REGIONS IN TIME:
GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ'S THE CURE FOR DEATH BY LIGHTNING AND
ANN-MARIE MACDONALD'S FALL ON YOUR KNEES

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of British Columbia, 1997

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2000

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The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 19 April 2000

DE-6 (2/88)
Abstract

This thesis examines the methods through which Gail Anderson-Dargatz and Ann-Marie MacDonald construct region in their novels *The Cure for Death by Lightning* and *Fall on Your Knees*. These texts, like all successful regional novels, describe more than geography. Their regions are also functions of time. I introduce the term "temporal region" to describe the spaces created by this interdependence of time and place. I then focus upon the specifics of descriptive and narrative approach that lead to the convincing portrayal of the Shuswap and Cape Breton Island in the texts. Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald direct attention to the foodways of their regions, expressing the connection between consumption choices and a society's historical and physical location. The authors also articulate their regions by highlighting cultural diversity in the areas they describe. In this way they deny the social homogeneity more sentimental regional texts often rely upon. Finally, the novelists use an appropriately Canadian method of regional opposition to define their temporal regions according to that which they are not -- they are not American, glamorous, or urban. They therefore must be Canadian, quotidian, and rural.
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Introduction

Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* and Gail Anderson-Dargatz's *The Cure for Death by Lightning* were not only commercially successful, but popular among critics as well. *Fall* was a huge success in Canada, selling nearly 30,000 copies by March 15, 1997 (Canadian Press), and *Cure* experienced similarly remarkable sales. Both novels were nominated for the Commonwealth Writers First Book Prize, which *Fall* went on to win, and both were shortlisted for the prestigious Giller Prize. In spite of such accomplishments, however, neither novel has provoked significant scholarly comment. Perhaps academics dismiss the novels as good writing "for the region in question" though unworthy of comparison with works coming from or aimed at the center of English Canadian literary discourse. After all, the Giller Prize which eluded Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald went to Margaret Atwood for *Alias Grace*, a novel set in Toronto and written by the Ontario author who for many has come to define Canadian literature.

Academics are missing the point. Scholars may overlook the appeal of regionalism in *Cure* and *Fall*, but reviewers do not. George Lear asserts that "the most striking thing about Gail Anderson-Dargatz's debut novel is the brilliant evocation of a landscape of mountains, forests, rivers and bush; a place where the nearest settlement, the Hamlet of Promise [sic], is no more than a one-street village." Anderson-Dargatz evokes an early stage of western development on the land she describes by emphasizing its isolation -- an isolation historically as well as geographically specific. Joanne Wilkinson of *Booklist* praises Anderson-Dargatz for her "detailed descriptions of the harsh work required to run a farm, and [her] gripping sense of place" (1420), and Michael McGowan remarks on the confluence of temporal and physical regions indirectly but clearly when he comments in *Quill & Quire* upon Anderson-Dargatz's "power in evoking time and space" (29). Guy Lawson of *MacLean's Magazine* notes a similar construction of a temporally specific region in *Fall*: "Deftly handling a large cast of
characters, places and times . . . MacDonald weaves ghost stories and dream sequences, music and poetry into the tale of the Piper family of New Waterford, Cape Breton, during the first half of the century" (53). Such comments reinforce the link between the novels' popularity and their compelling evocation of time and place. *Kirkus Reviews* praises MacDonald in regional terms as well, saying her "time, place, and people . . . all ring clear and true, making for an accomplished, considerably affecting saga." (Rev. of *Fall*, 85).

As the above selections demonstrate, reviewers responded enthusiastically to *Cure* and *Fall*'s adamant and dynamic regionalism. Cape Breton Island and the Shuswap Valley¹ are not static spaces of cultural cohesion and consistency. Instead, they are regions located in history, and their temporal locations are impossible to articulate without reference to the physical and cultural spaces they affect. The reverse is also true; physical regions develop as they do in response to history, and reviewers acknowledge as much, seldom mentioning region without also mentioning the time that further articulates that region. Juliet Fleming writes that *Cure* is "set in dystopic rural Canada during the Second World War." Eva Tihanyi says that in MacDonald's novel, "[s]panning the first half of the twentieth century, the story unfolds mainly on a mythically charged Cape Breton Island but takes us also to New York City in the Roaring Twenties" (37). That almost every critic of the novels mentions time as well as place is not surprising; the two concepts are mutually dependent. When describing spaces in which readers are to believe, geography and the society that exists upon that geography are always temporally unique. Even if a landscape is "empty", we must know whether or not it has always been empty or if it has been abandoned owing to circumstances that will help us place that space in time. Anderson-Dargatz and

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MacDonald are aware of the temporal nature of regions and enhance the believability of their fiction through attention to the time-specific details that would have affected the societies of which they write, just as they pay attention to nuances of the physical landscapes they describe.

Canadians responded enthusiastically to these novels on both critical and popular levels precisely because they articulate strong Canadian regional identities. Each novel contains elements of the mythic, but each also convinces its readers to believe in the world the author (re)creates. As Laurie Ricou states, "[r]egional literature . . . is tied to realism because it attempts to distinguish accurately the features of a clearly definable region, either rural or closely linked to the land" (1993). Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald create convincing regions by giving their readers as much detail as possible. Purely geographic description is inadequate to the successful construction of regions, however: "In its fullest achievement . . . regional literature . . . is not synonymous with surface detail and pedestrian style but with profound exploration of the shaping influence of particular regions on individual lives" (Ricou 1993). The settings of Cure and Fall appeal to our need to place ourselves in time as well as in space. They give us a sense of their characters in history, not as marginalized observers of distant events, but as focal points in changing social landscapes, much as we are ourselves.

Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald use foodways, cultural diversity and urban comparisons to situate their regions in time. Obviously landscape description of some sort is vital, but I will address the physical description of the spaces in Cure and Fall only in relation to the above techniques, for they are the most striking approaches to region in the novels. For instance, both novels contain almost compulsive references to food. Cure is so liberally strewn with recipes and descriptions of meals that food becomes a narrative motif and acts as a powerful indicator of place (on a farm in the Shuswap) as well as of time (during the Second World War when rationing affects local foodways). Fall is similarly focused upon alimentary images. Although MacDonald
does not incorporate recipes to the extent that Anderson-Dargatz does, she nevertheless asserts the importance of food in the expression of her region and culture; many of her characters, and particularly Materia, identify themselves through the foods they prepare and/or long for. As in Cure, in Fall food is an expression of time and of class, as well as of a physical or social region. One eats what is available, and what is available changes over time, marking the narrative historically.

Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald also develop plausible regions in their novels by insisting upon the diversity of their regions. Each writes against the nostalgia so often associated with regional writing to describe spaces full of difference. In Fall, MacDonald describes a Cape Breton which is home to the people of Scots-Irish heritage we normally associate with the Atlantic provinces, but she does not allow their dominance to erase the important contributions minorities make to the region. Lebanese, Jews and blacks from America and the West Indies are all necessary to the region she describes. Her choice of minority presences in Fall is period-specific, as well, so that Materia's family arrives in the region because of a specific conflict with the Turks, and the black entertainers who travel to New Waterford stop coming when they find that the blacks from the West Indies are not interested in their brand of vaudeville. Differences alter over time so that the very lack of cultural cohesion in Fall allows for the construction of a culture caught in the process of change. A similar awareness of cultural diversity exists in Cure so that although Promise may seem to be a culturally cohesive unit, or at least a community which desires the erasure of differences, Anderson-Dargatz includes the fringe region of the Reserve. Anderson-Dargatz's Shuswap is thus a region inhabited by peoples of different cultures, and the strategies the people of Promise and the surrounding area use to deal with differences evoke a period in history as much as they elicit the land on which that social history takes place.

\(^2\)See Ursula Kelly (35) for an elaboration upon the tendency towards sentimentalism in regional fiction.
Residential schools are specific to a time (from the turn of the last century to the 1970s), as well as to a physical region (the Canadian west), and the small-town claustrophobia we sense from Beth Weeks is intensified by the stresses of a population whose young men are gone to war or to work in factories.

In addition to an awareness of foodways and cultural diversity, Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald use regional oppositions to establish their settings in time. Promise and New Waterford are small towns which often clarify their rural identities by comparing themselves to larger urban settings less obviously tied to the land. In *Cure*, Nora urges Beth to flee the confines of their land-based agricultural region with her to recreate themselves in Vancouver where they can become nurses or get factory work, both labours more distanced from raw materials than the farm labour which has defined Beth thus far (273). In *Fall*, Kathleen and Frances dream of escape from Cape Breton to New York City, which is an urban dream-space with an economy seemingly unrelated to the land upon which it thrives. Like Vancouver in *Cure*, New York is a place of potential anonymity, and therefore offers a freedom foreign to the rural cultures geographically bound by valley or rock. Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald thus reinforce the authenticity of their small-town regions by placing them in opposition to larger urban centers upon which characters may cast their dreams. Once again, however, these comparisons are particularly powerful because of the historically specific spaces the novelists describe. Vancouver offers escape through war-related work opportunities and New York is ripe for Kathleen with the beginnings of Jazz. Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald also create oppositional identities for many of their characters through contrast of their detailed and difficult Canadian lives with the idealized American lives they see at the movies. The authors therefore use alternative regions of the imagination to emphasize the authenticity of the regions in which their characters actually live.
*Cure* and *Fall* are novels whose successes extend beyond the regions they describe. Their popularity -- among reviewers, if not among academics -- reflects the truth of a statement that MacDonald made in an interview with Sarmishta Subramanian: "There are a lot of people who would accept the invitation to identify with an experience that is outside their own" (85). Readers read to recognize themselves in fiction, but also to experience lives which are not their own. They must believe in the historically and geographically grounded regions the authors depict, however, before they can embrace the fictions authors impose upon those regions.
Chapter One:

Time and Terms of Regional Reference

Time is not a complement to, but a component of, a novel's setting. In the introduction to *Cure*, Anderson-Dargatz positions her novel in time, both in relation to the protagonist's personal experience (i.e., how old she is) and in relation to a distant war: "My story takes place in the midst of the Second World War, the year I turned fifteen, the year the world fell apart and began to come together again" (2). The war affects the economy and even the level of wilderness of the Shuswap in which Beth lives. For example, rumours circulate regarding the rounding up of wild horses to send to the troops as meat (12). The war also affects those left behind, altering gender relations at home: "But now the war was on, and . . . almost all the young men of age were gone, and that was at the front of everyone's mind. The women were hungry for them" (140). In *Fall*, too, MacDonald uses war as a clear historical referent in a story which takes place in non-war regions. Instead of causing privation, though, the war leads to unusual regional prosperity: "The war has created a boom in the Sydney coalfields. Full employment, lower wages, and strikes forbidden by law, coal being vital to the war effort" (105). Like Beth in *Cure*, however, Kathleen and Frances in *Fall* feel the historical war at a remove even as they fight their own wars to come of age.

MacDonald's allusive chapter and section titles demonstrate her temporal use of Western cultural currency: "Women of Canada Say, 'Go!'", "No Man's Land," "Lest We Forget," "We Are the Dead," and "Armistice Day" are all historical hints with double entendres regarding the domestic war occurring in the "peaceful" regions of Cape Breton and New York. In *Cure*, too, the European theatre of war is an entity of the imagination, a black hole that sucks in young men and resources, and makes farm hands and flour difficult to acquire. Anderson-Dargatz's story plays itself out, however, in a far more intimate space of racial tension, barely tamed lands, and the grueling self-sufficiency of farm life in the British Columbia Shuswap Valley. As in *Fall*, the official,
nationally shared histories in *Cure* act as narrative touchstones and temporal referents for the regional stories of individual families.

Region is more than topography; it is a site of change, both social and physical. In *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing*, W. H. New comments that "[i]f 'region' is redefined as a process . . . it argues against linguistic fixity and social inertia, for it takes its meaning only in and over time" (118). One cannot pin *Fall* to a single period, yet it is a temporally specific novel in the manner in which it chronicles regional changes. Were MacDonald to describe a Cape Breton unaffected by war, work and women's changing place in society her setting would be one of the imagination, static and stagnant. That she incorporates historical and social developments into her narrative makes her novel a more accurate representation of Cape Breton. Similarly, *Cure* centers its narrative on a society caught in the process of change from a pre-World War II to post-World War II perspective. Its actions take place not before or after a recognizable history, but in the midst of history itself so that were she to describe the Shuswap in temporally ambiguous terms her construction of region would be incomplete. As New recognizes, "[l]andscape is a place, but it is also a body of attitudes in time" (130). MacDonald follows the shifting attitudes of Cape Bretoners, even as she describes the shifting of Cape Breton. She does not simply focus on a single body of attitudes in time, but examines the process of change itself, recognizing that it is integral to the development of the area. In Cape Breton workers extract coal from the earth and construct entire company towns based upon the workers' relation to the earth and the economic system that exploits that work: "It was 1907 and there was a town now. It had sprung up overnight starting with Number 12 Colliery. Numbers 13, 15 and 16 followed in short order. The railroad came in and so did the miners" (38). These workers then come to mimic the land in that they, too, become resources to be exploited and left to languish when the coal, or their worth as workers, expires.
Cure perhaps fits New's insistence upon the historical specificity of fictional regions even more precisely than Fall does in that Anderson-Dargatz chooses a narrower temporal setting and so more obviously captures "a body of attitudes in time." In Promise and its environs, farmers attempt to tame the land, extracting food and cash crops from it as miners extract coal in Fall. Anderson-Dargatz also cultivates an aura of sexual and social repression specific to a period and a place in which women were coming to prominence as urban workers. For example, Nora tells Beth, "They're begging for girls to work the factories" (164). Factories welcome women because the men who used to work them are away at war. Cities are not the only sites of social upheaval, though. Non-urban areas also become entangled in the processes of time, however much they long for stability. Most of the young men in the Shuswap are away at the time Anderson-Dargatz describes. Native men and girls must do their jobs and this leads to changes in racial and gender attitudes. Men become a valuable commodity. At the Dominion Day picnic, for instance, Beth's mother is an object of envy because the changes others have suffered owing to their collective historical moment have not yet deprived her of her men. Beth tells the reader, "You could see it... in the way the women both ignored and snatched glances at my mother. My mother had her son still at home, and a handsome young buck named Dennis working for her. Though they pitied my mother because they now feared my father, she had the power these women lacked: she had men to care for" (140). The attitudes of Promise are reactions to changes in the world around it and are specific in time. Women would not envy Beth's mother her men were their own not working in distant factories or at war.

In Regions of the Imagination: The Development of British Rural Fiction W. J. Keith admits that "[a] certain amount of topographical accuracy is... invariably a feature of regional writing, since region implies not only the local, but the locatable" (Keith 13). We need to know that although New Waterford and Promise may be fictional, they are nevertheless set in topographical areas whose characteristics we can
verify. The B.C. interior and Cape Breton are actual regions. We as readers can confirm enough about these locations to believe that the authors' fictional constructions take their cues from real world spaces. Once again, however, no matter how accurate a landscape description an author renders, without reference to that land as a space located in and affected by time, a novel is likely to feel as claustrophobic as the time-trapped society it describes. Keith is absolutely correct when he says that "[i]t is not unreasonable to assert that the best regional novels are concerned not with a static rural society but with a countryside in process" (Keith 9). Cure and Fall are novels intensely concerned with the ways in which change affects social, geographic and temporal regions. The spaces they describe are interesting to us on one hand because we feel we recognize them, but on the other hand because they are in transition, just as our own regions are.
Chapter Two:

Food and the Construction of Region

On the first page of *Cure* Beth says that "[t]he cure for death by lightning" appears in her mother's scrapbook "under the recipe for [her] father's favorite oatcakes" (1). This scrapbook then emerges as a unifying device so that recipes and remedies appear throughout the text as a complement to the narrative. There is even an index of these recipes and remedies, thirty-seven of which are food-related (293-294). Clearly, food is crucial to *Cure*. In her essay, "Cooking, Culture and Colonialism," Anne Goldman comments on the type of communication that occurs in the transmission of foodways: "We do not often perceive cookbooks as literature, let alone as the occasion, covert or explicit, for political commentary. But recently, critics of literature have begun to argue that we acknowledge the ways in which the exchange of recipes may communicate more than the culinary" (170). In *Fall*, Materia exchanges food and food knowledge for friendship, but in *Cure* Anderson-Dargatz embeds the importance of recipes as self-expression in the text. One could almost approach the novel as an annotated cookbook, giving as it does careful instructions regarding food production, preparation and consumption. More importantly, Anderson-Dargatz's use of food in *Cure* serves to represent the historically specific region that produces and consumes that food.

Roger Abrahams asserts that "[e]thnic or regional identity can be acted out within the home by eating certain foods prepared in special ways" (20). In *Cure*, each food must be prepared and consumed in a certain manner and at specific times. For example, in preparation for Mrs. Bell's visit to Beth's mother, Mrs. Weeks "baked as if her life depended on the fluffiness of her raspberry buns and the lightness of her daffodil cake"
Anderson-Dargatz gives a lengthy description of how to make each of these items, including instructions for the cleaning processes that accompany their production. Beth tells us, "raspberry buns were a standard treat for my mother's guests" (66). The food Mrs. Weeks prepares for company is not the food she prepares for her own family when they dine alone. Foods in her culture mark the occasions on which they are consumed, and belonging is tied to knowing what foods are appropriate to what occasions. Raspberry buns, mostly white and sweet, are emblematic of the kind of society the people of Promise long for, and thus an acceptable alimentary offering of ideology.

For the occasion of this social tea visit, Anderson-Dargatz also illustrates how food marks inclusion and exclusion within the household unit. At the time of the visit, "Billy and Dennis were out seeding barley; hired hands never ate in the parlor when there were guests" (69). Normally, Billy and Dennis dine with the Weeks family, but when an outsider comes to call their lower status as farm hands and as Natives keeps them away from the family table and out of the "proper society" most white people of the region strive to emulate. A similar clarification of class and racial boundaries occurs in the novel when Bertha and her progeny arrive. Mrs. Weeks, who would normally invite Bertha to come into the kitchen to share food and friendship, receives Bertha with visible and uncharacteristic discomfort: "Bertha! my mother said. 'I wasn't expecting you today.' Bertha looked at my mother's tight smile. 'Guests?' 'Yes,' said my mother. 'But maybe you could come by later? On your way back from town.'" (70). Mrs. Weeks acts towards Bertha at this time as she knows Mrs. Bell would, shunning her as a social and racial inferior. She cannot invite Bertha to tea, for if she does she risks alienating white society (or what little access she has left to white society) as embodied
by Mrs. Bell. Bertha, of course, ignores Mrs. Weeks' attempt to shun her and joins the party anyway, upsetting Mrs. Bell's control over the tenor of her visit. John, normally unfriendly to Bertha whom he often refers to as "that squaw" (23), is tickled by Mrs. Bell's discomfort and rewards Bertha by sudden cordiality and an offer of "Cookies?" (73). John expresses his temporary acceptance of Bertha through an invitation to consume together, which is a way of asserting solidarity. To invite someone to eat your food is to invite them to join in your culture and your community. John asks Bertha to identify with him in order to annoy Mrs. Bell who does not believe whites and Natives should mix any more than absolutely necessary. Mrs. Bell needs to believe that she is different from Bertha and her daughters in order to assert her own cultural and alimentary identity. After Mrs. Bell leaves, John further expresses his rediscovered neighbourliness towards Bertha by allowing her to take some cream home in spite of the rationing imposed on the region because of a distant war. In this way, Anderson-Dargatz links food and the manner of its exchange to a specific time as much as to the region that identifies itself by the production of that food. Cream is a product specific to a valley in which dairy farming suits the cultural and physical landscape, and John's offer of cream to Bertha in a historical moment of food constraints illustrates the novel's temporal setting.

All this attention to domestic alimentary detail and the awkward way in which Mrs. Weeks attempts to conform to the anticipated foodway of her guest, Mrs. Bell, gives us the sense of a lonely farming region where a social visit merits special effort and where a woman's reputation rests on her ability to serve the most delicious spread at tea. Women are, after all, even more isolated than men on farms, generally house-bound and
distant from women on other farms or in town. Their labours also remain rudimentary and less marked by the age in which these labours are performed than the work of their male counterparts so that a task as basic to life as the preparation of food takes on huge importance in women's lives. In Canada, by the 1920s, (and long after as we can see by the kind of farm life Anderson-Dargatz evokes in the 1940s), "additional farm income tended to be ploughed back into agricultural machinery and additional acreage. The result began to transform the nature of male labour, at least on the more prosperous holdings... In contrast, female operations in and around the home frequently retained the character of the earliest days of settlement" (Finkel 223). This division of technology in Cure is blatant; although the Weeks men use farm machinery to help them with their work, Beth and her mother still cook with fire and store food in a root cellar. The production of food for the family therefore remains a hugely time-consuming task and the primary duty of women. It is a task that is as much friend as foe to farm women, though; the demands of an economy based upon the production of food (dairy, meat, crops) are what keep many farm women like Mrs. Weeks lonely and overworked. Even so, these women still turn to the mastery of food -- its production and presentation -- as a way of reducing isolation and expressing social competence. In a way, Beth's mother's life really does depend "on the fluffiness of her raspberry buns and the lightness of her daffodil cake" (64). Were she to fail in her role as a hostess, she would lose the last of her white friends in Promise and thus her last contact with her region. Because of the bizarre behavior of her husband, much of Promise society ostracizes her so that as Beth tells us, "[t]he only one not afraid to talk to my mother when my father was around was Mrs. Bell" (54-55). Beth's mother is so desperate for social contact with the white
community of her region that when Mrs. Bell sits with her to share food publicly at Sarah Kemp's funeral, her "face lit up then, even for righteous, gloomy Mrs. Bell" (55). Mrs. Weeks needs to continue to share food, and thus herself, with other women. This is why she must perform her role as hostess to Mrs. Bell in a way that conforms to regional expectations. To serve foods strange to Mrs. Bell, or to serve them in manners or with people different from the kind of society Promise desires, would be to make her as strange to others as her husband already is. A food transgression could kill the little social life Mrs. Weeks needs to maintain her faltering sanity.

The manner of consuming the tea Mrs. Weeks painstakingly prepares is as important as the actual foods and company present. Beth recalls that "[d]uring another visit, Mrs. Bell had shamed me, and my mother, by giving me a brisk lesson on sitting. She'd caught me on the bench near the kitchen door sitting with my legs crossed, drinking a cup of tea" (68). Mrs. Bell briskly tells Beth not to cross her legs, because "'[t]hat's how the worldly women sit, the women who smoke. You sit like that and you're asking for something'" (68). In the Shuswap Valley in 1941, one can consume tea correctly or incorrectly. To consume incorrectly is to ask for society's condemnation, which in this case is dispensed by the prudish Mrs. Bell. Turtle Valley is a rural, not a worldly region and to sit in a worldly manner is to betray one's regional identity. The Weeks family therefore sits in restrictive chairs which limit the possibility of unacceptable movement. Beth tells the reader that, "[t]he day [Mrs.Bell] caught me posing like Rita Hayworth, she had taken me by the hand and had led me into one of the parlor chairs that pinched my thighs closed. . . . I now sat at the parlor table as she had instructed, with my legs tucked together, feet firmly on the floor, arms on the arms of
the chair. . . . We all sat that way around the parlor table in those pinched chairs . . . " (68). The chairs in which the family sits are as rigid as the social rules to which Mrs. Bell demands adherence. Tea is not simply a matter of physically nourishing those who partake in it, but an occasion to satisfy social conventions connected with the desired foodways of the dominant society. Ironically, these food conventions deny the body even as they pertain to the maintenance of it. Food is, after all, a sensual pleasure, and to place people in confining chairs as they consume is a way of pretending nourishment is less a physical activity than it is a social nicety. Anderson-Dargatz reminds the reader that the manners Mrs. Bell's visit demand are artificial, though. Tea at Bertha's house, for example, takes place informally and is an expression of her own hybrid culture in which comfort is more important than conformity (116).

Anderson-Dargatz further explores the physical sensuousness of the foods her region yields as a way of exposing the constraint visits such as that of Mrs. Bell impose upon the region. The Shuswap may be short on men and the pleasures they can provide, but the area is not without the means to sensually satisfy through the foods that literally spring from the earth: "[r]aspberries hang like nipples on tall, thorny stalks. . . . When a berry is ready you'll know by its softness, the deep purple-red color, and the ease with which it gives itself to you" (158). Anderson-Dargatz could as easily be talking about a woman as a raspberry, so sex-laden is her description of the fruit. This technique of food fetishization is deliberate, for "[y]ou approach each fruit, like each lover, differently" (158). Her terms for the cherry are even more erotic: "a cherry sun-hot off the tree, well, that's where it came from, the insinuation of lust in the cherry, the smut-name put to the ripe button-love of a woman. Cherry. It's all juice and warmth, an O in
your mouth, a soft marble for your tongue to play with, a sweet soft thing with a core cloaked in flesh" (158). Food in nature is the satisfaction convention cannot contain. It comes from the earth to the eater directly and is a pleasure unaffected by rationing or sexual prudery. Consumption here is the incorporation of a physical desire into the body which the dominant foodways of Turtle Valley otherwise deny.

In addition to describing private foodways and contrasting social conventions with the physicality of food those conventions deny, Anderson-Dargatz evokes a farm-centered small town life in the Shuswap by rendering vivid images of communal consumption. Sidney W. Mintz notes in *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* that "[f]or many people, eating particular foods serves not only as a fulfilling experience, but also a liberating one -- an added way of making some kind of declaration. Consumption, then, is at the same time a form of self-identification and of communication" (13). In *Cure*, the people of Turtle Valley eat together to reassert their mutual belonging and to demonstrate the values of the farming region they created. They identify with each other by eating each other's foods and communicate their aspirations by preparing extravagantly in spite of the difficulties the community faces. At harvest time the entire white community gathers to share the bounty of their farm-focused work:

In Turtle Valley it was the fowl supper we looked forward to, a community dinner held in the United Church every farmwoman contributed to. It was a feast, even then, in wartime, a time of rationing. The excess food was the point of it all, a kind of prayer for bounty, an offering that might bring a better year next year. Always next year. The prayer of the farmer. Next year. (179)

The people of Turtle Valley share the desperation seemingly inherent in their food-based economy and express their hope for fatter times through the extravagant communal consumption of food. Each individual, by his or her participation in the feast, enacts his or her place in the construction of a regional identity.
Another event in *Cure* where the people of Promise use food to express their projected identity is at the Dominion Day picnic. In spite of divisions within the community, the townsfolk and farmers of the region come together to enact their allegiance to an empire that has taken their young men, and much of their food, for the purposes of a distant war. Ironically, many of the conflicts that bubble below the social surface of the region are a result of Canada's involvement in the war; the celebration of Dominion Day is therefore a celebration of membership in an empire that divides the society in *Cure*. Even so, the people of Turtle Valley attempt to overcome their Commonwealth burdens by displaying fervent patriotism to the British Empire through communal consumption. The women at the picnic are jealous of Mrs. Weeks because she still has men at home to care for, but by eating foods produced on the farms and in the kitchens of the region, Beth is able to forget her and her mother's difference from their neighbours: "[t]he food, though -- you couldn't help but get distracted by the food. . . . This was a time to show off, and every woman there chose the best recipe in her scrapbook and picked the freshest, most perfect ingredients from her garden" (140). The women all know to use their best plates, and serve the best of their region, thus expressing their belief in the traditional food values of their society while at the same time providing distraction from the historical moment which affects their region through limitations on both food and men. It is as though the women consume food as a substitute for the men they are unable to consume, foreign regions having stolen them.

Anderson-Dargatz's use of food contributes significantly to her construction of a small town farming region specific to the Shuswap Valley, where a woman's pride has to do with the foods she serves, the way she serves them, and with whom and how she
consumes them. As I have already indicated, however, her food use reminds readers of the novel’s temporal setting as well as its physical one. At the Dominion Day picnic Beth comments on the food fashion of her region: "A few of the women, including my mother, had early cucumbers grown against the sunny side of the house where the heat was trapped, and, like my mother, they sliced the cucumbers so thin they were transparent, and placed them between thinly sliced buttered bread. That was the thing, at the time, to make the thinnest sandwiches" (140). We might say that the "thing" today is to make the fattest sandwiches. What we wish something as simple as a sandwich to be, then, has to do with our region, our time in history, and the combination of the two. Perhaps we now demand fat sandwiches because we live in an age and in a region of abundance while the society Anderson-Dargatz constructs in Cure makes a virtue of necessity by competing in minimalism and by making that minimalism a symbol of elegance. In her discussion of the food strains immigrants endure, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong makes an observation that reflects the kinds of alimentary constraints Anderson-Dargatz uses to locate her region in time: "The ability to obtain food . . . is related to the ability to work around the terms set by powerful others. If the powerful control resources, the powerless must devise means to maximize their resources by either overcoming Necessity or submitting to it" (55). Throughout Cure Anderson-Dargatz reminds her readers of the special value food has in a time of war. Food restrictions dictated by others cause those who prepare food to value foods according to the thrift involved in their production. Thin sandwiches allow the sandwich makers to stretch available resources while maintaining culinary competition and community pride. Thin
sandwiches are also popular because they approximate the foodways of the British with whom this Canadian region wishes to identify.

The war itself is more distant idea than lived fact in Beth's experience. Discussion of food rationing and the community enforcement of food ethics specific to wartime reminds the reader that *Cure* takes place in a temporally limited region. Beth says the townspeople gossip that her father, whom they do not like and whom they therefore wish to slander, "still hoarded flour and sugar, coffee and tea, in the hole behind my parents' marriage bed. That last one was a lie, and a dangerous story. It was my mother who stocked the hole behind the bed; that was her domain. And there were many who took those government posters in the store seriously" (55). The government needs food to feed its soldiers, so it sends out propaganda to keep the civilian population from hoarding it, convincing Canadians that to store food in such slim times for one's own family instead of living on less for the good of the war effort is unpatriotic. The government then relies on its various regions to police themselves through social ostracism of those who do not adhere to the food ethics of wartime Canada. In Promise's only store, Bouchard and Belcham's, "the walls were plastered with government posters. Some said DON'T BE A CUPBOARD QUISLING! and warned of fines up to five thousand dollars and imprisonment for hoarding food, others advertised Victory bonds or demanded that we all DIG FOR VICTORY and grow a garden plot..." (49). The government tells its subjects to eat sparingly, an instruction which shifts markers of community belonging from hearty daily indulgence in food to the resistance of food (as in the resistance of second helpings), or to the ability to produce one's own food so long as it is not food necessary to the war effort. Families like the Weeks, for
example, should grow their own vegetables, but they should not keep their own cream, which is a rationed food item.

Sidney Mintz confirms the importance of war in the alteration of foodways, not just for soldiers, but for civilians as well. He asserts that "[w]ar is probably the single most powerful instrument of dietary change in human experience" (27). Civilians "got too little meat; and the wartime media were full of stories and jokes about romancing the butcher. They got too little sugar, too little coffee, and too little tobacco. Their food habits, too, were being radically affected. Hence North American food preferences . . . were significantly reshaped by the war experience" (26). Mintz writes of the Second World War; Anderson-Dartgatz's attention to the strain placed on food habits in the region and time she describes is therefore accurate. In Belcham's, "posters explained the latest rationing regulations, which seemed to change monthly, on tea, coffee, and sugar. Sugar was limited to half a pound per person per week that month, down from three quarters of a pound" (49). The people of Promise, like people all over North America, definitely get too little sugar and coffee compared to what they were accustomed to in non-war years. The ways the Shuswap deals with shortages, however, helps define it as a region. One cannot, after all, plant the same foods in victory gardens all across Canada. Each area is appropriate to certain foods, and sharing these foods marks a new food identity in each region. In Promise, the foods of choice become the foods made from home-grown cucumbers and cherries. The community continues to eat together on occasions such as the Dominion Day picnic, the day of Sarah Kemp's funeral, and the fowl supper, but second helpings are frowned upon in a way they would not be were the society of the region unhindered by wartime restraints.
In "Edible écriture," Terry Eagleton notes that language and food are not only essential to survival but central to the construction of cultural identity: "Language is at once material fact and rhetorical communication, just as eating combines biological necessity with cultural significance" (205). Language can also carry cultural significance precisely through its articulation of food and foodways. Both Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald use language to evoke foodways specific to the regions they describe in *Cure* and *Fall*. Food is sensual and substantial, but it is also abstract: the discussion of food is always a discussion of identities, both regional and individual. The narrator in *Cure*, for example, describes food in a way that evokes a time and a foodway gone by. Beth tells us plainly, "My story takes place in the midst of the Second World War . . . [and] the evidence for everything I'm about to tell you is there, in the pages of my mother's scrapbook, . . . in the recipe for pound cake I made the night they took my father away" (2). Beth makes pound cake in an oven heated by fire, not in a modern appliance, and the flour and sugar in the cake are items made precious by rationing. Clearly, the foodway Beth participated in as a girl and surely the food item itself are no longer what they were but are parts of a culture and region that have changed.

MacDonald also uses food to evoke a unique geographical region as well as specific historical periods in *Fall*. Like Anderson-Dargatz, she introduces the alimentary aspect immediately. She writes that Materia, "had a stroke while cleaning the oven. . . . What did she plan to cook that day? When mumma died, all the eggs in the pantry went bad -- they must have because you could smell that sulphur smell all the way down Water Street" (2). Before MacDonald even gives her name, she describes Materia in relation to the kitchen. It is therefore fitting that Materia should end her life in the space that is hers and in the appliance with which she cooked to nourish and give life to others. The narrator wonders what she planned to cook, a query which indicates her own naïveté, but which also expresses her view of her mother in relation to food, as if food is her mother's life and her only thoughts revolve around its preparation and consumption.
She then further enforces the childlike tone of her observations by connecting the death of food (the rotting of the eggs) with the death of her mother, instead of admitting the real cause of the sulphur stench, which emanates directly from the oven. The only thing Materia planned to cook that day was herself, and she used the oven to do it. Finally, MacDonald connects food to the immediate region she establishes by having the sulphur smell of Materia's final dish "smell all the way down Water Street." In this way, food and food associations permeate the local landscape.

While Anderson-Dargatz uses food primarily to express attempts at community solidarity and to evoke wartime foodways which temporally establish the region she describes, MacDonald uses foodways to express the cultural diversity of her setting. MacDonald generally associates the stereotypical foodway of Cape Breton with James, who is the most stereotypical Cape Bretoner in Fall, having deeper roots in the area than any of the other primary characters and being of the Scots-Irish heritage that dominates the island. Though from a different culinary culture, Materia eventually learns to make the foods that please her husband: "At home, Materia stood at the counter rolling out dough for a pie -- steak and kidney like James's mother used to make ..." (40). Materia learns to roll over her own food identity, or at least to adapt it, by rolling out her husband's. She is a source of nourishment for James and their daughter as James's mother was for him. MacDonald then furthers the notion of Materia's food-associated identity by describing her in food terms. She is doughy, and James accuses her of becoming the food she ought to be preparing for him. What James does not realize is that Materia's weight gain is a symptom of her loneliness. She eats to console herself so that during the isolated days of her early marriage she becomes the soft mass she will remain the rest of her life, finding the sexual and emotional nourishment she does not receive from James in more obvious alimentary ways:

One evening he came home to find her sitting at the kitchen table with a bowl of molasses cookie dough, for that was what the ingredients lined up on the table indicated.
He was delighted. Her first attempt at cooking. He even gave her a kiss to show just how pleased he was, but when he went to dip a finger in the dough the bowl had been licked clean.

"What in God's name are you doing?"

She just looked queasily straight ahead.

"Answer me."

She just sat there, bloated.

"What's wrong with you? Don't you think? Haven't you got anything to say for yourself?"

The blank stare, the flaccid face. He grabbed the bowl.

"Or are you just a lump of dough?" (24-25)

James wants to be like everyone else, with a "presentable" wife and fair children. When Materia indicates that she would be interested in cooking for her husband, as wives are supposed to be, James is more able to accept her, but when she not only does not cook, but does not bother to nourish him and eats all the cookie dough herself, he becomes angry. Her refusal of a stereotypical role reminds him that he plucked her from her role as a child too soon. He thought he could mold her, told himself that "[s]he was young, she'd learn in time" but she does not learn from him (20). During their early marriage, she becomes dough instead of making it for him.

James represents a Cape Breton foodway based on the traditional Scots-Irish foods characteristic of the island's people. Scots-Irish descendants are the norm, and as James wishes to fit in it is only natural that he prefer the foods common to his region. After all, one is not only what one eats, but one eats what one wishes to be. Materia pleases James immensely when she prepares boiled dinner. "Something sure smells good," he says. Kathleen asks what they are having, and when Materia tells her, she groans. Kathleen refuses the cultural identity the consumption of such regional food would indicate, preferring to establish a more "sophisticated" persona. Boiled dinner is
Real Cape Breton cuisine is the cuisine of the cultural majority on the island, but in the Piper family it is a cuisine prepared by a woman who rests on the edge of the dominant culture, just as she rests on the edge of her own husband's awareness. Materia therefore exhibits her cultural adaptability through her ability to alter her foodway to suit the familial and geographic region in which she must function. In her essay, "Symbol and Performance" Susan Kalcik notes that "[w]omen seem particularly resistant to change in foodways and can be significant in maintaining foodways if they are in charge of the family meals". (40). By the same token, women can accelerate the speed of their family's assimilation by adapting their foodways to the region in which they live. By preparing boiled dinner Materia allows her daughters to feel that although their mother looks different and speaks differently from other mothers on Cape Breton, she serves her children similar foods, and they therefore share similar regional identities. The consumption of boiled dinner is also a literal consumption of region, for the foods which combine to constitute the dish are all locally produced, and thus part of the land. That Materia is able to "surpass herself" in the use of such local ingredients shows that she understands and is adept at altering her food-based labor to suit the taste of her Cape Breton audience -- namely her husband, and later, most of her children. When Kathleen assumes an English identity, however, as she does when her mother serves boiled dinner, she rejects the regional self the ingestion of boiled dinner would indicate. She connects low social status with the foods typical of Cape Breton, and attempts to construct her identity on an English model of toasted cheese. She realizes that a "change in eating
habits could thus be used to signal a change in status, usually from a less to a more
desirable group" (Kalcik 50). After all, her father keeps telling her she is bound for
better things than are available on the rock, mired as it is in poverty and strife, and for
Kathleen that includes boiled dinner. She is proof that "people tend to eat as they would
like to be perceived, so that it is as much a matter of 'you eat what you wish to be' as
'you are what you eat'" (Kalcik 54).

In spite of her husband and her daughter's regionally associated preferences,
Materia's primary culinary influence counters both Scots-Irish and English foodways.
When she finally does learn to cook, instruction comes from her Jewish neighbor so that
although James is pleased to come home to a hot meal for a change, the first food
Materia serves him is foreign to his experience. Materia prepares chicken soup with
matzo balls, and James asks her, "'This some kind of Ayrab delicacy?'" (29). In fact, it is
a traditional Jewish dish Mrs. Luvovitz brought to Cape Breton from Germany, and
Materia tells him so. James is wary of his wife's choice of friends, but is pleased "she
had finally started acting like a wife, even if the results were on the heathen side" (30).
He is suspicious of his neighbours. If they are the source of his wife's sudden ability to
prepare food, then he should at least find out if they are dangerous. Food is, after all, an
expression of identity, and if his wife expresses their culinary culture he should be sure
their identity is something he is willing to ingest. Appropriately, when James goes next
door to meet the Luvovitzes, Benny introduces himself by introducing the food he
produces. "'Taste this,'" he says and gives James some smoked meat (30). James wants
to know what it is (he must monitor his own consumption and thus maintain control
over possible alimentary pollution) and finds that he likes the meat, but he is still
unwilling to accept the culture which produced it. He buys half a cow from Benny, but
stipulates, "'I don't want it kosher'" (30). Benny responds with humour to James's fear
of difference inflicted upon him through ingestion:

"What do you mean, it's kosher, I butcher it, it's kosher."
"I don't want you to do anything funny to it."

"Don't worry, you see that cow?"

"Yuh."

"That's the one I'm saving for you. That's a presbyterian cow."

"I'm Catholic."

Benny laughed. James smiled. Compared to Materia's family, the Luvovitzes seemed downright white. (30)

James is able to accept the difference of the Luvovitzes and the food they give him, both through direct sale and through the cooking instruction they give Materia, by comparing them to a family which is even more strange to his conception of Cape Breton than they are. He makes them white in his own mind to allow the food they give him to settle in his stomach.

Materia is a constant reminder of yet another foodway, neither Scots-Irish nor Jewish, simply by her visible difference from these groups. She is Lebanese, and although she displays remarkable adaptability through her acceptance of regional foods and her quick mastery of the local cuisine, she cannot entirely let go of her ethnic identity and the means of expressing that identity through food. For a woman cut off from her only Lebanese contact, food forms a way of recalling the familiar when everything else, including the Cape Breton cuisine she prepares to please her husband, is foreign. Her strategy is common among immigrants: "Traditional foods and ways of eating form a link with the past and help ease the shock of entering a new culture; thus many struggle to hold on to them despite pressures to change" (Kalcik 37). Materia does give into her husband's pressures to prepare foods that reaffirm his own ethnic identity, but she also maintains her own traditional foodway, thanks to Benny Luvovitz who smuggles recipes to her from her mother. Even so, Materia does not reclaim her Lebanese identity through the preparation of traditional Lebanese cuisine so much as she negotiates her ethnic identity in the context of the region in which she lives. The first
Lebanese food Materia prepares for her husband is *kibbeh*, which "was the national dish of Syria and Lebanon" (50). Mrs. Mahmoud gives the recipe to Benny, knowing it is really for her disinherited daughter, so that "[t]hat evening, Mrs. Mahmoud watched her husband eat and thought of her lost daughter, perhaps even now serving the same dish to her own husband. Would he appreciate it? Did he love her still?" (51). Food is a connection between mother and daughter and they enact their secret solidarity by serving the same foods to their husbands. Of course, James does not love his wife anymore, but he does appreciate the food she introduces him to, even if he is suspicious of it as he was with the meat he got from the Luvovitzes. He watches the way Materia eats *kibbeh* and follows her example, then asks, "'Where'd you learn to cook this?'" She tells him,

"Is raw, no cook."

He paused.

"Kosher?"

She nodded. He resumed eating. Materia got a pang; she thought, "We're happy without the girl." (51)

James accepts Materia's food and thus a part of her identity as well so that through food Materia feels a connection with her husband she does not normally enjoy. In her essay, "Food as a Cultural Construction," Anna Meigs highlights such alimentary identity-sharing when she states that, "exchanges of food are linked to bonds of social alliance and solidarity" (95). Through food, Materia shares her culture, as she once shared her body, and thus feels a solidarity with James from whom she often feels isolated. The *kibbeh* Materia serves James is not a pure expression of her ethnic heritage, however, but one which conforms to its new region of presentation even as it evokes a nostalgia for "the old world." Writing of Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Guy Beauregard comments on food identities in a way equally applicable to MacDonald's *Fall*. He argues that "[t]he cultural and the culinary frequently go hand in hand," and "the stories
Marusaki tells, like the food she cooks, are not attempts to reclaim an authentic identity . . . They are instead part of . . . the process of writing diaspora: negotiating, and not merely preserving, cultural identities outside of narrow ethnic, racial, and national borders" (59). The meat Materia uses as the base of her dish comes from a kosher butcher, which it probably would not have had she made it in the region from which the dish originates. In fact, her whole family has adapted to the use of Kosher meat in this dish because "it had to be made from the most trustworthy meat, therefore the Mahmouds bought only from Luvovitz's Kosher Canadian Butcher Shop" (50). Even James realizes the importance of high quality meat so that he accepts kibbeh only once he assures himself that it is made from meat his Jewish neighbours produced.

Although MacDonald admits a particular cuisine as typical of Cape Breton, her use of food in *Fall* and her insistence upon the mixing of foodways serves to highlight regional diversity. Materia learns the foodways of her region, (boiled dinner and kidney pie) and the foodways of her Jewish neighbours (chicken soup with matzo balls), yet manages to recover and adapt her traditional Lebanese foodway as a way of communicating her minority identity. Materia's primary function in relation to those around her is to prepare food. She makes meals for her family, and with her only real friend, Mrs. Luvovitz, she communicates mostly through food sharing: "... Materia doesn't speak English much. For with whom would she converse in English? Not her husband. And Mrs Luvovitz has always been mercifully undemanding of Materia in that regard, their friendship having revolved around food..." (86). Food allows Materia to fit into Cape Breton, even as she alters the region by altering the foods she serves her family of Cape Bretoners and by sharing foods with her neighbours. She crosses cultural borders with the culinary, redefining the social and alimentary nature of her adopted region as she does so.

MacDonald uses Teresa and her relationship to various ethnic foodways to highlight the different elements that comprise the cultural region of Cape Breton as well.
Teresa compares the Mahmouds she works for with the more prevalent "meat-and-potato set" of the region: "She likes the foods she's learned to prepare for them -- this tabooleh, for instance. It makes a nice change from the Anglos and Scotch she has worked for, with their endless meat and potatoes and not a spice in sight" (119). Like Materia in the Piper household, Teresa in the Mahmoud home is an adapter of foodways to such an extent that she not only learns to prepare Lebanese food proficiently (and with kosher meat), but also enjoys the food herself. At the same time, her reflections on the differences between the Mahmouds and her own cultures of Barbados and The Coke Ovens, and their differences from Cape Bretoners generally serve to illustrate the cultural layering integral to the limited region MacDonald describes. As Sau-ling Cynthia Wong states in her discussion of foodways in the Asian diaspora in *Reading Asian American Literature*, "[c]ulture is not a piece of baggage that immigrants carry with them; it is not static but undergoes constant modification in a new environment" (43). Foodways in *Fall* mingle as the community receives immigrants who do not fit the cultural profile established by its original settlers. Each group contributes new food influences to the society as a whole so that Teresa and James are able to appreciate Lebanese cuisine in its new regional context without losing their own cuisines and former food identities. Alimentary images and language in *Fall* are thus a contrast to those in *Cure*; in the former food is a signifier of all that is adaptable about Cape Breton, and a way of insisting upon the diversity of the region. In the latter, food is almost always an expression of the self-sufficiency crucial to a farming region in wartime and the desperate desire of most members of the community to share a recognizable foodway and consistent identity.

Whether an insistence upon difference in the evolution of a region or a longing for cultural coherence in a time of chaos, in both *Fall* and *Cure*, food is crucial to the construction of region, in a temporal as much as a physical sense. Geographically, families tend to consume that which is easily produced in their region. In *Cure*, the
Weeks follow a foodway based upon home-grown foods such as eggs, cucumbers, potatoes and cherries. This particular foodway is partly a reflection of the fertility of the region where such foods are able to grow, but the choices the people of Turtle Valley make are equally linked to the foods that remain available when so much else is rationed or taken away for the purposes of war. One naturally eats that which is readily obtainable, which is why the Irish eat potatoes, Chinese eat rice, and Swedes eat fish. Foodways are not abstract cultural constructs imposed upon the land, but are habits and preferences born of what the environment will yield. The food choices the residents of Turtle Valley make are therefore regional, but in a temporal sense as well as a spatial one, for as Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald clearly realize, "evocations of flavors and cooking methods work efficiently to recall the manner of an entire way of life" (Goldman 178).

The same attention to food influences Anderson-Dargatz uses to recall the Shuswap in time are apparent in the construction of Cape Breton in Fall. Materia maintains a garden which grows foods stereotypical of the rough and rocky island upon which she lives: potatoes, cabbages, apples, and carrots. These are hardy foods commonly associated with the Scots-Irish people who first settled Cape Breton and who dominate it at the time in which Fall is set. She also prepares, serves and consumes kosher beef, which illustrates the fallacy of a homogeneous cuisine for the region. Cape Breton identities cannot be summarized by the ethnic majority. Like Mrs. Weeks in Cure, however, Materia tailors her personal food choices to suit her household economy and strives for at least a minimal level of self-sufficiency by preparing and consuming that which her region will allow. Her daughter Mercedes does the same when she takes over the family garden: "She is very proud of the scrawny carrots and strange potatoes it produces and she always announces the fact that the family is being nourished by the bounty of their own backyard" (187). Mercedes, like her mother before her, comes to define herself through her domestic labour, and especially through her ability to nourish
her family. She also follows her mother's example in her use of food as cultural communication. To be able to grow potatoes in Cape Breton soil solidifies her otherwise ambiguous ethnic identity. She feeds her family regional fare, and with the visible darkness of Materia gone (though I do not for a moment suggest that Mercedes does anything but revere her mother), she is able to express belonging to the dominant meat-and-potatoes culture that surrounds her.

Anne Goldman notes, as MacDonald and Anderson-Dargatz illustrate, that "presenting a family recipe and figuring its circulation within a community of readers provides a metaphor non-threatening in its apparent avoidance of overt political discourse and yet culturally resonant in its evocation of the relation between the labor of the individual and her conscious efforts to reproduce familial and cultural traditions and values" (172). MacDonald's insistence upon the various cultural contributors to the foodway of Cape Breton and their flexibility is a political statement in its refusal of a sentimentally homogeneous regional culture. Materia partially assimilates by "eating Cape Breton" just as the Weeks family in Cure eats "Turtle Valley," but she does not abandon the kibbeh of her youth. She slaves over the produce and preparation of food from Cape Breton soil, and "fills jar upon jar with preserves, labelling them 'Summer 1914'" (70). Materia preserves and later feeds her family food of her adopted region.

She also labels the food of the region with a date, for it is not enough to know where the foods came from, but one must also know when they came from there. The same is true of the novels Cure and Fail themselves; to be told these novels are set in specific regions which the authors name and which they describe in all the details of physical space, cultural relations, and expressions of those cultural relations through localized foodways is insufficient to establishing setting. The reader must also know what the novels' historical positions are. Cape Breton was a very different region before its immigrants ate things other than meat-and-potatoes. Similarly, the Shuswap exhibited a very different character before the reservation system came into effect, and its inhabitants
expressed themselves through food with more abandon in years in which consumption was an exhibition of pride and not a reminder of constraint.

MacDonald also establishes her region by transferring food words and images to things which are normally non-food subjects. The first description MacDonald gives of Cape Breton's black ghetto includes a powerful alimentary image to explain how the people of the area were literally forced to ingest the land upon which they lived: "The Coke Ovens was a cosy community, its houses painted everything but white, snuggled right up against the steel mill. The mill put bread on the table and a fine orange dust on the bread" (56). The people who live in The Coke Ovens eat their regional economy every day so that the land in which they live and the identities they derive from their work are one with the foods they ingest, regardless of outside culinary influences. The "fine orange dust" that supplements their diet indicates the age in which they live, as much as their physical location, for their region is as yet unfettered by the environmental and health regulations that would prevent the mill from colouring the bread of the coloured population with poison. MacDonald thus confirms Anne Goldman's assertion that "the culinary metaphor provides writers with a means of examining power" (191). Obviously, MacDonald does not accept the racial hierarchy that marks Cape Breton historically; she therefore combats complacency by evoking an image of alimentary pollution as a metaphor for the cultural pollution that is racism.

In The Coke Ovens, consumption of the non-consumable is inadvertent, but in the Piper basement Mercedes deliberately consumes her region in a way that evokes both temporal and geographical space. When Lily becomes ill with a fever, Mercedes believes Lily's fever is a punishment for her own sins and constructs a special penance for herself: "[w]hile Frances sang to Lily in the dark, Mercedes was naked under burlap, kneeling by the furnace, offering up her sacrifice to God" (275). Her sacrifice is ingestion of the non-ingestable: "Through my fault,' Mercedes can barely get out the words, and as she takes the first bite of coal, chews and swallows, sorrow overwhelms
her. She is bitterly aware of how she hurt God, and of how God in his infinite mercy has given her this second chance of which she is not worthy. 'Through my most grievous fault.' She takes another bite of coal..." (276). Mercedes attempts to turn the darkness of her sin to Godly light by consuming a form of darkness which is itself a source of light. She consumes a paradox even as she believes in one. Like the residents of The Coke Ovens, she ingests the source of her regional identity. In geological terms, Cape Breton is a large lump of coal upon which people live. Early in the novel, MacDonald addresses this regional characteristic: "Cape Breton Island is not a pearl -- scratch anywhere and you'll find coal -- but someday, millions of years from now, it may be a diamond. Cape Breton Diamond" (88). Cape Breton is a harsh land where only a thin layer of earth hides the darkness of its foundation. That darkness is a source of power and light, however, so that the region evolves as it does almost entirely because of the extraction of coal from it. People flood in to alter the landscape, sending it away to fuel the dreams of regions distant from their adopted one. At the same time, they bring their own cultures, including their foodways, to influence and alter the society that receives them -- however unwillingly. When Mercedes eats coal, she bodily incorporates the source of her region's physical shape, its economic base, and the cause of its amalgamated culture. All of these things are difficult to swallow. Her sisters may leave the region she consumes, but it is such a part of her identity that she never does leave the island, remaining instead to gain a reputation as hard as the coal she consumes in self-inflicted penance as a girl.

Mercedes's regional consumption as offering marks her as a character, for it highlights the evolution of her identity as much as it blackens her tongue. Her penance also acts as a rhetorical reminder of the time in which MacDonald sets Fall. As Cape Bretoners are now all too uncomfortably aware, coal is an old-fashioned power source whose economic clout has all but vanished. Coal still identifies the region, but few homes maintain coal as their primary heat source so that were Fall set in the Cape
Breton of today, it is unlikely the consumption of coal would appear as an obvious penance to Mercedes. During the depression, coal cellars were common. Now they are not. Mercedes thus chooses to punish herself in a domestic region specific to a particular time, with a non-ingestable of particular resonance to her larger cultural and geographic region.

In a similar manner, MacDonald uses food to indicate time as well as geography through Mercedes's belief that food can be a compensation for the ills of her father and of her society generally. Cape Breton is caught in the throes of labour unrest once again, and "[t]his time, not only have they cut off credit at the company stores, they've cut off New Waterford's water and electricity" (228). MacDonald describes the effect of disease on the landscape and the division of the local culture into strike-supporter and strike-breaker factions as specific to Cape Breton just before the depression. Mercedes then tries to remedy this situation, or at least to diminish the hatred of her father this time and place-specific situation causes, by supplying food to those who have become sick through lack of nourishment. Mercedes will go to the New Waterford General Hospital "[a]nd there Mercedes will have Lily give all their old story-books and clothes, as well as several pies that Mercedes will bake, to the poor children suffering upstairs" (233). Mercedes thus uses food as a kind of apology for her affluence to a region that is experiencing strife.

Like Anderson-Dargatz, who highlights the way food restrictions and strategies for coping with scarcity specify her region, MacDonald shows how the Great War alters Cape Bretoners' relationships to food even though they live in a region untouched by war directly. James is a veteran and so appreciates the value of food, even when it is not especially appetizing. Frances faces a bowl of porridge which she cannot bring herself to eat, and James tells her, "Men in the trenches would have given an arm for what you're turning your nose up at" (220). James has lived through scarcity, and has learned the folly of wastefulness, just as the women in Cure strive to make the most out of little
during a period of rationing. Like them, he makes a virtue of necessity, interpreting Frances's distaste for an economical food typical of her region as an insult to the region and its food values. James and many other men who fought in the Great War learned the value of plain food when they could not get any and brought their new appreciation home to influence the foodways of their regions.

The most obvious way in which MacDonald uses consumption as a historical marker in *Fall* is, of course, her integration of prohibition into the plot itself. She links her character's actions directly to social history when she tells us, "James is doing well off the Nova Scotia Temperance Act. He's doing even better off the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, otherwise known as Prohibition" (191). Like the boot business that allowed James to support his family independent from the mill (which is what employs the majority of the working residents of New Waterford), James saves his family from the pre-depression poverty that plagues the region by selling a consumable. Admittedly, the consumption of illegal liquor was hardly specific to Cape Breton at this time, but the fact that MacDonald comments on the convenience of the Nova Scotia Temperance Act in particular does highlight an exact historical period in an identifiable and limited region. In her description of James's bootlegging MacDonald also acknowledges the tolerance that evolved in Cape Breton as a result of legal temperance: "It's not surprising that bootlegging is tolerated. Who can blame a body for seeking to supplement his income a little? Or for just brewing some consolation to share with friends and family around a fiddle? And that's what most people do" (192). The society of New Waterford adapts its drinking habits from public to private in order to accommodate regionally and historically specific legislation so that even the Mounties in the area exercise forbearance towards those who breech Temperance. Also, attitudes towards alcohol in *Fall* are specific to New Waterford, though the town is technically a part of a larger region -- Nova Scotia: "Naturally there is a Women's Christian Temperance League, but they are a Protestant bevy and New Waterford is a Catholic
The region is reasonably united in its opposition to ingestion restrictions and so uses the convivial sharing of forbidden drink in the home to reassert regional difference from the mainland. James, however, does not drink. He would rather dissociate himself from the region he coldly supplies. MacDonald clarifies James's position in opposition to the friendly attitude of most Temperance-era drinkers: "There is no shame in bootlegging. Not the way it is practised by most people. James, however, is a professional. At his shack, in the middle of a secret clearing in the woods, he takes genuine scotch and gin, real rum, and cuts it all with his own lye-quickened concoction that bubbles day and night. He reseals the genuine liquor bottles and turns a handsome profit" (193). James feeds poison to the people because he despises their dependence upon drink when they cannot save the money to feed and clothe their children properly. This is a time in New Waterford when, "[m]any miners' children walk to school barefoot and eat lard sandwiches soaked in water to give them substance -- this during times of full employment" (192). James cannot be bothered to deal ethically in business with people who he believes do not display proper regional values. In his alimentary priority system, food is more important than drink; he does not care that the entire region hates him, he says, "[b]ecause I'm not disappearing down the same drain they are" (193). James is in conflict with his region because he pollutes its people for profit and because he does not share their weakness. To share food and drink is to share identity. To refuse to ingest that which is an identifier of region is akin to rejection of the region itself.

As Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald illustrate, food and region are reflections of each other in that foods are born of the regions in which they are grown, prepared, and served, even as regions evolve in relation to the various food influences people bring to their region from other places. Also, foods are temporally specific within physical regions so that war, immigration patterns, and transitory food fashions all effect that which regional participants choose to consume at specific times. In Cure and Fall,
Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald detail foodways in order to establish their regions in time as well as space, for just as food is an expression of individual identity, so is it a powerful tool in the clarification of region.
Chapter Three:
Region as a Non-homogeneous Space

Gail Anderson-Dargatz and Ann-Marie MacDonald construct their regions as more than historically or geographically discrete spaces, developing them as diverse and therefore credible regions as well. In her article "Overcoming the Two Solitudes of Canadian Literary Regionalism," Lisa Chalykoff notes that, "while it is thought to be blatantly ideological to assume the existence of an overarching national identity or culture, positing the existence of such homogenizing entities on behalf of regions meets with far less suspicion" (168). If the idea of Canada as a nation of ethnically, or even culturally, homogeneous peoples is ridiculous, then so too is the idea that the regions which compose Canada, encompassing as they do huge and somewhat arbitrary areas, are any more uniform in their make-up. Herb Wyile expresses a similar concern with the fallacy of culturally cohesive regional identities in his 1996 article, "Regionalism, Post-nationalism, and Post-colonialism: The Case of Canadian Literature(s)," in which he says that, "critical formulations of regionalism react to the internal colonialism of such national formulas by stressing regional diversity within the nation, but at the expense of diversity within the region" (271). Perhaps we are too insecure in our national identity to tolerate the splintering of allegiances beyond provincial boundaries and so prefer to associate single ethnic or cultural peoples with each space.

Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald prove the lie of such simplistic regional conceptions. They deny singular cultural identities within the regions they describe, including in their works characters not normally associated with their regions, and peoples generally pushed to the margins of mainstream recognition. Indeed, Anderson-Dargatz receives criticism for her inclusiveness and contradiction of regional stereotypes from reviewer Matthew Manera in Canadian Forum: "The events and the characters in this story, if taken as single events and single characters, might have been believable in a real or fictional world, but taken all together they give the impression of an author trying
too hard to be original while at the same time being true to life" (43). Manera asserts that because Anderson-Dargatz denies the expectation of homogeneity in the Shuswap of 1941, the narrative is not credible. He says, "The Cure for Death by Lightning gets lost in its overemphasis on strangeness seemingly for its own sake" (44). What Manera fails to understand is that Anderson-Dargatz, like MacDonald, focuses on differences within her region precisely in order to explode simplistic understandings of region and to reveal the complexity inherent in the society she describes. Her approach to the construction of regional communities through the articulation of diversity and conflict is in keeping with what Janice Kulyk Keefer says is "the change in the imaginative portrayal of community -- predictably from that rockbound conviction of the primacy and solidarity of community one finds in nineteenth-century Maritime fiction to recent perceptions that crisis or decay is the bottom line of communal life" (34).

Anderson-Dargatz contrasts and clarifies Promise through her depiction of the reservation. White society tries to suppress what it sees as Native superstition by imposing Christian education upon Natives, but many on the reserve regard this indoctrination by dominant society with reciprocal suspicion. The tension between the groups is so palpable that reviewer Juliet Fleming remarks upon the "genocidal misunderstanding between the whites and the Indians" (22). When Bertha describes some of the sacred parties and magic that used to take place in the underground house Natives used to occupy in winter, a daughter of hers, educated in the residential school system, says, "Nonsense" (118). The daughter's voice has been co-opted by a white society that does not want to admit local difference. Bertha recognizes the irony of her daughter's stance, however: "'You talk worse nonsense than that,' said Bertha. 'Baby born with no man fathering him. Man comes back to life after three days dead. Man walking on water. That's nonsense.'" (118). What is more, the "nonsense" of Christianity that is a tool of whites for the erasure of diversity in the region Anderson-Dargatz describes is specific to a time as well as a place. Residential schools, intended
to dissolve differences between whites and Natives by decimating Native culture were
around from the turn of the last century to the 1970s in the west. They were a strategy
of dealing with difference specific to an era, and could not be transplanted to a story set
during modern times.

The racial tensions between the people of the reserve, the white people of Promise,
and the "half-breeds" caught between the two communities are also historically specific.
Although the groups always interacted, Anderson-Dargatz reminds us that they do so in
her temporal region more than ever because of a vacuum left in the white work force
thanks to the labour demands of the war. Integration leads to insults, which in these
communities have to do with the betrayal of race, revealing a two-sided fear of
miscegenation. Those trapped in ambiguous racial identities, as Nora is, are abandoned
by both sides. To Beth's father, Nora is a squaw, yet when she defends herself against
the taunts of boys on the reserve, they say, "That's the white in her talking. She ain't
worth nothing" (113).

Involved in the racial tension that regionalizes *Cure* is the conflation of belief
systems for many people on both sides of the white/Native divide. Nora's mother has
had her Native beliefs beaten out of her by residential school teachers, but the stories
Bertha tells are part of a native mythology that a number of whites, Beth and her mother
included, absorb as part of their understanding of region and of themselves. When Beth
talks about Billy's concern that a salamander may crawl up his pant legs and eat his
heart, she does so without condescension. She has grown up in a region and with
people for whom such concerns are as real as the stories in the Bible are for Mrs. Bell.
More important than a belief in the malice of salamanders, though, is Anderson-
Dargatz's incorporation of the Coyote myth into her novel. The Coyote myth is specific
to Native cultures in the West, (although the notion of a shape-changer in general is by
no means exclusive to that region). Coyote is a creature of the country, not of
urbanized, predominantly white regions like Vancouver. Although Dan may joke about
sasquatches (77), he and Beth generally accept the tales they hear from their Native friends, and Dan is the one who alerts Beth to the presence of a shape-shifter in the area: "They say Coyote Jack's a shape-shifter. He turns into a wild dog or something. That's why they call him Coyote" (77). Dan and Beth's understandings of their world are affected by the beliefs of people who are otherwise marginal to their sense of regional belonging. They are of European descent, but because of the ethnically diverse environment in which they live, not all of their ideas are. As I will later illustrate, MacDonald describes a similar borrowing of beliefs according to regional participants when Mrs. Luvovitz mistakes Materia for a kelpie.

To further highlight the level of cultural difference within Turtle Valley, Anderson-Dargatz denies the notion of coherence even among the white people who dominate the land. The Swede whose property borders that of the Weeks is different from them, not just because of his nationality, but because of his methods of fencing, of feeding his chickens, and of maintaining his home:
The Swede had built his fences with living trees for fence posts; he had planted young poplars between mature trees, and bent and wove them into crossbars that he held in place with vines of honeysuckle. Because honeysuckle never dies, the vines flourished, winding themselves farther around the living fence posts and crossbars, year after year, building an impenetrable hedge that came into leaf and blossomed from May to October. (37)
The Swede incorporates his fence into the landscape instead of simply using post and barbed-wire to impose artificial and temporary property boundaries as most of his neighbours do. He therefore asserts his difference in an extremely obvious way which offends Beth's father. John does not want to see the Swede make permanent marks on that which he views as his, so he kills the living fence and replaces it slightly further onto the Swede's property with the barbed wire which conforms to the general farming practices of the region.
Goat is another example of Turtle Valley's reluctant diversity in that all of Promise seems to want to ignore him because he does not have the level of intelligence and social skills required to fit into society. He is thus consistent with Anderson-Dargatz's determination to include diversity in her regional construction, for as critic Michael McGowan notes, "between the local Indian reservation and town, there's a Deliverance-like preponderance of inhabitants who are either mentally unstable or physically disfigured" (30). Goat is both. When he approaches Beth and says hello, she "looked at the faces of the town buildings and at the albino crow on the church roof and pretended Goat wasn't there" (51). It is easier for the people of Promise to ignore Goat than to teach him things or to learn what he might have to teach them. Anderson-Dargatz does not allow her readers to avert their eyes from difference, however. Beth's father recognizes that Goat may have a gift as well as a curse, even though Beth and others refuse to see the boy-man, effectively pushing him to the edge of the social region in which they live. Goat wants to fit in, and when he sees Beth shy away from him he attempts to assert sameness: "I'm like everybody else,' Goat said. 'My dad said I'm like everybody else" (51). That he must say he is like everybody else proves that he is not. His father may deny the difference of his son, but the strategy the majority of the social region employs to deal with Goat is to overlook his existence. By his mere presence he explodes the cultural cohesion the region strives for through common foodways and uniformity of behavior. Of course, there have been "village idiots" since the beginning of time, but it was only during a specific period that society institutionalized and sterilized them. Over a community meal at Sarah Kemp's funeral, Dan expresses what is likely a common idea regarding Goat: "I'll tell you what's shameful,' said my brother. 'Them keeping that mongoloid idiot running around. They should lock him up. Send

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3See "Facts about . . ." for information on Alberta's sterilization program, and see Whyatt for information on the involuntary sterilization of women in British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.
him to Essondale with the other crazies" (59). At the time of which Anderson-Dargatz writes, "morons" were often removed from society and, in Western Canada at least, many were indeed sterilized. We now know much more about genetics and how the brain works, so can understand the potential talents people like Goat may have, but during the Second World War in the B.C. Shuswap very little of such things was understood or tolerated. Promise's perception of Goat as a problem, and its solution -- to send him away to be "fixed" -- is a strategy of dealing with difference specific to the time and place Anderson-Dargatz takes such pains to evoke.

In an interview for *The Georgia Straight* Anderson-Dargatz spoke frankly to Les Wiseman about her insistence upon ethnic and developmental diversity in *Cure*: "I want readers to come away with one thread, a sense of community, of not writing people off because they're difficult or because they're ugly or monsters... they're still members of the community" (22). Without characters like Goat, Bertha, and the Swede, the region in which *Cure* takes place would be unconvincing, challenging nothing and asking nothing of the reader. Anderson-Dargatz refuses the comfort of a sentimental and simplistic setting, however, provoking a reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* to comment that "[t]hough the inventory of authentic period detail is evocative, make no mistake: this is no warmhearted tale of pioneer life" (57). A *Kirkus* reviewer echoes this enthusiasm for Anderson-Dargatz's achievement of gritty realism through insistence upon regional differences, writing that "[a]tmospheric is the real strength here" and that Anderson-Dargatz constructs her narrative "without an iota of sentimentality" (389).

MacDonald also writes against the expectation of regional homogeneity, both racial and intellectual. In fact, so important is diversity to the construction of region in *Fall* that Eva Tihanyi introduces her review by foregrounding it: "*Fall on Your Knees* is... ambitious and inclusive of diversity" (36-37). Critic Shelley Page, writing for *Canadian Forum*, notes a similar insistence upon difference when she writes that "[t]his Cape Breton is one of rich colours and a crazy mixed-up palette" (47). Like Anderson-
Dargatz, MacDonald includes mentally and physically challenged characters as well as visible minorities to highlight the many types of people who contribute to the evolution of her region. Hector worked at the mill, literally transforming the landscape of his region, and had only been "married fourteen months when a half-cooked beam fell and caught him on the side of the head. Now he can go for little walks if you hold his hand, but mostly he gets pushed along in his wheelchair" (329). Like Goat, Hector functions at a sub-standard level, and like Goat, "[h]e could learn to read again . . . if someone thought of teaching him" (400). Unlike Goat, however, Hector's community does not ignore him, but integrates him into their daily lives and listens to what he has to say, though "[w]hat's left to him is the speech of dogs" (400). Teresa often brings Hector with her when she visits Adelaide, and when Hector tries to tell Wilf Beel that something is wrong, Wilf listens and is able to help (400-401). Hector's level of acceptance within The Coke Ovens may be because the people around him know what it is to be invisible to and ignored by dominant society, and so are more willing to accept difference within their fringe region than are people within the more visible Cape Breton culture who prefer ethnic and physical uniformity. They also include him because they remember who he was before he was broken. Although acceptance of people with disabilities is fairly common in our time, what most marks Hector's difference and the reaction it evokes as historically specific is, first of all, the cause of the injury itself, and secondly, the diagnosis Hector receives. Safety standards in the economically depressed region of Cape Breton, particularly for minority workers, were minimal in the early decades of the twentieth century if they existed at all. Hector might not have been caught by a beam in a modern mill. More basically, the mill itself is specific to time in that The Coke Ovens no longer has a mill to employ its residents. Also, the doctor who treats Hector after his injury "said Hector was brain-damaged into a cheerful vegetable" (400). Obviously, Hector is not a vegetable, for he perceives what is going on around him and he displays the ability to learn. As I mentioned in my discussion of Goat in Cure, however, at the
time in which MacDonald sets *Fall*, less was known than today about brain function or regenerative ability so that the doctor’s misdiagnosis is an error likely based upon the medical science of the day.

In addition to addressing the presence of people with handicaps on the societal fringe of Cape Breton, MacDonald addresses such differences in white New Waterford as well. Lily is a character essential to the novel, and although she possesses the beauty white society prizes, she also possesses a withered leg. This leg allows Lily to stay home from school and be educated in seclusion by her father, but she is neither hidden, nor in hiding from her region. On the contrary, she is a proud member of her community and well-liked generally. During the Armistice Day ceremonies of 1929, Lily ignores the bleeding her special shoe causes because, "[s]he is carrying the Nova Scotia flag up Plummer Avenue. Her heart and lungs are big and plaid like the tartan bags of air that feed the pipes. And for once Lily's type of walking is the ideal type" (239). Lily may not be her society's ideal, but she knows she belongs to her region and is proud of how the men of Cape Breton conducted themselves abroad in “The War to End All Wars.” MacDonald does not sentimentalize the dominant Scots-heritage of the region she describes by ignoring the differences that make it other than ethnically and physically uniform; instead, she gives us a character many would either pity or ignore and makes her a strong and obvious part of Cape Breton. She also explains that Lily is more than a token crippled child who will lend her story pathos; Lily is simply one of many who were damaged by the poverty and conflict that marked Cape Breton Island both physically and culturally during the time of which she writes. She tells us "[t]here are plenty of children with braces on their legs, some with crooked backs, too, but Lily is the only one out marching" (241).

What makes Lily different from both Goat in *Cure* and Hector in *Fall* is that she cherishes her physical flaw. Mercedes saves money to take Lily to Lourdes to be healed because she does not see the importance of the flawed leg to Lily's identity: "Think how
perfectly lovely Lily would be without her affliction," she says (272). Mercedes sees Lily as most people would -- as a beautiful girl whose life is ruined because her limbs do not match. Lily does not care about matching, though; she is comfortable with herself and with her place in her region as she is. She does not want to be healed, but she can only tell Frances this for fear of hurting Mercedes (295). When Mercedes does ask her to come with her to Lourdes for a cure, Lily responds that she is not sick. Mercedes is astonished and asks, "Lily. Don't you want to have two good legs?" (445). Lily does not. Her difference helps her to understand others who are different, and she enjoys this in a way Mercedes and others who are physically normal never can. Mercedes takes Lily to visit veterans from the First World War in the local hospital and Lily . . . feels badly for them, they've been terribly hurt, but pity is a poison unction. Lily has experienced pity but she didn't know what to call it, she only knew it made her terribly afraid. As if she had disappeared and become a ghost. Having experienced her own disappearance, she is conscious of how important it is for people to be seen, so when she looks at them -- even the blind one -- she looks for them, just in case they too have got lost and need finding. (300)

People in Promise avoid seeing Goat, preferring to ignore his difference from themselves and their ideal. The people of New Waterford must acknowledge differences, however, for they live in a time when many children, veterans and miners are scarred by disabilities. Even so, they look at people like Lily differently than they look at each other. Pity clouds their vision. Lily knows this and therefore values the physical difference that allows her to see as she does. MacDonald herself attempts to see her characters with a Lily-like non-bias. She develops characters who have disabilities and shows how they contribute to the region she describes, complicating its definition.

Clearly, MacDonald knows that "both national and regional spatial divisions are socially produced, and thus both spatial divisions are equally capable of repressing the existence of social difference within their borders" (Chalykoff 169). Just because a
region is already a unit of a larger entity, as Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, and even the Atlantic provinces are to Canada, that smaller region does not necessarily contain uniform ethnicity or culture. As Guy Lawson remarks in an early review of *Fall*,
Like the rest of Canada, early-20th-century Cape Breton, where much of the story is set, was not a homogeneous society. It was an island with a dominant Celtic culture . . .
[b]ut it was also the new, often harsh, home for Eastern European Jews, Lebanese refugees, people of African descent. "Cape Breton is incredibly diverse," says MacDonald, the daughter of two native Cape Bretoners. "There are tough, hardworking people from all over the globe. For example, when people think of Cape Breton they don't think of a four-foot, 11 1/2-inch, Mediterranean woman like my mother." (53)
Cape Breton is not as white as traditional conceptions of the region would lead one to believe; MacDonald therefore incorporates diversity into her fictional construction of region just as she experienced diversity in the actual region.

Materia is a significant example of MacDonald's insistence upon the non-homogeneity of Cape Breton, because she and her family are Lebanese. The Mahmous began their lives on the island as travelling peddlers and even conducted business in Gaelic (11). Once they became more prosperous, they worked their way into the upper crust of the white society of their adopted region. Their wealth and Christianity allows the dominant society to ignore the obvious violation of homogeneity that is their darkness in order to maintain the illusion of cultural cohesion. Many of the founding Mahmouds' children and grandchildren remain in the region and even intermarry, reducing the visibility of their minority status. Mahmoud does not come to accept intermarriage without difficulty, however. As the kind of racial insults people in *Cure* use against each other show, miscegenation is something people on both sides of an ethnic divide fear. When James elopes with Materia, Mahmoud is furious, not just because his young daughter was stolen from him, but because the man who stole her
was not Lebanese: "When Mahmoud's eldest daughter Materia ran off with the enklese bastard, Mahmoud gave his second eldest daughter to Tommy Jameel, thinking that his being Lebanese was enough" (315). Of course, it was not, and Mahmoud learns the flaw in his racialized logic too late. Happily, his other children fare better in marriage than the first two, and "[t]wo married nice Lebanese Canadian boys from Sydney and the youngest married a doctor -- enklese, but a good one. And his sons all married well: three got wives from the Old Country, which is ideal. Three married Canadian girls: one Lebanese, two Acadian" (315-316). The fact that two of his daughters are able to marry men who are both Canadian and Lebanese lets us know that although MacDonald only introduces us to the Mahmoud family, there are others on the island of Lebanese ancestry who have acquired hyphenated identities and made the region more than a transitional home. Indeed, MacDonald tells us that "[t]here are many Arabic-speakers in Cape Breton now" (87). MacDonald also informs us of the flexibility of Mahmoud's racism. He hates James and includes James's race in his reasons for animosity towards him, yet he is able to accept a white man in his family if that man earns his respect. Mahmoud simply waives the other enklese husband's race. MacDonald highlights a similar strategy of reluctant acceptance of the necessary in James's friendship with Benny Luvovitz. He compares him with others more obviously different from himself, especially Materia's family, in order to pretend likeness with his own ethnicity and culture. Still, we know that Mahmoud prefers that his sons obtain brides from the "Old Country," for he believes (as many still do) that compatibility is easier among peoples who share similar cultural understandings and who will thus reassert former ethnic identities rather than demand cultural accommodation. This effortless understanding is what he attributes the success of his own marriage to because "he and Giselle were both from the same race, culture, language and faith" (339). Even so, one son marries a Canadian girl who is Lebanese, and two sons marry Acadians, which reminds the readers once again of the intermingling of races that took place in the time and place of which
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MacDonald writes. Cape Breton is not entirely the Scots-Irish enclave we stereotypically assume -- and never was. It is an island of immigrants, and no ethnic group lives entirely in isolation from another, but influences and is influenced by others.

MacDonald's Cape Breton, like the Canadian multicultural dream, is a region of possibility. It is a place where someone like Camille, whose parents come from Lebanon, can choose her husband regardless of his race: "She could have been Camille MacNeil, Camille Shebib, or Camille Stubinski" (316). Her family's money and her own beauty surely bolstered her popularity among men foreign to her ethnicity, but that racial boundaries were loose enough to admit such cross-cultural matching belies the facade of an adamantly homogenous region. MacNeils, Shebibs, and Stubinskis all exist on Cape Breton and are willing to cross cultural boundaries to be with a Mahmoud. Writing on *Fall* for *Chatelaine Magazine*, Sarmishta Subramanian remarks on the credibility the inclusion of difference lends *Fall*'s region:

... MacDonald would do for [Cape Breton] what she does for so many of her characters: bring to life its shimmering undercurrents, its forgotten dimensions. So the New Waterford of her novel is populated with Jewish and black families, Lebanese immigrants, nun-run girls' schools, speakeasies reeking of moonshine -- because, she points out, the real Cape Breton has always been about more than lobster fishing and Celtic music. (85)

Even at a regional level as minute as a neighbourhood, MacDonald's construction of Cape Breton defies uniformity. James may think to himself that he fits the land better than the English who colonized it, that "he was Scottish and Irish, like ninety percent of this God-forsaken island, not to mention Canadian," but he is married to someone whose family he inaccurately calls "[f]ilthy black Syrians" (19). He rejects those who are different from what he perceives to be the regional norm, even though he has married a Lebanese Canadian. His aversion to the darkness in his own family is appropriate to his region, however, and his daughter Kathleen, before she becomes friends with Rose,
expresses racism and shame of her mother's darkness, language, and "foreign" food. James sets the example in excluding Materia from the family circle early in their marriage because with her on his arm, he does not feel like everyone else:

Other men went strolling with their wives of a Saturday evening. Took them to church on Sunday, sat at opposite ends of a row of children. But not James. He didn't want people thinking he'd married a woman old enough to be his mother, for one thing. But mainly, what with Materia gone slack in mind and body, he didn't want his child stigmatized. For on top of everything else, Materia was dark. He tried not to see it, but it was one of those things that was always before his eyes, now that the scales had fallen from them. (36)

James claims Materia bewitched him, justifying his actions in a way that does not disturb his regionally constructed understanding of a racial hierarchy and his place in it: "He knew from his reading that clinical simpletons necessarily had an overdeveloped animal nature. She had seduced him. That was why he hadn't noticed she was a child. Because she wasn't one. Not a real one. It was queer. Sick, even. Perhaps it was a racial flaw" (34). James cannot understand why he would have abandoned his racial values in order to elope with Materia, so he simply denies responsibility. He had to know she was a child, if only because when he met her in her father's home she was wearing "her green and navy Holy Angels pinafore," and because later he picked her up after school at the "Holy Angels Convent School" (12). He does not understand his pedophillic instincts and so assumes Materia's willingness to please him is a flaw in her and not in him. He then shuns her, justifying exclusion within his own home by pretending his discomfort with difference is simply an attempt to protect his daughter from the difficulties of association in a racialized society.

Before Kathleen was born, James "hoped the child would be fair" (25). She is fair, for which James is grateful, and within the home -- the only space permitted Materia -- the mother tries to love her daughter, but James forbids her from enjoying even her
mother-tongue with her first daughter. While feeding Kathleen mush (a foretaste of Cape Breton cuisine?), Materia coos to the baby in Lebanese: "the child smiled and Materia said a silent prayer of thanks, because at that moment she'd felt a faint breath of something not far from love" (35). Materia connects with her child by sharing her difference. James cannot tolerate such an expression of an identity founded in a cultural region other than his own, though, and forbids Materia to speak anything but English with Kathleen. The baby Kathleen initially responded to her mother positively. It is only after the intervention of James and his appropriation of most aspects of both parenting roles that Kathleen learns to be ashamed of her mother. In New York she does not tell Rose her mother is not white, but when Rose sees the Piper family picture and sees Materia's colour, Kathleen feels the need to explain, "'My mother is white.' 'Not quite.' 'Well she's not coloured'" (504). Kathleen attempts to deny her mother's difference, identifying herself instead with her father, which is exactly what he taught her to do. When Kathleen alters her racial attitudes and tries to use her mother's darkness to identify with Rose, however, Rose responds, "She got a year-round tan, that don't count for coloured" (511). That MacDonald uses the term coloured, in opposition to "white" marks her text historically. The terms used to describe racial diversity have since altered, of course, but MacDonald chooses to use "coloured" in order to mark the racial language her characters use in temporal space.

Next door to the Pipers live the Luvovitzes who come to run Luvovitz's Kosher Canadian Butcher Shop and Delikatessen (MacDonald 38), a name which perfectly illustrates the type of plural identities many residents of the island feel. Materia still dreams of the Lebanon she knew as a small girl, just as Mrs. Luvovitz maintains a place in her heart for her region of origin through Yiddish music and food. These women also identify with the amalgam of peoples who have come to call Cape Breton Island home. Such diverse loyalties can cause difficulties, however, either between neighbours or within individuals. When Mrs. Luvovitz's boys, Rudy and Abe, enlist to fight in the First
World War, she shows up in Materia's kitchen to cry on her Lebanese-Canadian friend's shoulder. The boys "thought she'd be proud, they're real Canadians" (104). The boys identify entirely with the region their parents adopted and want to show the world that they are not culturally complex, but purely Canadian. They forget that their mother's identity remains hyphenated: "Her boys will be fighting their own flesh and blood. The Luvovitzes are real Canadians, and the Feingolds are real Germans," (104). Cape Breton is made up of immigrants, and when Europe goes to war, some are bound to find their loyalties divided. Belonging to Cape Breton at this particular historical moment tears Mrs. Luvovitz apart.

In spite of internal conflicts such as that provoked by the Great War, Mrs. Luvovitz's primary regional identification has shifted away from Germany since her adoption of Cape Breton. She still cooks Jewish/German food, and even teaches Materia to do so, but she acknowledges the alteration worked on her by her environment when she first sees Materia and wonders if the woman is a kelpie: "Mrs. Luvovitz had resolved to speak to the woman next time, because by now she was beginning to suspect she'd been all too Celtified" (27). Indeed, as James asserts, most people on the Island are Irish or Scottish, and although there are visibly non-Scottish people on the island who impact upon their society, so too does the heritage of the Celts affect the minority residents. The various cultures of the region thus coalesce to create the uniquely diverse space of Cape Breton.

Keefer notes that "[a] refusal to shift perspectives, to take moral risks, to extend or alter boundaries -- all these create the plague sore of community in Maritime writing. The homogeneity of community is achieved . . . by excluding or considering as non-persons the most blatant outsiders" (39). Many writers, in order to achieve a sense of place, exclude characters and influences not obviously linked to that place, relying instead on stereotypes to establish regional identity. MacDonald and Anderson-Dargatz eschew such a convenient approach to setting, preferring to construct fictional regions
as diverse as the actual regions they represent. Shirley Chew, writing on *Fall* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, remarks that

[f]irst, there is a history of the island which is tied to the fortunes of its coal-mining industry . . . Next, and interwoven with this history, a narrative of the changes taking place within Cape Breton society, as there are added to the early English, Scottish, Irish and French immigrants diverse new arrivals -- Arabs from Lebanon, Eastern Europeans, Black Americans, West Indians. Racial prejudice persists, but colourful signs of the cultural mixture begin to flourish . . . (25)

If Chew appreciates MacDonald's approach to regional diversity, then it is likely that readers do, too. Few of us live in ethnically or culturally uniform societies, and we respond well to MacDonald's inclusive reconstruction of a region that is not our own.

Perhaps the most striking example of the way in which MacDonald undercuts the superficial sameness of Cape Breton's inhabitants comes in her depiction of working culture in the mine. James scabs for the coal company during a desperate strike and so comes to work underground, in the dark, with a variety of men and boys from cultures he would normally reject as inappropriate to the region. In the dark he can hear their accents, but he cannot see the colour of their skin and so never really has to admit the diversity of the racial environment he has crossed picket lines to enter. He does not realize, for example, that his best friend in the pit is black: "James couldn't place the man's accent and never realized he was black, from Barbados, just knew he was Albert who never got them killed" (49). Of course, in the light of day Albert is too strange to the dominant culture to be accepted above ground as he is in the pit; once the strike is over, the company gets rid of him: "The strike ended in April 1910, and James got a job on the surface as a checkweighman in reward for his loyalty. He had expected to see his pit buddy Albert up there too, had hoped to get a look at him in the light of day, but Albert had been let go. He had moved on to Sidney with many others from Fourteen Yard, and settled in Whitney Pier in the neighbourhood known as The Coke Ovens"
Desperate times call for desperate measures, but in times of peace differences once again become apparent and must be suppressed or dealt with through segregation within the region. Just as the Natives in *Cure* live on the reserve, the blacks in Cape Breton are socially coerced into living in The Coke Ovens. Of course, ethnic slums are particular neither to Cape Breton, nor to the time of which MacDonald writes, but the circumstances which led to the The Coke Ovens are historically specific within Cape Breton. Before the mining strike of 1909-1910, the island had few visible minorities to accommodate, or even acknowledge, but when the workers of Irish and Scottish descent refused to enter the pits the company brought in labour from regions further afield: "Barbados, Italy, Belgium, Eastern Europe, Quebec . . . . The Dominion Coal Company had reached far and wide to break the strike. Very few English voices in the darkness and those that there were were heavily accented." (49). Many of these minority workers stayed in the region after the strike ended and became a part of the culture that pretended they were not there. This sudden influx of new peoples to a region otherwise dominated by people of Scots-Irish heritage could not have happened without the coal that the physical region afforded and the strife that the extraction of that part of the land caused. Thus, in *Fall*, the facade of social homogeneity erodes even as the earth is altered. As William Westfall notes, "[h]istorical, social, and cultural forces can create and destroy regions over time" (12). Another way in which MacDonald writes against the sentimental notion of a cohesive regional identity in Cape Breton is to offer Materia a realm of acceptance outside her family. James is ashamed of her darkness, her shape, and her social manners, so she finds her place in an alternative society which is part of the region, yet marginal to it. Materia plays piano for Vaudeville troupes and silent films, becoming something of a star in her fringe world as a result. She expresses herself through music, and her audience "[likes] her all the better for being a bit loony" (53). People accommodate Materia's difference by calling her crazy, though they call her this with affection, and her husband resents her popularity, justifying his anger by
convincing himself that the people who like Materia are too low class to notice. Both
dismissals are ways of dealing with difference without actually acknowledging
racial/cultural diversity within the ethnically dominant region. MacDonald's exposure of
such culture-preserving strategies, however, denies them their power and makes us look
at the region as a site of dynamic multiculturalism rather than as a site of safe
homogeneity.

That such inconsistency of cultural origin among inhabitants of Cape Breton comes
as a result of changing times is inescapable. Because of the temporally and physically
specific situation of labour unrest in the region, for instance, the colour of entertainment
and entertainers alters: "Up till now the vaudevillians had been white, doing their
minstrel shows and piccaninny turns in blackface, but now there was a coloured
migration to the Sidney coalfield, genuine coloured artists started coming up from the
States" (52). Materia likes the new group better, perhaps finding relief from being the
only obvious "other" around, but these artists, too, move on as the region changes its
cultural make-up. After a time, "]t]he coloured artists stopped coming . . . because
word had gone down the line that the new arrivals in the Sydney coalfield were up from
the West Indies and weren't too interested in American coloured entertainment" (53).
With such examples of social flux and divisions MacDonald highlights the lack of
cultural cohesion among even those who the larger group would likely lump together
according to their colour. Even amongst blacks in the region there are serious cultural
differences. These differences arise from historically specific immigration patterns in the
region during periods of labour unrest and come to shape a minority community very
different from similar minority communities south of the border. Adelaide can demand
with pride -- through her practiced Cape Breton foodways and her actual heritage
experience -- that, "I'm from Halifax for a hundred and fifty-six years, mister, where're
you from?" (397). Leo and Teresa, however, possess enough of an accent to mark their
origin as West Indian. The ginger beer Leo sells, and which seems to be fast on its way
to becoming a Cape Breton favorite, is a recipe he learned from his West Indian mother, and Teresa is popular among her neighbours in Coketown, regardless of their origins, as the title holder of the "West Indian cooking crown" (344). Most West Indians came to Cape Breton to work in the mines, which marks their involvement with the land they live in physically as well as historically, while those blacks who established a Cape Breton presence earlier did so to escape American slave-holding (Finkel 119). Each group contributes something unique to the dominant culture of Cape Breton, though, even if influences are as minor as a hankering for ginger beer. In any case, the cultural dynamics MacDonald acknowledges are always regionally and culturally specific. The Coke Ovens grew out of an era of relative prosperity pulled out of the land itself, and people came to the region or left it according to economic forces at work within Cape Breton.

Keefer asserts that "it is the power to nurture, sustain, and preserve meaningful experience, as well as to cramp, choke off, or exclude new forms and expressions of being that makes of community an infinitely rich territory for Maritime writers" (36). Although Anderson-Dargatz is not a Maritime writer, like MacDonald she turns her reader's attention to the diversity of the region she constructs in order to bring her community to life. The community of Bertha's family, like the community of The Coke Ovens, works to preserve meaningful minority identities even as the dominant culture attempts to exclude them from mainstream consciousness. MacDonald and Anderson-Dargatz examine strategies of intolerance and include characters outside their regional centers in order to reveal non-homogeneity. They are inclusive not because diversity adds colour to their stories, but because diversity is their stories. Goat, the people of the reserve, Hector, the Mahmouds and the people of The Coke Ovens are all important to the regions in Cure and Fall. They are historically authentic cultural representatives whose presences place the novels in time as well as space.
Chapter Four:

The Construction of Region through Regional Negation

In truly Canadian fashion, Gail Anderson-Dargatz and Ann-Marie MacDonald construct their regions by reference to that which their regions are not. After all, Canadians may not know how to define themselves, but they do know what they are not -- American. In his cleverly titled, Nationalism without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian, Richard Gwyn notes that "[t]he quickest way anyone can insult a Canadian encountered abroad is to say, 'American?' The denial comes instantly, and is always uttered with defiant pride" (54). America and Americans are definitions in relation to which we distinguish our land and ourselves. Gwyn demonstrates the truth of this strategy in the politics of Canadian identity, but the same logic applies to the construction of Canadian regions in Cure and Fall. Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald articulate their spaces by contrasting them with American dreams as well as with urbanized Canadian spaces.

In both Cure and Fall, the authors describe relatively rural regions with consistent attention to details of history and social development as well as to minutiae of geography. Indeed, their attention to regional specifics indicates the vast amount of research Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald did in preparation for their novels. In a 1998 article on MacDonald we learn that "when Ann-Marie is writing, it invariably means she is reading -- mountains of stuff on anything related to her subject" (Subramanian 82). This interest in locally specific detail even earns MacDonald criticism from a reviewer in a non-Canadian publication -- The Times Literary Supplement. Shirley Chew asks, "are the chapters on the Great War really necessary, especially as MacDonald the note-taker is constantly getting in the way here of MacDonald the storyteller?" (25). The attention MacDonald gives to elements of the regions she describes helps to place those regions in time as well as in space. In "Boots," one of the chapters Chew likely considers unnecessary to the narrative, MacDonald writes that James "is
shipped home to be honourably discharged. No one can know how tired he is. He will be tired for the rest of his life" (114). He sees that "Halifax has been blown up. He doesn't wonder how or why. The war has grazed the edge of Canada, is all" (114). The experience of the Great War changes the society to which James returns in that many young men who left for the war do not return, and many of those who do see life with tired eyes, as James does. Their vision of their home region is altered by the visions of horror they lived overseas so that James is able to interpret the Halifax explosion as a continuation in his home region of his foreign war experience.

Reviewers comment on Anderson-Dargatz's exhaustive research of the Shuswap and its historical character for Cure, as well. Booklist praises her "detailed descriptions of the harsh work required to run a farm," (Wilkinson 1420), and although the reviewer does not indicate the exact farm work Anderson-Dargatz describes, we know that the Weeks' farm and the tasks it requires are very much tailored to the geography of Turtle Valley and to the historical moment of Anderson-Dargatz's setting. Fields of flax and dairy cows suit regionally unique terrain, and the manners in which the fields are harvested and the cows milked are specific to the era of the Second World War. Publishers Weekly remarks upon the "period minutiae" of Cure, too, indicating that such detail is perhaps what allows readers to accept the contrasting element of "grim supernatural phenomena" (57). Anderson-Dargatz's own editor, Louise Dennys, told Les Wiseman of The Georgia Straight that "Anderson-Dargatz's painstaking research into the historical period makes the book 'incredibly rich as a Canadian novel," (20). Dennys specifies the Canadianness of Cure as a way of distinguishing it from American novels and so highlights Anderson-Dargatz's construction of a historically unique region according to what it is not: American. Just as some reviewers criticize MacDonald for her fastidious regional research, though, so do some reviewers take Anderson-Dargatz to task for her period detail. "Too soon," writes Matthew Manera, "the beauty of story and description begins to disappear under the too obvious results of careful and detailed
research" (43). Judging by the remarkable sales of *Cure*, which although unconfirmed are generally known to be impressive, readers disagree (Wiseman 20). We appreciate the many minute truths that allow us to believe in fictions like *Cure* and *Fall* and enjoy regions which make what they are not clear through detail of what they are.

*Cure* and *Fall* are novels which evoke self-consciously non-American regions. In them, America is a land of vagueness and fantasy in comparison with the detailed drudgery that dominates depictions of the rural Canadian spaces Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald construct. For example, Beth Weeks longs for the glamour of American film star Ginger Rogers. In her first description of Promise, Beth relates Rogers' visit in a way that articulates her own region as a drab contrast to the Hollywood starlet. Of all the myths attached to the Blundells' motel, Beth says,

> [t]his one I know is true: the spring the grizzly attacked our camp and my father sold the sheep, Ginger Rogers and an unnamed male companion drove into town while on holiday and stayed the night at the Blundell's haunted motel because there was no place else to stay. Hanging on the wall of the room in which Ginger Rogers stayed was a photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Blundell standing on either side of the elegant and smiling movie star. (50)

Beth remembers the American's visit in relation to events which have nothing to do with Hollywood. Grizzly bear attacks and the sale of sheep are events which sharply contrast the nature of Turtle Valley with the fantasy film spaces (ballrooms, sophisticated hotels and high society) with which Beth associates Ginger Rogers. Rogers seems incongruous on paper between people as ordinary to Promise as the Blundells so that to Beth her visit is almost mythic. In fact, so unlikely is the contrast that Beth feels the need to assert its truth to the reader, saying "This one I know is true," as if her statement is too fantastic to stand on its own.

Anderson-Dargatz uses the glamour of a famous American whom most Western readers will easily recognize in order to confirm the obscurity of her narrower regional
focus. Ginger Rogers is the embodiment of everything that Promise and its environs are not. In Canada, in the B.C. Shuswap, in a time of distant war, the kind of woman Ginger Rogers is does not exist and the kind of woman who does exist is not in style. Beth bemoans this disparity early in the novel:

I was a big girl, muscular from milking, riding horses and doing farm chores, with the ruddy complexion that comes from fresh air, sun, and plenty of good food. But that wasn't the beauty of the time; then a woman was beautiful if she was fragile and had smooth, manicured hands that didn't grow callused or red from work. The magazines I read said it was a woman's duty to maintain her beauty for the war effort. But how could I have skin "caressingly smooth" when I needed the calluses to milk cows and shovel manure? (28).

The beauty ideals which inflict themselves on Beth's region, and on Beth herself, are those of the wealthy in urban centers or on silver screens. In either case, their unattainable standards of femininity highlight the difference between the fantasy of vague and distant places and the reality of a region that demands tough female hands for work upon the land. Even so, Beth adheres to the foreign dream of glamour as a definition of what her society is not, seldom referring to the Blundells or their hotel without also reminding us of the dazzling American who briefly touched them: "There were rumors about the Blundells, the owners of the motel where Ginger Rogers stayed. . . . there was a ghost there, in the room Ginger Rogers slept in . . ." (59), and Beth "stared at the window of the room where Ginger Rogers had slept" (176). That the Blundells' establishment is a fixed part of the regional landscape is secondary in Beth's mind to the fact that a famous stranger flitted through it. Even a whore's ghost, tied to the area thanks to an old gold rush, is not as important as the woman who haunts the room now through her Hollywood fame. Beth even blocks out her own reflection in the glass of the hotel in her need to see Rogers:
I cupped my hands against [my face] in the glass and looked for ghosts or some hint at the glamorous life of Ginger Rogers. Some graffiti maybe, a message cut into the cedar wall with a knife, "Ginger Rogers was here," or a thread from an exquisite gown overlooked in a year of cleaning. There was the picture of Ginger Rogers standing between the elderly Blundells, framed in a locked glass box on the inside wall near the door so no one would steal it, and that was something, to see that surprising glamour strung up between two such ordinary faces. (229)

Beth wishes Rogers had left a piece of herself in Promise, as if Rogers' mark upon the cedar wood -- a product of the land she knows -- could reduce the isolation of Turtle Valley and bring the American-produced fantasies of film closer to the gritty and detailed reality she experiences daily. Beth writes that her favorite page in her mother's scrapbook is "the newspaper clipping of Ginger Rogers's visit of the previous year, next to my mother's recipe for quick Sally Lunn. . . . I touched the fuzzy photograph of Ginger Rogers, but lightly, so I wouldn't smudge the newsprint. All that glamour so close to home. . . . She was so beautiful, so foreign to anything I knew in the valley" (66). Anderson-Dargatz establishes the actual region in which Beth lives, both temporally and spatially, with a painstaking accuracy and contrasts it with the region Ginger Rogers evokes, as fuzzy to the residents of Turtle Valley as the photograph Beth's mother pastes into her scrapbook.

Anderson-Dargatz provides another comparison between the Hollywood-style glamour Beth admires and the style of the region in which she lives when she has Beth emulate a second starlet. Beth gets in trouble when Mrs. Bell catches her imitating someone outside her region: "She'd caught me on the bench near the kitchen door, sitting with my legs crossed, drinking a cup of tea. I thought I looked like the picture of Rita Hayworth in the magazine Mrs. Bell's daughter, Lily, had brought me once, in the days when she visited us with her mother" (68). Beth wishes to bring the urban elegance of a region that is not her own into the harsh rural region that is, posing like a film star
on a bench overlooking a farm with fields, manure, chickens and cows. Anderson-Dargatz then uses Mrs. Bell's criticism to clarify the attitude of the region generally: "Don't cross your legs like that,' Mrs. Bell had said. 'That's how the worldly women sit, the women who smoke. You sit like that and you're asking for something" (68). Turtle Valley is not a region of worldly women because it is a region only tangentially related to the rest of the world. Ginger Rogers and Rita Hayworth are not only foreign to the B.C. interior, but to Canada generally, so that they become conveniently vague receptacles of Canadian regional fantasies. Beth knows who she is and where, in space as well as in time, because she knows who and where she is not. She is not a starlet and she is not in an urban American center. She is on a farm in an area remote, even to other Canadians, in a time of distant war and local privation.

Another instance in which Anderson-Dargatz uses the opposition of fantasy to reality to define her region is when, within two pages, she discusses movie magazines and manure. Beth remembers how "Lily Bell had brought me old magazines full of movie stars and beauty secrets, and we had lain on my bed, giggling at the pictures and gossiping about other kids at school" (88). A few paragraphs later Anderson-Dargatz redirects her focus from fantasy and fun to the realities of Turtle Valley and its absence of glamour: "During hygiene inspection, Mrs. Boulee found a yellow streak of manure on my forearm, from helping my father in the night, and my nails were dirty. She wasn't all that unkind, saying only I should be more careful about washing up after chores..." (88-89). Beth wears her region in a literal way, as many of her classmates probably do, so that to find a streak of manure on her forearm, though embarrassing, is not unusual enough to merit severe condemnation from the school teacher. The method through which Anderson-Dargatz here reveals Beth's alliance to the land also serves to specify her character's position in time. Beth lives in a land suitable for dairy farming, which is what causes her to have manure on her arm, and the inspection which reveals it is historically specific.
The images Beth sees in American magazines and movies establish her home by its marked difference from those regions, but such Hollywood contrasts are not the only ways in which Anderson-Dargatz establishes Turtle Valley by negation. In addition to such American oppositions is the opposition of city versus country, or urban versus rural. Turtle Valley is a rural region where people like the Weeks sustain themselves through cultivation of the land, therefore linking themselves to it in concrete ways. When Beth and Nora dream of escape from their strongly land-based realm and the identities it imposes, they dream of big cities like Vancouver and Calgary where they can find work that is less regionally specific, though specific to an age of distant war. Nora, desperate to escape the squalor of the reserve, begs Beth to leave Turtle Valley with her: "Those factories in Vancouver will hire any woman who shows up on the doorstep. We could be making airplanes or guns. We'll be making money for sure. We could get a place of our own. No underground dirt house. A real house, with windows" (273). Because Anderson-Dargatz sets \textit{Cure} during the Second World War, Beth and Nora dream of escape from domestic and farm work to urban areas and jobs previously denied women. Nora's suggestion that they get a real house to replace the earth house they use as a hide-out distinguishes them as residents of a region where (and when) Native earth houses, though no longer in common use, are still a part of the land. It is as though everything local is detailed in dirt, whereas cities are shiny dreamspaces that clarify the Shuswap according to what it is not.

Ann-Marie MacDonald, though interested in a place far from that which Anderson-Dargatz describes, uses similar strategies of regional contrast to define Cape Breton in \textit{Fall}. Like Beth in \textit{Cure}, a number of the characters in \textit{Fall} project their longing for urban glamour upon Hollywood icons. Mercedes and her friend Helen Frye choose on-screen lovers to fulfill romantic needs the scruffy boys of Cape Breton cannot. Mercedes dreams of Rudolph Valentino who "is most often to be found in his lavish striped tent, or galloping across the sands on an Arabian charger" (196). There
are few, if any, striped tents on Cape Breton Island, and there is more coal than sand on its coastline. A part of the silent screen at this time, Valentino is a vague image who absorbs Mercedes' desires in a way the drudgery of her life, as an extremely young household head in a region continually struggling under poverty, cannot. For Mercedes's part, her longing to tame Valentino fits well into her image of herself as a capable woman. By projecting her fantasies upon a man whom she does not know and who is not part of her world she is able to glamorize the work that she does and imaginatively transpose it to service for a man too dark and dashing to exist in any prominent role on Cape Breton Island. In fact, his darkness is likely one of the reasons she chooses him as a focus of affection. Her mother Materia was dark, and told Mercedes and Frances stories of the Middle East, making the place and its language exotic in its imprecision and comforting in its familiarity. Valentino recalls memories of those tales and his darkness is familiar to Mercedes in a way it would not be for Helen Frye. Her crush is also temporally specific, placing her choice in time just as Beth Weeks' interest in Ginger Rogers and Rita Hayworth reminds the reader of the era the author wishes to recreate.

Helen Frye, somewhat less burdened by domestic responsibilities than Mercedes is, chooses Douglas Fairbanks as her fantasy lover: "Mercedes indulges Helen's schoolgirl crush but can't sympathize; Fairbanks is somehow smug and self-sufficient. Valentino is haplessly fierce and hopelessly needy. Helen once said he was coarse -- there almost went the friendship. But they made up the next day and took turns describing their future married life with their respective paramours" (196). Helen's preference for a more obviously white man suits the values of the predominantly white community in which she was raised. She dreams of a man like those around her, but better because rich, American, and ethereal enough to imagine into her life with relatively little compromise. The boys around her cough up phlegm, have fights in the schoolyard, and disappear into the coal pits when they reach manhood, perpetuating their meager
existence in the manner of their fathers. Fairbanks, "smug and self-sufficient," does not need the coal company that runs (and sometimes ruins) Cape Breton Island, but could provide for Helen at a level of luxury utterly foreign to her region.

Cape Breton is not a land full of Valentinos and Fairbankses, or of the elegance and comfort their silent silver-screen images intimate. When Valentino dies, Mercedes reverts her focus to her home region in a way that changes her forever. She ceases to look beyond the island for images of herself, accepting somewhat sternly the reality that surrounds her: "The day she heard the impossible news it was all Mercedes could do to keep from running to Helen Frye's house. She found the strength to forbear. It's simple, really: just don't move and you won't do anything you'll regret later" (252). Mercedes will never move, but will stay in New Waterford till her death, refusing the possibility of alternative regional identities in favor of that which she knows. Her use for Valentino and other such imaginative contrasts is over.

Frances, more at odds with her region than her sister is, "is a moving picture fan too but she has different idols. Lillian Gish. Lillian Gish. Lillian Gish. Her hair is perfect. Her eyes are perfect, her little mouth is perfect. She is so small and so brave. She can be bent, but never broken" (197). Gish's strength is of a kind Frances wishes to emulate, for Frances has been the victim of her father's physical and sexual aggression. She needs to believe that like her heroine, she "can be bent, but never broken." Frances eschews regional conformity by escaping the reality of school in New Waterford to participate in American cinematic fantasies. Frances does not realize or accept the differences between herself and her heroine, however, imagining that she and Lillian Gish are kindred spirits: "They have so much in common: forced to live in poverty, to stoop to shameful stratagems and desperate measures just in order to survive. And they both know what it's like to live 'way down east'" (198). Like Beth in Cure, Frances in Fall imagines that because she and the starlet she admires share a sense of region, she can dissolve the differences of experience and possibility which bind her to a rural and
rocky home. Frances does not fit into New Waterford society, so chooses an alternative region of the imagination as evoked by on-screen images of urban Americans like Lillian Gish. She even tries to bring a piece of Gish to Cape Breton when she writes to the actress asking for a signed photograph, much as Beth Weeks hoped to keep Ginger Rogers in Promise through the discovery of a stray thread. Frances either does not know or care that Gish was born in Ohio and only knew what it was like to "live down east" in the cinematic sense. The star is someone different from the people Frances lives with. She cherishes her heroine's image as a rebellion against the limits of her life upon a dank rock where children starve and miners strike. MacDonald thus clarifies Frances's coal-blackened regional reality by comparing it to fantasies of a celluloid space, dimly defined and fantastic.

Lillian Gish is not the only Hollywood heroine Frances cherishes. While Lily carries the Nova Scotia flag on Armistice Day, leading men who mark their region in time by their wounds earned abroad, Frances rejects Nova Scotia patriotism in order to watch "Louise Brooks in Pandora's Box again before the authorities get wind and it gets banned" (239). Another American, with glamour enough and hair short enough to horrify the general sensibility of New Waterford, Louise Brooks comes to be the woman Frances most admires. Beth Weeks contradicts the values of her region when she crosses her legs in imitation of Rita Hayworth, and Frances Piper boldly dissociates herself from the Catholic confines of New Waterford when she chops off her hair in imitation of her idol (288). Indeed, by this time "Louise Brooks has usurped Lillian Gish in Frances's heart and on her wall. . . . She is the best and the worst girl in the world. She is also the most modern. Frances longs to be sold into a 'life of sin', forced onto the stage and into 'houses of ill fame' where life is tragic but so much fun" (246). The region Frances knows best, in all its boring everyday detail, is white New Waterford. She longs for the dangers of a region darker than this and believes she finds it in the dinginess of Boutros's speakeasy, "the only drab house in The Coke Ovens" (283).
ghetto inhabited mostly by poor blacks is hidden beneath the obvious region of respectable society, an inclusion which signals the truth of MacDonald's statement in an interview that, "Everything I've ever written is about diversity" (Lawson 55). By focusing on differences among people within the region she describes as well as between the regions these people dream about and the actual spaces they live in, MacDonald defines her setting. She tells us plainly that "[t]here is no such place as 'down home' unless you are 'away'" (341) and makes use of "away," on screen as well as in the exciting urban image of New York, to define her Cape Breton as Falls' "down home."

Consistent with her construction of region as that which Cape Breton is not as much as that which it is, MacDonald does not deny the youngest Piper daughter an oppositional identification. Like her sisters, Lily dreams of a film star: "Lily has been slain by Mary Pickford" (198). She watches Pollyanna, in which Pickford becomes crippled, doubtless identifying Pickford's fictional ailment with her own real one. Lily is therefore able to take herself out of Cape Breton and place herself on screen in the role of a heroine. Her choice of movie idol, though more patriotic than the choices of her sisters, nevertheless asserts difference from the local. Pickford hails from Toronto, which is a far cry socially, as well as geographically from the region that is home to Lily. In any case, being Canadian means very little at the historical moment and in the place of which MacDonald writes, for "[g]eography, of which we have 'too much' as William Lyon Mackenzie King once observed in one of his rare soundbites, has always ensured that Canadian identity would be as much, or more, local than national" (Gwyn 268). Though not yet Prime Minister at the time that the Piper girls harbor their various crushes, King's statement is undoubtedly true. However much they long to identify themselves with people of other, more exciting regions, the actual lived identities of the Piper daughters are all of Cape Breton derivation, and involve in their construction the island's unique geography and social diversity.
In *Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the End of the Twentieth Century*, John Ralston Saul writes that our most basic national myth is that "Canada exists only because it did not wish to be American. In other words . . . our existence is an artificial construct based entirely on a negative" (28). As a national region, Canada (and its inhabitants, many of whom write fiction) defines itself by what it is not. Namely, it is not American. It therefore follows that in such an environment, where identity is so often determined by negation of identity, novelists such as Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald would construct regional identities along similar lines of opposition. Hollywood and its mostly American screen idols are out of place in the daily details of Turtle Valley and Cape Breton Island so that inclusion of them in *Cure* and *Fall* contributes to the definition of those spaces according to what they are not. Similarly, these Canadian regions are specifically non-urban in comparison with larger centers whose elegance and promise is less dependent on the land than the farms in Turtle Valley and the mines on Cape Breton Island are. In *Cure*, Anderson-Dargatz highlights the rural identity of her region by comparing it in all its grimy earthiness to cities like Vancouver and Calgary to which Nora dreams of escape. In *Fall*, MacDonald contrasts the dark poverty of Cape Breton to its urban opposite even more strongly, using New York as a kind of counterbalance to the Island throughout the novel. In *Cure*, only Nora leaves her region, and neither the reader nor the narrator ever sees her again, but in *Fall* characters cross the divide between North and South several times, allowing them to discover for themselves what their oppositional region is like and so to realize new understandings of the old region by comparison to the new.

The first character to invoke the urban fantasy of New York City in *Fall* is the man who fathers the Piper family and thus its narrative. While a young James Piper courts an even younger Materia, he talks to her about leaving the only region he has ever known to go to New York City. "There's the Red Cross Line," he tells her; "Someday I'm going to get on her, b'y, and go" (14). MacDonald clarifies James's difference from his
dream even as she introduces the idea of the urban ideal into her novel, distinguishing James's language with a locally specific speech pattern -- "b'y." She then further contrasts the landscape of Sidney with the grand metropolitan name James has just spoken, showing us James and Materia walking "back up the Old Pier hand in hand. To the right of them sank the tepid sun, while to their left the blast furnaces of Dominion Iron and Steel erupted into a new day's work. A light orange snow began to fall" (14). The colours MacDonald incorporates into the landscape/waterscape of her comparatively non-urban region at first seem as mythical as the American dream of New York James harbors. The orange snow that falls, however, is less a charming trick of the light than it is evidence of pollution of the land and its inhabitants by the Dominion Iron and Steel factory which dominates the local economy and determines much of the physical and social region from which James wishes to escape. Of course, James does not leave for New York as he thought he would, but he does transfer his dream to his daughter Kathleen. He tells her, "One day you'll get on one of those liners, my darling, and go" (45). Her whole focus becomes that of her father before her so that she does not realize the strong regional component to her identity until she goes to New York, a dream realization which is temporally specific in that much of her admiration for this urban fantasy center has to do with the war in Europe, which causes changes in the society so many soldiers left behind.

Kathleen is the character in *Fall* who most obviously realizes the nature of her region by comparison to New York. When she first goes to New York, she sees the urban center as a place to reinvent herself, not yet realizing that although she is young, her region is old and gives her a history and an identity that is other than her creation. Kathleen is truly and utterly Kathleen in New York. That's what the city does for you if it's meant for you. She's got plenty of personality and no history, and she has never breathed so much air in her life. She comes from an Atlantic island surrounded by nothing but sea air, yet in the man-made outdoor corridors of this fantastic city she can
finally breathe. This air is what the gods live upon. The gods who get things done. Not the gods who mope on ancient promontories and exhale fossil vapours, waiting for someone to fill in the fragments of forgotten sagas that have come unravelled with age. Those gods have sagged so long on their rocks, they are well on their way to turning to stone themselves. (122)

Kathleen does have a history, one based upon a region of rocks where the deities she disdains for their age linger and permeate society. By contrasting the powerful urban gods Kathleen imagines belong to New York with the sagging rural gods who linger over Cape Breton's coastline and the coastline of the peoples who first settled Cape Breton, MacDonald defines her region once again by Kathleen's dramatic declaration of what it is not.

In her first days in the city, Kathleen writes that "all New York is a warm embrace just waiting to enfold me" (456). As time passes, however, she realizes that she reacts to New York according to her formative experiences in Cape Breton. In her diary she writes,

I love the buildings. They're called skyscrapers. They're the closest thing to an ocean here. But it's an ocean that goes straight up, not flat out. They say that the body of water stretching away to the east of Manhattan is the ocean but it isn't. Not my ocean, anyway. It's weird because back home I just took it for granted, my grey-green sea. Now I have a granite ocean. It gives me the same happy-sad feeling I need sometimes. When I look straight up at the buildings I can feel alone in a good way. Not in that horrible way of no one knows me. (463)

Kathleen does not recognize the quality of the ocean she viewed all her life from Cape Breton Island until she notices the difference of an ocean in the buildings of New York City. She also realizes that the land she grew up in gave her a certain feeling, a quirk of personality perhaps, that makes her need an ocean-induced happy-sad feeling, the feeling of being alone but not lonely with water for company.
New York eventually teaches Kathleen her difference from the city she thinks has adopted her. Writing of her visit to Rose she says "AND she thinks I have an accent! She said, 'Where you from, girl?' ... I said 'Cape Breton Island.' And she said, "C'Bre'n Ireland'? I said, 'I don't talk like that.' She said, 'That's exactly how you talk.' 'Cape Breton is in Canada, not Ireland, what do they teach you at school here?" (497). Kathleen learns that she is marked by her region in the way she speaks, just as her father was, as well as by her perspective. She assumes people in New York should know or care where Cape Breton is. MacDonald thus shows us that the two regions she describes, rural and urban, Canadian and American, help to define Kathleen's understanding of both by negation and/or reflection of each other.

New York City is also an urban space which allows MacDonald to compare the kind of blindness Kathleen engages in at home to what intrigues her about New York. Ever aware of her novel in time, MacDonald reminds us that New York supplies the First World War, to which it owes much of its vibrancy at the time of Kathleen's presence. Kathleen writes that "New York feeds the war. New York goes to the whole world and the whole world comes to New York. I love seeing huge crates with Chinese writing swing through the air and pile up on the dock alongside every other language known to man" (464). Diversity excites Kathleen in the big city, but when she was at home in New Waterford, she did not even accommodate the domestically bound diversity of Materia, refusing her mother's native tongue just as she refused her food. She loves that parts of New York accept mixed couples, and says "I fail to see why colour should cause such a commotion" (473), when during all her years in New Waterford Leo Taylor drove her to and from school each day, and she never spoke to him or to his family because they were black. Of course, her father shaped her beliefs in matters of colour, but the fact is that she easily acquiesced with his views as most members of her region at her time there in history would have.
When Kathleen visits Rose at home, she returns to a more conscious commentary of the differences between New York and New Waterford, as if clarifying her home region for herself and finding comfort in similarities as well as an awareness of contrasts. Rose's neighbourhood, she says, "reminded me of New Waterford, except Harlem is really prosperous. Not to mention that here I'm the odd one out. Everyone stared at me as I slunk by till I felt like something out of P.T. Barnum, 'See the white slave princess, raised by wolves in darkest Canada!'" (506). As Teresa is to Frances in New Waterford -- a racial oddity -- Kathleen is in Rose's Harlem. That MacDonald describes Harlem as a prosperous place also alerts the reader to the desperate level of poverty in Cape Breton at the time she describes. Harlem is, after all, a ghetto, even if it is a prosperous one, and if Kathleen who has never even visited the Coke Ovens thinks that Harlem is more affluent than Cape Breton, the island is in dire straights indeed. Her comments also tell us that if everyone in Harlem is black, making Kathleen feel like the odd one out, then she still cherishes a blindness to the diversity of her home region, where many inhabitants are as black as the coal they extract from the earth, denying the fit of Kathleen's regional reversal along ethnic lines.

New York provides a contrast to define Cape Breton along rural/urban lines for characters in *Fall* other than the Pipers, however. Teresa, too, dreams of a new life in New York, though she never expects to sing at the Met as Kathleen does, and does not view Cape Breton with the contempt that Kathleen expresses: "Teresa has grown up in The Coke Ovens section of Whitney Pier and, despite the ongoing battle with grime from the trains and smokestacks, she wouldn't want to live anywhere else, except New York City" (118). Teresa expresses no knowledge of New York City; hers is simply a vague aspiration for a freedom Cape Breton denies her. MacDonald uses Teresa's dream of an urban American space to describe the space Teresa does know, and the area that is the dominant setting in *Fall*. New York is little more than a name to Teresa, and is thus a realm of possibility while Cape Breton and The Coke Ovens are real. Hers is a
region where the earth falls from the sky as orange snow or a dusting on bread, and where the work of cleaning is never done. Teresa expresses fondness for the place, though, because although like James and Kathleen it speaks to her more of limitations than of luxury, it is a place full of friends and people who share her regional identity. Unlike Kathleen, she does not need to actually go to New York to define her "down home."

Both Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald use the urban and American fantasy projections of their characters to define their regions through opposition to what they are not. Turtle Valley is as much itself because of its distance from Ginger Rogers, Rita Hayworth and cities like Vancouver as it is because of its cartographic position and the kinds of things that will grow there. Similarly, Cape Breton Island owes its identity in MacDonald's novel as much to the stars on the silver screen the Piper girls idolize and to New York City, both distant and distinct from New Waterford, as it does to the shape of Shore Road or to the society that revolves around the mouths of coal pits. The authors thus look beyond their regions in order to view them better, thereby giving their readers cultural and historical reference points with which to contextualize the rural spaces their characters inhabit.
Conclusion

I read *The Cure for Death by Lightning* and *Fall on Your Knees* in the summer of 1998. I had been out of the country the year before and had consequently missed the hype that surrounded their publications. In fact, I came upon them merely by chance. My mother called me from Vancouver Island to tell me about *Cure*, which her book club had recently read, and a friend had thrust her copy of *Fall* into my hands over lunch when she realised (with no small expression of horror) that I had not yet read it. I was working at the time, not yet lured back into the gilded halls of academia, and so had a weekends and evenings to myself.

I read the novels back to back, and for the week it took to read them I was unavailable to the world. Within pages of each novel I felt the urge to unplug my phone. The only region that mattered to me was the immediate region of my bed. The only food I ate was popcorn. It was wonderful. Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald offered me access to spaces I had never known before, earning my belief in their fictions because of their deliberately tangible descriptions of Cape Breton and Turtle Valley. I appreciated their layering of cultures within their regions, and how that layering was different from that of the regions in which I had lived. When I emerged from my apartment, I sought out the foods of Beth Weeks and Materia Piper, as if eating cherries and *tabouleh* could help me get inside the heads of these fictional phantoms. I coaxed a friend with a VCR to rent a Ginger Rogers movie with me, and tried to picture the starlet in Promise, sparkling in black and white against the dirt red dust of the town's only street. I thought about New Waterford and Turtle Valley -- intimate, intriguing, and irretrievable -- and compared them to my own region -- urban, anonymous and contemporary.

I enjoyed *Fall* and *Cure* for the same reasons most reviewers did. Anderson-Dargatz and MacDonald convinced me to read beyond my skepticism into regions I found both credible and compelling. The events which occur in the narratives are
sometimes atrocious, sometimes attractive, and often far-fetched. Readers accept the unlikely, however, because of the detailed attention the authors give to their temporal and physical spaces. They give us enough of regional truth to merit our belief in unrealities.
Works Cited


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