

**Dialogism, Cultural Narratology,  
and Contemporary Canadian Novels in English**

by

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## Abstract

In "Dialogism, Cultural Narratology, and Contemporary Canadian Novels in English," I develop a methodological framework that combines Mikhail M. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism with the idea of a cultural narratology to read for ideological signification in narrative structures. Narrative forms, I argue, are not ideal and timeless but socially and historically determined. In this dissertation, I explore how they can contribute to or impede a text's challenge to hegemonic discourses and social injustices. In particular, I focus on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to examine the multiplicity and interrelation of voices in narrative texts. Because voices and discourses always operate within relations of power, I understand struggle and conflict not as obstacles to but as conditions of dialogic relations. In my readings of selected contemporary Canadian novels in English, I argue that these texts challenge dominant discourses from positions of difference and resistance and inscribe previously oppressed and silenced voices through dialogic relations. As a result, the novels question the idea of an homogeneous Canadian culture.

After establishing the theoretical context for this study, which includes the notion of resistance literature and the principles of cultural narratology, I introduce Bakhtin's main ideas on dialogism and situate my own approach to dialogism in a selective overview of recent Bakhtin criticism. The remaining chapters are devoted to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon*

*Cafe*, Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*, Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, and Margaret Sweatman's *Fox*. I conclude by indicating further directions for research that could employ the methodological framework of dialogism and cultural narratology.



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## Chapter One

### Dialogism, Cultural Narratology, and Contemporary Canadian Novels:

#### What's the Point?

The study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract "formal" approach and an equally abstract "ideological" approach. Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon--social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 259)

The seemingly offhand but very serious question "what's the point?" which according to Mieke Bal should continually be asked of all academic work (1990, 729), is the kind of ongoing self-criticism that has guided this project since its early stages; sometimes the question slowed me down and other times it was revitalizing. My desire to bring together dialogism, narratology, and Canadian novels comes from my belief that complex relationships exist between Canadian culture and literature which deserve exploration. Culture does not merely function as background to a novel, and by the same token, as Edward Said has pointed out, "novels are not reducible to a sociological current and cannot be done justice to aesthetically, culturally, and politically as subsidiary forms of

class, ideology, or interest" (1993, 73).<sup>1</sup> Rather, novels themselves contribute significantly to cultural attitudes and references and thus help to consolidate social visions or encourage resistance. Literary texts are cultural practices that defy the separation of an isolated cultural sphere "believed to be freely and unconditionally available to weightless theoretical speculation and investigation" from a political sphere "where the real struggle between interests is supposed to occur" (57).

Among the most common characteristics that many Canadians like to ascribe to themselves and their culture are a belief in equality, support for diversity, compassion, tolerance, inclusiveness, non-violence, common sense, and moderation.<sup>2</sup> And yet, articles in daily newspapers, victims' testimonies, personal experiences, government task forces and commissions, and academic studies show that discrimination is alive and well in Canadian society. Sexism, racism, and homophobia are only three of the ideologies that result in discriminatory practices in social arenas such as education, employment, health

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<sup>1</sup> In *Culture and Imperialism* Said, in an exemplary manner, sets out to examine "how the processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and--by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts--were manifested at another very significant level, that of the national culture, which we have tended to sanitize as a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments, free from worldly affiliations" (1993, 12-13).

<sup>2</sup> Cecil Foster refers to the report of the Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, also known as the Spicer Commission, as a source of these Canadian self-characterizations (1991, 17). See also "The Spirit of Canada" (1995), Neil Bissoondath (1995), and Anthony Wilson-Smith (1995, 10, 15).

care, media, justice, immigration, the arts, and politics.<sup>3</sup> Northrop Frye's notion of "a peaceable kingdom" seems untenable in the face of Canada's long history of discrimination (1971, 249).<sup>4</sup> The conflict between the ideology of democratic liberalism and discriminatory ideologies in the belief systems of the dominant culture can best be described as an ideology of "democratic discrimination."<sup>5</sup> Although the need to ensure equality in a pluralistic society is voiced repeatedly, privileged individuals and institutions are too often more interested in maintaining their status quo than in bringing about changes in the social, economic, and political order, which prevents others, for example people of colour, women, gays, and lesbians, from full access to the rights and privileges of society.

Many contemporary Canadian novels call into question the idea of a "benign Canada" as a country without a history of oppression, violence, or

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term ideology descriptively for shared attitudes, values, assumptions, and ideas. Ideologies are situated in discursive fields in which social powers conflict and collide. I do not restrict the use of ideology pejoratively to the activities of a dominant social power or to covert means of oppression and exploitation, although I acknowledge that ideologies can distort or conceal relations of power within society. Following Louis Althusser, I use ideology to describe signifying practices that constitute human beings as social subjects and produce lived relations between them and the world (Eagleton 1991, 18, 28-31).

<sup>4</sup> Too many examples come to mind: genocidal practices against Aboriginal peoples, the Chinese "head tax," restriction of continuous passage for South Asians to Canada, incarceration of Japanese Canadians during World War II, reluctance to allow Jews to seek refuge during the 1930s and 40s, restrictive immigration policies for non-whites, relocation of Inuit to the High Arctic, abuse of children, and violence against women.

<sup>5</sup> I echo here the words of Frances Henry and Carol Tator in "The Ideology of Racism--'Democratic Racism'" (1994); they analyse the concept of "democratic racism" as permitting the maintenance of two apparently conflicting ideologies: an ideology of democratic liberalism and a racist ideology. I believe that their concept would be helpful in discussions of other ideologies of discrimination as well.

discrimination (Mukherjee 1995b, 438), and expose the contradictory nature of ideologies such as democratic racism. They give voice to those previously silenced and resituate those cast as outsiders, thereby exposing the myth of an innocent nation and challenging its hegemonic centre.<sup>6</sup> In the process of inscribing these voices, Canadian writers continually imagine and re-imagine Canada in their texts. Similarly, every time literary critics address Canadian literature they imply a construction of a nation called Canada (Lecker 1995, 235). I propose that Canada may be most usefully understood at this time "through the ways in which it is represented, and on the assumption that all representation is formation" (Knowles 1995, 18); we need to study "the significances and material effects of a potentially infinite ongoing series of representations, representations that each serve particular interests, that contest with one another for a kind of discursive sovereignty, and that cumulatively come to function in the place of an ever-retreating 'in-itself'" (18).

Not only am I interested, however, in the kinds of voices constituted and the constructions of Canada inscribed in these novels, but I also want to examine the unspoken assumptions in the way voices are constituted and

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<sup>6</sup> Following Antonio Gramsci, I use the term hegemony to describe "the set of values and beliefs through which the ruling class exercises its power over the masses" (Cavell 1993, 344); it is a dynamic process with degrees of completion because the hegemonic group must continually make compromises in its attempt to incorporate ever more elements of society. Hegemony does not simply refer to visible class power but describes an intricate interlocking of coercion and consent embodied in social, political, and cultural forces. As a result, in practice hegemony can never be singular; its internal structures are highly complex and include concepts of counter-hegemony (Williams 1977, 112-13).

interrelated in narrative texts. Is there a particular kind of formal experimentation signalled in contemporary Canadian novels that exposes cultural hegemonies, or are there narrative strategies that challenge the limitation of the generic codes of the novel? How can these formal devices contribute to or impede the text's challenge to social hegemony and injustices? I propose that the concept of dialogism can be instrumental in answering these questions. The term dialogism is used by the Russian cultural and literary theorist and critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) in his discussions of language and discourse in literature. His work, which was not published until the early sixties--Bakhtin himself being arrested during the Stalinist years and later forced into invisibility--has achieved remarkable popularity over the last twenty years, which has led his biographers to assert that "Bakhtin is emerging as one of the major thinkers of the twentieth century" (Clark and Holquist 1984, vii).

Bakhtin describes dialogism as the organizational principle of the polyphonic novel in which a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" are "juxtaposed contrapuntally" (1984a, 6, 40). In this interplay of voices no single monologic voice is allowed to unify or dominate; not even the narrator's views can constitute an ultimate authority. Working with Bakhtin's concepts, many critics have recognized that dialogism is not only the organizational principle of polyphony in the novel but that it also "embraces," in Anne Herrmann's words, "an ideological interrogation of literary practices" (1989, 4). A polyphonically conceived fictional world is itself a content, a textuality

constituted by ideological practices (O'Neal 1983, 285; Thibault 1984, 90). To treat dialogism only as a literary device would diminish and depoliticize Bakhtin's approach (Grace 1987, 133). However, only a few steps have been taken towards a cultural criticism that uses dialogism to consider formal practices within social contexts.<sup>7</sup> I believe that cultural narratology enables us to recognize that the narrative form is "far from being a mere neutral, value-free, transparent container" (O'Neill 1994, 123) and that dialogic relations in narrative structures are ideologically informed.

Although I believe that dialogism provides an effective methodological tool for the examination of ideological signification in narrative structures, I am not suggesting that every novel with a polyphonic narrative is necessarily ideologically subversive or that novels lacking such textual features are ideologically conservative. Many critics examining Bakhtin's writings have reminded their readers that concepts such as dialogism or carnival are not inherently subversive, liberating, or benevolent.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in their discussion of Canadian novels, Sylvia Söderlind and Glenn Deer have both come to the

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<sup>7</sup> In the context of Canadian literature, note the work of Barbara Godard (1984/85, 1987, 1990a/b), Sherrill E. Grace (1987, 1990), Richard Cavell (1987), Linda Hutcheon (1988), Martin Kuester (1992), Robin Howells (1993), and Penny van Toorn (1995). Although not dealing with Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Lorna Irvine (1986) and Coral Ann Howells and Lynette Hunter (1991) focus on the connection between narrative strategies and socio-historical context. See Jeanne Delbaere (1990) for essays that discuss multiplicity, polyphony, and dialogism in Canadian fiction; however, these essays do not provide much contextualization.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Caryl Emerson (1988, 514), Michael André Bernstein (1989, 199), David K. Danow (1991, 132), and Michael Gardiner (1992, 182). For a more detailed discussion of this aspect see Chapter Two (50-51).



conclusion that what is rhetorically subversive is not always politically subversive or critical of authority.<sup>9</sup> The ideological propensity of narrative, rhetorical, or linguistic devices depends on the social and cultural practices in which they are embedded. In Susan Stanford Friedman's words (1989, 180), narrative is "potentially polyvocal and polymorphous" and its meanings are therefore defined not by any intrinsic qualities but by its social uses (Homans 1994, 8; Booth 1989, 75). Moreover, dialogism has often been used as a means to explore the peaceful and harmonious interaction of voices. As a result, the elements of struggle, conflict, and power dynamics have been neglected. Feminist critics in particular have suggested recently, however, that one of the greatest strengths of the concept of dialogism lies in its potential to articulate resistance through a contextualized investigation of power relations.

My emphasis on constructions or re-imaginings of Canada implies a suspicion of what seems to be or presents itself as transparent or natural; to me, a gendered and racialized vision of Canada that works to privilege dominant groups, especially those constituted as white, middle-class, male, and

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<sup>9</sup> Söderlind summarizes that "[t]he political force of all the novels I've studied ... puts into question the analogy between literary and political radicalism.... The correlation in Deleuze and Guattari's theories between 'minor literatures' and ideological subversion results, I would argue, from an a priori valorization of a certain aesthetics and its subsequent translation/perversion into the realm of politics, a kind of category mistake or wishful thinking which, it seems, every generation insists on repeating" (1991, 229). Deer observes that "[t]he relationship between a novel's propositions concerning authority and its form is not simply complementary" (1994, 133). See also on other literatures, Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman (1993a, xx) and Loretta Todd (1992, 76).

heterosexual, is not self-explanatory--it is a socio-historical construction.<sup>10</sup> I believe that we do not have access to an unmediated, objective reality, in other words, that reality is not found but invented. While I do not deny the existence of an ontological world, I believe that we cannot perceive anything that lies outside our own experience. As a result, we do not mirror "the" reality but construct models or versions of it. Because I understand reality as a subject-dependent construction, the question of what Canada "really" is becomes irrelevant. From an epistemological perspective, I want to inquire instead what we know about Canada and how we know it. Only through the analysis and negotiation of these constructions, their values, norms, and truths can we create levels of consensus that will allow us to interact socially; to participate in this process is everyone's responsibility. In other words, to think in terms of constructions does not lead to passivity, helplessness, or the removal of historical agency; on the contrary, it requires commitment and ongoing negotiation. What is crucial for my argument is that these constructions are always open-ended and provisional. Hence, they can be influenced, renegotiated, and changed. A rejection of essentialist notions about Canada allows us to challenge the hegemonic construction that has gained currency because of the power relations in which it operates.

Michel Foucault's concept of discursive formation is helpful to understand

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<sup>10</sup> The following theoretical thoughts on constructions have been developed together with my colleagues Matt James and Paddy Rodney, see Helms, James and Rodney (1996). I cannot elaborate here on the ideas of constructivism; for useful introductions, see Paul Watzlawick (1984), Henry D. Herring (1985), Egon C. Guba and Yvonne S. Lincoln (1989), Siegfried J. Schmidt (1992), and Thomas A. Schwandt (1994).

how constructions operate within fields of power relations.<sup>11</sup> Instead of treating Canada as a pre-existing form of continuity, we must show that our notions of Canada "do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized" (1972, 25). We must try "to tear away from them their virtual self-evidence, and to free the problems that they pose.... We must recognize that they may not, in the last resort, be what they seem at first sight" (26). To approach Canada as a socio-historical construction enables us to think of it as a discursive formation, that is, a system of dispersion among statements, or in other words, a regularity among objects, types of statements, concepts, or thematic choices (38). Foucault also reminds us, however, that discourse not only "transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (1978, 101). An understanding of constructions within power relations thus also prepares the way for their renegotiation. With this approach I hope to contribute to a de-essentializing of Canada and an understanding of it as socially constructed.

In addition, I understand all dimensions that contribute to social and

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<sup>11</sup> See Foucault's explanation of power as a complex strategical situation in a particular society: "power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies" (1978, 92-93).

discursive positions such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, as socially constructed, contested, and contingent (Scott 1992, 36).<sup>12</sup> These dimensions are thus neither additive analytical categories nor fixed entities; rather, they may be more usefully conceptualized as "interlocking systems of oppression" (Billson 1991, 53), as "intersections of ... various systemic networks" (Mohanty 1991, 13), or as "constructive social and cultural relations of ruling" (Bannerji 1993a, xxii).<sup>13</sup> Recognizing the simultaneity of these relations in critical analyses and the need to situate them in specific socio-historical contexts allows for a reconceptualization of power, domination, and resistance.<sup>14</sup>

My interest in cultural criticism and in novels that expose cultural hegemony and my opposition to neocolonialist relations have been informed by postcolonial criticisms. While its relations to its colonizer Britain have been described as postcolonial, Canada plays a double role as an "invader-settler colony" (Brydon 1995, 2), because "it has also been an agent of that [imperial] power in the control it has exercised over populations within Canada's

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<sup>12</sup> See also Joan W. Scott (1986, 1988), Diana Fuss (1989), Judith Butler (1990), and Donna J. Haraway (1991). On the notion of race, see in particular Henry Louis Gates, Jr. who describes it as an arbitrary construct (1985, 6), Theo Goldberg who speaks of a "fluid, fragile, and more or less vacuous concept" (1993, 80-81), and Gunew who defines race as a "social formation" (1993, 9). See also the essays in Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (1994) which are informed by questions of race in nonessentialist understandings of identity.

<sup>13</sup> See also Roxanna Ng (1993, 188), Butler (1990, 10), Wolfgang Karrer and Hartmut Lutz (1990, 13), and Gregory (1994, 27-28).

<sup>14</sup> However, it should be clear that in focusing on these dimensions I am neglecting many others such as age, religion, able-bodiedness etc. that situate a subject. Butler explores the political impetus that can be derived from "the exasperated 'etc.'" and the invariable failure to provide a complete representation of subject positions (1990, 143).

boundaries" (Bennett 1993/94, 175). Various examples come to mind: the internal colonization of Native peoples, regional colonialism (for instance *vis-à-vis* Québec and the north), differential treatment of ethnic and racial minorities. The double role of Canada, and of the "Second World" in general (Lawson 1991, Slemon 1990), has led to an exclusion of these literatures from studies of anti-colonialist practice because anti-colonialist resistance has often been seen as synonymous with Third and Fourth World writing (Slemon 1990, 32-33; Lawson 1995, 22).<sup>15</sup> While I do not want to elide the differences between experiences of colonialism in Canada and countries of the Third and Fourth World (Mukherjee 1990, 2), I agree with the argument that we need to discard simple binaries--such as colonizer/colonized, Europe/its Others, First/Third World, vocal/silent--at the heart of some postcolonial criticism in order to examine the double role and ambivalence of the middle ground, for example, in the literatures of Canada (Slemon 1990, 34; Mukherjee 1990, 7; Brydon and Tiffin 1993, 150-51). In other

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<sup>15</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explain that the term "Third World literature" has been one of the suggestions for a politically and theoretically more appropriate term than "Commonwealth literature," but they see it as "limited and pejorative" (1989, 23; Tiffin 1983, 25). The term has been used to refer to the literatures of developing countries in Africa, South-East Asia, and sometimes the Caribbean which have experienced the effects of colonization (Slemon 1987, 10). The term is most commonly used in opposition to imperial cultures of the First World such as Great Britain, Japan, and the United States, although critics disagree whether U.S. literatures should also be considered postcolonial. Alan Lawson proposes the term "Second World" to refer to "more or less that part of colonial space occupied by the postimperial, so-called settler colonies" which are otherwise left out of the First/Third World opposition in which Third World and postcolonial are often collapsed into each other (1995, 21). This category usually includes Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Lawson 1991, 67). Aware of the political and discursive difficulties of the term, Lawson describes the Second World as "a polemical reading position that finds a peculiar power in the dynamic *relation between* those apparently antagonistic, static, aggressive, disjunctive--even dis/abling--binaries with which we have inscribed our cultural condition" (1991, 68).

words, we need to engage with the problems that come with the "confused, contradictory, and deeply *ambivalent* position within the circulations of colonialist power and anticolonialist affect" of invader-settler cultures (Slemon 1995, 283). For the purposes of this project I use postcolonialism as a provisional, locally situated, and historically grounded critical strategy to read for and think through a transformative politics in those contemporary Canadian novels that challenge the consequences of colonialism and imagine non-repressive alternatives (Brydon 1995, 10).

The forms of dialogic relations I will examine more closely are informed by the desire for such a transformative politics. Ultimately, I believe that the novels are not so much interested in the temporary, authorized transgressions found in parody but in a permanent destruction of hegemony (Hutcheon 1989, 99). I read these novels, therefore, as resistance literature that, as Barbara Harlow has explained, "calls attention to itself, and to literature in general, as a political and politicized activity" (1987, 28). According to Harlow, resistance writing sees itself "involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production," of which colonialism is only one example (28-29), but as Stephen Slemon points out, resistance is not something that is simply "there" and easily accessible in a text (1990, 36). To get at resistance requires a carefully theorized strategy such as dialogism which reminds us that resistance is produced and reproduced through readers who are situated in their own specific contexts. Resistance is always constructed through multiple

ideological relations; in other words it is always mediated.

Moreover, it is crucial to note that resistance literature is not merely reactive. Peter Hitchcock in *Dialogics of the Oppressed* argues that multiple voicings and dialogism fracture the monolithic and monologic discourse of power and call into question what he refers to as "the 'logic' of omnisubjection" (1993, xvi).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Godard has shown that we do not have to follow certain Foucauldian critics in their focus on the strategies of exclusion and containment which enable hegemonic discourses to consolidate their power in the face of their own internal tensions and contradictions; instead, we can shift the focus to these internal tensions and examine how they enable the elaboration of new discursive formations (Godard 1990b, 195). Dialogism allows us to theorize resistance not as a counter-effect to networks of power but from a position of struggle, radical action, and change within power relations. The counter-discourse of dialogic relations moves beyond opposition to or reversal of positions and explores how discourses are displaced and destabilized and how they are simultaneously connected and disassociated.<sup>17</sup> As Godard summarizes it, the dialogic "establishes a theory of a transformative practice

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<sup>16</sup> For reconceptualizations of resistance, see also Slemon (1990, 36) and Laurie Finke (1992, 14).

<sup>17</sup> Counter-discourse situates itself as "other" to a dominant discourse that tries to exclude heterogeneous voices. See Richard Terdiman (1985, 25-81) and also Helen Tiffin's explanation: "[t]he operation of post-colonial counter-discourse is dynamic, not static: it does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but to, in Wilson Harris's formulation, evolve textual strategies which continually 'consume' their 'own biases' at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse" (1987, 18).

grounded in critique and resistance" (198). At the same time, resistance is always necessarily embedded in the structures it seeks to undermine or subvert (Slemon 1990, 37). The novels under consideration show varying degrees of complicity with systems of oppression even when they seem to show the most obvious resistance.<sup>18</sup>

What kinds of struggle are inscribed in contemporary Canadian fiction? How is difference constructed in a multicultural society, and what does this construction reveal about access to positions of power? Is the multiplicity of multiculturalism a form of liberal pluralism and/or of celebratory dialogism? Is dialogism a strategy for liberation from oppression and/or does it result in chaos, nihilism, and disintegration? Several critics have recently asked similar questions (Grace 1987, New 1990a, Godard 1990a/b, Emberley 1993). I am most concerned with the ritual invocation of liberal pluralism or heterogeneity, which too often disguises the perpetuation of exclusion. As Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd have pointed out, pluralism is "enjoyed only by those who have already assimilated the values of the dominant culture. For this pluralism, ethnic or cultural difference is merely an exoticism, an indulgence which can be relished without in any significant way modifying the individual who is securely embedded in the protective body of dominant ideology" (1987, 9-10). Pluralism can easily become a strategy to neutralize or defuse opposition by seeming to

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<sup>18</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that doubleness is an element of all Canadian writing, nor that doubleness occurs only in the Second World.



accept it; in Gayatri C. Spivak's words, "[t]he putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order better to exclude the margin" (1987, 107). The ideology of "democratic racism" (Henry and Tator 1994) or popular "unity in diversity" phrases serve as examples here. Because multiculturalism or pluralism paradigms exclude the concept of hierarchy, they fail to recognize that discrimination, whether racism, sexism, or classism, relates to the possession of politico-economic control of authority and to forms of resistance (San Juan 1992, 129).

Many of these discourses of pluralism tend towards harmonization without seriously questioning or changing the social relations in which they operate. Only when we work with a perspective that stresses difference as struggle can we counteract assimilation, cultural normalization, and strategies of containment. Hegemonic formations need to be destabilized through struggle in the in-between sites where movement and change can take place. The work of the writers selected here attempts to explore such sites for intervention as they reconstruct notions of Canada in their novels.

At this point it is necessary to outline in more detail the methodological framework of cultural narratology which I intend to use. I believe that an interface can be created where dialogism and narrative theory meet, so that the analysis of formal structures can be combined with the consideration of their

political implications. But can there be an alliance between narratology,<sup>19</sup> or any other largely formal poetics, and an explicitly political/contextual/cultural criticism of which Bakhtin's dialogism is only one representative concept?<sup>20</sup> To many, this question may seem a contradiction in terms. Let me phrase this challenge rather polemically: is not the supposedly scientific, descriptive, and value-free discourse of narratology the very antagonist of the apparently impressionistic, ideological, and mimetic approaches of political or cultural criticism? What I propose, and here I follow Bal, is based on the recognition that "the often alleged opposition between historical and systematic analysis is a false one" (1990, 728; Lanser 1986, 341). What appears as an abyss between incompatible approaches, then, is not an ontological given but can be dismantled as a self-created critical construction (Nünning 1994, 102).

The project of bridging this gap or of refiguring boundaries may be vehemently opposed by those who are primarily concerned with defending their

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<sup>19</sup> In a broader sense, narratology is often used synonymously with narrative theory of all theoretical persuasions; but in a more restricted sense, it refers to the theories of narrative structure (O'Neill 1994, 13). Narratology is here understood as a (largely structuralist-inspired) theory, discourse, or critique of narrative. It studies the nature, form, and functioning of narratives and examines what all narratives have in common (for example at the level of story) and what distinguishes them from one another. Tzvetan Todorov (1969, 10) has been credited with introducing the term *narratologie* to describe the systematic study of narrative structure (Prince 1987, 65). Structuralist analysis of narrative is associated with the 1960s and was begun by Claude Lévi-Strauss who advanced a new theory about myth (1963). Later proponents of narratology in its various forms include A.J. Greimas (1983), Gérard Genette (1980, 1988), also Seymour Chatman (1978), Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983), and Bal (1985).

<sup>20</sup> Actually, P.N. Medvedev/Bakhtin's concept itself is rooted in a "sociological poetics" that combines theoretical and historical approaches (1985, 30).

own (academic/disciplinary) territories.<sup>21</sup> Nilli Diengott's response (1988) to Susan Sniader Lanser's "Toward a Feminist Narratology" (1986), in which she proposes a paradigm shift in narratology,<sup>22</sup> is a good case in point. According to Diengott, there is no need for and no possibility of reconciling feminism and narratology (1988, 49); misguided attempts at reconciliation result from a lack of clarity in defining objects of study (47), from confusion as to where narratology belongs (44, 46), and from some feminists' desire to appropriate other fields of study (42, 50). Another example of such defensive responses is Gerald Prince's suggestion (1994) that questions concerning contexts can be considered under the pragmatic aspect of narratology; his response is a way of "domesticating the context"<sup>23</sup> which ultimately reveals Prince's primary interest, like Diengott's, in re-asserting the distinction between narratology and narratological criticism, in other words, between theoretical poetics and interpretation. While, according to Prince, narratologists should be able to recognize variable, extratextual determinants, they are not concerned with the determination of meanings but

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<sup>21</sup> Some critics will refuse to acquire terminology and strategies that, to them, seem overly formalistic either because they do not see any value in theory or want to avoid 'contamination' of their fields. Some may fear the dehistoricization of their ideological project; others may be alarmed by the contextualization of supposedly universal models.

<sup>22</sup> Lanser describes her task as follows: "to ask whether feminist criticism, and particularly the study of narratives by women, might benefit from the methods and insights of narratology and whether narratology, in turn, might be altered by the understandings of feminist criticism and the experience of women's texts" (1986, 342). This early essay focuses on the second question.

<sup>23</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from Gayatri Spivak's response to Prince's paper "Narratology: Criteria, Corpus, Context" presented at the International Conference on Narrative Literature in Vancouver, 29 April, 1994.

rather with what I would describe as a search for a universally valid model of description--exactly the kind of system feminist and other narratologists have challenged.<sup>24</sup>

The meeting or alliance I propose grows out of a more relational and interdisciplinary understanding of a culturally oriented literary criticism that recognizes "that revision of a theory's premises and practices is legitimate and desirable" and willingly attempts to familiarize itself with new discourses (Lanser 1986, 345). Mere reiteration of the same paradigm or the insistence on "clarity" do not ensure the validity of a paradigm itself.<sup>25</sup> Rather, it seems crucial to examine self-consciously the usefulness of one's approach. Bal's question "what's the point?" can, once again, serve as a useful reminder neither to take an approach for granted nor to reject it *a priori* but to review it continuously (1990, 727, 729).

A growing number of critics have suggested productive ways of challenging narratology and of allowing other literary approaches to benefit from what it has to offer in a cooperative manner. These critics have proposed a

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<sup>24</sup> For another interesting example of this debate, see the exchange between Dorrit Cohn (1995a/b), Mark Seltzer (1995), and John Bender (1995). Cohn argues that the "associations of modal types with ideological positions" lie outside the realm of classical narratology (1995a, 14). She claims to fault ideologically oriented critics not for "using narratological concepts to construct cultural history but for *misusing* them," and she insists that "persuasive ideological diagnoses of novelistic form cannot be achieved without supreme caution and extensive sensitization to the complexity involved" (1995b, 35). Bender suggests, however, that the intensity of Cohn's attack derives from "an intolerable violation of what she [Cohn] seems to take as transhistorical disciplinary and subdisciplinary boundaries" (1995, 31).

<sup>25</sup> Lanser has skilfully pointed this out in her response to Diengott's critique (1988, 53-54).

range of innovative questions, models, and interpretations in the process of exploring an alliance between narratology and feminism, New Historicism, as well as other critical theories. Their approaches emphasize notions of dialogue, cooperation, expansion, re-formation, and complementarity. Lanser, for example, has focused on bringing together feminist criticism and narratology in what she refers to as "a feminist narratology" (1986) or "a feminist theory of voice," which she explores in *Fictions of Authority* (1992). "Why Don't Feminists 'Do' Narratology?" is the provocative question with which Robyn Warhol introduces *Gendered Interventions* (1989). By proposing "a partial poetics of narrative discourse" that recognizes distancing and engaging narrators as conventions of narrative texts in nineteenth-century realist fiction (1989, xv), she attempts to analyse "gendered differences in writing strategies" as well as to "expose the gender bias in literary theories" that have ignored the engaging narrator as a literary convention (24).<sup>26</sup> Ansgar Nünning (1992) suggests a methodological approach based on the conceptual frameworks of narratology and New Historicism and he applies this method to (re)read novels of the eighteenth century. Moreover, providing a succinct overview of major contributions to "feminist narratology" and indicating potential directions for future research, Nünning (1994) has argued that an alliance between narratology and feminist

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<sup>26</sup> Warhol nevertheless insists on the distinction between poetics and thematic interpretation as advocated by Prince; her own work consists of "analyses, not readings, because interpretation is not the goal of this study" (1989, viii). I would argue, however, that *what* is communicated by a novel cannot be separated from *how* it is communicated.

criticism can be crucial in current reconceptualizations of literary criticism.

Lanser, Warhol, and Nünning are interested in developing methodological frameworks that allow them to examine the connections between narrative forms and the historically determined understandings of reality that inform them.<sup>27</sup>

Generally speaking, these approaches have long parted with the purely mimetic concept of literature in which literature is seen as a mirror of reality. Instead, literary texts are recognized as "historical and cognitive events in their own right" (Schwarzbach qtd. in Nünning 1992, 199). Their relationship with society is reciprocal and dynamic:

On one hand, literary texts are considered products of their contexts in that they take up social problems and cultural knowledge of a time and comment upon as well as interpret them with the help of specific literary means. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that literary reality models in return influence society as they contribute to the development of new ways of perceiving, thinking and feeling about the world. (Nünning 1992, 199; my translation)<sup>28</sup>

Novels produce their own fictional worlds through specific narrative techniques.

These narrative forms themselves are recognized as ways of constructing the

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<sup>27</sup> I focus here in some detail on the work of Lanser, Nünning, and Warhol; for further interesting challenges to and expansions of narrative theory, see, for example, Patrick O'Neill (1994), the contributions to *Neverending Stories: Toward a Critical Narratology*, edited by Ann Fehn, Ingeborg Hoesterey, and Maria Tatar (1992), and the essays in *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*, edited by James Phelan (1989b). Phelan notes in his introduction that "the findings of the volume most fruitfully intersect with the developments in criticism following upon the Anglo-American discovery of Bakhtin" (1989a, xviii).

<sup>28</sup> Lanser refers to this as the "dual nature of narrative" (1986, 344). See also Herring (1985, 43) and Joanne S. Frye who attempts to show in her analysis of women's writing and reading that "novelistic conventions are not fixed but are instead subject to redefinition"; "women's novels alter women's lives; women's lives alter women's novels" (1986, 202).

experience of reality in language. Thus, the narrative form itself is already a content. The analysis of these textual practices can provide us with an understanding of historically determined moral conflicts, world views, habits of thought, and individual and collective reality models that can reach far beyond the mere analysis of topics and themes; as Nünning points out, this understanding differs significantly from traditional text-background or influence studies (1992, 199-200).

If narrative techniques are formal means of inscribing socio-cultural experiences, they cannot be timeless ideal types that have miraculously been handed down to narratologists in ready-to-use systems. Instead, as Lanser explains, they are historically determined and are the result of "complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text" (1992, 5). Constituents of these power relations include, for instance, gender, race, and class. Even the broadest elements of narration are thus ideologically charged, socially variable, and sensitive to differences (23).

Let me return to Bal's candid question: what's the point then of a cultural narratology that recognizes that ideology is located in narrative structures themselves? The point is that once narrative forms are seen as socially constructed, novels become valuable sources for cultural studies because their narrative forms provide information about ideological concepts and worldviews. Thus, the kind of narratology conceptualized here is not an end in itself. In

alliance with a cultural view it enables us to identify and understand cultural experiences translated into and meanings produced by particular formal practices (Lanser 1988, 59).<sup>29</sup> For this reason, I introduce the term "cultural narratology" instead of employing Chatman's notion of "contextualist narratology," which he has criticized for focusing *exclusively* on "the acts in the real world that generate literary narratives" (1990, 310).<sup>30</sup> A framework of cultural narratology can be effective on two fronts: first, semanticizing narrative forms can move narratology beyond its notorious a-historicity and second, by providing adequate descriptive tools, narratology enables cultural analyses to attend to the tools and strategies that are characteristic of narratives (Nünning 1992, 267), while at the same time increasing intersubjectivity, plausibility, and coherence in critical readings.

As I bring together Canadian novels and cultural narratology, I am interested in explaining the texts' dialogic dynamics and thinking through some of their tensions. Since my discussions of the individual texts concentrate on their dialogic relationships, it is inevitable--and very frustrating to me--that many other aspects worth investigating will unfortunately remain untouched. My

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<sup>29</sup> This general statement also allows for Bal's important reminder that narratology does not have to be and should not be confined to narrative texts as traditionally defined (1990, 750). She convincingly discusses examples from anthropology, science, and visual art with the help of narrative theory.

<sup>30</sup> In the end, Chatman would probably be critical of an integration of structuralist and contextualist orientations too. Although I find his criticism of contextualist narratology problematic, I have decided not to engage with his argument in detail here and to introduce the term cultural narratology instead in order to emphasize the relevance of narratology for cultural studies.



readings are, therefore, in no danger of exhausting the potential of these novels. As I think with and at times against Bakhtin, I want to avoid turning dialogism into yet another master narrative. My approach to dialogism is a theory in the making, as Chapter Two will show. Nevertheless, I take seriously Kim Blaeser's concern over colonizing gestures of critical theory, especially with regard to Native literatures:

The [Native American] literature is approached with an already established theory, and the implication is that the worth of the literature is essentially validated by its demonstrated adherence to a respected literary mode, dynamic or style. Although the best scholars in native studies have not applied the theories in this colonizing fashion but have employed them, the implied movement is still that of colonization: authority emanating from the mainstream critical centre to the marginalized native texts. (1993, 55-56)<sup>31</sup>

It is difficult to escape this paradoxical situation completely, but instead of validating the selected novels through their inclusion in this dissertation, I expect that the novels will show me whether dialogism is a useful critical tool for reading resistance literature. I am neither trying to construct fixed paradigms for the field of Canadian literary criticism, nor attempting to present a homogeneous picture of contemporary Canadian fiction. The framework of dialogism and cultural narratology allows me to articulate my versions of these novels, while other readers may prefer other theoretical models that will result in different

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<sup>31</sup> Similarly, van Toorn has reminded us that "[t]he speech, writing and other cultural practices of minority groups are only liberated into the public domain to the extent that the patron discourses succeed in trapping them in the categories which the dominant audience has available to contain them" (1990, 103). Thanks to Peter Dickinson's article (1994) for bringing van Toorn's warning to my attention. See also Leonore Keeshig-Tobias (1990, 175).

versions.<sup>32</sup> This dissertation has been conceived and written not as an act of containment but as a project of exploration; it invites continuing debate.

As Chandra Mohanty reminds us in the context of Third World women's writing, it is not enough to assert the existence of resistance literature; it is also crucial to investigate "the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records" (1991, 34). In my work on this project I have been reminded constantly that the critical processes of reading and analysing literature are a subjective undertaking. Why and how do I write about Canadian literature? As a white German woman, I speak to Canadian novels in many ways from the outside; yet, after having lived and studied in this country for several years, I occasionally feel that I may be writing from the inside of Canadian culture. While I am aware of a number of shifting inside/outside configurations in which I am situated within Canada, I experience other dividing lines between inside and outside primarily through language, nationality, and geography. Thinking and writing in a language other than my mother tongue is a good example for me of my often deceptive insider/outsider situation. This second language is never transparent or self-explanatory--at times it is treacherous. Living in two languages has made me sharply aware of how central language is to the constitution of subjectivity, to how I understand the world, myself, and others, and to how I construct the realities I perceive.

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<sup>32</sup> Simone Vauthier quotes Robert Kroetsch's statement that "criticism is really a version of story" (1993, 4); I adopt her notion that her readings of short fiction are "versions of story" which are informed by her narratological approach and her socio-historical positioning (4).

Trinh T. Minh-ha's "Outside In Inside Out" has helped me think about "that undetermined threshold place where she [the insider/outsider] constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider" (1991, 74).<sup>33</sup> I do not believe that there is an essential homogeneous inside, an authentic insider, or an absolute reality out there somewhere. In the process of watching myself shift back and forth between the positions available to me, I have chosen to emphasize the need "to cross to and fro across borders rather than ... fetishizing the border into a spectacle of difference which in fact ... disavows difference" (Gunew and Yeatman 1993a, xxiv).

Let me reflect briefly on my selection of novels, a choice very much determined by my own interests and cultural expectations. The simplest answer to why I have chosen these novels and not others is that I enjoyed reading them and have something to say about them. But the selection has, of course, also been motivated by the novels' suitability for my readings of the dialogic principle at work; my discussions explore how dialogism can work as a critical tool to examine novels as sites of resistance and struggle. Moreover, even after repeated readings, these texts still surprise me with new challenges; they remain perplexing, and at times have proved to be frustrating. The corpus is admittedly eclectic and open to the charge of arbitrariness. I had to be realistic about how

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<sup>33</sup> See also Rosa Ho's (1994) interesting discussion, which brought Trinh's essay to my attention.

many novels I could discuss without becoming superficial in my analysis, which meant that I had to limit the number of novels considered in each chapter. In the final chapter I comment on some of the other novels I had originally hoped to examine in detail. I also had to take into account how novels would work together in each chapter. The seven novels selected did not finally "make it" into the thesis because they are the most polyphonic contemporary fiction in Canada, because they are the "best" novels written in Canada in the last fifteen years (whatever that may mean), or because they are all proven bestsellers. Actually, I ended up with some very popular and by now critically acclaimed novels such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, which is taught in high school and university courses, as well as little-known texts such as Margaret Sweatman's *Fox*, which has not yet received the critical and public attention I believe it deserves. And, finally, the order in which I discuss the novels is not supposed to suggest a notion of linear progression or increasing excellence. The discussions in each chapter take different directions; at times they overlap and support each other and at other times they may seem contradictory.

I made a deliberate decision to restrict my study to novels written in English. When I contemplated including French Canadian examples, I realized that I did not have the kind of knowledge about French Canadian culture which this project would require. More importantly, I wanted to resist the sometimes unspoken expectation that a study of Canadian literature has to include the literatures of the "two founding nations," English and French. The notion of the

two founding nations in itself seems highly problematic for it reinforces a long tradition of internal colonialism toward First Nations people and others. If I had considered novels written in languages other than English, I would have preferred to include Canadian novels written in a number of different languages. Unfortunately, I know only a few languages well enough to read them in the original. For these pragmatic and political reasons, I decided to focus exclusively on novels written in English.

All of this said, let me outline briefly how I have organized the rest of this dissertation. In the next chapter, I prepare the ground for the following readings. I focus on Bakhtin's writings to introduce some of his crucial ideas about dialogism. Then, I situate my own approach in a selective overview of recent Bakhtin criticism. Struggle and conflict form the basis for my understanding of dialogic relations because I recognize that discourses always operate within relations of power. As a result, I am interested in an analysis of dialogic relations not only to describe the heterogeneity of voices but also to explore how the actual relations between them can expose dominant discourses and challenge them from positions of difference.

Chapters Three to Six explore the framework of dialogism and cultural narratology in relation to specific contemporary Canadian novels in English. In Chapter Three I discuss the processes involved in telling and writing family history in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. The dialogic relations in these novels foreground the epistemological questions

involved in rewriting history and emphasize its openendedness. I argue that in spite of their similarities, these novels employ dialogism to different ends: one is ultimately most interested in getting history right, while the other simultaneously affirms and challenges individual and community history. Chapter Four focuses on the processes of un/reading in Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. The novels challenge the monologism of fixed categories and hegemonic discourses by recontextualizing them and offering alternative constructions. Dialogic relations operate, for example, at the level of genre conventions, in the interrelations of chronotopes and narrative strands, and in the quotation of documents. I am particularly interested in questioning the novels' gestures of strategic monologism within their polyphonic narratives. In Chapter Five I analyse the contestatory textual politics in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. Through dialogic interaction among and within perspectives and through a relational approach to oral storytelling and written narrative, both novels critique the false binary choices offered to Native peoples and inscribe a third position of self-determination. Margaret Sweatman's *Fox* provides the focus for Chapter Six, in which I examine how the performative operates as a counter-hegemonic strategy in the novel. Through the collage of voices that have been forgotten or obscured in traditional historiography and through a recontextualization of familiar voices, *Fox* opens up sites for intervention and restages the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.

In the final chapter, I conclude by looking ahead to some of the novels that I considered for inclusion in this dissertation but that still await closer analysis. I also indicate further directions for research that could employ the methodological framework of dialogism and cultural narratology.

## Chapter Two

### Dialogism:

#### Mere "Fave Rave" or Opportunity for Critical Intervention?

To say that Mikhail M. Bakhtin's writings have become popular in contemporary Western academic discourse over the last two decades is both a considerable understatement and an obvious simplification.<sup>1</sup> When Ken Hirschkop compiled his bibliography of critical literature on Bakhtin in 1989, he claimed--and feared?--that the Bakhtin snowball was about to turn into an avalanche (1989a, 195). The interest in Bakhtin's work has certainly taken on remarkable proportions, a scenario that has been variously described as the "cult of Bakhtin," "a Bakhtin fad," or "the Bakhtin industry" (Said in Williams 1989, 181; Malcuzyński 1990, 84; Morson 1986, 81).<sup>2</sup>

Appreciative characterizations of Bakhtin's ideas frequently include the adjectives flexible, suggestive, ambitious, ambiguous, and generous. Such

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note, as Emerson points out, "that the Bakhtin boom in post-Communist Russia has had a different trajectory from our own domestic American one" (1995, 1). In a very useful way, she introduces the essays in *Bakhtin in Contexts*, edited by Amy Mandelker, by juxtaposing the issues they raise "to a debate or a representative essay among Russian scholars also at work on Bakhtin's legacy" (1995, 5).

<sup>2</sup> The "meteoric rise of Bakhtin's star" (Danow 1991, 123) is reflected, for example, by the fact that the November issue of the *MLA International Bibliography* (1995) lists 1134 entries under Bakhtin's name alone and 356 under the term dialogism.



praise is not limited to studies in one single discipline; Bakhtin's concepts have created interest across many traditional disciplinary boundaries and figure in numerous interdisciplinary studies: literary criticism, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, ethnography, film studies, cultural studies, women's studies, and music.<sup>3</sup> Even within specific fields, the diversity of approaches is extremely broad. Within English studies, for instance; Bakhtinian approaches have been used to analyze Gothic fiction (Howard 1994), contemporary drama (Keyssar 1991, Harvie and Knowles 1994), Victorian novels (Garrett 1980, Clark-Beattie 1985, W.V. Harris 1990, Shumway 1994), Victorian biography (Amigoni 1993), black women writers (Henderson 1989, Andrade 1990), poetry (Davidson 1983, Richter 1990), parody (Hutcheon 1989, Kuester 1992) and texts as diverse as the Bible (Reed 1993) and novels by James Joyce (Kershner 1989), Malcolm Lowry (Grace 1990), Leslie Marmon Silko (Krupat 1989), and Christa Wolf (Herrmann 1989). In these discussions, many labels have been attached to Bakhtin; he has been called a formalist, semiotician, Marxist, neo-Kantian, structuralist, and postmodernist. A number of critics have expressed their dismay about Bakhtin's apparently unlimited applicability,<sup>4</sup> while others have begun to examine critically

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<sup>3</sup> This does not come as a surprise considering that much of Bakhtin's work cannot easily be said to belong to one specific field of study either; consider his own explanation: "our study will move in the liminal spheres, that is, on the borders of all the aforementioned disciplines [the linguistic, philological, and literary], at their junctures and points of intersection" (1986, 103).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Young, for instance, is particularly alarmed because "it seems that just about anyone can, and probably will, appropriate Bakhtin for just about anything" (1985/86, 74). See also Paul de Man (1983, 104).

but enthusiastically the reasons for his remarkable popularity. Any definitive label, however, seems to contradict Bakhtin's own belief in the open-endedness of all critical work, including his own (1986, 155, 170), as well as his suspicion of "theoretism," that is, any method that considers systems in which every element has a place in a rigorous hierarchy as the only valuable form of knowledge (Morson and Emerson 1990, 27-28).<sup>5</sup> The sheer number of Bakhtin's writings and their often contradictory nature resist generalization, but critics have used labels to contain the heterogeneity of his ideas, to simplify his discourse, and, at least temporarily, to ease their own discomfort with the open-endedness and conceptual slipperiness of Bakhtin's work.

Within the vast array of current critical work on Bakhtin, I can identify three main purposes. Critical exegeses of Bakhtin's writings, for example by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (1990) and Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist (1984), are particularly valuable to those who lack familiarity with Russian critical thought and cannot read his texts in the original. These critics have also contextualized Bakhtin's writings and/or have discussed them in comparison with other theoretical approaches (for example, Patterson 1988, Jefferson 1989, White 1984). Moreover, Bakhtin's terminology has been applied to specific writers, texts, and problems. This approach has found its most severe critic in de Man who concludes that "[t]o imitate or to apply Bakhtin, to read him

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<sup>5</sup> As a result, Bakhtin was critical of structuralist projects (1986, 169-70); a narratology that does not include a diachronic perspective and focuses on self-enclosed systems at the expense of context would exemplify the totalitarian assumptions he criticized.

by engaging him in a dialogue, betrays what is most valid in his work" (1983, 107). De Man argues that dialogism and its ideologies of otherness belong to a descriptive discourse of poetics, while dialogue is part of a normative hermeneutics with which dialogism is incompatible. And finally, some critics recognize it as the most urgent task to put Bakhtin's ideas "*into circulation*" (Pechey 1989, 40), to explore the "productive possibilities" of his theories (Hitchcock 1993, xi), and to extend and challenge the potential of his work (Morson and Emerson 1989, 4).<sup>6</sup>

In this study I engage critically with Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to develop a politicized Bakhtinian approach. By participating in the circulation of Bakhtin's concepts, I do not wish to partake in "uncritical hero worship" or perform "mechanical applications" of Bakhtin's ideas (Morson and Emerson, 1989, 49). While something as fashionable in contemporary literary criticism as dialogism may trigger fears and warnings of superficial readings or careless appropriation--after all, Hitchcock has not warned us of dialogism as the "fave rave of the culturati" for nothing (1993, xii)--<sup>7</sup> I want to show that dialogism can be a valuable means for developing a cultural-narratological approach to

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<sup>6</sup> In this regard the studies by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986), Peter Hitchcock (1993), Gardiner (1992), Patricia S. Yaeger (1988), Dale Bauer (1988), Don H. Bialostosky (1986), and Finke (1992) have been seminal. Their contributions, as well as many other explorative approaches, will be referred to in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Consider the concerns of Frank Davey who criticizes scholars of Canadian literature who use Bakhtinian theory for not recognizing the dialogic nature of Bakhtin's own work and for ignoring its overtly political character (1988, 2-3). See also Grace who recognizes a trend in recent criticism "to call any experimental postmodern text carnivalesque, or even polyphonic" (1987, 134).

Canadian fiction. In this chapter, as well as through later discussions of the novels, I will explore in more detail what motivates my preference for this approach.

Given the extensive critical work that Bakhtin's writings have elicited, it is tempting to read critics explaining or commenting on Bakhtin rather than to read Bakhtin's own work. Engaging with his long, repetitive, and often contradictory essays can be fascinating but also very discouraging. How much easier it is to go to a book about Bakhtin that neatly summarizes and categorizes his crucial ideas. While I think it is important to get some first-hand experience of Bakhtin's writings, I am not suggesting that the reader can thus find a way of returning to the original Bakhtin. As White has said in his reply to Young's attack on Bakhtin criticism: "[t]here is no repetition, no retreat, no anachronism, in short there is no going *back* to 'Bakhtin.' 'Bakhtin' *was not* in the forms in which he now is.... It is not we who return to 'Bakhtin.' It is 'Bakhtin' who now finds meaning amongst us" (1987/88, 218-19). To emphasize the fact that his 'Bakhtin' is an appropriated version and to resist the illusion of a close, unproblematic familiarity with 'Bakhtin,' White explains that he uses the single quotation marks "to signal his ['Bakhtin's'] alienation from and dismemberment in the current conflict of possession" (221). With this caveat in place, a familiarity with Bakhtin's works nevertheless provides important common ground for further discussion and enables both the reader and me to recognize my own as well as other critics'

vested interests in engaging with Bakhtin.<sup>8</sup>

Bakhtin himself never actually used the word dialogism in his writings (Holquist 1990, 15). As I use and problematize the term dialogism, I am trying to capture Bakhtin's wide-ranging thoughts on the topic of dialogic relations without draining the concept of its processual and unfinalizable nature. Initially, Bakhtin discussed dialogic relations in the context of Dostoevsky's novels, but he later expanded the concept to grapple with the novel as a genre, with language, epistemology, and even ontology. The main sources for Bakhtin's reflections on dialogism are *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984a), first published 1972 as the revised edition of the earlier *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Art* (1929), "Discourse in the Novel" (1981), originally published in 1975, and "The Problem of the Text" (1986), first published in 1979.<sup>9</sup>

Bakhtin uses the term heteroglossia to indicate that language is always multi-layered, stratified, and never unitary:

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<sup>8</sup> What follows is only a very brief introduction to the concept of dialogism. For useful and more extensive introductions to his life and work see Clark and Holquist (1984), Morson and Emerson (1990), Holquist (1990), Danow (1991); see also Simon Dentith's overview of the writings of Bakhtin and his circle which introduces his Bakhtinian reader (1995, 3-104).

<sup>9</sup> These three are among the texts whose authorship has been attributed to Bakhtin. However, for a number of early works this question has not yet been, and may never be, resolved. These texts include *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928) by P.N. Medvedev, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929) and *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* (1927) by V.N. Voloshinov. The debate was initiated by an article by V. V. Ivanov (1976), first published in 1973, in which he claimed that the three texts were written by Bakhtin himself. This opinion was also promoted by Clark and Holquist in chapter six of their biography, "The Disputed Texts" (1984, 146-170). For a rejection of this view see Irwin R. Titunik (1984, 1986) and chapter three in Morson and Emerson (1990, 103-119). I am not qualified to enter this debate here. Moreover, I do not think that the question of authorship would affect my own discussion. However, to acknowledge the dispute, I will refer to Bakhtin where his authorship is unquestioned and otherwise to Voloshinov/Bakhtin or Medvedev/Bakhtin.

Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems (identical in the abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound. (1981, 288)

These languages develop out of the tension of conflicting centripetal and centrifugal forces in society: "[a]longside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (272). As Bakhtin explains, because languages develop out of these processes, they cannot be considered a neutral medium (294). On the microlevel, Bakhtin concludes that every single word is inherently dialogic, that is, "[i]t is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents" (276). To use a word, then, and make it our own, we have to appropriate it from someone else's discourse.

From this perspective, languages, even single words, are specific views of the world, ways of conceptualizing the world in words (291-92). It is as worldviews that these "'languages' of heteroglossia" enter the novel (291).<sup>10</sup> When Bakhtin describes the novel as "a microcosm of heteroglossia" (411), he makes explicit the connection between the social world of heteroglossia and its

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<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin further explores the artistic "transformations" of languages into worldviews or social voices in "The Problem of the Text" (1986, 118-19).

artistic representation in the novel.<sup>11</sup> The processes of language unification and decentralization reflected in the novel cannot be separated from the ongoing social and ideological struggle in society.<sup>12</sup>

However, although the novel "orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it" through heteroglossia (263), this mixing of languages is not arbitrary or unsystematic. Bakhtin insists repeatedly that the goal of the novelistic process is the creation of an "*artistic image of a language*," to be achieved through artistic consistency and careful organization (366). Bakhtin explains further that "[t]he image of such a language in a novel is the image assumed by a set of social beliefs, the image of a social ideologeme that has fused with its own discourse; with its own language.... In the novel formal markers of languages, manners and styles are symbols for sets of social beliefs" (357). Heteroglossia can thus enter the novel in two ways: in

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<sup>11</sup> Consider also Bakhtin's description of the novel "as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)--this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre" (1981, 262-63).

<sup>12</sup> In his study of Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin discusses the reasons and factors that contributed to the rise of the polyphonic novel (1984a, 22-32). He argues that Dostoevsky "found and was capable of perceiving multi-leveledness and contradictoriness not in the spirit, but in the objective social world" (27), that the epoch itself plus Dostoevsky's vision of coexistence and interaction, not evolution, made the polyphonic novel possible. In "Discourse in the Novel," he also connects the rise of the novel with centrifugal forces (1981, 272-73, 370). Todorov summarizes Bakhtin's explanations by saying that "the periods in which the novel flourishes are periods of weakening central power" (1984, 58).

the form of subjects and their languages and thus as a means of internal orchestration, or, if the novel seems to know only one language and style, heteroglossia can function as "dialogizing background," against which the world of the novel is set and which reminds the writer that the unitary language of the novel is neither self-evident nor incontestable (332).

To illustrate his notion of multiple languages and numerous voices within the novel, Bakhtin introduces the concept of polyphony.<sup>13</sup> He draws attention to the fact that he is employing an analogy between music and the novel: "[w]e are transforming this metaphor [of polyphony and counterpoint] into the term 'polyphonic novel,' since we have not found a more appropriate label. It should not be forgotten, however, that the term has its origin in metaphor" (1984a, 22). The voices (6), subjects (7), ideological positions (18), or consciousnesses (6), as Bakhtin variously refers to them, are characterized as "independent," "unmerged," "fully valid," "equally authoritative," "with equal rights," and "autonomous" (6, 7, 8).<sup>14</sup> Although Bakhtin emphasizes that the material brought together in the novel is heterogeneous, he insists that an element of similarity is also required to bring these voices into contact. He sees this

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<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Jenny Lawn for reminding me of Roland Barthes's interesting discussion of the analogy between text and musical score in *S/Z* (1974, 28-30).

<sup>14</sup> A clarification of Bakhtin's notion of independence and autonomy may be helpful here. Independence or relative freedom characterizes the characters' relationships "vis-à-vis the author--or, more accurately, their freedom vis-à-vis the usual externalizing and finalizing authorial definitions" (1984a, 13). Their relationship with the other voices in the novel, however, is one of interdependence and mutual influence (1984a, 36; 1986, 91).



similarity in their dimension as specific views of the world (292-93). Polyphony is not only a way of describing the existence of multiple voices though. Bakhtin's pivotal interest in polyphony lies in using it to explore how these voices interact. Dialogism is the organizational principle governing how these voices coexist and interrelate:

*The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through. Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally. And this is so because dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life--in general, everything that has meaning and significance. (1984a, 40)*

Dialogic relationships, then, are possible not only among utterances or single words, but also between language styles and social dialects, as long as they represent semantic positions or worldviews of speaking subjects (1984a, 184; 1986, 116). Dialogic relations cannot be understood in purely logical, linguistic, or psychological terms; rather, they manifest specific kinds of semantic relationships (1986, 118, 124). Such relationships cannot be established with things or objects; only voices, subjects, "*integral* positions," can engage in dialogue (138, 121). Because dialogic relations indicate semantic bonds, their analysis is not possible within traditional linguistics, by which Bakhtin means especially the work of Saussure and those influenced by him. Dialogic relations are the subject of a "metalinguistics" that deals with the realm of discourse, language in dialogical interaction, language in living totality (1984a, 181-83, 202).

Some critics have followed Clark and Holquist (1984, 10) and Todorov (1984, 24) in calling this kind of linguistics "translinguistics," because "the term *meta* has become so banal in the West" (Clark and Holquist 1984, 10). We may be more familiar today with the terms pragmatics or social discourse analysis.

What kinds of interaction can actually take place between these voices? They may agree dialogically, modify, supplement, polemicize, parody, or contradict each other (Bakhtin 1986, 121; 1984a, 95, 184)--but in all cases, they come into contact, which will not allow them to re-emerge unaffected (1984a, 189). Such dialogic interaction obviously does not aim for resolution of differences in a dialectical synthesis because difference remains crucial for dialogic relations. Dialogism has no teleology and is not a problem that needs to be solved; it is not about winning battles or merely tolerating the conflict with other voices. Dialogic relations are actually constituted by struggle and open-endedness.

The value of meaningful dialogue as negotiated exchange is crucial for Bakhtin not only in his analysis of polyphony in the novel but also in his view of the world. Bakhtin rejects both relativism and dogmatism as either unnecessary or impossible positions and seeks instead a position that allows for a sense of moral responsibility (1984a, 69). Ethical questions were at the forefront of his early writings in the 1920s, which have been published in *Art and Answerability* (1990) and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993); after his work on the development of the novel, especially on Dostoevsky and Rabelais, he returned

to similar themes in his later essays (1986). Although these early and late phases of his writings have only played a limited role so far in critical studies, I believe that they can serve as a reminder of the crucial role of ethics in Bakhtin's work.

In the process of presenting the concept of dialogism, I have admittedly smoothed out some of the internal contradictions in Bakhtin's writings. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge with Hirschkop that a term such as dialogism is itself dialogical (1989b, 3). The meaning of this key term is constantly being negotiated, appropriated, and rewritten by critics in concrete socio-historical circumstances, just as it is within Bakhtin's own discourse. Where does that leave the critic? What does she make of the fact that dialogism, for Bakhtin, not only describes the nature of language, but also is the principle of discourse and the universal axiom of human life? After all, Bakhtin explains that "[t]o be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end" (1984a, 252). If this is so, how can dialogism function as a useful *differentia specifica* of novelistic discourse as well as an oppositional strategy in the fight against ideological unification in language and novelistic discourse? How can it be a useful category in the analysis of the novel if any utterance is already inherently dialogic? Cannot all novels consequently be dialogic? I will try to engage with some of these issues as I proceed; suffice it to say now that dialogism is not as easily accessible a concept as some would have us believe: "there are no easy

prescriptions for interpretation or quick fixes to be found in dialogism. It is no theoretical steroid" (Holquist 1990, 107). In my own appropriation of dialogism, I follow the lead of critics who have challenged Bakhtin's problematic all-encompassing notion of dialogism, rejecting it as a kind of master trope, and exploring what Bakhtin left unsaid and undertheorized. I concur here in particular with Bernstein's approach: "dialogism must be tested, not merely lauded. It must, by its very definition, be brought into our contentions as a participant without any guarantee or privilege, rather than as a kind of ultimate Court of Assizes under whose jurisdiction the debate proceeds and according to whose criteria the worthiness of the enterprise will be determined" (1989, 199).

For such critical readers, liberal appropriations of Bakhtin's concepts, which often provide readings using Bakhtinian concepts but leave the ideas themselves unchallenged, are disconcerting.<sup>15</sup> Liberal versions of dialogism have emphasized notions of exchange, negotiation, agreement, and tolerance, focusing almost exclusively on the bright side of dialogism. A plurality of voices

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<sup>15</sup> Young, for instance, argues that Bakhtin's liberalism makes his writings dubious material for radicals, especially those of Marxist provenance, to adopt (1985/86, 92). Finke identifies a "liberal humanist misreading of the dialogic" that makes Bakhtin into "a weak-kneed pluralist" who underestimates elements of coercion, constraint, and power (1992, 16). Hirschkop warns of Bakhtin's assimilation into a liberal schema (1986, 79), drawing attention to questions of oppression and power (75). See also Stallybrass and White who treat carnival as a wider phenomenon of transgression in order to "move beyond Bakhtin's troublesome *folkloric* approach to a political anthropology of *binary extremism* in class society" (1986, 26). Pechey wants to rescue Bakhtin "from the cold storage of intellectual history and from the politically compromised liberal academy (1989, 40). And Suzanne Rosenthal Shumway suggests that Bakhtin can be appropriated even, and I would add especially, by those "who argue most fervently against Marxism and feminism" because his writings constitute a "descriptive theoretical system" rather than a normative plan of action that would threaten the status quo (1994, 168).

is envisioned as several well-intentioned, equal partners experiencing peaceful, harmonious encounters. Terry Eagleton's polemics expose, albeit in an exaggerated manner, the shallowness of liberal readings of Bakhtin: "[i]t is very hard to believe that Bakhtin spilt so much ink just to inform us that we should listen attentively to one another, treat each other as whole persons, be prepared to be corrected and interrupted, realise that life is an endless unfinished process, that too much dogma makes you narrow-minded, that nobody has a monopoly of the truth and that life is so much richer than any of our little ideas about it" (1989, 188). Critics of liberal Bakhtinian appropriations remind us that power dynamics inform society and novelistic discourse at every level, but that liberal readings are less interested in addressing inequalities and oppression than in securing the status quo of the ruling classes. It is important to remember that Bakhtin experienced authoritarian rule and marginalization within an historical context when he was confronted with bleak and hostile social realities; what we know about his experiences of exile, imprisonment, and silencing sits uncomfortably with a liberal belief in individual freedom.

In Ann Jefferson's words, critics need to take into account that dialogism is based on a "definition of discourse in relation to power itself" (1986, 174). The struggle for power fuels the energies of both centrifugal and centripetal forces. Neither social context nor novelistic discourse can therefore offer neutral playing-grounds. Consequently, subject positions in dialogic relations are inscribed along a vertical social axis, so that dialogism inevitably operates with implicit

principles of domination and subordination (Hitchcock 1993, xviii; Stallybrass and White 1986, 198).<sup>16</sup> Seen in this light, dialogism describes more than friendly, mutually enriching encounters between different but equal voices. If discourse and power are indivisible, then narratives themselves are sites of social struggles, power struggles. However, while not upholding pseudo-equality, Bakhtin does not explore the aspect of struggle in any detail.<sup>17</sup> Recent feminist criticism engaging with Bakhtin has drawn attention to the absence of struggle or battle as Bakhtin's "blind spot" (Bauer 1988, 5).<sup>18</sup> The space in which the encounter, the struggle, the clash of voices takes place is hardly positive or neutral. It is contested ground that is ambivalent, at least, if not hostile. Foucault's analysis of power relations and his concept of discursive formation, which I have introduced in the preceding chapter, can help to explore how dialogic conflict actually operates within the social framework.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Aaron Fogel argues that all dialogue involves coercive disproportion; there are no equals (1989, 180). The acknowledgement of hierarchical registers within dialogism undermines at the same time the charge of relativism that has been brought to Bakhtin's concept.

<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin discusses struggle and conflict within and between discourses especially in "Discourse in the Novel" and with Voloshinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. In one of his most notable statements regarding the necessity of conflict, he explains that "[i]t is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture's awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict" (1981, 368).

<sup>18</sup> See also Clive Thomson (1989), Mary S. Pollock (1993), Yaeger (1988), Jefferson (1986), and Iris M. Zavala (1990).

<sup>19</sup> Numerous studies have suggested that Foucault's work could be of assistance in further exploring Bakhtin's concepts, for instance Stallybrass and White (1986, 201), Graham Pechey (1989, 52), Gardiner (1992, 141-66), Young (1985/86, 84-85), David Amigoni (1993, 25-34), and Jefferson (1986, 174-77).

If we make explicit the connection between dialogic relations and power dynamics, then dialogism in a novel (and the criticism that discusses it) can help to explore how hegemonies are organized historically (Pechey 1989, 52) and to expose such dominant discourses in narratives (Hajdukowski-Ahmed 1990, 161); it can also function as a form of cultural critique that makes social heterogeneity of voices visible and indicates potential resistances to dominant structures (Zavala 1990, 86). Because dialogism can become a strategy for combatting monologism by calling attention to oppressive hierarchies of power, Robert Stam, among others, believes that Bakhtin's categories are "especially appropriate for the analysis of opposition and marginal practices" (1989, 21). Obviously, Bakhtin did not address himself to all forms of oppression, but he staked out a conceptual space for doing so. Feminists working with Bakhtin's concepts have been particularly interested and successful in exploring the space for oppositional practices.<sup>20</sup> Where Bakhtin seems to have missed or neglected the notion of masculine hegemony within social structures, feminist critics have intervened to explore whether and how dialogism can become a strategy to de-

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<sup>20</sup> The engagement of critics with feminist theory and Bakhtinian concepts is well under way. Consider, for instance, the work of Wayne C. Booth (1982), Richard M. Berrong (1985), Mary Russo (1986), Bauer (1988), Yaeger (1988), Nancy Glazener (1989), Herrmann (1989), Thomson (1989, 1993), Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz (1989a/b), Clair Wills (1989), Marianne Cave (1990), Maroussia Hadjukowski-Ahmed (1990), Mary O'Connor (1990), Zavala (1990), Dale Bauer and Susan Janet McKinstry (1991), Kay Halasek (1992), Pollock (1993), and Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow (1994). Most of these critics would not actually want to claim Bakhtin as a feminist. Rather, their starting-point is usually to acknowledge that Bakhtin omitted gender issues in his discussions of linguistic stratification. Then, recognizing the explanatory and activist potential of many of his concepts, they appropriate his ideas for their feminist analyses of cultural marginalization, subversion, or power relations.

privilege and disclose the hegemony of patriarchal discursive practices and other oppressive ideologies such as racism, (neo)colonialism, ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, heterosexism, and classism.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, very few critics working with the dialogic principle have acknowledged not only that "those in power do not usually engage in dialogue with those they oppress" (Mukherjee 1995a, 233), but also that it is probable (and often enough, the reality) that the dominant voice will continue to dominate others in spite of the willingness of oppositional and dominating voices to engage in dialogue (Pollock 1993, 232). Yet, this recognition seems crucial. In narratological terms, the relation between character(s) and narrator(s) is especially important. While a character may serve as focalizer to provide much of the information about his/her marginal perspective, the perspective of the narrator can easily domesticate that character's resistant perspective. The marginal voice can be included and heard, yet it may ultimately be subordinated and dismissed or appropriated.<sup>22</sup> A critical understanding of dialogic relations

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<sup>21</sup> Diaz-Diocaretz (1989a, 131); Zavala (1990, 86), (1993, 262, 270-71); Louise Yelin (1989); Thomson (1993, 227); Jennifer Harvie and Richard Paul Knowles (1994, 20); Kobena Mercer (1988, 59); and Godard (1990a, 159, 161). See also Clive Thomson and Hans Raj Dua who explain that each article in their collection "explores how cultural forces work in society to allow for or to prevent the production of knowledge" (1995a, v).

<sup>22</sup> A feminist dialogics of reading that seeks a space of resistance in interpretive communities is another form of critical intervention that can come out of the recognition that dominant structures are often reaffirmed in spite of resistance. However, through these "failed communities," Bauer argues, it becomes possible to "theorize the process by which alien or rival social languages are excluded and silenced" (1988, 6). She attempts to read woman's voice back into the dialogue to reconstruct how it was read out of it in the first place (4). See also Patricia Lorimer Lundberg who develops "a dialogically feminist model for reading" (1990, 296; 1989).



needs to be suspicious of and prepared to expose strategies of domestication, absorption, and cultural normalization.

These challenges to Bakhtin's work suggest that we need to pay more attention to the implications and realities of conflict, contestation, and aggression when we explore dialogic relations. Emerson, for instance, finds Bakhtin's presumption of benevolence underlying all dialogic relations to be one of the most troubling aspects of his work (1988, 514).<sup>23</sup> More substantially, Gardiner has noted Bakhtin's failure to grasp the realities of power structures and has consequently challenged his optimism about liberating struggles (1992, 176). One of the most provocative criticisms has come from Fogel who has suggested that most dialogue is constrained and forced (1989, 174). If all initiation of dialogue takes the form of coerced speech, disproportion and violence have to be recognized as constitutive of dialogue rather than as an exceptional perversion (179). To see dialogue primarily as a mode of conquest (Fogel 1985, 1989; Rabasa 1987, 147), however, directly questions Bakhtin's notions of friendly boundaries and encounters. As Morson and Emerson point out, for Bakhtin the worst that the other in a dialogue can do is fail to answer (1990,

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<sup>23</sup> A 'nod' in the direction of conflict and risk is a common characteristic in recent Bakhtin criticism; however, critics usually abstain from addressing the implications of contest or violence in any detail. Holquist, for example, frequently mentions struggle in his discussion but does not go beyond a closing gesture indicating that the darker sides of dialogue require more exploration than they have received so far (1990, 181). Danow acknowledges Bakhtin's omission of violence from his discussion of dialogue but does not see this as an impediment to "Bakhtin's positive view regarding its potential" (1991, 134). Both R.B. Kershner (1989, 21) and Emily A. Schultz (1990, 148-150) acknowledge opposition and risk in dialogic struggle but ultimately affirm joy and the potential for change in dialogism.

470). As a result, Bakhtin's discussions of dialogic relations generally lack any mention of suffering, torture, or violence.<sup>24</sup> It must be noted, however, that these elements play a significant role in *Rabelais and His World* (1984b)--only to be banished again. Bakhtin seems to ignore the danger of carnivalistic violence because he is obviously fascinated with a violence without pain. He is not so much concerned with the individual body or experience; instead, individuals are subsumed into the collective body of the people. Moreover, Bakhtin's indifference to dialogue in his study of Rabelais supports his problematic view of violence and makes those thoughts on violence less relevant for my exploration of dialogic relations. His discussion of carnivalization and laughter in his revised book on Dostoevsky, which was written after the book on Rabelais, differs significantly from the latter. Both carnival and laughter are recharacterized here in less destructive and more positive terms.

Can dialogue and dialogic relationships actually become counter-productive in struggles in which voices try to be heard? If dialogic interaction always implies the threat of violence and if voices are frequently absorbed or domesticated in the process, then how can it be safe for any oppositional voice to engage in dialogue? Pollock has drawn attention to the potential problems

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<sup>24</sup> Bakhtin's comments on violence are contradictory. While violence may be destructive in the dialogic sphere (1986, 150), he nevertheless talks about "justified revolutionary violence" in the context of class oppression (1984a, 298). In his discussion of confession in Dostoevsky, Bakhtin avoids addressing the issues of violence or torture altogether. He defines confession as "a higher form of a person's *free* self-revelation *from within* (and not his finalizing from without)" (1984a, 294).

and dangers "when the weaker voice allows the stronger one into its space" (1993, 238). Because the dynamics of dialogue do not protect weaker voices, it seems necessary for marginal voices to control the space into which they invite dominant ones, which at times may result in their use of other forms of communication or silence as languages of transgression. It is important to note that silence is conspicuously absent from Bakhtin's writings, but that it eventually needs to be theorized in dialogic relations. Silence can obviously be coerced, a sign of oppression and exclusion, but it may also represent a choice and function as a form of transgression and strategic resistance (Hitchcock 1993, 204; Cheung 1993, 20) or as a "weapon of authoritarian discourse" (Wall 1989, 211). As a voice in itself, silence also draws attention to Bakhtin's exclusive focus on linguistic expression (Hirschkop 1989b, 18); voices and worldviews can be expressed and interact dialogically, however, even if they are not expressed in words.

Taking Fogel's skeptical view of dialogism one step further, Bernstein has asked whether dialogism is or should be a universal desideratum at all (1989, 200; 1992). Unlike Bakhtin, he suggests that sometimes voices may not lead to stimulating exchanges but may sound like "intolerable babble" or noise (221); the dialogic nature of discourse may be experienced as entrapment and damnation, rather than liberation (208, 222). Such a predicament may indeed lead to rage, resentment, and violence as a means of controlling the inescapable. Dialogism as the *cause* of violence is an unfamiliar notion in the

context of Bakhtin's work and criticism, but this recognition in itself may indicate to what extent readers have internalized Bakhtin's positive sentiments concerning liberating and enriching dialogic relations without acknowledging the negative.

Discussing the potential relevance of Bakhtin's theories within the history of the English language, Tony Crowley similarly problematizes the binary opposition implicit in Bakhtin's work between authoritarian monoglossia and pluralist heteroglossia. According to Bakhtin, if we desire a democratic, decentered social structure, we will necessarily operate by enhancing dialogism. Crowley, however, speculates that in certain contexts a preference for dialogism and heteroglossia could be politically regressive (1989, 83). Bakhtin does not problematize the possibility of such a temporary suspension of heteroglossia for potentially beneficial centralizing tendencies. Although he acknowledges the simultaneity of both unifying and decentering forces, he dismisses institutional forms of ideological unification and organization.

When we resist sentimentalizing dialogism and simplifying communication, we have to acknowledge that "the resonance of multiple voices may be a catastrophic threat as much as a sustaining chorale" (Bernstein 1989, 199). In other words, dialogism is not inherently beneficial or life-enhancing. No cultural practice is liberating or repressive *per se*; its political effect is always determined by the concrete socio-historical context in which it operates and the

uses to which it is put by historical agents.<sup>25</sup> While dialogism always signifies struggle, it may be a force of cultural resistance as well as a means of conquest. Instead of equating dialogism in an essentializing manner with liberation and monologism with totalitarian rule--which locks them into a mutually exclusive binary opposition--I suggest they need to be treated as principles that only achieve liberating or repressive effects once they are embedded in specific historical contexts. I am able, then, to concede that ruling forces at times adopt dialogic forms and oppressed groups resort to what I think of as strategic monologism.<sup>26</sup> Dialogism cannot be the monopoly of the oppressed (Hitchcock 1993, 1), nor can it free oppressed people by itself. As a critical tool it can be used within emancipatory practices and thus contribute to a process of historical transformation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For further contributions to this discussion, see especially the ground-breaking work by Stallybrass and White on carnival (1986, 14), but also White (1987/88, 238), Gardiner (1992, 182, 231: Fn26 and Fn29), Stam (1989, 94-96), Hitchcock (1993, 8), Jacqueline Howard (1994, 51), and Crowley (1989, 89).

<sup>26</sup> I have formulated the idea of strategic monologism as an analogy to Fuss's discussion of strategic essentialism in the essentialism versus constructionism debate. The most useful way of approaching monologism may be the double gesture of theorizing monologic spaces while at the same time deconstructing them to keep them from solidifying (1989, 118). See also the arguments by Bauer (1988, 166), R. Barton Palmer (1990, 104), and Zavala (1993, 263), who indicate that monologism and dialogism are not separable but are always already implicated in each other. Palmer argues that Bakhtin seems to give priority to centrifugal tendencies within a language, which leaves monologism an error to be corrected (1990, 106).

<sup>27</sup> This point has also been raised by Hitchcock (1993, 1, 86) and Gardiner (1992, 192-94). See also Gardiner's critique of Morson and Emerson's treatment of utopian elements in Bakhtin's work and his discussion of Bakhtin's "critical utopia," which "must be linked to an anti-hegemonic or transformative politics" (1993, 47). Shumway explains that "Bakhtinian theory leaves little room for actual practice; it is concerned only with detecting the weaker voices in a text, and not with creating and implementing plans for strengthening such voices" (1994, 155).

To understand dialogism as a critical tool still leaves ample methodological leeway. Critics have analyzed dialogic relations in terms of themes, points of view, plots, rhetoric, reader responses, intertextual quotations, structural elements, and genre conventions.<sup>28</sup> The wide range of application is not surprising because Bakhtin himself emphasizes that *all* elements of novelistic discourse are juxtaposed dialogically (1984a, 40). In my readings, I will concentrate on the concept of voice: what kinds of voices engage in dialogic relations; how do these relations operate; and through what narrative techniques are they actualized? Before I can engage these questions, one crucial problem remains to be solved: what actually do I mean by a voice? As I outlined above, Bakhtin uses voice interchangeably with terms such as language, subject, or consciousness. In his notes for reworking the Dostoevsky book, he turns to the definition of voice yet again: "[t]his includes height, range, timbre, aesthetic category (lyric, dramatic, etc.). It also includes a person's worldview and fate. A person enters into dialogue as an integral voice. He participates in it not only with his thoughts, but with his fate and with his entire individuality" (1984a, 293). I will focus on the notion of voice as such a concrete worldview, an ideological position, a perspective.<sup>29</sup> This approach differs from some traditional

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<sup>28</sup> See Peter K. Garrett (1980, 10) and Howells (1993, 438) as examples of the varieties that have been addressed within one study.

<sup>29</sup> Rimmon-Kenan discusses Bakhtin's notion of polyphony as the interplay of "a plurality of ideological positions" (1983, 81); D.G. Bond similarly explains that the dialogic nature of the novel is constituted by "the juxtaposition of different worldviews" (1989, 877).

understandings of voice in narrative theory. In Prince's definition, for example, voice is necessarily linked with the act of narration, that is, the question of who speaks in the text (1987, 102-03). While to examine perspectives as ideological positions does not necessarily entail saying anything about how they are constituted in the text, they necessarily play a crucial role as ideological positions in both focalization and narration (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 82).

It is not sufficient, however, to describe dialogic relations by accounting for individual perspectives in a narrative text. We can only describe their complex dialogical interrelations when we consider the internal make-up of each perspective as well as the perspective structure of the whole text.<sup>30</sup> Since dialogism is a relational phenomenon describing the interaction between perspectives, it cannot be located at isolated points in the text; it has to be actualized in the process of reading. The reader brings together these perspectives and extends "these distantly separate ideas by means of a dotted line to the point of their dialogic intersection" (Bakhtin 1984a, 91). Even if a single phrase or comment may be an indication of or means for the realization of dialogic potential, for example a double-voiced phrase, dialogic relations between voices can only be (re)constructed from the text as a whole.<sup>31</sup> Mere

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<sup>30</sup> The term "perspective structure" is used by Manfred Pfister (1988, 57-68) and Nünning (1989, 76-83).

<sup>31</sup> I understand "the text as a whole" as an abstract level of the text which is defined by the relations of contrast and correspondence between the levels of characters and narrators. This structural level is created in the actual reading process. Other elements that can be situated on this level are suspense, time structure, irony, chapter divisions, epigraphs etc. Nünning suggests

alternation of heterogeneous perspectives, narrative fragmentation, or the simple clash of rival voices do not in themselves guarantee dialogic relations;<sup>32</sup> dialogism, in Paul Thibault's words, "has the potential for re-defining the relations among 'voices,' for re-defining the interpretation of previous 'voices,' or even the set of rules according to which the discourse is to be interpreted" (1984, 113). Only if the coexistence of ideological positions at the level of the text as a whole is dynamic and confrontational, can we actually talk of dialogic relations.

Finally, let me identify two of the narrative strategies that can create dialogic relations between voices: the interplay of multiple perspectives and the internal dialogization of one perspective. In a text that uses multiple perspectives, different voices are placed side by side, which creates perspective refraction of the narrated world along a horizontal axis (McHale 1987, 170). But a character's perspective is not necessarily homogeneous. Internal dialogism describes a single perspective that is experienced as a mosaic of competing ideological positions.<sup>33</sup> Dialogization here occurs along a vertical axis that refracts a single character's consciousness. Bakhtin pays close attention to these interior dialogues in his discussion of Dostoevsky; he describes them as a

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this level as an alternative conceptualization to what has been and still is frequently referred to as "implied author" and "implied reader" (1989, 31-40).

<sup>32</sup> Concerning the problematic relationship between narrative techniques of multiplication and fragmentation and notions of change and transformations see M.-Pierette Malcuzyński (1984, 80, 83; 1990, 94), Bond (1989, 878), and van Toorn (1995, 15-16, 202-03).

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, the work of Michael Peled Ginsburg (1980) and Rosemary Clark-Beattie (1985) on the internal dialogization of the narrator's perspective.



number of conflicting voices within the limits of one consciousness (1984a, 220). Although such microdialogues, according to Bakhtin, do not yet qualify as polyphony because there is no dialogue between unmerged consciousnesses, neither are they homophonic (220-21).<sup>34</sup> These two strategies are in no way mutually exclusive; novels with multiple perspectives frequently show internally dialogized perspectives as well. Under conditions of such dialogic interaction, double-voiced discourse--discourse with a twofold direction--arises: "[i]t serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions ... In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated" (1981, 324). In his book on Dostoevsky, Bakhtin introduces a classification of different types of such double-voicing which includes quotation, reaccentuation, parody, stylization, hidden dialogue, and incorporated genres (1984a, 199; 1981, 324). I will introduce each type of discourse as it becomes relevant in my discussions.

Problematizing the concept of dialogism has led me to believe that dialogism can indeed be more than a "fave rave" of the academic establishment. If we recognize conflict and antagonism not as disturbance but as conditions of

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<sup>34</sup> Bakhtin describes Raskolnikov's interior dialogue as follows: "nothing incorporated into its [the novel's] content ... remains external to Raskolnikov's consciousness; everything is projected against him and dialogically reflected in him.... All others' perception of the world intersects with his perception. Everything that he sees and observes ... is drawn into dialogue, responds to his questions and puts new questions to him, provokes him, argues with him, or reinforces his own thoughts" (1984a, 75).

dialogical relations, then we can examine the complex interrelations between dialogism in novels and their social contexts in order to understand the formation of hegemonies and resistance to them. It would be the resolution of dialogic struggle that would put such a project at risk. As a methodological tool for the discussion of ideological signification in narrative structure, dialogism can open up opportunities for critical interventions.

## Chapter Three

### Storying Family History:

#### Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*

By telling family histories, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990) examine the relationships between their female protagonists--Naomi Nakane and Kae Ying Woo--and other family and community members, as they attempt to place these characters in their historical, geographical, and social contexts. The telling of history is not a simple, transparent process in these novels, however, for it also involves creating, challenging, constructing, and reconstructing histories. The novels focus not merely on what constitutes the families' histories, but through dialogic relations *Obasan* and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* explore how their histories are constructed, told, and written. To talk about Kogawa's and Lee's novels as storying family history may at first seem tautological, but I want to draw attention to the processes, strategies, and ideological as well as epistemological implications of creating family history.

On 22 September 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney announced the Redress Agreement negotiated with the National Association of Japanese

Canadians. The settlement acknowledged the injustices committed against Japanese Canadians during and after World War II, offered symbolic financial compensation to individuals and the community, and provided for some forms of non-monetary compensation such as clearance of conviction records, citizenship applications for those unjustly expelled and their heirs, and the establishment of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (Miki and Kobayashi 1991, 138-39). Many critics who have focused on the role of history in Kogawa's *Obasan* and the novel's relation to history agree that it was instrumental in influencing the Canadian Government's settlement with Japanese Canadians.<sup>1</sup> These critics have discussed Kogawa's novel as an attempt to write revisionist history, that is, to challenge the dominant version of Canadian history by complementing and modifying it from the perspective of Japanese Canadians.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of the narrative strategies in *Obasan* shows, however, that the novel is not only an attempt at revisionist history, but that it also problematizes the ontological and epistemological status of history itself.<sup>3</sup> Hutcheon

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the *Canadian Who's Who* for the same assessment (1991, 552). For brief overviews of critical responses to *Obasan*, see Arnold Davidson (1993, 17-23) and Cheng Lok Chua (1992, 106-07). For comments on the role of history, see Mason Harris (1990, 44), B.A. St. Andrews (1986, 36), and Gary Willis (1987, 245).

<sup>2</sup> For historical information about Japanese immigration to Canada and the wrongful treatment of Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War, see, for instance, Ken Adachi (1991), B. Singh Bolaria and Peter S. Li (1985), Barry Broadfoot (1977), Roy Miki and Cassandra Kobayashi (1991), Maryka Omatsu (1992), Ann Gomer Sunahara (1981), Patricia E. Roy (1989) and Roy et al. (1990). I do not think of these texts as unproblematic representations of history but as partial constructions; the same applies to summaries of historical events in later chapters.

<sup>3</sup> A similar suggestion has been made by Donald Goellnicht (1989), Marilyn Russel Rose (1987), and Hutcheon (1988b, 198).

introduced the term historiographic metafiction to describe novels that use "dates" and "facts" of official historiography, but at the same time undermine their claim to objectivity and authority because they cannot be reconciled with the individual experiences and perceptions of the characters in the texts (1988b, 105-123). Historiographic metafiction thus self-reflexively problematizes the ability to know the reality of those facts and dates. I will consider *Obasan* as an example of historiographic metafiction and argue that dialogic relationships between the different perspectives of what happened to Japanese Canadians during and after World War II expose Kogawa's central strategy in her attempt to question traditional concepts of history and to display an infinite process of constructing new versions of the past.<sup>4</sup> In *Obasan* this process goes beyond the suspension of valorized oppositions and infinite regress; it asserts the need for political commitment even if, or maybe because, history is recognized to be a construction.<sup>5</sup> While Kanefsky sees "historical scepticism" and "antiessentialist implications" as part of "systems of ambiguity and distortion" and claims that they are "alienating, silencing, and politically crippling" for Naomi (1996, 11, 15,

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<sup>4</sup> Dialogism has also been used in Cavell's analysis of *Obasan* (1986); however, he is not primarily concerned with the concept of history, but focuses on questions of absence and presence and the series of doublings in the text, such as the doubling of the narrators Naomi and Emily.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Brydon, however, has been critical of using Hutcheon's term to describe *Obasan* because the suspension of values that characterizes postmodern fiction in general and historiographic metafiction in particular does not apply to the "committed fiction" of *Obasan* (1994, 468-69). See also Rachele Kanefsky (1996) for a humanist approach to Kogawa's novels; she disagrees with readings of her novels as historiographic metafiction. However, following critics such as Elizabeth Wesseling (1991), Nünning (1995), and many of those represented in Bernd Engler and Kurt Müller (1994), I would argue that historiographic metafiction can indeed be ideologically committed and political.

31, 16), I argue on the contrary that epistemological scepticism and an understanding of history as constructed provide opportunities for commitment and change in *Obasan*.

Naomi Nakane is the homodiegetic narrator<sup>6</sup> in *Obasan* who relates the events of three days in September 1972, when she returns to Granton after her uncle's death, and her childhood experiences during the Second World War. However, the novel is not limited to displaying the subjectivity of Naomi's perception and her perspective. Dialogic interaction is conveyed by means of two techniques. First, Naomi's perspective is internally dialogized as she anticipates other people's reality constructs and their reactions and, thus, creates a microdialogue in her mind (Bakhtin 1984a, 74-75). Her consciousness appears as a mosaic of competing individual and collective perspectives; everything she observes is drawn into dialogue so that everything is projected against her and dialogically reflected in her. Second, in a montage-like fashion, the novel incorporates other genres such as official and private letters, diary entries, telegrams, newspaper articles, conference papers, and memoranda. As Bakhtin has explained, these incorporated genres have their "own verbal and semantic forms for assimilating various aspects of reality" (1981, 321); each document offers a different discourse on the same subject. As the narrator incorporates these texts, the novel creates "a fiction of sociological

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<sup>6</sup> A homodiegetic narrator is a narrator who is also a character in the situation and events s/he narrates; s/he is to be distinguished from a heterodiegetic narrator who is not part of the narrated world (Prince 1987, 40-41; Nünning 1989, 306).

documentation" (Lim 1989, 244). It co-opts the discourses of these documents, but Naomi's own responses to these texts are as important to the reader as the documents themselves.

To analyze the dialogic relationships in *Obasan*, I first want to reconstruct Naomi's perspective as she has created and maintained it since her childhood. Secondly, I want to have a closer look at the documents that have been incorporated and how they function within Naomi's narration. At the beginning of the novel, Naomi's view of her world presents a coherent picture to her; her life is primarily defined by her work as a teacher and her visits to her family, her aunt and uncle, in Granton. However, doubts about her social status as an unmarried woman and, as a result, feelings of inferiority impinge on this seamless picture of herself. To Naomi, her single status must be her own fault, the result of her insecurity:

Megumi Naomi Nakane. Born June 18, 1936, Vancouver, British Columbia. Marital status: Old Maid. Health: Fine, I suppose. Occupation: School teacher. I'm bored to death with teaching and ready to retire. What else would anyone want to know? Personality: Tense. Is that past or present tense? It's perpetual tense. I have the social graces of a common housefly. That's self-denigrating, isn't it. (7)

Ironic distance helps Naomi to protect the areas of her life that seem uncertain to her. Her childhood memories during and after the war, especially the unexplained absence of her mother, who never returned from a visit to Japan after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, are part of this uncertainty. When Naomi as a child tries to get answers to her questions about her mother, her questions are

left unanswered by Obasan, who remains silent (26). Naomi's frustration about not knowing finally makes her imitate Obasan's seemingly successful manner. She believes with Obasan that silence is better than speech: "[s]ome memories, too, might better be forgotten. Didn't Obasan once say, 'It is better to forget?'" (45). However, Naomi's nightmares, her memories of Old Man Gower, and her feelings of guilt about her mother's absence indicate that her silence leaves events and emotions unresolved.

The most important voice in Naomi's internal dialogue is that of Aunt Emily, who is an anti-racist activist living in Toronto. On her visits to Granton, she tries to show Naomi the necessity of a different way of life and a different way of dealing with the past; she challenges the attitudes that are at the basis of the static society in which Naomi lives. Aunt Emily is mostly interested in the injustices that the Japanese Canadians had to endure during the Second World War; she demands that these injustices be exposed and compensated. Emily's memories of the war differ significantly from the official versions of the past. She points out to Naomi that Japanese Canadians were dislocated from their positions of identity as Canadians because they were not recognized as Canadians and were thus denied their civil rights (33, 40; Jones 1990, 217-18). With the order in council PC 1486, passed on 25 February 1942, the Minister of Justice was given the power to remove all persons from a designated protected zone; however, this power was applied to only one group: "all persons of Japanese racial origin" (qtd. in Miki and Kobayashi 1991, 23-24). The War



Measures Act legalized these racist government actions. Japanese Canadians were made into outcasts in their own country. No longer was their status based on citizenship or their birthplace; their racial background was inscribed as the marked position in an oppositional structure. They were made into "ethnic others," "enemy aliens" (Miki and Kobayashi 1991, 24).

Naomi's ideal of silence is incompatible with Emily's way of thinking. Naomi listens to Emily's explanations without interest: "[t]he very last thing in the world I was interested in talking about was our experiences during and after World War II" (33). One of her strategies to protect herself from Emily's influence is a critical ironic distance similar to the kind she applies to herself:

Dear Aunt Em is crusading still. In seven canonical words, she exhorts, cajoles, commands someone - herself? me? - to carry on the fight, to be a credit to the family, to strive onwards to the goal. She's the one with the vision.... Obasan's language remains deeply underground but Aunt Emily, BA, MA, is a word warrior. She's a crusader, a little old grey-haired Mighty Mouse, a Bachelor of Advanced Activists and General Practitioner of Just Causes. (31-32)

Naomi's attitude is ambivalent. Her doubts about the efficacy of Emily's attitudes and problem-solving strategies are mixed with a certain fear of her Aunt--"I never quite know when she'll explode" (34)--and her awareness that she is choosing the monologic way of resistance instead of confrontation. Naomi's refusal to confront other perspectives becomes obvious in her evaluation of the documents that Emily shows her after a conference visit earlier the same year and that Naomi regards as proofs of an unchangeable past: "[c]rimes of history, I thought to myself, can stay in history. What we need is to concern ourselves

with the injustices of today" (41). It is only when Naomi finds the collected documents in a parcel that Emily sent to Obasan's house for her that she becomes interested and curious to engage with them: "[b]ut on my lap, her papers are wind and fuel nudging my early morning thoughts to flame" (32). A photograph of herself and her mother, given to her by Obasan, starts the process of dialogic interaction in her mind (46). For the first time, Naomi is willing to accept the pain of memory in order to revive her feelings for her mother. She anticipates Emily's reaction to her hesitation in order to break down her own resistance:

The house in which we live is in Marpole.... It does not bear remembering. None of this bears remembering.  
 "You have to remember," Aunt Emily said. "You are your history. If you cut any of it off you're an amputee. Don't deny the past." ...  
 All right, Aunt Emily, all right! The house then--the house, if I must remember it today, was large and beautiful. (49-50)

The painful memory of her mother destroys the artificial unity of her perspective on the past, which Naomi has so skilfully constructed through her silence. She begins to realize that her memories are only "[f]ragments of fragments" and "[s]egments of stories" that need to be connected to each other (53).

Once the photo has triggered her engagement, Naomi is at least willing to look at Emily's diary, which is quoted in the novel the way Naomi found it among Emily's documents (80-110). Here the montage of the diary functions as a commentary because Emily's homodiegetic diary narration presents information about the internment and her own evacuation to which Naomi did

not have prior access. It supplies explanations for some of Naomi's worries, while creating others. Naomi does not explicitly comment on the diary and its effects on her; but she continues her own narrative of past events where Emily's narration ends. The reader may get the impression that the document has been cited without distortion. However, as Meir Sternberg has explained, "[w]hatever the units involved, to quote is to mediate, to mediate is to frame, and to frame is to interfere and exploit" (1982, 145). The reader has to remember that the moment the diary is incorporated into Naomi's story, it is mediated and necessarily includes something new, namely Naomi's understanding and evaluation of it as she incorporates it into her "story." As a result, the apparently unconnected texts develop diverse interactive relationships. Tension arises from Emily's original intention to address her diary to her sister, which can be considered the original external context of this text, while Naomi on the other hand uses the diary in the novel with explanatory and complementary intentions. In the new frame of Naomi's story, Emily's diary becomes double-voiced because it serves two speakers at the same time (Bakhtin 1981, 324). Its inclusion in the novel introduces a new voice into Naomi's narrative, thereby stratifying the unity of the novel and intensifying its diversity of voices.

Two letters from the "Department of Labour, British Columbia Security Commission" (173), which explain the disappearance of Naomi's father and uncle and the departure of the rest of the family from Slocan, can also be analyzed as having commentary functions. When these letters were sent as

orders carrying out the Order in Council, they enforced the eastward movement of Japanese Canadians. But while the letters are analeptic in the chronological sequence of the story, that is, they explain past events, they are redirected to Naomi and repronounced as part of her narration (Jones 1990, 222): "[t]he orders, given to Uncle and Father in 1945, reach me via Aunt Emily's package in 1972, twenty-seven years later. The delivery service is slow these days. Understanding is even slower" (172-73). Although these documents comment and explain the chronological and causal structure of the story, Naomi also exposes the contextual nature of such documentary evidence by redirecting and defamiliarizing them.

Let me turn to another type of incorporated genre. The newspaper clippings that Naomi finds in Emily's package report the departure of Japanese Canadians under "Canada's Japanese Repatriation Plan" (184-85); they have the function of a contrastive montage, because here two or more passages are put side by side to clarify or expose each other. First, the articles that talk about the happy return of the Japanese to their homeland are contrasted with a telegram from a missionary in Slokan to Mackenzie King in which the return is qualified as a forced measurement of government politics and is described as "the cruellest cut of all," "[e]xpensive, inhuman and absolutely unnecessary" (184). However, the dialogic relations themselves have to be activated by the reader, since Naomi does not explicitly explore the contrast. At this point, Naomi is not yet willing to deal with these documents as proof of a collective enforcement that

has influenced her view of the past. Newspaper descriptions are still left intact as factual accounts of reality. Naomi is as yet incapable of explicitly challenging these constructs of reality as particular readings of events.

The climax of her confrontation with the official documents is situated in the twenty-ninth chapter when Naomi finds an article describing the situation of deported field workers, which Emily has marked with an index card saying "Facts about evacuees in Alberta" (193). The article praises the Japanese Canadian workers since they are considered responsible for an increase in the production figures for the sugar beet fields in the province. Naomi's first reaction reads like this: "[f]acts about evacuees in Alberta? The fact is I never got used to it and I cannot, I cannot bear the memory" (194). The question itself is already a technique to express the dialogic interaction between her viewpoint and the one presented in the article. Not only does she repeat the words from the index card to reinforce its statement, but she modifies the quote by turning it into a question. Naomi's own memories of her time on Mr. Barker's farm reflect less the economic success than the difficult living conditions with which her family had to cope. Naomi quite explicitly resists the article's claim to truthfulness and its underlying collective reality model. Naomi shows in this contrastive montage that the facts of the article do not correspond with her own perspective: "'[g]rinning and happy' and all smiles standing around a pile of beets? That is one telling. It's not how it was" (197). Re-citing the caption, she begins to understand that such "facts" cannot be accounted for by the opposition of right versus wrong

because they are always dependent on the observer's viewpoint, embedded in a historical context.

Naomi's attempt to create and maintain an alternative viewpoint on her own experience is mixed with her inner conflict about whether the ensuing pain would be worth the effort. The imagined conversation with Emily displays her conflict as the pressure and counter-pressure of remembering speech and forgetting silence:

Aunt Emily, are you a surgeon cutting at my scalp with your folders  
and your filing cards and your insistence on knowing all? The  
memory drains down the sides of my face, but it isn't enough, is it?  
It's your hands in my abdomen, pulling the growth from the lining  
of my walls, but bring back the anaesthetist turn on the ether  
clamp down the gas mask bring on the chloroform when will this  
operation be over Aunt Em?  
Is it so bad?  
Yes.  
Do I really mind?  
Yes, I mind, I mind everything. (194)

The coercion to speak, through the imaginary surgery Emily performs on Naomi, may be well intended on Emily's part and seen as necessary (Rose 1988, 223). But as King-Kok Cheung has rightfully pointed out, "read against the dream of the Grand Inquisitor, Naomi's pain suggests that even Emily's method may fall short" (1993, 161). Emily may be guilty of not paying attention to Naomi's needs and inner speech. It does not come as a surprise that Naomi finally breaks her silence not in a face-to-face encounter with Emily but through her imagined dialogues.

In spite of her still existing doubts about the usefulness of the

confrontation requested by Emily, Naomi's response to the condolence visit of Mr. Barker, the family's former employer and landlord, shows how critical and self-confident she has become (221-26). For Naomi, his concern for their well-being comes too late and the concern itself is patronizing: "[i]t was a terrible business what we did to our Japanese," Mr. Barker says. Ah, here we go again. 'Our Indians.' 'Our Japanese.'... The comments are so incessant and always so well-intentioned" (225). Naomi's response indicates how much she resents the suggestion of being an outcast, in 1972 as well as in 1945. She refuses to accept Mr. Barker's acknowledgement of past injury because his words reveal that he still sees Japanese Canadians as others, as excluded from a Canadian "we." Naomi realizes that if the record is to be set straight, if Japanese Canadians are to be recognized as Canadians, they have to take action themselves. Her reflections on Mr. Barker's visit end with her answering back to many of those insulting questions asked of Japanese Canadians: "[w]here do any of us come from in this cold country?" (226). And her response reaccentuates and thereby reclaims the "we" that Mr. Barker so skilfully reserves for the white, Anglo majority; Naomi's response becomes a proclamation of the collective identity of Japanese Canadians:

Oh Canada, whether it is admitted or not, we come from you we come from you.... We come from the country that plucks its people out like weeds and flings them into the roadside.... We come from cemeteries full of skeletons with wild roses in their grinning teeth. We come from our untold tales that wait for their telling. We come from Canada, this land that is like every land, filled with the wise, the fearful, the compassionate, the corrupt. (226)

Naomi's response not only interacts dialogically with Mr. Barker's previous comments; its opening phrase "Oh Canada" also evokes the Canadian national anthem. Its sentiments, however, are not those of loyalty and devotion but take the form of a lament. Parodic references to the anthem occur at earlier moments in the novel as well.<sup>7</sup> Naomi imagines the reply of B. Good, "the custodian in charge of all the property" (37), to a letter of inquiry by Aunt Emily: "[b]e good, my undesirable, my illegitimate children, be obedient, be servile, above all don't send me any letters of enquiry about your homes, while I stand on guard (over your property) in the true north strong, though you are not free. B. Good" (37). The allusions to the anthem show how its language and ideology can easily be used in the service of patriarchal and racist practices. Naomi uses the discourse of the anthem to show how a national symbol may purport to speak for a nation, while its construction of that nation relies on the exclusion of minorities. When Naomi and her friends sing the anthem as part of the Slocan school drill (156-57), the voicing of the anthem seems deeply ironic (Davidson 1993, 62-63). Again, the first person plural pronoun does not include these Japanese Canadian children: they cannot claim Canada as their "home"--they have been made into "enemy aliens"; they are told that Canadians with European ancestry have a right to think of themselves as "native" to the country, while this right is denied to immigrants from countries other than Europe and even to Aboriginal

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<sup>7</sup> Parody is another form of double-voiced discourse in which a semantic intention is introduced that is directly opposed to the original one (Bakhtin 1984a, 193).



peoples. When the children are expected to perform the ceremonies of their own exclusion, the anthem becomes a lament for a deeply racist country.<sup>8</sup>

The realization that there is "evidence for optimism" (199) in the dialogic confrontation and modification of her own and other perspectives comes to Naomi when she finally understands that speech and silence do not have to remain mutually exclusive or paradoxical. Rather, they are increasingly imagined as complementing each other (Cheung 1993, 165). Just as Naomi has learned to face Emily's documents about the war, she realizes that constant questioning, accusing, and searching for guilt are unsuccessful in doing justice to her missed mother. Naomi can accept neither Obasan's absolute silence nor Emily's impatient speech with its claim to truthful documentation, without modifying them. Naomi comes to accept the relationship between silence and speech as a "dialogic struggle" that is characterized by infinitely negotiated tension (Lim 1989, 242). Within this struggle the opposition of silence and speech may at times break down completely (Cheung 1993, 151), so that silence, for example, can become a figure of speech and even a language of transgression as it does for

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<sup>8</sup> The tension between "home," "native," and "land" in the anthem is also evoked in quotations from Emily's manuscript entitled "The Story of the Nisei in Canada: A Struggle for Liberty" (38-42). Emily engages dialogically with a line from Sir Walter Scott's "The Lay of the Last Minstrel": "Breathes there the man, with soul so dead, / Who never to himself hath said, / This is my own, my native land!" (1909, 39). Challenging her identification as a Canadian in different contexts, Emily tries to change the sentence by emphasizing different parts and transforming it into a question; but her re-accentuations only confirm what she already felt before: "I am Canadian" (40). Kogawa has adopted Emily's text in *Obasan* from a manuscript by Muriel Kitagawa (Kogawa 1995a, 22), whose writings Kogawa acknowledges in her preface to the novel. In his introduction to Kitagawa's work, Roy Miki highlights the importance of Scott's poem and its sentiments for Kitagawa (1985, 22-23). For the complete manuscript, see Kitagawa (1985, 286-88).

Obasan throughout the novel.

Naomi is now able to listen to the two Japanese letters she found among Emily's documents, but whose content she does not know. The letters were written by her Grandmother Kato from Japan, and they relate what happened to Naomi's mother after the bombing of Nagasaki and why she did not return to her family. Naomi interacts with these letters by partly recounting their content in her own words and at the same time inserting original quotations. The letters finally make Naomi's accusation of her mother redundant. She is able at last to listen to her mother's "voice": "Mother. I am listening. Assist me to hear you" (240).

The following chapter presents Naomi's hidden dialogue with her mother and is the climax of the internal dialogism in the novel. In a hidden dialogue the statements of the second speaker are omitted, but the general sense is not violated (Bakhtin 1984a, 197); it seems as if Naomi's mother "is present invisibly" (197). The readers do not actually read her mother's words, but they can see their traces in the influence on all of Naomi's remarks. On the basis of her new information, Naomi tries to restore the connection with her mother by anticipating her attitudes and reactions in her address.

Naomi seems to stand on firm ground at the end of the last chapter. She returns to the coulee, which she used to visit with her grandfather; her experience of the land is peaceful, beautiful, almost serene. An harmonious tension seems to have been reached: "water and stone dancing" (247). And it is

no accident in this final scene that Naomi is wearing Aunt Emily's coat which "is warmer than [her] jacket" (246). Better equipped with what Emily has given her--a coat but probably also her speech and activism--Naomi achieves a "personal transcendence" (79), which has led Arnold Davidson to say that "*Obasan*, in its last chapter, comes dangerously close to over-resolution" (77). But the novel does not end here. The postscript, another document presumably taken from Emily's package, is identified as an "Excerpt from the memorandum sent by the co-operative committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and Senate of Canada, April 1946" (248-50). The excerpt is a ten-point argument against the plan the government devised after the war to return Japanese Canadians to Japan. The last move of the novel is, therefore, to place Naomi's personal narrative in a larger public context. Only this time it is not Naomi who is engaging with the text dialogically; instead, the document challenges the reader to activate its dialogic relations with the rest of the novel.

Because the excerpt emphasizes the political implications of Emily's narrative, it pays a final tribute to Emily's position of political activism. However, while the novel foregrounds the political protest of Japanese Canadians, supported by the references to Ed Kitagawa, Jean Suzuki, and Gordon Nakayama in Kogawa's acknowledgement (n.p.), the excerpt is signed by James M. Finlay, Andrew Brewin, and Hugh MacMillan (250). The Cooperative Committee for Japanese Canadians, which was incorporated in June 1945, is only one example of the growing number of anti-deportation voices of the time.

Alongside the legal battle of lawyers to halt the deportations, the Cooperative Committee and its allies organized an anti-deportation campaign that included fund-raising activities, distribution of pamphlets, organization of meetings, writing of letters to the Prime Minister and members of Parliament as well as numerous press statements (Sunahara 1981, 138). The public reaction opposing deportation orders was spontaneous and strong. The excerpt thus serves as a reminder of a time when influential Canadians began to organize against racial discrimination and public opinion shifted, when the time for change had come. However, the excerpt also alludes to the second uprooting of Japanese Canadians which was the result of "voluntary" repatriation and resettlement programmes and well under way during the summer of 1946. Although the deportation orders-in-council were ruled to be legal in December 1946, the policy had already become unnecessary and, because of public protest, even politically unwise.

Davidson sees the fact that the Anglo Canadians who signed the memorandum are set up as counterparts to the B.Goods of the novel as "a reading directive in the form of a crucial question": "[w]ho represents the Anglo-Canadian reader in this text? The three individuals who opposed mass deportation or say, the custodian of confiscated property, the misnamed functionary, B. Good?" (1993, 81). The political implications of the excerpt startle even contemporary readers; the final document challenges them, that is, Anglo readers, to ask how it was possible that Canada could adopt these "methods of

Naziism" depicted in Naomi's narrative and to ensure that Canada no longer does and never will again (250).

The montage-like narrative structure has at least two effects in *Obasan*. First, Kogawa allows the reader to use the documents in order to reconstruct the perspectives that contribute to Naomi's inner conflict. Second, the montage creates a field of tension between the different viewpoints that challenges the quality of the documents themselves. Documents used as source material for traditional historiography are denied their claim to truthfulness. Through quotation the documents are re-contextualized, and this exposes them as readings of events embedded in a historical situation. Their underlying reality constructs are not simply "right" because they have collective character. Actually, collectivity and homogeneity are ultimately seen as expressions of existing power structures and monologic control. St. Andrews has drawn attention to the fact that "history often silences the oppressed and glorifies its collective social memory" (1986, 31). In her attempt to contrast this collective memory with an alternative view, Naomi exposes every description of reality and the past as an undertaking determined by subjective interests and conditions.<sup>9</sup> In the end, the homogeneity of the collective memory is itself unmasked as a construct based on subjective interests; it is therefore revisable.

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<sup>9</sup> Kogawa has commented that "[o]ne has to acknowledge that another person's expressed reality is her reality, and that's hers" (1993, 152). In another interview, she has commented on the problem she has "with trying to write *The Truth, The Real Live Thing*, is that I don't think you ever get it. You never get it" (1995a, 34).

*Obasan* presents the reader with a collection of documents about and from the past and the attempt of the narrator to find coherence in the diverging perspectives, which is only possible through dialogic relativization. Although the cited newspaper articles and government decrees cannot be changed as material texts or in their original effects, they can be made part of a dialogic confrontation today. When they are introduced into a novel such as *Obasan*, they are moved out of their socio-historical vacuum and submitted to the unfinalizable and infinite dialogue of the text (Bakhtin 1986, 152).

The novel itself has been part of the process of revising Canadian history. It was published at a time when Japanese communities across Canada experienced a resurgence of pride and self-awareness in the late 1970s with the lifting of the thirty-year ban on access to World War II government files and the celebrations of the 100-year-anniversary of the first Japanese immigrant to Canada, Manzo Nagano (Miki and Kabayashi 1991, 60-61). Japanese Canadians, not unlike Emily and Naomi, began to explore the ways in which language had been used to impose, enforce, and naturalize the Japanese difference as "essential" and how that difference had then been used to justify injustices. The need to contest the very discursive practices that had defined them, plus the confidence and courage resulting from organized community activity, enabled Japanese Canadians to tell their own stories, to break the silence, and to pursue a redress movement.

Where does fact end and fiction begin in this process? Through

quotation, double-voicing, and thus dialogic relations, fact and fiction seem to inform each other and hold each other in suspension. As historiographic metafiction, *Obasan* provides a Japanese Canadian perspective on the events of the Second World War. Subsequently, quotations from the novel were used twice by politicians on Settlement Day to explain the seriousness and validity of the claims made by Japanese Canadians.<sup>10</sup> In the House of Commons, Ed Broadbent, leader of the New Democratic Party, quoted Naomi's words to reinforce the notion that the injustices committed against Japanese Canadians were not abstract deeds but that they caused "profound, serious human suffering" and were "real experiences in real lives" (qtd. in Miki and Kobayashi 148). Gerry Weiner, Minister of State for Multiculturalism, quoted from Emily's manuscript "The Story of the Nisei in Canada: A Struggle for Liberty," which is itself quoted from Kitagawa's writing, in his press statement to explain that Japanese Canadians fought for acknowledgement of the injustice done to their people because they were loyal Canadians (Miki and Kobayashi 150). The intertextuality does not stop here. In *Itsuka* (1992), her sequel to *Obsan*, Kogawa actually traces Naomi's involvement in the redress movement. This novel ends with a description of the events on Settlement Day, 22 September 1988 (271-79): "as I look down I can see Mr. Broadbent.... he rises and speaks and he's fighting to control his voice. 'They, as Canadian citizens, had done no wrong'" (275). The

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<sup>10</sup> This fact is mentioned by Goellnicht (1989, 306n28) and Davidson (1993, 14-15) in their discussions of *Obasan*.

pervasiveness and infinite regress of quotations shows that the dialogism of the narrative in *Obasan*, which I have begun to explore, is part of a larger dialogic intertext, in which the relations between novel and society are indeed dynamic and reciprocal.

"I've been waiting for this book, didn't know who would write it, a novel that explores our history, confirms the process of building a chinese canadian presence" (135). With these words Rita Wong opens her review of Lee's first novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Similar notions of assertion and agency characterize many reviews and discussions of the novel; the novel's paperback cover describes it as a "memorable and moving picture of a people's struggle for identity."<sup>11</sup> I believe that the sense of achievement expressed by Wong derives not only from the fact that this is a novel written by a Chinese Canadian or from what stories it actually tells; at least part of Lee's accomplishment, I would argue, comes from the strategies she uses to organize *Disappearing Moon Cafe*.

Chinese Canadian communities have been a vital force in Canada for a long time. But because of the severe racism Chinese Canadians have encountered, a confident, self-conscious, and critical voice to tell their stories is still a recent phenomenon. The first Chinese workers came to British Columbia in 1858 when news reached California that gold had been found in the Fraser

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<sup>11</sup> The comparison with the cover of *Obasan* is interesting: "[a] moving novel of a time and suffering we have tried to forget." The first person plural pronoun identifies the readers as not belonging to the Japanese Canadian community, but instead as the dominant groups that have tried to forget acts of official racism.



Valley and that there was a second Gold Mountain in North America.<sup>12</sup> During the period from 1881 to 1885, a larger number of Chinese workers, estimated at 15,700 to 18,000 (Li 1988, 17; Wickberg 1982, 22; Dawson 1991, 21), entered Canada directly from China: they were sought as cheap labourers for the construction of some of the most treacherous sections of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia.<sup>13</sup> Tolerated in times of need, these "sojourners" were no longer wanted once the railroad was completed and economic difficulties hit British Columbia (Li 1988, 26). Hidden behind what could be described as a utilitarian attitude, a wide range of exclusionary policies and discriminatory legislation was instituted, of which the imposition of a head tax upon every person of Chinese origin entering Canada--initially \$50 in 1885, \$100 in 1900 and \$500 in 1903--may now be the best known.<sup>14</sup> These measures culminated in 1923, when on 1 July the Canadian Parliament passed the Chinese Immigration Act, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, which almost completely stopped Chinese immigration to Canada. Since immigration

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<sup>12</sup> I have consulted the following sources for this all too brief and selective historical overview: Kay Anderson (1991), Bolaria and Li (1985, 81-104), Brian J. Dawson (1991), Li (1988) and (1992), Roy (1989), Edgar Wickberg (1982), and Paul Yee (1988).

<sup>13</sup> Chinese workers contributed significantly to other new industries as well, such as mining, land clearing, lumbering, salmon canning, and domestic service.

<sup>14</sup> Consult Li for some more details from a much longer list: "[b]etween 1884 and 1923 the British Columbia legislature successfully passed numerous bills restricting the political and social rights of the Chinese. For example, a bill in 1884 disallowed Chinese from acquiring Crown lands and diverting water from natural channels ... The Coal Mines Regulation Amendment Act of 1890 prevented them from working underground ... The Provincial Home Act of 1893 excluded Chinese from admission to the provincially established home for the aged and infirm" (1988, 27-28).

had always been geared towards a male workforce, Chinese communities in Canada were predominantly male. Women and children were usually left behind. With the introduction of head taxes, bringing over wives was a privilege of the economically successful merchant class. A wife became a status symbol in Chinatown.<sup>15</sup> In 1947 the Act was finally repealed, and the right to vote extended to the Chinese. It took another twenty years before immigration applications from the Chinese were judged by the same criteria as were those of other nationalities. As a result of the changed immigration policies, the Chinese population has increased substantially since 1967; a significant number of people have immigrated under the business immigration program that Canada introduced in 1978 and expanded in 1985. While the capital injected into the Canadian economy, particularly on the West Coast, has been welcome to offset economic recession, increasing numbers of Chinese Canadians have again become the target of racial antagonism (Li 1992, 272-73).

Chinese communities have lived in and contributed to Canada for over 130 years, but discriminatory practices have led to their systematic marginalization, silencing, and exclusion in all sectors of social life (Chan and Helly 1987). With a growing interest in ethnic literatures and the establishment of more alternative publication houses, literary voices from the Chinese Canadian

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<sup>15</sup> The history of Chinese immigration to Canada is most often written in legal and thereby male terms; for attempts to correct this picture see especially the interviews collected in *Jin Guo* (1992) by the Women's Book Committee, Yee (1988), and to a lesser extent Evelyn Huang with Lawrence Jeffery (1992).

communities have finally been (allowed to be) heard. Recently, anthologies such as Bennett Lee's and Jim Wong-Chu's *Many-Mouthed Birds* (1991) and autobiographical works such as Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children* (1994) and Evelyn Lau's *Runaway* (1989) have attracted attention. Sky Lee explains the lack of Chinese Canadian writers who record their experience: "[t]he silence is a reaction toward the very blatant, very violent racism the Chinese in Canada have endured ... I think the line of trust, in terms of communication, has been broken too often.... Our generation is the first generation to regain a voice" (qtd. in M. Andrews 1990). In *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Lee situates her fictional narrative of the Wong family in the carefully researched historical context of Chinese immigration to Canada and of the Chinese Canadian community in Vancouver's Chinatown in particular.<sup>16</sup>

The specific socio-historical contexts are crucial for a present-day reading of the novel if we are to understand the historical context of events told in the narrative and to explain how the text is "raced, classed, and sexed through relations of power, hegemony, oppression and resistance" (Schueller 1994, 4). *Disappearing Moon Cafe* performs double manoeuvres that may seem contradictory. It acknowledges a history of discrimination in Canada, but by its focus on one Chinese Canadian family, it insists that characters need to take

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<sup>16</sup> See Liam Lacey (1990) on Lee's historical research. Lee uses material surrounding the Janet Smith murder case and incorporates information about everything from immigration procedures such as detention camps, to architectural details in Chinatown such as cheater floors, to the expeditions organized by the Chinese Benevolent Association in Victoria to retrieve bones of missing railroad workers, and references to telephones as "crying lines."

responsibility for their actions in the novel, even if circumstances are not of their making. Although the Chinese Exclusion Act, for example, was imposed on the Chinese population and had serious effects on the demographics of Chinatown, making it "ripe for incest" (147), this situation cannot serve as a justification of incestuous relations. As a result, the novel does not just portray positive aspects of the Chinatown community; it is not a nostalgic review of past hardships or a present day picture of a model minority. Sky Lee has spoken self-consciously of this fact: Chinese Canadians may be offended; the rest of the Canadian audience may find the novel exotic (M. Andrews 1990, Lacey 1990).<sup>17</sup> As the novel powerfully asserts the presence of Chinese Canadians, it also challenges the homogeneity of the community by exposing its misogyny, greed, and secrets of incest and suicide. It simultaneously evokes a strong sense of community and challenges its motives.

Facing the table of contents and following a dedication and acknowledgements, Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* provides the genealogical tree of "The Wong Family" (n.p.). Since the text on the back-cover tells the reader that the novel "traces the lives and passionate loves of the women of the Wong family through four generations," this chart should provide some guidance through a complex family saga (Seaman 1991, Wong 1990, 135). However, what

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<sup>17</sup> For Sheldon Goldfarb (1990) the exotic does not work. He describes the novel as "a lot of sound and fury, of Victorian-style melodrama, along with Victorian-style sentimentality about the noble Chinese workers, the goodness of Mother Earth and the joys of women together." His review serves as an excellent example of a white male critic imposing Western literary criteria on a text. Goldfarb's comments say more about himself than about the novel discussed.

looks, at first glance, like a neat and straightforward visual aid to the history of the Wong family is not followed by a similarly transparent narrative. Let me take a closer look at the tree before I move on. In keeping with conventions of genealogical research that traces a male-line descent from a common ancestor (FitzHugh 1985, 106, 117), the tree shows the earliest ancestor at the top and the descendants extending below, indicating marriages, children, and dates of birth and deaths. It should be noted, however, that the tree begins not with Gwei Chang or his ancestors but with the parents of Kelora who was Wong Gwei Chang's first partner and who bore their son Ting An. Moreover, names and dates are only provided for those characters who will play a significant role in Kae's narration throughout the novel; for example, no names or dates are given for Ting An's wife or Song Ang's husband, either wife or daughter of John, or Kae's husband. Attention is directed to the end of the Wong family line by providing the following information for Suzie's child: "last Wong male died at birth 1950."

Indeed, the traditional genre of the family saga, driven by what Patricia Tobin has identified as the "genealogical imperative,"<sup>18</sup> is invoked, yet simultaneously undermined in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. The narrative seems to pull away from the family tree, from its lines of descent, succession, linearity,

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<sup>18</sup> The genealogical imperative "equates the temporal form of the classical novel ... with the dynastic line that unites the diverse generations of the genealogical family.... By an analogy of function, events in time come to be perceived as begetting other events within a line of causality similar to the line of generations, with the prior event earning a special prestige as it is seen to originate, control, and predict future events" (Tobin 1978, 6-7).

and its traditional focus on the male line. The family history, which in ancestor research is understood as "identifying family members in the context of their physical and social environment" (Wright 1995, 3), is here informed by a focus on the women of the Wong family, by narrative juxtapositions, gaps, and contingencies. As the novel develops, the connections between the family tree and family history are sought out but also challenged and undermined. The novel does not seem interested in reproducing and transmitting the correct or complete knowledge of the Wong family history but instead draws attention to how this knowledge is produced. The question of male origin is ultimately displaced, as it already is in the family tree, and the practices, discourses, and silences of the Wong family become the focus of attention. By dialogizing its narrative form, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* foregrounds the discontinuities of history, the differences and relations between members of the Wong family, and the affirmation of knowledge as perspective, and thus explores the kind of genealogy that Foucault describes as a means to write a general, non-foundational history (1972, 10).<sup>19</sup>

The novel is divided into a prologue, seven chapters, and an epilogue, all of which are further subdivided into a total of forty-nine sequences. The character whose perspective focuses each section is indicated by headings usually consisting of the respective name and a year. Only a small number of

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<sup>19</sup> See also Foucault's "Genealogy, Nietzsche, History" for his descriptions of this kind of genealogy as "[e]ffective history" and "*wirkliche Historie*" as opposed to traditional history (1984, 89, 86).

sections are headed by inserted genres (letters, telegram, phone call) or themes (babies, story, The Bones, Feeding the Dead).

*Disappearing Moon Cafe* opens with a Prologue that introduces Wong Gwei Chang, whose generation initiates the secrets and problems later explored by Kae. While five sections are headed by his name (the second most after Kae), they are relegated exclusively to the Prologue and Epilogue, a framing device that I want to return to later. The time settings move between 1892, when Gwei Chang first encountered Kelora, and the year of his death, 1939. The four sections of the Prologue serve primarily expository functions, creating an atmosphere while remaining vague about what the main narrative will involve. The Prologue contextualizes the novel in three important ways. First, with a strong focus on memory, the notion of history is introduced as a subject-dependent construct rather than a static fact (1, 7-10). For example, the narrator tells us that Gwei Chang "played with his memories all day long. Or they played with him" (5); he wonders whether he could believe Chen because "Chen told him lots of strange, elusive stories, but who knows which ones were true and which ones were fragments of his own fantasy?" (7). Second, the Prologue introduces information about the early immigration of Chinese workers to Canada. For instance, after coming initially for the gold rush (7), many Chinese men were hired as labourers for the CPR. Gwei Chang was sent by the Benevolent Association in Victoria to find the bones of those who died along the tracks of the railway; their bones were to be returned to Victoria and from there

taken to China for proper burial (2, 16, 18; Wickberg 1982, 24). During his search he comes across several leftover work camp gangs. This historical information informs many of the family stories told later in the novel. And third, the opening sections introduce a number of issues through the relationship between Kelora, a young Native woman who speaks Chinese, and Gwei Chang, an adult Chinese man who has immigrated to Canada. Their encounter draws attention to the complex relations between race, gender, and language explored throughout the novel.

The first chapter introduces Kae Ying Woo, a thirty-six-year-old Chinese Canadian woman who is recovering from giving birth to her first child, Robert Man Jook Lee. Still in hospital, Kae assesses her situation frankly:

I'm so very disappointed. I've been brought up to believe in kinship, or those with whom we share. I thought that by applying attention to all the important events such as the births and the deaths, the intricate complexities of a family with chinese roots could be massaged into a suant, digestible unit. Like a herbal pill--I thought I could swallow it and my mind would become enlightened. (19)

Brought up with a strong belief that families assure people of their places in the community, Kae followed the path of the proper and perfect family woman: she got married and then had a child. Thus, she hoped to follow the "inevitable logic underlining life," ensuring a proper beginning and "a well-penned conclusion" of a life story that could indeed be massaged into a pill and swallowed (20). The linearity underlying such a plan was to ensure order, enlightenment, and reassurance. For all her life, Kae participated in this order by listening to and



internalizing the family history the way it was told to her. Kae's "close scrape with death" during childbirth (21), however, has created a crisis in her life, a threshold situation in which she needs to re-evaluate her life.<sup>20</sup> Time in the chronotope of the threshold seems to be without duration, almost instantaneous according to Bakhtin (1981, 248). Similarly, the sections in which Kae participates as a character seem to have no duration, they are without specific time references, except when she decides to visit Hermia. Kae realizes two things: rather than bringing her fulfilment, giving birth leaves her feeling frustrated and trapped; and second, the family history she was privy to was only one version of that history while many other stories had been kept secret from her. In the hospital room, her mother decides to share some of these stories with Kae, once she finds her grandson in good health. Paradoxically, "the story--the well-kept secret that [Kae] had actually unearthed years ago--finally begins to end for [her] with the birth of [her] son" (23). The crisis of giving birth forces Kae to rethink her situation and to explore the possibility of change, so that her time of physical healing may also become emotional and spiritual healing.

Instead of one family history, one coherent version massaged into a pill, the narrator Kae collects and presents multiple, often conflicting and

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<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin identifies the threshold situation as a characteristic of the Socratic dialogue in his history of dialogic prose (1984a, 111). He explains that "its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life. The word 'threshold' itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage ... and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold)" (1981, 248).

contradictory stories. This new approach to family history is born out of her realization that every history is always a particular history, someone's interested construction. She problematizes this concern throughout the narrative: if history can be told in so many different ways, what is reality and truth (132, 191, 214)? How does history get constructed; whose stories get included; whose silences loom large (66, 145-46, 180)? The new approach to her family history is enacted through her gathering of all the stories she has heard and now retells. The narrative form of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* thus suggests qualities of an oral history of the Wong family. As an oral history, the narrative of forty-nine sections is appropriately organized, primarily through associative connections, and breaks away from chronological succession and notions of causality. In some sections the narrator explicitly leads into the next one; some sections present a particular time or event from different characters' perspectives; some seem to be triggered by a single thought or memory; others do not share any such obvious commonalities but may connect with later or previous sequences. While all sections somehow relate to members of the Wong family and their contexts, only some of these connections are pointed out by Kae. As the reader fills in the gaps and completes the connections between different stories--what Bakhtin has described as extending "the dotted line" between separate elements to the point of their interaction (1984a, 91)--the dialogic relations that are activated between perspectives undermine the discourse of the genealogical imperative. As the narrative seems to move closer in concentric circles to the question of Suzie's

death, and with it to the end of the Wong lineage, it simultaneously expands and moves outward again. The gaps and interruptions, the secrets of what Kae has not known about the Wong family are foregrounded. Discontinuity becomes the driving force of the narrative.

To argue that *Disappearing Moon Cafe* presents a recollected family history is also to raise the question of who narrates its stories, especially in sections where Kae does not identify herself as the homodiegetic narrator. Some confusion exists in the criticism over this question, which can be partly explained by a lack of terminological clarity. No distinction is usually made by critics between narration and focalization.<sup>21</sup> In the sections or parts of a section where Kae does not identify herself as the narrator by referring to herself in the first person singular, the narrating instances nevertheless fulfil more than mere diegetic functions; they are not impersonal devices but become more or less personalized characters. A surplus of information allows for frequent privileged evaluations<sup>22</sup> and foreshadowing explanations that allude to later events.<sup>23</sup> But there are also many contextual references that provide evaluative background

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<sup>21</sup> Graham Huggan, for example, describes one paragraph as "Beatrice Wong's interpretation," presumably because the section is headed by her name (1994a, 145-46); however, the first person singular pronoun in the last few paragraphs of the section should be attributed to the homodiegetic narrator Kae reflecting on her telling of the Wong family stories (41). Gary Draper makes a similar mistake when he refers to "a variety of narrators" (1990). I would argue that he means a variety of focalizers.

<sup>22</sup> For examples, see 8, 25, 26, 29, 49, 92, 140, 147, 159, 164, 165, 223, 228.

<sup>23</sup> See examples on 16, 50, 159, 234.

and cannot be attributed to any of the other characters.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the narrator exercises a synthesizing function because s/he provides many generalizations that cannot easily be attributed to another character.<sup>25</sup> Rather than assuming various heterodiegetic narrators who are vaguely personalized but cannot be identified, I argue that Kae is the narrator of these sections too, because she retells the many stories she has been told and has gathered during her lifetime. In the telling she is no longer foregrounded as a participant in the story. Although she does not refer to herself, the observations and explanations provided are consistent with her perspective, knowledge, and background. This approach would account for her omniscience, her knowledge of times, places, and events when and where she was not present. Through this narratological manoeuvre, the novel maintains some of the qualities of presenting an oral history. Hermia so poignantly asks of Kae at the round-table that Kae orchestrates in "Feeding the Dead": "[d]o you mean that this story isn't a story of several generations, but of one individual thinking collectively?" (189). As the collector and teller of her family stories, Kae, indeed, becomes the individual thinking collectively, the orchestrator of dialogic relations.

While Kae may thus be identified as the only narrator (with the exception of Suzie, more on that later), focalizers shift much more frequently. Not only does Kae act as focalizer, most explicitly in those sections where she

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<sup>24</sup> For more examples, see 16, 24, 28, 32, 74, 77, 93, 94, 130, 140, 147, 221, 224, 232.

<sup>25</sup> For examples, see 6, 10, 14, 49, 115, 123, 136, 139, 180, 221.

foregrounds her own presence, but the character whose perspective is the focus of one sequence often acts as focalizer within that section. Thus, perspectives of family members are established not only through the narrator's perspective but also through their own experiences. Yet, the text literally refuses to make final statements about any character's perspective. The frequent shifts in time, place, and focalizer keep their positions from materializing permanently. Kae's history of the Wong family is a collection of pieces that continuously shift in their relation to each other; as each story is told, it has already begun to change. At times, Kae herself makes self-conscious comments regarding the processual nature of her storying; the reader must continuously adjust and readjust the connections between the many perspectives the text presents.

Let me take a closer look at how some of the perspectives relate to each other. Mui Lan is introduced as the proprietress of the successful Disappearing Moon Cafe in Vancouver's Chinatown; she came to Canada in 1911 as the "merchant's wife" of Gwei Chang, bringing with her their sixteen-year-old son Choy Fuk. Initially a warm and optimistic woman, proud of her husband's overseas prosperity, Mui Lan begins to feel distant from him and misses the supportive community of women she enjoyed in her village in China. Only through the stories related primarily in the Prologue and through some later references can the reader infer some of the reasons why Gwei Chang seems distant to his wife: he is more concerned with the memory of Kelora and the life

he left behind.<sup>26</sup> Mui Lan adjusts to the lonely life in Chinatown by becoming increasingly cold, noisy, and demanding. However, she can only enjoy the economic success that becomes her life's new goal when the good name of the family and its continuation can be assured at the same time. To her distress, after over five years of marriage, her daughter-in-law Fong Mei, whom she selected and brought to Canada to be Choy Fuk's wife, is still without children. Mui Lan's determination to have a grandson justifies all means, whether secrets, lies, or blackmail. Her final offer to Fong Mei is a threat cloaked in a promise:

"I know a woman's heart! What woman would deny that yearning for a baby son, or even a baby girl to begin with.... Well, now you have the opportunity. All you need to do is give up your old man for a few days, and soon you'll have a son--and with him, security, prestige, honour, and the glowing warmth of a family to look after your old age. What could be easier? And where's the harm in that?" she asked innocently. (62)

If Fong Mei follows her mother-in-law's advice, she will let her husband have an affair with another woman who will bear a child that Choy Fuk and herself can later pass off as their own. While Mui Lan reads Fong Mei's body movements, her nodding as agreement, and sees her worn down by her mother-in-law's attacks on her self-esteem and dignity, a shift in focalizers allows the reader

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<sup>26</sup> Consider the following examples. Gwei Chang thinks of Kelora during Wong Foon Sing's interrogation in 1924: "[f]or a precious instant, he remembered another smooth caress. One he once cherished. For a brief moment, he remembered a time when he had soared beyond all human reach. But the feeling passed as it always did, and he was again left behind, always disappointed, always dazed" (78). He remembers her also before his death in 1939: "[f]unny, how he could just be sitting there and the feeling of her lips brushing against his would take him by surprise.... But just for a second. Then it would be gone, leaving him to agonize alone. Funny, wasn't it, how she could still do that to him" (235).

access to Fong Mei's experience of the situation. What looks like agreement to Mui Lan is bottled-up, barely contained aggression on her daughter-in-law's part:

By now, Fong Mei was all but cried out. She still kneeled on the floor, covered in a cold sweat, as if drained from some kind of wasted exertion.... Suddenly, she realized that there was rage as well. *So, it was rage, pushing her body beyond its limits! Rage that made her body shudder with icy fear.* (60, emphasis added)

In the free indirect discourse, emphasized here by italics, the narrator's voice recedes and foregrounds the feelings of the character Fong Mei.<sup>27</sup> These are the first indications that the once quiet, obedient, and fearful woman who was married to Choy Fuk at seventeen and who learned that to live in her in-laws' household meant to be silent and invisible, changes into a more free-spirited person who tries to turn someone else's rules and decisions to her own advantage--while Mui Lan still believes that Fong Mei's humiliation could not be worse. The change is captured in the following section attributed to Fong Mei:

She had changed these past six months. Where the loathsome living arrangement that Mui Lan had forced her into had once made her blood boil, it in fact suited her now. Fong Mei no longer felt like she was a part of somebody else's plans. *And quite truthfully*, Fong Mei had never borne any malice towards *that poor, unfortunate waitress-woman.... Pitiful thing--just a sore bag who didn't seem to have enough gumption or sagacity to manipulate a better life for herself.* (91-92, emphasis added)

Fong Mei is now able to assert her own sense of self. In doing so, however, she employs Mui Lan's very own strategies; she finds solace in reminding herself of

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<sup>27</sup> Critics have pointed out that Lee too often indicates these transitions to free indirect discourse by exclamation marks, as if to make sure that her reader picks up on the shift in voice.

the waitress's social inferiority.

Choy Fuk pretends to comply with his mother's scheme to keep himself and his wife out of trouble. The reader learns from his perspective (94-104), that he feels no sympathy for Fong Mei's initial reservations because "[h]e was a man. And it was not for a man to withhold his vital life-force stream on the spiteful whim of a barren wife. So what if he enjoyed the woman? What could be more natural for a man?" (96). Only through his perspective do we learn about the pressures he feels when after six months Song Ang is still not pregnant: "[h]ow can I face my mother, huh? How can I dare show my face in Chinatown, huh?" (102)<sup>28</sup> When it is revealed in Ting An's section that he was involved with Fong Mei, and when readers learn that both Song Ang and Fong Mei had babies in 1926, they can connect and fill the silences by actualizing the unspoken tensions between the perspectives presented: what is never actually said is that Choy Fuk is sterile, which means that both the waitress and Fong Mei must have been with someone else to get pregnant. Since this remains unknown, there is initial worry when Keeman, Song Ang's son, wants to be involved with Beatrice, because they are presumably both Choy Fuk's children. However, as it turns out neither of these children is his! By relating the individual

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<sup>28</sup> Consider also: "[w]hen she had first approached him, he couldn't believe his good fortune--a wife and a whore! However, now that he was fast on his way to becoming the biggest laugh in Chinatown, he couldn't help but get a little clouded over, because it woke him up at night now, dripping with sweat, gasping for breath, groping for deliverance" (100) and "[i]t felt good to talk in the dark, because it was faceless. 'You'll have to get pregnant, A Song. If not by me, by somebody else. But you must have a baby.' His voice stripped as bare as a beggar" (110).



stories to each other, the reader is able to relativize their claims: what is one character's truth is another's lie; what is one character's gain is another's loss.

Suzie's perspective clashes most harshly with those of other family members in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. It is Kae's "unwholesome curiosity surrounding her demise" (191) that drives her to tell Suzie's story--the story everybody else in her family has relentlessly tried to silence. According to the official family version, with which Kae opens her narrative, Suzie had "died of pneumonia as a young woman, when [Kae] was still a baby. She didn't ever marry or multiply" (19). Only when Suzie is pregnant and determined to marry Morgan, who unbeknownst to her is her half-brother, are the secrets and lies so skilfully constructed and protected by the previous generations of Mui Lan and Fong Mei exposed. Not only does suicide need to be kept a secret because it is usually considered a disgrace in Chinese culture, but what remains to be inferred by the reader is that previous wrongdoings would come to light and taint the family honour.

The first of the three sections headed by Suzie's name (171-73) directly relates to the previous one in which Suzie promises Beatrice to behave well and stay away from Morgan when she remains at the house alone while the family takes a trip to San Francisco to find Mui Lan. The reader learns from Suzie, however, what Beatrice does not know: that she did not keep her promise. The dialogic engagement between these two perspectives is further heightened by the dialogic format of Suzie's revelations themselves. She picks up on her final

comment to Beatrice regarding Morgan that "[w]e just talk" (170) and begins the next section: "I wanted to tell you how we talked, my dear sister. Just saying that Morgan and I talked was a lie, flat and purposely kept so" (171). The direct addresses to her sister ("my antimatter twin," "Sister," "Bea," "my dearest" [171, 173]) and the frequent, increasingly desperate and pleading questions create the impression of Beatrice's presence as interlocutor. Suzie's guilty explanations not only respond to Bea's earlier trusting statement "I believe you" (170) but also anticipate her immediate disapproval and disappointment. The questions and accusations she expects from her sister shape the way she attempts to explain and apologize for "how we got out of control" (173). This section interacts dialogically with Beatrice's and other earlier sections but is also internally dialogized as Suzie anticipates Beatrice's unspoken words within the hidden dialogue.

The second section under Suzie's name chronicles the events after she has announced to her mother that she and Morgan are expecting a child and that they want to get married (193-208). Confusion grows over the question of who is related to whom (Beatrice to Keeman or Suzie to Morgan). According to the official family history, Suzie is Choy Fuk's daughter, but the reader has learned that she is indeed Ting An's child and, therefore, Morgan's half-sister. The confusion climaxes when Suzie relates her experience of giving birth prematurely. In this threshold situation, the tense shifts to the present and Suzie's narrative alternates between talking about herself in the first and third

person: "Suzie is on the verge of death again; her labour long and hard. Suzie is worn out, gasping for air; I got slurped in. 'I can't take any more,' my dark, clammy moan.... I am drifting, drifting up high. There in the dark room, near the window, my body on a narrow bed" (206). The threshold experience of birth, its horror and pain, makes Suzie experience herself as internally split, which leads to another form of doubling.

In the last section that Suzie narrates and focalizes, she describes her state after having returned home (211-13). Again, there is a strong sense of doubling between what she is able to do--having lost all sense of time, without basic skills of getting dressed and feeding herself--and how she wants to appear to others, especially to Bea and Keeman, as a woman in control. Only through Kae's letter to Hermia announcing her decision to come for a visit, does the narrative tell the reader indirectly of Suzie's suicide shortly after (214-16).

To give Suzie a voice of her own, to make her a homodiegetic narrator in these important sequences counteracts the previous silencing of her story by her family. As a narrator she constitutes herself as a subject, no longer the object of someone else's narration. The strategy validates Suzie's perspective within a complex set of stories that have silenced her. While Kae's ventriloquizing of Suzie's voice may be seen as problematic, I believe it is more important to recognize Kae's willingness as a narrator to take the risk of losing control over

all the voices involved, including her own.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the strategy of making Suzie her own narrator dramatically exposes the devastating effects of the family's secrets and lies. While it seems that everybody else's stories focus on dispersing more lies and secrets, Suzie's sections exert a centripetal pull in the novel, solving the family puzzle for Kae. But knowledge of her story at the same time has the opposite effect for her: it ultimately dissolves the family history, unravels its artificial unity, and enables Kae to accept family history as a space of dispersion, allowing her in the end to move away from her family as she leaves for Hong Kong to be reunited with Hermia and possibly to start a new life.

Kae's perspective engages with the stories of other family members in three ways. She relates experiences from her own past, especially with Morgan and Hermia and as a new mother in 1986. However, dialogic relations operate within these stories as well when her present narrating self comments on her past experiencing self. This is particularly pronounced when she talks about her experiences with Morgan (41, 64-70). Moreover, through her commentary, for example on Mui Lan (31), Fong Mei (37-38, 154), Beatrice (145-46), and Morgan (136, 159), she explicitly establishes dialogic relations between her own perspective and those of her relatives, which evaluate, contextualize, and challenge theirs. And finally, in her self-reflexive and meta-narrative comments she problematizes her role as writer and family chronicler.

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<sup>29</sup> I would argue that Kae is not just ventriloquizing in these sections narrated by Suzie, but that she is always also ventriloquized herself. For an interesting discussion of Holquist's notion of "ventriloquization," see David Carroll (1983, 72-74).

By retelling and thereby engaging with her family's stories, Kae initially searches for answers, authenticity, origins, and the true family history, all of which she sees as diametrically opposed to the lies, secrets, masks, and silences of her family as she has known it. As she explores the relations between the stories of her relatives, their temporalities and localities, her pre-conceived dualisms break down, and boundaries blur. As her own genealogy acknowledges and follows shifts, disruptions, and gaps, Kae begins to approach history differently. History is always made up of a collection of stories, and only through their dialogic interrelations does a provisional history emerge.

Rather than dwelling on written sources of history as *Obasan* does, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* engages with the fictionality and the transience of a family's oral tradition (Hutcheon 1990, 91). The challenge of the novel's narrative form lies in finding a format or structure in print that allows for the transition from oral history into written text. The novel tackles this problem by combining the centrifugal pull of the complex family stories and their multiple focalizers with the centripetal force of the narrator Kae, who is both part of the family history and its orchestrator. Kae's exploration does not pretend to be objective, neutral or uninterested. By foregrounding her role as family historian, the novel/Kae acknowledges that her selections of stories and their orchestration is tied to her agenda in the production of a history of the Wong family.

The dialogic structure resulting from Kae's orchestration is displayed in miniature in the section "Feeding the Dead" (185-90). Contemplating the

advantages and disadvantages of being a writer, Kae asks herself rather cynically at the end of the preceding section:<sup>30</sup>[h]"How many ways are there to tell stories? Let me count the ways! For example, love is a fragile subject matter, too easily corrupted, often beaten dead. Let's take an opinion poll: the many and varied ways to destroy love! Oh, come on! We should be very good at it. It'd be fun!" (185). In "Feeding the Dead (1986)," Kae literally stages a poll of the people involved in her family history, bringing together some family members already dead (Suzanne, Fong Mei, Mui Lan) and others still alive (Beatrice, Chi, Morgan, Hermia, herself). In a unique manner, the section combines elements from a Bakhtinian dialogue of the dead, Chinese mourning rituals, and stage directions for a movie scene.

To create this unique hybrid section, Kae orchestrates all of the characters including herself, their voices, and their statements by introducing, framing, and evaluating them, albeit rather cryptically as should be expected from a movie script.<sup>31</sup> In spite of her role as orchestrator, she cannot remove herself from the personal involvement with the other characters and therefore still feels "obliged" to Fong Mei (187). Many of the comments are organized through anacrisis, the rhetorical device Bakhtin describes as one person's word

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<sup>30</sup> Part of her cynicism is expressed here through her parody of the opening lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnet XLIII" (1992, 41).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the following introductory remarks: "I could begin with Suzanne" (185); "Beatrice (if she was willing to talk, I'm sure would respond in a brief, essential way)" (186); "I bet Chi's answer would, as a matter of fact, be very uncharacteristic of her" (186); "I gulp, but I'm afraid I still feel obliged to give Fong Mei the last word" (187).

provoking someone else's (1984a, 110). Suzie's first observation, for instance, ends with the question "[h]ow else do you think she [Fong Mei] could have had three of us over eight years?" (185), which Kae herself answers "'I would say jealousy,' referring to Ting An" (186); thus, she expands Suzie's comments by speculating on Ting An's perspective. Beatrice responds by commenting on the nature of love as one of the driving forces in people's lives. In turn, her warning that it also carries some danger is answered by Chi who undermines Beatrice's warning "Since when has that ever stopped anyone?" (186). Moreover, Chi disagrees fundamentally by questioning the very possibility of love: "[m]aybe it's just something which people have invented to torture themselves with" (186). Spoken as a general comment, Morgan understands it as addressed to him, an attempt to blame him for what happened to Suzie. Regardless of the others' comments, Fong Mei is mostly interested in explaining her actions in the past to justify her behaviour that sacrificed her daughters for her own concern for family position and money, male lineage, and her personal revenge on Mui Lan and Choy Fuk. In spite of Fong Mei's attempt to redeem herself in the eyes of her daughters, Suzie does not believe her mother's explanations and sees only empty rhetoric in her words. Desperately trying to break free, she breaks down: "[k]not after knot after knot! ... All this bondage we volunteer on ourselves! Untie them! Untie me! Don't tie any more!" (189).

In addition to the film scenario strategy, Kae stages several dialogues with the dead in this fascinating section. Bakhtin has described dialogues of the dead

as characteristic of the Menippean satire; they allow the characters to be freed from all positions and obligations of ordinary life so that they can reveal themselves with unlimited freedom (1984a, 112, 140). The living women are joined by the dead: Fong Mei herself announces that she speaks "from beyond the grave" (187)--with the hindsight that it gives her. The women are seated around "a timeless circular table" (187); while situated firmly in their own chronotopes, these women can cross time barriers to be reunited. Together they are part of "a classic scenario of wailing women huddled together to 'feed the dead'" (188). Both wailing and food presentations are part of the traditional Chinese death rituals. Loud wailing as an expression of grief publicly announces the death and at the same time mitigates the emotional shock (Watson 1988, 12). Moreover, ritual weeping and wailing function to reaffirm the cohesion and solidarity of the family group.<sup>32</sup> Food presentations are an indispensable feature of the funerary rites, for they help the dead to make the transition from corpse to ancestor and facilitate the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead (Watson 1988, 13; Thompson 1988, 73-74).<sup>33</sup> Supplying food becomes a concrete expression of the continuing relationship between the living and the

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<sup>32</sup> Such weeping would traditionally consist of sobs and sighs but also of "speeches expressing affection for the dead, hope that his soul would ascend to Heaven, and glorification of his past deeds" (Yang 1967, 35). These speeches confirm the ties between the dead and the living.

<sup>33</sup> Yang explains: "[a]s in many other cultures, the offering of food and drink to the dead and later the sharing of them by the entire family group had serious social implications. Food was the supreme factor in the sustenance of life, and man's struggle for it had always involved the social group. By offering it at the sacrifice, an effort was made to share it between the living and the dead, thus maintaining contact between the two" (1967, 40).



dead, but it also serves to maintain, construct, and reconstruct social networks (Thompson 1988, 74), in particular the network of women in Lee's novel.<sup>34</sup>

Although Kae evokes these funeral rites to rehearse the formal family status and relations among the women of the family, she plays with them at the same time. She quotes the women's chant:

Mui Lan lived a lie, so Fong Mei got sly.  
Suzie slipped away; Beatrice made to stay,  
Kae to tell the story,  
all that's left of  
vainglory. (188)

The women's vanity and hypocrisy are relentlessly exposed and mocked in these lines. The chant may bring together the four generations of women, but its nursery-rhyme quality so trivializes their actions and histories that it inevitably questions the notion of communal grieving and the possibility of reciprocal relations. Moreover, Kae self-reflexively includes herself as narrator in this chant, thereby further undermining conventions of realism in this section. The question remains: who or what is being mourned and who or what is being fed in "Feeding the Dead"? Is it, metaphorically speaking, the death of love since Kae wanted to explore "the many and varied ways to destroy love" (185)? Are all the dead women of the family mourned in this section, that is, Mui Lan, Fong Mei, and Suzie? I believe that this section, by presenting another threshold situation, actually stages Suzie's belated death rituals because the women believe that

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<sup>34</sup> Thompson also points out that a male chief mourner, preferably a son, and a daughter, or female substitute, is needed to make the offerings to the dead (1988, 74). This could be one reason for Morgan's presence in "Feeding the Dead."

"her spirit is the most restless, most at risk" (189).

The connections between the Prologue and Epilogue and their relationship with the intervening seven chapters also deserve closer attention. The Epilogue constructs a frame for the novel by focusing again on Gwei Chang's relationship with Kelora and by picking up on earlier motifs. The Epilogue ends with his imagined conversation with Kelora, remembering their closeness and intimacy. On their own, Prologue and Epilogue seem to enforce a frame for the narrative which reaffirms the male lineage of the Wong family, focusing in particular on the patriarch himself. Although five sections are attributed to Gwei Chang, they are not situated within the central chapters of the novel but have been moved to the margins of the text instead. In relation to the seven central chapters that tell of the women's agency within the family and the internally destructive powers of the family history, the Epilogue seems to have displaced the man who used to be in control. However, Gwei Chang's death does not bring the dispersion of the family history that the novel has enacted to an end; instead, his death, which is associated with the "New Moon" (217), signifies both beauty and transformation.

While I have so far emphasized the centrifugal pressure of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* in its differences between stories and the dialogic relations between them, I would now like to look briefly at how Lee uses language to create a sense of coherence and community between the characters of the Wong family and within their immediate context of Chinatown. Some critics have identified

Lee's often documentary-style use of language, especially the literal translation of Chinese idioms and colloquialisms (for example, the vulgarity of swearing), as responsible for grounding or rooting the narratives of this Chinese Canadian family.<sup>35</sup> While Lee does not incorporate passages in Chinese, she employs idiomatic structures of Chinese and transposes them into English. Although she can still attract an English-speaking audience, she nevertheless disrupts that dominant language through the translation effect, which Godard describes as writing "in structures of thought and language from their [minority writers'] native tongue transposed into English" (1990a, 158).<sup>36</sup> As a result, the writing becomes double-voiced in its clash with linguistic norms.

Language plays a significant role throughout the novel, which is foregrounded in the Prologue when Gwei Chang and Kelora first talk and he expresses surprise at her ability to speak Chinese. Ting An is repeatedly singled out as the person in the Wong family who has the best knowledge of English and who, moreover, is local-born, which qualifies him to deal with the white community. Kae admits frankly that she does not speak Chinese; she requires the help of her friend Hermia to translate letters exchanged between her

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<sup>35</sup> See also Wong (1995, 143) and (1990, 137), M. Andrews (1990), Denise Chong (1990), and Lacey (1990). Draper, however, criticizes Lee's prose for being unidiomatic and over-modified (1990).

<sup>36</sup> Other critics have discussed similar strategies under the concept of an "interlanguage" in which the linguistic structures of two languages are fused. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin see interlanguages as potentially "paradigmatic of all cross-cultural writing, since the development of a creative language is not a striving for competence in the dominant tongue, but a striving towards appropriation, in which the cultural distinctiveness can be simultaneously overridden--overwritten" (1989, 68).

grandmother Fong Mei and her sister. A closer examination of the terms used to distinguish Chinese Canadians in Chinatown from the primarily Anglo-Celtic majority in the rest of Vancouver and Canada shows a clear demarcation of us and them, in which the other is constructed from the perspective of the Chinese Canadian characters.

The dominant community, repeatedly referred to as those responsible for the making of laws and policies but also as health care providers (204, 208), are most frequently referred to as ghosts (35, 42, 54, 107, 112, 219, 225), barbarians (61) and devils (24, 34, 61, 113); these terms are often modified by the adjective "white." Vancouver, the West Coast, and Canada are called wilderness (61), frontier (61) and backwash bush (30). These phrases can be attributed primarily to the focalizers Mui Lan, Fong Mei, Morgan, and Ting An, and less often characterize Kae's perspective. The Chinese Canadian characters speak of themselves and are referred to by the narrator as Tang People (25, 61, 73, 79), yellow people (70), and Chinaman/Chinamen. While "Tang People" is a phrase chosen by the Chinese Canadians coming to the West Coast as an indication of their origin,<sup>37</sup> the other two have commonly been used as derogatory terms by non-Chinese Canadians. Phrases such as "yellow people" and "yellow

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<sup>37</sup> See Wickberg: "[t]he Canton delta, as the heartland of Cantonese Guangdong, is distinct.... From a northern Chinese perspective Guangdong was at the margins of the Chinese cultural system.... But the Cantonese are self-consciously distinct. They regarded themselves as 'people of the Tang,' in contrast to the more typical term for ethnic Chinese, 'people of the Ha'" (1982, 7, 9). Because Lee refers to the novel's characters and their language as Chinese, I have followed her usage in this chapter.

substratum" were frequently used in newspapers such as *The Colonist* to talk about the Chinese but especially in connection with the idea of a "yellow peril" which gained much attention in the wake of Japan's successes in the Russo-Japanese war (Roy 1989, 181-82, 123).<sup>38</sup> When these phrases are used pejoratively in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, they are set off by quotation marks: "chink" (130, 172), "Iron-Chink" machine (169),<sup>39</sup> and "Chinaman" (76, 97). Three times these words are used by white youths for provocation, and once "Chinaman" is attributed to a white woman addressing a Chinese man in a business interaction (76). In these cases the quotation marks function as explicit markers of the distance from which the narrator cites these phrases.

In other instances, however, the word "Chinaman" is used without quotation marks (2, 3, 6, 7, 14, 221, 223).<sup>40</sup> There may be two explanations for this usage. Within social discourse of the time, the racist trope "John Chinaman" had become naturalized to the extent that it appeared not only in newspaper

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<sup>38</sup> In B.C., Henry Stevens, Conservative member for Vancouver Centre "built a prominent political profile around the 'Yellow Peril' slogan" in the 1910s and 1920s (Anderson 1991, 135).

<sup>39</sup> The salmon-canning industry was one of the primary employers of Chinese Canadians; usually 75% of a plant crew were Chinese (Yee 1988, 59-62). The "Iron Chink," a butchering machine, was introduced to mechanize salmon-canning plants at the beginning of this century and thus to reduce labour costs. One machine could replace about thirty skilled workers. Obviously, the phrase dehumanized Chinese labour.

<sup>40</sup> Compare how Suzie uses "chinks" with intonational quotation marks, ironic usage: "I bet he [the policeman] would have been too impressed by rich chinks to see anything else" (198).

articles, but in political speeches as well as in official reports.<sup>41</sup> The concept of an essentialized "John Chinaman" not only symbolized his alien status in the community but it also functioned as an image of all men and women from China by collapsing any class, gender, family status or other divisions within the Chinese Canadian community (Anderson 1991, 37, 71; Chao 1995, 335, 338). The novel exposes its racist usages but also attempts to reappropriate the phrase. The phrase itself becomes double-voiced because it becomes subject to the evaluation of Chinese Canadians themselves who expropriate it and submit it to their own intentions.<sup>42</sup> These examples of internally dialogized words are particularly powerful in the novel because their double-voicedness is emphasized by retaining their racist overtones.<sup>43</sup> Through these double-voicings at the level of the word, the novel further extends its process of dialogization to engage perspectives otherwise not directly represented in the novel, those of the dominant white community.

For Kae, there is no undivided place or position from which to speak in

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<sup>41</sup> See Li for the definition of "Chinaman" in the Statutes of B.C. in 1920 (1988, 35). For the use of the term in a *Province* editorial in 1937, see Anderson (1991, 167). On 9 January 1886 the ten-stanza poem "John Chinaman" was printed in the *Nanaimo Free Press* (Roy 1989, 64-65). See also W. Peter Ward's chapter on "John Chinaman" (1990, 3-22).

<sup>42</sup> See Bakhtin (1981, 294; 1984, 195) and Morson and Emerson (1990, 325-29).

<sup>43</sup> Anderson has explored how the Chinese Canadian community has used such phrases or classifications of "Chinese/Chineseness" "in part to offset the history of negative stereotyping and as a means of self-identification and economic gain" (1991, 179). See also Heesok Chang's comments on Sharen Yuen's *John Chinaman* installation, which was part of the *Self Not Whole: Cultural Identity and Chinese-Canadian Artists in Vancouver*, 2-30 Nov., 1991, Chinese Cultural Centre (225-26). Lee contributed a literary reading to the event (1994, 240).

this novel. She is both insider and outsider, in Canada, in China, and in particular in the Chinese Canadian community. As Trinh Minh-ha explains,

[t]he moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. (This is often viewed by the outsiders as strategies of partial concealment and disclosure aimed at preserving secrets that should only be imparted to initiates.).... she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider. (1991, 74)

Kae is the deceptive insider/outsider who is aware of her positioning, as a member of her community and family, but also as the narrator in the novel.

While she may overestimate her role ("I am the resolution to this story" [209]), she breaks the silence of her family, her Chinatown community, and the dominant culture.

Joy Kogawa and Sky Lee resort to strategies shared by many writers in colonized spaces: "fragmenting the homogeneous structures that smooth over differences; decentring the language, complementing one voice with another from a different space, including the silences previously excluded; foregrounding the problematic nature of language itself" (Brydon 1987, 105). The effect of these strategies in the narrative structures of *Obasan* and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* are dialogic relations between multiple perspectives. In both novels these perspectives do not interact on a level playing-field; various forms of hierarchies

and oppression inform the contexts in which perspectives operate. While *Obasan* and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* employ dialogism as their guiding narrative strategy, they do so in different ways and, I believe, with slightly different purposes.

Both novels manage to stay largely within the conventions of realism but succeed in contesting them at the same time through their overlap with history, auto/biography, and storytelling. The historiographic metafiction of *Obasan* focuses on the written products of history and incorporates other genres, government documents, newspaper reports, official letters, to expose and ultimately challenge a hegemonic history, written and supported by these documents, that serves the dominant discourse. Lee, on the other hand, chooses not to reiterate discourses that have encouraged her family's and community's silences and prefers to speak her own silences through the storytelling of her fictional Chinese Canadian family (Chalykoff 1994, 26).

*Disappearing Moon Cafe* may also be thought of as historiographic metafiction, but its focus is the exploration of oral history because it looks inward, into the stories of the Chinese Canadian community in Vancouver, into the stories of the Wong family in particular. While Kogawa challenges the notion that a written document represents a fact that is irreversibly fixed, Lee suggests that the oral is no more fictional than the written is factual.

In their attempts to reconstruct, reconsider, and challenge versions of history, Naomi and Kae are aware that they are reconfiguring their own



identities. To story their family's histories is always also to story their own identities. While *Obasan* is the private interior narrative of Naomi rendered into public discourse through Kogawa's novel (Davey 1993, 111), Lee's protagonist Kae is a writer who reflects critically on her own orchestration of stories, the construction of history through stories, and the shaping of her identity in the process. Although this metafictional element in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* is consistent, it remains obscure and problematic throughout the novel because the reader cannot be sure whether the novel Kae is writing is the novel we read or whether what we read is Kae's preliminary collection of stories before she starts writing.

And yet, a crucial difference emerges in the way the novels conceptualize history. While it would be difficult to reduce *Obasan* to Aunt Emily's position, her approach to history nevertheless seems to dominate the novel. According to Emily, it is possible "to get the facts straight" (183), so that once Japanese Canadians speak out, the right version of history can be written. Although Emily calls for revisionist history, her reliance on 'rightness' does not challenge the concept of history itself (Davey 1993, 103). Moreover, the novel seems to challenge the injustices committed against Japanese Canadians on the grounds of a universal humanism that insists on the equal standing of all as it seeks out the commonalities among races rather than deploying a discourse of difference (Kogawa 1984, 21).

Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, on the other hand, uses dialogism to a

different end. Difference and particularity are crucial in the stories of the Wong family which Kae orchestrates. She self-consciously presents her family history as one configuration of history only; she understands and enacts genealogy as dispersion rather than as a return to origins. The novel relies not so much on a continuous drive to get things 'right', as it holds dual impulses in suspense. The stories are at times constructive and then disintegrative; they explain and obscure. Kae's orchestration affirms a sense of community and challenges that community at the same time. Family history is important but cannot be considered transparent. To reconstruct the stories of other family members helps to shape Kae's own sense of self, while simultaneously undermining that identity. She is always both insider and outsider in the stories she tells and in the family of which she is a part.

Lee activates, or better, she asks the reader to activate the dialogic tensions between the stories. As a result, the dialogic struggles I have just outlined contribute to the performative quality of her novel. The predominant mode of storytelling allows her to write a fictional oral history that functions as a strategy of revision "supplemented by historical interruption" (McFarlane 1995, 26). At this point of interruption, it provisionally stages the subjectivities of its protagonists through race, gender, and class in the Chinese Canadian community. I believe this performative aspect in Lee's novel resists a discussion that attempts to make the workings of the novel transparent. Any story told in the novel is dialogically related to all the others, so that any comment on an

isolated incident or comment within a story becomes reductive.

That the dialogic relations of *Obasan* and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* have such different effects may be related to the time of their publication and the present situation of Japanese and Chinese Canadian communities. *Obasan* was published at a time when discussions leading to the 1982 Charter of Rights were well under way in Canada. The constitutional affirmation of equality among Canada's constituent groups set the tone for many formerly subordinated groups "to seek recognition of, and restitution for, the past," which for many meant to organize redress movements (James 1995, 14). I believe that *Obasan* is informed by and has contributed to the redress movement of Japanese Canadian communities. By exposing the consequences of the injustices committed against Japanese Canadians--the loss of community, the repression of memory, the psychological problems--the novel enacts "a form of recuperation and of exorcism" (Omatsu 1992, 171). Within the novel, the investigation of Naomi's psychological trauma requires that the context of Aunt Emily's involvement be placed in a broader social movement; similarly, the redress movement enabled and required Kogawa to break a personal silence and bear witness to the past of official racism in the novel (Kogawa 1984, 24; Cheung 1993, 153). The negotiation of the settlement in 1988 gave the Japanese Canadian community a new authority to speak on constitutional civil liberties, which became evident in their contributions to the parliamentary hearings on the Charlottetown constitutional proposals. As Omatsu comments on the Redress

Settlement: "we are learning that the potential for flexing our political muscle is limited only by our inability to see beyond our own backyards" (1992, 169-70).

The redress movement of Chinese Canadian communities has drawn less attention than that of Japanese Canadians. The insistence on symbolic financial compensation for the imposition of a head tax between 1895 and 1923 has been similarly strong, but their claims, together with those of seven other redress organizations, were rejected in December 1994 by the Minister of Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, Sheila Finestone. While recognizing the historical contexts that have contributed to the community's situation today, Lee seems more interested in understanding how individual family members worked within these parameters. Therefore, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* takes a closer look at the Chinese Canadian community itself. The dominant discourses within the community are exposed and its internal heterogeneity is foregrounded. Resisting the essentialization of the community, Lee reaffirms internal differences in a genealogy of dispersion. The novel may seem less obviously informed by the effects of the Charter of Rights, but that impression may be wrong because the affirmation of equal status may well have encouraged a closer, more critical examination of the community.

## Chapter Four

### Processes of Un/reading in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* and Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*

In one of her imagined conversations with her mother Ina in *Ana Historic*, Annie tries to explain what it means to her to tell a story: "if i'm telling a story i'm untelling it. untelling the real" (141). Unlike Ina, who believes that "you can't rewrite what's been written" (142), Annie not only untells and rewrites what has been written but she also speaks the silence of what has not been written. Similarly, the narrator of *Places Far From Ellesmere* takes Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* to Ellesmere Island in order to set Anna free and to imagine her unwritten story: "[k]nowing that this story, all that is written, can be un/read, uninscribed" (113). The process of un/reading is a recurrent motif in Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* (1990) and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* (1988). Both texts challenge fixed categories of reality, fiction, genre, gender, sexuality, and social discourse, showing how they have determined representations of women in history and literature. In their attempt to cross established borders,<sup>1</sup> they deconstruct naturalized categories and offer

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<sup>1</sup> Hutcheon develops the notion of "border-crossings" in her review of Marlatt's *Ana Historic* but limits it to a discussion of genre classifications (1988c, 17).

alternative constructions from new perspectives. These two actions are performed simultaneously in what Marlatt has described as fiction theory. Her definition is a helpful starting-point in my readings of *Ana Historic* and *Places Far From Ellesmere*. "Fiction theory," Marlatt explains, is

a corrective lens which helps us see *through* the fiction we've been conditioned to take for the real, fictions which have not only constructed woman's 'place' in patriarchal society but have constructed the very 'nature' of woman (always that which has been). fiction *theory* deconstructs these fictions while *fiction* theory, conscious of itself as fiction, offers a new angle on the "real," one that looks from inside out rather than outside in (the difference between woman as subject and woman as object). (Marlatt et al. 1986, 9)

In this chapter I will explore the un/readings that these texts perform. I will examine in detail Marlatt's and van Herk's play with genre conventions, the interaction of their narratives, the use of incorporated documents, the relationships between women and nature, and the orchestration of endings. My readings will try to determine to what extent dialogism is used in Marlatt's and van Herk's texts to expose hegemonic discourses and at the same time inscribe counter-discourses.

According to its title, *Ana Historic* is a novel, but many of its characteristics defamiliarize that label: a lack of linear plot development, fragmentary paragraphs, unusual diction, blank pages, unnumbered pages, divider pages that use white space to foreground single lines, arbitrary headings, italicized paragraphs, an acknowledgement page that lists eleven source texts, to name only a few. On one of the divider pages the reader is told explicitly that

"a book of interruptions is not a novel" (37). Does that mean that *Ana Historic* is not a book of interruptions or that it is not a novel after all? Paradoxically, it is both a novel and full of interruptions. Marlatt challenges the reader's familiar ways of seeing and being seen and through "dialogic play" sharpens her awareness of what novelistic discourse legitimizes (Lowry 1991, 85). In an interview with George Bowering, Marlatt explains that in *Ana Historic* she tries to "[d]econstruct the novel" in its conventional form, in particular by undermining the novel's sense of continuity in a plot that is traditionally dominated by one central line of development to which everything else is subordinated (1989, 104). The debate over whether *Ana Historic* is a novel or not ultimately seems superfluous. Marlatt's implied adherence to novelistic convention, indicated by the subtitle, serves as her point of departure and drives the subversive gestures of the novel.<sup>2</sup>

Van Herk pursues similar goals of generic subversion but chooses a different strategy. Readers who think of genres as products--given, fixed, and natural--may want to describe *Places Far From Ellesmere* as a "genreless book" (Thomas 1991, 70; Goldman 1993, 31); traditional categories do not apply and

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<sup>2</sup> In "Blurring Genres: Fictioneer as Ficto-Critic," van Herk criticizes similar debates over Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and describes critics' disapproval and their need for familiar genre categorizations as "assembly line sorting" (1991, 38). A number of critics have used alternative descriptors to approach Marlatt's novel. Pamela Banting, for example, has discussed *Ana Historic* in connection with her reading of Marlatt's translation poetics (1991, 125); Manina Jones has focused her discussion of the novel around the notion of a documentary collage (1993, 141); Stan Dragland considers the text as "historiographic metafiction" but ultimately finds Marlatt's own concept of "fictionalysis" for a hybrid text of fiction and autobiobiography more suitable (1991, 176-77). Peggy Kelly (1995) reads *Ana Historic* and Gail Scott's *Heroine* as examples of fiction theory.

"geografictione"--the term coined by van Herk for the subtitle--may not be part of the critic's vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Marlatt, van Herk does not challenge generic conventions of the novel from within the literary tradition; she introduces a new term instead. She has identified genre as one of the tools of a patriarchal literary tradition and therefore seeks to transgress its generic conventions, to refuse the reader the comfort of categories, and thus to reinscribe genre as a process in which the reader is actively engaged (van Herk 1991, 38; Manera 1995, 87). To cross familiar genre boundaries and inscribe a new generic location becomes a political act for van Herk (Buss 1993, 197); she is prepared to accept the cost of marginalization in exchange for liberating effects:

cross-boundary writing asserts some powerful reconstructivities.... By estranging themselves from the safety zone of genre, they [such texts] participate in their own marginalization.... their refusal of an authenticating space permits them to question the persistent locations of race, gender, nation, and language. "To ... inhabit the border country of frontiers and margins robs discourse of a conciliatory conclusion" (Chambers, 116). It is as refugees from conciliation that such writing locates its praxis, in exchange for the freedom to question the master/piece and the concomitant time/piece of linear and structural narrative that such palimpsesticism offers. (van Herk 1993, 16-17)

But what is a geografictione? The term combines geography, fiction, and the ending -e, which in many Indo-European languages marks the feminine

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<sup>3</sup> Many critics use other, more familiar genre labels to discuss *Places Far From Ellesmere*, for example, "collage," "geographically located, feminist-literary fantasy" (Kirkwood 1991, 29), "autobiographical text" (Buss 1993, 200), and "autobiographical essays" (Wilson 1991, 43; Buss 1993, 200). The narrator is self-conscious about not following conventions of novelistic discourse; "[i]f this were a novel," she says, she could predict the narrative development (106). The narrator also reflects on being a character in a larger novel (118).



form. Rather than a modifier-head structure, in which geography modifies fiction, van Herk indicates the reversibility of its components when her narrator comments on Edberg: "Edberg: this place, this village and its environs. A fiction of geography/geography of fiction: coming together in people and landscape and the harboured designation of fickle memory" (40). Van Herk has developed the connection between geography and fiction in "Mapping as Metaphor: The Cartographer's Revision" (1992, 54-68). She argues here that "mapping, like language, is creation more than representation and so it is not illogical to think of fiction as cartography" (58). Because geography always relies on an observer, it will always be a subject-dependent fiction rather than an objective fact; in turn, by telling stories, fiction tries to provide a map for experience, subjectivity, and nation.<sup>4</sup> The term *geografictione* therefore describes a literary genre (as the subtitle indicates) and describes a place ("This *geografictione*, this Ellesmere" [113]). The perspective from which the mutual implications of geography and fiction are explored is that of a woman, as the feminine ending of *geografictione* already suggests. Van Herk foregrounds the idea that geography, mapping, and fiction cannot be neutral/neuter; as the narrator realizes in her explorations, all three discourses, as she knows them, have been written by men, while the

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<sup>4</sup> Consider also van Herk's comment in the same essay: "[t]he only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories" (1992, 58). In his conversation with Margaret Laurence, Kroetsch similarly explains that "we haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real" (1970, 63). Four years later, however, Kroetsch revisits this idea in "Unhiding the Hidden": "[a]t one time I considered it the task of the Canadian writer to give names to his experience, to be the namer. I now suspect that on the contrary, it is his task to un-name" (1983, 17). The relevance of these ideas is obvious in Robert Lecker's *Making It Real* (1995).

perspectives of women have been silenced and marginalized by a patriarchal tradition. *Places Far From Ellesmere* opens up the spaces of interconnection between place and fiction in order to inscribe alternatives.

Van Herk's georafictione is divided into four sections, which focus on four different places: Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary, and Ellesmere. The second subtitle, "explorations on site," raises a number of interesting issues. The common understanding of exploration as a systematic investigation of unfamiliar, unknown regions for scientific purposes is both evoked and undermined in van Herk's georafictione. The observational character of the first three sections suggests such a project of investigation on location. But the narrator seems to reconstruct these sites from memory, through association. No scientific purposes drive the narrative; the narrator instead explores places as they relate to her own life, her personal experiences, her memories, her "landscapes of the mind" (Porteous 1990). In the narrator's attempt to write her own experience, the discourses of geography and history become closely connected. The matrix of place and time becomes a way of understanding experience--a notion that Bakhtin explores through the concept of the "chronotope."<sup>5</sup> Meaning, Bakhtin argues, is only possible "through the gates of the chronotope" (1981, 258). I propose that the four sections of *Places Far From Ellesmere* relate to each other

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<sup>5</sup> Bakhtin was dissatisfied with the way aspects of time and place had been treated separately in literary criticism. He used the chronotope to capture the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981, 84).

dialogically through their respective chronotopes.<sup>6</sup>

A number of observations support such a relational reading. In the reconstruction of the exploration sites, explicit references to the other locations show how each section is informed by and reflects on the others in the narrator's experience.<sup>7</sup> The ongoing reconfiguration of places occurs as the narrator (and reader) reads towards and then back through Ellesmere. The title itself suggests a relational focus: *Places Far From Ellesmere*. While the head of the phrase is "places," these places are considered and situated in relation to one particular site, Ellesmere. "Far" itself implies the interdependent place/time matrix of the chronotope; "far" indicates distance and remoteness in spatial but also in temporal terms.

In the first three sections the narrator establishes different chronotopes by associating each city with a time in her life: Edberg with childhood and teens, Edmonton with university years, Calgary with work and adult life. She explores these places by reading them through already existing maps and creating her own map as she goes along. Although these maps may not be adequate as referential guides, they operate as ways to organize, orient and control the personal, social and cultural experiences of the narrator (Huggan 1994b, 14).

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<sup>6</sup> See Bakhtin on the interrelation of chronotopes: "[c]hronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex relationships.... The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest use of the word)" (1981, 252).

<sup>7</sup> Note the cross-referencing to Edberg (79, 83, 86, 113, 140), Edmonton (79, 81, 83, 86, 113, 141), and Calgary (83, 86, 113, 141).

The narrator contemplates the question of representation and the status of maps. Maps can be neither objective nor totally exact; they are resemblances of the environment and function, therefore, not as copies but as models of reality. Can such a map then be considered factual? Or "is it all an elaborate fabrication," the narrator wonders (15). Comparing her memory of Edberg to other people's recollections, she realizes that there are "other originals" (37): "their versions negate yours" (37-38). The narrator creates two kinds of maps, the boundaries of which increasingly blur: maps that attempt to model her environment and maps that represent her experiences of places.

The narrator begins the exploration of Edberg by paying close attention to physical location, which is indicated primarily through the use of numerous prepositions:

A welt in the parkland on the raise between Dried Meat Lake and Meeting Creek, just off the Donald/Duhamel trail: snagged between clumps of poplar and willow, the steady infusion of a prairie vapour from the everywhere tenacious low-growing rose bushes. (13)

There might have been a trail passed here, that cart trail through this region partly wooded and with scattered trees and coppice (J.B. Tyrell, 1887) once, a trail that angled across the sections and quarter-sections without the ninety-degree angles of the survey crews ... a trail that led between communities, between schools, between stopping places and boarding houses (with their lice and good company), between general stores, between horse-barns. (13-14)

She provides a detailed account of various locations she inspects and their spatial relation to each other in order to assess whether they still exist. Her map

thus becomes a map of place and time, a map with its own chronotope. The narrator examines public places, the cart trail, the creamery, the cafés, the town pump, the blacksmith shop, the hotel, post office and many more to find out which sites are gone, which ones have changed or have remained:

"disappearing locations of appearances: sites of seeing" (29). The other map is one of personal experiences; it notes "allowances" and "forbiddences" (24-29) and memories associated with the buildings, streets and sites mapped before. As the narrator shows, her maps of Edberg always revolve around the presence of the mapmaker herself. Her maps cannot claim neutrality but are instead a form of personal and social knowledge that is determined by the coordinates of place, time, and her own subjectivity. Therefore, like these maps, Edberg cannot be a fixed place to which the narrator can easily return. Edberg becomes for the narrator "[a] fiction of geography/geography of fiction ... Invented: textual: un/read: the hieroglyphic secrets of the past" (40).

Similarly, Edmonton is read as a city whose division by the Saskatchewan River into north and south parallels the narrator's own experience as an adult woman with a divided self. She feels cut off from her childhood, separated from Edberg, removed from home, struggling to "start a life in Edmonton" (45). She realizes that the place to which she comes is one with "its own nebulous prairie history: a fort(ress) to be stormed" (44). Edmonton, the old trading post of the Hudson Bay Company, has already been mapped by others. She tries to get to know the place through her reading: "Edmonton is a reading, an act of text, an

open book" (47).<sup>8</sup> In spite of her efforts, she lacks agency in this city where the streets walk her rather than vice versa (54). She cannot escape the restrictions she associates with the chronotope of Edberg. The geographical division she sees around her and the division she experiences inside are disruptive and feel like stagnation (48).

In her next exploration the narrator finds herself trapped in a similar dilemma. The presence of maps and cartographic principles is even more pervasive in the section on Calgary. The narrator considers "Calgary as quadrant, the sweep of a long-armed compass quartering the city NW/NE/SE/SW, segmented" (70). She consults maps to locate places in the city (59, 69) and hopes that they will also help her to find herself: "[h]ow to find yourself: see map" (71). Calgary with all its maps, however, does not fulfil these hopes. To express her feelings of entrapment, the narrator compares the city to Jericho (57-58, 62, 74), the ancient city whose massive walls are brought down by seven trumpet-blowing priests to be taken over by the Israelites in the Biblical story. Does Calgary have to be destroyed in a similar fashion for the narrator to be able to free herself? The materialist existence of the twentieth century seems overwhelming in Calgary, its "iconography of money" overpowering (65). The narrator is left confused, caught in "labyrinths" of buildings, light and stone (72, 74): "[w]ho can find you here, a clumsy bawling beast in the centre of a web of

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<sup>8</sup> See also the following references to her reading of the place: "[t]hrough the maze of your books you try to read this place" (52); "you read, entext yourself a city of pages" (53).

thread, a cat's cradle of encapturement?" (73). In this state of confusion and distress, her desire to belong and to find a home becomes paramount (61, 62, 66, 68, 69, 71).

This desire for a home seems to be the driving force of van Herk's georafictione (Manera 1995, 88). The narrator literally and metaphorically recedes from and moves towards home: she moves north, then south, and north again. As the spiral movement of the narrative suggests, home is not a fixed entity, not a product, but itself an eternal process: "[h]ome is a movement, a quick tug at itself and it packs up" (69). Paradoxically, to be home you must move. No matter how hard the narrator tries to map her own places, to find her home--in Edberg, Edmonton, or Calgary--she cannot be satisfied. The desire to escape, to leave again is always present: "[i]s this [Edberg] a place from which to launch a world" (33); "how to get from this point [Edmonton] farther, how to reach the reaches of the world, and maybe Russia" (48); "[t]o belong then. Leaving not here but from here" (61). Home itself becomes a shifting signifier that has to be invented (33). Every return will be a return to something new; every home will be provisional. The title of the first chapter, "Edberg: coppice of desire and return," captures this notion in its image of a coppice, which is a thicket of small trees that is repeatedly cut back only to be allowed to regrow. Similarly, Edberg as the place of childhood and home is a place that, metaphorically speaking, has to be repeatedly cut down and reconstructed. Instead of becoming a reified myth, home becomes the goal of a continuously

desired and deferred return.

The desire to return home, the longing for permanence and essence, is connected in *Places Far From Ellesmere* with the narrator's interest in "engraving," graveyards, and plots (23, 61, 62, 140), which Kirkwood has referred to as van Herk's "death-fixation" (1991, 29). As Goldman has pointed out, however, "physical engraving, i.e., burial in the landscape, has affinities with the engraving or emplotting of fictions" (1993, 31). The narrator contemplates: "[t]o dare to stay here to die, to dare to stay after death, to implant yourself firmly and say, 'Here I stay, let those who would look for a record come here'" (61). If home signifies safety, then the plot, in both senses, should promise refuge and protection. But the familiar plots of novels promise women refuge only in marriage, insanity, or death. Her explorations of the three cities and her futile attempt to follow cartographic principles lead to a drastic measure: she moves away from the urban centres and pre-written maps and fictions to Ellesmere, the extreme north. Ellesmere Island does not figure as a place of permanent residence but as a destination for a camping trip with her partner Bob in July, the brief summer weeks in the north. The narrator comes to Ellesmere from the south; for her, as for many others, the north is "a place to visit, not a land in which to stay" (Grace 1991, 250). But the narrator is driven by her hope for revelation, for the impossible. Can she find a home/a plot on Ellesmere Island? "At last, again, you think you've found a home. You search out possible sites for your future grave" (140); but in the end her search is frustrated:



"[y]ou are destined to become ashes. Ashes alone. There are murderers at large. You have imagined again and again places for your ashes to be scattered to the high winds" (141). She cannot find or select a safe place because there are no safe places, no safe plots--neither graves nor fictions--for women.

Unlike van Herk's georafictione, in which four chronotopes are dialogically related through the perspective of one character, *Ana Historic* juxtaposes and dialogically relates the perspectives of three women: Annie, Mrs. Richards, and Ina. Their narratives are not divided into separate sections; instead, the text shifts rapidly between these (and other) perspectives. The effect of this strategy is a non-linear and disrupted novel that resists and subverts notions of cohesion and master plot (Banting 1991, 125; Tostevin 1989, 38). While it may seem as if "Marlatt lets the story lie there, apparently in pieces," a closer examination will reveal its intricate structure (Dragland 1991, 182).

Annie is married to her former college history professor, Richard, for whom she often does archival research in the library; they live in Vancouver with their two children, Mickey and Ange. Annie is trying to cope with the recent loss of her mother, Ina, whose death has created a threshold situation, a crisis and break in her life, that results in Annie's own writing (Bakhtin 1981, 248). Through her own memories of childhood, Annie tries to retrace the life of her mother Ina, a "proper" British lady, who, after leaving Malaysia, comes with her family to Vancouver where she suffers from loneliness and isolation. Her distraught behaviour is diagnosed as hysteria and treated with electric shock, which leaves

Ina permanently disoriented. As Annie conducts research for her husband, she discovers a reference to a woman called Mrs. Richards. Official historical documents tell her that Mrs. Richards arrived in Vancouver in 1873 and worked as the second school teacher at Hastings Mill School. When she married Ben Springer the following year, she disappeared from the public record. Disappointed by the lack of information about her, Annie invents a history for Mrs. Richards with the help of her journal, which she finds stored in the archives of Vancouver.<sup>9</sup>

The similarity of sound and appearance of the three names suggests several interrelations.<sup>10</sup> Not only are the first names strikingly similar--Annie/Ana, Annie/Ina, Ana/Ina--but Mrs. Richards becomes Ana Richards in the writings of Richard's Annie. As Lowry has pointed out, the names "interrelate, rhyme and echo through the reading" (1991, 94). Unlike other critics who read these characters as flowing and blending into each other (Tostevin 1989, 37; Chan 1992, 68), I would argue that their perspectives remain distinct while they are interrelated through many parallels and conflicts. All three women are immigrants, wives, mothers, and writers. Annie writes a novel (140); Mrs. Richards keeps a journal (29); and Ina writes family stories in a notebook (20).

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<sup>9</sup> In her interview with George Bowering, Marlatt has pointed out that she used many archival sources but that Mrs. Richards's journal was her own invention (1989, 97). I see Marlatt's inclusion of passages from Mrs. Richards's journal as an interesting exploration of the roles of public versus private genres.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Dragland (1991, 178), Lowry (1991, 94), and Davey (1993, 199).

While they influence, relativize, and illuminate each other, they nevertheless remain separate characters who in themselves are not unitary but "heterogeneous subjects composed of multiple discourses" (Jones 1993, 143; also Dragland 1991, 178). Marlatt herself has referred to the stories of Annie and Ana, for instance, as analogies, twins, off-rhymes, and stories that echo each other (1989, 101).

When Annie comes across the references to Mrs. Richards in the archives, she immediately realizes that "there is a story here" (14), a story she wants to pursue. The story of her mother's life is more difficult for Annie to write: "I-na, I-no-longer, i can't turn you into a story. there is this absence here, where the words stop" (11). In a way, she imagines for Mrs. Richards what her mother could not imagine for herself and what she could not imagine for her mother (Grisé 1993, 92): "Ana/Ina whose story is this" (67). It is through her own memories of her childhood and the imagined conversations with her mother that she rewrites her life story. Once driven by the desire to "efface" her mother (50), to become "another (the other) woman in the house" (50), Annie is now disturbed by her absence. Without Ina, the "plotline" that her life once followed is no longer clear to Annie (17). Ina used to keep her "on track" leaving her unaware of digressions, alternatives, holes, and absences (17). The many asides ("you said") in Annie's writing attest to her mother's lasting influence as her guide and teacher as well as her constant critic who challenges her notions of history, fiction, and truth: "you go on living in me, catching me out" (141); "i feel myself

in you, irritated at the edges where we overlap" (17).

In the case of Mrs. Richards, Annie relies on her journal, which helps her to reconstruct her actions as well as her thoughts. Her concern is not so much that she gets the story right, but that she explores the space of fictional possibilities, "the gap between two versions" (106). Annie compares the stories of official history to pictures that are framed and static:

framed by a phrase that judges ... sized up in a glance, objectified. that's what history offers, that's its allure, its pretence. 'history says of her ...' but when you're so framed, caught in the act, the (f) stop of act, fact--what recourse? step inside the picture and open it up.  
(56)

As Annie opens up the picture of Mrs. Richards which is provided by the official documents, she challenges its selectivity and its framing. The story Annie imagines for Mrs. Richards in turn opens up the picture of her own life. When Annie wonders about Mrs. Richards's first name--"what is her first name? she must have one--so far she has only the name of a dead man, someone somewhere else" (37)--she chooses "Ana" without further explanation, a choice that hints at the connection between their life stories (39). Moreover, the name comments on Annie's endeavour of imagining her story: "ana / that's her name: back, backward, reversed / again, anew" (43). Ana is a palindrome that literally enacts what the prefix suggests. Annie/Ana is writing back to and writing anew the official history that does not recognize her actions.

Wondering why Mrs. Richards disappeared from the records after her marriage (134, 146), Annie reflects on her own married life, asking herself

whether there were other possibilities. Shocked at first by Zoe's suggestion of a relationship between Mrs. Richards and Birdie Stewart, she does imagine how they could have become close, what they would have said (138-39). Mrs. Richards's story thus becomes "a historical leak for the possibility of lesbian life in Victorian British Columbia" (Marlatt 1990b, 15); it acts as a rehearsal for Annie and enables her to express her desire for Zoe so that their relationship becomes a contemporary rewriting of the imagined encounter between Ana and Birdie. In the exploration of these relationships, Annie refuses to pretend that she is a disinterested, objective observer or chronicler of history. On the contrary, she foregrounds her struggle to inscribe her own subjectivity. Annie's voice becomes the means for the reader to envision strategies of resistance, project them into the past, and continue their development in the present and future (Grisé 1993, 96-97). Annie realizes her implication in the stories of Ina, Ana, and herself and also her implication in the process of producing and maintaining gendered female bodies.

While the reader is well aware that Annie attempts to reconstruct Mrs. Richards's and Ina's stories, the novel's fragmentary style succeeds in telling their stories without seeming to, without establishing a narrative authority. The dialogic relations between stories seem to undermine any consistent structure of embedding. Ana, Ina, Annie, and Ange become a "continuum of life stories" in discontinuous form (Grisé 1993, 92). *Ana Historic* gives voice to these previously silenced women by dialogically writing them into the gap between history and

fiction. Marlatt's "genealogy for lost women" reinscribes these women as speaking subjects who can participate in the creation of their own worlds (Goldman 1992, 33; also Lowry 1991, 84). However, the main interest of the novel is in the process itself, rather than in the conclusion to the individual stories. It is no surprise, therefore, that Annie experiences particular difficulties with the beginnings and endings of the stories she reinscribes.

To suggest the notion of connectedness and continuum between these perspectives, Marlatt skilfully shifts pronouns to blur the edges of these stories:

she who is you  
or me  
"i"  
address this to (129)

Marlatt's shifting pronouns refuse the possibility of stable references. Shifting references do not necessarily indicate that the self is unstable or unnameable. However, these references resist the cultural inscriptions of women's bodies which Ana, Ina, and Annie have experienced. Thus, Marlatt "forces the reader to confront the degree to which the concept of the individual is dependent upon, and constructed by, discursive practices" (Chalykoff 1994, 5). Through engaging with these practices, the concept of woman can begin to be reinscribed. Moreover, the pronoun of the second person, "you," reinforces a sense of connection between the audiences established in the novel; it brings together and heralds a culture centred on women who share lives and histories (Chan 1992, 69): "o the cultural labyrinth of our inheritance, mother to daughter to

mother ..." (24). As Marlatt has said in an interview, "that 'you' shifts around quite a lot, because sometimes it's 'you,' Mrs. Richards, a lot of the time it's 'you,' Ina-- and sometimes it's 'you' reflexive, anywoman's you" (1989, 100). The reader herself thus becomes part of the shared experience and has to take responsibility for the performance of the text; she is left unable to escape this address (Hutcheon 1988c, 19).<sup>11</sup>

The second person singular pronoun is also a crucial feature of van Herk's georafictione. Like Marlatt's pronouns, van Herk's "you" shifts frequently, especially between the reader of *Places Far From Ellesmere* and its narrator, who often seems to be addressing herself. The inclusive pronoun "you" that moves outward to include the reader reinforces the narrator's implication that all women are Annas who "have suffered from the rigid frame imposed by the representation of women as Woman" (Goldman 1993, 36). At the same time, the narrator here seems to be engaged in a conversation with herself, so that the "you" actually refers back to herself (Manera 1995, 89). While Thomas has criticized this strategy as "alienating," as "a defense against self-disclosure" (1991, 69), I see the technique as successfully suggesting that in every reading of herself the narrator's subjectivity is constructed through discursive practices. Thus, the narrator foregrounds herself as a living text, a character being read.

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<sup>11</sup> Consider also Marlatt's explanation in "Difference (em)bracing": "[words] set up currents of meaning that establish this you i also am (not third person, as in totally other, and not quite the same as me). 'You' is a conduit, a light beam to larger possibility, so large it fringes on the other without setting her apart from me" (1990a, 188).

Dialogic play not only occurs between Marlatt's life stories of three women and van Herk's chronotopes but also between these narratives and a variety of quoted documents. Both texts provide bibliographies that list many of their immediate sources. They thus foreground the recognition, in van Herk's words, that "[w]riting is an act of appropriation" (n.p.). Marlatt's Annie contemplates the dialogic quality of all discourse: "echoing your words, Ina--another quotation, except i quote myself (and what if our heads are full of other people's words? nothing *without* quotation marks.)" (81). None of the documents quoted in these texts supports women's desire to write their own stories; each document has reduced women to Woman and has silenced them. All discourses are informed by power relations but, as the narrators reread these documents and pry open the monologic "'economy' of discourses" from positions of difference and resistance (Foucault 1978, 68), Marlatt and van Herk suggest that no discourse is exempt from being dialogized, opened up, and challenged. By examining how these discourses operate, what their tactics and power relations are, they question any postulate of causality and claim to monologic truth. Dialogic relations institute a strategy for inscribing voices previously unheard and this strategy deprivileges dominant discourses of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality and the hegemonies they support.

I want to take a closer look first at van Herk's page of quotations, which follows the table of contents in *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Here the reader finds excerpts from Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, Michel Foucault's *The*



*Archaeology of Knowledge* and Albert Camus's "The Minotaur or the Stop in Oran." These quotes are followed by two sentences that are indented like the preceding quotes but enclosed in square brackets and left unsigned: "[In the explorations of memory and place lie unsolved murders; in the multiple dissensions of distance and time, certain conditions prevail. The world admits deserts and islands but no women.]" (n.p.). The speaker quotes three renowned, white, male, European philosophers and writers of the twentieth century and then collates ideas and phrases from their quotations to create a new statement. As these phrases are re-combined and brought into new contexts, they acquire different meanings and point to their own silences. The world, as written and constructed by men (in these quotations), includes deserts and islands but no women. Literally and metaphorically, women are neither acknowledged nor allowed into the text of the written world. By adding the dialogic afterthought, the speaker admits herself into the world she has experienced as dominated and controlled by men, reclaiming the connection between desert, island, and woman--van Herk's entire text becomes an extension of this opening gesture of reinscription.

The most extensive quotations in *Places Far From Ellesmere* come from Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* (1875-77), which the narrator takes to Ellesmere Island with her "to solve a problem in how to think about love; to solve a problem in the (grave) differences between men's writing and women's writing: to solve a problem in sexual judgment" (82). In her re-reading of Anna, she

hopes to "un/read her, set her free" by providing a woman's reading of "a male reading of women" (82). The first three sections on Edberg, Edmonton and Calgary already weave the thread of Tolstoy's novel into this geografictione (16, 33, 36, 48, 50, 64), but only when the narrator comes to Ellesmere does the actual un/reading take place.

*Anna Karenin* has traditionally been considered the prototype of nineteenth-century psychological realism. In the novel, Anna's adulterous passion for the young officer Vronsky in St. Petersburg in the 1860s ultimately leads to her suicide. The narrator undertakes what both Pianos (1995, 98) and Goldman (1993, 35) have referred to as an exploratory strategy of a feminist reading of Tolstoy's novel: "reading is a new act here, not introverted and possessive but exploratory, the text a new body of the self, the self a new reading of place" (113). Tolstoy is unable to deal with an independent woman who is not only sensual but who also reads, and reads her own life. He has to destroy Anna for what he perceives to be a transgression of moral and social laws. But the narrator reads Anna out of her position of victimhood, and in the process Anna becomes a symbol for all women who are oppressed: "women are all Annas, caught or not" (82). If the narrator can un/read Anna, women can find strategies of resistance to un/read themselves, to un/read the category of Woman which has stifled them.

To un/read Anna, the narrator quotes phrases and paragraphs from the novel and integrates them into her own text: "[t]he words are stirred, mixed, like

pieces of a jigsaw; broken up into their separate shapes and the whole picture lost, left to be reconstructed by another, a different hand" (113). The quotes no longer follow the chronology of Tolstoy's plot but become part of a new text that has its own logic. Dialogic relations are created as the narrator compares her own situation and women's situations in general to Anna's; she highlights similarities and differences and thus exposes the ideologies that inform the narrative of Tolstoy's novel. The act of reading itself is significant:

Although her first desire is to read, she is distracted, perhaps because she is placed on that train by Tolstoy, and you know that he uses trains to displace her.

*At first she made no progress with her reading. For a while the bustle of people coming and going was disturbing ... she could not help listening to the noises ... all this distracted her attention.*

Anna is travelling to Ellesmere; she needs to be transported there in order to read her English/Russian story. (133-34)

The narrator analyzes Tolstoy's desire to displace Anna, to unsettle her, keep her from reading, but she turns his strategy against him by reading Anna's journey as bringing her to Ellesmere where she will find the quiet and solitude necessary for her reading:

She will extinguish her lamp when she pleases.

*And the candle by which she had been reading the book filled with trouble and deceit, sorrow and evil, flared up with a brighter light, illuminating for her everything that before had been enshrouded in darkness, flickered, grew dim and went out for ever.*

But not quite for ever. Here in the forever light of Ellesmere you are unreading the Anna that Tolstoy pretended to write. (138)

While Anna's reading light may go out in Tolstoy's novel, the narrator challenges this fact in the new context in which she performs the un/reading of the novel and Anna. In the constant light of Ellesmere there is no reason for Anna's light to go out; it can be rekindled in the narrator's rereading. Anna's desire to read, together with the way she "trusts her reading and her body" (142), ensure her downfall in Tolstoy's novel, but the same qualities in the narrator can ensure her freedom from Tolstoy's grasp.

Why does van Herk choose *Anna Karenin* as the novel for her narrator to un/read in *Places Far From Ellesmere*? Van Herk has explained that her novels have focused on women characters--Judith, Ja-el, Arachne, and here Anna Karenin--because of her desire to "question meaning, history, representation, to question our desires and duties, to question one another. And to re-write, inscribe differently, to re-verse the previously static and perpetually frozen" (1991, 132). One of her strategies for inscribing a textual presence for women is to reclaim "lost, abandoned and misrepresented women's myths" (van Herk 1987, 12). By un/reading the story of Anna Karenin, for instance, van Herk has chosen one of the best-known stories about women written by men. In the spaces where her women characters enter forbidden territory and cross forbidden boundaries, van Herk's rewritings locate alternatives in order to "mime a fictional future" for women, to explore what is possible rather than what is

probable (van Herk 1987, 9). As the narrator frees the textual Anna, she also hopes to liberate women readers' desires (to imagine the liberation of other fictional women or themselves); and by extension, the writer herself may be liberated from an oppressive textual tradition (Buss 1993, 201).

Possibility is also a key notion in Marlatt's revisionist strategy of quotation, which enables Annie to project lives and texts for herself, her mother, and Ana out of the past into the future. In this sense, *Ana Historic* becomes a reaction against a history in which women are a-historic (Dragland 1991, 180). Annie writes stories of who these women are and who they could be through an "analysis of the social context each of them inhabit [*sic*]" (Marlatt 1990b, 15). These social contexts are reconstructed through a wide range of texts that are mentioned, alluded to, or quoted from in the novels; eleven of these sources are acknowledged in the bibliography. They include historical studies and school textbooks about Vancouver and British Columbia, books of (clinical) psychiatry, the Bible, pop songs, novels, newspapers, and Hannah More's *Strictures* (1799). A rereading of the documents in *Ana Historic* shows that their discourses, which have supported official history and thereby silenced and objectified women, are not fixed; placed in a new context, they can be challenged and exposed as constructions. In the act of self-consciously reproducing monologic speech, the novel draws these discourses into a dialogic economy (Jones 1993, 142). In this process of dialogization, which Banting has described as a form of translation, "the documentary language becomes denatured, provoked to yield its

ideological biases. The language of history breaks down into its components, namely, the language of nominalization, categorization, hierarchization, domination, colonization, subordination, and control" (Banting 1991, 125).<sup>12</sup> Annie is no longer interested in contributing to the books of "already-made" history which her husband writes by "looking for missing pieces ... missing facts" (98, 134). She realizes nevertheless that she must engage in a different kind of history-making, "making fresh tracks my own way" (98), if she wants to participate in the creation of her world. Her dialogic encounters with the quoted documents become her strategy for deconstructing official history and opening up the still frames of historical facts to focus on the stories of people's lives, the "missing persons in all this rubble" (134).

Annie challenges the documents that speak of Mrs. Richards not only because they lack information about her life, but also because she questions the criteria that determine what constitutes history, especially the insistence on "cause and effect," the narrow focus on social status (48), and the Cartesian public-private split. The "historic voice (voice-over)" (48) retrospectively registers only public positions and familial status: Mrs. Richards was a school and piano teacher; she came to Vancouver as a widow and the following year married Ben

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<sup>12</sup> I take issue, however, with Banting's suggestion that these documents are "being quoted and collaged into this unfamiliar context" "without being altered or transformed in any way" (1991, 125). With Bakhtin, I would argue "that the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is--no matter how accurately transmitted--always subject to certain semantic changes.... The formulation of another's speech as well as its framing ... both express the unitary act of dialogic interaction with that speech, a relation determining the entire nature of its transmission and all the changes in meaning and accent that take place in it during transmission" (1981, 340).

Springer. Marriage is equated with a retreat into the folds of family life, and as a result she becomes invisible to chroniclers of history. So selective and brief are the references to women, and in particular to Mrs. Richards, in Alan Morley's *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis* (1961), Major J.S. Matthews's *Early Vancouver* (1932), and A.M. Ross's "The Romance of Vancouver's Schools" (1971) that Annie can quote, read, and challenge them all (39, 47-48). What she misses in these texts is what she valorizes in her fictional rendering of Ana's life: her daily activities and reflections, her personality, and her friendships with other women in her community.

In some ways these absences of women in the official history only reinforce what Annie learned in early life about the role and place of women in society. Her recognition triggers a quotation from M. Allerdale Grainger's novel *Woodsmen of the West* (1964):

a woman's place. safe. suspended out of the swift race of the world.

the monstrous lie of it: the lure of absence. self-effacing.

*'Watch Carter when the "donk" (his donkey!) has got up steam--its first steam; and when the rigging men (his rigging men!) drag out the wire rope to make a great circle through the woods. And when the circle is complete from one drum, round by where the cut logs are lying, back to the other drum; and when the active rigging slinger (his rigging slinger!) has hooked a log on to a point of the wire cable; and when the signaller (his signaller!) has pulled the wire telegraph and made the donkey toot ... just think of Carter's feelings as the engineer jams over levers, opens up the throttle, sets the thudding, whirring donkey winding up the cable, and drags the first log into sight; out from the forest down to the beach; bump, bump! Think what this mastery over huge, heavy logs means to a*

*man who has been used to coax them to tiny movements by patience and a puny jack-screw...'*

history the story, Carter's and all the others', of dominance. mastery. the bold line of it.

soon it will be getting dark, soon the kids will be coming in from outdoors. (24-25)

This quotation from Grainger powerfully asserts the presence of men in the world. Presence is defined in his novel by Carter's dominance and mastery over machines, nature, and women (through their very absence from history). This politics of power together with "a language of possession" (Jones 1993, 151) ensures that history becomes, as Annie states, "the story ... of dominance. mastery" (25). This paragraph and other quotations from Grainger's novel in *Ana Historic* (63, 80) challenge what Ralph Andrews, who quotes extensively from Grainger's novel in his *Glory Days of Logging*, describes as "crystal clear word pictures of man and conditions of the time" (1956, 12). Through her dialogic repositioning of quotations, Annie shows that these "word pictures" are specific to their socio-historical contexts and informed by patriarchal ideologies. Again, Annie engages with still frames, static pictures, which her rereadings begin to unsettle as she "[t]hink[s] what this mastery ... means to a man" (25).<sup>13</sup> She is

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<sup>13</sup> Annie's rereading of sections from *Woodsmen of the West*, which originally was printed in a very limited edition that sold slowly, also questions the public recognition Grainger himself has received. He is still remembered today for his contribution to the Forestry Act of 1912, which is considered to have laid the foundations for the forestry policy in British Columbia--policies that have led to serious environmental problems caused by the logging industry. Joel Martineau (1996) argues, however, that *Woodsmen of the West* is more critical of turn-of-the-century ideologies of gender and ecology than Marlatt's quotations suggest. Martineau emphasizes the narrator's "self-awareness and his ironic perspective on the masculine culture of agency" (4) and Grainger's attempt to shift the focus of the frontier discourse from commodity to community (10).



determined to inscribe herself into her own history, her story; so she follows Grainger's quote with a description of her own domestic situation as she waits for her children to return home.

The connection between history, nature, and men is also challenged through the dialogic relativization of quotations from Lawson and Young's *A History and Geography of British Columbia: For Use in Public School* (1906):

tomboy, her mother said. tom, the male of the species plus boy. double masculine, as if girl were completely erased....

it wasn't tom, or boy, it wasn't hoyden, minx, baggage, but what lay below names--barely even touched by them.

*'Douglas fir and red cedar are the principal trees. Of these, the former--named after David Douglas, a well-known botanist--is the staple timber of commerce. Average trees grow 150 feet high, clear of limbs, with a diameter of 5 to 6 feet. The wood has great strength and is largely used for shipbuilding, bridge work, fencing, railway ties, and furniture. As a pulp-making tree the fir is valuable. Its bark makes a good fuel.'*

clear of limbs? of extras, of asides. tree as a straight line, a stick. there for the taking.

Mrs. Richards, who stood as straight as any tree (o that Victorian sensibility--backbone, Madam, backbone!) wasn't there for the taking. (13-14)

In the description of the Douglas fir, its qualities for the economy are foregrounded: tall and wide, usable in a variety of industries--all of which serve the interest of man.<sup>14</sup> The act of naming, "Douglas fir," goes hand in hand with

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<sup>14</sup> Marlatt incorporates another quotation from Lawson and Young in which they describe the red cedar (Lawson and Young 1906, 98; *Ana Historic* 19-20). The quotation highlights the usefulness of red cedars, for example, in house finishings; the trees 'serve men and could be called "the settler's friend" (20). In her journal, Mrs. Richards puts this observation into perspective: compared to the

the patriarchal ideology of possession. In contrast, as a young girl Annie refuses to be named by her mother through a "double masculine." She denies the act of naming its power and significance in a masculine economy and claims a part of herself as inaccessible to the language of men and history. As she dialogically engages with the quotation, she repeats parts of it with a difference, rephrasing it as a question: "clear of limbs?" (14). Annie exposes masculine values based on pragmatism and utilitarianism and supported by the same linguistic economy identified in Grainger's novel (Jones 1993, 149). When Annie uses the same terminology to describe Mrs. Richards--"who stood as straight as any tree ... wasn't there for the taking ... imagining herself free of history" (14)--she not only mocks the quotation but reclaims the positive qualities of trees in her characterization of Mrs. Richards and refuses the exploitation that comes with it in the masculine economy. Moreover, while Mrs. Richards has been named by her husband through a marriage that operates within the same patriarchal discourse, she refuses to be controlled by it, refuses to be "there for the taking" in more than one sense.

Repeatedly, Annie places descriptions of the "important events in the world" which make up history ("the real story the city fathers tell" [28] such as the building of the CPR) side by side with those events of the women ("not facts but skeletal bones of a suppressed body the story is" [29] such as the arrival of

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Earth, "Man ... is afterall dwarf in such green fur, mere Insect only.--It comforts me" (20).

the first piano). Women's history values private events and is less concerned with pinpointing facts and figures of exploitation. In a particularly striking example, Annie imagines the counterpoint between the boat race that men write and "the ships men ride into the pages of history" (121) and "women's work" (123) of giving birth to the first white child at Hastings Mill, which goes unrecorded in archival documents (113-27). Here the fun-filled, yet banal, leisure activities of men are regarded more highly than the painful, life-giving labour of women. This example shows that the underlying criteria for men's and women's history are themselves highly contradictory and problematical. If a masculine discourse is indeed interested in productivity, would births not rate high on the scale?

When Annie attempts to tell her mother's story, to come to terms with her death and absence, she uses a similar strategy. She places the public, masculine discourse of the medical establishment, which diagnoses Ina as depressive and hysteric and subjects her to electroshock treatment, side by side with her personal memories of her mother's emotional outbursts, anxiety attacks, and unhappiness in the family home. Four quotations are taken from Leonard Roy Frank's *The History of Shock Treatment* (1978), a compilation of conflicting perspectives on shock treatment collected from various documents. Although most of the sections Annie quotes endorse the treatment, her critical engagement with these quotations supports Frank's "demystifying message" (xiv). He seeks to expose the abuse of state-delegated power by psychiatrists

who use shock treatment and furthermore "to arm psychiatric inmates with the knowledge and the will to resist assault by the psychiatric system" (xiv); Frank dedicates the book therefore to "all those engaged in the struggle against psychiatric tyranny" (n.p.).

Annie's description of Ina's behaviour after returning from the hospital exposes the misleading rhetoric used to describe the treatment and identifies the side effects of amnesia as actual brain damage. The promise of health, of being herself again, is supported by the medical descriptions of the treatment but challenged by Annie's memories of the end result:

[Harald] came to my bedroom and we had long discussions about depression and what the psychiatrist said. you could go into hospital for only a few days, for treatment that would erase the thoughts that tormented you, and then you'd be yourself again in a week or two.

yourself again: who was that? i could barely remember the mother who'd laughed at 'Hokey-Pokey,' loved Abbott and Costello, read 'The King asked the Queen and Queen asked the Dairy-Maid' in funny voices ...

*'Glissando in Electric Shock Therapy is the method of applying the shock stimulus to the patient in a smooth, gradually increasing manner so that the severity of the initial onset is minimized.'*

... when Harald brought you back from the hospital he brought back a stranger, a small round person collapsed in on herself.

(144-45)

The woman who before was frightened and depressed, unsure of her identity, is left with no ability to feel or remember her identity at all. Given the severity of Ina's symptoms, Annie wonders whether the diagnosis of hysteria and the shock

treatment are really designed to contain and silence women rather than to help them. Feminist critics of the medical establishment have pointed out that the medical discourse has always relied upon such principles of domination.<sup>15</sup> As medical discourse connects behaviour to the body, it makes it into a scientific problem so that the body becomes an object for medical therapy. The result is, as Sherwin points out, that "by medicating socially induced depression and anxiety, medicine helps to perpetuate women's oppression and deflects attention from the injustice of their situation" (1992, 85). Haraway supports this observation by arguing that "[t]he biochemical and physiological basis of the therapeutic claims immensely strengthen[s] the legitimating power of scientific managers over women's lives" (1991, 14).

Annie explores the history of hysteria in medical discourse, especially the long-held notion that hysteria was the result of uterine displacement and therefore a woman's disease.<sup>16</sup> A quotation from James Hillman's *The Myth of Analysis: Three essays in Archetypal Psychology* (1972) indicates that one of the avenues pursued to "cure" women of hysteria was to remove their uteri (Hillman

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<sup>15</sup> For further discussion, see, for example, Susan Sherwin (1992) who points out that feminist criticism needs to look at all modern medical practices, from its institutional structures, to its treatment of patients, to reproductive technologies, to research, and medical practitioners (84-88). See also Joan Tronto (1993), who argues for a paradigm shift to an ethic of care, and many of the essays collected in *A Reader in Feminist Ethics*, edited by Debra Shogan (1992).

<sup>16</sup> Once hysteria had been made into a "nervous type" discourse, it became a disorder of sympathy, thereby linking suffering, sympathy, and women. For brief overviews, see Foucault (1965, 136-58) and Hillman (1972, 251-58).

1978, 255-56; *Ana Historic* 89).<sup>17</sup> Ina herself has suffered a hysterectomy as well as other invasive procedures (88). By comparing her own experiences of her mother's situation with the objectifying medical discourse, Annie exposes how diagnoses function as organizing mechanisms to support the principle of domination. Annie's reaccentuation of these quotations emphasizes that it is crucial to consider who speaks the name hysteria, because, as Hillman warns, "where hysteria is diagnosed, misogyny is not far away" (1972, 254). Through the authority to define what is normal or pathological, medicine often reinforces gender roles and existing power inequalities.

Annie's dialogic engagement with these and other quoted documents opens up the discursive fields in which these documents circulate. While *Ana Historic* acknowledges their existence and the extent to which they have constituted the subjectivity of women, Annie recontextualizes them to expose their ideological underpinnings. This process disrupts their monologic authority, challenges their logic, and leaves them in fragments, only to incorporate alternative tellings that occur in the cracks the re-readings have opened. Jones reads Annie's assumption of the subordinate, supposedly non-authoritative, role of copyist in the novel as its most powerful "subversive gesture" (1993, 142). It allows her to explore the space between history and fiction, to challenge the binary opposition, and thereby to invent "a historical leak, a hole in the sieve of

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<sup>17</sup> Hillman also points out how different medical and scholarly discourses, such as classical studies, rely upon each other to support their fictions of science and reality, which they like to present as factual histories (1972, 270).

fact that let the shadow of a possibility leak through into full-blown life" (Marlatt 1990b, 15). In *Ana Historic* Marlatt insists that history can be changed because its own discourse is a fiction:

If history is a construction and language is also a construction--in fact, it actually constructs the reality we live and act in--then we can change it. We're not stuck in some authoritative version of the real, and for women that's extremely important, because until recently we always were--the patriarchal version was always *the* version, and now we know that's not true. We can throw out that powerful little article. When we change language, we change the building blocks by which we construct our reality or even our past 'reality,' history. (1993, 188)

Marlatt exposes the monologism of the male gaze and the historic voice-over in *Ana Historic*: indeed, she returns the gaze and replaces the voice-over with a polyphony of voices. Both strategies--performed through dialogic relations--are empowering possibilities for women to reclaim themselves as speaking subjects who participate in the creation of their own worlds.

In the worlds that women construct for themselves, they are no longer confined to the domestic space; they become aware of their own situatedness, not only in language and the field of history, but also in their natural environment. Both Marlatt's and van Herk's texts recognize that patriarchy has placed women and nature in the category of the absolute and alienated "other." Over the last two decades, the connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature have been explored in the context of ecofeminism, a term coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974) to indicate

women's potential to bring about an ecological revolution.<sup>18</sup> Instead of insisting on the alienation of human beings from nature, ecofeminists consider the interdependent relations in human-human and human-nature interaction. Dialogism, with its focus on multiplicity and interrelatedness, reinforces the ecofeminist recognition of the necessity for diversity, interdependence, and reciprocity in these relations. Bakhtin himself never extended his ideas about dialogism to the relationship between human and non-human nature. For him, only speaking subjects seem to have agency. While non-speaking subjects can be participants in dialogue as the objects of utterances, they remain in the role of object. As Murphy has suggested, however, by bringing together dialogism with feminism and ecology, it is possible to break dialogism out of the anthropocentrism in which Bakhtin performs it (1991b, 48). From such an ecofeminist perspective, I would now like to take a closer look at how *Ana Historic* and *Places Far From Ellesmere* develop the possibly dialogic relationships between women and nature.

In Annie's early memories in *Ana Historic*, nature, more specifically the woods, are part of male territory, where men work on powerlines or clear land (12). Similarly, even the boys of the neighbourhood have already claimed "the Green Wood" as theirs, as a place with a "fort," "slingshots," and "air gun" (12).

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<sup>18</sup> Ecofeminist discourse has developed with incredible speed across many disciplines. For introductory essays, see "Ecological Feminism," a special issue of *Hypatia* (1991), Judith Plant (1989), Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (1990), Stacy Alaimo (1994), and for a more literary approach Patrick D. Murphy (1994).



Only a small section of the forest, "that part directly behind the garden, that part she and her sisters called the Old Wood" is left to the girls (12). Too close to the domestic, feminine space of the house, it is of no interest to the boys. To the girls, however, "the Old Wood" suggests safety, comfort, and familiarity: "moulted and softened with years of needle drift, tea brown, and the cedar stump hollow in the middle where they nestled in a womb ... sniffing the odour of tree matter become a stain upon their hands like dried blood" (12). Even this familiarity is overshadowed by the fear of those who, according to what she has been taught, truly control nature: "but what if the boys ... what if the men tried to bulldoze their woods? so what could we do? her little sister shrugged" (12). Annie internalizes this notion of separate spheres, which is endorsed by her mother who continually reminds Annie of the dangers of the woods in which men and bears may hide (18).

And yet, unlike her mother, who is afraid of the bush, Annie secretly trusts the land. The woods become her escape "from the world of men" (18). In the anonymous, undisturbed environment of the forest (18, 19, 46), she feels "in communion" with the trees and animals around her, "native" in the world of nature (18). Annie's attempt to write herself into history, partly through her own writing of a novel, partly through exploring her mother's and Ana's stories, finds a parallel in her desire to reclaim her familiarity with nature as well as her sense of belonging and connection. Both nature and women have been silenced by and have suffered from patriarchal culture:

Ana's fascination:

the silence of trees  
the silence of women

if they could speak  
an unconditional language  
what would they say? (75)

Nature and women have been overwritten by the desires, bodies, and histories of men, fathers and husbands; in order for Annie to liberate herself as a woman and to reclaim her positive relationship with nature, she needs to re-inscribe women's desires, bodies, and histories and with them respect for the land.

In *Ana Historic* the most respectful and harmonious relationships with nature are associated with the presence of women, women's bodies, and love between women: Ana joins the two women she sees sitting in a pool in the woods beckoning her to join them (86); Annie finds two women kissing in a car that is parked in the woods (106-07); the birth of Jeannie Alexander's son takes place inside the house, but the nature of birth and women's bodies are closely paralleled with the natural setting outside, the trees, the rain forest, the scarlet maples, so that the country of the land becomes the country of the woman's body (127). Moreover, as Jeannie gives birth to her son and to the new Ana, whose consciousness has been raised by her witnessing of the birth, Zoe metaphorically gives birth to a new Annie (Kelly 1995, 84). And finally, when Annie goes to visit Zoe at her house, she compares the community of the women to her early memories of nature: "i wanted to listen, as i used to listen in

the woods to the quiet interplay of wind, trees, rain, creeping things under the leaves--this world of connection" (151). If nature's elements relate to each other dialogically, and women relate to each other in the same way, then women and nature can also share, listen, respond, and connect with each other, in other words relate dialogically.

In this context, it is not surprising that Marlatt's epigraph--"The assemblage of facts in a tangle of hair" (n.p.)--is a quotation from what has become one of the touchstone texts for ecofeminists: Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978). When Griffin introduces a selection from this text in her later collection *Made from this Earth*, she explains that "[t]hough the book contains analytic ideas, it moves by the force of echoes and choruses, counterpoints and harmonies. In one way, the book is an extended dialogue between two voices (each set in different type face), one the chorus of women and nature, an emotional, animal, embodied voice, and the other a solo part, cool, professorial, pretending to objectivity, carrying the weight of cultural authority" (1982, 82). In *Woman and Nature*, Griffin suggests that man has been alienated from both woman and nature in the patriarchal systems of the Western world, while woman and nature are seen as connected. Thus, both are established as proper subjects for domination but their connection can also become the source for women's strengths and a way to deconstruct patriarchy's discourse of domination.

Marlatt's specific quotation is taken from Book Four of Griffin's *Woman*

and *Nature* entitled "Her Vision." Here the speaker rereads a woman's body as a source of knowledge and history:

*Fine light hairs down our backbones. Soft hair over our forearms. Our upper lips.* Each hair a precise fact. (He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no choice.) *Hair tickling our legs.* The fact of hair against skin. The hand stroking the hair, the skin. Each hair. Each cell. (He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.) *Our hair lying against our cheeks.* The assemblage of facts in a tangle of hair. (He has taken from her all right to property, even to the wages she earns. He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.) (209-10)

For Griffin, and by analogy for Marlatt, facts of history are not derived solely from public events and are not dissociated from live bodies and personal experience; the body itself is a textbook of history, with Ina the most obvious and disturbing example. In an interesting way, the context of Marlatt's epigraph foreshadows the problematics of women, especially of Mrs. Richards, in *Ana Historic*. Through marriage a woman like Ana fades into the background, disappears from public records altogether, becomes a housewife like Ina whose emotional behaviour is controlled by a masculine medical establishment through shock treatment, or runs the household and supports her husband by doing research as does Annie. The absence of these women from official history drives Annie to explore their stories. It is the lives of all three women which Annie needs to write back into history; it is also their bodies, which have been controlled by men, and their connection to nature that need to be reclaimed. But not only the theme of Griffin's *Woman and Nature* resonates in *Ana Historic*; like Griffin, Marlatt employs

dialogic relations between stories, voices, documents, woman and nature. These texts challenge the monologism of patriarchy through a double-voiced discourse that critiques what it observes. Both texts posit a strategically monologic ending that concludes with the voices of a community of women.

Commentary on *Ana Historic* has often focused on the novel's utopian ending and the essentialism that has been said to ground Marlatt's reinscription of women, lesbianism, and the notion of origin. Does Marlatt indeed reinstate the old binary of nature versus culture (Davey 1993, 196)? Is the literal and literary climax at the end "unexpectedly conventional in its utopian vision" and therefore unsatisfactory (Tostevin 1989, 38)? Such readings of *Ana Historic*, I believe, are reductive because they remain within the hierarchical thinking of patriarchal discourse and ignore the more complex dialogic manoeuvres of the novel.<sup>19</sup> The novel obviously exposes a wide range of binaries crucial to Western patriarchal structures, but none remains in place. Through the exploration of a lesbian relationship with Zoe, Annie has not simply reversed her place within the male/female binary by privileging women or claiming the male prerogative of desiring women, as Davey suggests (1993, 209); rather, their relationship suggests a different position that opens up the familiar binary, deconstructs it in order to find a new space that is not determined by patriarchal discourse. As

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<sup>19</sup> Marlatt anticipates such readings: "[a]s soon as you try to write from the margin versus the centre, so that the margin is seen from the centre of its own values, then you're open to the attack that you're simply trying to reverse the hierarchy and make this *the* centre. This is a trap of binary thinking, which is always hierarchical. It says there has to be an either/or and it can't get to that place of both/and" (1991a, 104).

pointed out before, Annie explains early on: "when you're so framed, caught in the act, the (f) stop of act, fact--what recourse? step inside the picture and open it up" (56). However, only if the reader deems the exploration of this possibility worthwhile will she engage favourably with the ending of the novel.

I welcome Marlatt's desire to imagine women in reference to themselves in a language so burdened with patriarchal value; however, I am doubtful that it is possible to imagine women in an altogether "unconditioned language" outside of patriarchal reference (75). Annie certainly takes steps in this direction; she renames herself and as Annie Torrent begins to speak her own desire: "you. i want you. *and* me. together" (152). Her act of renaming becomes a disruption of the paternal genealogy in which women cannot speak or write (Goldman 1992, 37). But Marlatt pushes this disruption further when she shifts into a more lyrical mode in the final section of the novel. Here she seems to indicate a contextual shift into a lesbian culture that posits different terms of reference and form. Significantly, this last page of the novel remains unnumbered and is followed by another white page. The space of Annie and Zoe's relationship is located outside of the linearity of the novelistic genre, which is itself part of a patriarchal tradition.

What is crucial at the end of *Ana Historic* is the fact that the voices of women, of lesbian women, too long denied and marginalized, are not subordinated, appropriated, or normalized by the dominant discourse of a patriarchal, heterosexist society. Perhaps many readers' discomfort with *Ana*

*Historic* derives from this final gesture of resistance. And yet, the conclusion is by no means closed or finished; on the last page Marlatt is literally "writing the period that arrives at no full stop" (90). The tensions explored through the dialogic narrative have not been resolved. The centrifugal and centripetal forces present in the text ensure a means of countering totalization, so that any monologic imagination, such as Annie's alternative, serves a strategic function in the dialogic play of the text. The desire that feeds the relationship between Annie and Zoe also sustains the ongoing process that may and must include the reader ("you") who will read the characters "into the page ahead" (n.p.). This movement towards the future suggests to me that the utopian element at the end of the novel does not indicate an idealist evasion into lesbianism or the nostalgic expectation of return to a long-gone, better past; rather, the working of lesbian desire here implies a counter-hegemonic impulse that needs to be linked to a transformative politics.

In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, the narrator finally escapes to Ellesmere to continue her search for a home, a future grave. She refers to Ellesmere most frequently as an island and a desert, both of which carry exclusively positive connotations for her. Ellesmere is "a happy island" (105), an "island paradise" (113). While the isolation and wilderness of islands in the north may be associated with loneliness and danger, the narrator cherishes her sense of exile and the island's self-sufficiency (104, 125). In her "exquisite desert" (104), she does not bemoan the lack of population or the lack of rain which stifles

vegetation--on the contrary, to her Ellesmere is a "fecund island" (77). She experiences a "northern desert of desire" in which the process of desiring and striving is more important than the achievement of goals (105).<sup>20</sup> Ellesmere is presented as different and set apart by the narrator who has "cut all connexion to all places far from Ellesmere" (77). Ellesmere is absence, awayness, remoteness, and inaccessibility (77, 89, 105). This literal removal in spatial terms is also a relocation to a dream-like place of suspended time ("white nights"), a place with "no judgements exerting themselves" (110), a place that teaches "the pleasure of oblivion" (130) and is free of "the graspings of most of [ ] man's impositions, his history or fiction or implacable des/cribement" (113). Through its "extremity of north" (131), Ellesmere Island functions as a threshold chronotope for the narrator (Bakhtin 1981, 248). The threshold of the north allows her to explore what is otherwise impossible. Here the narrator can attempt to escape the rules of southern patriarchal discourse and un/read *Anna Karenin's* story of oppression, murder and victimization. Here she can be "only a body" (77), desiring to be uninscribed by phallogentric discourse, pretending that she is suspended from the world of books, telephones, and newspapers. If

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<sup>20</sup> Van Herk's comment in "Desire in Fiction: De-siring Realism" is illuminating in this context: "[d]esire moves us forward, incites change, asks for *more*.... The true measure of human beings is not what they know, but what they long for, what they strive to attain despite its inaccessibility. And yet, it is not the result that is important, for when one goal is reached, there will be another. What is important is the striving, prompted by desire. Finally ... de-sire will force us to abandon the well-known context for a better one, even if it is not so safe, desire will give us courage to explore the fullest range of human possibility, desire prompts us to make fiction after fiction and make them good" (1992, 84-85).



her own suspension is possible on Ellesmere Island, then the island may become a refuge from the over-determined, masculine representations of women (Goldman 1993, 32). In such a place they can explore a new discourse, new ways of seeing in which the illusion of absence becomes presence, the invisible becomes visible, and silence becomes a language, a form of transgression.<sup>21</sup>

As I read the narrator reading the text of Ellesmere in van Herk's georafictione, I am troubled, however, by the tension the narrator creates between her idea of the north as a "tabula rasa" (77), an "undiscovered place" (113) and her explicit acknowledgement of and dialogic engagement with a tradition of Canada's north as defined by a history of male adventurers, explorers, and exploiters (Berger 1966; Grace forthcoming). Early on the narrator contemplates the question: "[w]hat justifies place?" (20). Does a place become a place through its land, rivers, animals, vegetation, and indigenous populations or through its discovery by white explorers and its opening up by the railway? Her response to these questions seems straightforward:

Henday (1754): Thompson (1787): Fidler (1792): Henry (1810): their wandering bivouacs. The flats of Dried Meat Lake "studded with groves of ash-leaved maples many of which are a foot in diameter" (Macoun, 1879); "the fertility of the Battle River district" (Deville, 1883); "partly wooded and with scattered trees and coppice" (Tyrrell, 1887). (20)

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<sup>21</sup> In her crypto-friction that explores her trip to the Arctic, van Herk identifies being "free of words" as her greatest desire (1991, 2): "this hereness, this nowness, and nothing else. I am suspended in an Arctic, not near Arctic or high Arctic but extreme Arctic, beyond all writing ... I am simply here, reduced to *being* ... I am at last beyond language, at last literately invisible" (3).

The narrator cites those who have written about the Canadian northwest before her: the first white, male explorers who surveyed, charted, and mapped the new land in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> She also alludes to the crucial role played in this process by powerful institutions such as the Hudson Bay Company, for which both Thompson and Fidler worked, and the Geological Survey of Canada, to which Tyrrell and Macoun were appointed. These references accomplish two things. By citing official history, the narrator sets up what she seeks to undermine; at the same time she shows that the concept of the north or northwest, the Canadian frontier, is a construction that has shifted with every new exploration undertaken, every new area that was surveyed. The narrator thus questions any unitary definition of place and creates a space for herself to engage with dominant history in order to reinscribe a different narrative. Her own justification of place is based on personal memory. The

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony Henday (1750-62) was part of a mission to encourage distant tribes of aboriginals to trade; he travelled extensively with the Cree in 1754-55, keeping a journal of his journey up the Saskatchewan River and along the Battle River valley. David Thompson (1770-1857) provided the first maps with a comprehensive view of the western territories. Peter Fidler (1769-1822), although usually less recognized than Thompson, also played an important role in mapping western Canada. Alexander Henry (1739-1824) was one of the first English fur traders in the northwest; he was taken prisoner for a year by some Native people in 1763; he wrote what is now considered a classic of Canadian travel literature, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories* (1809). John Macoun (1831-1920) was on the first of five government surveys of western Canada in 1872; he promoted the agricultural capabilities of the western interior; he was a foremost field naturalist who was appointed to the Geological Survey of Canada in 1882. Edouard-Gaston Deville (1849-1924) was a surveyor for the French navy before he came to Canada in 1875 and became surveyor general of Canada ten years later; he is known for his experimentation with photography. He was also a founding member of the Royal Society. Joseph Burr Tyrrell (1858-1957) consolidated information of earlier explorers and filled in gaps and blank spots on existent maps in his explorations of the northwest; he worked for the Geological Survey of Canada (1881-1898); he also discovered the dinosaur beds of southern Alberta. Later he worked as a miner and a mining consultant and edited historical publications such as the diaries of Samuel Hearne and David Thompson (*The Canadian Encyclopedia* 1988).

sources and citations cannot replace the process of individual construction:

"[d]ream yourself a place: Edberg (20)."

I see another excellent example of this strategy of dialogically engaging with previous history in the narrator's attempt to chronicle the history of Ellesmere. A comparison of the entry for "Ellesmere Island" in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* with the narrator's commentary in *Places Far From Ellesmere* is instructive:

The island was sighted by William Baffin in 1616, but was not explored until the 19th century. John Ross discovered parts of the coastline in 1818 and the island was named for the earl of Ellesmere during the Ingelfield expedition of 1852. Sir George Nares carried out extensive observations in 1875. (*The Canadian Encyclopedia* 1988, 687)

Ellesmere ... Hard to configure as an island at first, sighted by William Baffin (how: from the shore/with a telescope/from his ship?) in 1616, but not explored until the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century island: the nineteenth century novel. But John Ross discovered parts of the coastline in 1818 (too much symmetry), and in 1852 the island was named, during the Ingelfield expedition, for the Earl of Ellesmere. Why? Had he given them money? What did they read on those ice-bound shores that suggested the island should be named for him? And was their reading correct? Is it an Ellesmere, or something else, some other name that other beings spoke? There must be another name, somewhere, if one only had the eyes to read it. Sir George Nares led an expedition of the Royal Navy (extensive exploration) in 1875 and 1876. (97, my emphasis)

The narrator not only challenges the prerogative of white men in the explorations of the north but she also questions the way that their expeditions have become history, that is, written history, deemed official and authoritative, as exemplified by the entry in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. The narrator creates a double-

voiced discourse by reaccentuating phrases and sentences from the encyclopedia--which I have underlined--and questioning what they do not account for (asking for reasons and practical considerations) and suggesting parallels important to her (for example between the nineteenth-century island and the nineteenth-century novel). This form of dialogism shows that Ellesmere Island is no "undiscovered place" (113), that history has documented its exploration. What the narrator points out, however, is that the expeditions of these men excluded women: "[t]hese names, every mapped configuration male/lineated" (88). The narrator intends to intervene, to undermine this familiar discourse of exploration with its masculine biases, in order to be able "to read through, past this male historiographical fiction" (84).

As the narrator explores Ellesmere Island from a woman's point of view, she erases the "other beings" who actually discovered the island, who gave it their own name (97): "[f]orty-two hundred years ago hunting bands roamed beside the inlets and fjords of Hazen Plateau. They had a name for Ellesmere, you are sure of that" (98). Only a few brief references (20, 97, 98) speak of the presence of First Nations peoples in the north and their encounters with white explorers, which are alluded to by the references to Anthony Henday and Alexander Henry. As she tries to recover women's voices, the narrator silences those whom she herself can "other" and displace. Her own discourse of resistance thus becomes complicit with the oppressive masculine discourse she seeks to disrupt. Only this erasure and complicity allow her to think of Ellesmere

as a "tabula rasa" (77), a place where she can be alone with Anna Karenin.<sup>23</sup>

This approach is even more surprising considering van Herk's fascinating examination of her journey to Grise Fiord on Ellesmere Island with her Inuit guide Pijamini in her crypto-friction "In Visible Ink" (1991, 1-11).

By creating a double-voiced discourse, the narrator reads the palimpsest of the north for the woman's story that has been inaccessible and unacceptable until now, concealed by a masculine historiography and geography. In turn, she superimposes this story of woman on the official historical and geographical constructions we have grown accustomed to. What she does not accomplish is to move outside of this opposition in order to see other layers of this palimpsest. In "Stealing Inside After Dark," van Herk reflects on the role of palimpsests: "[the book] encloses: pages, words, ideas; it can, for a period of time, enclose the reader, although only when it is itself opened. That paradox speaks to the presence of book(s) in life, to the writing (palimpsestic) of books, their reading (palimpsestic), and their textual suggestiveness (palimpsestic) as audience, as substitute and subterfuge, as illusion and artifact" (1991, 139). Only our own palimpsestic reading of this georafictione can reinscribe what van Herk leaves

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<sup>23</sup> Ken Coates has commented that one of the patterns of southern control of the north is the government's treatment of the north as a *tabula rasa* for government action (1993/94, 25). The relocation of Inuit families and communities, and the declaration of the Yukon and North Western Territories as bilingual etc. are well-known examples. See also Louis-Edmond Hamelin on the precedence of Native Peoples and their colonization: "[t]hose who were already on the land were denied any title to that land, and this permitted the European settlers to consider the land as vacant, appropriate it and then consolidate the land grab by means of new cartography and place naming, the only official version" (1988, 15). See Grace (1991, 251-54) on representations of First Nations peoples of the north in literature.

unconsidered.

A similar strategy, I would argue, can be detected in the cover illustration by Scott Barham. The grey and white map of British Columbia and Alberta, which shows the area of Edberg, Edmonton, and Calgary, serves as the ground on which a coloured insert is placed. This insert looks like a collage of a map of the Arctic Archipelago, a picture of Ellesmere Island in the shape of a woman's body, and a grid of Calgary which is superimposed on the northwest coast of Greenland, separated from Ellesmere Island by the Kennedy Channel. In this collage, the womanly shape of Ellesmere Island is superimposed on all the existing maps and becomes the centre of the cover page and van Herk's georafictione, erasing geographical distinctions and differences in the process.

What then is the original text that has been obscured and overwritten by masculine readings? Is it Ellesmere as woman, Ellesmere as the mother of women,<sup>24</sup> and north as feminine? While the dominant narratives of the north are gendered masculine because of masculine traditions of exploration, mapmaking and historiography, the land of the north is at the same time configured as feminine, exotic, the "other." The frontier of the north is thus "equated with Woman, but denied to women" (Grace forthcoming, 20): "[t]error of women = terror of the north. Lost in one frozen waste or another, lost to women or the wiles of Ellesmere" (123). Van Herk's georafictione suggests that

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<sup>24</sup> See Buss's comment on the island's name: "Elles/Mere. 'Ellesmere,' the play on the foreign language's 'elles,' a female 'they,' and 'Mere,' the mother contained in the island's name, is a suitably playful title for the special kind of feminist play that Aritha van Herk constructs" (1993, 199-200).

only this reclamation of the north as feminine enables the narrator to un/read and thus free Anna from Tolstoy's plot. But is not her inscription of Ellesmere as woman in danger of being complicit with and co-opted by a discourse that has always written the island in terms of familiar tropes such as the virgin land to be conquered?

To reclaim Ellesmere from official history and reinscribe it as feminine, the narrator frequently relies on anthropomorphic descriptions of the island: "a northern body" (131), "thinly naked" (90), "fat with the flesh of heated snow" (96), a body with head, ears, and palm (124, 142). This body is explicitly gendered: "female desert island with secret reasons and desires" (130), "the landscape of a woman" (131), "no one's mistress" (139), "islanded woman" (142). Again, I sense a tension between the narrator's personification and sex-typing of the essential Ellesmere and her desire to reconstruct the narrative of Tolstoy's Anna. Does her strategy, I would ask with Murphy and other ecofeminists, oppose the patriarchal ideology of domination or does it inadvertently reinforce elements of that ideology and thereby limit its own effectiveness in subverting the system it opposes (Murphy 1988, 155)? While it may be worthwhile to treasure the land and women in a culture in which both are exploited, anthropomorphic and gendered descriptions of Ellesmere as woman cannot be used without evoking the patriarchal framework in which these descriptions have supported the oppression of women and nature. To think of the island as a woman's body maintains the male/female dualism that hierarchically divides. *Places Far From*

*Ellesmere* shows few traces of a dialogic challenge to these dichotomies or of a struggle to deconstruct the old paradigm that rests on "humanity's false egotism fed by anthropocentrism" (Murphy 1988, 162). In spite of the narrator's reverent revaluation of northern space as feminine, she only inverts traditional gender valuation and ultimately reinscribes the patriarchal sex-typing she tries to undermine. To claim a natural rather than a constructed alliance between woman and the land, I believe, only binds her more tightly to the narrative of domination in which Anna Karenin, for instance, finds herself.

In her reinscription of *Ellesmere* as woman, the narrator seems to rewrite both land and woman with agency. The narrator frees the women, "[r]eader and Anna and *Ellesmere*" (139), who are "watched, judged, condemned" (126), so that they can read *Ellesmere* themselves (139). But the narrator depends on *Ellesmere* to make this possible because "[o]nly the north can teach what reading means" (132).<sup>25</sup> But in spite of this interdependency, the narrator does not see herself as part of the land. She remains an observer, albeit a meticulous one; only occasionally does she wish to become part of the land, "to become *Ellesmere*" (121), by submerging herself in the rivers (100, 121). In her descriptions of the environment--harebells, poppies, muskoxen, glaciers-- the

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<sup>25</sup> Van Herk has commented on her own experience of travelling to *Ellesmere* Island: "the time I spent at Lake Hazen in the northern part of *Ellesmere* Island taught me unreading, the act of dismantling a text past all its previous readings and writings ... enabling me to untie all the neatly laced up expectations of words and their printing, their arrangement on the page, the pages bound together into a directive narrative, that then refused to be static, but turned and began to read back, to read me, to unread my very reading and my personal geography" (1991, 3-4).



narrator shows a fascination with objects, but she does not pay much attention to how elements of the environment interact or what role she plays in this interaction. Rather than becoming part of the landscape, she takes control of it in order to un/read Anna.

Ultimately, Ellesmere Island--"the islanded woman"--and Anna remain passive (Walchli 1993, 17): "Ellesmere, this high sun-shadowed plateau left holding Lake Hazen in its palm, this islanded woman waiting to be read a justice or a future" (142-43). This final shift into the passive--"waiting to be read"--removes the agency, freedom, and self-sufficiency the narrator earlier read for both Ellesmere and Anna. Another look at the cover shows that the picture of Ellesmere in the shape of a woman also shows a passive body, the body of someone who is sleeping or dead. With her hands at her sides, her knees slightly pulled up, her large breast exposed, and her hair floating toward the North Pole, this woman is not about to take action. And Anna Karenin, of course, is killed in the end with the narrator knowing all along that she is "dead before she begins, the end already read. You know where she is going, have pre/read that destination" (83). Unable to read their own futures, are both Ellesmere and Anna left helpless at the end, still dependent on the discursive practices of a patriarchal system? The ending remains ambivalent (Buss 1993, 200). The final sigh "Oh Anna" (143) can be an expression of pity and sorrow over the inescapability of the dominant discourse--of the Canadian north, of Tolstoy, of the literary tradition. But it may also declare the solidarity of the

speaker with Anna, women, the reader, and a feminine north.

Van Herk's georafictione employs dialogic strategies to map its own text. The narrator engages dialogically with many of the earlier readings and histories of Ellesmere Island, the north, and nature. When it comes time to un/read Anna, however, the space in which that is possible becomes one very much controlled by the narrator. Her trip to Ellesmere Island and her reinscription of the island as woman is monologic in that it subordinates every other context and history to this perspective. The strategic quality of this gesture, like the narrator's strategic relocation to the north, does not perform the kind of paradigm shift that leads to actual practice for change. Her anthropomorphic and gendered reinscription of the north risks being undercut and co-opted by an essentialism that easily plays into patriarchy's oppression of women and nature.

The processes of un/reading in Marlatt's *Ana Historic* and van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* always signify more than a one-directional reversal of action; they never simply express negation or deconstruction. Instead, they need to be understood as double movements in which every un/reading becomes a new reading, every untelling is a new telling, every reading also means being read, every deconstruction implies a reconstruction, and every act of undocumenting implies another act of documenting. In both texts dialogism functions as the central strategy to perform these double movements. In this chapter I have focused my attention on the dialogic interrelations of chronotopes and women's life stories, the dialogic play with genre conventions, and the

dialogic incorporation of quotations from other texts.

Each of the subjects, or still frames, to use Marlatt's metaphor, is placed into a new context so that it is no longer static and self-sufficient but takes on new meaning and begins to shift.<sup>26</sup> As chronotopes, stories, genre conventions, and quotations begin to sound differently in their new contexts, they are defamiliarized, rehistoricized, and re-energized. In both *Ana Historic* and *Places Far From Ellesmere*, these dialogic relations attempt to break down the familiar rules of formation, the dualisms and hierarchies, on which patriarchal discourses of history, fiction, literature, and geography have rested. Through dialogism, these binaries are not merely reversed; instead, their structure is undermined and the hegemony they support is unsettled in order to explore the spaces between, the alternative sites and concepts. As Jones has argued in her discussion of *Ana Historic*, "[t]his economy of un-thinking at the expense of the given is neither outside history (a-historic) nor assimilated to it, but ana-historic: it redefines an intertextual space in which the writings that map out 'woman's place' are forced to 'finance their own subversion'" (1993, 160).

Because un/reading is ultimately a reconstructive practice, *Places Far From Ellesmere* can be driven by van Herk's desire "to invent a women's world" (1991, 132) and *Ana Historic* can be seen as Marlatt's attempt "to do a woman's version of history" (Marlatt 1989, 98). These processes of reinscribing women's

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<sup>26</sup> In addition to mere reversal, the *OED* notes a second meaning of the prefix un- in which "the sense passes into that of releasing or setting free from confinement" (1989, Vol. XVIII, 850).

histories, of literally putting their bodies on the map (in the case of van Herk), do not necessarily lead to a narrative authority for women, or stability and unity of their subject positions. Annie's subjectivity at the end of Marlatt's novel, for example, is still in process. Although she engages in a relationship with Zoe, their coming together points into the future of other contexts, other struggles. As I indicated earlier (155-57), I see a potential danger in the possible naturalization of lesbianism at the end of *Ana Historic*. I believe, however, that a strong argument can be made to support even such a gesture of strategic essentialism and monologism because it serves to resist normalization by the dominant discourse. Such monologism can function as a construction that ultimately seeks to deconstruct itself. What Fuss has so convincingly argued in the context of the essentialism debate may be a helpful reminder here: "the radicality or conservatism of essentialism [monologism] depends, to a significant degree, on *who* is utilizing it, *how* it is employed, and *where* its effects are concentrated" (1989, 20). These questions of who, how, and where also have to be asked when we challenge van Herk's and Marlatt's texts, as I think we should, for not reflecting on their own exclusionary processes--especially in terms of race and class--in their construction of new histories.<sup>27</sup>

My reading of van Herk's strategy of reinscribing Ellesmere Island and the north as essentially feminine has been more sceptical. The narrator's dialogic

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<sup>27</sup> See C. Annette Grisé (1993) and Emberley (1993, 155-56).

engagement with chronotopes and quoted documents increasingly becomes a means of control in her attempt to revision the north and Anna Karenin.

Although the narrator initially seems to resist any unitary definition of place, the essentialism that informs her authoritative construction of Ellesmere Island undermines and counteracts the dialogic strategies she employs. While van Herk's un/reading stalls at the end of *Places Far From Ellesmere*, Marlatt's un/reading moves beyond the last page of *Ana Historic* as it projects a transformed social world for which we need a transformative political practice.

## Chapter Five

### Critiquing the Choice That Is Not One:

#### Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*

The counter-discourses developed in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985) and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) challenge the internal colonization suffered by Native peoples in Canada and signal a contestatory politics of representation in content as well as in narrative structures.<sup>1</sup> Both *Slash* and *Green Grass, Running Water* respond to the choice Native peoples have been faced with in literary representations and their social contexts in Canada: assimilation or extermination. The novels reject this simplistic binary antagonism that ultimately leaves Natives no choice because both options are forms of (self-)annihilation. Until recently, assimilation was the official government policy towards Native peoples, but even today this assimilationism is a powerful, implicit agenda directed towards the social, economic, and political integration of Natives into the dominant society. The history of

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<sup>1</sup> I use "Native" here as a general term that refers to status and non-status Indians, Métis, Dene, and Inuit. See Kateri Damm (1993, 12) and King (1987, 5) for more detailed discussions of the complex questions of Native identity.

assimilation begins with early colonization and includes the British North America Act (1867), the Indian Act (1876), its amendment in 1951, the struggle over the federal White Paper in 1969, and finally the official policy of multiculturalism (1971), which has functioned "to decentre the historically and culturally specific claims of Aboriginal peoples ... submerging them in a vast, abstract, undifferentiated, multicultural mosaic" (Kulchyski 1995, 63). These policies have separated Natives from white society and have often alienated them from their own communities (Dickinson and Wotherspoon 1992, 406). What is on the political agenda today are the questions of whether and how self-determination and land claims can be negotiated in a Canadian nation-state.

*Slash* and *Green Grass, Running Water* insist on discourses of culturally specific, rather than universal, rights that expose the totalizing power of the choice that is not one and voice an alternative third position, which is realized in the novels' character portrayals and plots but also in their narrative structures. This alternative has been described as a return to traditional approaches, or simply the "Indian way" (Currie 1990, 150), or as "liberation through self-determination" (Horne 1995, 263). While *Slash*, for example, supports the right to individual positions at the end, he does not endorse the pluralism of a liberal multiculturalism, as Margery Fee has pointed out (1990, 175); instead, he emphasizes the need to recognize difference in opinion and aims for solidarity: "[e]ach position is important and each has the right to try for it. We should all back each other up" (235). Moreover, the novel suggests that the reductive

"choice" between white assimilation and Native tradition also allows for a position of dis-identification, in which otherness does not have to imply subordination but can become "anotherness" (Godard 1990b, 217).

A similar binary has been perpetuated in representations of Natives in white institutions and media. Stereotypes of the Noble Savage, the Mystic Shaman, or "the children of nature" have idealized and romanticized Native peoples, while images of the drunken, lazy savage have demonized them as a potential threat or a lost cause.<sup>2</sup> In these fixed categories, Natives are rarely depicted as individuals. Both Armstrong and King rewrite these representations of Native peoples, exposing them as interested constructions and rejecting what Marilyn Dumont has called "colonial images" that portray monolithic images of "nativeness" (1993, 48, 49). The novels show a range and multiplicity of Native experiences, in rural, traditional, and reserve environments as well as in urban settings. Part of Slash's struggle is to reject images of himself and his people as either "*too Indian or not Indian enough*" (Dumont 1993, 47) and to find enough confidence to demand to be seen as different, but not inferior, even in the face of discrimination (86). Similarly, the characters in *Green Grass, Running Water* challenge the criticisms of white culture that they are no longer "real Indians" (141, 187), at the same time exploring how to "become what [each of them] had always been. An Indian" (262). The need for new self-representations that leave

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed analyses of images of Natives, see, for instance, Fee (1984), Terry Goldie (1989), Daniel Francis (1992), and Damm (1993).



behind the signs of internal colonialism is one of the driving forces of these two novels.

The desire for new representations is closely connected with Armstrong's and King's attempts to defy another false choice, that is, the opposition of Western literary traditions and Native oral storytelling. Both texts make extensive use of direct speech, incorporating speech patterns of the vernacular through their choice of words, speech rhythms, and sentence structures. Often direct speech is used to create a sense of oral narration as stories are retold within the novels. *Slash* and *Green Grass, Running Water* perform a critical recuperation of these stories and the methods of storytelling which white Western culture has often devalued as naive and simplistic. The novels refuse to posit speech and writing as absolute opposites and examine instead their complex interrelations. The result is hybrid novels that explore the notion of "orality in literacy" rather than orality and/or literacy (Calinescu 1993; Dickinson 1994, 321). Through storytelling, *Slash* and *Green Grass, Running Water* "give voice to Indigenous memory systems long silenced by the history of imperialism, and transform the usually solitary reading experience into a more cooperative and responsive act of listening" (Dickinson 1994, 320).

Armstrong's novel may be seen as more "polemical" than King's, to borrow King's own terminology, because it chronicles the imposition of non-Native expectations on Native peoples and the methods of resistance employed by Native people to maintain their communities (1990a, 13). King's

"associational" novel, on the other hand, focuses on a Native community and the daily activities and ordinariness of its members rather than on the conflict between two cultures (1990a, 14).<sup>3</sup> The historical circumstances for the writing of *Slash* help to explain this difference. Involved in the Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project that began in 1979, Armstrong was trying to develop material for the school system: "[w]e wanted a tool to use in education, to give not just the historical documentation of that time but, beyond that, the feeling of what happened just prior to the American Indian Movement, and what happened during that militancy period" (1991, 14). The need to document the problems of assimilation for both Native and non-Native readers drives Armstrong's *Slash*. As a result, *Slash* was published in 1985 with Theytus Books. Both Theytus Books in Penticton and Pemmican Publications in Winnipeg were founded in 1980 in response to the problems Native writers were experiencing in the Canadian publishing industry.<sup>4</sup> Compared to *Slash*, King's *Green Grass, Running Water* seems less didactic and more playful, albeit no less serious. Maybe in order to reach a wider (non-Native) audience, King published his novel with the non-Native publishing house HarperCollins, a decision King should not necessarily be criticized for (Horne 1995, 259-60).

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<sup>3</sup> Polemical and associational are two of the four terms King suggests to describe Native literature in his attempt to avoid the term "post-colonial"; the other two are tribal and interfusional. Tribal refers to literature that exists primarily within a tribe or community and that is usually presented in a Native language; interfusional describes Native literature that blends oral and written literature (1990a, 12-13).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the marginalization of Natives in the Canadian publishing industry and alternative, self-controlled publishing ventures by Natives, see Greg Young-Ing (1993).

Armstrong uses Tommy Kelasket, later nicknamed Slash, as the homodiegetic narrator who also functions as primary focalizer in the novel. Slash describes his own experiences; he tells his own story of what it means to be Native without being despised or silenced by whites. As Fee emphasizes, "[t]his 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" (1990, 172). To foreground the voice of the Native narrator and focalizer is to refuse to allow the dominant discourse to reabsorb or normalize the voice of Native resistance and difference. The use of an homodiegetic narrator does not suggest, however, that Slash establishes a unified or autonomous subjectivity. The novel carefully inscribes Slash's identity as a process of struggle rather than as a ready-made product, as a community-based rather than as a self-sufficient project. The novel traces Slash's development from the sixth grade to early adulthood, from an undisturbed life on the reserve through his involvement in Native activism in Canada and the United States in the 1960s and 70s to his return to life on the reserve with his young family. But the focus on Slash's perspective does not result in a monologic narrative. On the contrary, Armstrong internally dialogizes Slash's perspective to show his development by revealing and staging the kaleidoscope of voices and stories that have made him who he is.

The hybrid form of *Slash* incorporates elements of European historical fiction, the "Native confessional mode developed in the Indian Movement," the oral anecdote, and self-reflexive narrative strategies (Godard 1990b, 214). The

genres of the *Bildungsroman*, the romance quest, and the picaresque novel have also been discussed in relation to the novel (Davey 1993, 57). By employing multiple narrative conventions, the novel succeeds in resisting Western literary discourses that have tended to frame the Native in terms of binary stereotypes; moreover, it rejects the notion of an essential aspect of Native writing and thereby displaces the fetishization of Native tradition (Godard 1990b, 220). The novel manages to situate itself simultaneously in a position of resistance and complicity. The double-voiced generic discourse that emerges from this position is echoed in Slash's speech throughout the novel.

The seemingly unmediated representation of Slash's direct speech often disguises the double-voiced quality of his own discourse. Sometimes fragments of the discourses of those with whom he collides are incorporated into his own speech. Mostly, Slash distances himself from the discourses that try to shape his life and intrude into his language through stylization or the use of quotation marks. But these strategies of distancing differ only in degree, and the lines between marked quotations, stylization (which recognizes the word as belonging to someone else's discourse), and imitation (which directly appropriates such discourse and merges with it) are easily blurred (Bakhtin 1984a, 198-90). In his rendering of the events at Wounded Knee, for example, Slash clearly marks the discourse of white authorities as questionable and suspicious:

A couple of senators arrived to "talk" and they went in with that same attitude. However, they came out saying that the "hostages" didn't want to leave.... That sure put a crimp in the actions being contemplated by National Guard forces. The "hostages" were necessary to lay some charges against their "captors" to justify the massive military-like presence which was escalating rapidly towards a confrontation. What good were "hostages" if they wanted to stay and support the Indians? (116)

What is understood by "talk" or who qualifies as a "hostage" obviously depends on the position of the speaker, and Slash dissociates himself through the use of quotation marks from the position of the authorities. Toward the end of the novel, Slash discusses with a friend the recognition of Native rights in the constitution:

'Why do you think there was a moratorium called on uranium explorations? Why do you think Berger recommended a ten year stop to any further development until land claims was settled? It's what they are doing right now. Settling it. They will buy out the land and the billions of dollars worth of resources on it for as little as they can. Then after that they will "give" you rights in some areas of it within provincial regulations for conservation.... They'll continue to "negotiate" on rights until that is done. Then they'll give us whatever they choose because our greatest weapon will be in their hands.'

(241)

The opening questions are phrased in the language of bureaucrats, but then Slash marks his own position by again using quotation marks to emphasize the hypocrisy of the word "give" as employed by the government because the rights that Natives claim are theirs already and do not need to be given to them. The second use of the verb "give" is no longer marked, however, and it becomes more difficult here to hear the voice of anyone else but Slash. Such blurring of different voices signals the complicity of Slash's discourse with the hegemonic

discourses he opposes.

In addition to these strategies of double-voicing, Armstrong dialogizes Slash's perspective through the direct or reported speech of numerous others. Slash remembers and recounts events in his story not so much for their own sake but rather to allow characters to talk and interact. In his narrative he restages the political debate; he is always listening to other points of view, other voices around him, without ever finding a tidy solution to this multiplicity of voices (Petrone 1990, 141). Instead of a synthesis at the end, *Slash* emphasizes throughout how different voices have mutually influenced each other, in particular how they have contributed to the formation of Slash's character.

Although Slash is involved with various political groups and movements, he comes to realize that his feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness are the result of his missing connections with his Native (Okanagan) community, its traditions, and his family. Armstrong has commented on the strong desire for community that drives the narrative, even when Slash is not himself aware of it: "in the writing process I couldn't isolate the character and keep the character in isolation from the development of the events in the community, and the whole of the people.... Everything is a part of something else. Everything is a part of a continuum of other things: a whole" (1991, 16).<sup>5</sup> Once Slash realizes that as a

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<sup>5</sup> In an interview with Janice Williamson, Armstrong comments on the notion of relatedness and community with reference to the lack of gendered pronouns in Okanagan: "[i]f I don't know the name, I would say the person who has been involved in connection with this. I can't say 'he,' or 'she.' A person is always connected or related to something, and we must always refer to that connection or that relationship" (1993a, 13-14).

Native he is "important as one person but more important as a part of everything else" (203), his life takes on a new meaning. He can no longer justify being selfish or indifferent about what happens, for example, to his health, because his illness or death would be an irreplaceable loss to his community.

One particular form of direct speech Slash repeatedly employs is the reproduction or retelling of "mini-stories," for example of his Uncle Joe and his grandfather Pra-cwa, which greatly contributes to the dialogization of the narrative and the construction of a community (Emberley 1993, 137). The shift to the mode of storytelling destabilizes--although it may not be able to escape--a simplistic generic categorization because it provides a textual space to consider an alternative inscription of the history of Native political argument (Emberley 1993, 132). Emberley argues that Jacques Derrida's heterogeneous concept of writing helps us understand the alternative position Armstrong's novel inscribes through storytelling (1993, 144-47). In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida deconstructs what he sees as the principal opposition of the Western metaphysical tradition: voice (*phonè*), which is considered natural and immediate, and writing, which is perceived as derivative and representative (1976, 11, 14). He attempts to show how speech and writing share the same features when it comes to signification; the intelligibility of any sign depends on the differential network of signifiers so that no mode of language, spoken or written, can claim an unmediated

embodiment of meaning.<sup>6</sup> Orality and literacy are then no longer categorical opposites but find themselves in differential relation.

The dichotomy between speech and writing has been the basis for universalist evolutionary theories, such as Walter Ong's in *Orality and Literacy* (1982), which posit a linear progression from a primitive oral to a superior literate consciousness. These deterministic models have often informed the paternalistic attitudes of Western critics towards the literary accomplishments of Native peoples. Because Native writings do not fit the conventions of Western literary traditions, they have been regarded as obscure or unsophisticated. However, recent critics of the orality/literacy divide have argued that orality and literacy should be understood as concrete social practices in specific contexts and not in developmental or hierarchical relation (Calinescu 1993, 177; Finnegan 1988, 160-61).

Although Bakhtin has identified the incorporation of multiple speech genres as a way of creating heteroglossia in the novel, his distinction among genres proves problematic in a discussion of *Slash*. Bakhtin acknowledges the heterogeneity of both oral and written speech genres, as well as their socio-historical specificity, but he also distinguishes between primary and secondary genres, explaining that primary genres are simple while secondary, (complex) speech genres "arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and

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<sup>6</sup> See Derrida's explanation: "[n]ow from the moment one considers the totality of determined signs, spoken, and a fortiori written, as unmotivated institutions, one must exclude any relationship of natural subordination, any natural hierarchy among signifiers or orders of signifiers" (1976, 44).



organized cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical, and so on" (1986, 62). While secondary genres are not exclusively literary genres, his classification of the oral story as a less complex or developed genre betrays his own ideological bias in a Western literary tradition. His narrow Eurocentric perspective extends to his characterization of the storyteller. For Bakhtin, the storyteller "is not a literary person"; he/she belongs in most cases to "the lower social strata, to the common people" who bring with them oral speech (1984a, 192). While the distinction itself may be valid, the implication of a hierarchical relationship is disconcerting. To base a reading of novels such as *Slash* or *Green Grass, Running Water* on those assumptions would be harmful indeed. In reading Native literature, readers and literary critics need to to recognize different sets of cultural assumptions concerning the role of story, which Lee Maracle has so eloquently summarized: "[w]ords are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people" (1992a, 87).

Storytelling foregrounds the notion of addressivity which according to Bakhtin is a constitutive feature of all utterances (1986, 95, 99). Because a story has to be told to someone, without whom it would not exist, the role of the listener is of great importance. In the oral performative context of the story, co-

operation between storyteller and listener is critical. As Ron and Suzanne Scollon have suggested in their study of Northern Athabaskan oral traditions, the oral tradition, as represented by narrative performance, relies on "mutual respect between storyteller and listener in a one-to-one situation, the mutual negotiation of position that never assumes that one side should be allowed to make its own sense of the situation 'stick'" (1984, 179). Responsive and respectful reading and listening is required, then, of the reader of *Slash*, who is not only situated as the listener to Slash's narrative but within that narrative as the listener to other stories as well.

The novel, moreover, draws attention to its own staging of the narrative as oral performance, albeit in written fiction, through the self-reflexive prologue and epilogue. Armstrong creates a circular movement that matches Slash's return to himself, his process of healing: "I look at that child and find him a stranger and yet he is nearer to me, as I am now, than when I became a young man full of a destructive compulsion to make change happen" (13). The prologue begins with a focus on the act of narrating: "[a]s I begin to write this story, I think back" (13). Introductory phrases such as "I must examine" and "I must understand" foreground the reflective and exploratory quality of the narrative as well as the need for and urgency of its telling. In this brief introductory section, Slash alludes to the important connection between himself as an individual and his people, a recognition of mutual dependence that is really the outcome of the story he is about to tell. The epilogue returns to the present time of narration:

"Tonight, I sit here up at the Flint Rock.... I decide to tell my story for my son and those like him because I must" (253). Slash reveals here that he can no longer think of himself as merely an individual; being a part of the rest of his people, he feels a responsibility especially for the next generation, that of his son Marlon. Just before he learns of his wife Maeg's death, Slash tells his infant son: "[i]f I keep to the Indian path and protect your rights the way Pra-cwa explained, you will be the generation to help them white men change because you won't be filled with hate.... You are the part of me that extends in a line up toward the future" (250).

The novel's final shift into the poetic mode with a poem to nature in the epilogue once again challenges the generic codes of the Western historical narrative. Native history is not measured here by white invader-settler notions of progress but by the Natives' ability to return to health and to frame and conceptualize their own understanding. The framing of the oral story also reminds the reader that the novel is indeed a distancing medium that is not the same as the face-to-face interaction of oral storytelling (Scollon and Scollon 1984, 184). The novel thus avoids an uncritical and essentialist simplification of storytelling and emphasizes instead the notion of orality in literacy.

The frequent back and forth movement between oppositional discourses, categories, and voices undermines and ultimately begins to blur the lines of division between them. Through its documentation of Native resistance and its narrative structures, the novel recognizes social conflict and political process

within Native cultures and between Native and non-Native societies as crucial. Thus, as the third option, self-definition together with political analysis and activism can become "the foundation for pro-action rather than re-action" (Currie 1990, 150).

Not unlike *Slash*, but in an even more pronounced way, King's *Green Grass, Running Water* achieves the interesting "blending of oral literature and written literature" which is characteristic of what King has called "interfusalional" writing (1990a, 13). He incorporates elements of the oral tradition and invader-settler narratives in a creative hybrid, "an intricate collage of multiple 'vignettes'" (Horne 1995, 260), and makes storytelling itself a topic of his stories. The narrator becomes a storyteller and the reader becomes a listener as the emphasis shifts to voices, rhythms, and the interaction between storyteller and audience in *Green Grass, Running Water*. This sense of community is crucial for the joint sense-making that King's puns, wordplays, and allusions require.

The narratives of *Green Grass, Running Water* shift frequently between three main dimensions: the storyteller and Coyote, the four Indians, and the main characters (Alberta, Babo, Latisha, Norma, Charlie, Lionel, Eli, Portland). The multiple narratives, which are often connected through simultaneous events, locations, or characters' relations, decentre any authoritative perspective in the novel. The fragmented narrative structure gives authority to the voices of all people involved in the novel, refusing a monologic voice, a strategy that Kim Blaeser has singled out as a characteristic of contemporary Aboriginal literature

(in Young-Ing 1993, 184). The novel becomes more than a collage of many separate pieces, however, only if the reader considers all stories, all perspectives in relation to each other. The task at hand is not to find out which story is accurate but to explore how they differ from and relate to each other. In the words of the storyteller, "[t]here are no truths, Coyote," I says. "Only stories" (391). By highlighting the gaps between narrative sections, King exposes the interstices of his narratives as sites where meaning can be negotiated.

However, the novel does not so much sustain neat separations between stories and perspectives as attempt to keep those boundaries from solidifying. For example, the trickster figures of Coyote and the four Indians show up in the stories of other characters as well. King has modelled the four Indians after four familiar pairs of white settlers and their Native companions in Western literature and movies; interestingly, he names the four Indians after the familiar white characters, thereby undermining expectations about identities and naming. The four are the Lone Ranger of western movies with his companion Tonto; Hawkeye, first known as Natty Bumppo in Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales," and his companion Chingachgook; Robinson Crusoe and his helper Friday from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; and Ishmael of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* with his friend Queequeg. It hardly comes as a surprise that the Indians themselves do not know of the traditions behind these characters and their companions: "Have a nice day, the soldiers say. Say hello to Tonto for us. And all those soldiers wave. Who's Tonto? says Ishmael. Beats me, says the

Lone Ranger. Keep waving" (418). The Western images of the suppression of Natives, as embodied by the white settler figures, are not familiar to the four Indians because they are not appropriate: the four Indians do not oppress whites. The naming thus challenges the validity and pervasiveness of these images.

The four Indians are locked up in Dr. Hovaugh's hospital, from which they have escaped to "fix the world," "helping out" (416, 418, 313, 427)--as they have done repeatedly in the past--and to which they return of their own accord once they have accomplished their task (427-28). Unlike their namesakes, whose goal it was to tame the wilderness, to move the frontier of white settlement westward, and to find strength in adversity, the four Indians attempt to redress the problems of such an invader-settler society and its impact on Native peoples. So they use the cars of Alberta, Babo/Dr. Hovaugh, and Charlie--the blue Nissan, the red Pinto, and the white Karmann-Ghia--to sabotage the Grand Baleen Dam (414-15); they change the outcome of yet another John Wayne western that they are watching in Bill Bursum's store so that "none of the Indians fell," instead "soldiers began falling over" (321); and they reunite Lionel with his family and community by lending him George's leather jacket. These Indians show qualities of the trickster as they appropriate the identities of the four settlers to escape from Fort Marion (417-19) and change names and gender identities, although only Babo Jones seems to know that they are women (53). While tricksters are often quite literally known for their trickery and crude behaviour, these four

Indians function as creators, culture heroes, and teachers (Gill and Sullivan 1992, 308). They frequently play a role in the process of creation--they try to tell the right story, to do it right (14). These trickster-transformers function as culture heroes who assist the Creator with the world and the storyteller with the word (M.L. Ricketts in Bright 1993, 21; Hirschfelder and Molin 1991, 58).

But the trickster comes in different shapes in *Green Grass, Running Water*. In addition to the four Indians, Coyote, one of the most common trickster figures in Plains and West Coast cultures, plays a crucial role in the novel. Although s/he participates in the creation stories, Coyote also has a more destructive side. S/he is responsible for the earthquake and the ensuing flood that destroys the dam and kills Eli (415). S/he is brave and cowardly, conservative and open-minded, wise and stupid, mischievous and sincere (Bright 1993, xi). S/he cannot help tampering with the world. Coyote, like the four Indians, seems to be able to change gender identities. He seems responsible, however, for impregnating both Mary (269-72) and Alberta: "[b]ut I was helpful, too," says Coyote. "That woman who wanted a baby. Now, that was helpful." "Helpful!" said Robinson Crusoe. "You remember the last time you did that?".... "We haven't straightened out *that* mess yet," said Hawkeye" (416). But in spite of, or maybe because of, the contradictions s/he represents and the confusion s/he causes, s/he is a paradoxical figure important for his/her role in change, criticism, and self-reflection. King has explained his use of Coyote in *Green Grass, Running Water*: "[w]hat I needed in this particular novel was a sacred clown. Someone who

could point out the fallacies in situations and arguments and who made sure that nothing stayed done" (1994, 6).<sup>7</sup> Although the four Indians and Coyote are helpers of the creator in his project of fixing the world, some things always get "messed up" along the way (416, 427). So while the novel may come to an end, the reader has learned that the trickster figures will eventually return and retell the story to fix it, yet again, and again.

When the readers encounter the storyteller, Coyote and the Four Indians, they learn immediately that this is only one of many times that the stories of the creation of the world have been told. Significantly, the novel begins with Native creation stories told by the storyteller and Coyote as well as the four Indians;<sup>8</sup> the monologism of Christianity is not only displaced but mocked in the initial play on dog and god/God as a backward dog or a lesser coyote. The Lone Ranger is chastised when he begins with fairy-tales and the story of Genesis: "That's the wrong story," said Ishmael. "That story comes later." "But it's my turn,"

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<sup>7</sup> King's reference to the "sacred clown" reminds me of Bakhtin's discussions of folkloric forms in the Middle Ages which tended toward satire and parody and which often took cyclical forms. In these forms Bakhtin identifies the figures of the rogue, the clown and the fool as central to the later development of the European novel. One of their features and privileges is "the right to be 'other' in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available; none of these categories quite suits them, they see the underside and the falseness of every situation" (1981, 159). In the struggle against conventions and fixed categories, these figures have "the right *not* to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally ... the right to live a life in ... the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as a comedy" (163).

<sup>8</sup> Native American creation stories can vary significantly according to a people's culture, geography, history etc. For the Cherokee, for example, the world began with water with the animals living above the rainbow (Hirschfelder and Molin 1991, 58). Changing Woman and Thought Woman are central to Navajo stories (Gill and Sullivan 1992, 56; Flick 1996, 4); First Woman is a figure in Earth Diver creation stories and Old Woman is a helper to a culture hero (Flick 1996, 10).



said the Lone Ranger. 'But you have to get it right,' said Hawkeye. 'And,' said Robinson Crusoe, 'you can't tell it all by yourself'" (14). The intersections of the cyclical nature of these retellings and repetitions with the developing narratives show that linearity is not an inherent trait of the lives of the characters, but a fiction created in the process of reading. Their life stories are part of a larger story reenacted by the storyteller and the trickster figures. One of the events that the four Indians re-enact repeatedly is the incarceration of Natives at Fort Marion in 1874. Just as Alberta retells the story over and over again in her history classes (18-21), the Indians re-enact it and escape every time by assuming other identities such as those of the four settlers. As Horne has pointed out: "[t]his frequent retelling is also a way of ensuring that this history of oppression not be forgotten" (1995, 268). Given the repetitive and recursive qualities of these stories, there can be no closure, no final word in this novel.

King has spoken of *Green Grass, Running Water* as "a very flat book. It comes up to a particular level and tries to maintain itself at that level all the way through. It's not the climaxes of the novel that are important, it's what the characters do. They don't have to do big things--it's the little movements that tickle me" (1994, 5). The novel focuses on the Native community in Blossom, Alberta, the character's daily activities, their struggles and joys, and presents them through contrapuntal, quick glimpses. King's character portrayals reject the binaries of the white "imaginary Indian," displace the familiar stereotypes of Natives as unemployed, rural folk with alcohol and drug problems; Native

characters in *Green Grass, Running Water* are neither demonized nor idealized. Alberta Frank teaches history at the university in Calgary from a Native perspective; she is involved with two men, Charlie and Lionel, but despite her desire to have a child, she would prefer to be independent of both. Latisha runs the Dead Dog Café in Blossom and raises her children by herself; she is recovering from an abusive relationship with her former spouse George Morningstar, who exemplifies white appropriation later in the novel. Norma is Eli's sister and Lionel's aunt and highly values Native culture and community; she is critical of her family members who have denied their Native heritage. These Native women are presented as agents of their own lives; they are strong women who nevertheless have their share of problems.

When it comes to the male characters, King's characterizations are less positive. Portland, in order to become a B-movie star in Hollywood, denies his roots and transforms himself into the "imaginary Indian" that white society expects him to be. Eli is the Native gone white, "[t]he Indian who couldn't go home" (286). Once he has left for Toronto, where he becomes a professor of English at the University of Toronto and marries Karen, a white woman, Eli no longer returns to the reserve. Charlie was employed as a token Native lawyer by Duplessis International Associates, the company that builds the Grand Baleen Dam and needs to convince, or force, Eli to leave his cabin so they can open the sluice gates: "[t]hey hired him because he was a Blackfoot and Eli was Blackfoot and the combination played well in the newspapers" (116). And Lionel,

after working for the Department of Indian Affairs, gets stuck with a job at Bursum's store, giving up on his potential and dreams. But these men, whom Horne has described as "mimic men" (1995, 268), change: Eli retires to his mother's cabin after her death, fiercely fighting the construction of the dam for ten years; Portland becomes the victorious chief in the "fixed" movie at Bursum's store; Charlie loses his job but reunites with his father; and Lionel leaves his job at Bursum's, returns to the Sun Dance and defends his Native values against the intruder George. So even the more problematic male characters defy simple stereotypes, which allows King to show that the idea of the Native is always a construction--it was in the past and it is in the present. "As times change," King insists, "those constructions change" (1994, 3). As he creates characters who determine their own self-images and make their own decisions, King is able to show a broad range of characters rather than a reductive and false binary.

The narrative provides the reader with brief glimpses into the lives of these Native characters, but the relationships of their stories to each other and to their Native culture suggest that their individuality is possible only through their sense of community. All of the characters experience the tensions between their desire for independence and community. However, a self-determined identity and a sense of belonging to a community seem to depend on each other. Only when the characters return, literally or metaphorically, to their Native community do they experience peace of mind and a sense of wholeness. Yet, with the strength that belonging provides comes the responsibility and obligation

to mend and keep up the community (King 1990b, 67). But how? Maria Campbell believes that "[t]he together remembering of the bits and pieces can, and will, realize our community and rebuild our nation" (1995, 89): "[r]ealizing community for my people is *Meena kah tip aim sooyak*. To own ourselves again. In other words, self-government" (86). The event of the Sun Dance provides a good example of community responsibility and renewal in *Green Grass, Running Water*. The re-emergence of Sun Dances in Native communities signals such an act of self-determination after they were banned in both the U.S. and Canada when government regulations and Christian missions were established on reservations in the nineteenth century (Hirschfelder and Molin 1991, 284; Gill and Sullivan 1992, 291). Alberta actually remembers an incident in her teens when her family wanted to attend a dance in Browning; they were harrassed at the American border and their outfits were confiscated (256-57). The novel does not have to describe the sacred events of the Sun Dance themselves for the Dance to become a focus of the narrative as the characters prepare for their participation. Latisha and Norma continue a long tradition of their foremothers by attending the Dance but Alberta, Eli, and Lionel mark a return and a new beginning by joining the community festivities.

The role of the reader in the performance of the text is crucial not only for intratextual relations but also for the many intertextual references in *Green Grass, Running Water*. King subverts expectations of a white invader-settler culture by reinscribing or parodying many of its central icons: Christianity (especially the

Bible), notions of progress, literary canons, history, and stereotypes of Natives. But in addition to his satirizing of these "ideological pillars," which exposes them to be "fraudulent and destructive" (Horne 1995, 259), King puts Native traditions and self-determination in their place. The naming of characters relies heavily on intertextual references,<sup>9</sup> so do allusions to novels.<sup>10</sup> Many of these references function as jokes or games; part of the fun, I believe, is the question whether the reader is able to pick up on these intertextual references. But not everything that is funny on the surface should be taken lightly. King obviously takes humour quite seriously; the reader, too, may sooner or later catch on to the subversive quality of King's jokes and puns, the double edge of his humour. By getting readers to laugh at themselves, by blurring familiar divisions and categories--whether between reality and fiction in his character constructions, or between history and gossip--King enjoys "putting the reader on the skids" (1994, 5). It is no wonder then that his humour is unsettling, no wonder that he uses trickster figures who will constantly keep the world moving, who won't tolerate

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<sup>9</sup> I am thinking here of the afore-mentioned names of the four Indians, but also of the following possible intertextual references: Joe Hovaugh plays on the name Jehovah; George Morningstar refers to George Armstrong Custer's nickname "Son of the Morningstar"; Buffalo Bill Bursum recalls Holm O. Bursum who proposed the Bursum Bill of 1921, which aimed to take large portions of their lands away from Pueblos; Clifford Sifton refers to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs with the same name in Laurier's government who promoted settlement of the West by displacing Native populations; Eli Stands Alone refers to Elijah Harper who blocked the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord in 1990; and Grand Baleen Dam evokes the James Bay hydroelectric project (Flick 1996, 2, 4, 6, 9).

<sup>10</sup> Some of the allusions are to Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*, Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck*, and Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*, as well as to historical figures such as Ann Hubert, Pauline Johnson, John Richardson, Susanna Moodie, and Archie Belaney.

complacent stasis. This sort of cross-referencing and interrelating is demanding for the reader. Reading *Green Grass, Running Water* is not an easy task; to make sense of the novel, readers need to connect stories, perspectives, intra- and intertextual references; they also need to become listeners and make the novel into a story or an oratory, so that they will notice the puns and the shifts of voices. It is not important that the readers understand all the jokes or connections King makes, but that they begin to negotiate meanings in the many in-between spaces of the narrative. Whether the audience consists of Native or non-Native readers,<sup>11</sup> the novel teaches them to listen, to connect, and to negotiate rather than to speak.

Both *Green Grass, Running Water* and *Slash* strive for discourses of critique, not negation. As Godard has pointed out, their transformative practices come out of the analysis and critique of binary discourses on Natives (1990b, 221). These novels create spaces for a critique of the choice that is not one; they open up sites where counter-hegemonic positions can be constructed (Emberley 1993, 136). In the process of such inscriptions, self-determination allows Natives to redefine the knowledge that invader-settler cultures have imposed, knowledge that has silenced, annihilated, or marginalized Natives in settler histories of discovery; in these novels, knowledge is reclaimed as

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<sup>11</sup> King has commented on writing for both Native readers to remind them of continuing values of their cultures and to show the active present and viable future in addition to a usable past, and for non-Natives, allowing them to associate with the Native world without feeling encouraged to feel a part of it (1990, 14).

interpretation through storytelling (Emberley 1993, 150). The novels' textual politics support the notion of orality in literacy through their incorporation of oral features, embedded narratives, and dialogic interpellations of stories within written texts. By interrelating multiple voices and listening to stories, the reader re-enacts the characters' own experiences of performatively constituting their identities. Their narrative strategies unfold an epistemological process as a way of knowing through telling and reading.

The "Native pedagogy" that Armstrong's and King's novels display teaches readers that they cannot look to these texts and their incorporated stories as "evidence" of the past (Fee and Flick 1995, 11). As Julie Cruikshank points out, oral tradition should be understood as "a window on ways the past is culturally constituted and discussed" (1990, 14). It is important not only *that* we read these stories but *how* we read them. In her introduction to *Sojourner's Truth*, Lee Maracle explains how Native stories differ from the European tradition:

Most of our stories don't have orthodox "conclusions"; that is left to the listeners, who we trust will draw useful lessons from the story--not necessarily the lessons we wish them to draw, but all conclusions are considered valid. The listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it. (1990, 11-12)

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, Eli similarly introduces his words to Lionel:

"Can't just tell you that straight out. Wouldn't make any sense. Wouldn't be much of a story" (361). As readers/listeners, we are not provided with solutions in these novels; instead, it is our responsibility to engage with the stories and

novels and to make sense of them.

If we engage with the "dilemma," Maracle suggests, we can become tricksters, "the architect[s] of great social transformation" (1990, 13). Although Maracle may thus be granting the reader permission to engage more playfully with texts, to abandon traditional categories and hierarchies, Susie O'Brien reminds us of the contradictory inscription of the *white* trickster (1995, 82). While the notion of the trickster can be liberating, Maracle's categorical definition of the other as white and European simultaneously limits "the freedom of the white Trickster to transcend difference and den[ies] the reader's freedom to assert a multivalent identity" (O'Brien 1995, 83). As a white reader, I feel simultaneously accommodated and alienated in my readings of *Slash* and *Green Grass, Running Water*. This tension reinforces my belief that dialogic relations and storytelling do not only signify play in these novels; readers need to take seriously the contradictions and conflicts the texts reveal. The performative element in Armstrong's and King's novels keeps categories and positions, including the reader's, from solidifying--it keeps conflicts alive. By participating in these performances, we can affirm possibilities of intervention.



## Chapter Six

### Is Difficulty Impolite?:

#### The Performative in Margaret Sweatman's *Fox*

In his exploration of nation as narration, Homi K. Bhabha questions the homogeneity and authority of a nationalist pedagogy in which people function as *a priori* historical objects (1994, 145). The performative, Bhabha suggests, is a counter-hegemonic strategy that constructs people as subjects in the present; it does not just negate the accumulative history of the pedagogical but through repetition it destabilizes and subverts the claims of the pedagogical to transcendent authority. "The liminality of the people," Bhabha explains, that is, "their double-inscription as pedagogical objects and performative subjects--demands a 'time' of narrative that is disavowed in the discourse of historicism" (151). Margaret Sweatman's *Fox* (1991) creates that temporality of the in-between and shows how the performative can operate through a narrative re-staging of the Winnipeg General Strike. The novel presents a collage of multiple voices, leaving the reader with the often difficult task of relating them to each other. Many readers, Sweatman suspects, will find such difficulty impolite, because "[i]t is a rejection of the discursive pact with the reader which insists on a prescribed message" (1993, 163). Discarding the criterion of politeness,

Sweatman uses the performative in *Fox*, both in a literal and metaphoric sense, to challenge the authority of the prescribed historical message and to show readers that the present is full of possibilities.

In the first critical analysis of the role of women in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, Mary Horodyski wonders: "[f]or all that has been written on women's actions during the Winnipeg general sympathetic strike of 1919, it could be concluded easily that females were not there at all, that they passed the six weeks holidaying at Lake Winnipeg. The historiography of the strike has been male-centred, and like all of history which refuses to include women and renders them invisible, it has been severely biased and incomplete" (1986, 28).<sup>1</sup> Sweatman acknowledges Horodyski's article in the novel's bibliography as one of the sources she consulted on the Winnipeg Strike. *Fox* is a rewriting of the events surrounding the Winnipeg General Strike, or better, a radical revising of the events as historiography has told us about them (Ellis 1991, 71; Fischlin 1995, 57).

Two decades earlier, Ann Henry's play *Lulu Street*, first performed in 1967, had already focused on the Winnipeg Strike and the experiences of two working-class women, Elly and Mrs. One, whose father and husband are involved in the strike. Mrs. One's hopes that "[e]verything will go back to normal" once the strike is over (1975, 110) are shattered when her husband is killed

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<sup>1</sup> For subsequent studies of women's roles in the Winnipeg strike, see Linda Kealey (1987) and (1989) as well as Pam Tranfield (1989).

during the riots of "Bloody Saturday" and Elly's father leaves to escape arrest. But the play says very little about the Strike itself and the women remain in the kitchen of their rooming house.<sup>2</sup> Sweatman's *Fox* reinscribes a wider range of women into the narratives of the Strike: women who went on strike, women who marched and were jailed, women who organized the food kitchen at the Oxford Hotel, women who were only marginally inconvenienced by the strike and regarded demonstrations as entertaining spectacles, women who substituted for workers, and women who tried to feed families when food supplies were quickly diminishing. In this chapter I consider how the central female characters in Sweatman's novel develop a sense of community-belonging and how the text foregrounds the performative through its narrative structure to write oppositional and transformative politics.

The Winnipeg General Strike is probably the single most studied event in Canadian labour history (B.D. Palmer 1983, 173).<sup>3</sup> The principle of collective

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Durkin's 1923 novel *The Magpie*, republished in 1974, is also set around the time of the Winnipeg Strike. The protagonist Craig Forrester, nicknamed Magpie, has just returned from the war and is full of hope for a new age in which all the promises of reform made during the war will come true. But his expectations are frustrated. He finds himself opposing Lasker Blount, the strike-breaking expert brought in to deal with the Winnipeg workers, as well as his upper-class wife Marion Nason whose superficiality and greed become unbearable to him. In the end, Forrester returns to the countryside where he grew up and is reunited with his childhood sweetheart Martha Lane.

<sup>3</sup> On 1 May, after three months of negotiations with the Winnipeg Builders' Exchange, all the unions grouped together under the Building Trades Council went on strike; they were joined by the Metal Trades Council the following day. The Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council polled affiliated unions on a general sympathetic strike, after it had been informed of the employers' refusal to bargain. The General strike commenced on 15 May at 11 a.m.; within hours almost 30,000 workers, many of whom were unorganized, had left their jobs. A General Strike Committee bargained with the employers and co-ordinated the provision of essential services. Opposition to the strike was organized by the Winnipeg Citizens' Committee of 1,000, which brushed aside the strikers' demands and declared the strike to be a revolutionary conspiracy. After the arrest of ten strike leaders on 16

bargaining was the central issue during the strike, combined with the demand for a living wage and a general improvement of working conditions. Labour and socialist politics have been examined through the strike and the formation of the One Big Union, and state policies have been analysed through the RCMP action in the days of unrest. Traditionally, historians have sought to contextualize and explain the labour confrontation through political and economic analysis, disregarding, for example, the role of language and discourse in the reconstruction of strike issues (Reimer 1993). Either the strike has been seen as part of Western radicalism (Bercuson 1990) or, in more recent revisionist readings that develop a "labor revolt thesis," the strike has been treated as part of a nation-wide ideological challenge that was connected to international changes (G. Kealey 1984).

*Fox* is an intricate collage of roughly one hundred sections that vary in length from just a few lines to up to six pages; some of these sections have titles (which sometimes function as ironic commentary); others are separated by dividing marks; some are dated, others are not. The text incorporates narrative sections, quotations from the mainstream and labour presses,<sup>4</sup> advertisements

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and 17 June and the events of "Bloody Saturday" on 21 June, when the Royal North-West Mounted Police charged into a crowd of strikers, killing one man and injuring many others, the Strike Committee announced the termination of the strike on 25 June for the following day. For more detailed discussions see, for instance, Kenneth McNaught (1959), Norman Penner (1975), David Jay Bercuson (1990), and J.M. Bumsted (1994).

<sup>4</sup> The *Western Labour News* was the official newspaper of the Trades and Labor Council edited by William Ivens. The Central Strike Committee published a Special Strike Edition from 18 May to 23 June which employed a language of "working class entitlement" growing out of the war that had recently ended (Reimer 1993, 220). The *Winnipeg Citizen* was the daily paper put out by the Citizens'

(27, 132), letters (9, 44, 176), a telegram (184), song lyrics (166), entries from the Canon's diary (38, 50, 58, 108, 148) and extracts from Rev. John Maclean's diary (114, 118, 155, 173), inscriptions of signs and banners (96, 165), quotations from public speeches (by F.J. Dixon and William Ivens, 30, 32, 104, 143) as well as unidentified quotations from Karl Marx (151, 170-72) and immediate commentators such as J.S. Woodsworth (197). The collage of documents and discourses emphasizes that the revisionary process is not linear or continuous and will not sustain the division of private and public spheres. The novel becomes a forum, an argument, in which different contributions are placed side by side to be negotiated (Sweatman 1995a). By introducing several speech genres, the novel recreates multiple contexts that the reader is asked to consider. As these genres recover old contexts, they also suggest the possibility of new ones (Bakhtin 1986, 87-88). One particularly interesting strategy Sweatman employs to reaccentuate incorporated genres is their translations from prose into poetry, which displaces and hybridizes generic conventions. The quotations from Marx serve as a good example of this process of dialogizing through generic translation (170-72).

In *Fox*, Sweatman incorporates historical data that studies have compiled about the strike. The novel follows the chronology of events between

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Committee and distributed free on the streets. The *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Tribune*, which was at times sympathetic to labour but ultimately opposed to the general strike, are the mainstream newspapers quoted in the novel; these dailies frequently carried full page advertisements paid for by the Citizens' Committee (Penner 1975, 116).

22 December 1918 and 21 June 1919, also known as "Bloody Saturday."<sup>5</sup>

Sweatman combines public events, which have constituted the nationalist pedagogy, with private ones, which perform disruptions of its homogeneous narrative. The reader recognizes the following central events: the crucial assembly in the Walker Theater on 22 December 1918; the first strike announcements on 1 May, the General Strike vote on 14 May, the establishment of the Citizens' Committee of 1000 on 16 May, the forty-minute legislation on 6 June, the arrests of 16 and 17 June, and "Bloody Saturday" on 21 June. Historical personages, for example six of the strike leaders arrested on 16 and 17 June (George Armstrong, R.B. Russell, A.A. Heaps, R.E. Bray, William Ivens, John Queen), interact with fictional ones such as MacDougal and the messenger boy, Stevie. In the process the line that supposedly separates fact from fiction is blurred.

Frequently, the novel splits the chronology of events by counterpointing activities that occur at the same time or by focusing on one event that is perceived from the perspectives of different characters.<sup>6</sup> For example, while

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<sup>5</sup> I have only noticed one possible inconsistency in the novel's chronology. Both "Stevie on the bridge" (122) and the much later "Parade" (162-66) seem to refer to the parade of June 4 when pro-strike soldiers marched south from Victoria Park, crossed the Maryland Bridge, over the Assiniboine and through Crescentwood--the wealthy residential district of South Winnipeg--and re-crossed north over Osborne Street Bridge to return to the city centre. At the same time F.G. Thompson had organized a counter-parade of loyalist, anti-strikers (Bercuson 1990, 146-48; Bumsted 1994, 46). Mary sees the anti-strikers organized by Drinkwater in the city and compares them to the pro-labour soldiers whom she sees marching through her own part of town when she returns to her father's house.

<sup>6</sup> Sweatman draws attention to another counterpoint by ending several sections with characters' reflections on the future: Drinkwater "looks into the stark early spring night and he sees *the future*" (78); for MacDougal, "this morning, the Future is amber, it is the future of First Things" (46);

Eleanor is entertaining friends at a toboggan party (1-5), "The Unlawful Assembly" takes place at the Walker Theatre (6-8), a mass meeting co-sponsored by the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council and the Socialist Party of Canada.<sup>7</sup> Many prominent speakers express their views on the controversial policies of the present Union government (for example, the orders in council passed under the War Measures Act, the military intervention in Russia, and the incarceration of political prisoners) and call on the workers to "unite and overthrow the capitalist system" (8). Similarly, while Eleanor and her friend Grace are talking about Eleanor's brother Tony, who died in the war (30-32), a meeting is being held at the Labour Church, the church for workers organized in Winnipeg by W. Ivens (32). Later, while Eleanor is concerned about making a confession to MacDougal, he is at the Mission teaching immigrants (67-71). And while Mary's wedding to Drinkwater is underway on 17 June (182), the strike leaders are arrested (184-89), which significantly weakens the strike efforts. The opposition that is set up through this narrative counterpoint is one of private versus public, middle versus working class, women versus men, and anti-strike

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"MacDougal sees the night's lush wing descend. He sees *the future*" (80); "Mary breathes deeply ... [her] hands stroking, caressing, wakening, *the future*. And she sees, that it is *good*" (81); the Canon believes, "[w]e shall see a better world. It is coming. I have faith" (108); "And Eleanor sees the future. *And it is missing*" (84).

<sup>7</sup> An unlawful assembly was defined by section 87 of the Criminal Code of 1919 as "an assembly of three or more persons who ... assemble in such a manner or so conduct themselves when assembled as to cause persons in the neighbourhood of such assembly to fear, on reasonable grounds, that the persons so assembled will disturb the peace tumultuously, or will ... provoke other persons to disturb the peace tumultuously" (qtd. in Bumsted 1994, 124). The use of force was legitimate to break up such an assembly.

versus pro-strike positions. I see two ways of reading these multiple counterpoints. On one hand, they expose the banality of the lives of middle-class women, such as Eleanor's and Mary's, who in the face of social unrest continue to focus their attention on entertaining friends and ensuring their own well-being. On the other hand, the strategy emphasizes that the mundane activities or concerns of these women are nevertheless political acts. While working-class women were redefining the political in terms of family and community rather than through institutions (L. Kealey 1989, 136), the novel reminds us that middle-class women were complicit with the politics of the strike through their non-involvement.

The context that each voice brings to the novel and the interrelations between each voice or section and the narrative as a whole characterize *Fox* as a dialogic narrative. Through this strategy, its discourses represent the multiplicity of voices which have often been reduced to a binary opposition between middle and working classes in critical studies of the Strike. Sweatman explains that her reading of Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" informed *Fox*:

I chose to write a polyphonic, overtly dialogic novel because that seems to me to be the most appropriate way to write about a small-scale civil war, the General Strike in Winnipeg in 1919, where intellectuals were jailed for 'sedition'--which is not only the use of inflammatory language, but is the use of such language in an environment, a cultural, and economic, and therefore, political context which will hear, receive, enact that language. The Marxist language (in combination with the Social Gospel, Methodist and millennial language) was dynamite just after the first war. That is dialogism. (1993, 159)



Sweatman tries to make the heterogeneity of voices that participated in the strike visible. She exposes the dominant discourses of white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class men and indicates potential sites of resistance for workers, women, and immigrants. Discourse plays a crucial role as communities enact exclusion and inclusion; it becomes highly charged in a society that attempts to censor public speech and literature. Several words, which operate as the language of exclusion, are identified in the novel, for instance, "alien" (15, 116, 178, 187), "red" (21, 24, 38, 115, 187), "Bolshevik" (5, 15, 72, 124, 178), "socialist" and "revolution" (12, 177), and "sedition" (23, 34). As Benstock, the "Dominion Censor" who accuses MacDougal of selling seditious literature, points out to him: "[t]hings must be in harmony, in pleasing agreement with the Dominion" (24). With the support of censorship laws, charges of seditious conspiracy or libel are used to muzzle public criticism. In the later trials of the strike leaders, in particular in the case of Robert B. Russell, sedition was defined by Judge Metcalfe as intending "to excite discontent or dissatisfaction; to excite ill-will between different classes or the King's subjects; to create public disturbances" (qtd. in Bumsted 1994, 67). Free discussion was acceptable as long as it did not take place "*under circumstances likely to incite tumult*" (qtd. in Bumsted 1994, 118). Sweatman emphasizes that discourses are social struggles, that books are not just words on a page, as MacDougal sardonically tries to convince Benstock (23); in the novel the discourses of inclusion and exclusion always operate within a socio-historical context.

For the most part, no overt narrator seems to orchestrate or control the voices and incorporated documents in the novel. The fragmented, paratactic narrative attempts to remain free of hierarchies, although Sweatman acknowledges that these can never be avoided completely (1995a), that she cannot, for example, escape the role of writer as imperialist (1995c). At times, the narrator moves into the foreground, for example, through the foreshadowing of MacDougal's arrest (46) and Mary's marriage to Drinkwater (179-80), and the evaluations that inform his/her observations (especially as the ironic critic of Mary but also as the bemused observer of Eleanor). In these cases, the narrator functions as focalizer but focalization often shifts to other characters, especially to Mary and Eleanor. In these sections, the narrative quickly, and often unexpectedly, moves back and forth between psychonarration, free indirect discourse, and interior monologue.<sup>8</sup> To capture the uniqueness of individual characters, Sweatman often uses the vernacular and oral storytelling when she shifts to the latter two techniques of rendering consciousness.

Two of the main characters in the novel are the middle-class women Eleanor and her cousin Mary who live in Crescentwood, a wealthy, residential area in the south of Winnipeg. Eleanor is the first character to be introduced in the novel:

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<sup>8</sup> In *Transparent Minds* (1978), Cohn introduces psychonarration, free indirect discourse (narrated monologue), and interior monologue (quoted monologue) as the three basic techniques for rendering consciousness in fiction. For brief definitions of these terms, see also Prince (1987, 34-35, 44-45, 78).

Eleanor is tall, taller than most men, and her face is long, her thin nose long as a lake-edging highway, her long face and her eyes like almonds, almost, a very strange long woman. She likes her own eyes, actually. She says to hell with those fat and innocent faces, my bones, my damn cheekbones anyway, will be fine on my face when it's old.... She looks like a big bird, a hawk, a prairie falcon.... Her hands are too big, her fingers splayed, she flings her hands about when she speaks. Her feet are long ... she's too awkward, she has long since outgrown herself. (1)

Eleanor not only fails to meet the expectations of feminine beauty exemplified by Mary's "perfect narrow eyes blue and clear" (2) and the "young faces round as biscuits" (3), but her unusual appearance correlates with different interests as well. She would rather stay in "her dark room where she lives and listens" (2) instead of entertaining her friends at a toboggan party; she joins the men in the library where they retreat to smoke and enjoy "a bit of manly company" (4); she reads the papers, such as the *Winnipeg Tribune*, and would rather learn more about "the Alien and the Bolsheviki threat" than go out to listen to a band play in town (5).

In contrast, Mary is the "perfect" woman; she is twenty-one years old, petite and pretty, reads Henry James, suffers from a "nervous disorder" (116, 63), and looks for a man who will take care of her. She is engaged to be married to Drinkwater, the up-and-coming business man who emulates and seeks advice from Mary's father, Sir Rodney. Mary's hopes for the future are bright: "forever after life will be a calm ocean crossed in the luxuryliner of joint fortunes and Drinkwater will carry a walkingstick and he will place one hand in the pocket of his evening coat, just so" (73). Although Mary is appreciated for

her faultless appearance, the narrator frequently exposes her innocence, ignorance, and simplicity: "Mary ... feeling every inch a slender young thing, is performing a function quite new to her. She is *thinking*" (61). As a woman whose "lips are Nearly Rose," whose "cheeks are Tender Peach," whose "skin is Linen and Cream," and whose "eyes are Royal Blue" (26), Mary defines herself--as the narrator facetiously and ironically suggests--through the language and values of fashion and beauty ads. Mary is interested in contemporary social issues such as the struggles of the workers only in so far as they affect her life-style. Her main goal is to ensure her status in the class environment in which she has been raised.

Through her marriage to Drinkwater, Mary will remain safely within the boundaries of their community, which Sir Rodney has taken care of by buying a house across the street from his own place. Yet, her safe and comfortable life-style does not provide her with the excitement she desires; so Mary has to take matters into her own hands to create a sense of danger and temptation. The novel exposes her occasional transgressions of rules and boundaries, which consist of sneaking out of the house without her father's permission to attend a parade with Drinkwater (162-66), premarital sex (179), and most interestingly her "B & E" (123-25). From the sketchy narrative it becomes clear that Mary frequently walks the dog as an excuse to "visit" houses that have been deserted by their neighbours for summer vacations: her father "doesn't realize she's going out so late, again, tonight" (124). Anticipating her excursion, Mary "knows exactly

which house she'll hit tonight. The Squib-Avonhersts' on Harvard" (124). Walking through the house, inspecting the owner's interior decorations, she is humming the Hebrew Benediction, which "reminds her of a christening" (124). Is Mary sanctioning her own actions, providing her own blessing here? This scene can be read, I believe, as an example of her arrogance as well as her thoughtlessness. Eventually she sits down in a chair. In these brief moments of her "break and enter," Mary has suspended all social rules and laws of property. But these transgression do not ultimately upset her place in the world of the middle class; as long as she is not caught, they are only temporary transgressions that actually confirm her social status because she is in control of their outcome and does not have to fear any repercussions.

Eleanor looks and behaves differently--therefore, she does not truly belong. She struggles to understand the situation she finds herself in: "[w]hat is this transformation?" (13). She tries to appreciate the world around her by reading articles in the papers, but she has to recognize her own limitations and her limited worldview: "[h]as she ever met a poor person;" "[h]er brother is dead. She hadn't had the wits to blame anybody, and it's her fault, she is so stupid!" (13). Eleanor tries to break free from her middle-class environment by moving out of her father's house and beginning to read: "MacDougal isn't even sarcastic with her, he doesn't seem to expect her to know anything, why should he expect anything, when he knows she runs on a short leash in this goddam suffocating city" (68). MacDougal, the socialist friend of Eleanor's father, is her guide and

love interest, and seems to guarantee her entrance into working-class circles.

She no longer feels a part of her father's world; "[s]he has slipped out of his vocabulary" (90):

But whereas tapestries, a desk with pigeon-holes for papers thin with the necessities of a big business, paintings and vases above and upon a grand piano, whereas all these things once gave Eleanor a *name*, the secure feet-on-the-ground knowledge of herself as *Eleanor*, daughter of, sister of, niece of, cousin of, member of--but owner of nothing, not really, it all belongs to Father. (68)

Compelled by the Social Gospel, which sought to apply Christian principles to a variety of social problems engendered by industrialization,<sup>9</sup> Eleanor tries to get involved in the workers' activities, goes to meetings with MacDougal, and joins the food kitchen (167-69). She tries to dissociate herself from the community she was born into and seeks other communities in which she can define herself, which she can join by her own decision, seeking "revolutionary enthusiasm" (14). But she finds it difficult to leave her familiar world behind, the clothes, the luxury, the lavish furniture, the food, the manners. She is still an observer and remains passive when she should be helping

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<sup>9</sup> As McNaught explains, the Social Gospel emphasized love and proclaimed the principle of co-operation as opposed to that of competition. It also focused on the brotherhood of man and was more interested in the welfare of individuals in this world than in the salvation of immortal souls (1959, 48-49). Many of the leaders of the Social Gospel were former Methodist ministers active in the labour movement (Bumsted 1994, 119). J.S. Woodsworth, for example, took over the All People's Mission in Winnipeg in 1907 (Bercuson 1990, 5); he was influenced by Rev. Salem Bland, whose *The New Christianity* (1920) Sweatman also lists as a source book for Fox.

MacDougal.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Mary, Eleanor does not seek temporary transgressions within her own community but a permanent reorientation that challenges the foundations of her life. At the end of the novel, Eleanor still lives in two worlds at once; she may have become resistant to, but is still complicit with, the middle class. When she goes to MacDougal's bookstore still unaware of his arrest, we learn from a police officer who functions as focalizer that he "has been instructed to leave her alone.... She must be rich to get special attention like that. She sure looks rich" (190). In addition to her treatment by others, she reflects on her own participation in Mary's wedding: "MacDougal I love you and today I am being driven to Westminster Church in a baby-blue Packard. It's a conspiracy, MacDougal, but I am just a spy.... and she sees in the mirror that she is her own double agent" (185).

As a result, Eleanor lives in the space in-between, in "double-time," to borrow Bhabha's term (1994, 145); she no longer belongs to her father's world but she does not belong to the world of MacDougal either. In fact, at a Labour Church meeting she realizes that she "is happy. She doesn't belong here; she's perfectly at home, orphaned at last. Anything can happen. Now! my life is rich. No one looks at her, or if they do, something is different. She's part of something here, they expect her to take part. Damn right, she says, damn right I

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<sup>10</sup> Consider these two parallel examples: "[a]nd only later ... as she folds herself into her reading-chair, does it occur to Eleanor that she might have helped MacDougal with the boys at the Mission pool.... She might have joined MacDougal in his care of the children" (161); "Eleanor stands beside him [MacDougal].... MacDougal with the dead boy in his arms. Eleanor standing beside them, her empty arms waving, waving, waving" (197-98).

will" (94).<sup>11</sup> Uncomfortable with her "impossible self" (117), feeling "stricken and embarrassed and disconnected from herself at every juncture" (39), Eleanor is not yet able to define herself in any new terms. Her immediate goal is to lose herself, to leave herself behind (154), which gives her comfort: "[s]he opens the window and stands there for a long time, breathing, her breathing marking the time, numbering the voices, her father, and her brother, her relations falling from her, the voices departing from her, leaving her alone at the window looking out" (91). Eleanor's personal transformation suggests that social change can become more than a visceral experience for the women of the middle class. Her challenge to community and class boundaries functions as a crucial strategy of the novel's performative discourse that disturbs, displaces, and disrupts the homogeneity of the pedagogical (Bhabha 1994, 230).

Language plays a crucial role in Eleanor's attempt to become her own woman. She realizes that her own perspective and her own discourse are valid:

She has recently discovered (and maybe this discovery has given her freedom) that she can indeed listen in a fragmentary way.... And another thing: it doesn't matter anymore that her patterns of translation differ from MacDougal's or her father's. The men speak their public language, and it is a marvel, their absolute sentences, and Eleanor, living under and between, always outside, has a place she can furnish according to her own design. She has decided this is good. (120)

I read Eleanor's "patterns of translation" and their valorization as a meta-

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<sup>11</sup> For similar sentiments, see the following examples: "[s]he has begun her reading .... she's at the number zero, she's not at home, and it's perfect, here" (91); "[s]he doesn't know them [other people], she loves not knowing" (95); "[s]he doesn't know how to cheer but she feels the tight moans of excitement in her throat" (95).



commentary on the alternative tellings of history in the novel. Just as she is able to see how her perspective and language differ from those of men, *Fox* encourages the reader to engage seriously with its fragmentary, revisionist reading of the Winnipeg Strike as an alternative to the masculine historiography that has projected an accumulative public history. Through its restaging of events, *Fox* simultaneously evokes and erases the boundaries that have supported the pedagogical.

When the novel provides glimpses into the lives of working-class women, the focus is no longer on love interests, mood changes, and luxuries but on material necessities such as food, rent, and a minimum wage. The reader learns about the effects of the Strike on these women and about their coping strategies. In anticipation of diminishing food supplies, women fill up wagons to stock up on food: sugar, turnips, and carrots (92-93). Moreover, on 24 May, women begin to set up a food kitchen that is initiated and maintained primarily by Helen Armstrong and the Women's Labor League. The example of the food kitchen shows how many women were on strike at the time but it also stresses the sense of solidarity among women. The kitchen was a service provided by women mainly for the support of other women.<sup>12</sup> It provides Eleanor with an opportunity to become part of the women's community by getting involved with their work (167-69). However, food is not the only problem faced by working-

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<sup>12</sup> The kitchen could serve between 1,200 and 1,500 meals a day. Men could also come to the food kitchen but were expected to pay or make a small donation, recognizing thereby that women workers were paid less (Horodyski 1986, 30; Bumsted 1994, 37; L. Kealey 1989, 137-38).

class characters in the novel. The women on strike also find it difficult to pay rent without an income. The Relief Committee helped to fund cash donations and special appeals were made to help the women in need because society feared that working women may turn to prostitution for economic support (Tranfield 1989, 34). The novel picks up on these unspoken concerns and makes them explicit in its description of Aileen, who works as a sales clerk at Eaton's and turns to prostitution so she can pay her rent and afford the clothes she is expected to wear at work (35-37).

The novel also depicts working-class women who organize for militant purposes. The women attack two delivery truck drivers whose scab work undermines the struggles of the workers on strike (141-43). Again, the narrative emphasizes the sense of community among women: "[o]ne of the ideas is they stick together because they're all alike, the women, but what happens is, they're together because of their differences. It makes them quiet" (141). Moreover, although this section foregrounds their violent acts, it also shows how the women are perceived in the press (Horodyski 1986, 34). The statement of a detective, which was printed in the *Winnipeg Tribune* on 21 June, is quoted at the end of the section, attesting to the dangerous and defiant nature of the striking women (143). Throughout the novel, tension builds between the descriptions of working-class women and the sections that focus on Eleanor and Mary. Once the reader begins to relate these voices dialogically, the stories of the working-class women openly challenge the complacency of the middle class

and the stereotypes of women's roles in society.

In spite of the labour turmoil of 1919 and earlier years, gender roles were firmly inscribed in Canadian society. Indeed, as L. Kealey points out, class and gender expectations were intertwined: "respectable middle class or upper class women would not participate in such unseemly behaviour" (1989, 141).

Moreover, women deserved special protection during the strike. The Strike Committee tried very hard to prevent violence and reminded the strikers repeatedly to adhere to "fair play" in the struggle (Bumsted 1994, 33-34). The methods of the authorities were labelled ungentlemanly and secretive, and the strikers were instructed that their own behaviour should be that of "decent men" who "treat women by the rules of decent society, even in the midst of a bitter struggle" (Reimer 1993, 230). Women who stepped outside accepted gender roles would lose their protection as women.<sup>13</sup> Fox, however, does not discipline these women for their transgressions; it highlights and re-evaluates their militancy during the strike in order to emphasize the solidarity among women. The novel presents their actions as a form of mutual support rather than as a display of meaningless aggression.

Issues of ethnicity and race further complicated how gender and class were connected in establishing communities and rules of conduct during the

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<sup>13</sup> Judge Metcalfe made the position of judicial authorities very clear in the post-Strike trials: "[i]n these days when women are taking up special obligations and assuming equal privileges with men, it may be well for me to state now that women are just as liable to ill treatment in a riot as men and can claim no special protection and are entitled to no sympathy; and if they stand and resist officers of the law they are liable to be cut down" (qtd. in L. Kealey 1989, 141).

Strike. As Horodyski has noted, whenever possible the women involved in riot actions were referred to as foreigners (1986, 34). That women were involved in militant action was bad enough, but by designating them as immigrants the problem could at least be contained. Similarly, the behaviour of immigrant men was often described as cowardly and furtive and was contrasted with the manly and forceful characteristics of the British men; through these comparisons, they were implicitly depicted as feminine (Avery 1976, 219).

The role of "foreigners" or "aliens," as they were variably referred to, was paramount during the Winnipeg Strike.<sup>14</sup> In his review, Scott Ellis has noted the absence of foreigners in Sweatman's novel (1991, 73). While I agree that immigrants are not given a voice in the novel, except for the young messenger boy Stevie, the novel is nevertheless infused with ethnic tensions and immigration issues. Winnipeg was already geographically segregated in terms of class and race at the beginning of the Strike: the working-class consisted mainly of "new immigrants" (mostly Slavic and Jewish) who resided in the north part of town, while the primarily British middle and upper classes lived in the south and west end. Anti-immigration sentiments were strong in the late 1910s (as the conscription crisis, calls for disenfranchisement, and the orders-in-council of 1918 suggest), and immigrants were increasingly singled out by the business

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<sup>14</sup> With increasing immigration in the first decade of this century, immigrants from Eastern Europe became the so-called "new immigrants" or "aliens," many of whom came from regions that were part of Germany or the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which made them "enemy aliens" when the war began (Bumsted 1994, 10, 76).

community, especially by the Citizens' Committee, as the instigators of political and industrial unrest. As Benstock explains to MacDougal: "we intend to focus that blame away from the Government, we choose to lay the blame elsewhere, the foreign element will do nicely" (24). The strikers, however, asserted that it was class not race that really mattered in their fight. Indeed, the *Western Labour News* charged the capitalists as the "real aliens" who served only themselves and not the community (Reimer 1993, 232; Avery 1976, 217).

The returned soldiers further complicated this situation because most of them were hostile to immigrants. As the headlines in *Fox* show, newspapers such as the *Winnipeg Tribune* used the opposition of soldier versus "alien" in their rhetoric (116, 126), and anti-labour loyalist veterans used it on their strike banners (165). That the category of the "enemy alien" was a convenient and flexible construct is shown in Sweatman's section on the forty-minute legislation of 6 June, which amended section 41 of the Immigration Act to allow for the deportation of British subjects under the conditions of undesirability (170-72). Canadian citizens were defined "either by reason of birth in Canada, or by reason of naturalization in Canada" (qtd. in Bumsted 1994, 48). This description applied to almost all British immigrants because few troubled to become naturalized in Canada. In other words, all of these interconnected references to class, ethnicity, and gender in *Fox* challenge the definition of "Canadian" as dependent upon the construction of an "other" that must be excluded; this exclusion is not only directed at strikers, and sometimes at unruly women, but

was also predicated on the figure of the "alien."

Stevie Macovitch, the young messenger boy, is the only immigrant character given a voice in *Fox*. He seems to appear everywhere, benefiting from the services he can render for people during the Strike. MacDougal takes particular interest in him after he learns that Stevie's mother is sick and cannot come to work (48-49). In the novel, it is Stevie who is killed in the riots of "Bloody Saturday": "[h]e sees MacDougal waving to him, he goes to him.... Stevie, in the middle of the road, eager to receive a message from his friend this so-serious MacDougal. The bullet, the hot shell, in the boy's face, it shoots off the face, he falls" (197). By making the dying "alien" a young boy, the novel highlights the vulnerability of the immigrants during the Strike. While the "other" is literally killed at the end of the novel, the boy's innocence exposes the senselessness and injustice of this construction of the "other" and of the violence directed against him. The sense of futility at the end of *Fox* seems to foreshadow the "profound dissolution within the working-class experience" that followed the Strike in Winnipeg (B.D. Palmer 1983, 177).

Sweatman's interest in the interconnections between questions of gender, ethnicity, and class in her rewriting of the Strike have not saved her, however, from criticism concerning the absence or silence of working-class and immigrant characters in the novel (Sweatman 1995a). What readers learn about the working-class women, they perceive from the outside looking in, but the novel does not provide a working-class character who functions as a focalizer to the

same extent that Eleanor and Mary do. As Sweatman has explained, reciprocity of the gaze is important to achieve respectful representation (1995b). Worried that her own positioning would lead to sentimentalizing or patronizing treatment of working-class characters, she decided to evoke their presence through ellipses and gaps, through the dialogic relations actualized in the novels' collage (1995a).

The difficult question of representation is approached from a slightly different angle in the final "List of Illustrations" (199-200). This list comes as a surprise to the reader because there are no photos in *Fox*, and not all of the photos described in this final section are even connected with the Winnipeg Strike. As referential art, photos are often considered to testify to the "real" existence of what they show. By narrating the photographic images, Sweatman, however, challenges the notion of their referentiality and stasis. Because narration depends on a speaker and progresses in time, the photos turned narratives are exposed as subjective, dynamic constructions. Any objectifying gaze that the observer may direct at the photos is challenged by the narrative. Sweatman's strategy resembles the techniques she employs throughout the novel to resituate and rewrite the events of the Strike. Defying the objectifying gaze of the masculine historiography that wrote women out of the Strike, *Fox* returns the gaze by inscribing a multiplicity of voices to tell their stories.

These voices are not simply added to the nationalist pedagogy though; they constantly have to be renegotiated in dialogic relations. As a result, *Fox*

performs interventions, not containment. The polyvalency of voices and their relations is reminiscent of the "fox" in the novel's title. Only one character, Drinkwater, actually sees the fox (53); however, both Drinkwater and Mary show fox-like appearances and behaviour: Drinkwater has a "fox-blond" body (40) and Mary "stops like a fox, gleaming and red" (2). The association of the fox with a sexually attractive woman applies to both Mary and Aileen (36). The fox is cunning and sly (Sir Rodney is referred to as an "old fox" [198]), out for his/her own best interest, unlikely to get caught. That the novel seems to privilege the telling of stories from an advantaged view could itself be read as "foxy," as Daniel Fischlin has suggested, because that perspective is "given to dissembling and self-deception, and therefore a useful marker of the novel's exposition of the 'advantaged' as an inverted ethical signifier" (1995, 62). The title may thus be a commentary on the subversive gesture of the novel itself. Through occasional (foxy) sightings and repeated performances, the novel can dislocate the homogeneous narrative of the pedagogical.

Sweatman dissolves the seamless historiographic narrative of the Winnipeg Strike in *Fox*, giving up the panopticon of an omniscient narrator (Fischlin 1995, 59). She incorporates voices of shifting contexts, public and private voices, family and community voices, creating a collage of distinct sections. Only by placing the numerous sections in dialogic relation with each other, by performing the text so to speak, can the reader make sense of the multiplicity of voices. Sweatman has commented on the problematics of the



performative, explaining that to keep the reader interested, the novel needs to balance old structures against fresh transgressions (1993, 161). These transgressions are not formalist projects but rewrite the ending of the historical record. The novel interrupts the pre-given, monumental narrative of the pedagogical by challenging its causality and monologism. In an open-ended, at times even careless way (Sweatman 1995b), the performative intervenes in the gaps, in the reaccentuations of incorporated genres, and speaks from in-between times and places. Its difficulty will seem impolite only to those who prefer to homogenize experiences, not to those who desire to articulate resistance and a politics of transformation.

## Chapter Seven

### Writing into the Page ahead<sup>1</sup>

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future).

Mikhail Bakhtin (1986, 170)

The novels I have discussed in the preceding chapters suggest that culture is not necessarily an homogeneous construction. They recognize, in Bennett's words, "that there is a collection of cultures within the *idea* of English Canada, not so much a mosaic as a kaleidoscope, an arrangement of fragments whose interrelationships, while ever changing, nevertheless serve--by virtue of their container, we might say--not only to influence what we see when we look through the glass, but also to affect the placement of the other elements in the array" (1993/94, 196-97). The dialogic relations between voices in these texts neither inscribe utopian negations of the dominant discourse nor do they seek a simple resolution by privileging one discourse of resistance. Difference is their point of departure and their continuing impetus for communication and struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> The title echoes Marlatt's last lines in *Ana Historic*:

... the luxury of being  
has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading  
us into the page ahead. (n.p.)

The heterogeneity that contemporary novels make visible is not a happy rainbow coalition. By rejecting the notion of dialogism as a normative liberal pluralism, the novels--and their readers--do not have to presume equality between voices; instead, they can acknowledge that inequality is historically and socially constructed (San Juan 1992, 140). I disagree with the neo-conservative argument that the less we say about inequalities and injustice, the less frequently they will occur and the less likely they are to provoke a backlash from the majority. On the contrary, I believe that we need to learn as much as we can about forms of oppression in the past and the present, from racism and sexism, to homophobia, forced relocations, and genocide.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary novels can contribute to this process of education if we understand literature as a discourse that interrogates our ways of knowing (Turner 1995, 15). Lecker's question serves as a useful reminder here: "[h]ow often do we step back and talk about ... how Canadian literature is part of the world in which we live?" (1995, 21). If we begin to see literature and social context as inextricably connected, then we can look to literature not only for the constructions of communities it inscribes but also for the specific devices and strategies it uses to express and revise them. The cultural-narratological approach I have proposed seeks to examine, mediate, and critique cultural representations, both aesthetically and politically (Thornton 1994, 90).

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<sup>2</sup> For critiques of the neo-conservative argument, see, for example, John Brenkman (1993, 89), Alan Cairns (1995, 25, 30), Henry and Tator (1994, 12-13), and Veronica Strong-Boag (1994, 6).

My exclusive focus on Canadian literature undoubtedly raises the question of nationalism. If Davey (1993) is right in his assessment that we already live in a post-nationalist state, then the focus on Canadian literature becomes outdated and irrelevant. But I disagree with Davey's argument; instead I believe that many contemporary novels, including the ones discussed here, attempt to re-imagine Canadian communities in a constructive way (Grace 1995, 12, 16). What we find, when we leave a nineteenth-century European notion of nation behind, is that these novels challenge a homogeneous and universalist understanding of Canada by exposing dominant constructions and interpellating silenced voices, oppositional or alternative positions. If, as Mukherjee suggests, we reject the idea that Canadian literature needs to follow "a" Canadian tradition, defined in Eurocentric terms, we can develop "a new nationalism, a nationalism whose grounding premise will be Canada's heterogeneity" (1995b, 441), a nationalism that can be "an effective, multifaceted *strategy* for decolonization" (Kelly qtd. in Fee 1995, 689). The analysis of resistance literature contributes to the challenge to the familiar, dominant discourse, which continually "intensifies itself, maintaining in effect a closure" (Itwaru 1994, 2). The direction of a literary criticism that explores Canadian culture, including Canadian literature, as sites of struggle rather than as homogeneous entities will give a new impetus to the Canadian cultural history Allan Smith has described (1991, 10-11).

In this dissertation, I have attempted to find a way of reading the selected novels critically, without simply sanctifying or sacralizing their discourses of

resistance and thereby closing them off from critique (Schueller 1994, 10; Chow 1993, 54). It would be too simplistic to suggest that polyphonic novels simply inscribe everything that disadvantaged voices are looking for. It is necessary to show the complexity of these particular novels, and of counter-hegemonic discourses in general, by exposing how discourses are always internally multi-layered and often ambivalent. In my discussions of Kogawa's humanist position, van Herk's essentializing of the feminine north, and Marlatt's strategic monologism, I have been suspicious of the moment when strategic positions solidify into positions of permanent complicity, when they ultimately affirm the hegemony they seem to de-privilege. I believe that critical readings are necessary because I am concerned that an indiscriminate and *a priori* valorization of resistance discourses and polyphonic narratives would otherwise skew the picture: "[i]f we treat only some of the routes to autonomy as legitimate, if we make marginality and resistance our only measures of authenticity, then we limit the questions we can ask and predetermine the answers we will receive" (Bennett 1993/94, 196). We need a self-conscious criticism that can help us understand contemporary inequalities in order to combat them, a criticism that explores the ideological signification of narrative structures in contextual studies.

The extent to which I consider cultural contexts in my readings differs from chapter to chapter and even within chapters. I believe it would be counter-productive to prescribe what constitutes the "right" amount of contextualization.

Rey Chow has warned us of the danger of supplying contexts for literary texts too readily:

The hasty supply of original "contexts" and "specificities" easily becomes complicitous with the dominant discourse, which achieves hegemony precisely by its capacity to convert, recode, make transparent, and thus represent even those experiences that resist it with a stubborn opacity. (1993, 38)<sup>3</sup>

I have been aware of the problematics of my colonizing the selected novels and their discourses of resistance by using Bakhtinian and narratological theories for my critical framework. In the process of writing, I have attempted to look over my own shoulder, so to speak, to detect such gestures of colonization and containment, but I cannot completely free myself of a certain degree of complicity. Moreover, regardless of my sympathy for resistance discourses, I realize that my attempt to explore these counter-hegemonic voices is always different from their own struggle, no matter how much I may feel tempted to gloss over that distinction.

The narratives of resistance which I have discussed often resisted the writing of my analyses. This experience was particularly frustrating with Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Margaret Sweatman's *Fox*. The traditional linear format of a dissertation seems at times to contravene the strategies employed in these novels. Whenever I was trying to focus on a particular voice, strategy, or element in these narratives, I

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<sup>3</sup> For a similar argument, see Cheung who reminds critics "not to drown Asian American texts in contexts, lest we perpetrate what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls the 'anthropological fallacy'" (1993, 14).

felt that the novels were slipping away because I could not capture the simultaneous interrelations between these elements and all the other pieces of the narrative. Paradoxically, this problem supports my claim that these narratives are constituted by dialogic relationships that "exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally" (Bakhtin 1984a, 40).

As I began writing this dissertation, I was still in the process of deciding which novels to include in my discussion. At this point, I would like to mention at least some of the texts I considered as alternative choices for each chapter. The chapter on Joy Kogawa and Sky Lee could have been expanded, for instance, by a discussion of Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* (1995). This novel consists of three parts, each narrated and focalized by another child of a Chinese family that has immigrated to Canada and settled in Vancouver's Chinatown during the 1930s. Its multiple perspectives are determined largely by the age and gender of each child and provide interesting refractions of each others' narratives. Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) explores the dialogic relations and struggles between three generations of Japanese Canadian women and would be interesting in comparison with Kogawa's *Obasan*. My discussion of *Obasan* could also have been followed by a reading of its sequel *Itsuka* (1992), in which Naomi becomes involved in the Japanese Canadian redress movement and which ends on Settlement Day, 22 September 1988. For a more complete look at Kogawa's writings, I would have liked to counterpoint these two novels with

her latest one, *The Rain Ascends* (1995b), in which the narrator Millicent learns that her father abused young boys during the years he worked as a minister. I suspect that the narrative structures of these novels, which show less internal dialogization of the narrators' perspectives and little or no use of incorporated genres, further support Kogawa's humanist belief in the value of truth and positivism and her interest in "spiritual questions," especially about the existence of evil (Kogawa 1995a, 27).

At an early stage, I considered concentrating on rewritings of northern narratives in Chapter Four, in which case I would have liked to read van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* with, or against, Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989), and Elizabeth Hay's *The Only Snow in Havana* (1992). Hay's text could have been connected with van Herk's georafictione by focusing on their interrelation of multiple chronotopes, through which the narrators search for a displaced home, and their challenges to traditional generic boundaries of the novel. Hay's narrator explores alternative narratives to the masculine histories of the north, literally and metaphorically questioning its monolithic whiteness and meditating upon the connection between snow and fur. My reading of Richler's novel would have focused on its rewriting of Canadian history from a Jewish Canadian perspective and its challenge to the fact/fiction opposition through its montage of documentary and fictional elements. Until the chapter began bursting at the seams, the discussion of van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* and Marlatt's *Ana Historic* also included Brian Fawcett's *Gender Wars* (1994).



Fawcett's multiple narratives and commentaries, as well as his intriguing typographical choices, invite a critical reading that explores whether these strategies really create dialogic relationships.

I considered several novels to broaden my analysis of the performative in *Slash* and *Green Grass, Running Water*. King's *Medicine River* (1989) raises interesting questions about the relations between its eighteen individual chapters which may be read as a short-story cycle rather than a novel. The stories of Ruby Slipperjack's *Silent Words* (1992) and Lee Maracle's *Sun Dogs* (1992b) are presented by homodiegetic narrators whose perspectives are internally dialogized, for example, through storytelling. Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) presents a fascinating counterpoint of the two voices of Cheryl and April, who respond in opposite ways to the choice between assimilation and oblivion.

Novels with multiple perspectives have been of particular interest to me during this project. For example, it is worth querying whether multiple voices necessarily guarantee dialogic interaction. Margaret Atwood's *Life Before Man* (1979), focalized by Elizabeth, Nate and Lesje, and Carole Corbeil's *Voice Over* (1992), which uses three focalizers, Odette and her daughters Janine and Claudine, invite this kind of examination. While Atwood's novel also shows internal dialogization of the three individual perspectives, which emphasizes their interconnectedness, the interrelating of the multiple perspectives in *Voice Over* seems more superficial. However, the novel creates increasing tension between

the isolation of the three different perspectives and the strong family bonds between mother and daughters it endorses. At the same time, Corbeil's novel traces Claudine's search for a voice of her own to replace the voice-over of the patriarchal and mono-lingual and mono-cultural environments in which she lives.

Two writers in particular, whom I regret to have left unconsidered in this dissertation, seem interested in multiple perspectives and collage effects to actualize dialogic relations in their novels: Carol Shields and Michael Ondaatje. Shields, I would argue, moves towards a more complex and interrelated form of multiple perspectives in her later fiction. While she simply opposes two perspectives in *Happenstance* (1980/82), she interrelates four perspectives in *Swann* (1987) which she eventually brings together and restages in the film script of "The Swann Symposium." *The Stone Diaries* (1993) is not only about the life of the main character, Daisy Goodwill, but also about her exploration of how to tell the story of her own life. She frequently switches from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration, casting herself variously as subject and object of her own story and including perspectives of other family members and friends. Through the complex interrelations between these multiple perspectives, the novel, and Daisy, attempt to mirror the web of personal relations that have constituted her life.

In *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976) and *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), Ondaatje resorts to an even wider range of devices in order to create dialogic tension between voices. The multiplicity of voices in *Coming Through Slaughter*

is appropriately reminiscent of jazz music, because the novel tells and retells Buddy Bolden's life history, creating contradictions between divergent perspectives. Through a multiplicity of counterpointed voices, *In the Skin of a Lion* similarly challenges how we read history and fiction. The novel seems to suggest through its narrative techniques that especially those on the margins--such as immigrants, workers, and women--have the power to challenge and change the perspective of the hegemonic centre. The transgression of generic boundaries in Ondaatje's fiction--are we dealing with novels, biographies, or history?--emphasizes the role of the reader as the texts undermine their status as fixed products and rely on the reader to engage in the process of constructing meanings.

The framework of dialogism and cultural narratology could also be used for a diachronic examination of Canadian fiction to explore whether it is accurate to say that "the more contemporary the text, the greater the degree of dialogism" (Grace 1987, 123) or whether Bakhtin's theories, based on the concept of otherness, are generally well-suited for the study of Canadian literature. Cavell's work on James De Mille's *The Dodge Club* (1987) and Robin Howells's reading of Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1993) can serve as useful starting-points. A broadened corpus should then also include monologic texts that attempt to suppress the dialogic principle and thus the potential for discourses of resistance. Because all texts are marked by relations of power, hegemony, and resistance, we need to question "the formation of normalized,

universalized, subjectivity by exposing the raced, sexed, and gendered constructions of all subjects" (Schueller 1994, 11). In other words, to exclude monologic texts from the theorization of dialogism positions these texts as if they were unified, thereby enshrining the myth of a Canadian uniculture.<sup>4</sup>

But why restrict the discussion of dialogism to novels? Bakhtin has been criticized repeatedly for his "peculiar pronovelistic generic chauvinism" (Parks 1991, 56), and I myself believe that dialogism may be a productive critical tool in reading other genres, such as poetry and drama.<sup>5</sup> While some specific aspects of the cultural-narratological framework would be irrelevant, I think the central idea of contextualized readings that recognize forms as ideologically charged could be helpful. For Bakhtin, both poetry and drama are monologic forms that lack the qualities of "novelness":

The language of the novel is structured in uninterrupted dialogic interaction with the languages that surround it.... But poetry, striving for maximal purity, works in its own language, as *if* that language were unitary, the only language, as if there were no heteroglossia outside it. (1981, 399)

The poet, according to Bakhtin, aspires to speak in a language free from dialogization over which s/he has full control. This is not to deny that poets and readers are aware of the heteroglot world around them, but that heteroglossia is

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<sup>4</sup> Obviously, the framework of dialogism and cultural narratology could also be used in readings of other national literatures. I am particularly interested in contemporary German novels to examine whether they expose and challenge Germany's discourses of internal colonialism toward the former East Germany and toward immigrant populations.

<sup>5</sup> Similar suggestions have been made by Grace (1987), Harvie and Knowles (1994), Helene Keyssar (1991), Jennifer Wise (1989), and David H. Richter (1990).

suspended "by convention" (Bakhtin 1981, 285). Even the discourse of doubts must be presented in a language that will not be doubted in poetry (286). But the incorporation of heteroglossia, the internal dialogism of one perspective, the messiness of daily life, and the contingencies of history, as they have been incorporated into some contemporary Canadian poetry, suggest that an exploration of dialogic relations may be fruitful in texts such as Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston* (1974), and Marlene Nourbese Philip's *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989).

Similarly, Bakhtin argues that "[p]ure drama [classical forms of drama] strives toward a unitary language, one that is individualized merely through dramatic personae who speak it. Dramatic dialogue is determined by a collision between individuals who exist within the limits of a single world and a single unitary language " (1981, 405). He recognizes, however, that contemporary realistic social drama may indeed be heteroglot (405). While Bakhtin believes that drama is inherently "alien to genuine polyphony" because it is "almost always constructed out of represented, objectified discourses" (1984a, 34, 188), he emphasizes repeatedly that a monologue is not necessarily monologic. Bakhtin's views on drama were obviously based on specific kinds of drama. It could be argued of course, as Harvie and Knowles have done, that contemporary Canadian drama has become "novelized" so that questions previously relevant to novelistic discourse are now relevant to drama as well

(1994, 157).<sup>6</sup> Many contemporary Canadian plays focus on dialogic monologues, that is, plays in which one actor performs multiple roles (these performances remain predominantly monologic), several actors play one character (a strategy that is potentially dialogic but often neutralized), or monologues "in which a single character engages in a dialogical accounting for a 'life' that is in some sense represented autobiographically" (141). Features of novelization are visible, for instance, in Guillermo Verdecchia's *Fronteras Americanas (American Borders)* (1993), Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991), Sharon Pollock's *Getting It Straight* (1992) and *Blood Relations* (1981), and Wendy Lill's *The Occupation of Heather Rose* (1987). The single consciousness of the character is shown as a mosaic of many conflicting voices that may show a development or resolution of his/her life. The disruption of authoritarian discourses--patriarchal, ethnocentric etc.--is enacted through structural means, a blending of performance styles, exaggeration, inversion, and often transformations.

Dialogism may also provide a particularly useful focus for studies of cross-generic texts such as Marlatt's *Salvage* (1991b), which combines poetry, fiction, and autobiography in five large sections. In each section Marlatt rereads and rewrites some of her earlier writings in light of her own feminist reading of

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<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin describes the features of novelization of other genres as follows: "[t]hey become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally--this is the most important thing--the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)" (1981, 7).

the late 1980s, as she explains in the Foreword. She salvages not only what she considers her own "failed" poems but also the dominant discourses of gender, class, and sexual orientation by subverting their monologic claims and reshaping them to inscribe her own positions of difference. Another example is Linda Griffiths's and Maria Campbell's *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* (1989), which endlessly repeats, as Joanne Tompkins points out, the rehearsal procedure that characterized the initial production of the play *Jessica* at 25th Street House in Saskatoon as well as the transformations of the text and the relationship between the two women (1995, 149). The hybrid form of the text is the result of its three separate sections: "Spiritual Things" is Griffiths's retrospective narrative of events that led to the play and the book, framing numerous extracts from dialogues between the two women; "The Red Cloth" presents the transcript of conversations between Griffiths and Campbell in 1988, carefully edited with captions and ellipses nevertheless; and *Jessica* is the script of the actual play. In the presentation of the three sections, chronology is displaced and with it the notion of linear causality that could explain why or how things happened the way they did. Only if readers are willing to renegotiate and rehearse the relations among the different systems of signification presented in the text can they arrive at preliminary scripts of their own, although they will always ask for yet another post-script. A focus on dialogic relations in *The Book of Jessica* also allows the reader to explore Griffiths's own narrative authority and the extent to which her assertion of control supports the hierarchies of discourse

and race which the project and the book presumably seek to undermine.

In the framework proposed in this dissertation, I have combined the concept of dialogism and cultural narratology to read for ideological signification in narrative structures. This form of culturally oriented literary criticism rests on the belief that working for social justice and commitment to critical theory, even variants informed by poststructuralism, are not necessarily at odds with each other (Gunew 1993, 1). An analysis of dialogic relations in novels, I have argued, can expose the sites for interventions that novels seek out, the gaps in what used to appear like seamless constructions of Canada, its culture and literature. In these sites, the texts inscribe silenced voices, allow their characters to claim identification with their environment, expose false choices, and rewrite monologic history through an emphasis on fragmentation, the montage of documents, the challenge to generic boundaries, the reconsideration of the role of communities, and the foregrounding of the performative. By exploring these subversive strategies, critics can affirm the possibilities of intervention which contribute to alternative constructions.

Have I answered Bal's haunting question "what's the point?" in this dissertation? I believe I have, but the very thought makes me uneasy. I am reminded of Gwendolyn MacEwen's poem "The Discovery," which ends with the following lines: "I mean the moment when it seems most plain / is the moment when you must begin again" (1989, 163). Maybe it is time to return to the questions that have led to and shaped this project. Maybe it is time to take



seriously what Wilson Harris has called "complex rehearsal" in the context of counter-discourse, a process in which I continually need to "consume" my own biases at the same time as I am trying to expose the dominant discourse (1985, 127). I need to re-cite and re-site this project, so that my own discourse remains dynamic and the endlessly deferred product becomes secondary. In other words, the "last" word of this sentence can only be the "last" word of this dissertation in so far as it is also the beginning of a new page and a new project.

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