon the love poet: "The sun reels into my room like a *pazzo*," "and butterflies alight / on the windowsill / to catch my metaphors / between their bright Sicilian wings."

Elsewhere in the volume, Layton moves out from such sanctuary to, among other things, take aim at what he sees as the mediocrity and malice of academics and the literati, to castigate self-deceivers, to praise the heroic, to elegeize, to derive comfort from the unceasing cycle of life and death, to characterize life, with its "mean compromises," as a comedy "not worth a frog's fart." In his final reckoning, he calls

upon Zeus to "Preserve all poets mad and marvellous, / guard them from the fury of envious dust."

JUDITH OWENS

## DENNIS COOLEY

DENNIS COOLEY, *Soul Searching*. Red Deer College Press, \$8.95.

DENNIS COOLEY, *Perishable Light*. Coteau Books, \$8.00.

DENNIS COOLEY, *Dedications*. Thistledown, \$8.95.

I DO NOT KNOW IF Dennis Cooley uses a computer when he writes, but I suspect that he does. A basic function of computers is to manipulate and arrange information. Each of these three books is very well organized: poems of a type are all together. Behind each book is a clear, logical organizing principle. In my mind's eye I have a picture of Cooley as a poet with a huge backlog of poems stored on disks. Patiently and rationally, he sorts files and categorizes data (poems) to construct books.

*Soul Searching* is about the relationship between soul and body. All poems in the book relate to this subject and all have a comical, irreverent mood. Clearly, Cooley does not believe in the traditional roles assigned to "soul" and "body." As a modern rationalist he does not believe in the soul's existence at all. Thus the title refers to a futile endeavour. He particularly likes to attack the notion that the body is a cage from which the soul longs to escape, a temporary physical entrapment for a spiritual entity. His attack normally involves extravagant metaphors which, ironically, hint that those who espouse a strong belief in soul are actually guilty of conceptually reducing the body to a machine and of seeing life in purely mechanical terms. The silliness of the comparisons also highlights the silliness of the doctrine of a

soul's existence. According to Saint Paul, says Cooley,

souls were sneezes  
that snooze in dough of bodies

.....

a lot of souls were snuff  
snorted up by stained & smelly bodies  
where they snored their lives away

and, of bodies, he says in another poem,

some of them are cars actually  
people climb (casually) into & out of  
the bodies (usually) idling drip  
blue blood & breathe gas

some of them just sag & bulge  
with the fatnes of age their parts jut through  
skins acned with salt

The book works because Cooley employs guerrilla rhetorical tactics. *Soul Searching* thrives upon the quick strike attack of wit and irreverence, followed by an equally quick retreat out of the poem and on to the next offensive. Prolonged head-to-head combat will not work because extended engagement through a developed argument would make Cooley as sententious and pompous as those concepts he is jabbing at.

In addition to the *reductio ad absurdum* through extravagant metaphor, Cooley has two other favourite devices to promote his attack. One is the ability to break out in someone else's voice at surprising moments and thus wangle a smile and win the encounter. The range of voices includes Burton Cummings ("he is a sweater / he comes undone"), George Bowering ("i am poured out like water / and my bones are unbuckled") and Robert Service ("& playing whist / with god half pissed / straight across from you").

The other is the tricky line ending. The latter part of one sentence is often the first part of another. The line break can be used to redefine a word even as we are reading it. The method is particularly effective where a word is split over two lines. An idea grows out of the previous one in a rapid-fire order:

Bodies were wallets or strong  
boxes you stuffed  
the bank notes in

and

round & free as a bum  
ble bee . . .

One irritating thing about *Soul Searching* is the gimmicky use of typefaces. I suspect that the overly large letters that begin every poem are intended to mimic illuminated manuscripts, but the analogy is unpersuasive.

*Perishable Light* is divided into four individual unified parts. Reading it is something like reading four very small chapbooks. Once again Cooley exhibits his organizational skills. The first part, "Homeward," is a sentimental journey back to Estevan. He returns in the present as an adult and in memory he returns to his boyhood on a prairie farm. The detail is realistic and most of the poems are descriptive, with a tinge of nostalgia. "Home again," in which images tumble one after another, is typical:

& then at the end  
when the jingle of Rex  
& Beauty stopped we stepped  
down into mud & marbles  
to manure balancing spring  
on hoodoos of snow to crows  
& crocus gathering themselves  
up like dogs from sleep  
  
when we came back spring was in  
us flushed and wet

In part two, "Of Sun & Moon," the poems concern the sun and the moon and their effects. Cooley sets up an exercise in finding new metaphors and images for these old subjects. The most striking example is "moon musings," a four-page list of metaphors. The whole section is a trifle too clever for my liking: the product of a wit that does not have a clear objective in mind.

Part three, "Short Circuit," is made up of poems concerned with issues. They discuss topics; they are about a subject, as

opposed to being descriptions of it as in the first two parts. "My dearest president" is a botched exercise in the *reductio ad absurdum* of a character. The anger unfortunately descends into self-righteousness. "The taboo on saying what you dont," a humorous meditation on the imposing strictures of French post-modernist literary theorists that, ironically, uses many of the figures these critics ban, is much more successful. The subject of the final short part, "Of the Seasons," is obvious. Because it was written in Winnipeg it gives most of its attention to winter

The third book to be reviewed, *Dedications*, is the only one with any looseness of organization. The first half of the collection is made up of poems dedicated to a specific person (Alexandre Amprimoz, e.f. dyck, David Arnason, etc.) or written with a fairly specific audience in mind ("a curse on a critic," "poetry: old style"). Most of these poems have specific Western Canadian settings and the dedicatees — at least, those whose names I recognize — have Western ties. One could see these poems as a regionalist collection and as a set of tributes to writers and friends who have helped Cooley to find the language and forms suitable for writing about the West.

The second half of the book is a collection of poems on miscellaneous subjects. After two and one-half books of "categorized" poems it is pleasant to go from poem to poem not quite knowing what subject or attitude to expect next. *Dedications* is not as good as the other two books. Maybe with three books in two years Cooley simply ran out of top-drawer material.

Cooley's penchant for "list" (interestingly a command in the BASIC programming language) poems is revealing to me. There is at least one in each of the books. Here is a mind that likes to process information in discrete bits:

brown beer bottles bobbing and bumping  
salt licks lunging to the surface

potato peels on garbage piles      squat of  
 papers from  
 Winnipeg  
 hard leather heels      sealers of spoiled  
 Saskatoons  
 picked-out nose bugs      boiler pipes

Cooley, like the computer I imagine him possessing, is essentially rational. His work is not dry or dull or mechanical, but it is more a product of the head than of the heart.

DON PRECOSKY

## FEMINIST POETICS

LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN, *'sophie*. Coach House, \$9.95.

LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN combines poetry and theory in an evocative and challenging text. Her perspective on previously male philosophic constructions of women, language, desire is immediately evident in the book's title — *'sophie*. Language and such traditions as the forms of poetry and desire evolve through an ideological framework, which has, since Socrates at least, been dominated by male philosophy — "*philo*" ('to love') "*sophia*" ('wisdom').

"Sophia" is also a woman's name. Tostevin's involvement with the current literary practice of deconstruction, which includes concentration on the word as name — defining, limiting, yet also an object in itself, separate from the object being named — expands the meaning of "philosophy." To name is to define, to limit the real mutable object to one's subjective perspective. Women have traditionally been excluded from actively creating the ideological framework behind language, desire, philosophy. Rather, we are passive objects of the definitions, the mute "e" in the French feminine — "l'amant(e) l'aimée" — masculine versions of ourselves — "son visage décomposé" — absent in language.

Tostevin wants to reverse this absence, to write a woman's language, desire, and theory — actively and with presence, with self-definition. She notes Jacques Derrida's comment that ". . . the I, in order to define itself, assert itself, has to deny so many elements of itself it can only differ from nothing by the smallest possible margin. The smallest possible sign. An apostrophe." "Philo" has been dropped from "philosophy" (traditionally defined, named, by men) and replaced with an apostrophe so that Tostevin can concentrate on a woman's name, a woman's definition.

The text, neither specifically poetry nor theory, challenges previous literary definitions that itemize poetry, prose, theory, English and French languages, etc., separately. Many of her poems integrate such traditional poetic items as eroticism or brilliantly concrete images with abstract language, theory on how poems are constructed, how women have been constructed as absence, or intertextual allusions to other writers and inventors, such as Louky Bersianik, Nicole Brossard, and, yes, Albert Einstein. One section of poems is written in French, the rest are in English. Two short essays or reports outline a two-week course given by Derrida and a conference on "the Semiotics of Eroticism." It is refreshing to see a woman who is actively working with the concepts of absence/presence and meaning/non-meaning call Derrida on his misogyny and question his authority. There is direct criticism here. However, Tostevin simply reports what occurred at the eroticism conference. She leaves the reader to formulate the criticism that there was no discussion of the differences between a male and female erotics, language, intermixture of mind and body. Perhaps this is because to name is to define, to place one's own subjective experience on the event, and we should be able to infer her criticisms through her description. Certainly, we

can see how a female erotics works out in practice in her poetry and how this relates beyond eroticism to a positioning of the female body/self in language.

Tostevin insists that we move beyond meaning and concentrate on sound, on song, to loosen the restrictions of definition: "your phrases tracing shackles around my thin shin bones." Sometimes she puns in English and French ("son corps où / se délit le son d'un coeur qui défaille . . ."; "jasmine / jazz that mines . . .") Sometimes she rhymes with vowels and end-rhymes:

. . . I crawl at the tortuous pace  
of the crooked foot tortoise in search of the  
sound  
your arrow makes when it reaches then  
wrenches from  
the real thing

Always, the search for the sound beyond meaning, yet beyond non-meaning as well — the half-speech ("mi-dire") that brings mind and heart together in unrestricted vocalization: "sons-souches qui trainent les profondeurs de la pensée." Descartes said, "I think, therefore, I am" — static and definitive. Tostevin says, "je mi-dis donc je suis." There are spaces and connections for change and movement between the half-sayings.

As with other deconstructive texts, the question of pronouns occurs. Who is "you?" In an active text, the writer and the reader both interact with the poem — the object on the page: "how did my desire come to wear your face. . ." When the text is also feminist, another perspective is added. The writer's "desire" wears "my" (the reader's) "face" as I read/interpret the poem, but "my" (the reader's) "desire" also comes to wear patriarchy's definition of me as a woman. As a woman reading, another level of meaning is added for me, further shattering the restrictions of static definition.

In the last poem, "song of songs," Tostevin takes the ultimate patriarchal au-

thority, the Bible, and redefines eroticism through a woman's perspective:

*canticum canticorum*  
a little cant  
a little cum  
where only the wet phrase  
holds an element of truth

She concludes the poem satisfied that "the muse has learned to write," that she is no longer confined to her role as muse, as object of an Other's words. She "is offered another apple *un appel une pomme*, a poem," a system of sounds and language with which she can name herself and women.

ELLEN QUIGLEY

## FANTÔMES GLISSANT

JOSÉ ACQUELIN, *Tout Va Rien*. l'Hexagone, \$11.95.

JACQUES BRÉMOND, *Au Partage des Eaux*. Les Éditions du Noroît et La Bartavelle, n.p.

SERGE LEGAGNEUR, *Textes Muets*. Éditions du Noroît, \$15.00.

ROBERT MARTEAU, *River Without End*. trans. David Homel, General, \$12.95.

THESE FOUR LITTLE books of québécois poetry in verse and prose remind us of the constancy of things as well as of their differences. The book format of verse has not changed very much since the short poem under the name of the lyric went its own way from the larger genres in the Renaissance to become centuries later the bulwark of the modern poetic imagination. With its delicate pictures and layouts, the book of verse has sought to reflect closely the contents of its poems. The reader therefore will prize each of these four volumes as a series of tableaux at an exposition, even though the differences among them are large.

Perhaps also the differences will strike the reader as a matter of individual talent. Volumes aside, it is amazing how much

the lyric can resist form and title, as in Legagneur and Acquelin, and how much it can seek it, as in Brémond and Marteau. Without form and title, the line of verse can go so far as to seek its identity in the dimensions of a bare page, like Legagneur's one-worger, "Paix," or his one-liner, "Bruit du dormeur." And yet, with form and title, the art of verse in prose, as in Homel's excellent translation of Marteau's *River Without End*, can seek its identity outside the page in a captured moment of time as long as from 3 May 1982 to 30 April 1983 in a particular place called the St. Lawrence River (hence the title of the volume itself). In the poems of Legagneur and Acquelin the text is verse, and poetry finds both its sense and coherence in the meaning of that text. In Brémond and Marteau, the imagery of poetry draws its life from somewhere outside the text, and the text is the harness that restrains it on the page, and no more.

All of this poetry of the 1980s is engaging for what it tells us of verse when the age itself proclaims that verse has nothing to do with life. In Acquelin and Legagneur, textuality and contextuality appear as a retort to popular culture's rejection of contemporary poetry. For their part, Brémond and Marteau appear to write in spite of their times. In these books of verse, three in poetry and one in prose, there is no social or political structure singled out for denigration. The poet seems consistently face to face with a metaphysical reality which he never deliberately sought out, and which always exerts its pressure inexorably on him.

Of the four poets, Acquelin seems the youngest, not only in years but also in his intensely straining self. Acquelin is a poet who has not yet found a place for the solitary human. The universe is a world full of significances that never coalesce into a pattern. "On peut passer sa vie / à tenter de traduire le vent" into reality, but there is no advantage to the translation. Like a

dog with a piece of meat, he consumes time which feeds on him, and "il y avait des nuages à hauteur de tombe," the human cattle that can collect itself into little groups can also assemble itself into "zero." Acquelin's world remains nevertheless a world of dreams not so much twisted as contorted by its futility, and the romantic in the poet stops him from giving in to the intensity of his pain.

More objective and less charming than Acquelin's art, Legagneur's practice of verse, terse and devoid of the romantic imagination, isolates modern life on the page. The beauty of life is supremely, perfectly ornamental, as in "Oiseau d'argent," and the impression of life, as in "Canard de bois réfléchit," is that it is a dry, wooden imitation of something that does not exist. The goddess of humanity is a "déesse de boue exaltée" ready to crack because mud always crumbles when it dries; the birds of the universe, as in "Orgueilleuses mouettes," give themselves a lot of trouble for nothing sully the structure of a cathedral with their droppings because no god lodges in it.

Much different from the epigrammatic structures of Legagneur's poetry, Brémond's verse turns poetic lines into prose paragraphs. He is not a voice that comments upon the universe, but rather that explores and comments upon itself constantly. As in "l'écriture des eaux," in which "les zébrures arachnoïdes, fantômes glissant d'une rive à l'autre, sans trace préétabli dira-t'on," the images of the imagination expand the consciousness onto a variant world. The mind is not so much philosophical as philosophizing. In the same poem, a new image, like that of the happy child bouncing a stone along the surface of the waters, compensates for the imminent disappearance of the circles which the stone creates even before the child has thrown his projectile. The first poem of the volume is entitled "les eaux mouillées," and the redundancy of the

"wet" and Brémond's repeated use of images of water in his other poems are symptomatic of the poet's effervescent task. The man-poet plunges and re-surfaces and plunges again, and the cascades of the final poem of the volume try hard to dissolve the marble immobility of the statue-priest of the fountain from which they spring.

By comparison Marteau's world of the St. Lawrence relies upon much more pronounced contrasts than Brémond's. Marteau's world is a historical place, and the river's path suggests to the poet all that history — and not only the imagination — has fed into imagery. Historical time and the imagination are in constant competition in a juggling act. For example, in Marteau's diary-like world, on "Friday, February 11, 1983," the poet writes, "the few fragments of the unwritten poem that reach us convince me, and indeed confirm, that literature is born in concert with the fall of the soul." But the fall of the soul is into time and therefore into history, as in "Monday, January 31," where Marteau as Homel translates him, writes that "Wolf and bison have no archives, / So none has told them their time has come." The fall of the soul into time is the seed for the birth of the imagination: literature and the imagination resemble the St. Lawrence River on "Sunday, October 3," "which just now was so calm," and "sends a shiver across its surface to remind us its depth is measureless." *River Without End* is a treatise of the imagination by a classical mind on the nature of the imagination itself and of poetry and history. As in "Wednesday, September 29," in which "A ship sends illuminated masts starward" but in which also "Mist and cloud limit sight," the limitations of life and art on the poet do not stop him from writing, but provoke him profoundly to create further.

ANTHONY RASPA

## THIRD WORLD

MARIE JAKOBER, *A People in Arms*. New Star Books, \$9.95.

SARAH MURPHY, *The Measure of Miranda*. New West Press, \$18.95/\$8.95.

THE POST-COLONIAL world has been politically and culturally sensitized to the repressive neo-imperialist influence of the United States, particularly by the veritable litany of measures taken to "protect" U.S. economic and political interests in the Americas. It is a litany which plods through repeated U.S. backing of corrupt right-wing dictatorships and military regimes, the human rights atrocities of which are visible in evidence of torture and the activities of death squads, and destabilizing or quashing of apparently popular, revolutionary governments. Marie Jakober in *A People in Arms* and Sarah Murphy in *The Measure of Miranda* set their first-hand senses of "third world" realities in the Americas against those of a directly or complicitly neo-colonizing "first world."

In her sequel to the well-received *Sandinista*, a sequel which documents the final months of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, Jakober combats implicitly what she sees as U.S. vilification of and misinformation about the present Sandanista government. She mythologizes its origins in a genuine people's revolution. Murphy's *Miranda* is the daughter of a small-time Canadian Prospero figure in the employ of a U.S. multinational company with Central American interests. She tries desperately to integrate her family's values and limited, picture-postcard experience of Central American living with her knowledge of the squalid poverty of the oppressed lower classes and the tortured, mutilated and dumped bodies of perceived political opponents in Central and South America.

Jakober's political understanding is at its subtlest in her presentation of the dif-

fering realities of Somoza's rich and the lower classes in Nicaragua, and the manner in which political and economic power and unreflective machismo are used to assert and bolster the semiotic reality of the rich. Thus, to the rich characters, U.S. influence signifies progress rather than neo-colonization, poverty signifies passivity, mindlessness, childlike irresponsibility and backwardness rather than oppression, and popular political uprisings signify communist influence, despicable terrorism and degeneracy. Jakober's appreciation of the power of oral autobiographical narratives as reinforcing testimonies to a revolutionary reality among the politically mobilized poor and to a counter-revolutionary reality among Somoza's cronies who flee to Miami is acute, as is her understanding of the way in which her accomplished U.S. novelist/journalist type interprets Nicaragua as "an extension of American obsessions and American policy and American existential angst." Jakober manages her range of historical types from different social classes and cultures skilfully, but I was disappointed by her failure to include even one representative of the *La Prensa* political lobby among her dramatized characters, and to indicate the projected political programs of the Sandanista revolutionaries after the desired seizure of power. The concepts of "the people" and "the popular" often seem to be sentimentalized by the implicit sympathies of the text.

Miranda needs to integrate a moral universe, to achieve a sense of proportion. Her efforts at integration are as doomed as those of Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith. After the gulf between her family's values and her own and her feminine powerlessness are realized at a memorably described family dinner, she can no longer make love, and slips, imperceptibly to her housemates, into madness. Her suicidal and ambiguously redemptive act of terrorism or summary justice galvanizes her

housemates into Ancient Mariner-like retelling of her story or giving up of political exile. The journals of her madness enable one of the housemates, Susan, an activist lawyer, to piece together and give notice to Miranda's transformation from "innocent Canadian integral" to physically fragmented "Miranda." The language and imagery of this impressive first novel are rich in symbolism drawn from Central and South American mythologies and cultures, Annis Pratt's archetypal schematization of women's "Novels of Rebirth and Transformation," calculus, recent feminist psychoanalysis, and Jung's work on Demeter/Kore myths. Miranda's determination to integrate an emotional and moral universe, for instance, is signalled in the photographs she wears in a heart-shaped locket. Her mother's choice of family postcard is "a diagram of family happiness stuffed into the cliché (home is where the heart is) of the locket." Miranda places over it part of a photograph of an anonymous sexually mutilated female corpse from Central America — a part which contains one blind eye, one blue bottle fly, one blade of grass. The locket becomes Miranda's Green World Token, and the corpse her Kore figure, her "third world" shadow. The blinded eye is a symbol of a castration complex, of feminine powerlessness. The representation of death, decay and renewal in eye, fly, and grass is linked with similar cycles in Demeter/Kore and Earth Goddess Maria/Xipe Totec myths. The symbolism works at complex levels and is complemented by implicit and finely differentiating allusion, especially to Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*.

There is some very sharp gender political analysis in *The Measure of Miranda*. The representations and accounts of the "wuf wuf puppy" syndrome of feminine deference to the family patriarch and his reality, the business executive/language teacher relationship, the Che Guevara

Groupie and Compañero Cocksman syndromes and the sexual adventure fantasies of Miranda's Green World Lover are particularly striking and powerful in their detail. Jakober's attention to the problems of sexist prejudice confronted by the female revolutionary and the reductiveness of machismo are rendered limp by comparison. The writing and thought which characterize her love scenes are hackneyed and her presentations of Pilar's sexual involvements strain under the pressure of romanticizing conception.

Enthusiastic readers of *Sandanista* will no doubt want to catch up with the fortunes of its characters and have some of Valerian's mystery unfold in *A People in Arms*. The action is well paced and the weighing of action against the political talk and opinion inevitable in the setting is handled impressively. They are evidence of the kind of writing skills which could enliven parts of Murphy's novel. Murphy's Susan tends on occasion, for example, to lecture her audience on Central American culture and U.S. neo-imperialism in her own voice or the reported voices of housemates. Perhaps it is a sign of overambitiousness in Murphy's treatment of Miranda that the images in *The Measure of Miranda* which will haunt me are those of Amparo, the Chilean refugee, discipling her pain and anger by engaging in folk craftwork and oral narrative which name the repressive political and gender political reality of her country. Both Jakober and Murphy can take pride in their achievements in these novels.

SUE THOMAS



## CHÂTEUX EN ESPAGNE

CLAUDE CHARRON, *Probablement l'Espagne*. Borealis Edns, \$18.95.

THIS AWKWARD NOVEL of broken dreams, hopes and promises could be summed up by one character's statement: "Ma grand-mère disait toujours qu'il faut se méfier des châteaux en Espagne." The uncertainty of castles in the air ("châteaux en Espagne") is underlined in the very title of this first novel by Claude Charron, the former cabinet minister of the Parti Québécois government who recounted the disappointing end of his own political hopes and dreams in his non-fictional autobiography, *Désobéir* (1983). A passing reference to a suspiciously similar book ("ces confessions larmoyantes d'un ministre déchu"), occasional cynical observations about "la survivance dont un peuple se contente," and the introduction at the end of the novel of a politician-turned-novelist named Claude constitute the few references to politics in this rambling story about supposedly ordinary people.

Set in Montreal in the summer of 1983, the intrigue revolves around a middle-aged suburban couple, Albert Paradis and Isabelle Fortier, who have been unhappily married for the better part of twenty-four years. The arrival of their only child, François, had shattered Isabelle's dream of a life without children. François became a drug addict and destroyed Albert's vision of his son as a famous hockey player. Isabelle and Albert live in near social isolation in their bungalow in north-end Montreal. Both make sporadic attempts to fight off their boredom and to dissipate the guilt they feel for their own failed lives. Albert's main concern is how to tell his wife that he faces forced retirement from his job at an insurance firm at the end of the summer. Fleeing the reality of her husband's depression, Isabelle de-

pend on the stories of her sister-in-law Madeleine to provide her with the stimulation she lacks in her own life.

Enter Marcel Gratton, a 24-year-old who, like most of the characters in the novel, has immigrated to Montreal to throw off the shackles of family and rural life. Formerly a male prostitute and a drug pusher, Marcel is a nude dancer in Montreal bars, where he seduces both women and men by his performances as a "torero" to the music of Ravel's *Bolero*. By a series of inconceivably bizarre circumstances, "beau," bisexual and supposedly benevolent Marcel becomes the lover of both Isabelle and Albert. Neither member of the couple is aware of the other's involvement — sexual or otherwise — with Marcel. The effects of Marcel's self-proclaimed generosity with his body and his "gift" of sensual pleasure are marred by his long narcissistic sessions in front of mirrors and by his total disregard for those with whom he becomes involved. His "message" jars because it is far too frequently didactic in tone: "Et qu'est-ce qu'il leur dirait encore à tous ces pauvres dévorés. . . . Il leur dirait qu'il ne savent pas vivre, qu'en se barricadant dans leur idées ils s'étouffent, qu'ils n'ont rien compris au devoir de se tenir disponibles, libres devant la vie. . . ." And on and on.

Coincidences and the liberating quality of sex — *voilà* the thematic concerns of this text. Accompanying the sex triangle of Marcel-Isabelle-Albert is a host of secondary characters, often brought together by practically unbelievable circumstances, whose (mainly sexual) activities add to the tone of resigned cynicism which dominates this story. An interesting and generally well-written portrayal of Montreal's night-life forms the backdrop to a number of coincidental get-togethers, where ex-lovers, lovers, relatives and colleagues all interconnect to celebrate sex and sometimes to form temporary liaisons.

Eventually, however, the number of coincidence becomes an annoying weakness in this narrative. Thus, Madeleine, the sister-in-law, leaves for Spain with her lawyer/lover once she has obtained her divorce from Albert's brother. During a tête-à-tête with his new lover Christian (for whom he has abandoned both Albert and Isabelle), Marcel reveals that he has always dreamed of seeing a bullfight in Spain. Christian surprises him with two tickets to Madrid. In a letter Madeleine writes to the aforementioned Claude, we learn that after Albert's unexpected death, Isabelle has also decided to go to Spain. Coincidentally, she boards the same flight as Marcel. *Probablement l'Espagne* is recounted in a straightforward style by an omniscient narrator and makes no pretensions to the fantasy mode. Had the novel played upon its numerous coincidences, making them into either self-conscious commentary or sources of humour in a bizarre narrative, this novel would perhaps have been more stylistically interesting. Such is not the case. Madeleine's letter, which constitutes the end of the novel, is the weakest part of an already uneven story. One wonders why the narrator makes this very questionable attempt to justify the implausible happenings of this convoluted plot. The quality of this text's prose is also uneven. Conversations between characters are generally well tuned, but many descriptive passages are far too long and repetitive. *Probablement l'Espagne* does offer some interesting glimpses of a general *ennui* in "cette dernière bourgade d'un million d'habitants avant le Pôle Nord." The soothing qualities of drugs, alcohol and "[des amours qui ne durent] plus longtemps que la courte éternité du feu entre deux corps" appear to be the only "châteaux en Espagne" that this narrative's post-referendum society can offer itself.

MARIE VAUTIER

## NEW LEAF

BETSY WARLAND, *serpent (w)rite: (a reader's gloss)*. Coach House, \$10.95.

SUBTITLED "a reader's gloss," *serpent (w)rite* dances inside a body of quotations. Like the conventional gloss, this text amplifies the familiar. However, this interpretive activity is accompanied by an invitation to misread, overread and transgress. Paratactic in structure, the main body of the text is in fact marginalia, notes upon notes cutting across a generous library of texts from poststructuralism to radical feminism.

This long poem, Warland's third book of poetry, circles issues central to radical feminist politics and poetics. Rooting through pre-Christian matriarchal mythology and gnostic texts, Warland listens to a "suscipe cyprine" Eve speak. Organized as a series of eight overlapping "turns," the text urges the reader to "get lost" in a labyrinthian echo chamber. The epigraph from Adrienne Rich, "truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity," introduces the reader to Warland's effort to avoid easy answers to difficult questions. Shifting between theory and poetry, this writing is unapologetic about its commitment to feminism and desire to interrupt masculine traditions and discursive practices. Spinning out of this work are overlapping queries about language and female subjectivity, the representation of the female body, sex/gender identity, lesbianism, sisterhood, community and violence, desire, love and war. Scraps and fragments of the poet's journey provide readers with an ambitious itinerary through Judeo-Christian theology, anthropology, news reports, poetry, mythology, children's rhymes, military strategy, psychoanalysis, popular song, history, literary theory, linguistics, eastern philosophy, and feminist theory and political analysis. This eclecticism

blurs borders between reading and writing, high and popular culture, the aesthetic and the political, the mainstream and marginal.

I need to address my own feelings of intellectual bad faith in criticizing a feminist text in this journal. For the critical context participates in the academic institution's derealization of feminism's radicality, a process whereby style displaces gendered experience and the discursive cash of cold, hard publishing increments is occasionally substituted for a sticky, gritty, sometimes painful engagement with feminist politics. This comment is not intended as a wholesale dismissal of feminist literary criticism or feminist theorizing. In *Men in Feminism* (1988) Meaghan Morris reminds us: "Institutionalization is not another name for doom, that fate always worse than death. It's an opportunity, and in many instances a necessary condition, for serious politics — including the failures, the repetitions, the reversals and the betrayals that any living politics entails." This said, my own difficulty with Warland's writing can be located in her linguistic transformations. While sympathetic with Warland's desire to unsettle language itself, this feminist reader experiences an overfamiliarity with her strategy. In her earlier book, *Open is Broken*, Warland's etymological plays were both provocative and promising. Her new book extends and deepens her use of language's history to tell a "herstory," to reverse and displace a word's common sense meaning. This use of etymology as a mode of feminist deconstruction has its illuminating effects in *serpent (w)rite* allowing us to read the privileges and powers of male authority inscribed in language itself. But the revelation of a cliché's ideological underpinnings occasionally leads the reader toward theoretical impasse. For instance, the relation between heterosexual "Big Bangs" and nuclear ones slides away from Rich's in-

terest in "complexity" of analysis toward a reductive and finally dangerous set of essentialist reading possibilities. Feminist theorists have confronted the limitations of generalizing biological accounts of patriarchal violence, a move which makes change or transformation impossible.

In spite of this reservation, Warland's text provides the reader with headspinning provocations about gender and writing. In voices which shift from ironic distance to epiphanic cry, her poem interrogates its own making, providing the reader with a political ethics of reading and writing. Following upon Virginia Woolf's dismissal of writing's "solitary birth," Warland breaks down "authority" and connects author with "*auctus*, to create, increase," and with "all these voices in our heads their words meeting our every gaze." This ideal community of "author-I-ty" is marked by difference, an "ANOTHERITY," and by connection. The final turn of the poem begins again, "turns over a new leaf," exposing a different Eve and exploring the dynamics of lesbian sexuality as symptomatic of a new order which recognizes both mutuality and autonomy. This acknowledgement of the complexity of relationship, even within the utopian gestures of lesbian lovemaking, anticipates the feminist community's current discussion about racial, class and cultural differences among women. Originator of the 1983 conference Women & Words/*Les Femmes et les Mots*, co-founder and co-editor of *(f)lip: a feminist innovative writing newsletter*, and a risk-taking poet, Warland makes an ongoing commitment to our feminist community and an important contribution to feminist aesthetics and cultural politics.

JANICE WILLIAMSON

## POETIC VOICE

DOUGLAS BURNET SMITH, *Ladder to the Moon*. Brick Books, \$9.95.

YVONNE TRAINER, *Landscape Turned Sideways: Poems 1977-87*. Goose Lane, n.p.

JAN HORNER, *Recent Mistakes*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

WHEN YOU STOP everything else you are doing, and quietly read a book of poetry, an interesting thing happens. All the busyness of everyday life drops away, and you can hear, quite distinctly, the sound of the poet's individual voice. There is also a silence around that speaking voice, and in the tension between the speaking and the silence, you can recognize that particular poet's cadence, locale, inflections and style.

What becomes obvious, in this kind of an acute listening, is whether or not the poet speaks honestly, poetically, and with confidence. And, whether or not the poet's speaking has become a crafted thing — a poem — separate from the poet. When the language of speech has actually become a poem, then a great intimacy between poet and reader can be transacted.

I will begin with the surest voice of the three poets under consideration here. Douglas Smith's *Ladder to the Moon* is his fifth or sixth book. The long poem, "Ladder to the Moon," forms the centre section of the book. This title is taken from a Georgia O'Keeffe painting, which is on the book's cover. The long title-poem is dedicated to O'Keeffe, and begins with a quotation from her — about seeing. Thus, Smith's book is permeated with the notion of seeing, and of vision. The long poem, in seven parts, is a sustained lyric and is the most advanced, in craft, of the poems in this collection. Particularly vivid in language and visionary content is section III, where the poet explores the notion of the colours and images in O'Keeffe's paintings:

sky of such blueness?  
empty sky.

bones of pure death?  
bones of poetry.

purple's pure?  
purple's pleasure.

At his best, Smith is lyrical, visual, precise and evocative. Another well-crafted poem in the collection is "Blue Plate." Two poems that are surrealistic in effect, but nonetheless held tightly together through the lyricism and parsimony of their language, are "Beak (I)" and "Beak (II)." When metaphysical speculation, physical observation and surrealistic vision fuse in Smith's work, the result is startling and unique effects.

*Landscape Turned Sideways* is a selection from three of Yvonne Trainer's previous books, plus new poems. The change in voice, from that of Douglas Smith, is like the difference between Mozart and Ian Tyson. Trainer's voice is earthy, of the land — quite specifically, the prairies — and about being vulnerable, each in our own particular way.

Trainer is able to speak through the personas of various farming people, of a child, and of herself as "poet." But whatever persona Trainer takes on, her voice remains constant — down-home, asserting that spark of humanness, questioning the glitter of any other kind of life from the one she knows. Trainer has a particular skill in lifting poems of very flat subject matter into a lyrical space. Trainer's natural gift for lyricism runs counterpoint to her naturally down-to-earth voice; between these two extremes is the fine tension of such poems as "Stars Like This," "Planting," and "Perhaps You Remember That Train."

Jan Horner's collection, *Recent Mistakes*, seems to be rather unfortunately titled, as Horner is a poet who is much less sure of her voice than either Smith or Trainer. Although Horner's language has

an easy-flowing abundance, and she is adept at turning a phrase, the voice in her book remains a voice, speaking — and we never move from listening to the poet, to that other experience where the poems begin to speak for, and by, themselves. These poems are not well-enough crafted nor deep enough in content for them to have a life of their own. Jan Horner writes in the confessional mode, rather than a metaphysical or lyrical mode. And so, by the very shape of the poems, they tend toward the prosaic. However, even in the confessional mode, the poem can differentiate itself from the speaking poet. One hopes that Horner will mature into her craft, so that her poems take a more individuated structure, and that her natural talent with language becomes linked to content and craft.

CAROLYN ZONAILO

## IN HER ELEMENT

CYNTHIA FLOOD, *The Animals In Their Elements*. Talonbooks, \$10.95.

TOWARD THE END of "A Young Girl-Typist Ran to Smolny: Notes For A Film," Cynthia Flood constructs an intricate, wondrously disruptive moment: the keynote of this tough and resplendent collection of fifteen stories. Amidst a series of flashbacks to the Russian Revolution, three women sell subscriptions to a radical newspaper in the wilds of Burnaby. After numerous rebuffs, Kate, young and middle-class, finally succeeds with Mac, old and working-class: the genuine article, a "real" leftist. Kate watches as he signs the form, his signature "a clear spiky hand which owes nothing to H. B. McLean [*sic*]." What so far seems a lazy inheritance from Callaghan (youthful idealism awed by wise experience) is unequivocally undercut by the anonymous screenwriter. Until now he, or she, has already supplied

more than forty directional footnotes in this eleven-page story, and here, MacLean is duly noted in fossilized academese:

System of handwriting instruction favoured for many years in Canadian public schools, and designed to pulverize any individuality in students' methods of moving pens across paper. Each lesson begins with 'Ready for printing — Desks cleared — printing materials ready (practice paper, pencils, and compendiums on desk). Pupils adopt attitude of attention. . . . All pupils should sit in a comfortable, hygienic position.' (H. B. MacLean and Grace Vollet, *The MacLean Method of Writing*, rev. ed., Agincourt, Ontario: Gage Ltd., 1966-67, *passim*)

This caustic blending of literary, filmic, and academic forms, the subverting of readerly continuity and conventional writerly realism, this moment of multiple disruption crystallizes the politicized textures of *The Animals In Their Elements*.

In one sense the scene indicates the kinds of sophisticated irony that underpin each of these stories. Whether explicitly "political" (i.e., "Beatrice" or "Evelyn and Rosie"), or implicitly politicized (i.e., "On the Point" or "Imperatives"), these short fictions continually reveal the power struggles intrinsic to capitalist life, many of which are conducted at the unconscious (not to mention gender-specific) levels. Within a relatively comfortable country like Canada, Flood consistently explores the material conditions which place, define, and control individual consciousness (including that of the writer herself). Here in "Smolny," has Kate really succeeded with Mac; or has she simply managed to sell to the already converted? Have her previous refusals from working-class people themselves initiated an awareness of internalized ideologies; or is she in fact the naïve butt of an ironic authorial joke? The point is that Flood refuses to provide a neatly ribboned closure for the disrupted reader. She writes, rather, from an elusive, contentious stance that denies the promise of paradise within

a strict party line, yet which insists on the imperative of personal, self-aware action.

But that niggling footnote does much more than support a mere textual irony or implicate a bemused reader. From title to footnote to conclusion (with Kate doggedly flogging *other* people's words), Flood meticulously foregrounds the political nature of language and its usage. Running throughout this collection is the image of both women and men, writer and readers, enmeshed within a network of official controlling discourses. Each of Flood's many characters — children, working-people, pensioners — is faced with the problematics of speaking/writing/living their own narrative. Storytelling, whether it be a straightforward narration of a writer writing, or the more internalized dilemma of re-membering — reconstructing through memory an authentic biography — *storytelling* becomes the recurrent personal and political imperative. ("Tabletalk," for example, juxtaposes a male academic lecturing on long-distance "instruction" [a recurring word], with a woman of the audience ironically remembering her own contorted history of paternal abuse and incest.)

The invocation of H. B. MacLean in "Smolny" focuses these political/discursive concerns: a chilling moment which highlights the role of both language and education in the mechanistic moulding of productive, obedient, and homogeneous citizens. (See Michel Foucault on the classical pen-men: *Discipline and Punish*, Part 3, chapter 1.) While Mac may well be a shining example of working-class recalcitrance with his spiky independent hand, the fact remains that he is a cripple with a smashed leg. No matter how heroic his small narratives might be in the eyes of Kate (or the reader), he — like the anonymous girl-typist — is engulfed, inscribed, and re-inscribed over by the larger controlling Narration of officialdom.

Although "Smolny" is easily Flood's

most formally experimental story, its technical virtuosity and radical social concerns indicate the revolutionary tenor of the entire collection. Many of these narrations subtly decentre the conventions of both storytelling and bourgeois thought; what W. H. New fortuitously describes as "the little anarchies of a fluid art" are brilliantly realized in both form and theme. The eponymous story, for example, replicates the fragmented thought patterns of an elderly Alzheimer's victim, while revealing the genuine but limited social compassion available to marginalized and disabled groups. "Twoscore and Five" likewise uses memory to create a series of stories within stories, a pleonastic embedding which quietly and convincingly undermines ingenuous generalizations of sexual politics.

*The Animals In Their Elements* is a deceptive collection. On first reading, many of these stories seem to be simple experiments revolving around the creation of poignancy or the elicitation of social sensibility. But Flood is no sentimentalist; nor is she a doctrinaire proselytizer. Her stories unfold into multiple clusters of thoughtful complexity and passionate commitment to real "democracy." She creates subtle subversions which disclose the inner workings of lives lived in the contemporary political network called Canada. This is a splendid and challenging collection of first-rate, pre-eminently readable fictions.

GARY BOIRE

The New Canadian Library has recently re-issued the following works: Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (\$6.95), with an afterword by Linda Hutcheon; Frederick Philip Grove, *Fruits of the Earth* (\$7.95), afterword by Rudy Wiebe, and *Settlers of the Marsh* (\$6.95), afterword by Kristjana Gunnars; Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners* (\$4.95), afterword by Timothy Findley; Stephen Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (\$5.95), afterword

by Jack Hodgins; Howard O'Hagan, *Tay John* (\$5.95), afterword by Michael Ondaatje; Martha Ostenso, *Wild Geese* (\$6.95), afterword by David Arnason; Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House* (\$5.95), afterword by Robert Kroetsch; and Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (\$6.95), afterword by D. M. R. Bentley.

E.-M. K.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

### 1) Anthologies

ROBERT MAJZELS, ed., *The Guerrilla is Like a Poet: An Anthology of Filipino Poetry*. Cormorant, n.p.

### 2) The Arts

RENÉ PAYANT, *Vedute: Pièces détachées sur l'art 1976-1987*. Trois, n.p.

### 3) Criticism

JUDITH SCHERER HERZ, *Short Narratives of E. M. Forster*. St. Martin's Press, US\$29.95.

### 4) Education

PHILIPPE BARBAUD, *Le français sans façon: Chroniques de langage*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

### 5) Fiction

BEULAH HOMAN, *A Place Called The Ridge*. Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., \$14.95.

### 6) Folklore

NICHOLAS HASLUCK and C. J. KOCH, *Chinese Journey*. Fremantle Arts Centre, \$13.50.

### 7) History

CRAIG HERON, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*. James Lorimer, \$29.95/14.95.

ANNE LEGARÉ and NICOLE MORF, *La Société distincte de l'Etat: Québec-Canada 1930-1980*. Brèches/Hurtubise HMH, \$22.95.

DENIS MARTIN, *Des Héros de la nouvelle-France: Images d'un culte historique*. Hurtubise HMH, \$35.00.

## 8) Life-Writing

JOYCE BARKHOUSE, *George Dawson: The Little Giant*. Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., \$12.95.

MARCEL TRUDEL, *Mémoires d'un autre siècle*. Boréal, n.p.

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Aphra Behn: The English Sappho*. Black Rose Books, \$36.95/16.95.

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Oscar Wilde: The Double Image*. Black Rose Books, \$36.95/16.95.

## 9) Poetry

SUSAN AFTERMAN, *Rain*. Univ. of Queensland, A\$7.95.

DAVID EGGLETON, *South Pacific Sunrise*. Penguin, NZ\$11.99.

SYLVANA GARDNER, *The Devil in Nature*. Univ. of Queensland, A\$8.95.

NUZRAT YAR KHAN, ed., *Dreams and Destinations: Shaheen and his poetry*. Canada-Pakistan Association, n.p.

JOHN MILLETT, *Blue Dynamite*. South Head, n.p.

ELIZABETH SMITHER, *Professor Musgrove's Canary*. Auckland Univ. Press, NZ\$14.95.

RICHARD KELLY TIPPING, *Nearer By Far*. Univ. of Queensland, A\$14.95.

TU FU, *The Selected Poems of Tu Fu*, trans. David Hinton. New Directions, US\$19.95/10.95.

## 10) Reference

JEAN DELISLE, *La traduction au Canada/ Translation in Canada, 1534-1984*. Univ. of Ottawa Press, n.p.

*Index of American Periodical Verse: 1986*. Scarecrow, US\$37.50.

*Index of American Periodical Verse: 1987*. Scarecrow, US\$39.50.

## 11) Science &amp; Nature

PETER KROPOTKIN, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, ed. and intro. George Woodcock. Black Rose Books, \$36.95/16.95.

The collection Québec 10/10 of Éditions Alain Stanké has recently issued the following paperback editions of Québec classics: Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, *Jack Kerouac* (Québec 10/10 #95); Pierre Chatillon, *L'île aux fantômes* (Québec 10/10 #107); William Kirby, *Le Chien d'Or* (2 vols., Québec 10/10 #111-112); Roger Lemelin, *Fantaisies sur les péchés capitaux* (Québec 10/10 #108); Alain René Lesage, *Les aventures de M. Robert Chevalier dit de Beauchêne, capitaine de flibustiers dans la Nouvelle-France* (2 vols., Québec 10/10 #109-110); Alain Stanké, *Des barbelés dans ma mémoire* (Québec 10/10 #106); and *Premier amour* anthology (Québec 10/10 #100).

E.-M. K.

Vintage International has recently published the following works in paperback: Kobe Abe, *The Ark Sakura*, trans. Juliet Winters Carpenter (US\$8.95); Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (US\$8.95); Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Assignment*, trans. Joel Agee (US\$7.95); Ford Maddox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (US\$6.95); E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (US\$6.95); Milán Füst, *The Story of my Wife*, trans. Ivan Sanders (US\$8.95); Gabriel García Márquez, *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, trans. Randolph Hogan (US\$6.95); Ryszard Kapuściński, *The Emperor*, trans. William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand (US\$7.95); Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* (US\$7.95); Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (US\$6.95); Doris Lessing, *The Fifth Child* (US\$6.95); Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (US\$8.95); Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and seven other stories*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (US\$7.95); Abdelrahman Munif, *Cities of Salt*, trans. Peter Theroux (US\$12.95); Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair* (US\$7.95); Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (US\$7.95); Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (US\$8.95); Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin* (US\$7.95); V. S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* (US\$7.95); Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way: Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (US\$9.95); Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (US\$9.95); Italo Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, trans. Beryl de Zoete (US\$9.95).

E.-M. K.

## ON THE VERGE

\*\*\* W. E. WASHBURN, ed., *History of Indian-White Relations*. Vol. 4 of *Handbook of North American Indians*. Smithsonian Institution, n.p. Acknowledging that political differences constructed a variety of contacts between native and European communities and institutions, this book assembles data on the different relations that emerged through Canadian, U.S., and Mexican history. Subjects include the character of treaties, the establishment of legal status, the nature of educational facilities, the emergence of rights movements, trade, missions (including the Russian Orthodox missions in Alaska), land use (the importance of fire rather than farming as a means of modifying the landscape, for example), and anthropology. Contributors also range widely, from Arthur J. Ray on the Hudson's Bay Company and other trade relations, Robert J. Surtees on Canadian domestic policies, and Mason Wade on French policies, to Leslie Fiedler on "conceptual relations." This last category deals with such topics as "cigar-store sculpture," film and literary images, and "hobbyist movements." But this category also reveals one of the limits of an otherwise impressive volume. Fiedler, talking of native images in literature, refers to British and American texts, but not Canadian. He twice mentions Seton as a "founder" of the Boy Scout Movement, but nowhere does the volume mention the "Woodcraft Indians." It's as though Seton had no Canadian past, an attitude which, despite the declared intentions of the book, permeates other chapters as well. A chapter on literary images in French refers to French and Louisiana but not Quebec writers. An excellent map depicts all the forts in the HBC network, but data on the North West Company is inadequate. The illustrations, however, are numerous, and the bibliography and index both full and helpful.

W.N.

\*\*\* CHARLES LILLARD, *Circling North*. Sono Nis, \$6.95. "Love is a vast geography" writes Lillard in the last poem of this sequence of lyrics evoking a "legendary north." Most of the poems use B.C. place names as titles, but Lillard understands place not as a specific topography, or a detail of vegetation or geology, but through a representative individual or especially as the locus of a half-dreamed love affair. Geography, to reverse the figure, is love. All the shadowy "ghost's breath" can be infuriating to a reader schooled in the conventions of

the topographical tradition. But Lillard should be understood as responding to an indigenous tradition in which place is named according to what human activities occur in the vicinity — a place defined as a story. Certainly Lillard has strong sympathies with the shaman-poets, such as Gary Snyder and a younger Susan Musgrave. Like them, Lillard often veers surreally into a twilight vastness — especially through the odd twists in syntax as he moves from line to line. Yet these moments are coloured by the allusiveness born of a strong sense of literary history, and a never-too-distant affection for such writers as Alden Nowlan and Al Purdy, whose presence keeps reminding the poet of the ugly social problems which also circle north. Those too, Lillard recognizes, demand a love vast as geography.

L.R.

\*\*\* *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre* (Oxford UP), a remarkable addition to the ever-growing shelf of reference works in Canadian literature, bears witness to the extraordinary growth in Canadian theatre during the past twenty-five years. This book has the strengths and weaknesses of all undertakings of its kind. Especially noteworthy are the essay-length entries on theatre in various Canadian regions and on forms of drama such as radio and television drama which have been of specific importance to this country. Some areas receive particularly rich coverage such as political theatre in the widest sense of the word, with entries under "Political and Popular Theatre," "Théâtre engagé," "Alternate [*sic*] Theatre," and "Censorship." The latter, compiled by Ramon Hathorn, is very illuminating, with alarmingly long paragraphs on censorship activities in Vancouver, Toronto, and Quebec. Equally alarming are some of the details offered in the entry (by James Noonan) on the National Arts Centre, with a long litany of financial cutbacks affecting mandate and excellence of that institution. Detailed articles on feminist and multi-cultural theatre, by Louise Forsyth and Jeniva Berger respectively, record developments in non-canonical forms of theatre. Occasionally, this effort is perhaps rather too emphatic: Denise Boucher's controversial play *Les Fées ont soif* receives attention under the title of the play, under "Feminist Theatre," and under "Censorship." Not all entries are of equal quality: "Motion Pictures" and "Television Drama," for instance, rely too strongly on lists of titles, unaccompanied by comment. And there are a few notable gaps. The Centennial

and Expo 67 are generally recognized as *the* watershed in the development of Canadian drama, but there is no entry on either, and the index offers only spurious references. Editing is somewhat uneven: some bibliographies are annotated, others are not. But these are minor cavils; the *Companion* is an essential work, well worth owning.

E.-M. K.

\*\* PETER MURRAY, *The Vagabond Fleet*. Sono Nis, \$29.95. Peter Murray, who wrote an excellent book on William Duncan of Metlakatla (*The Devil and Mr. Duncan*) now enters a quite different area of West Coast history, the record of the seal hunters who put out in their schooners from Victoria during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the seal rookeries in Alaska. Sealers are people not likely to arouse much enthusiasm nowadays, and Murray's specimens, who almost exterminated the North Pacific fur seal herds, were perhaps a degree more inhumane than their modern successors. Still, a good book can be written on a distasteful subject. Unfortunately in *The Vagabond Fleet* Murray has got entangled in presenting the facts — which is one of the historian's duties — at the expense of presenting them readably, which is the other duty. His book is dense with the names of ships and men, and the channels of broader understanding are clogged with them. If he had paid more attention to selecting illuminating examples than to providing lists, his book would have been more accessible and more useful.

G.W.

\* W. A. WAISER, *The Field Naturalist: John Macoun, the Geological Survey and Natural Science*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$30.00. John Macoun, like him or not, was one of the leading figures in opening the West, with his enthusiastic accounts of the fertility of the prairie lands; he was also one of Canada's great naturalists, contributing enormously to our knowledge of the variety of flora and fauna. He made his mistakes — his unwillingness even to consider evolutionary theory seriously was one of them — but he deserves a serious biography and a respectful if critical one. W. A. Waiser's book on him, *The Field Naturalist*, leaves the gap wide open. It is an exasperating book, sacristic instead of really critical, and intent on presenting a comically belittling portrait of the workaholic "Professor" who cannot see the scientific wood for the trees of his abundant and not always perfectly preserved collections. It is too much

an attempt to impose current biological attitudes on a past where the field naturalist was the important man of science. Waiser's general contempt for the "collectors" is unfortunate; he ignores the fact that collectors of natural history specimens in the Victorian era laid the foundations of modern biology, and that the work of such great field men as Alfred Russell Wallace and Henry Walter Bates, the friend and informant of Darwin, played an enormous role in the development of evolutionary theory. Macoun's creationism was a personal blind spot that should not condemn him or collectors in general to mockery.

G.W.

## REFERENCE

RECENT REFERENCE BOOKS include James D. Hart's *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature* (Oxford, \$19.95), a paperback reprint which contains brief guides to authors, books, and some generic subjects (Presbyterianism, Romance); it is hard to tell how some Canadians made it into the book (Callaghan, Carman) and others with seemingly similar claims (Seton, for example) got left out. Richard Maltby's *Passing Parade* (Oxford, \$41.95) is subtitled "A History of Popular Culture in the Twentieth Century"; unlike the *Companion*, this book is lavishly illustrated, often in colour, and for the most part adopts a discursive rather than dictionary format. More importantly (perhaps because of the author's Exeter background), it addresses a different set of subjects, including Escapism, the connections between Hollywood and Cultural Imperialism, and the marketing of taste, celebrity, youth, sex, and power. Urban and suburban values figure prominently. Perhaps also revealing the cultural perspective brought to the subject here, however, Canadians are almost nowhere to be seen in this book: the closest one comes is some mention of McLuhan, the *Monty Python* Mounties skit, and the *Maple Leaf Rag*. (Mary Pickford is called a "U.S." actress. And no acknowledgement is given to Canadians' contributions to the development of the phonograph, telephones and telephone culture, or script-writing.) But the book is nevertheless instructive, and several statistical tabulations of American and European social change are particularly useful. A third recent book is a *Bibliography of Studies in Comparative Canadian Literature 1930-1987* (Univ. de Sherbrooke, n.p.), ed. Antoine Sirois et al.

W.N.

In *Portraits des héros de la Nouvelle-France: Images d'un culte historique* (Hurtubise), Denis Martin presents engravings and other images of the heroes and heroines whose presence was invoked throughout the nineteenth century to instil French-Canadians with pride in their national heritage; occasionally, however, these heroes became so associated with conservatism that they were the first to be parodied, even destroyed, by the iconoclastic mood of the 1960s. Martin presents pictures of "les saints martyrs canadiens," Marie de l'Incarnation, Jeanne Mance, Kateri Tekakwitha, Marguerite Bourgeoys, Cartier, Champlain, Columbus, Montcalm, and others, and he traces processes of idealization and religious/nationalist indoctrination. While Martin draws on the treasures of the Musée du Québec, *Regard sur les collections de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Guérin) takes a look at representative samples of the holdings of that library. The book is the catalogue of an exhibition held to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the institution, and some of its finest holdings were displayed to mark the occasion, ranging from the first atlas of the Americas in Cornelius Wytfliet's *Histoire universelle des Indes orientales et occidentales* (1605), the writings of Lescarbot and Champlain, a copy of Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) to more recent works like the *Refus global* (1948) and *Les Insolences du Frère Untel* (1960). The book is beautifully illustrated. To viewers of Denis Arcand's "Jésus de Montréal," Michael P. Carroll's *Catholic Cults and Devotions: A Psychological Inquiry* (McGill-Queen's) may be a particularly timely publication. Certain to incense dogmatists, the book describes the "anal-erotic origins of the rosary" as well as exploring psychoanalytic implications of the Angelus, the

Stations of the Cross, the Stigmata and so forth. This book, too, has been aptly illustrated.

E.-M. K.

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## BRONWEN WALLACE, 1945-1989

I'M DEEPLY TOUCHED by your invitation to write something about Bronwen Wallace for *Canadian Literature*. She was a writer whose work has seemed to me to grow in grace and strength over a very short period, as though the muse knew there was no time to be wasted in learning the trade.

I did not know Bronwen personally. The two or three times we met at meetings of the League of Canadian Poets never resulted in a serious or sustained conversation. I only felt I began to know her when I read her work during the preparations for a third edition of *15 Canadian Poets Plus 5*, which Oxford and I had determined to make into *15 Canadian Poets Times 2*. I was so impressed with what I read, I very quickly decided she should be included in the revised anthology, both for the uniqueness of her voice and the unusually moving and uplifting content of her poems.

I should say, openly, that I found very little support for the inclusion of Bronwen's work. Not many poets had read her carefully. Others thought she was minor. Academics were no better informed or enthusiastic. Among the women poets, she had a good deal of impact, both as a writer and as a person. Mary di Michele and Lorna Crozier both spoke highly of Bronwen and her work. They knew her well and had corresponded with her. In fact, either of them would be more suitable candidates for writing a memoir about this remarkable woman.

The situation of Bronwen's work was not unlike that of Pat Lowther, who died shortly after I had encouraged Oxford University Press to publish her *Stone Diary*. Pat had written wonderful poems, revealing a unique political awareness and a profoundly lyrical gift. Several major poets actively tried to dissuade me from putting her work in the second revision of the anthology. Looking back at this book, as it has evolved over the years, I still believe that Pat Lowther is one of the strongest voices we have produced. And now she is joined, in poetic gifts too soon terminated, by Bronwen Wallace.

What I have to say about Bronwen's poetry is already there in the notes at the end of *15*

*Canadian Poets Times 2* and much of it has been elaborated by Dennis Lee in his long and generous tribute in the *Globe and Mail*. I called Bronwen "an archeologist of the emotions" and tried to draw attention to her struggle to make our 'hidden lives' surface. The task required, above all, a return to narrative, a capturing and remaking of narrative techniques to accommodate the peculiarities of languaging in the world of women, where individual anecdote erupts from and is subsumed into the collective experience of women, as mothers, lovers, wives, workers. Like Wordsworth, she believed in the mysteriousness of the commonplace — in other words, that nothing is ordinary, if you take the time to examine it tenderly.

As keeper of the stories, Bronwen avails herself of the old oral techniques of digression, counterpoint, refusing the linear road of yellow bricks and taking, instead, the necessarily circuitous route to the heart. She learned from Purdy, from her friends around the kitchen table; what she made, finally, was her own and it was very good. I am very grateful to her for her legacy of poems and goodwill, for her stubborn particulars, and for her grace.

GARY GEDDES

## L. J. PETER, 1919-1990

LAURENCE PETER, whose name became a watchword of modern society when he and Raymond Hull wrote *The Peter Principle* in 1969, died in California on Friday, 12 January 1990. "The Peter Principle" itself simply asserted that "in a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence"; and this attempt to explain "why things go wrong" was so readily applicable to contemporary institutions (schools were Peter's favourite examples, but government and company bureaucracies ran close behind) that people rapidly fell in love with the phrase. It had the added attraction of seeming to explain why *other people's incompetence* explained North America's prodigious capacity for snafu — without necessarily requiring any hypercritical self-awareness. This irony is one that Peter must have savoured. For while he was critical of social pretension (*Will People Never Learn?* asked one of his subsequent titles), he also had a large capacity for tolerance and amusement.

Asking much of others, he gave much in return, commanding attention quietly. He listened with sensitive ears to the uncertainties and aspirations of the young to whom he de-

voted so much of his life. Born in Vancouver in 1919, he taught in the British Columbia school system for several years before going on to study educational theory, to apply his ideas about "competencies in teaching" within the California system, and to win fame as a humourist and social commentator. I was lucky enough, when I was twelve years old, to have had him as a teacher, and in my memory he stands out — not just because he was a big man, but because he was large of mind and heart. He was also an example of someone who knew that support mattered more than dismissal. He knew that bureaucracies and bureaucratic catches could be resisted simply by refusing their authority over his own actions. And by his own actions in the classroom — he would encourage quality in part by rejecting the arbitrariness of numerical and social enclosures — he demonstrated that *any* restriction was just another bureaucracy to be overcome.

We corresponded, in later years, though we never met again. In the mid-1980s, until a stroke debilitated him, he was still working on several books. Nothing, I think, ever quenched his passion for common sense or his acutely self-aware irony. (His business card listed his occupation as "Hierarchologist.") Every letter contained a jocular enclosure: a comic verse, a quip, an unusual newspaper clipping, a membership card for a Competence Society — which would not only satirize people's infatuation with membership cards but also expose the terrible desire for ratification that leads so many people in one desperate leap from insecurity into authoritarianism.

But his letters always ended with the one word "Peace." This single word spoke the gentleness that always mattered more to him than power, or wit. He was much, much more than an antic comic. While I regret he was so little honoured by his native country, I celebrate the freedom he stood for: a freedom of the imagination, a freedom from the small enclosures and limited systems of petty minds. As I write these words, I can also imagine his eyes smiling at them, disputing the rhetorical gesture they make, and hear him seeking a compatible peace through the saving grace of humour.

I admired the man. I still do.  
Peace, Laurence.

W. H. NEW

\*\*\* PATRICIA E. ROY, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants 1858-1914*. Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$37.95. The hostility to Asian peoples was a malady that affected the social and political life of British Columbia for almost a century, from the time the first Chinese arrived in flight from the dying California gold rush in 1858 to the decades after World War II when prejudices dwindled and immigration laws were gradually amended to remove all discrimination based on race. In *A White Man's Province* Patricia Roy deals with the first part of this period, from 1858 to 1914; the remaining years, during which discrimination reached its peak when the Japanese were expelled from the coast in 1941, will presumably be the subject of the sequel which she proposes. As her subtitle suggests, Professor Roy is concerned principally with the political repercussions of the "oriental question." True, she examines the attitudes of the general population towards Chinese and Japanese, and particularly those of the labour movement, since much of the agitation against Chinese first and Japanese later rose out of an expressed need to safeguard the wages of white men against competition from "cheap Oriental labour." This, of course, was a period before labour had a powerful organization to express its desires politically; the CCF did not appear in British Columbia until the 1930's. The few labour representatives elected to the provincial legislature usually gave their votes to whichever major faction or party would bring in laws protecting or favouring the workers. But for the most part labour depended on the favour of the MLAs who belonged to the Tories or the Liberals, and the MLAs in turn were conscious of the importance of the labour vote. Throughout this period the exclusion of Oriental workers was the most insistent and consistent labour demand, and regardless of party the politicians of the province with varying degrees of enthusiasm expressed their opposition to the entry of Chinese, Japanese and later Sikhs. In this way they were often at odds with the federal government, for the fears aroused by the presence of Asians were not so strong in other parts of Canada where few of them appeared. But, since it was a time when agitations over provincial rights were fashionable, to be at odds with Ottawa was one way to popularity. As a study of the motivations of politicians and their general elevation of expediency over principle, *A White Man's Province* is a dismal book, but a true one.

G.W.

\*\*\*\* HARRY ROBINSON, *Write It On Your Heart: The Epic World of an Okanagan Storyteller*, comp. and ed. Wendy Wickwire. Talon/Theytus, \$18.95. As ethnographer Wendy Wickwire explains, this publication has the relatively rare distinction of putting into print Native stories not translated but told at the source in *English*. From over a hundred stories told over twelve years by Robinson, a Similkameen rancher (d. February 1990 at age 89), Wickwire has here transcribed twenty-three. With only the most minimal of editing, Wickwire maintains all of Robinson's repetitions, gaps, digressions, and abrupt shifts of faithful transcription. She further suggests the speaking voice by setting the stories in lines whose varying indentations reflect a rhythm of pause and tonal variation. This format, increasingly evident in response to Dell Hymes' investigations of performance and oral forms, works very effectively here. Robinson's stories, with their non-standard syntax and usage, could be difficult reading if they were set in blocks justified right and left. But setting them in relatively short lines, with generous use of space, encourages a slow, lingering reading and an attentive listening. Robinson's subjects include traditional creation stories, a one-page anecdote which succinctly characterizes the exploitive fur-trader, and a long, circling meditation on God's presence among the people and his prophecy of the coming of the white man. "Epic" is not too grand a word to describe the scope and impact of Robinson's enthusiasm, but it should not be taken to imply an aura of antiquity. By incorporating modern references, community geography, and contemporary analogies, the storyteller shows great skill in adapting and shifting his material to keep it vital. "So, I didn't see that," he summarizes near the end of one short account of stickgame players, "but I heard in the stories, / and whoever, some of the people, / they seen that / and they tell the stories about them." Certainly these remarkable stories, like some people, "got a power." L.R.

\*\*\* MAXIMILIEN BRUGGMAN, *Indians of the Northwest Coast*. Text by Peter R. Gerber, trans. Barbara Fritzemeier. Facts on File, US\$45.00 The English-language version of *Indianer der Nordwestküste*, originally published in Switzerland in 1987, assembles over 220 glittering photographs of heavily mossed nurse-logs and curving driftwood beaches, decomposing totem poles and restored masks in museums. The text, although obviously introductory, is sufficiently broad-ranging to go beyond argillite jewellery and traditional diet to

include elementary discussions of the kinship system, the Indian Act, and land claims. That Bruggmann's camera turns from seascapes and artefacts to show contemporary natives at school, or at work logging and fishing, distinguishes it from many other glossy gift books on the subject. The book's 'epilogue' extends the sense of cultural vitality, and of the extensive remaking of traditional forms, with an album of biographies, and fine reproductions of the works of eleven younger native artists.

L.R.

\*\* JOAN CRATE, *Breathing Water*. NeWest, \$22.95; pa. \$12.95. Dione, Joan Crate's first-person narrator, has a compulsion to tell, or think, stories. A single glimpsed detail of dress, or appearance, will set her mind to imagining a person's life story. That story may be shaped by, or will run into, the formula of television's matinee soap operas. And always close at hand lies the temptation, and the challenge to destroy the illusion, of the "vague, yet pretty" sex of a paperback *Confessions of Love* series. Most significantly, permeating Dione's consciousness and giving a startling counter-resonance to all her stories, are the Northwest Coast Native legends told to her by her father. Joan Crate has written a knotted and gangly novel about a young mother both drowning and breathing water. Dione fears being "absorbed" by house and husband. She is also one of the salmon people, fighting the currents that shape the role of housewife, continually transforming herself. Dione's mind is so knotted in a tangle of multiplying adjectives and overlapping similes, that I found it difficult to detect the intricately expanding verbal resonances I found so revealing in Crate's first collection of poems, *Pale As Real Ladies*. Similarly, amidst Dione's "rag-[ing], louder, higher than the sizzling humming," I missed the line of biographical narrative (of narrator, of Pauline Johnson) in the serial poem. "Other stories interfere. There are too many stories." But as an exploration of the turmoil of a contemporary woman, caught between cultures (Greek and Native especially) and between personal and social conceptions of her role, *Breathing Water* is rewarding reading, stylistically ambitious, willing to risk the fecundity of its own imagination. And somewhere amongst the daydreams, the motorcycle fantasies, the follies of Raven, and the tedium of domestic manual, the sheer necessity of story wins out. Dione must tell to her son the story which both gathers up the past and gives the storyteller a name. As she says about her own father, "If only he'd tell them a story, . . . then they'd understand." L.R.

## LAST PAGE

ABORIGINALITY AND multiculturalism are not Canadian preserves. Recent Australian commentary has discovered not only how important such issues are in current cultural contexts but also how radically they call for revisions of cultural history. Such commentaries range from the dense and scholarly to the pictorial and widely accessible. While the comments on multiculturalism derive frequently from migrant writers themselves, many recent books on aboriginality speak about their subject from the outside, which for some readers calls into question the political validity of the enterprise itself. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between works which describe a history, and works which articulate a way of looking at life which challenges the very processes of descriptive history. It is also important to recognize that both kinds of book form can be valuable, and that distinguishing between the two does not denigrate either one; rather, it asks that the reader not confuse the one with the other.

Adam Kendon's *Sign Languages of Aboriginal Australia* (Cambridge, n.p.) is a dense scholarly description of signing patterns; it is a codification of signifying gestures among the many aboriginal peoples of Australia. But it is also a history, in part a history of white misapprehensions about sign-writing. (Some early observers thought that the aboriginal petroglyphs indicated that the people had at an even earlier time been "converted" to freemasonry.) The book's stance and tone differ markedly from *Australia: Beyond the Dreamtime* (Facts on File, \$24.95), ed. Thomas Keneally et al., the well-illustrated text from a popular BBC television series. While aborigines constitute one of the subjects of this book, they constitute only one among many others (the Eureka Stockade, the Kelly gang, shearing, Gallipoli, Crocodile Dundee: called "a pure myth" of self) that are singled out as signs of a developing collective Australian history, nature, and attitude. The sense here of what a sign is, how it works, and what it works to do, all differ from Kendon's analysis of similar subjects.

Mediating between these works are several others. *A Sense of Exile* (Univ. of Western Australia, n.p.), ed. Bruce Bennett, is a collection of symposium essays on various topics (including Singapore, Malaysia, and Utopia) which together probe the reasons for the prevalence of certain cultural attitudes in colonial societies. The canonical preference for colonial romance, for example, reiterates the need to validate illusion, perhaps especially an illusion of power and

superiority in the face of the realities of uncertainty and unfamiliarity. For related, though not identical, reasons, ideological romance is one of the temptations of current "migrant writing" also, as is revealed in the anthology of multicultural women's writing collected by Sneja Gunew and Jan Mahyuddin, *Beyond the Echo* (Univ. of Queensland Press, \$14.95). The paradigms which these writings employ call attention to difference and to absence; they frequently assert the force of a mother figure (who is lost or absent, whose absence represents a break in a "natural" process of communication), the force of the environment (which questions the nature of "familiarity"), and the force of language and narrative form. (When some of these works use the formula "Tell me a fable," they are not being conventionally "primitive," but rather calling into question the "normative" values conventionally embodied in received narrative patterns, and therefore questioning the system that makes migrant writers — and women — marginal in the society that has "received" these "norms.")

Given these developments, it is surprising to find that *Australian Cultural History* (Cambridge, n.p.), ed. S. L. Goldberg and F. B. Smith, addresses the topic of aboriginality so little, and that the *Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, ed. Laurie Hergenhan, addresses the subject of multiculturalism more in passing than directly. Yet both of these are good books, earnest attempts to deal with the biases of previous books and previous apprehensions about Australian culture, and they are not unaware that whatever they do will also construct a version of reality, a way of seeing. In many respects, both are of interest as much for their categories of investigation as for the individual judgments within these categories. Goldberg and Smith's book contains essays on egalitarianism, Anglicanism, state schools, wealth, physiology, exhibitions and festivals, ballet, patronage. Hergenhan's book contains essays on literary genres, bibliography, various categories of non-fiction, aboriginality, and differences between oral and written notions of culture. Hergenhan is particularly concerned to extend the boundaries of what conventionally has been described as "literature" in Australia; Goldberg and Smith are more directly concerned with the institutions through which such conventions get established.

Two important books directly address several of the ways in which literary conventions intersect with aboriginality. J. J. Healy's *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, an account of ways in which aborigines are depicted in Australian literature, first appeared in 1978;

newly released in a second, revised edition (Univ. of Queensland Press, n.p.), it contains one new chapter, and a new introduction, reflecting on changes since 1978 in social perceptions of the aboriginal peoples in Australia and developments in literary representations of them. Adam Shoemaker's *Black Words White Page* (Univ. of Queensland Press, n.p.) surveys writings by aborigines, focusing primarily on the period since 1929, when David Unaipon wrote *Native Legends*. That Shoemaker's book has been questioned in Australia by aboriginal reviewers (much in the way Lenore Keeshig-Tobias has questioned the authenticity of the way white writers represent — and thus contrive to "speak for" — native peoples in Canada) indicates the political volatility of this subject. Both books, however, display a conscientious determination to frame a way of questioning the critical status quo.

Writing of several white literary versions of the aborigine — as primitive, as embodiment of energy, as psychic "disturbance," as mythic past — Healy observes how the subject of aboriginality derives in some respects from an interest in self. The character of the "other" in this sense constitutes a validation of self rather than a questioning of it, reiterating the socio-political satisfaction that permeates colonial romances. But later on, Healy adds, "The aborigine moved as theme from the status of soliloquy to that of public debate." Noting that the first edition of his text was written more or less "innocent" of theory, he underlines that the second edition does not attempt to hide this form of political naïveté; though more self-conscious, the text of the second edition remains that of a "white frontier. . . It bleeds its doubts, still, in a receding field of power, closed off increasingly, it seems, from the pressures and suspicions of the present."

Shoemaker at some points challenges Healy (and Keneally), but at others he reiterates their historical descriptions — of a society that was apparently willing to accept sentimentality and idealization as realism, and to use the stereotypes of the savage, malicious witch-doctor and the comic simpleton primitive as though they were politically objective judgments. After a useful history of the emergence of a "fourth world" consciousness in Australia (Shoemaker attributes the term to the Canadian George Manuel in 1975), the author goes on to emphasize how an appreciation of aboriginal writing requires a sense of social context. A society that treats the aboriginal first as an object and

then as a creative subject has still to be distinguished, Shoemaker writes, from a society that treats aboriginals as men and women. A people that numbered 300,000 in 1788 and only 60,000 in 1930 has to be aware of the impact of European disease and genocide. Or in specific textual terms, the paradox of Mudrooroo Narogin (Colin Johnson) having to draw on white histories of the Tasmanians in order to write his novel about their extinction, *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, makes his work political by context as well as in explicit intent. Relatedly, the literary subject of rape in the writings of Archie Weller has to be read in association with a cultural concern about the "wanton destruction of nature." And a poetry or drama of propaganda (the term itself is a judgment rooted in a eurocentric aesthetics) — as in the writings of Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Kevin Gilbert, Jack Davis, Lionel Fogarty, Maureen Watson, and others — has to be read not as European lyric but *against* the implications both of the conventional values and the conventional shapes of the genre. A traditional literature that is available to readers through an anthropologist's translations is susceptible to a variety of cultural distortions, not the least those involving verbal form. So with contemporary writings, when they are available in what looks like the same language but is in fact arguing against many of the covert presumptions that language historically encodes.

Paddy Roe's *Gularabulu*, ed. Stephen Muecke (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, \$12.95), exemplifies many of these tensions and contradictions. It's a collection of stories from West Kimberley, by an aboriginal writer, edited by a European-Australian. Muecke writes that "Presenting the stories as a narrative art is a way of justifying a writing which tries to imitate the spoken word." The form the language takes therefore explicitly constitutes part of its "meaning." Roe tells three kinds of story: "Trustori" (legends), "Devil stori" (tales of social anomalies), and "Dugaregara" (tales of law and ceremony). But these are contemporary stories, about violence in current society and methods of resolving problems. The difference is that these categories are not the terms of historical description, imposed from outside the culture; they derive from within it. They are a way, in other words, of reading the present world through an alternative (and implicitly revisionary) structure of values.

W.N.

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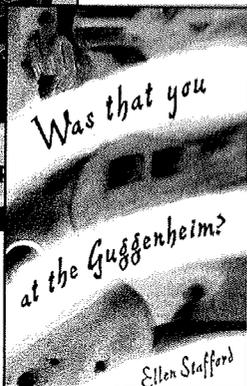
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