

COUNTER-DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN  
FIRST-WORLD MIGRANT WRITING

by

PETRA FACHINGER

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Department of Comparative literature

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date Oct. 18, 1993

## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers an analytical discussion of contemporary fictional and autobiographical narratives by migrants who write in a language other than their mother tongue and/or grew up in a bilingual environment. While not all literature by ethnic minority writers is necessarily concerned with the experience of growing up in or living between cultures, the present study deals with those writers whose texts self-reflexively and counter-discursively seek to define and express individual identity at the interface of two or more cultures. The writers discussed not only move spatially between places but also shift emotionally and intellectually between different languages and cultures as well as literary texts from these cultures. The focus is on language and the literary text itself as it becomes the site for an interaction of cultural codes. The methodology adopted draws eclectically on theories which explore "the space between" from anthropological, linguistic, post-colonial and feminist perspectives.

The thesis examines different textual paradigms of countering dominant discourses as found in ten representative texts from Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States which have been chosen to cover a range of cultural experience. The texts discussed are: Angelika Fremd's Heartland and Josef Vondra's Paul Zwilling; Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth, Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal and Rachna Mara's Of Customs and Excise; Franco Biondi's Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle

and Akif Pirinççi's Tränen sind immer das Ende: Roman; Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street, Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language and Richard Rodriguez' Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez. It is shown that self-reflexive negotiation of Self and Other in the text takes different forms depending on the writer's ethnic and racial background, his/her gender and the adopted country's social and political attitudes toward the newcomer. Re-writing, however, which is understood as an intentional, political dialogue with specific texts, is a recurrent counter-discursive strategy in the texts discussed. Finally, the thesis argues that the re-writing of traditional literary genres, such as Novelle, short story cycle, autobiography, Bildungsroman and quest novel, rather than of a particular text, as in other post-colonial contexts, is the most prevalent form of "writing back" in migrant literature. Texts written by migrants not only creatively revise literary conventions, challenge the concept of "national literature" and undermine canonically established categories, but also defeat attempts to approach a text with a single "appropriate" theory to reveal the strategies and the effects of cultural hybridity.



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for Patrick  
my grandmother  
and Hildegard von Bingen

## INTRODUCTION

What Is in a Name?

My father's name was originally Katsuji Uyemura. Then Thomas Katsuji Uyemura. Then Tom Katsuji Mura. Then Tom K. Mura. (David Mura, Turning Japanese)

The terms "ethnic," "multicultural" and "migrant" writing are often used interchangeably in literary criticism dealing with works by authors outside the ethnic mainstream of established literary traditions. In Australian literary criticism "migrant" is the favoured term.<sup>1</sup> The Bicentennial celebrations of 1988 promoted research on "ethnic" literatures and drew attention to the lack of a critical vocabulary suitable to describe a literature written by Australian authors from non-Anglo-Celtic cultures. But in spite of the critical awareness in Australia of the inadequacy of the current terminology, "migrant" is often used as meaning non-Anglo-Celtic writing so that third-generation Australian writers with an "ethnic" surname are often considered "migrants."<sup>2</sup> German critics have been using the term Migrantenliteratur rather than Gastarbeiterliteratur for the last ten years when referring to the literature written by those not born in the country since

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<sup>1</sup> The main proponent of the term "migrant" over "multicultural" and the major theorist of migrant literature in Australia is Sneja Gunew. See, for example, Striking Chords (1992) edited by Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley, a critical reader on migrant literature.

<sup>2</sup> See Sneja Gunew, "PMT (Post modernist tensions): Reading for (multi)cultural difference" in Striking Chords.

they found that the latter term was not only derogatory but also misrepresentative.<sup>3</sup> Some of the authors whose works have been designated as Gastarbeiterliteratur were writing even when they lived in their native countries, others went to Germany in order to continue their education, and some came from countries such as Iran and Syria which are not countries from which guest workers were recruited. The literature written in German by members of the second generation (e.g. Dante Andrea Franzetti and Carmine Abate), however, is often also indiscriminately referred to as Migrantenliteratur. In the United States the most common term for literature written by those who are not members of the dominant ethnic group is "multicultural" which is currently given preference over "multi-ethnic" and "polyethnic." This term is mostly used in an inclusive fashion so that recent American anthologies of multicultural literature include not only Native American and black writers but also, for example, the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes.<sup>4</sup> The introduction to The Before Columbus Foundation Fiction Anthology (1992) claims: "'Multicultural' is not a description of a category of American writing--it is a definition of all American writing." The Before

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<sup>3</sup> See Helmut Kreuzer, "Gastarbeiter-Literatur, Ausländer-Literatur, Migranten-Literatur? Zur Einführung," Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik 56 (1984): 7-11.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the Graywolf Press bestseller Multi-Cultural Literacy. Ed. Rick Simonson and Scott Walker. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1988.

Columbus Foundation<sup>5</sup> believes that "the ingredients of America's 'melting pot' are not only distinct, but integral to the unique constitution of American culture--the whole comprises the parts. There are no outsiders" (xi-xii). Those involved with the Foundation believe that "mainstream" is no longer a valid metaphor for a literature that, in demographic terms, is increasingly being written by minorities. Co-editor Ishmael Reed suggests dispensing with notions of "mainstream" and "minority literature"; instead one should speak of the "ocean of American literature."<sup>6</sup> According to the Before Columbus Foundation, ethnic hyphenization as in African-American, Asian-American and Hispanic-American reduces these literatures to "subculture status" (xiii). Werner Sollors argues along similar lines in Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture (1986) when he claims that any partitioning of American literature along ethnic lines hinders the development of a unified national culture. Sollors and other representatives of the so-called "Ethnicity School," such as Mary Dearborn and William

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<sup>5</sup> The Before Columbus Society was founded by Ishmael Reed in 1976 and has been working to redefine notions of mainstream American literature. The Before Columbus Review is its quarterly publication. The two-volume anthology of multicultural fiction and poetry, published in 1992, was culled from the American Books Awards 1980-1990 which the foundation has sponsored since 1980. Ishmael Reed, Rudolfo Anaya, Shawn Wong, Kathryn Trueblood, Bob Callahan and Gundars Strads were, among others, part of the foundation's Board of Directors in 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Reed's notions are actually reminiscent of how Herman Melville has his narrator in Redburn (1849) describe the American people: "...our blood is as the blood of the Amazon, made up of a thousand noble currents all pouring into one. We are not a nation so much as a world..." (216).

Boelhower,<sup>7</sup> have been criticized for subsuming race under ethnicity.<sup>8</sup> According to Alan Wald, the "Ethnicity School" presents one of the two oppositional critical views on ethnicity employing alternative critical methodologies which have developed in the last two decades in the United States. What he calls the "'proponents of class, gender and race methodology'" (22-23) represented by critics such as Henry Louis Gates, Ramón Saldivar and Houston Baker, among others, particularly stress the importance of distinction that theories of culture have to make between European immigrant groups and internally colonized peoples of colour. The prejudice and oppression to which immigrants from Italy or Ireland have been exposed differs, so these critics argue, in degree and in kind from the oppression suffered by African-, Asian-and Latino-Americans.

In Canada, the argument of critics such as Linda Hutcheon against the use of "ethnic" in favour of "multicultural" is that "ethnic" is "never free of relations of power and value" (Other Solitudes 2). Linda Hutcheon and other critics of multicultural literature in Canada, however, use the term "multicultural" in quite a different way from The Before Columbus Foundation. Linda Hutcheon includes in her anthology Other Solitudes: Canadian

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<sup>7</sup> See Alan Wald, "Theorizing Cultural Difference: A Critique of the 'Ethnicity School,'" MELUS 14.2 (1987): 22-33.

<sup>8</sup> In Beyond Ethnicity Sollors explains: "I have here sided with Abramson's universalist interpretation according to which ethnicity includes dominant groups in which race, while sometimes facilitating external identification, is merely one aspect of ethnicity" (36).



Multicultural Fictions (1990) only those writers who arrived in Canada from somewhere else. Some other Canadian critics, among them Ven Begamudré and Lambert Tassinariu, argue that "multicultural" as a concept fails since it glosses over the differences between cultures. They prefer the term "transcultural" which they believe emphasizes "the dynamic potential of cultural diversity" (Kulyk Keefer 14).<sup>9</sup>

I am opting for the term "migrant," since, when taken literally, it refers only to those writers who, for economic or circumstantial reasons, exchanged one cultural context for another. Unlike "multicultural," in some American critics' sense of the word, it therefore excludes writers such as Toni Morrison, Cynthia Ozick, N. Scott Momaday, Sally Morgan, Mudrooroo Narogin, and Lee Maracle, to name but a few, who can be considered multicultural, from a "beyond-ethnicity" perspective on multiculturalism, but not as migrant writers. My reasons, however, for preferring "migrant" over "multicultural" or "transcultural" are not merely pragmatic.

### The Corpus

... to be Chinese-American is not the same thing as being Chinese in America. In this sense there is no role model for becoming Chinese in America. It is a matter of finding a voice or style that does not violate one's several

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<sup>9</sup> See Janice Kulyk Keefer's article "From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope: Out of the Multicultural Past Comes a Vision of a Transcultural Future," Books in Canada September 1991: 13-16.

components of identity. (Michael M. J. Fischer 196)

Immigration is a form of abjection. It is a desire for a yet unknown object, a desire that kills its subject. I sit beside myself in everyday life. I look over my shoulder when I write. I said that I'm at home here. Yes, but I don't feel at home with myself. My immigrant condition affords me the (perverse?) pleasure of a doubled view. My language is the window that looks onto my home and into my homelessness. My language knows no boundaries. It does not express the geography that puts labels on writing, speech, thought. (Smaro Kamboureli, in the second person)

I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle. (Richard Rodriguez, Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez)

Like any corpus, mine is eclectic. Because I am interested in paradigms of counter-discursive strategies, I have chosen to concentrate on a limited number of texts rather than presenting a broad survey. I am looking at contemporary non-canonized fictional and autobiographical narratives, the earliest being Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal (1964), the most recent Rachna Mara's Of Customs and Excise (1991), written by migrants in a language other than their mother tongue and by writers having grown up in a bilingual environment. The majority of the five female and the five male authors I am dealing with are European immigrants, the rest are people of colour who are members of internally colonized minority groups or who were born in ex-colonies. I am including texts from four different national contexts: Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States. All four countries have culturally diverse societies. Germany differs from the other three countries in that children born to foreigners in Germany have no claim to citizenship. Post-

colonial criticism refers to Australia and Canada as post-colonial (invader/settler) countries. The United States is often no longer recognized as such because of its economically and politically hegemonic position. But while the authors of The Empire Writes Back argue that American literature is post-colonial in the sense that it "emerged out of the experience of colonization" (2), Gayatri Spivak claims that the term "post-colonial" has been used as a label for so many different contexts that it is left drained of all political meaning. She believes that the complex and diverse political and economic relationships between countries and between different groups within individual societies could more adequately be described as "neocolonial" (Spivak 224). And the stream of immigrants from Latin American, Asian and African countries, in particular, to the United States has never stopped. According to Arthur M. Schlesinger, more immigrants arrived in the United States during the 1980s than in any decade since the 1920s and are responsible for a third of population growth (Schlesinger 120).

Forms of neo-colonialism exist everywhere today within Western societies with a large immigrant population from poorer countries. According to Anne McClintock, "internal colonization" occurs when the group in power treats another group or region within the country as it might an overseas colony (88). Aboriginal peoples everywhere in the New World have been subjected to colonization as well as the African-Americans and Mexican-Americans in the United States. In Germany, people from

southern European countries, which were sources of cheap labour in the nineteen sixties and seventies, have also been undergoing forms of internal colonization. Italian and Turkish migrants, for example, are subjected to mainstream othering in Germany in a way comparable to that of migrants from ex-colonies in the New World. The experience of a German or Italian writing in Canada or Australia, or that of an Italian living in Germany, is different from that of an American writing in France or that of a German writing in Italy. In her autobiography Slow Fire (1992) Susan Neiman, a Jewish-American author, describes the preconceptions about ethnicity and race she encountered during her stay in Berlin. When looking for an apartment Neiman was discouraged by the restrictive "No Foreigners" in the newspaper advertisements only to be told that she was not a "foreigner" but part of the "occupation" (46). She later came to the conclusion that "foreigner" in Germany usually means "Turk."<sup>10</sup> The fact that the texts I am discussing were written out of post-colonial and/or neo-colonial experience is an essential condition of their textuality.

The marginalization of an "ethnic" group is often bound with the issue of class difference. The fact that poverty and lack of education, in particular, lead to discrimination finds

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<sup>10</sup> This was particularly true of working class Turks speaking only broken German in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, however, with more than half a million refugees from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe seeking asylum--a number which motivated the government to tighten asylum laws on July 1, 1993--Neiman's observation has become outdated.

expression in the texts written by migrants from so-called guestworker countries in Germany (Franco Biondi, Akif Pirinççi) and by Chicano/Chicana writers (Richard Rodriguez, Sandra Cisneros) in the United States. There is a danger, however, of turning the condition of the underprivileged into issues of culture. On the other hand, one often encounters the implicit assumption that the majority of migrants is working-class. Half of the writers with whom I am concerned are academics who still are or have been closely associated with academic institutions.

Although my selection of authors has been determined on biographical grounds--with the exception of the Chicano/Chicana writers all of the authors whose works I am discussing were not born in the countries where they are living--I emphasize the psychological and epistemological rather than sociological significations of the term "migrant." A "migrant" writer is a writer who feels simultaneously at home and not at home in two cultures and two languages, an experience which endows him/her with a double vision and a bicultural sensibility and imagination. Migrant writers are people who not only literally move between two geographical places but also shift emotionally and intellectually between different languages and cultures and texts from these cultures. The focus of my thesis is on language and the literary text itself as it becomes the site for an interaction of cultural codes.

The majority of the writers whose works I am discussing are migrants moving into another so-called First-World culture.

This bias is created first of all by my own experience as a European migrant living in Canada. Furthermore, the Eurocentric nature of my academic training makes me more sensitive to forms of self-reflexive alterity in the works of writers with a similar cultural background than to those in the works of writers with a cultural background that differs from mine. My study is not comparative in the sense that it strives to arrive at any general conclusions about the literatures, mainstream or migrant, written in these countries. It is comparative in the sense that I am making the assumption that texts written by migrants have certain characteristics in common, since all migrants share a range of comparable cultural experiences. Despite their obvious differences, the texts written by migrants are also closely related. My focus is on the migrant experience itself and its manifestation as an encounter between different modes of discourse. In order not to gloss over the cultural differences, however, it is necessary to consider the cultural contexts against which the writing has been produced. Angelika Fremd's Heartland and Josef Vondra's Paul Zwilling, for instance, are characterized by their Australianness in their reproduction of cultural values and belief systems as well as of literary conventions and themes, while Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth, Rachna Mara's Of Customs and Excise and Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal share ideological and literary characteristics that make them Canadian.

There has been a proliferation of so-called ethnic or

multicultural writings in all four countries within the last ten years. The growing interest in autobiographical and fictional accounts of migrant lives is the result of increasing migration worldwide in the wake of political and economic developments which have been turning the world into a "global village." Kateryna O. Longley refers to migrants as constituting the "Fifth World": "The Fifth World consists of resettled people who have lost their cultural and linguistic bases. They have in common the problem of finding a niche and participating in a new dominant culture without having the basic tools that make this possible--fluency of language and competence with 'the system' in its day-to-day workings..." (22-23). The majority of "ethnic" or "multicultural" texts, however, is not concerned with the experience of growing up in or living between cultures. I am only interested in those texts written by migrants which self-reflexively negotiate individual identity at the interface of two or more cultures.<sup>11</sup> It remains to be asked whether or not the self-reflexive negotiation of Self and Other assumes different forms in texts written by migrants who are not of European/Western descent. The tension between the active process of acculturation and the individual's identification with

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<sup>11</sup> In an interesting discussion of self-reflexivity in "ethnic" texts Eli Mandel defines a work of ethnic literature as "existing at an interface of two cultures, a form concerned to define itself, its voice, in the dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self-creation, transformation, and identities" ("The Ethnic Voice in Canadian Writing," Figures in a Ground: Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of Sheila Watson, ed. Diane Bessai and David Jackel (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978) 274.

his/her "ethnic" community is expressed differently by visible minority writers. The pressure to assimilate, many of their works imply, is much stronger on visible minority groups than on white European "ethnic" groups. Writers from the ex-colonies often focus on this pressure, the loss of their peoples' sense of history in the new country and their own need to keep in touch with their cultural heritage. In Canada, for instance, most of the contemporary South Asian<sup>12</sup> prose writing in English by authors such as Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, Saros Cowasjee and Neil Bissoondath<sup>13</sup> is not set in Canada. In the United States of America and Canada, writers of Chinese descent such as Maxine Hong Kingston in The Woman Warrior, Amy Tan in The Joy Luck Club and The Kitchen God's Wife and Sky Lee in Disappearing Moon Cafe write about their female relatives' lives in China before emigration and their difficulties of adjusting to the new culture rather than their own. The absence of a more sustained reflection on the predicament of the individual in these texts can be partly explained by the fact that Chinese mass immigration to North America predates that of other ethnic groups. Today most writers of Chinese background are third generation and might not experience otherness as acutely as someone who has immigrated recently or might not be able to

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<sup>12</sup> I am using the term "South Asian" to denote migrants from the Indian sub-continent, i.e. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, or those who have ancestral links with those countries.

<sup>13</sup> Although this is not the case with his latest novel, The Innocence of Age (1992).



explain it.

Furthermore, I am excluding canonized authors, that is those who have been recognized writers for years and whose works have been published by major publishing houses to international acclaim. These authors include second-generation writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan and Joy Kogawa and first-generation writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and Michael Ondaatje. Although Mukherjee in Jasmine (1989) and Ondaatje in Running in the Family (1982) employ similar self-reflexive strategies as the writers I am discussing, the first two authors' displacement,<sup>14</sup> is of a different kind. Coming to terms with their own ethnicity is not an immediate subject in their fiction. But more importantly, neither Mukherjee's nor Ondaatje's texts reveal the anxiety over the impossibility of translation from one language to another characteristic of the texts I am dealing with.

I want to show that, in spite of their different cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Suwanda H.J. Sugunasiri argues that Michael Ondaatje "experienced no displacement" (64) and Arun Mukherjee claims that he "... does not write about his otherness. Nor does he write about the otherness of the Canadian society for him" (33). Ondaatje's reply to Linda Hutcheon's question in an interview in Other Solitudes if he "feels" like a Sri Lankan Canadian writer ironically confirms Sugunasiri's and Mukherjee's claims. Ondaatje says he "feels" that he "has been allowed the migrant's double perspective, in the way, say, someone like Gertrude Stein was 're-focused' by Paris" (197). In an unpublished paper with the title "Jasmine, the Sweet Scent of Exile", Anu Aneja criticized Mukherjee for trying to please a white middle-class audience and for thus giving up her oppositional position on the margins to turn into a "cosmopolitan" writer and Emmanuel S. Nelson expresses his disappointment with the "superficial" "analysis of racism" in Mukherjee's Darkness (Nelson 57-58).

contexts, the texts I have chosen share certain features with regard to their subject matter, their language, their modes and, above all, their discursive strategies. Certain literary genres such as autobiography, the Bildungsroman and the quest novel are built on self-reflexivity, "the duplicities of self-creation" (Mandel) within society, and provide challenging paradigms for the representation of migrant experience. All three forms describe quests for self-awareness and socialization processes. In migrant writing the focus is on the protagonist's acculturation, the transformation from cultural outsider to "insider" or of his/her inability or refusal to become part of the dominant group. Since the educational system has assumed such a dominant role in an individual's socialization and acculturation, institutional education is a topic in most of the texts I am considering.

Unlike Shakespeare's Caliban who is forced to learn Prospero's language, the migrant writer lets his/her own tongue disrupt the flow of the dominant language. Migrant writing is bilingual in a sense that the Other language is always present. This presence manifests itself in the intrusion of words from the authors' (m)other tongues. Sometimes the words are left untranslated, sometimes a translation is offered in parenthesis. Bilingualism also expresses itself in form of intentional or unintentional interference, stylistic over-determination, code-switching, neologism and defamiliarization. On the narrative level, the bicultural imagination leaves its imprint in doubling

techniques, privileging of juxtaposition over progressive narrative strategies, intertextuality, transgression and hybridization of genres. These strategies are oppositional because they undermine fixity and promote difference. The writers I am dealing with re-write works or literary conventions of their cultural background and/or that of their adopted country. They are bricoleurs, using, in Claude Lévi-Strauss' words, the means at hand in an attempt to draw attention to the relativity of cultural norms and to lay open the cultural constructedness of identity.<sup>15</sup>

#### Counter-Discourse and Re-writing

In every language, moreover, discourse and syntax supply indispensable means of supplementing deficiencies of vocabulary. (Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind)

Every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its immediate past. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation. Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself. (M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," 421)

Along with the authors of The Empire Writes Back, Diana Brydon defines "post-colonial" as "the lingering legacy of the imperial/colonial relation" (Brydon, "The Myths That Write Us:

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<sup>15</sup> See the first chapter in Claude Lévi-Strauss' The Savage Mind (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972).

Decolonising the Mind" 4). In most post-colonial criticism, the term post-colonial is used to designate a literature produced in the former colonies that assumes a position of resistance to the metropolis. Many post-colonial critics are interested in the literary strategies which post-colonial writers employ to express these relations. "Counter-discursive strategies," as Helen Tiffin, among others, refers to these oppositional strategies subverting the dominant discourse (Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse"),<sup>16</sup> take on different forms, such as magic realism<sup>17</sup> and post-colonial allegory.<sup>18</sup> Re-writing is another such strategy. A frequent strategy adopted in "writing back to the empire" consists in the re-writing of a specific canonical work. Just as Jean Rhys in Wide Sargasso Sea and Bharati Mukherjee in Jasmine "write back" to Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, Caterina Edwards re-writes Madame Bovary in her novella "Becoming Emma." The three canonical works which have been re-written over and over again

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<sup>16</sup> In "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse" Tiffin adopts the concept from Richard Terdiman's Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> See Tiffin "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse."

<sup>18</sup> See Stephen Slemon, "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing," Kunapipi 9.3 (1987): 1-16.

by those at the margins are Shakespeare's The Tempest<sup>19</sup>, Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe<sup>20</sup> and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness.<sup>21</sup> Re-writing, that is exposing the assumptions that underlie the dominant discourse and "dis/mantling" them (Tiffin 23), can also limit itself to a certain aspect, element or idea of a canonical text, or the particular ideology that is espoused by it. Re-writing is a counter-discursive strategy to which various kinds of minority groups have resorted. Hélène Cixous, among other feminist critics, has underlined the importance of women's re-writings of patriarchal myths. Over the last few decades, feminist writers and critics have, for example, been re-writing fairy tales, mythologies and religious texts from their own points of view. The migrant writers whose works I am discussing also engage in various forms of re-writing. One type

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, George Lamming's The Pleasures of Exile (1960), Aimé Césaire's Une Tempête: Adaptation De "La tempête" De Shakespeare Pour Un Théâtre Nègre (1969), Fernández Retamar's Caliban (1972), Max Dorsinville, Caliban Without Prospero: Essays on Quebec and Black Literature (1974). For criticism on re-writings of The Tempest see Elaine Showalter's "Miranda's Story" in her book Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing, Peter Erickson's Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves, Diana Brydon's "Re-writing The Tempest," Laura Donaldson's "The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading" and Chantal Zabus' "A Calibanic Tempest in Anglophone and Francophone New World Writing."

<sup>20</sup> Michel Tournier's Vendredi ou Les Limbes Du Pacifique (1967), Samuel Selvon's Moses Ascending (1975) and J.M. Coetzee's Foe (1986) are the most widely discussed re-writings of Robinson Crusoe.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Wilson Harris' Heartland (1964), James Ngugi's The River Between (1965), Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North (1970) and Audrey Thomas' Blown Figures (1974).

of re-writing, however, seems to predominate in these texts: the re-writing of genre.

### Migrant Writing and Comparative Literature

...when Europeans come together to discuss their various national literatures, they are seen as being able to communicate coherently across linguistic barriers, and such coherence is not only encouraged in conferences but even institutionalized in the form of comparative literature departments in various universities across the country; in contrast, when ethnic minorities and Third World peoples want to have similar discussions, their dialogue is represented, according to the ideology of humanism, as incoherent babble, even though they propose to use a single dominant European language for this purpose. (Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd 3-4)

Comparative Literature today has often to contend with the criticism of those working within the field of Commonwealth/Post-Colonial Literary Studies. In search of a methodology for the "comparison" of the new literatures in English, post-colonial critics have looked to the discipline, which also "compares" literatures, for a suitable methodology and found it guilty of "political conservatism" (Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse" 19). Comparative Literature has been criticized above all for its Eurocentrism, its ideal of universality and its lack of self-reflexivity. Within the last decade, however, Comparative Literature has moved away from the rigid and isolated pursuit of some of its traditional (Eurocentric) areas of study: the study of themes, genres, literary movements and influence/interrelation. In the introduction to The Comparative Perspective on Literature:

Approaches to Theory and Practice (1988), one of the more recent attempts by Western literary comparatists to redefine their discipline, Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes conclude: "Comparative Literature today seems to be less a set of practices (e.g., comparing texts in different languages, comparing literary and 'nonliterary' texts, comparing literature and the other arts) and more a shared perspective that sees literary activity as involved in a complex web of cultural relations." (11) In recent years the objective of many conferences organized by Comparative Literature Departments and Programmes has been to "decolonise" Comparative Literature.

One would think that a discipline which has no stable canon and is interested in cultural relations would eagerly embrace the study of emerging and minority literatures despite the many rules which have been imposed on it by white male critics since its inception. Diana Brydon points out that a main point of disagreement between post-colonial critics and literary comparatists "begins with their definitions of what constitutes a national literature" (Brydon, "Post-Colonial Discourse/Post-Colonial Practice: Re-siting The Tempest 7). She goes on to quote Frank Warnke<sup>22</sup> who claims that Comparative Literature uses the term "national literature" to designate "not the literature produced by citizens of a given nation-state but rather the literature of a given language" (Warnke 48, footnote 1). The

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<sup>22</sup> Warnke's essay is included in Koelb and Noakes' critical anthology.

preference traditional Comparative Literature has given to language over political borders in determining what constitutes a national literature is reflected in the Comparative Literature curricula of North-American universities. In most North American universities it would, for instance, not be legitimate for a Ph.D. student in Comparative Literature to write a thesis on Australian, American and Anglo-Canadian poetry. As Brydon points out, "such an approach [as Warnke's] actively obstructs understanding of the differences of post-colonial englishes and their literatures" and unjustly privileges language over other cultural factors (7).

In "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" Homi Bhabha argues that today the nation is written by those who occupy the margins, that is, people of colour, women and migrants. Migrants, who are usually at home in (at least) two languages and cultures, challenge the concept of "national literature." Does Akif Pirinççi who was born in Turkey and writes in German participate in Germany's or Turkey's national literature? Is Henry Kreisel an Austrian or Canadian author? And is Sandra Cisneros a Chicana, Mexican or American writer? Whereas German literary critics, for instance, are still debating the national literary affiliation of migrant writers in Germany,<sup>23</sup> Canadian literary critics are unanimous in welcoming Henry Kreisel, for example, into the Canadian canon. Sandra

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<sup>23</sup> See Harald Weinrich, "Um eine deutsche Literatur von außen bittend," Merkur 37.8 (1983):911-20.



Cisneros' public identity as American writer, on the other hand, is at odds with her personal and political identity as a Chicana. According to Sneja Gunew and K. O. Longley, the majority of texts written by migrant writers in Australia is not considered to be part of institutionalized Australian Literature (introduction to Striking Chords).<sup>24</sup> Migrant writers also upset the boundaries of literature departments. Should Richard Rodriguez' autobiography, for instance, be taught in an English Department, in American or Hispanic Studies or a Department of Chicano Studies?

Furthermore, the majority of texts written by migrants resists translation into another language. Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street, for instance, which reproduces in English the syntactic and idiomatic qualities of Spanish, would lose part of its oppositional thrust when translated into French, Hindi or Japanese. The same holds for Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle in which Franco Biondi works creatively with the German language to write, as he puts it, against its foreignness. Not only do these texts resist translation, but they also blur the borders of genre.

#### Celebrating the Space Between

He spoke of his theory with which he was trying to

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<sup>24</sup> See also Con Castan, "Ethnic Australian Writing. Is It Really Australian Literature?" Outrider 3.2 (1986): 64-79.

revolutionise the attitude of the country to its past. He claimed that in order to understand history, one needed a type of vision that only people placed at the crossroads could provide. That is, people who lived between cultures, who were forced to live double lives, belonging to no group, and these he called 'the people in between.' This vision, he maintained, was necessary to the alchemy of cultural understanding. (Antigone Kefala, The Island)

To be a critic of ethnic literature is, indeed, first and foremost, to learn about position, to be aware that one speaks from some point or some status, hence to become more careful about and with theory. (Francesco Loriggio 576)

The theoretical approach to migrant literature needs to be eclectic. There is no single literary theory that can adequately describe the strategies of a crosscultural endeavour that manifests itself in the interaction of discursive strategies. There are various theorists who have been exploring the "space between" from different angles. Anthropologist Victor Turner, adopting Arnold van Gennep's model, speaks of the phase between "separation" and "reaggregation" in rites of passage as "liminal." The most important properties of this intermediate phase are transgression of boundaries, a special liminal vocabulary where "normal word-order may be reversed or even randomly scrambled" and paradox, "or being both this and that" ("Variations on a Theme of Liminality" 37). The liminal is the realm of cultural creativity and change in which the individual is freed from society's structures to enter "communitas," an "anti-structural" mode, a word Turner coined to designate "dissolution of normative social structure" (60 "Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, And Ritual"). Liminality is a phase of

social transition, "a sort of social limbo" (57), a state of "topsy-turvidom" with its own rules and structures.

Another theorist acutely aware of the interdependence of linguistic and social constraints is Mikhail M. Bakhtin. He argues that there exist two counter tendencies within any language system. One tendency is toward monoglossia, a tendency toward "linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language" (The Dialogic Imagination 270), the other toward heteroglossia through which "the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work" and "the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (272) thus revealing the dialogic nature of language. The greater the rift between the forces of "official" and "unofficial" language is, the harder it is for unofficial speech to pass into dominant discourse. Heteroglossia operates in all utterance and is responsible for the generation of "new socially typifying 'languages'" (291). This heteroglossic condition of language brings forth hybridization. According to Bakhtin, hybridization, the "mixing of two languages within the boundaries of a single utterance" (358) is a deliberate "artistic device" in the novel, while "unconscious hybridization is one of the most important modes in the ... evolution of all languages" (358). Both "unconscious" hybridization and hybridization as a stylistic and narrative strategy in migrant literature are the subject of my thesis. For the migrant a word or phrase exists simultaneously within at

least two languages and two cultural systems. When a "bilingual" migrant writes in the language of the dominant group the words become "double-voiced," and thus potentially subversive in that any attempt to fix meaning is automatically undermined.

Re-writings, or re-accentuations in Bakhtin's words, are celebrations of Bakhtin's heteroglossia and Turner's "anti-structural" mode. The works I am discussing are liminal in that they transgress genres and linguistic boundaries. The migrant writer's position is paradoxical in that he/she is writing from the margins of society but has the imaginative space of two cultures at his/her disposal. This spatial dialectic expresses itself in the location of the narrative between two (or more) places: a German town and a Mediterranean village in Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle, Cologne and a Turkish village in Tränen sind immer das Ende: Roman, Chicago and a Mexican village in The House on Mango Street, India, Canada and England in Of Customs and Excise, Cracow, Vancouver and New York in Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language, Sacramento and Mexico in Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez, Berlin and a small Australian town in Heartland, Venice and Edmonton in The Lion's Mouth, Vienna and Melbourne in Paul Zwillling and Vienna and Edmonton in The Betrayal. The two (or more) places become geographical tropes expressing the differences between the cultures. In travel literature, the journey to a foreign country can also be described as a transitional phase with

liminal features.<sup>25</sup> Since the phases of "separation" from society and "reaggregation" into society are very different experiences in the case of migration and travel, the liminal phase is also characterized by a different kind of dialectic between Self and Other. This dialectic finds expression in its particular relationship to space. Unlike the traveller who remains more or less outside the other culture, the migrant--even if he/she refuses to become a member of the other society--is still a part of it. The bicultural imagination not only triangulates between here and there in a desire for "home," but finds expression also in a proliferation of liminal spaces such as confining hotel rooms or apartments, boats, attics, national borders, boundaries between neighbourhoods, gardens, windows, doors and thresholds, the opposition between inside and outside, private and public space. In his essay "Of Other Spaces" Michel Foucault claims: "[W]e are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" (22). The concept of space gives way to the concept of "site," which "is defined by relations of proximity between points" (23). Foucault uses the term heterotopia to designate "counter-sites" in which the sites within a culture "are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (24). Heterotopia is a cultural space within society which "is capable

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<sup>25</sup> See Norma J. Bishop, "Liminal Space in Travellers' Tales: Historical and Fictional Passages," diss., The Pennsylvania State U, 1986.

of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (25). Furthermore, heterotopias begin "to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (26). Heterotopia can contribute to an understanding of the tensions between here and there and now and then in migrant literature. The bicultural imagination juxtaposes spaces and brings texts and literary conventions from different cultures together and challenges the traditional order of things by placing texts and conventions into new contexts thereby inverting their meaning.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their critical work on Franz Kafka pose the question: "How many people today live in a language that is not their own?" (19). These critics refer to a literature as "minor" when it is being forced into a position of otherness on account of its non-territorial status. They assert that minority literature is characterized by three features: "a high coefficient of deterritorialization" in its language, the fact that "everything in [it] is political" and "that in it everything takes on a collective value (16-17). In the migrant's language the word is wrenched from its referent and the signifier cut off from the signified. Deterritorialized language, however, does not only express alienation but also bears the potential for creation and innovation. If somebody is writing from the margins, Deleuze and Guattari claim, "this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for

another consciousness and another sensibility" (17). The two authors' emphasis on the "collective value" of minority literature and the possibility of alternative community comes close to Turner's notion of liminal communitas with its anti-structural potential of "dissolution of normative social structure" ("Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, And Ritual" 60) and to "generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behavior of those in mainstream social and political roles" (65).

Deleuze and Guattari in their essay closely link the question of levels of language with the concept of territorialization. They borrow the concept of tetraglossia from French linguist Henri Gobard who differentiates between four levels of language at work in any society: vernacular or maternal language belonging to a rural community, the territorial language of "here"; vehicular language, language of the city and of bureaucracy, the language of first deterritorialization, the language that is "everywhere"; referential language, the language of meaning and culture which brings about cultural reterritorialization, the language which is "over there"; and mythic language, the language of religious or spiritual reterritorialization, the language of the "beyond" (Deleuze and Guattari 23). Gobard's sociolinguistic model shows that translatability is, above all, the property of the vehicular language--which Bakhtin refers to as "official"

language--, where the emphasis is on content and not on expression. The two languages, English and German, which serve the writers I am discussing as "vehicular" and "referential" languages, have a special status as the language of culture.

For migrants from southern Europe, for instance, German is a language of power because of Germany's economic hegemony. German is also the lingua franca which migrants with different mother tongues use to communicate with each other. At the same time German has, because of its abuse during the Nazi regime, a peculiar history among European languages, a history which George Steiner claims made the German language go "dead" (Steiner 96) and which forced Henry Kreisel to renounce it as his referential language. Franco Biondi's concept of writing in opposition to the foreignness in the language implies a manipulation of the language in a way that offers him possibilities of reterritorialization. English has been subjected to deterritorialization in its function as the international language of business and the language of American multinationals. In that and other respects American English differs from Australian and Canadian English which in Robert Kroetsch's words can be called "mandarin" English (Kroetsch, "The American Writer and the American Literary Tradition" 11). When Henry Kreisel talks about his decision to abandon German for English it becomes clear that he means British English and consequently he turned to British authors for guidance during his first years in Canada. In other words, when a migrant writer



in Australia or Canada writes in English, he/she decides to contribute to a "minor" literature--a literature "which a minority constructs within a major language" (Deleuze 16)--within a literature that is already written in a "minor" language. On the other hand, when a Chicano/Chicana opts for using English as his/her referential language, he/she chooses the language of the colonizer. Sandra Cisneros, for instance, deterritorializes English by reproducing in English the syntax and idiomatic qualities of the Spanish language. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization and reterritorialization is useful as a theoretical framework particularly in the case of writers who are part of mass immigrations or mass labour exchanges from one country to another as are migrants from southern Europe and the Chicanos/Chicanas in the United States.

In Borderlands/La Frontera (1987) Chicana critic and writer Gloria Anzaldúa gives voice to "the new mestiza"<sup>26</sup> who is caught in the interstices between the various cultures she inhabits. Living in the "borderlands" between the American and Mexican worlds she

copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode--nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that West Indian poet Lorna Goodison uses the persona of the "mulatta" in I Am Becoming My Mother (1986) to re-write patriarchal mythology.

contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (79)

"Borderlands" becomes a metaphor for that liminal space of "infinite possibility," paradox and oppositional practice: "Los atravesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (Anzaldúa 3). In her own writing Anzaldúa practises what she theorizes by mixing autobiography, historical document and poetry.

Mauritian critic Françoise Lionnet develops a similar concept of the space between. In the wake of Wilson Harris' and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's analyses of the creolization of post-colonial societies, she uses métissage to describe the practices of self-representation in five post-colonial female authors of diverse cultural backgrounds who "subvert all binary modes of thought by privileging (more or less explicitly) the intermediary spaces where boundaries become effaced" (Lionnet 18). According to Lionnet, métissage denotes a "braiding" "of cultural forms" (4), "a form of bricolage," in that "it brings together biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature" (8). Lionnet regards métissage as a "concept of solidarity" (9) "where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages" (6) which is reminiscent of Turner's notions of communitas and Deleuze and Guattari's vision of "another possible community" and "another consciousness and another

sensibility" (17). Lionnet asks to go beyond overturning binary oppositions and instead "to articulate new visions of ourselves [sic], new concepts that allow us [sic] to think otherwise, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground and the very condition of possibility of thought, of 'clarity' in all of Western philosophy" (6).

The notion of writing from a cultural space between is one expressed equally by minority writers and feminist theorists of various backgrounds. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) the French critic Hélène Cixous argues that the dichotomy between male and female imprisons women within the binary structures of patriarchy. In her essay she promotes "other bisexuality" which defers sexual and cultural identity. Reminiscent of Michel Foucault's pronouncement that we live in "an age of juxtaposition," Cixous claims:

we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather of a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another. As subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places. Woman un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield. (882)

Cixous attacks binary thought which, in her opinion, is the pillar of patriarchy, and hails a feminine language that subverts binary patriarchal logic. Both men and women have access to the bisexual mode of writing; at this point in history, however, it is women who are open to and equipped for this interstitial mode:

A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor--once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it

articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction--will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language. (885)

In Cixous' description, Anzaldúa's claim of the mestiza's tolerance for cultural ambiguity and Lionnet's idea of a "braiding" of cultural forms meet. Cixous' battle against monolithic language and hegemonic cultural models shares certain features with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming minor" which is their retort to the homogenizing voice of power. These critics suggest:

To make use of the polylingualism of one's own language, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape.... (26-27)

Cixous' concept of the "other bisexuality," the concept of "becoming minor" and theories of creolization, hybridization and mestizaje all run counter to the belief in the fixity of cultural identity.<sup>27</sup>

In liminality, according to Victor Turner, "people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements" ("Liminal to Liminoid, In Play, Flow, And Ritual" 60). Robert Kroetsch argues that "[a] principal way to establish

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<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Garber in her investigation of the cultural politics of cross-dressing discusses the possibilities of the "third." The third for her "is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility" since "[t]hree puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge" (Garber 11). The concept of cross-dressing could offer some interesting insights into the counter-discursive strategies in migrant writing.

or re-establish narrative coherence in the face of the gap between signifier and signified is through a re-telling of stories" ("The Grammar of Silence: Narrative Pattern in Ethnic Writing" 69). The tension between this ludic and innovative aspect and the urge to re-gain voice is characteristic for the migrant text. The first, for instance, manifests itself in the subversion of mainstream language and re-writings of various kinds, the second in the privileging of narrative genres which focus on the self such as the Künstlerroman (Fremd, Edwards, Cisneros, Pirinççi) and autobiography (Hoffman and Rodriguez).

The first chapter, "Two Works of Minor Literature: Franco Biondi's Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle and Akif Pirinççi's Tränen sind immer das Ende: Roman," demonstrates how an Italian and a Turkish writer in Germany counter the discourse of the masters. In Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle Biondi subverts the form of the Novelle and re-writes certain aspects of Gottfried Keller's Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe. Pirinççi's Tränen sind immer das Ende: Roman is a picaresque re-writing of Goethe's Werther and its adaptation by East German Ulrich Plenzdorf's Die Leiden des jungen W. Biondi's and Pirinççi's texts are characterized by their emphasis on politics, their "collective value" and the authors' attempt to deterritorialize and reterritorialize the German language.

The second chapter, "Versions of the Female Migrant Short Story Cycle": Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street and

Rachna Mara's Of Customs and Excise explores another strategy of challenging totalizing discourse. Cisneros and Mara focus on the multiple marginalization of migrant women within the dominant culture and the patriarchal world. The short story cycle offers formal possibilities to capture the dialectic between the individual and the community. The cyclical form with its inherent tension of unity in disunity is reflected in the generational cycle of first-generation mothers and second-generation daughters and their attempt to sustain a female genealogy across the ideological generation gap. Female space is reterritorialized at the end of the cycles.

The third chapter, "The Private and the Public Self: Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language and Richard Rodriguez' Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez," shows how these two authors transgress genre by merging autobiography and essay, thus claiming general validity for their personal stories. Both authors focus on the importance of language in the social construction of reality and argue that literacy in the dominant language is the social transformational power. They maintain that public life cannot be expressed in the vernacular. Their choice to write in the most American of American genres, autobiography,<sup>28</sup> reflects the authors' desire

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Robert F. Sayre, "Autobiography and the Making of America," Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1980) 146-168 and William C. Spengemann and L.R. Lundquist, "Autobiography and the American Myth," American Quarterly 17.3 (1965): 501-519.

for assimilation into the dominant culture. The story of migration turns into a story of conversion.

In Chapter Four, "Re-writing the Bildungsroman: Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth and Angelika Fremd's Heartland," I demonstrate how alterity is depicted as a privileged state. In re-writing the traditional Bildungsroman Fremd and Edwards appropriate the male European plot to a migrant woman's ends. Resistance to closure, reversal of discourse, intertextuality and hybridization are the most prominent strategies they employ to counter the official story of identity formation.

The fifth chapter, "Re-writing the Male Quest: Josef Vondra's Paul Zwilling and Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal," discusses Vondra's and Kreisel's adaptation of Joseph Campbell's quest myth. In both novels the theme of the Doppelgänger is closely interwoven with that of the quest. The quest in migrant literature written by men does not always end in success and the space between is not as easily redeemable for male writers as it is for female writers.

The rationale for the coupling of texts in each of the five chapters is the similarity of the discursive strategies they employ rather than their authors' gender, ethnic and cultural background or the country in which the texts were written. Furthermore, multicultural study should put people into a dialogue with the Other. My intention is to create a polyphony of voices not only by putting two texts into a dialogue, but

also by introducing other voices through epigraphs which offer additional perspectives of the space between.



Chapter One: Two Works of Minor Literature: Franco Biondi's Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle (1984) and Akif Pirinççi's Tränen sind immer das Ende: Roman (1980)

Reality, however one interprets it, lies beyond a screen of clichés. Every culture produces such a screen, partly to facilitate its own practices (to establish habits) and partly to consolidate its own power. Reality is inimical to those with power. (John Berger, And our faces, my heart, brief as photos)

Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization in Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle

Franco Biondi's Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle is "minor literature" in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's sense. These critics assert that minority discourse is characterized by three features: "a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (16) in its language, an emphasis on politics, and a collective value.

Franco Biondi migrated to Germany as a guestworker in 1965 when he was eighteen years old. He later obtained a diploma in psychology. Since the mid-seventies he has been writing exclusively in German. Biondi's situation as an Italian-born writer in Germany is different from that of the other writers with whom I am dealing. The difference lies not so much in the fact that Biondi learned his adopted language relatively late in life, since that is also true of Henry Kreisel and Josef Vondra, but in the fact that Germany is not a settler country. Mass immigration to Germany is a relatively recent phenomenon. The German government never thought of labour migration from

southern European countries to Germany during the 1960s and 1970s as permanent immigration, but as a temporary influx of labour. Therefore, questions of assimilation, multiculturalism and integration had not been dealt with in German politics on the level of the country's constitution before reunification and other recent international political events. In reality, however, several million of the guestworkers who originally arrived in Germany with a work visa, have become permanent residents. For them Germany is no longer a guest country, "ein Gastland," as the politicians chose to call it. The official policy pursued a dual strategy, simultaneously aiming at temporary integration and at the guest workers' return to their home countries. In recent years the rights and demands of the second generation, that is the children of those Gastarbeiter who were born and raised in Germany, have moved into the foreground of the political discussion. Those born in Germany often never learn the language of their parents, yet they are not full members of the "guest country" since they retain their parents' nationality.<sup>1</sup>

Biondi's Novelle deals with the fate of twenty-year-old Mamo, the son of Gastarbeiter parents in Germany. His parents and three younger siblings were asked to leave Germany since the

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the second generation, like other foreigners in the FRG, do not have the right to vote and are subject to the so-called Ausländergesetze. The Ausländergesetze were first enforced in 1965 and then revised in 1990. Paragraph 45 says that a foreigner can be deported if his/her residence in the FRG interferes with public order and security or other considerable interests of the country.

authorities insist that the apartment they had been living in for twenty years was too small for a family of six. Since they were not able to find a larger apartment within the time granted them, they returned to their home country leaving Mamo behind. Being of age, Mamo has his own residence permit. But when he loses his job, he, too, receives a letter from the immigration office asking him to leave Germany within a few weeks. Mamo, however, feels that Germany is home and decides to stay. Abschied der zerschellten Jahre follows from the alternating perspective of a third-person narrator and interior monologue Mamo's thoughts, feelings and memories during the time he awaits his deportation. Equipped with a gun which he bought from an American soldier he barricades himself in his parents' old apartment waiting for the police contingent which, so he thinks, will take him to the border. This time of waiting is a time full of memories, anxiety, anger, silence and despair.

Biondi calls Abschied der zerschellten Jahre a Novelle. The German Novelle is the offspring of one of the earliest literary exchanges between Italy and Germany. The first cycle of Novellen written in Germany was Goethe's Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderter (1795) which is an adaptation of Boccaccio's Il Decamerone (1349-1353). It is difficult to find a general definition for the German Novelle, which, according to Martin Swales, is characterized by "hermeneutic unease ... which casts doubt on the validity of the social universe as traditionally defined and inhabited" (207). What appears to be its most

generic feature, however, is the unexpected turn of the event which it describes. Goethe, in one of his conversations with Eckermann (29.1.1822), defines the Novelle as "eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit." According to Benno von Wiese, unerhört in Goethe's understanding of the word means 'not yet heard of,' that is 'new,' rather than 'extraordinary' as the modern usage of the word unerhört suggests (Wiese 5). There are some other essential characteristics that the majority of the Novellen seem to share. In the Novelle, as becomes obvious from Goethe's definition, the event is of greater importance than the characters or their emotional development. With its stress on the unexpected and unpredictable, the structure of the Novelle implies the tension between the ordinary and familiar of everyday life and the sudden interruption of the flow of events. Consequently, the turning point of the events is the point from which the narrative structure of the Novelle is organized. Many theorists of the Novelle have been particularly interested in discussing the turning point.

The frame is another common characteristic of the Novelle. In the novellas that adopt the Boccaccian model, the frame serves to define the narrative situation: a disintegrating society is held together by the telling of novellas. The frame usually establishes a connection with the society of which the audience or reading public is a part. As von Wiese points out: "...zur Novelle gehört vor allem, daß sie innerhalb einer Gesellschaft erzählt wird und daß sie im Rahmen der ästhetischen

und ethischen Maßstäbe dieser Gesellschaft bleibt" (4).<sup>2</sup> The relative brevity of the Novelle and its straightforward development to the turning point asks for condensation and stylisation. Characters and objects often take on symbolic function, and some novellas make abundant use of leitmotifs.

Biondi undermines the traditional structure of the Novelle by beginning his narrative with the turning point and placing it in the opening frame. The framed story, which provides the background for Mamo's shooting of a policeman, aims to show that it is not the desperate deed of an adolescent that represents the "unerhörte Begebenheit"--it is the socio-political circumstances that should be called "unerhört." In displacing and replacing certain narrative components of the traditional Novelle, Biondi deterritorializes it, that is, he literally removes it from its original space and gives it a different function. In this re-writing process, Biondi obviously had one specific Novelle in mind: Gottfried Keller's Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe (1855), one of the most popular German Novellen. Keller's text is an adaptation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (1597) and Goethe's version of the story of the two "star-crossed lovers" in Hermann und Dorothea (1797). Romeo and Juliet dramatizes, among other things, the conflict between the bourgeois claim for individual love and the demands of an aristocracy with an outmoded code of honour. In Romeo und Julia

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<sup>2</sup> ...it is an essential characteristic of the Novelle that it is told within a society and that it remains within the aesthetic and ethical standards established by this society.

auf dem Dorfe Gottfried Keller describes the destructive impact of bourgeois values on an agrarian community.

Keller tells the story of the young lovers Vrenchen and Sali who commit suicide since society denies them the right to get married to each other. At the beginning of the novella their fathers Manz and Marti are working in peaceful harmony in their fields. Their property is separated by a fallow stretch of land which does not seem to belong to anybody and has become a playground for the two children. The children's fathers know that a vagrant musician and tinker called the Schwarze Geiger (the Dark Fiddler) is heir of the property, but they do not want an outsider to receive the right of domicile: "...wir haben so genug zu tun, diesem Geiger das Heimatsrecht in unserer Gemeinde abzustreiten, da man uns den Fetzel fortwährend aufhalsen will. Haben sich seine Eltern einmal unter die Heimatlosen begeben, so mag er auch dableiben..." (64).<sup>3</sup> The fiddler himself cannot prove his identity. He has no money, no country, no right of domicile and claims that if only they would grant him his property he would sell it and use the money to emigrate. In tacit agreement Manz and Marti each cut off a furrow of the field and treat it as their own. Meanwhile the town of Seldwyla decides to put the field up for an auction. Greed consequently poisons the relationship of the two men. Both claim to have a

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<sup>3</sup> ...we are busy enough to refuse this fiddler the right of domicile in our community since they keep trying to land that scoundrel on us. Once that his parents chose to become homeless he might just as well stay with it....

right to the piece of land and turn into mortal enemies. Their property is eaten up by the costs for the lawyers and consultants whom they engage to fight for their cause. When Vrenchen and Sali meet for the first time as adults who discover their love for each other, Vrenchen's father follows them stealthily and attacks Vrenchen in a violent fit. Sali, in order to protect her, hits him on the head with a stone which turns the old man into an idiot. The lovers feel that this accident has made their marriage impossible. Furthermore, the Swiss law of the time did not permit marriage between people without any possessions. The young people decide to spend their last and only day together at a village fair and at a dance among the poor in the evening. They celebrate their wedding night on a hay ship floating towards Seldwyla where their drowned bodies are found in the morning.

Biondi adopts the theme of the two lovers who cannot get together because society and its values interfere. The father of Mamo's German girlfriend does not approve of the relationship since Mamo is the son of a Gastarbeiter. Mamo is too ashamed to discuss the impending deportation ("Abschiebung") with her. For him the deportation is a sign of personal failure:

Er traute sich nicht. Nicht weil er den Mut nicht gehabt hätte, so glaubte er, so redete er sich ein, sondern weil er sich zutiefst schämte. Er schämte sich ungeheuerlich, daß ihm sowas überhaupt zustoßen konnte; und daß es von seinen Freunden, ja vielleicht von Dagmar selbst als sein

Versagen gedeutet werden könnte. (102)<sup>4</sup>

Dagmar suggests that they leave together for his country of origin and get married. Mamo, however, does not believe in a new start, since he knows that he will neither find a job nor ever feel at home in his parents' country. Furthermore, to leave Germany would mean to escape and Mamo refuses to run away once more: "Was sie vorschlug, roch für ihn nämlich wieder nach Flucht. Er wollte aber nicht mehr fliehen. Nie mehr" (107).<sup>5</sup> He also realizes that Dagmar does not understand him. Everybody, including Dagmar, regards him as an "Ausländer" (a foreigner). Mamo, however, feels that Germany is where he belongs. Since Mamo knows that he speaks German like a native and that many Germans do not fit the blue-eyed and blonde stereotype either,<sup>6</sup> he believes that what drives people to ask these questions is an urge to categorize the other and to find clichés and stereotypes confirmed:

Auch wenn er eine andere Nationalität hatte, war das denn so wichtig? Und bei dem Klima, das in diesem Land herrschte, schuf eine solche Frage nicht eine noch größere Trennungslinie? Einen Abgrund? Haben diese Fragenden solche Fragen nicht deshalb gebraucht, um sich auf die Personen

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<sup>4</sup> He didn't dare. Not because he lacked the courage, so he thought, so he tried to convince himself, but because he felt deeply ashamed. He was terribly ashamed, that something like that could happen to him and that it could be interpreted by his friends, maybe perhaps even by Dagmar, as his failure.

<sup>5</sup> What she was suggesting smelt of escape. But he did not want to escape anymore. Never again.

<sup>6</sup> It is curious in this context that Keller, with subtle irony, describes Vrenchen with "eine bräunliche Gesichtsfarbe und ganz krause dunkle Haare" (63) that makes her akin to the dark complexioned Schwarze Geiger.



einzustellen? Nation X Staunen und Einstellung der Blicke auf Exotik? Und Nation Y vielleicht Blickstufe Mitleid? Und Nation Z Öffnung der Blende auf Bewunderung? Und bei Nation O das Abwenden der Kamera? (82)<sup>7</sup>

Keller's Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe and Biondi's Abschied der zerschellten Jahre both describe the conflict between the individual and the state. This conflict is heightened by the power of human prejudice. Biondi changes the theme of a mutually planned and desired suicide to mere implication. Since Mamo and Dagmar do not understand each other's needs, their suicide is only suggested between the lines but never considered as a real possibility:

Und sie fügte hinzu: Wenn alle Stricke reißen, können wir auch woanders hingehen. Er wollte fragen: Was meinst du damit?... Vielleicht verstand Dagmar Mamo besser, als er glaubte; vielleicht hatte sie seine Andeutungen richtig verstanden, und sie redete sich deshalb den Mund wund. (110)<sup>8</sup>

Their inability to understand one another and their alienation from each other in this final conversation, show that Keller's version of the old story, harmony and union in death if not in life, is not a valid model for an Italian migrant writing in

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<sup>7</sup> Even if he had a different nationality, was it all that important? Considering the climate in the country, did such a question not create an even fiercer dividing line? An abyss? Didn't those who asked him the question ask such questions in order to prepare themselves for the person they ask? Nation X astonishment and focus on exotic? And nation Y perhaps focus on pity? And nation Z open the aperture to admiration? And for nation O turn away the camera?

<sup>8</sup> And she added: If all else fails, we can also go to some other place. He wanted to ask: What do you mean?...Perhaps Dagmar understood Mamo better, than he thought; perhaps she really understood what he had been hinting at, and that is why she kept talking till she was blue in the face.

1984 Germany.

Biondi leaves the end of the Novelle open.<sup>9</sup> Keller was inspired to write his Novelle by a newspaper report in the Züricher Freitagszeitung. This report makes no moral judgements on the lovers' suicide. Keller ends the text with an ironic paraphrase of this report. In the Seldwyl newspapers, so Keller writes, one could read that this suicide was a sign of a spreading moral depravation and the unruliness of passion ("ein Zeichen von der um sich greifenden Entsittlichung und Verwilderung der Leidenschaften" [128])). This kind of ironic perspective criticizes the hypocrisy and false morality of society. Biondi adopts a similar strategy of changing the narrative perspective. Towards the end of the story Biondi presents the reader with a multiplicity of perspectives on Mamo's shooting of the policeman and the events that led up to it. While Mamo is firing his shots into the crowd of people, the Bundeskanzler is giving a speech on TV regarding the "Förderung der Rückkehrbereitschaft"<sup>10</sup> in which he encourages the Germans to practice more tolerant behaviour towards the guest workers and their families. Mamo imagines the headlines of next day's newspapers: Last interview with the assassin! His

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<sup>9</sup> Biondi explained in a letter to me (December 12, 1990) that he intended the end of the story to be understood dialectically as describing undesirable yet existing conditions.

<sup>10</sup> Förderung in this context something like support and encouragement. Rückkehrbereitschaft is one of the many words in German immigration politics which cannot be translated smoothly into English. It means as much as readiness to return to the home country.

motives and his reasons. On the penultimate page of the book the social worker, who was summoned by the police, retrospectively tells Mamo's story to a friend giving it thereby still another perspective.

It is important to keep in mind that in both Keller's and Biondi's texts, the bone of contention is space: the field between the two others in Keller and the apartment in Biondi. Keller shows that peasant society is doomed as soon as it makes contact with the materialistic values of the city. Biondi transforms this description of a clash between two value systems for his own political purposes. Abschied der zerschellten Jahre reveals the injustice of the "Ausländergesetze." Biondi's Novelle intends to show that (what used to be) West Germany is a multicultural society, although the law and political action run counter to any attempts at integrating the second generation.

Biondi refuses to give Mamo a specific ethnic identity. When asked about his nationality Mamo answers: "Ansonsten bin ich aus dem Niemandsland ... genauso wie der Odysseus vor dem Zyklopen; bekanntlich hat er vor dem Zyklopen Niemand geheißen, um seine Haut zu retten. Genau dasselbe geschieht auch mit mir" (83).<sup>11</sup> Mamo's ethnicity is defined by what it is not: "Der ist

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<sup>11</sup> Otherwise I am from no man's land ... just as Ulysses standing in front of the Cyclops; as you know he was called Nobody standing in front of the Cyclops, in order to save his skin. The same happens to me.

ja kein Türke," (43)<sup>12</sup> somebody points out in his defense. Since Mamo does not identify with his parents' ethnic background, he has no ethnic memory. The old man Costas serves as a surrogate ethnic memory in the text. He is also a surrogate father for Mamo. Costa's country of origin also remains unidentified; it is somewhere in the Mediterranean. Costas spends most of the day sitting in the court yard staring, so it seems to those passing by, at the wall. When Mamo asks him what he keeps looking at, Costas explains in a stylized German that is very different from the vehicular or referential language that he is trying to recover his country's story, a story that was interrupted by mass emigration. In the old times, explains Costas, people used to sit together at night and somebody would tell a story. Costas tells Mamo a novella about the abuse of power and victimization. Later he explains that his fishing village--an agrarian community with a strong oral literary tradition--was destroyed by an unscrupulous businessman who deprived the village of its independent economic base and turned it into a cheap tourist resort. As in Keller's Novelle, the advent of industrialism and capitalism has a devastating impact on the agrarian community. With Mamo's story Biondi dramatizes the loss of the vernacular, the failure of communication and the loss of a personal story.

Costas' novella disrupts the flow of the narrative dealing with Mamo's fate. His novella represents another culture with another way of life. It is the Other reclaiming its space. Just

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<sup>12</sup> He is not a Turk.

as the uncultivated strip of land in Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe, which is reclaimed by weeds and shrubs, lies between the two cultivated fields, Costas' novella is surrounded by deterritorialized prose and spills over its boundaries by repeatedly interrupting Mamo's story. Costas' "poetic" use of the German language clashes with the bureaucratic language, the language of the city and the state. His voice reterritorializes symbolically the space that was lost to his people.

Although the "Wildnis" (wilderness)<sup>13</sup> takes over in Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe and ridicules law and order, the lovers have internalized the values of bourgeois society to such an extent that they cannot live together without being married. Therefore, the only choice they have is to commit suicide. In Abschied der zerschellten Jahre Costas' stories cannot prevent Mamo's death. Keller's young lovers cannot live in "Niemandland" (no-man's-land) as symbolized by the uncultivated strip of land, and Mamo refuses to return to the no-man's-land of his origin. Mamo does not kill a Tybalt nor does he strike at Dagmar's father, whom, ironically, he has never met. Mamo kills an official representative of the country that refuses to function as his Vaterland (father country).

The image of the heart as a leitmotif pervades Biondi's Novelle. The motif appears first when Mamo demonstrates his shooting skills at the shooting gallery on the fairground:

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<sup>13</sup> "Wild," "verwildert," "Verwilderung" are keywords of Keller's Novelle. They are opposed to "sauber," "artig," "ordentlich" and "grade."

Die Schießbude zog ihn an wie ein Magnet, nicht weil man dort nur ballern konnte ... sondern weil auf Karten mit drei roten Herzen geschossen wurde. Drei rote dickgezeichnete Herzen. Übereinander, das oberste war am größten und das mittlere am kleinsten. Darunter stand geschrieben: 'Je Herz 1 Schuß.' (59)<sup>14</sup>

After Mamo wins twice in a row, the owner of the gallery offers some proverbial wisdom: "Gute Schützen sind wie Liebende, beide treffen ins Herz...."<sup>15</sup> When Keller's lovers spend their last afternoon at the country fair, Vrenchen buys Sali a gingerbread heart which has a proverb written both on the front and the back.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the Novelle Biondi uses an abundance of idiomatic and metaphorical phrases with the word 'heart' at the centre in order to reveal the hollowness and hypocrisy of such language. Metaphorically, when Mamo takes aim at the heart of the policeman he is firing at the heart of the German language. In his essay "Die Fremde wohnt in der Sprache" Biondi writes: "Ein In-Frage-Stellen der Sprache als Instanz der Mehrheit hat mich immer mehr in der Auffassung bestärkt, daß die Fremde nicht so sehr in dem Menschen wohnt, der aus der Fremde kommt; primär

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<sup>14</sup> The shooting gallery attracted him like a magnet, not just because one could shoot there ... but because the targets were cards with three red hearts. Three red highlighted hearts. On top of each other, the top one was the biggest and the one in the middle the smallest. Underneath was written: "One shot per heart."

<sup>15</sup> Good marksmen are like lovers, both hit the heart....

<sup>16</sup> The two proverbs are: "Ein süßer Mandelkern steckt in dem Herze hier, Doch süßer als der Mandelkern ist meine Lieb zu Dir!" and "Wenn Du dies Herz gegessen, vergiß dies Sprüchlein nicht: Viel eh'r als meine Liebe mein braunes Auge bricht!" (115).

wohnt sie in der Sprache selbst" (31).<sup>17</sup> In this essay Biondi describes his fascination with the etymology of words and the changes of their meaning through ideological deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Biondi claims that for him, writing in German does not mean to write in a foreign language but to write in "opposition to" the "foreignness" (Fremde) in the language: "Für mich heißt es also nicht: Schreiben in fremder Sprache. Sondern: Ich möchte gegen die Fremde in der Sprache anschreiben" (32).<sup>18</sup> In theory and in practice, Biondi dedicates himself to deterritorializing and reterritorializing the German language. Biondi calls this endeavour "in Widerspruch zur besetzten Sprache schreiben" (to write in opposition to the occupied language). He does this by defamiliarizing dead metaphors, slogans, jargon, and proverbs.<sup>19</sup> In Abschied der zerschellten Jahre, for instance, a

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<sup>17</sup> A questioning of the language of the majority as authority has increasingly confirmed my belief that foreignness does not dwell as much in the person who comes from foreign lands as it does in language itself.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore I would not say: To write in a foreign language. But: I would like to write up against the foreignness in the language.

<sup>19</sup> George Steiner writes in "The Hollow Miracle," in which he describes the gradual deterioration of the German language: "A language shows that it has in it the germ of dissolution in several ways. Actions of the mind that were once spontaneous become mechanical, frozen habits (dead metaphors, stock similes, slogans). Words grow longer and more ambiguous. Instead of style, there is rhetoric. Instead of precise common usage, there is jargon. Foreign roots and borrowings are no longer absorbed into the blood stream of intrusion. All these technical failures accumulate to the essential failure: the language no longer sharpens thought but blurs it." (96)

multiplication of proverbial expressions can be found within a single sentence which pushes the tolerance of everyday speech for such language material to its very limits. By changing one word in an idiomatic expression, Biondi defamiliarizes the whole phrase whereby he resuscitates its earlier and more literal levels of meaning. Language becomes "double-voiced."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Biondi seeks a multicultural identity within the German language: "Gegenwärtig interpretiere ich daher meinen Bezug zur deutschen Sprache so, daß ich darin eine multikulturelle Identität suche, jenseits der nationalen und kulturellen Schranken, die mit einer Sprache verbunden sind"(30).<sup>21</sup> He demonstrates, for example, how words of Yiddish origin<sup>22</sup> are, ironically, still alive in contemporary German--

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<sup>20</sup> Victor Turner claims: "...in liminality people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements" (60).

<sup>21</sup> Presently I see my connection to the German language in that I am trying to find a multicultural identity in it, beyond the national and cultural barriers, which are associated with a language.

<sup>22</sup> I am referring to words such as "Schlamassel" and "piesacken." Mamo remembers a graffiti saying: "Warten auf die Kristallnacht." His interior dialogue continues: "Zunächst war er betroffen und erschrocken, dann hatte er sich gesagt: Ist scheiße [sic], die Nazis sind gar nicht an der Macht. Und die, die am Hebel sitzen, die brauchen solche plumpen, groben Sachen nicht, die machen es anders, wenn sie jemanden vertreiben" (91-92). Biondi echoes Kristall in Kristallnacht--a technique he adopts from Paul Celan--in Mamo's stream of thoughts: "Er dachte, und sie vielleicht auch, daß ihre Beziehung wie ein wunderschöner, aber sehr empfindlicher Kristall wäre, der behutsam behandelt werden müsse" (94). In a letter to me (27.4.91) Biondi pointed out that he highly admires Celan for his use of language.



most native speakers of German are unaware of the provenance of these words--whereas the words of American origin are conspicuously alien elements.<sup>23</sup>

Biondi is one of the founding members of the Polynationale Literatur- und Kunstverein. This organization was founded in Frankfurt in 1980 to further the cultural cooperation of the various ethnic minorities in Germany in order to give them a stronger presence within the German literary and artistic scene. Its founding members included the Italian writers and artists Franco Biondi, Gino Chiellino, Vito d'Adamo, Guiseppe Giambusso and Carmine Abate and some writers of Syrian and Lebanese descent such as Rafik Schami, Suleman Taufiq and Jusuf Naoum. The aim was to create a polynational awareness and create multicultural forms of expression with German serving as a lingua franca and referential language, the language of culture. The founding of the Polynationale Literatur- und Kunstverein can be interpreted as an attempt "to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (Deleuze and Guattari 17). Biondi's refusal to give Mamo or Costas any specific ethnic identity has to be seen within this context. The fact that a specific ethnic group, and in particular the Italian, is absent from the text is significant. I would like to argue, however, that Biondi's Italian background is a constitutive factor in the production of

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<sup>23</sup> I am thinking here of words such as "shooten," "verpowern," and "player."

Abschied der zerschellten Jahre. In his Novelle, Biondi reterritorializes a genre that made its way from Italy to Germany with Goethe's adaptation of Boccaccio. In re-writing Keller's Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe he also reterritorializes a story that Shakespeare first adopted in his tragedy from Italian novellas.

Italy was the first country with which the German government came to an agreement on labour exchange in 1955.<sup>24</sup> The number of Italian migrant workers in Germany was for many years the second largest. As early as 1975 the Associazione Letteraria Facoltà Artistiche, a group founded by several Italian migrant writers, started to systematically collect texts written by fellow Italian migrants which they then published in their own periodical called Il Mulino and in several anthologies. Poetry by Italian migrants also appeared in the newspaper Il Corriere d'Italia (Frankfurt) and Incontri, a bilingual monthly magazine published in Berlin. In 1984, the year in which Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle appeared, only a member of an ethnic minority group that was already relatively well established in German society and had brought forth the largest group of writers, would have wanted to dispense with ethnic identification and to metaphorically reclaim literary territory.

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<sup>24</sup> Italian migrant workers have also had a different status in Germany right from the beginning since Italy founded the European Economic Community in 1957 together with Belgium, France, Germany, Holland and Luxembourg.

Living Second-Hand: Tränen sind immer das Ende: Roman

Akif Pirinççi's Tränen sind immer das Ende: Roman is fictional autobiography posing as a novel. The novel is written in the first person by the eighteen-year-old protagonist Akif Pirinççi. Like the author, Akif was born in Turkey and emigrated to Germany with his parents when he was eight years old. Tränen sind immer das Ende is a re-writing of Plenzdorf's Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. (1973) which in turn is an adaptation of Goethe's Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (1774). By referring directly to Goethe's novel at the same time, Pirinççi triangulates between the two texts. There are a number of significant similarities and differences between Pirinççi's and Plenzdorf's novels which are worth exploring.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the seventeen-year-old Edgar Wibeau runs away from Mittenberg to Berlin in order to become a painter, Akif leaves his small-town home for Cologne to write detective plays. Both novels are variations of the Künstlerroman. Furthermore, the two authors, like their eighteenth-century model--and Abschied der zerschellten Jahre: Novelle and its literary forebear for that matter--combine the theme of unfulfilled love with a critique of society. Both protagonists refuse to pursue a "respectable"

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<sup>1</sup> Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. appeared at first in a prose version in Sinn und Form in 1972. The text of the novel differs slightly from the original text. The dramatic version, which was staged shortly after the first appearance of the text, was a theatrical sensation because of its political frankness.

career. Just as Werther condemns the "fatalen bürgerlichen Verhältnisse" (the unfortunate bourgeois circumstances [443]) and the "Einschränkung ... in welcher die tätigen und forschenden Kräfte des Menschen eingesperrt sind," (the limitation ... which is imposed upon the active and inquiring faculties of mankind [388-389]) Edgar criticizes certain aspects of East German socialist ideology and Akif the West German work ethic and bourgeois conformism. Tränen sind immer das Ende and Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. also share some characteristics of the picaresque novel, which has always been a medium to criticize society. Like Mamo, Akif and Edgar are outsiders. Not only do they come from lower-class families but they are also representatives of ethnic minorities: Edgar's ancestors were Huguenots and Akif is the son of a Turkish Gastarbeiter.

The picaresque is more strongly developed in Tränen sind immer das Ende. Akif is surrounded by dropouts. The two men with whom Akif has the most regular contact are his neighbour Knacki, recently released from jail, who suggests that Akif prostitute himself in order to make some money, and Laszlo, a Hungarian emigré, who hates the Germans and seeks solace in alcohol. Laszlo teaches Akif how to avoid paying for food and drinks in restaurants and bars. Procuring food usually plays an essential part in the picaro's life. Akif takes stock of his deprived situation:

Ich hatte fast überhaupt kein Geld und keinen Job. Nur dieses lächerliche Acht-Quadratmeter-Zimmer mit Blick auf den verwahrlosten Hinterhof, wo man nur überladene Mülltonnen und Kinder sah, die Krieg und Frieden spielten.

Auch das Arbeitsamt rückte nichts raus, da ich bei dieser Filmproduktion nur vier Monate gearbeitet hatte. Ich befürchtete wirklich, zu verhungern, was sich später auch als die Wahrheit herausstellen sollte.<sup>2</sup> (85)

Akif's eight-square-metre room with a view of the decrepit backyard is a travestied version of the Gartenlaube (summer house) where Edgar hides after his arrival in Berlin and which becomes the playground for Charlie's children. On his first day at work several men introduce themselves as Akif's Meister (superiors) which makes him wonder whom he is supposed to serve and, in picaro fashion, he decides only to serve himself.

Both Edgar and Akif fall in love with women who are a few years older and well integrated into society. Charlie is a kindergarten teacher who marries shortly after Edgar meets her, and Christa, whom Akif calls a "Bürgermädchen," comes from a sheltered middle-class home and is a law student. Edgar and Akif join the workforce after having met Charlie and Christa. Edgar becomes a member of a house painters' brigade and Akif a stagehand at the Cologne Opera. At their work places they both meet ersatz father figures who take them under their wings. The Bohemian Spanish Civil War veteran Zarembo--another outsider of society--protects Edgar from the brigadier and Hassan the Turk, the most experienced member of the "Türkenkolonie" (117) at the

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<sup>2</sup> I was almost broke and didn't have a job. Just this lousy eight-square-metre room with a view of the desolate backyard where only overflowing trash cans were to be seen and kids playing war games. And the employment exchange didn't dish out any money either, because I had only worked for this film company for four months. I was worried I might starve, which, later turned out to be true.

Opera, tries to make life easier for Akif.

There are two major differences in plot development between Plenzdorf's and Goethe's texts on the one hand and Pirinççi's on the other. Akif does not compete with another man for Christa's love. In contrast to the more innocent love both in Goethe's and in Plenzdorf's novel--if one disregards the one decisive kiss both in Goethe and Plenzdorf--Akif and Christa have a sexual relationship which lasts for a few months until Christa breaks it off. The other major difference concerns the ending of Tränen sind immer das Ende. While Werther and Edgar die without achieving a balance between individual and communal identity, Akif, after an aborted suicide attempt and a week in hospital feels the strong desire to write his story. The picaro is a survivor.

Werther's and Edgar's rivals Albert and Dieter are contrast figures. Whereas Werther is a character modelled after the protagonists of the English sentimental novel who indulges in his feelings, despises pedantry and seeks the union of self and nature, Albert is rational and industrious. And while Edgar is irreverent and creative with a good portion of self-irony, Dieter, as rational as Albert, is a conformist without a sense of humour. As much as they are attracted to Werther and Edgar, Lotte and Charlie opt to stay with the men who are a part of society. In Tränen sind immer das Ende, the woman, instead of being merely the object of the protagonist's desire, is a more complex character and plays a more active part. Christa, the

ambitious law student, is part of the conformist student generation of the late 1970s, which was more interested in self-analysis than in political action. Akif dislikes Christa's university friends and criticizes them for their self-satisfied and conformist attitudes. Christa ends the relationship with Akif because, in her opinion, there are worlds between them ("Wir beide leben in getrennten Welten" [168]). In Tränen sind immer das Ende the issue of class difference does not dissolve as easily as in Eichendorff's Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts: Akif does not get his "anmutige Pförtnerstochter" (213). Akif's exclusion from Christa's world echoes the clash between nobility and bourgeoisie in Goethe's novel. Although Graf von C. and Fräulein von B. both feel an affinity of mind and soul to Werther, they are not prepared to compromise the social order for his sake. Akif is aware of the social difference between himself and Christa:

Ich brauchte das Geld, allein Gott weiß wie sehr, sah aber auch nicht ein, warum ich täglich acht Stunden meines kostbaren Lebens in dieser dumpfen Hölle verschwenden sollte. Ich war verzweifelt und zugleich machtlos. Zum Schreiben kam ich wegen dieser Angelegenheit und wegen Christa überhaupt nicht mehr. War das das Ende? Dumme, schwere, vernichtende Arbeit? Gleichzeitig wußte ich, daß es auch mit Christa nicht mehr so weitergehen würde, wenn es tatsächlich so weiterging. Sie eines Tages Richterin oder Anwältin und ich ein bekloppter Holzkopf von einem Bühnenarbeiter. Das paßte hinten und vorne nicht zusammen! Sekretärin zu Christa: 'Frau Born, da ist ein Herr von der Müllabfuhr'. 'Nein, nein, das ist doch mein Ehemann!'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> God knows how much I needed the money. But I didn't see why I should be wasting eight hours of my precious life in this dull hell day after day. I was desperate and powerless at the same time. I didn't even have the time to write any more because of this and Christa. Was this the end? Stupid, hard, crippling

(149-150)

Werther resigns from his post with the ambassador because work within the absolutist regime does not give the Bürger the opportunity to apply his talents and skills in a self-fulfilling manner.<sup>4</sup> Edgar leaves his apprenticeship since work life in East Germany does not allow for individualism. Likewise, Akif blames circumstances for preventing him from dedicating himself to writing.

While Plenzdorf, through Edgar, criticizes the role of education and work training in East Germany as a tool of conformism, education in Tränen sind immer das Ende is satirized as a commodity and the basis of careerism. One of the first questions Christa asks Akif is whether or not he has a high school diploma. He explains to her "daß [er] vom Gymnasium auf die Realschule und von dort aus auf die Volksschule geflogen war" (that [he] was demoted from the Gymnasium to the Realschule and from there to the Volksschule [39]). Akif criticizes the emphasis on rote learning in favour of critical thinking ("dieses ewige, sinnlose Lernen und Pauken" [39]) in the classroom. He also blames the "faschistoiden Bürgerkinder,"

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work? At the same time I knew that it couldn't go on with Christa the way it had, if it would at all. She, a judge or lawyer one day and me a stupid blockhead of a stagehand. That didn't go well together at all! Secretary to Christa: "Frau Born, there is a gentleman from the trash collection." No, no, that's my husband!"

<sup>4</sup> See Arnold Hirsch, "Die Leiden Des Jungen Werthers. Ein Bürgerliches Schicksal Im Absolutistischen Staat," Etudes Germaniques 13.3 (1958): 229-250.



taking it out on teachers who are "anders," (different) for his fading interest in school. The text suggests that as a Turk in Germany, that is, an outsider, Akif is predestined for a menial job. On signing his work contract Akif concludes: "Hiermit wurde ich also ein richtiger Arbeiter, was mein Vater mir seit meiner Kindheit prophezeit hatte und wovor er mich mit allen Mitteln zu schützen versucht hatte" (93).<sup>5</sup> Hassan discourages Akif from taking the job: "'Sohn, das ist keine Arbeit für dich. Nicht für einen jungen Menschen. Die Oper macht dich kaputt, das hältst du hier nicht aus. Schau mich an, Sohn! Ich arbeite seit siebzehn Jahren hier. So sieht ein Mann aus, der seit siebzehn Jahren hier arbeitet'" (120-121).<sup>6</sup> It is ironic that labour behind the scenes in the service of culture should have such a debilitating effect. Later, when they drink together in a pub whose patrons are only Turks ("wo nur Türken sofften" [185]), Hassan suggests that Akif return to Turkey, marry his daughter and take care of his goats. This allusion to Akif's Turkishness, as many others in the book, ironically subverts the ethnic stereotype. The unhappy return of a Gastarbeiter to his home country is a

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<sup>5</sup> I became what my father had predicted since I was a kid and had always done his utmost to protect me from becoming: a worker.

<sup>6</sup> "Son, that's no work for you. Not for a young man. The opera kills you. You won't be able to take it. Look at me, my son! I've been working here for seventeen years. That's what a man looks like who has been working here for seventeen years."

recurrent theme in German migrant literature.<sup>7</sup> The reader knows that the return to Turkey is no solution for Akif. Furthermore, the mostly non-Turkish reading audience finds itself in a position of knowing Akif better than his countryman. It takes, after all, a stretch of the imagination to picture the streetwise and well-read Akif among the goats in the Turkish countryside.

At the beginning of the book, Akif meets Christa in a discotheque, an allusion to the ball in the countryside where Werther meets Lotte. Akif introduces himself as Akif from Turkey anticipating Christa's compliments on his German:

'Hast du meinen Namen eben nicht mitbekommen?' 'Nein.' 'Ich heie Akif. Bin Trke, weit du,' antwortete ich ungeheuer natrlich. Ich wartete nun auf das 'Du kannst aber sehr gut Deutsch.' Und es kam prompt."<sup>8</sup> (8)

Like Mamo in Abschied der zerschellten Jahre, Akif neither identifies with his ethnic background nor does he feel German: "Im Grunde fhle ich mich gar nicht als Trke, aber auch nicht als Deutscher. Ich schwanke nicht einmal so in der Mitte.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Gianni Bertagnoli's Arrivederci, Deutschland! (1964), Franco Biondi's Passavant's Rckkehr: Erzhlungen (1976/1985) and Carmine Abate's Den Koffer und weg! (1984). Joseph Pivato explores the return journey as a recurrent theme in Italian-Canadian literature in "The Return Journey in Italian-Canadian Literature," Canadian Literature 106 (1985):169-76.

<sup>8</sup> "Didn't you get my name a minute ago?" "No." My name is Akif. I'm a Turk, you know," I said extremely naturally. I waited for the "Your German is very good." And it came promptly.

Wahrscheinlich bin ich gar nichts" (9).<sup>9</sup> Throughout the book, however, he continues to self-ironically call himself a Turk. With the strategy of Othering himself, he undermines the thrust of stereotypes by anticipating them and turning them against their perpetrators. This self-ironic identification with an ethnic group which elicits automatic prejudice, parallels Edgar's repeated critical self-references such as "ich Idiot," "wie ein Verrückter," and "ich Spinner." With these self-accusations Plenzdorf travesties the socialist maxim of public self-criticism. Edgar's aversion to public self-criticism contributes to his decision to leave his apprenticeship after the confrontation with his supervisor: "Ich hatte was gegen Selbstkritik, ich meine: gegen öffentliche" (15). One of the main characteristics of Akif's language is its comic effect. This effect is partly achieved by the unexpected combination of words and ideas which often verges on the macabre. Exaggeration and hyperbolic expression contribute to the comic effect as well as self-deprecating irony. Whenever Akif speaks about himself or refers to a part of his body he uses either obscenities or disparaging terms, as if he were holding up a mirror to society and reflecting its response to a Turkish school dropout without a respectable job.

Migrant literature in Germany before 1980 could best be described as what Franco Biondi and Rafik Schami refer to as

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<sup>9</sup> I actually don't feel like a Turk, but not like a German either. I don't even stagger in the middle. Probably I'm nothing.

"Literatur der Betroffenheit" ('literature of affliction' or 'literature of the affected'). The majority of this literature consists of first-person accounts of homesickness, suffering, victimization and alienation. Conditions under which the migrants live and questions of identity are its major themes. According to Biondi and Schami "Gastarbeiterliteratur"<sup>10</sup> was to function as "Selbsthilfe zur Verteidigung der Identität" (Self-help as a means of defense of one's identity [133]). The two authors claim that affliction creates solidarity, since all migrant workers are subjected to dislocation and discrimination no matter where they come from. In these texts, which foreground the experience of the 'I,' immigrant experience is constructed within the conventions of poetry, autobiography and realist fiction. Authenticity is the final criterion. Toward the end of Tränen sind immer das Ende, Akif announces that after his unsuccessful suicide attempt he decided to write his story down. In the process, so Akif claims, he rarely followed the rules of the men of letters: "Hierbei habe ich mich sehr selten an die goldenen Regeln der Literaten gehalten und Sachen getan, die man nicht tun darf, wenn man ein gutes Buch schreiben will" (255).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Biondi and Schami use the term "Gastarbeiter" self-consciously in order to expose the irony within it: "Die Ideologen haben es fertiggebracht, die Begriffe Gast und Arbeiter zusammenzuquetschen, obwohl es noch nie Gäste gab, die gearbeitet haben." (The ideologues managed to shove together the terms guest and worker, although there have never been guests, who worked [134-135]).

<sup>11</sup> In the process I have rarely followed the golden rules of the men of letters and I've done things which one shouldn't do when one wants to write a good book.

The golden rules are an allusion to Werther's claim: "Man kann zum Vorteil der Regeln viel sagen, ungefähr was man zum Lobe der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft sagen kann. ... dagegen wird aber auch alle Regel ... das wahre Gefühl von Natur und den wahren Ausdruck derselben zerstören" (391).<sup>12</sup> Akif's coming of age is constructed in terms of the decision to write his personal story. In doing so he becomes a writing subject within a literary tradition that originated in Germany, namely the Bildungsroman, which turns into a picaresque novel in Tränen sind immer das Ende. While the traditional hero of the Bildungsroman completes his quest for self-definition successfully, Tränen sind immer das Ende, by comparison, ends with Akif's confession that he has not learned his lesson:

Nun ist es also an der Zeit, mich vom Stuhl zu erheben und durch diese Tür da in mein neues und hoffentlich glückliches Leben hineinzumarschieren. Allerdings muß ich mich diesmal selbst fragen, was ich damals im Regen Christa gefragt habe: Wie geht das, Leben?<sup>13</sup> (256)

The last thing Akif does before leaving Cologne is to take his television to the pawnshop--an act which can be interpreted as the author's tongue-in-cheek comment on Akif's attempt at a more "authentic" and less mediated life in the future.

Just as Plenzdorf breaks with the tradition of socialist

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<sup>12</sup> One may say much in favour of the rules, perhaps what one may say in praise of bourgeois society. ... any rule, however, will destroy the true feeling of nature and the true expression of it.

<sup>13</sup> The time seems to have come now to get up from my chair and to march through this door into my new and hopefully happy life. This time, however, I need to ask myself what I once, in the rain, asked Christa: How does that go, life?

realism by constructing his novel as a montage of third-person interviews, retrospective first-person narrative and direct quotations from Goethe's Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, Pirinççi self-reflexively subverts the authentic and realistic discursive practices of migrant writing in West Germany. Intertextuality becomes oppositional strategy. Edgar uses Werther's claims for individual self-fulfillment, his "Werther-Pistole," in order to shock those around him who pledge allegiance to the system and to unmask their conformist behaviour. The difference between Plenzdorf's and Pirinççi's strategy becomes obvious in their protagonist's attitude toward J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye (1951), a text to which both authors are indebted in addition to Goethe's novel. Edgar particularly cherishes Holden's story because nobody recommended the book to him:

Meine zwei Lieblingsbücher waren: Robinson Crusoe.... Das andere war von diesem Salinger. Ich hatte es durch puren Zufall in die Klauen gekriegt. Kein Mensch kannte das. Ich meine: kein Mensch hatte es mir empfohlen oder so. Bloß gut. Ich hätte es dann nie angefaßt. Meine Erfahrungen mit empfohlenen Büchern waren hervorragend mies.<sup>14</sup> (33)

Since the cover of Goethe's novel was destroyed, Edgar has no idea who its author is. Furthermore, even after having memorized the passages of the text that appeal to him most, Edgar does not discard it. On the contrary, he gets used to carrying it around,

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<sup>14</sup> My two favourite books were: Robinson Crusoe.... The other one was by this guy Salinger. It got into my clutches by sheer coincidence. Nobody had heard of it. I mean: nobody had recommended it to me, or something. Good thing that. I would never have touched it. My experience with recommended books was splendidly rotten.

tucked under his shirt. By contrast, Akif's friend recommended The Catcher in the Rye to him. After having memorized it, he throws it away:

Genauer gesagt, immer, wenn ich an Rolf dachte, dachte ich gleichzeitig an dieses Buch. Er hatte es mir damals sehr empfohlen, und ich las es und war schlichtweg begeistert. Ich las diesen Roman so oft, bis ich ihn eines Tages auswendig konnte und wegschmiß.<sup>15</sup> (70)

Just as Edgar's and Akif's attitudes toward "borrowed" texts differ, so do their authors'. Whereas Plenzdorf quotes directly from Goethe, Pirinççi drops names and absorbs bits and pieces of "world literature" into his own text. Toward the end of the novel, when Akif comes to identify more and more with the Frankenstein-Monster, he disowns "die gesamte positive Weltliteratur, die man sich in der Not zwangsweise reinwürgte" (the whole positive world literature, which, for lack of anything better, one forced down one's throat [213]) in preference to the genre of gothic and horror. At his last meeting with Christa, which takes place in a pizza parlour, she orders a glass of lemonade which annoys Akif since it ridicules the tragic atmosphere: "Wie soll man da tragische Sätze aufsagen! Immer wenn ich dieses Scheißglas mit der pißgelben Flüssigkeit drin vor mir sah, verging mir die Lust am 'Werther' -

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<sup>15</sup> To be precise, whenever I was thinking of Rolf, I was also thinking of this book. He had highly recommended it to me and I read it and was simply thrilled. I read this novel so many times that I knew it by heart one day and threw it away.

spielen" (44).<sup>16</sup> For Akif Werther is just another role.

Goethe mirrored Werther's fate in several characters. This is paralleled by Plenzdorf's and Pirinççi's reference to characters from literature and the movies<sup>17</sup> with whom Edgar and Akif identify. By constructing potential models of identification from various contexts, Pirinççi undermines the discursive construction of the migrant's experience as authentic and exclusive. In prescribing alienation and dislocation as the major themes of migrant literature lies the danger of its marginalization. In order to come of age, migrant literature needs to embrace themes other than coping with the separation from home and the conditions of (work) life in Germany. The title of Pirinççi's novel, which, according to Akif is a quotation from Allen Ginsberg, travesties the indulgence in emotions in Die Leiden des jungen Werthers which finds expression in the language of Empfindsamkeit (sensitivity). Tears flow freely in Tränen sind immer das Ende and Akif believes in the cathartic effect of a good cry. This uninhibited show of emotions ironically contradicts his earlier affirmation

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<sup>16</sup> How then is one supposed to recite tragic sentences! Whenever I saw this goddam glass with the piss yellow liquid in front of me, I did not feel like playing Werther any more.

<sup>17</sup> Akif's favourite film is Citizen Kane with whose protagonist he identifies. If he should ever succeed in becoming a film maker, Akif muses, he would like to make films such as Singin' in the Rain, It's a Wonderful Life, Bringing up Baby, The Big Sleep, Big Sky and The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (50). Edgar's favourite movies are those featuring Charlie Chaplin and "'Junge Dornen' mit Sidney Poitier" (38). It is interesting to note that both Plenzdorf and Pirinççi studied film.



that "Türken wären in der Regel hartgesottene Männer" (Turks generally are hard-baked men [168]). At the same time this flow of tears can be understood as burlesque and a humorous refusal to perpetuate the image of the migrant as "afflicted." By repeatedly comparing himself to heroes from movies and literature and his life to the plot of a Harlequin novel, Akif denies all claim to authenticity:

Millionen und Abermillionen von Liebenden gingen irgendwann aus irgendwelchen dramaturgischen Regeln auseinander ... und alle vergossen beim Abschied eimerweise Tränen. Doch ausgerechnet ich, das personifizierte Sinnbild allen Leidens, ich, die lebendiggewordene Kunstfigur sämtlicher Kitschchromane, ja gerade ich arme Sau war nicht in der Lage, zu weinen. An Lust fehlte es mir nicht, nur an Kraft. Ich war des Weinens müde.<sup>18</sup> (225)

Whereas Goethe and Plenzdorf intended to describe a collective experience illustrated by an individual incident, Pirinçi presents Akif's sufferings as constructed and second-hand.

Language in the three texts is a major factor in establishing a common ground with the reader. All three texts appeal frequently to the reader's sympathy and understanding. The second half of the eighteenth century experienced a change in the understanding of how language works.<sup>19</sup> The reliability of language to adequately convey emotions was questioned. A scene

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<sup>18</sup> Millions and billions of lovers have separated at some point for some dramaturgical reason ... and all of them shed buckets full of tears when saying goodbye. But I of all people, the personified symbol of all suffering, I, the contrived literary figure of all Harlequin novels, yes, I poor devil wasn't able to cry. I didn't lack the desire but the energy. I was tired of crying.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

from Die Leiden des jungen Werthers illustrates Goethe's preoccupation with the limitations of language. When the sudden downpour of rain after a thunderstorm comes as a relief, Werther and Lotte express their love for each other by spontaneously recalling Klopstock's name. The evocation of the name of the poet who inaugurated the language of Empfindsamkeit in Germany is the most effective way of expressing what they are feeling:

... sie sah gen Himmel und auf mich, ich sah ihr Auge tränenvoll ... und sagte-Klopstock!- Ich erinnerte mich sogleich der herrlichen Ode, die ihr in Gedanken lag, und versank in dem Strome von Empfindungen, den sie in dieser Losung über mich ausgoß. Ich ertrug's nicht, neigte mich auf ihre Hand und küßte sie unter den wonnevollsten Tränen.<sup>20</sup> (404)

Goethe resorts here to metaphors of water and the word Strom (stream), in particular, to capture the nuances of the couple's emotions. Plenzdorf concludes his novel with an explanation for Edgar's death: "Nach dem, was die Ärzte sagten, war es eine Stromsache" (According to what the doctors said, it was a matter of current [148]). The German word Strom signifies not only 'stream' but also 'electrical current.' Although Edgar's death may have been directly caused by high voltage, the deeper cause is to be found in problems of communication, differing values and lack of understanding. Peter Wapnewski points out that East German literature in the 1970s propagated a new subjectivism in

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<sup>20</sup> ... She gazed up to the sky and then at me. I saw her eyes fill with tears ... and she said-Klopstock!- I at once recalled the heavenly ode which was the subject of her thoughts, and sank into the stream of sentiments which she poured over me with this name. I could not bear it, inclined toward her hand and kissed it while shedding the most blissful tears."

rebellion against the work ethic and regimentation (539). Werther speaks of the well-established ("die gelassenen Herren") as those sitting on both sides of the river trying to contain the potentially dangerous force of the stream with dams. Like Plenzdorf, Pirinççi adopts Goethe's images of the stream to express problems of communication and the ideological gulf between those who conform and those who do not. On the last page Akif concludes that Christa now stands on the opposite side of the stream ("auf dem gegenüberliegenden Ufer" [256]) and that he is tired of swimming: "Und weil ich keine Kraft mehr besitze, habe ich auch nicht die geringste Lust, zu schwimmen. Ich glaube, ich kann gar nicht schwimmen. Und ich glaube, ich werde mein Leben lang nicht mehr schwimmen können" (256).<sup>21</sup>

Both Plenzdorf and Pirinççi use a spoken, conversational German that is suffused with slang expressions to characterize Edgar's and Akif's diction. This technique takes it for granted that the reader is familiar with this type of language, if not the numerous allusions. The reader is treated as an accomplice. It is here where both authors are most indebted to Salinger. Critics have often commented on the authenticity of Holden's and Edgar's language. Christa's surprise at Akif's/Akif Pirinççi's fluency in German will most likely be shared by many German readers. Franco Biondi writes from outside of the German

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<sup>21</sup> And because I don't have any strength left, I also don't have any desire to swim anymore. I believe I can't swim at all. And I believe that for the rest of my life I won't be able to swim anymore.

language, whereas Piriñçi writes from the inside. Biondi's objective is to write against "die Fremde" (alienness) that is inherent in language by, in turn, making it "alien," that is by breaking grammatical rules and placing words in unfamiliar contexts. As he puts it in the concluding sentence of his essay "Die Fremde wohnt in der Sprache,": "...diese Art zu schreiben ... drückt anders aus und spricht doch von demselben" (this mode of writing ... expresses differently and still speaks of the same [32]). Piriñçi, on the other hand, shocks by using familiar expressions to suggest something else. The book opens, for instance, with the description of the discotheque where Akif meets Christa: "Der Kasten hieß (und heißt immer noch) "Treff" und war überfüllt wie Dachau" (The joint was called "Treff" [and still is] and was as packed as Dachau [5]). Akif describes his fellow students' attempt to take it out on one of their teachers as "[sie] haben ihn mit diesem 'Eumel' gehänselt bis zum Vergasen" (they teased him with this "Eumel" until they were blue in the face [39]). "Bis zum Vergasen" which cannot be translated literally into English refers to gassing of victims in the concentration camps. The expression is still widely used in contemporary German and the younger generation is often unconscious of the origin of the phrase. Christa casts an Auschwitz-like glance ("einen auschwitzähnlichen Blick") at Akif whenever they are at odds, and thinking about his deteriorating relationship with her, Akif can suddenly see the "Endlösung," a word which apart from conjuring up images of mass murder also

"playfully" alludes to the title of the book. By repeatedly, apparently innocently, referring to concentration camp atrocities, Pirinççi demonstrates how language, and in this case particularly the German language, can be (and has always been) manipulated and abused. By drawing the parallel between Nazi Germany and the 1980s, he also points out that xenophobia in the Federal Republic of Germany is still rampant.

Like Franco Biondi, Pirinççi writes both from within and against a dominating literary and cultural tradition, which is Deleuze and Guattari's definition of a "minor" literature. Pirinççi's writing against, however, takes on a form that is distinguished from Biondi's. Not only does he write against the established discursive practices of migrant experience in Germany, but by constructing the Turkish migrant as picaro he also "writes back" to a literary form which became very popular in Germany after the second World War.<sup>22</sup> By giving Werther's and Edgar's story an open rather than a fatal end, Pirinççi illustrates one of the picaresque novel's main conclusions: freedom can only be understood as individual opposition and resistance.<sup>23</sup> The fact that Akif manages to save his life by making the essential call from a public phone and that he

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Mann's Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull (1951), Günther Grass' Die Blechtrommel (1959) and Heinrich Böll's Ansichten eines Clowns (1963) are the best known examples.

<sup>23</sup> See Ronald Blaber and Marvin Gilman's book on the picaresque, a genre they find well-suited to the expression of opposition in post-colonial societies.

subsequently tells his story confirms how vital it is to break the silence.

Migrants from Turkey, unlike those from Italy, used to be a particularly silent minority in Germany and it was not until the 1980s that novels by Turkish authors were published, usually by small publishing houses. Unlike most Italian writers in Germany, the majority of Turkish authors did not write in German which retarded their literary recognition. Akif Pirinççi has a special status among Turkish writers in Germany. His three novels to date have been published by mainstream publishers, but paradoxically he has been widely ignored by critics working within the field of German migrant literature. His work does not fit into the picture. His second novel, Felidae (1989), is a detective novel whose protagonist is a cat. The protagonist of his recent novel Rumpf (1992) was born without arms and legs and commits the perfect murder. This work is a macabre hybrid of the detective and picaresque novel. Pirinççi seems as much a picaresque figure as his avatar and mouthpiece Akif, a misfit in the German literary landscape.

## Chapter Two: Versions of the Female Migrant Short Story Cycle

The Multicultural Department is a Canadian invention. It is supposed to ensure that ethnic cultures are able to flourish, so that Canadian society will consist of a mosaic of cultures--that's their favourite word, mosaic- instead of one uniform mix, like the American melting pot. If you ask me, mosaic and melting pot are both nonsense, and ethnic is a polite way of saying bloody foreigner. (Rohinton Mistry, Tales from Firozsha Baag)

Margin, however, has another meaning which I prefer to hold uppermost in my mind, when I work as a member of two groups--Blacks and women--traditionally described as marginal. That meaning is "frontier." Surely this meaning is encapsulated in Williams' phrase "emergent energies and experiences which stubbornly resist" the dominant culture. The concept of frontier changes our perception of ourselves and the so-called mainstream. (M. Nourbese Philip, Frontiers)

Living in the Borderlands:<sup>1</sup> Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street (1984)

Being migrants to and indigenes of the United States<sup>2</sup> at the same time, the Chicanos' situation is very different from that of other migrant groups. Although the terms "Chicano" and "Mexican-American" are often used synonymously, "Chicano" is the name Mexican-Americans prefer giving to themselves because of its political and cultural implications. The term Chicano was

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<sup>1</sup> I am adopting this term from Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza (1987) where she describes the U.S.-Mexican border as "una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country-a border culture" (3).

<sup>2</sup> After the Mexican War (1848), the Mexican territory north of the Rio Grande, that is the present states of California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico and half of Colorado, became part of the United States.

appropriated by political activists during the 1960s to show solidarity with the farm workers. Literary critic Juan Bruce-Novoa uses the term "Chicano" to refer to "all people of Mexican heritage living permanently in the United States. Some are monolingual in English or Spanish, but most find themselves on a sliding scale of interlingualism based on a Spanish/English mixture" (Bruce-Novoa 75). Raymund A. Paredes suggests a much more inclusive definition in the literary context that is reminiscent of Eli Mandel's definition of the "ethnic text": "Chicano Literature is that body of work produced by United States citizens and residents of Mexican descent for whom a sense of ethnicity is a critical part of their literary sensibilities and for whom the portrayal of their ethnic experience is a major concern" (Paredes 74).

Chicanos/Chicanas exist between two cultures. They have drifted away from Mexican culture but have not been fully integrated into American society, partly because of their own resistance to assimilation and partly because of Anglo-American racism. Chicanos/Chicanas have been creating a literature that merges characteristics from their Indian, Spanish, and Anglo-American heritage. Gloria Anzaldúa remarks:

When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; mestizo when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; Raza when referring to Chicanos; tejanos when we are Chicanos from Texas. (63)

The position of a Chicano/Chicana writing in English in the



United States, no matter if he/she lives in the rural Southwest or in a barrio in Chicago, is different from the European migrant writing in an adopted language in New York, Edmonton or Cologne. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a minor literature needs to be modified within the context of Chicano/Chicana literature. Of the three features of a minor literature, emphasis on politics and collective value not only apply but are an essential aspect of Chicano/Chicana literature. Deterritorialization, however, which refers to the migrant's separation from the homeland as well as the severance of the signifier from the signified in his/her language does not describe the experience of most contemporary Chicanos/Chicanas. The Chicano/Chicana mode of experience and expression is the borderland.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1980s an impressive number of Chicana writers entered the scene creating new images of Chicana women. They have been tackling the questions of gender and female sexuality that used to be widely ignored by their male predecessors. Born to a Mexican immigrant father and a Chicana mother, Sandra Cisneros spent most of her childhood in the Mexican community of Chicago. However, the family was "constantly moving back and forth between Chicago and Mexico City due to my father's

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<sup>3</sup> See Renato Rosaldo, "Politics, Patriarchs, And Laughter." Rosaldo suggests "that the creative space of resistance for Chicanos be called the border, a site of bilingual speech" (Rosaldo 67). Emily Hicks explores the implications of "border writing" in her article "Deterritorialization and Border Writing."

compulsive 'homesickness'" ("From a Writer's Notebook" 69). The House on Mango Street is a collection of interrelated short stories based on autobiographical experience. In "From a Writer's Notebook. Ghosts and Voices: Writing from Obsession," Cisneros describes the obstacles she had to overcome in finding her own voice as a writer. She speaks about the difficulty of trusting a voice that she acquired at home growing up with an English-speaking mother and a Spanish-speaking father in a working-class environment. Cisneros claims that the poor cannot afford to write "by inspiration," but "write by obsession" about that "which is most violently tugging at [their] psyche" ("From a Writer's Notebook" 73). In Chicana literature everything is political and everything takes on a collective value in Deleuze and Guattari's sense.

The majority of the forty-four short stories of The House on Mango Street fill only half a page and are poetic in style, transgressing the boundaries of prose and poetry. Cisneros comments:

I recall I wanted to write stories that were a cross between poetry and fiction ... Except I wanted to write a collection which could be read at any random point without having any knowledge of what came before or after. Or, that could be read in a series to tell one big story. I wanted stories like poems, compact and lyrical and ending with a reverberation. ("From a Writer's Notebook" 78)

These prose poems are related to each other through the narrator Esperanza Cordero, a tomboyish Chicana girl of ten or twelve. They are also linked by a common theme: the position of girls and women in Latino society. Women's experience depicted in the

collection ranges from domestic violence to incest and rape. The setting of The House on Mango Street is a barrio that is inhabited by Latinos/Latinas and is located in a run-down area of an American city. Cisneros writes from a Chicana feminist perspective dedicating her book bilingually: "A las Mujeres. To the Women." Although mainstream feminism and Chicana feminism share the perspective on questions of gender and sexuality, there are differences between them with regard to issues of race, culture and class. The Chicana's experience as a woman cannot be separated from her experience as a member of an oppressed working-class racial minority.

An even more important issue for most contemporary Chicana writers is finding and asserting their identity within their own culture. They face the double bind of reconciling their loyalty to their Mexican heritage while standing up for their rights as women. The culture described by feminist Chicanas in their literature is male-dominated and misogynist. Cisneros focuses on the sexism that is evident in Chicano culture and the negative attitudes toward female sexuality which is often bound with issues of class. Racism is not a major issue in the cycle. Unlike many works written by Chicanos a decade earlier, The House on Mango Street does not focus on the oppression and humiliation which Chicanos are subjected to in a predominantly white world. The ethnic boundaries in The House on Mango Street are such that the Anglo-American world does not directly intrude into the barrio, as described in "Those Who Don't":

Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake. (29)

The boundaries of the barrio could well serve as a protection if the enemy were not within. Cisneros not only depicts women as victims, but she also shows how girls and women perpetuate the role models assigned them by patriarchy. She describes the clash between the male and the female rather than that between the Anglo-American and the Chicano world. She is not interested in the male hero torn between two cultures, which was the major topic of Chicano literature in the 1960s and 1970s, but the socialization of a young Chicana within the barrio and within the community of women, some of whom serve her as guides in her rites of passage.

The link between the stories is also established through the recurrence of some minor characters. Characters that appear in several stories are Esperanza's younger sister Nenny, and her slightly older friends Marin, Alicia and Sally, who, because they are more streetwise, pass their experience on to her. The short story cycle, or "short story sequence" as Robert M. Luscher prefers to call it (Luscher 149),<sup>4</sup> is a genre favoured by many migrant writers, women writers in particular. The cycle is so attractive to minority writers because it is an ideal form

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<sup>4</sup> Luscher argues that Forrest Ingram's term short story cycle "draws attention to the recurrence of theme, symbol, and character, but does so at the expense of deemphasizing the volume's successiveness" (149).

to express the dialectic between the single unit and the whole, between independence and interdependence. Forrest Ingram observes:

Central to the dynamics of the short story cycle is the tension between the one and the many. When do the many cease being merely many and congeal into one? Conversely, when does a 'one' become so discrete and differentiated that it dissolves into a 'many?' Every story cycle displays a double tendency of asserting the individuality of its components on the one hand and of highlighting, on the other, the bonds of unity which make the many into a single whole. (19)

Ingram's observations uncannily conjure up notions of the tension between unity and pluralism in monocultural and multicultural paradigms such as the American melting pot, where peoples of diverse ethnic backgrounds supposedly merge to make a new people and the Canadian mosaic, where ethnic groups function as part of the whole while retaining their distinctiveness. For the reader the cycle also poses a task in perspectivism. The stories are linked in such a way "that the reader's experience of each one is modified by his experience of the others" (Ingram 13). Each of the stories could stand by itself, but receives additional meaning when seen within the cycle.

The House on Mango Street, like Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth and Angelika Fremd's Heartland, is among other things a girl's coming-of-age story and a portrait of the artist as a young woman. Although most of the stories are presented through Esperanza's eyes, and it is she who will eventually leave the barrio in order to become a writer, her experience is

not represented as unique. Marin, Alicia and Sally share Esperanza's experience of growing up in a working-class milieu that is characterized by male dominance. The maturing process of the girls is defined by disillusionment and violence. This is a communal rather than an individual experience. As in most coming-of-age stories, Esperanza's maturing process is linked to first sexual awareness. However, Esperanza is not granted the feeling of freedom that so often is the result of first sexual encounters in boys' coming-of-age stories. Cisneros depicts a society which does not respect a woman's spiritual and physical boundaries. In "The First Job" Esperanza talks to "an older Oriental man" who suggests that they could be friends and sit in the lunchroom together. Esperanza observes:

He had nice eyes and I didn't feel so nervous anymore. Then he asked if I knew what day it was and when I said I didn't he said it was his birthday and would I please give him a birthday kiss. I thought I would because he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his cheek, he grabs my face with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn't let go. (52)

Descriptions of cultural oppression are hardly ever absent from a Chicano novel. Chicanas, however, focus on the "borderlands," or "liminal" space, of women's everyday experience in a world that is defined by domestic violence and male oppression. Esperanza's maturing process advances through the stages of her watching other girls being abused by men and by eventually being raped herself. In her poetry Esperanza finds a way of expressing the pain of growing up as well as her anger.

Although varieties of the Künstlerroman are privileged by

a wide range of migrant writers of various ethnic backgrounds, for Chicanos/Chicanas to find their own voice in writing is an essential means of preserving tradition in the Chicano community which is immersed in another culture. Unlike that of the majority of the European migrants to the New World, the Chicanos' cultural and literary tradition is oral. In texts written by women in which the question of female identity is intertwined with the exploration of cultural history, finding a voice and breaking the silence is an even more essential survival technique. Contemporary Chicanas re-write aspects of the literature written by Chicano men thereby scrutinizing cultural parameters and reinterpreting them from their own perspective. In some ways The House on Mango Street is a woman's re-writing of stories that deal with the experience of coming of age from both the Anglo-American and Chicano tradition as well as of critical texts that espouse male ideology, as I will show later on.<sup>5</sup> At the same time The House on Mango Street enters into a dialogue with works by fellow women writers of colour, such as Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1976).<sup>6</sup> The mestiza, says Anzaldúa,

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<sup>5</sup> There are allusions to Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (1919) and James Joyce's Dubliners (1914) as well as of Tomás Rivera's Y no se lo tragó la tierra (1970) in Cisneros' text. Ellen McCracken draws attention to echoes from Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place and Pedro Juan Soto's Spiks in addition to those from Anderson's and Rivera's short story cycles.

<sup>6</sup> In an interview with Reed Dasenbrock, Cisneros points out: "I love Maxine Hong Kingston. The Woman Warrior--what a wonderful book that was for me. That gave me permission to keep

learns to "juggle cultures" (79).

In "My Name" Esperanza talks about her name which means hope in English and "too many letters" in Spanish. "It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse--which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female--but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong" (12). People born in the Chinese year of the horse are said to be headstrong and anxious to maintain their independence--traditionally masculine attributes. The official Chicano culture is male-centered and has its roots in vaquero<sup>7</sup> culture. Horsemanship, courage and endurance are those cultural values celebrated in the literature of the Chicano Renaissance. The warrior hero in this literature represents a figure of resistance to Anglo-American domination.<sup>8</sup> For Esperanza, however, the horse woman is above all an image of resistance to male domination:

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it. And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window all her life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow ... I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place

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going with what I'd started with House on Mango Street" (303).

<sup>7</sup> Vaquero is the Spanish word for 'cowboy.'

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting discussion of the treatment of the figure of the warrior hero in Americo Paredes, Ernesto Galarza and Sandra Cisneros see Renato Rosaldo, Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis.



by the window. (12)

"My Name" is an allusion to the first section in The Woman Warrior called "No Name Woman," which tells the story of the narrator's aunt in China whose name the family tried to forget since she was bearing an illegitimate child. The entire community and her family reviled her although it was very likely that she was the victim of rape. Both Kingston's protagonist and Esperanza identify with these female ancestors. Whereas the male writer has the traditional heroes to identify with, the female writer is hampered by the heritage of patriarchal myths in a society which excludes her from a wide range of experience. What Esperanza longs for is a feminine space:

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after. Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem. (100)

"A House Of My Own" echoes not only Virginia Woolf's plea "for a room of her own" but also Maxine Hong Kingston's observation that privacy is unknown to Chinese women.<sup>9</sup> Cisneros points out that Gaston Bachelard's La Poétique de L'Espace (1957) inspired her to write her own philosophy of domestic space:

... a house, a house, it hit me. What did I know except third-floor flats. Surely my classmates knew nothing about

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<sup>9</sup> In The Woman Warrior she writes: "Not many women got to live out the daydream of women-to have a room, even a section of a room, that only gets messed up when she messes it up herself. The book would stay open at the very page she had pressed flat with her hand, and no one would complain about the field not being plowed or the leak in the roof" (72).

that. That's precisely what I chose to write: about third-floor flats, and fear of rats, and drunk husbands sending rocks through windows, anything as far from the poetic as possible. (73)

The first two chapters of La Poétique de L'Espace represent a white middle-class man's phenomenology of the house. Not so many women own houses. And it is not the typical experience of the average Chicana to grow up in a house. Bachelard concludes:

Mais comment donner au ménage une activité créatrice? Dès qu'on apporte une lueur de conscience au geste machinal, dès qu'on fait de la phénoménologie en frottant un vieux meuble, on sent naître, au-dessous de la douce habitude domestique, des impressions nouvelles. La conscience rajeunit tout. Elle donne aux actes les plus familiers une valeur de commencement. Elle domine la mémoire. Quel émerveillement de redevenir vraiment l'auteur de l'acte machinal! (73)

When read against this passage, it becomes clear that The House on Mango Street does not express Esperanza's materialistic desire to own a house but needs to be read as the attempt to reterritorialize women's space. The house becomes a metaphoric space of the female self. In "Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water" Esperanza wants to know if she will ever own a house. The fortuneteller tells her that she sees "a home in the heart" (64). Woman needs to become her own house in which she can be self-confident and free of fear.

The barrio is on the one hand a manifestation of ethnic ghettoization; on the other, it has been mysticized by some Chicano poets and critics, among them Tomás Rivera who claims that la casa, el barrio and la lucha are "constant elements in the ritual of Chicano literature" (Rivera 441). Rivera

investigates the significance of these three concepts for the Chicano community. To illustrate the cultural meaning that the concepts carry he quotes from poetry written by well-known Chicano poets--none of them women. He writes: "La casa is to me the most beautiful word in the Spanish language. It evokes the constant refuge, the constant father, the constant mother" (Rivera 441). The barrio, the homeground of the community, nourishes, "conserves" and "cleanses" the poet (445). And la lucha "is a struggle of cultures, dignified and undignified, a struggle of man and that which he creates, a struggle to tear away one's own masks and discover oneself" (448). Just as she does with Bachelard's phenomenology of male space, Cisneros transforms the male ideology behind this argument into a feminist practice in her text. The house Esperanza will own one day will be a communal space:

One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I now how it is to be without a house. (81)

When woman has a house of her own, she does not need to keep the madwoman in the attic but can feel free to invite whomever she wants. Cisneros shows that the barrio that Rivera celebrates as the Chicano's space of community and autonomy does not have the same implications for the Chicana. It is a threatening space where male violence is an ever present reality.<sup>10</sup> Esperanza's

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<sup>10</sup> In an interview with Pilar E. Rodríguez Aranda, Cisneros points out: "I wrote it [The House on Mango Street] as a reaction against those people who want to make our barrios look like Sesame Street, or some place really warm and beautiful.

barrio, the space of the community, that nourishes her aspiration to become a writer, is the world of women. Her paralyzed aunt Guadalupe encourages her to become a writer: "That's nice. That's very good, she said in her tired voice. You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free..." (56). Esperanza, just like Cisneros, finds her literary voice through her own "borderland" experience and that of other Chicanas. At a baby girl's wake, three wise old women predict her future as a writer. In "The Three Sisters"<sup>11</sup> las comadres ask her to make a wish and assure her it will come true. Then one of them takes Esperanza aside:

She held my face with her blue-veined hands and looked and looked at me. A long silence. When you leave you must remember always to come back, she said. What? When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know: You can't forget who you are.... You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you. (98)

Unlike many initiation stories written by male authors in which the young male protagonist needs to set himself apart from the community in order to be able to be a writer and to free himself from the milieu he grew up in, Esperanza will have to come back to fulfill the artist's mission, that is, be a model and support for the community of women. In "Beautiful and Cruel" Esperanza declares her own "quiet war," her way of keeping up la

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Poor neighborhoods loose [sic] their charm after dark, they really do" (69).

<sup>11</sup> The title is reminiscent of James Joyce's "The Sisters" in Dubliners.

lucha, her struggle at the frontiers of gender: "I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (82). Just as Esperanza's struggle transgresses the borders of gender, Cisneros rejects the dominant culture's definition of what a Chicana woman is and what role behaviour she is expected to conform to.

A recurrent motif with symbolic significance in The House on Mango Street is that of shoes and feet. In ancient times, shoes denoted liberty. And in China feet were bound to hinder women from moving around freely. In "The Family of Little Feet," Esperanza and her friends dress up in some discarded high-heel shoes and walk around the barrio:

Hurray! Today we are Cinderella because our feet fit exactly and we laugh at Rachel's one foot with a girl's grey sock and a lady's high heel.... Down to the corner where the men can't take their eyes off us. We must be Christmas.

Mr. Benny at the corner grocery puts down his important cigar:

Your mother know you got shoes like that? Who give you those?

Nobody.

Them are dangerous, he says. You girls too young to be wearing

shoes like that. Take them shoes off before I call the cops, but we just run....

Across the street in front of the tavern a bum man on the stoop. Do you like these shoes?

Bum man says, Yes, little girl. Your little lemon shoes are so beautiful. But come closer. I can't see very well. Come closer. (38-39)

At first flattered by the male attention, the girls eventually become aware of the potentially violent nature of male power. The story also portrays the competition between girls/women for

the attention of men. Parading down the street the three friends pass a group of girls who are obviously jealous of the stir which the three caused. There are two categories of girls and women in the stories. Those who comply with the patriarchal system are characterized as having "tiny feet" and wearing suitably feminine shoes, for instance Mamacita in "No Speak English" and Sire's girlfriend in "Sire" who wears make-up, but "doesn't know how to tie her shoes." And then there are those girls like Esperanza who are not prepared to "wake up early with the tortilla star" (32) and make the lunchbox tortillas. In "Chanclas"<sup>12</sup> Esperanza is wearing her new dress for a dance but her mother forgot to bring her new shoes. She is very self-conscious about her "old saddle shoes" which she wears to school, "brown and white, the kind I get every September because they last long and they do" (45). But eventually she dances confidently and happily with her Uncle Nacho forgetting she is wearing ordinary shoes. Women, according to The House on Mango Street, cannot be themselves until they stop trying to look beautiful for men.

Marin, the protagonist of several stories, will be sent back home because she is "too much trouble" (27). Marin knows too much for her age, her skirts are shorter than those of the other girls, she smokes and is not afraid. Marin is named after Doña Marina or La Malinche, the Indian lover of Hernán Cortés

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<sup>12</sup> Chanclas is the Mexican word for 'old broken shoes.' Cisneros does not translate richly culture-bound words such as frijoles, los espíritus, comadres into English.

and mother of his illegitimate children. Malinche, the Mexican Eve who betrayed her people, is a symbol of the Spanish conquest. Her rape led to the defeat of the Indians and the birth of the mestizo/mestiza race.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary Chicanas have been re-writing Malinche's story in their works from a feminist perspective.<sup>14</sup> As Robert Kroetsch points out, the re-writing of myths and stories "is often an attempt at healing" ("The Grammar of Silence: Narrative Patterns in Ethnic Writing" 69).

Another type of woman that has been mythicized in Chicano literature written by men is the curandera, the healer or white witch. The most famous example is Ultima in Rudolfo Anaya's Bless me, Ultima (1972). These women are usually depicted as bodyless widows or spinsters. Cisneros' Elenita in "Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water," on the other hand is a being of flesh and blood who needs to reconcile witchcraft with her household chores:

Elenita, witch woman, wipes the table with a rag because Ernie who is feeding the baby spilled Kool-Aid. She says: take that crazy baby out of here and drink your Kool-Aid in the living room. Can't you see I'm busy? Ernie takes the baby into the living room where Bugs Bunny is on T.V. (59)

Along with the re-writing of myths goes their demystification.<sup>15</sup>

In her humorously debunking style Cisneros claims that women do

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<sup>13</sup> See the introduction to "Chicana Writers" in The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States (310)

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Cherrie Moraga's Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios (1983), Lucha Corpi's Marina Poems, Carmen Tafolla's poem "La Malinche" (1978) and Angela de Hoyos poem "La Malinche a Cortez y viceversa" (1980).

<sup>15</sup> See McCracken.

it every day. This casts an ironic light on male authors' tendency to romanticize and mythicize some female characters while branding others as whores.

One of the recurrent figures in Chicano literature written by men is the Chicano represented as outsider in Anglo-American society. Cisneros makes the point that women have been doubly alienated. Chicanas have not only been oppressed, excluded and alienated by Anglo-American culture but also by their own, a culture that idealized woman as the centre of family life. Any role outside of that narrow sphere was not only censured but most often refused her. Cisneros like other Chicana writers shows how women have been denied education and the right, the time and the space to find self-fulfillment in art. In "A Smart Cookie" Esperanza tells her mother's story:

I could've been somebody, you know? my mother says and sighs. She has lived in this city her whole life. She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a T.V. But she doesn't know which subway train to take to get downtown.... Then out of nowhere: Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down. You want to know why I quit school? Because I didn't have nice clothes, but I had brains. Yup, she says disgusted, stirring again. I was a smart cookie then. (83-84)

Women who were granted their own kind of education and allowed to perform their craft, most notably the curanderas, were treated as outsiders and were depicted as such by male authors.

The Chicana artist is torn between her role as a woman and her aspirations as an artist. In order to become a writer, Esperanza needs to rebel against traditional role expectations by transgressing the borders of gender. Esperanza needs to be



"selfish" as she refers to her wish to become a writer. She calls herself "born bad"<sup>16</sup> and she thinks. "I am an ugly daughter. I am the one nobody comes for" (82). On the other hand she longs to grow into a woman, as shown in "Hips" and for sexual fulfillment: "Everything is holding its breath inside me. Everything is waiting to explode like Christmas. I want to be all new and shiny. I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt" (70). Whereas the artist hero, as Maurice Beebe observes, tends to be "sensitive," "passive," "introverted" and "absentminded" (Beebe 5), Esperanza, like many of her sisters in other female Künstlerromane is adventurous, fearless and spirited. Sally, who "got married like we knew she would, young and not ready but married just the same" (95) represents Esperanza's conventional feminine foil. Esperanza's name, unlike Sally's, sounds heroic: "she's special" observes one of the comadres. In order to free herself and fight for the rights of women, Esperanza needs to establish a sense of communion with other women, create a "circle," as one of the comadres tells her to do. Not the barrio and the male literary tradition but the synchronic and diachronic community of women provides the homeground that nourishes the Chicana writer. The Chicana has been driven from her body as much as she has been excluded from owning space and having access to education and writing. In "The Laugh of the

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<sup>16</sup> See the short story of the same title which echoes Kingston's rhetorical question: "Isn't a bad girl almost a boy?"

Medusa," where she explores the possibilities of écriture féminine, Hélène Cixous emphasizes the importance for women to write the body:

Woman must put herself into the text--as into the world and into history--by her own movement.... It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (Cixous 875, 881)

In The House on Mango Street the need for writing the body goes hand in hand with the need for writing place. With subtle irony Cisneros plays on the polysemy of mango in the title of her stories. In Spanish mango is not only the name for the fruit but also for 'handle' or 'haft' and a slang word for 'penis.' Mango de pluma means 'penholder,' mango de escoba means 'broomstick' and tener la sarten por el mango 'to be the master of the house.' One of the many things the house stands for in the stories is the female body. Another source of inspiration for Cisneros' short story cycle was Virginia Lee Burton's picture book for children The Little House. Her-Story (1942).<sup>17</sup> The Little House is the story of a house in the country whose owner promises never to sell her and predicts that his great-great-grandchildren will live in her. The little house on the book's cover has the face of a woman. The story of the little house is a story of reversed dislocation. Urbanization and rapid

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<sup>17</sup> See Cisneros "From A Writer's Notebook: Ghosts and Voices: Writing form Obsession" (70).

industrialization change the landscape so radically that within a few years the little house unhappily finds herself within an urban centre. Rediscovered by the great-great-grandchildren she is moved back to the countryside where she lives happily ever after. Woman can only prosper in a congenial environment.

In The House on Mango Street subversion of the dominant discourse is brought about not only by a young girl's voice innocently talking about rape and other kinds of male violence but also by the hidden bilingualism of Cisneros' writing. Cisneros simulates the flavour of Spanish by reproducing in English its syntactical and idiomatic qualities. Whereas Biondi suppresses his vernacular Italian and "reworks" the German language in his attempt at reterritorialization, Cisneros reterritorializes the vernacular Spanish by fusing a Spanish "deep structure" with an English "surface structure." Ironically, Cisneros' hidden mother tongue is her father's tongue. It was her father not her mother who spoke Spanish with her at home. Unlike, for instance, the open bilingualism of Rudolfo Anaya's Bless Me, Ultima (1972) in which English and Spanish clash against each other, Cisneros' subtle bilingualism internalizes the borders between the two languages just as Esperanza's struggle against patriarchy resorts to oppositional practice<sup>18</sup> rather than open battle.

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<sup>18</sup> In Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative, Ross Chambers differentiates between "oppositional behaviour" which he sees as a "survival tactics" and revolution "which is a mode of resistance to forms of power it regards as illegitimate" (1). In his view, oppositional behaviour "has a

Acutely aware of the social problems which women have to face, and in particular those who live at the borderlines of two or more cultures, Cisneros does not create heroines but female characters who are a blend of strengths and weaknesses. Some of the married female characters, alienated housewives, take on grotesque features. Cisneros' women become grotesques, because, in order to escape from a tyrannical father and a life full of restrictions, they opt for marriage and create a new prison for themselves.<sup>19</sup> The subsequent dependence on the husband and submission to his rule make it impossible for these women to adjust when forced to follow their husbands to the United States. "No Speak English" is the story of Mamacita who refuses to adjust to her new environment:

Whatever her reasons, whether she is fat or can't climb the stairs or is afraid of English, she won't come down. She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull...Ay! Mamacita, who does not belong, every once in a while lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country. And then to break her heart forever, the baby boy who has begun to talk, starts to sing the pepsi commercial he heard on T.V. No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English, and bubbles into tears. No, no, no as if she can't believe her ears. (74-75)

Unlike Mamacita, Cisneros does not believe in a single cultural

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particular potential to change states of affairs, by changing people's 'mentalities'" (1).

<sup>19</sup> This is reminiscent of Sherwood Anderson's explanation in the introduction of Winesburg, Ohio that adopting a certain idea or belief as their only truth makes people "grotesques."

alliance. Instead, she explores the possibilities of the space between genders and genres. The male European concept of minor literature needs to be re-visioned to serve as a working model for the Chicana experience. The House on Mango Street is political in that it "express[es] another possible community," namely bonding with the female line of ancestry and the female community and "forge[s] the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (Deleuze and Guattari 17) where, in Françoise Lionnet's words, "solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages" (6).

Thicker Than Water? Rachna Mara's Of Customs and Excise (1991)

Mala, one of the protagonists in Rachna Mara's sequence of short stories, Of Customs And Excise observes: "When we lived in Canada and people asked what my nationality was I'd say, 'Canadian. What's yours?' Where are you from? In England, it's easy, From Canada" (104). Mala, whose parents emigrated to Canada from India when she was a child, chooses to live in England later in life, where she has a daughter. The quotation highlights the difference between circumstantial and voluntary migration. It also addresses the particular plight of people of colour in Western culturally diverse societies of being continuously viewed as having come from somewhere else. Unlike the migrant of colour, the white migrant--once he/she has mastered the language of the adopted country-- usually ceases to be perceived as a foreigner. Mala's observation also reflects the book's concern with border crossings, on the one hand, and cultural and racial boundaries, on the other.

Sandra Cisneros focuses on sexism rather than racism in The House on Mango Street, but Mara is concerned with both. She not only explores the problems of a young Indian woman growing up in Canada with a tyrannical father who clings to the Indian way of raising a daughter, but also the difficulties of a British woman who grew up in India as a colonial child. In the stories dedicated to Asha, Bridget's Indian servant girl, Mara focuses on the clashes between culture and race as well as those

between classes. The stories dealing with Parvati, Mala's mother, describe the conflict of a woman torn between fulfilling the role of submissive wife and helping her daughter to escape from the marriage her father is arranging for her. The story about Mrs. Ungoli, Parvati's mother-in-law, sheds an ironic light on Indian filial obedience. The lives of these five women are intricately interwoven.

Whereas many short story cycles are unified by place (and time), such as Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, James Joyce's Dubliners and The House on Mango Street for that matter, or character as in Margaret Laurence's A Bird in the House, Clark Blaise's A North American Education and Alice Munro's Who Do You Think Your Are?, Of Customs And Excise defies temporal and spatial order. Neither do the stories dwell on the development of one particular character. The stories move back and forth between Barundabad, Prince Edward Island, Montreal and England, where Mala moves to work as a translator. England is also the place where the six-year-old Bridget suffers from the separation from her ayah at the boarding school, where her mother sends her fearing that Bridget is "getting too native" (67). Of the ten stories, five are set in India and five in Canada. "Pipal Leaves," "Asha's Gift" and "Auspicious Day" take place in the past at the time of Mala's birth. "Market Analysis" and "Muni" take place at the time when Mala is nineteen and attempts to get Mohan's permission to go to McGill to study French, Canada's "Other" language. "Daffodils" takes place three

years later, after Parvati secretly gave Mala some money to leave home. "Moon Snails" deals with Mala's return to P.E.I for Mohan's funeral thirteen years after she had severed ties with her parents. In "Doctor," which takes place twenty years after Bridget left India to return to England and care for her dying mother, her ride on an Indian train conjures up images of a trip to the Himalayas. At that time she tried to rescue Parvati from her father-in-law's voyeurism which had upset her so much that she had a miscarriage. Bridget also remembers her unhappy time at Rushton Manor where cruel fellow students presented her with a golliwog shouting: "'Bridget Parkinson was suckled by a wog'" (71). In the last story, "Parvati's Dance," which takes place after Mala's reunion with her mother, Mala tells her mother's story, the story of "a perfect Indian girl" with "romantic ideas" (111) who spent her teenage years reading romance novels, watching romantic movies and taking classical Indian dance lessons. In "Seed Pearls" which is also set in the present, Parvati's mother-in-law reminisces on her sickbed about her wedding and the way she was cheated out of her dowry by her husband's mother and sisters. She thinks of leaving some of her jewellery to Parvati and nothing to her other daughters-in-law since "at least she [Parvati] listened. No straying eyes, no showing off" (81). This is ironic in light of previous stories which show how badly Mrs. Ungoli treated Parvati.

Rachna Mara's irony is much gentler than, for instance, Bharati Mukherjee's "mordant and self-protective irony"



(Darkness 2). While retaining ironic detachment, Mara is at the same time sympathetic to her characters' shortcomings. The irony springs from the incongruities between the different perspectives from which a character is described. The short story cycle with its intrinsic resistance to a single point of view offers itself as a form to exploit these ironic discrepancies.

The sequential arrangement of the stories is such that the events of the past slowly unravel through the implications they have on the present, as in Ibsen's analytical drama. Just as in Ibsen's plays, the ghosts of the fathers/mothers haunt the children. This technique forces the reader to reconstruct the course of events, which is no easy task since the chronology of the stories is not only undermined by the non-chronological sequence of the single episodes but also interrupted by numerous flashbacks. Furthermore, some of the stories are written from an omniscient point-of-view, others in the first person; several use stream-of-consciousness. Some are written in the present and some in the past tense. There are two narrative energies at work in Of Customs And Excise: one to subvert and one to create unity and coherence.

As Robert Luscher observes, "Constructed without the novel's more rigid narrative skeleton, the short story sequence relies on a variety of textual strategies to provide unity and coherence" (150). The stories in Of Customs And Excise are not only linked by the fact that the five women's lives are

intertwined but also by a variety of recurrent images, symbols and unifying themes. All five women defy openly or secretly, "excise," the patriarchal confines of customs and duties as they have an impact on female sexuality, marriage and child bearing. As in The House on Mango Street, however, women are also shown to collude with the patriarchal system and to perpetuate traditional role behaviour. As much as the stories deal with the difficulties of growing up between cultures, they explore the relationships between mothers and daughters across the generations and cultures. Some of the book's main themes are latent and open racism, cultural prejudice and misconception. Just as the stories contain a large proportion of dialogue--Mara lets her characters speak for themselves--the stories are arranged in a way that each successive story enters into a dialogue with the previous one. This strategy counteracts the depiction of women's silence and inability to communicate with each other across cultures and generations.

As a patchwork quilt is composed of random pieces which nevertheless create coherence, the stories are stitched together through the recurrence of certain objects and images to create unity in disunity. The characters are linked through objects with which they are associated. The necklace is probably one of the most pervasive images in the stories. When Mala withdraws to her room after losing the battle over McGill she plans to take revenge by sleeping with a white boy:

She dragged her necklace off. Strands of tiny Rajasthani beads twisted together, unvarying as a genetic code.

Tomorrow. Her father would have to let her go to class. She'd wait outside for Dave, they'd skip class, drive some place quiet. She twisted the necklace hard. It burst, the cord biting into her skin. In all her fantasies, it had never been Dave, never. But at least he wasn't a stranger. (47)

Parvati's mother bribes the astrologer with a gold necklace out of Parvati's dowry to tell the Ungolis that "only immediate marriage was auspicious" (52). In "Seed Pearls," Mrs. Ungoli remembers the seed pearl necklace, pearls "delicate as whispered wishes" (83), she was given on her thirteenth birthday. The necklace, symbol of femininity and fertility, is here not only associated with female sexuality but also with the continuity of life. The necklace, according to Cirlot's Dictionary of Symbols, "stands for the unifying of diversity, that is, it represents an intermediate state between the inherent disintegration of all multiplicity ... and the state of unity inherent in continuity" (216).<sup>1</sup> By tearing the necklace apart, Mala symbolically breaks the ties with that part of her Indian heritage which prescribes passivity and submission with regard to a woman's sexuality. And yet, Mala closes the circle by choosing the traditional roles of wife and mother. When Parvati is mourning her mother's death, Mala cries out:

'Don't die, Mummy, don't. Mummy, I'm scared. Don't ever die.' She held me close. 'Mala, listen, I will never die, because I am in you. You came from my body, so you are part

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Sandra Cisneros uses the image of the necklace to describe the arrangement of her stories in The House on Mango Street: "You didn't have to know anything before or after and you would understand each story like a little pearl, or you could look at the whole thing like a necklace" (Dasenbrock 305).

of me. As long as you are alive, I will be alive in you.' Her face lit. 'And my mother will always be in mine.' 'And her mother was in her,' I shouted. Like those Indian dolls she bought me, one inside another, bright yellows, reds, dark almond eyes, the same fixed, smiling mouth. Alike forever. But I'm not like her, don't want to be. I'll never do the meek and suffering act for any fucking man, slave for the whims of some despot, duty, religion, whatever. (63)

Like the The House on Mango Street, Of Customs And Excise stresses the importance of a female genealogy and the continuation of a female tradition as a counterbalance to patriarchy.

Blood, and menstrual blood in particular, is another recurrent image linking the characters and with them their individual stories. "It binds all women together, the bed" (53) observes Parvati. When Mala secretly leaves her parents home she starts menstruating:

Shoving clothes in backpack. Underpants, bras, T-shirts, socks. I felt cramps, something wet. I didn't know what to do with my stained underwear, scrunched it in my backpack. I had only one pad. In the taxi, all the way to the airport, I sat on edge, afraid of a stain more than anything else. (62)

In "Asha's Gift" Asha is intrigued by the box of sanitary napkins she finds among Bridget's toiletries. In response to Asha's question: "Do you have any spare rags?" (25) Bridget starts supplying Asha regularly, who makes a little money on the side by selling a few pads here and there. Apart from the fact that these two episodes show that all women are inevitably connected by the laws of nature, they link two characters who are the only ones whose paths never cross. Separated by time and space, the lives of the two nineteen-year-olds, the age at which

the reader first encounters them, could not be more different: one an orphaned refugee in India, streetwise and unscrupulous, the other growing up in a middle-class family in Canada. However, they both rebel openly against patriarchal dominance, unlike the other women in the book: Asha by killing her brother-in-law and Mala, less radically, by sleeping with a white boy to undermine her father's plans to marry her off to an Indian and by getting a university education against his will.

Spilt blood is a symbol for sacrifice. If the Ungolis had found out that Parvati was more than three months pregnant, she would most likely have died. Dr. Naigar explains to Bridget: "'There'll be an accident, screams in the night. They'll say her sari caught fire while she was frying something, or she ate poisoned food put out for rats'" (17). Blood stains on the marriage bed are the obligatory proof of virginity. Parvati remembers her wedding night:

He took me as is his duty. Hurt only because I was scared. Long after he was sleeping, I did what my mother told me. Jabbed finger with hairpin. Seven times. In the morning, my husband, my mother-in-law, they saw blood on sheet and were satisfied. (53)

The marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Ungoli was contracted because of the bride's wealth rather than her beauty. Mrs. Ungoli's experience shows that the absence of blood can bring disgrace to the bride in a different way:

He sees me for the first time on our wedding night. Afraid, the bed with flowers. He takes off the jewels, parts my jasmine veil. Looks away. You must be tired. Yes, I'm tired. Afraid. The next day, and the next, they look at the sheets. Whispers like cobwebs. He should not look away. I dress in silk, must wait. All these jewels I have, these

silks, I can be lovely. A fine match, see how tall he is, how fair. My fault. Short, dark. Whispers, sticky, covering me. They want my blood, I am glad to endure that pain, just don't shame me. (85)

Mala, by sleeping with a white fellow-student and taunting her father by telling him so, openly rebels against his attempt "to have sacrificed her on the altar of his Indianness" (107). The image of blood also refers to genetic heritage. Bridget regrets that Parvati does not discuss her problems with her which makes her see that in spite of having been born in the country and speaking its language she does not belong:

She never discusses her family with me. She cannot possibly imagine how I understand. To her I am a doctor, she knows nothing of me, Bridget. She knows that I was born in India, lived here till I was six, but nothing of the flesh and blood, the things that count. (66)

Filial obedience keeps Parvati from complaining about the abuse she is suffering in the Ungoli household. Blood seems to be thicker than water. When Parvati learns about her daughter's rebellious act she wonders: "Such things, can they run in the blood? My daughter, all mine, not Mohan's. The other man, her father - I cannot call him my lover, even though she was conceived in love. No, I will not think of him. I will vomit blood" (50). The bond between mother and daughter is made even stronger by Parvati's secret, whereas Mala's two brothers seem to be closer to their father.

The image of blood within the context of racial identity is closely connected with the contrasting images of black and white, light and darkness. In Mara's stories black and white first of all denote skin colour. Mara's description of Indian

disdain of dark skin is reminiscent of Richard Rodriguez' observation in "Complexion" of the Mexican women's "fear of having a dark-skinned son or daughter" (116). In both cultural contexts, as described by Mara and Rodriguez, dark skin is considered to be almost a physical impairment. Whereas Parvati and Mala are very fair-skinned, Mohan is repeatedly referred to as "dark man." Mohan is self-conscious of his dark colour and regards it as a defect. He responds with anger when somebody makes skin colour an issue:

Shobba caught her up in a hug. 'Your turn will come soon enough, Mala. We'll have no trouble marrying you off, a fair girl like you. And we'll find you a good--looking, fair boy, just like that Pradeep--' She stopped abruptly as she saw Mala's father approaching, and added hastily, 'Not that it matters how a boy looks, as long as he's clever and well off.' (41)

When Parvati pleads for Mala, trying to make Mohan understand the implications of their daughter's having grown up in a western society, he retorts: "'What is Mala thinking? She should be going out with white boys? Does she think she is too good for a kala admi?'" (45).<sup>2</sup> The fact that Mohan refers to his dark skin with the Hindi rather than the English term, makes obvious that the darkness of his skin was stigmatized before he arrived in Canada. By having Mala translate the phrase rather than, by authorial intrusion, provide a translation in parentheses, Mara points at Mala's role as an intermediary between the two

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<sup>2</sup> Mara has Mala translate kala admi in the next sentence as 'black man.' Kala admi is one of the few Hindi expression for which Mara provides a translation, a fact that gives it special significance.

cultures. The translation also conveys a sense of cultural alterity by making the reader aware of the gap between the two cultures and bridging it at the same time.<sup>3</sup> The book repeatedly draws attention to the importance of context. Fair to Indian eyes, Mala is considered, however, a person of colour in Canada, a foreigner and an exotic creature: "There were guys who'd never go out with her because of her colour and others who wanted to because of it, anticipating an exoticism she didn't have" (39). Mala had "always tried to minimize the difference between herself and her friends" (38) by refusing to speak Hindi, wear saris and jewellery and cook Indian food. When the Indian bride on the plane to Toronto asks Mala: "You are also from India, no?" (103) she is upset and asks herself: "I just told her I grew up in Canada. Can't she see the difference in our clothes, the way we talk?" (104). On the other hand Mala has not lost her longing for Indian spices and colours. Unlike the protagonists in Bharati Mukherjee's fiction, for instance, Mala finds support in the culture of her new home, Canada. Racism in Canada, as described in the book, is subtle rather than blatant and has a tendency to exotify non-white cultures. Still, Canada is pictured as a country where women have the freedom to take control over their lives.

Bridget consciously experiences racist behaviour for the

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<sup>3</sup> 'Black man' is only one of the possible meanings kala admi has. It can also refer to a man of lower caste, such as a coolie. The expression can also mean 'of vicious nature.' Within the North American context, however, 'black man' usually refers to African-Americans only.



first time at the boarding school in England when a girl taunts her about her affection for her Indian nanny:

She takes me to the mirror above the sink, points out my freckles with a sharp, jabbing forefinger. Her nail leaves curved indentations on my skin. 'See, it's starting already. You were suckled by a wog so you've got black milk inside you. When you grow up, you'll be all black and you'll be an ayah. (75)

This bad fairy's wish is being mitigated in an ironic way. Asha despises Bridget for her pale skin, which to her is not "nice and fair so much as boiled-looking, with ugly, dark blotches" (19). Bridget has contradictory feelings about India. The poverty, the "fatalism," the dirt, the fauna and the heat "frustrate" her, whereas she "admires" the "resilience" and the "exuberance" (12). Bridget suffers from internalized guilt for being white. She has a recurrent nightmare in which she is whipping Heera, her ayah. The book opens with the description of another of Bridget's nightmares in which Dr. Naigar listening to the heartbeat of a cow makes her eat "a blob of feces" (7). In the dispute over whether eastern or western medical practice is more efficient in treating the villagers, Bridget wonders if she would "find it easier to confront Dr. Naigar if she were white" (13). When she gets suspicious about Asha's repeated misinterpretation of her orders she asks herself if this was "a typical white reaction to a brown face, chronic distrust" (11). Asha cannot help but consider her employer a "fool": "Asha's smile widened. So many things she could do, worse than chilies in her food, worse than spit.... Why was she laughing? Didn't she understand? Didn't she know what could happen? Stupid,

stupid woman" (35). In misjudgements of situation, custom and character, such as Bridget's in the quotations above, lie the major ironies of the book. Bridget's fears and considerations assume the intellectual and moral superiority of the European. As well-meaning and eager to help as she may be, Bridget remains caught within the confines of her racial and national background.

Bridget and Asha are connected through the image of the doll and that of embroidery. The word "gift" in the story entitled "Asha's Gift" can be interpreted in several ways. It could refer to the rag doll "with coarse, dark threads for hair" (27) which her grandmother gave Asha as a "gift" to make embroidery more attractive to the child and which curiously resembles the golliwog Bridget was presented with at the English boarding school. A "gift" is also the embroidery thread Bridget promises to get for Asha in her attempt to teach Asha to ask for things rather than steal them. The title could also ironically refer to Asha's angrily spitting into Bridget's lunch while preparing it, or even to have spared her of "worse." The word refers, however, above all, to Asha's resilience and "oppositional behaviour" (Chambers) which help her to survive and are her real gift.

Embroidery and collage, recurrent images in Of Customs and Excise, function as a kind of mise en abyme. In "Doctor," at the end of her re-enactment of her emotionally abused childhood and Parvati's past as a physically and emotionally abused bride,

Bridget draws the reader's attention to the embroidery she is engaged in: "I pierce the needle through to the other side. Rather messier this, threads tangled, knotted, streaks of colour overlapping, crisscrossing from one patch to another" (80). The piece of embroidery is symbolic of how, disregarding the discrepancy of "flesh and blood," these women's lives are intertwined, "tangled" and "crisscrossing." In addition to the experience of abuse, Parvati and Bridget share a secret whose discovery might have been fatal for one of them. Thinking about her father after his death Mala comes to the conclusion: "So little I know about him. A collage of drab, rough scraps. A workaholic, rasping, rigid. It'll be different with Nina and Jake. Those collages he makes for her, she loves them" (108). The absence of any reference to Jake's racial, ethnic and cultural background implies that what counts in the new generation is not ethnic and racial continuity but the ability of bringing different parts together and arranging them--in what Victor Turner calls an "anti-structural" move--in a new pattern. The images of collage not only reflect the concept of the Canadian mosaic, the reality of which is here seen ironically: "Set apart, little brown tiles in a mosaic, twirling with the other tiles, exotic costumes, dances, food. Gee I love your culture. What country are you from?" (104), but also the reader's capacity to synthesize the details of the text, which Luscher refers to as "pattern-making faculties to formulate the variable connections and build textual consistency" (155).

Luscher argues that "there is more room for subjective interpretation and active participation" (158) in a short story sequence than in a novel, which implies that the former is the more pluralistic genre. Luscher also draws attention to the "spatial narrative organization" of the short story sequence:

... the text's diachronic dimension never disappears totally, but the synchronic or associative relationships become more prominent in assembling pattern and meaning. In such a shift, setting, theme, and nontemporal patterns of organization, such as recurrent symbols, leitmotifs, and counterpoint, which require greater reader collaboration, become major unifying forces in the reading experience. (166)

In such narrative organization, the opening and concluding stories have key significance. The first story familiarizes the reader with some Indian "customs" from Bridget's perspective. It also shows how Bridget gets involved in saving Parvati's life by keeping her secret from the Ungoli family. It is not until the last story that the reader learns who Mala's father is and how Parvati was "tricked" by him. The story shows how Indian women are treated as commodity and how tradition makes them pay "excise" on happiness and self-fulfillment. It is Mala who reconstructs and tells Parvati's story by patiently extracting pieces of information from her. "Parvati's Dance"--an allusion to the dance of Shiva--<sup>4</sup> celebrates the reunion of mother and daughter through the breaking of silence. Both, Cisneros and Mara show how women's lives are determined by patriarchal discourse. Just as Cisneros re-writes the male plot and

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<sup>4</sup> The dance of Shiva is performed when something is destroyed to be made anew.

demystifies<sup>5</sup> cultural myths, Mara proscribes a romantic and exotic reading of the events in her stories. In "Parvati's Dance," for instance, Mala describes how her mother, raised on romances, was lured into reliving a romance plot. Mala wishes she could "leave her there, soft-eyed, dreaming, let everything turn out all right. Her parents relent when they see how well placed he is, how devoted. And they live happily ever after, barring the usual ups and downs of life" (118). In Parvati's case, however, the romance plot, successful courtship and marriage as women's aspired goal, falls short. It is ironic that Parvati chose this plot in an attempt to escape another patriarchal scenario: arranged marriage. By telling her mother's story and dismantling the romantic plot, Mala not only comes to a better understanding of her mother but liberates herself from the restrictions which traditional fictional models impose on a woman's life.

Of Customs and Excise is most colourful and visceral when talking about India. The stories that are set in Canada could take place anywhere in the western world. There is nothing specifically Canadian about the landscape, the cities, or the people. India, the "exuberant" and "resilient" continent, the "messier side," the "area of darkness," as V.S. Naipaul referred to it, intrudes into Canada's ordered blandness. Short story cycles thrive on the tension between the independence of each story and the unity of the collection as a whole. Of the ten

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<sup>5</sup> See McCracken.

stories, the two in which Asha appears as protagonist, "Asha's Gift" and "Auspicious Day," are the most independent and, if published separately, would most likely work more successfully than the others. It is almost as if this "minor" character imposed her Indianness upon the whole cycle.

Of Customs and Excise also abounds in Hindi words most of which go untranslated. They appear italicized in the text which sets them off from the dominant language. This oppositional strategy forces the reader to engage herself/himself with Indian culture.<sup>6</sup> Both, Mara's initial withholding of important information and her refusal to gloss the Hindi expressions--that is to provide parenthetical translations of individual words--make it necessary for the reader<sup>7</sup> to reconstruct meaning.<sup>8</sup> Most of these expressions are not left completely self-contained but receive meaning through the context. Apart from the fact that these insertions, woven<sup>9</sup> into the English sentence structure,<sup>10</sup> assert Mara's mother tongue in the text, they are also indicative of the fun of working creatively with both languages.

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<sup>6</sup> As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out, "the choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status" (66).

<sup>7</sup> That is, to the reader who does not speak Hindi.

<sup>8</sup> Compare The Empire Writes Back p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> See Cisneros' use of this expression to describe this bilingual activity in the following quotation.

<sup>10</sup> The authors of The Empire Writes Back refer to this strategy as "syntactic fusion" (68).

Sandra Cisneros, who in her second book of fiction Woman Hollering Creek, And Other Stories (1991) lets Spanish intrude much more aggressively into the text than in the earlier The House on Mango Street explains in an interview:

You can say a phrase in Spanish, and you can choose to not translate it, but you can make it understood through the context. 'And then my abuelita called me a sin verguenza and cried because I am without shame,' you see? Just in the sentence you can weave it in. To me it's really fun to be doing that; to me it's like I've uncovered this whole motherlode that I haven't tapped into. All the expresiones in Spanish when translated make English wonderful. I feel like I haven't finished playing around. (289)

Both, Cisneros and Mara are interested in voices. The manifestation of two languages in a text, contributes to the creation of the multiplicity of these voices. In addition, Mara mimics the syntactic and idiomatic idiosyncrasies of Hindi speakers who were not born into the English language as an expression of Parvati's and Mohan's dual cultural allegiance.

Bilingual strategies are indicative of a writer's own cultural dualism. Mara shares Cisneros' experience of having grown up and living between cultures and the impulse of negotiating this experience in her text. She was born in India and moved to England with her parents at the age of fourteen where she finished school and went to university. At the age of twenty she emigrated to Canada--her mother and brother are British citizens--and lived in Prince Edward Island before settling in Ottawa. Mara is also the author of four children's books which she published between 1988 and 1991 under her

married name Rachna Gilmore.<sup>11</sup> None of these books has any specifically racial or ethnic content. Just as Cisneros defines herself, as the context demands, as Mexicana in Chicago and Chicana in Texas,<sup>12</sup> Mara is visibly and intentionally "ethnic" when writing Of Customs and Excise, invisible when writing books for children.<sup>13</sup> It seems that in Of Customs and Excise Mara has become more interested in exploring her ethnic heritage. In The House on Mango Street as well as in Of Customs and Excise the exploration of ethnic heritage and the struggle against culturally imposed restrictive traditions is described as an essential step towards establishing personal identity. Neither Cisneros' nor Mara's women light out for the territory, but take up the struggle wherever they happen to live. The short story cycle offers itself as a form to express the tension between personal and communal identity. Cisneros and Mara exploit the short story cycle to subvert dominant forms of discourse by replacing unity, linearity and separation with multiplicity, circularity and interweaving.

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<sup>11</sup> Mara is not the author's maiden name but an adopted penname.

<sup>12</sup> See the interview with Reed Dasenbrock.

<sup>13</sup> This is apart from the fact that there is a photograph of her and the illustrators of her books on each of the covers of the books.



Chapter Three: The Space between Assimilation and Deracination:  
 Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation: A Life In A New Language  
 (1989) and Richard Rodriguez' Hunger for Memory: The Education of  
Richard Rodriguez (1982)

#### Discourse on the Logic of Language

English  
 is my mother tongue.  
 A mother tongue is not  
 not a foreign lan lan lang  
 language  
 l/anguish  
 anguish  
 - a foreign anguish. (Marlene Nourbese Philip, She Tries  
Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks)

To date, integration and assimilation have never taken  
 place on equal terms, but always as assimilation by the  
 dominant culture. In relations with the dominant culture,  
 the syncretic movement is always asymmetrical.... (Abdul R.  
 JanMohamed and David Lloyd 7)

#### In Search of the Private Self: Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation

Eva Hoffman was born in Cracow in 1946 into a Jewish family. In  
 1959 Hoffman's parents decided to leave Poland and to emigrate  
 to Vancouver. Increasing anti-semitism had made life difficult  
 for them in Poland. Hoffman left Canada, the country of "exile,"  
 for the "real America," where she earned a Ph.D. in English from  
 Harvard. Today she lives in New York and works as an editor at  
 the New York Times Book Review. There are some striking  
 similarities between Hoffman's autobiography, Lost in  
Translation, and Richard Rodriguez' Hunger for Memory: The  
Education of Richard Rodriguez (1982). Richard Rodriguez was  
 born in 1944 in Sacramento, California, to Mexican immigrant

parents. Rodriguez decided not to complete his dissertation on English Renaissance Literature because he was disillusioned with affirmative-action programmes, which, in his opinion, did not help those who really deserved support. Rodriguez works as an editor and journalist in San Francisco. The parallels between Hoffman's and Rodriguez' lives and the discursive strategies they employ to represent them in their autobiographies are intriguing, although their ethnic backgrounds are very different.

In both autobiographies the focus is on institutional education and how it brings about assimilation into middle-class America. Since both authors grew up in a language other than English, their works deal with the problems of living a life in another language. Although they were both successful in academia, they decided against pursuing a university career. Both Hoffman's and Rodriguez' lives, as depicted in their works, can be described according to Victor Turner's model as passing through a phase of separation into the realm of the margin (or limen) and eventually moving through a "reaggregation" process. Both autobiographies--as the majority of the works I have discussed so far--are hybrid texts. Hoffman and Rodriguez transgress the boundaries of genre by using the form of the essay to explore the immigrant condition in less personal terms.<sup>1</sup>

Eva Hoffman divides her book into three sections:

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<sup>1</sup> Rodriguez actually calls his autobiography "essay-autobiography" (7).

"Paradise," "Exile," and "The New World." The first section deals with her life in Cracow, Hoffman's childhood paradise. Hoffman is forced to leave paradise when she is on the threshold of adolescence. As in the migrant Bildungsroman, the experience of growing up and having to adjust to a new society converge in Lost in Translation. In the second section Hoffman talks about her unhappy life in Vancouver. In Canada, Hoffman lived on the margins and felt like an outsider. Hoffman pictures the United States as a much more congenial place for migrants. With her move to the "real America," (171) Hoffman began her North American education and "reaggregation" into middle-class society. Her career as an editor of The New York Times Book Review, the most influential among the American literary reviews, indicates the degree to which Hoffman has become "reaggregated." It becomes particularly obvious in this third section of the book just how problematic the notion of assimilation into American society is.

Hoffman interrupts the chronological flow of her life story several times by presenting the views of her adult, "assimilated" self. "Control" is one of the most frequently used words in Lost in Translation. The way in which Hoffman assumes control over her text, and thus her life, might well be an act of compensation for her lack of control over her environment and over the new language during her formative years. The first section of the book, "Paradise," actually starts with the expulsion from paradise: "It is April 1959, I'm standing at the

railing of the Batory's upper deck, and I feel that my life is ending." (3) The beginning evokes the feeling of loss that pervades the book. For Hoffman the word "'Canada'" had "ominous echoes of the 'Sahara'" (4). Hoffman does not set out with a description of her birth and early childhood, but with the experience of separation and a new beginning. Paradoxically, the new beginning makes the adolescent Hoffman feel as if her life was over since Canada holds no promises for her. The uprooting from her native soil entails a move from a cultural centre to the periphery, from meaningful, organized space to a borderland where meaning becomes problematic. The 12-day-long voyage on the Batory from Poland to Montreal and the subsequent journey by train from Montreal to Vancouver can be described as liminal states which prepare the family emotionally and symbolically for the Other place: Canada.

Cracow is the place that becomes most real in Hoffman's story: it is there, not elsewhere. "Paradise" resembles a memoir, which differs from autobiography in its emphasis on the author's environment rather than on his/her developing self. Cracow appears as a place which is obviously transformed into a locus amoenus by the selective and ameliorating powers of memory. Space and personal identity are closely related and unproblematic in "Paradise." Hoffman explains that she felt safe in Cracow because the city is full of history: "Age is one of the things that encloses me with safety; Cracow has always existed, it's a given, it doesn't change much. It has layers and

layers of reality. The main square is like a magnetic field pulling all parts of the city together." (39) She describes her compatriots in "Paradise" with much nostalgic detail. Ciocia Bronia, the maid, who saved her parents' life during the war by hiding them from the Nazis, Pani Orlovska, the family friend, and Pani Witeszczak, Eva's piano teacher, are eccentric characters who are represented with great vividness. Like Cracow these characters have an aura. Hoffman spends little time and loving reminiscence on describing the people of the Vancouver community. They are as bland and have as little substance as the white bread and the pre-sliced, plastic-wrapped cheese that are given to the Wydras as a welcoming meal in Vancouver. Extravagance of style and feeling were the objectives of Hoffman's Polish education: "The best compliment that a school exercise can receive is that it is characterized by polot--a concept that combines the meanings of dash, inspiration, and flying. Polot is what everyone wants to have in personality as well. Being correct and dull is a horrid misfortune" (71).<sup>2</sup> This appreciation of polot stands in sharp contrast to Eva's North American education where diligence and a certain amount of conformity are being asked for. According to Hoffman, her father is a living personification of polot. The father, whose first name is never mentioned, is depicted as larger-than-life. "Strong as a bull," he not only managed to free himself twice from Gestapo captivity but also carried his wife, who was

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<sup>2</sup> Polot could be best translated as 'flair.'

recovering from a miscarriage, through the snow on their way to safety. In Vancouver he lost his "peace of mind." Spatial structure changed, and he is faced with "seemingly unresistant amorphousness." (128) There is nothing he can apply his polot to and consequently, life has lost its meaning.

What makes Cracow a paradise to Hoffman is that it represents a space where the connection between signifier and signified is unproblematic. Everybody speaks the same language. Being Jewish does not alienate the Wydras in Poland as far as language is concerned. Polish, not Yiddish, is the language of the family and the community. Yiddish is the language of "money and secrets," which Hoffman's parents use when they do not want to share thoughts with their daughters and which they do not pass on to them. Being Jewish in Poland taught Hoffman a lesson in difference which she experienced not only with respect to a gentile majority, but also in relation to a belief system from which she was alienated. When Hoffman was eleven, her mother asked her not to betray her own religious background in public any longer: "'It's time you stopped crossing yourself in front of churches. We're Jewish and Jews don't do that'" (29). When Catholicism was instituted in Polish schools, Hoffman's parents instructed their daughters to "show respect by standing up" but not to "compromise" themselves by saying the words (34). In Poland, the Wydras were already living between two cultures and trying to incorporate elements from both into their lives: there was the Christmas tree and the Passover dinner. The Wydras did

not have a clearly identifiable social status. Hoffman observes: "And, like the apartment in which we live, we ourselves are located somewhere on the tenuous margins of middle-class society, in an amphibian, betwixt and between position" (13). The war tragically prepared the Wydras for a life that was characterized by a certain amount of gentile hostility and the father's hazardous entrepreneurship. "Paradise" is concerned with origins. The hardships of the war, the loss of many loved ones, and their own narrow escapes from death have shaped her parents' lives:

They have been divested of religious faith, and the residues of both Victorian and Orthodox prudishness. They are, in a way, unshockable; they've lost the innocence of an inherited, unquestioned morality. The only thing they're left with is a deep skepticism about human motives, and a homegrown version of existentialism--a philosophy born of the War, after all--with its gamble that since everything is absurd, you might as well try to squeeze the juice out of every moment. (16)

Hoffman points out how much the war and her parents' stories have not only dominated her life but have made it difficult for her not to discount her own pain: "I come from the war; it is my true origin. But as with all our origins, I cannot grasp it" (23). Cracow is and is not the place of her family's origin. The Wydras' Jewishness "defers" their origins. The death of the grandparents in World War II interrupts the family's genealogy. The violent separation from the ancestral past seems to facilitate the parents' decision to emigrate. Hoffman does not problematize her separation from the family's Jewish background. In America, she has been moving away from both her Polish and

her Jewish origins.

"Exile" starts with a description of the Wydras' arrival at the train station in Montreal waiting for someone to give them "guidance" (99). Hoffman feels alienated and initiates a process of cultural "othering" in turn. For the first time she sees "a black man" and wonders if all "black men" are as handsome as Harry Belafonte, whom she knows from Polish television. There is also a "teenage girl in high-heeled shoes and lipstick" whom Hoffman finds incredibly "vulgar" (99). Whereas in "Paradise" the autobiographical self is very close to the objects and the surroundings it describes, in "Exile," and even more so in "The New World," the self keeps its distance. The quality of the writing becomes at the same time more essayistic. The narrative shift suggests that life in North America is less immediate. Hoffman's reaction to the country is cerebral rather than visceral. In Cracow she experienced life in a much more spontaneous and physical way than in America which has partly to do with the fact that in the new country she turned into an adolescent and started to live less in her body than in her mind. But Hoffman was also much more a part of Cracow than she would ever be of Vancouver or even New York City, where, so she claims, she now feels at home. Only in Cracow was the self at one with its surroundings.

Since James Olney's influential article appeared in 1980, autobiography has frequently been analyzed in terms of its three separate components: autos or self, bios or life, and graphe or



writing. In "Paradise" Hoffman is more concerned with bios, whereas in "Exile," the exploration of the conditions of the self becomes the prevalent mode of discourse. The self becomes problematic because it is uprooted from its natural surroundings. In the new environment the relationship between self and Other changes and the self has to be reconstructed in another language. The lack of role models in the Vancouver community made it particularly difficult for Hoffman to refashion her self. Vancouver was also a place where Hoffman was being cast in the role of Other. Like Bharati Mukherjee, who also has the dual perspective of having lived in both Canada and the United States, Hoffman accuses Canadian society of hypocrisy and cultural othering.<sup>3</sup> Where Hoffman's Polish background was a stigma in Vancouver, it gave her added value in the eyes of her classmates at Rice University: "They are curious about what I have to say, and fascinated by the fact that I'm a 'European,' which in their minds guarantees some mysterious and profounder knowledge" (179). Hoffman neglects to point out that in Vancouver she probably was one out of hundreds of immigrants from Poland, whereas at Rice University she most likely had the privilege of being the only Polish student. The theme that Jewish emigrants ended up in the wrong place in Canada pervades

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<sup>3</sup> Hoffman writes about her fourteen-year-old self: "I want to tell Canadians about how boring they are. 'Canada is the duller country in the world,' I write in the notes for my speech, 'because it is the most conformist.' People may pretend to have liberal beliefs, I go on, but really they are an unadventurous lot who never dare to sidestep bourgeois conventions" (133).

Canadian literature. In Mordecai Richler's The Street, "Canada was not a choice, but an accident" (Richler 17) just as in Adele Wiseman's The Sacrifice, Canada is second best rather than the place of choice.<sup>4</sup> Canada still features in the minds of many as a heterotopian space, whereas the United States still seems to hold utopian promises.

Victor Turner claims that the most important properties of the liminal state are transgression of boundaries, a special liminal vocabulary, ambiguity and paradox. Hoffman's experience in "Exile" is characterized by transgressions of cultural and emotional boundaries. Furthermore, she led a "life in translation" where her mother tongue atrophied and was no longer adequate to describe current experience, while English was not yet fully available to her. In this phase of her life, the paradox became an essential mode of consciousness and being. Hoffman and her younger sister were initiated into Canadian society by a renaming ritual. The renaming of the two sisters from Ewa and Alina to "Eva" and "Elaine" was a traumatic experience for Hoffman:

The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us-but it's a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn't refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can't yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. (105)

Scenes of baptism, where insensitive teachers Anglicize their

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<sup>4</sup> See Carole Gerson, "Some Patterns of Exile in Jewish Writing of the Commonwealth." Ariel 13.4 (1982), 103-114.

new students' names have become a topos in migrant literature. Hoffman uses quotation marks around the new names in order to dramatize the separation of the signifier from the signified. This renaming predicates a life in quotation, a life of presence in absence. In this state of liminality Hoffman had to undergo a revision of her self-image: "But there's no doubt about it; after the passage across the Atlantic, I've emerged as less attractive, less graceful, less desirable" (109). The pain she felt about the loss of what was dear and familiar and the rejection of what Vancouver had to offer in terms of people, culture, architecture, and food put her into a state of emotional limbo. Hoffman "lost [her] sense of humour" (119) and reacted to even minor provocations with what she calls "immigrant rage" (203). The source for this rage is the "false persona" (119) she is forced to take on: "I'm enraged at my adolescent friends because they can't see through the guise, can't recognize the light-footed dancer I really am. They only see this elephantine creature who too often sounds as if she's making pronouncements" (119). In this border state of consciousness, Hoffman walked through the streets of Vancouver feeling as if a screen had fallen before her eyes, blurring her vision. "The city's unfocused sprawl" and "its inchoate spread of one-family houses" (135) strained her eyes. The fog became even thicker when Hoffman faced the well-filled shelves in the supermarkets. Her new environment encouraged consumerism to a degree that Hoffman had not experienced before. In Poland the

Wydras lived a middle-class life, but they moved considerably down the scale of social status in Vancouver. Hoffman developed several survival techniques such as to "stop wanting" (136). She consciously numbed her senses in order not to be tempted to buy what she could not afford anyway. Since Hoffman did not yet have a full command of the English language, she felt that this shortcoming made her invisible too: "People look past me as we speak. What do I look like, here? Imperceptible, I think, impalpable, neutral, faceless" (147). In this process of adaptation, Hoffman "learnt restraint" and a "new reserve" (146). Furthermore, she began to see the world from an "oblique angle" (183), an angle that catapulted her out of the centre to the margin where she "decided that [her] role in life [was] to be an 'observer'" (131). This decentered vision and the observer's position still characterize Hoffman in adult life as becomes obvious from the description of her public adult self at a party in New York. This vision made Hoffman an expert in identifying "alienation," "irony" and "paradox" (182) in literature at Rice University. Hoffman points out that New Criticism as "an alienated way of reading meant for people who are aliens in the country of literature" (183) was a method of interpretation congenial to the "oblique angle" (183) of her vision and continues:

But my particular kind of alienness serves me well too, for I soon discover that triangulation is a more useful tool in literary criticism than it is in life. As I read, I triangulate to my private criteria and my private passions, and from the oblique angle of my estrangement, I notice what's often invisible to my fellow students. (183)

I assume that it was Hoffman's sense for incongruities that prompted her to write a dissertation on the grotesque in modern literature.

Eva Hoffman's life in the New World was also made more complicated by the fact that her parents could not serve her as guides through her rites of passage since they both lost their polot and their chutzpah. They had even greater difficulty adjusting to their new environment than their daughters. Hoffman writes: "I'm a little ashamed to reveal how hard things are for my family--how bitterly my parents quarrel, how much my mother cries, how frightened I am by our helplessness, and by the burden of feeling that it is my duty to take charge, to get us out of this quagmire" (112). The paradox of role reversal in the parent-child relationship is another topos in migrant writing. Alina's religious education also took a paradoxical course. As "a gesture of assimilation" (144), the Wydras sent her to a Hebrew school. Soon, she "embrace[d] ethnic exclusivity" (144) and argued against letting non-Jews into Vancouver's new Jewish Community Centre. Hoffman did not approve of her sister's rigidity. It violated the "equation" she had developed "between Jewishness and a kind of secular humanism" (144). Hoffman's sister, who is four years younger, seems to have lived less in the cultural interstices.<sup>5</sup> She did not feel the need to negotiate between the two cultures and the two languages to the

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<sup>5</sup> This is also true of Richard Rodriguez' brother and sisters.

extent Hoffman did. It was Alina who soon started to use her Polish name again, whereas Hoffman never did.

The way Hoffman learnt English, namely "from the top" (217) is one of the greatest paradoxes of Hoffman's life on the margins. The vocabulary she was exposed to was the language of instruction in the Vancouver classroom. Hoffman points out that until relatively late in her life she was filling gaps in her vocabulary:

'Beveled, chiseled, sculpted, ribbed,' " I think as a wooden lampstand I liked flashes through my mind ... I search for the right shade of a pearly pinkish shell I found on the beach as if my life depended on it, and to some extent it does. I can't live forever in a windy, unfurnished imagination; I have to make a comfortable habitation there, fill it with a few household things. (217)

Not words like "insolent" and "enigmatic," the ones she eagerly learnt "from books" (106) caused Hoffman problems, but words denoting emotions and attitudes, such as "kind," "happy," "nice," and "envious," since they are culturally charged and have no direct equivalent in Polish, which brings with it a different value system. The translation process is hampered by the fact that the new words do not yet have any connotations and associations:

'River' in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. 'River' in English is cold--a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke. (106)

After the expulsion from paradise, the language of names gives way to the language of knowledge, a language which involves what

did not exist in paradise: judgement.<sup>6</sup>

Hoffman's themes--the clash of values, and the pain of loss, separation, and exile--are familiar autobiographical material; what is distinctive is her absolute interpretation of herself through the other language. "Triangulation" is Hoffman's term to describe the process of translating back and forth between her Polish self which finds expression in the emotional language of childhood and her more rational and distanced American self, which expresses itself through the language of education. The voices of her private self and her public self vie for attention. When a friend gave Hoffman a diary for her fifteenth birthday, she was not sure which language to write in. Eventually she decided to write in English, since it was "the language of the present," although not "the language of the self":

In the solitude of this most private act, I write, in my public language, in order to update what might have been my other self. The diary is about me and not about me at all. But on one level, it allows me to make the first jump. I learn English through writing, and, in turn, writing gives me a written self.... When I write, I have a real existence that is proper to the activity of writing--an existence that takes place midway between me and the sphere of artifice, art, pure language. This language is beginning to invent another me. (121)

Since she did not yet have a self in the new language, Hoffman found it particularly difficult to write in her diary in the first person. Only when she became able to express her childhood

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<sup>6</sup> The fact that Hoffman chooses not to quote the Polish word for river in the original shows how anxious she is not to create any distance between herself and the English-speaking reader.

in English through the process of psychotherapy, her "translation therapy" and "talking cure," as she calls it, did she reconcile the two voices and stop triangulating to Polish "as to an authentic criterion" (272):

But in my translation therapy, I keep going back and forth over the rifts, not to heal them but to see that I--one person, first-person singular--have been on both sides. Patiently, I use English as a conduit to go back and down; all the way down to childhood, almost to the beginning. When I learn to say those smallest, first things in the language that has served for detachment and irony and abstraction, I begin to see where the languages I've spoken have their correspondences--how I can move between them without being split by the difference. (273-74)

To be living between two languages, Hoffman gradually came to see, does not inevitably end in schizophrenia.

"Exile" ends with a reference to Mary Antin's autobiography The Promised Land which was written in 1911 when Mashke, renamed Mary, was thirty years old. Hoffman points out that in certain details Antin's story so closely resembles her own that "its author seems to be some amusing poltergeist [sic]" (162) come to show her that her life is not unique. The parallels between the two authors lives are uncanny indeed. The Promised Land is a narrative of success, a story of a model assimilation. Antin was born into a Jewish family in Polotzk, a town within the Russian Pale. Faced with czarist anti-Semitism, the Antins decided to emigrate to the United States where they settled in Boston when Mary was thirteen--Hoffman's age when the Wydras emigrated. Mary became an outstanding student and was offered a scholarship to Radcliffe. Like Hoffman's and Rodriguez' autobiographies, The



Promised Land gives credit to the American educational system as the main assimilating force.

Hoffman claims that the similarities between Antin's life and hers end when Antin gives her views on her story. In other words, although Hoffman admits to a striking similarity between Antin's and her representation of bios, she denies any similarity between their ways of dealing with autos. Hoffman sees the main difference between their autobiographies in Antin's interpretation of her new life as an untarnished success story: "For, despite the hardships that leap out from the pages, Mary insists on seeing her life as a fable of pure success: success for herself, for the idea of assimilation, for the great American experiment" (163). Hoffman slightly misrepresents her predecessor, since Antin is quite aware of the price she paid for her assimilation. Nor is there such a big difference between Antin's and Hoffman's views on their adopted country and the assimilation process as Hoffman wants to make the reader believe.

The life stories of both authors are conversion narratives that describe the transformation from foreigner to middle-class American: trial period, transformation induced by education, and final success. Hoffman is almost equally profuse in her praise of American education as Antin:

For one thing, I've learned that in a democratic educational system, in a democratic ideology of reading, I am never made to feel that I'm an outsider poaching on others' property. In this country of learning, I'm welcomed on equal terms, and it's through the democratizing power of literature that I begin to feel at home in America....

(183-184)

In this description of the school system, Hoffman disregards important issues of race, class and gender. It is interesting in this context that Hoffman neglects to mention Mary's older sister Fetchke/Frieda in her summary of Antin's life. Three years older than Mary, Frieda was too old to benefit from the American school system, became a seamstress and married at the age of seventeen. Critics have blamed Antin for losing sight of her own sister's fate in praising America as a country of equal opportunities. And it is characteristic for Hoffman's autobiography to lose sight of gender issues in particular. The pressure to succeed and to become American was obviously very hard on the younger Hoffman. The fear of poverty loomed large. Hoffman admits:

But there is another motive driving me as well, an extra edge to my ambition--an edge that wasn't there before, and that comes from a version of the Big Fear. I know how unprotected my family has become; I know I'd better do very well-or else. The 'or else' takes many forms in my mind--vague images of helplessness and restriction and always being poor.... I have to make myself a steel breastplate of achievement and good grades, so that I'll be able to get out--and get in, so that I can gain entry into the social system from where I stand, on a precarious ledge. I am pervaded by a new knowledge that I have to fend for myself, and it pushes me on with something besides my old curiosity, or even simple competitiveness. (157)

And like Benjamin Franklin, whose name the older Hoffman claims she had never heard at the time, the teenaged Hoffman devises programmes of "physical, intellectual, spiritual, and creative self-improvement" (137), efforts reminiscent of those that turned Jimmy Gatz into Jay Gatsby. Hoffman describes education

not in terms of the joy and enlightenment it has to offer, but rather as a hard-earned passport to worldly success. Consequently she calls her Ph.D. the "certificate of full Americanization" (226).

Hoffman, however, does not ask what price she is paying for her Americanization. She lives between two cultures, but it is more important for her to participate in one world than the other. In her adult life Hoffman does not feel the urge to regain some closeness to Polish culture and literature. It is symptomatic that she repudiates the family surname in favour of an "inaudible" Anglicized name.<sup>7</sup> She never mentions what language the family speaks at home. There is, so it seems, hardly any family life. Soon after the Wydras arrived in Vancouver, Hoffman found a substitute home with the wealthier and more assimilated Steiners and spent more time with this family than with her own. Unlike Hoffman, Mary Antin is aware of the alienation from her family as a price for literacy and assimilation when she writes in her autobiography: "This sad process of disintegration of home life may be observed in almost any immigrant family of our class and with our traditions and aspirations. It is part of the process of Americanization; an upheaval preceding the state of repose" (271). Towards the end of her autobiography, Hoffman describes a visit with her

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<sup>7</sup> Hoffman's sister Alina, who lives in Vancouver, still carries the family name Wydra.

parents. The communication between them appears to be strained and artificial. Her parents are reluctant and shy to ask her about her work, her divorce, and especially to ask the ultimate question: is she "happy"? Hoffman's response is characterized by impatience and irritability. When her mother asks her if she has a warm winter coat, Hoffman's reaction is: "Yes, Mother, I mentally answer, I have a new Geoffrey Beene coat, and a pair of Charles Jordan shoes...I can buy myself such things now, though I still, if you must know, feel as though I've gone on an indecent binge when I do" (247). Benjamin Franklin's description of his achievements anticipates Hoffman's account of her success: "From the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and in which I passed my earliest years, I have raised myself to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world" (3). Conversion, the objective of spiritual autobiography, is thus transformed into wealth and social prestige. Hoffman does not point at the shortcomings of Franklin's vision which, among other things, assumed the absence of racial and sexual prejudice and discrimination in a classless society.

Hoffman becomes a public person at the expense of her private identity. It is not "happiness" Hoffman wishes to gain with the help of her psychotherapist, but "control." She points out:

I've gained some control, and control is something I need more than my mother did. I have more of a public life, in which it's important to appear strong.... My mother stays close to herself, as she stays close to home. She pays a price for her lack of self-alienation--the price of extremity, of being in extremis, of suffering. She can only

be herself; she can't help that either. She doesn't see herself as a personage; she's not someone who tells herself her own biography. (270)

Hoffman's writing about her private life in her public voice presupposes, after all, that she is able to do so. Her mother lacks the skill to address the public in English. By claiming that her mother has no autobiographical self, Hoffman marginalizes and silences her in an act of collusion with patriarchy. Furthermore, after having achieved a public reputation as an editor of one of the most widely-read American literary reviews, Hoffman reproduces the prevailing ideology of male selfhood in telling her public success story in a public voice. The role models she has adopted--Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams and "those New York intellectuals, like Alfred Kazin or Norman Podhoretz"--are white men. By participating in male-defined culture and male ideology of selfhood, Hoffman represses her female self and plays a part in perpetuating the disempowerment of women. Hoffman says she envies Kazin and Podhoretz because they knew where the centre was: "Their journeys from the outer boroughs to Manhattan felt long and arduous to them, but at least they knew where the center was, they felt the compelling lure of its glittering lights" (160). For Hoffman, New York, the ultimate centre, is Paradise regained. Cracow, Vancouver, New York. Her journey leads her from a cultural centre to the margins and back to the Centre. The price Hoffman pays for her "reaggregation" is high. By opting to be a public person in American mainstream society, she

sacrifices not only her cultural background and her mother tongue but also alienates herself from her family and her female self.

In Search of a Community: Richard Rodriguez' Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez

In the wake of the American controversy over the acceptance of Spanish as an official language of instruction along with English, Richard Rodriguez, an opponent of bilingual education, has been designated as the public voice of Latino-Americans by the mainstream media.<sup>1</sup> The Chicano intellectual community, however, treats him critically, if not with hostility.<sup>2</sup> In "Middle-class Pastoral," which serves as a prologue to the book, Rodriguez says: "This is what matters to me: the story of the scholarship boy who returns home one summer from college to discover bewildering silence, facing his parents. This is my story. An American story" (5). By claiming that his story is not necessarily a story of a child with a particular ethnic background, but a story of the clash between working class and middle class values, Rodriguez effaces his own ethnic background. Ethnicity comes in the back door, however, when he points out that "Mexican-American" in the United States almost always implies working class.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Zweig in his commentary in the The New York Times Book Review calls Hunger of Memory a "superb autobiographical essay" (26). The anonymous commentary in Time called "Taking Bilingualism to Task" says in its subtitle: "A gifted Mexican American says it [bilingualism] cheats minorities" (68).

<sup>2</sup> Tomás Rivera calls Hunger of Memory a "humanistic antithesis," and Ramón Saldivar blames Rodriguez for being "uncritical when he deals with the historical factors affecting Mexican American life in general and his own life in particular" (28).

Unlike Eva Hoffman, Richard Rodriguez was born in the United States. His separation from his parents' culture did not happen geographically but emotionally and intellectually. Unlike most Mexican-Americans in California, the Rodriguezes did not live in a barrio but in a middle-class neighbourhood where they were the only non-white family. Isolation from the Chicano community in Sacramento created a strong bond among the family members. Rodriguez remembers his childhood as a childhood of "intense family closeness:" (3)

I grew up in a house where the only regular guests were my relations. For one day, enormous families of relatives would visit and there would be so many people that the noise and the bodies would spill out to the backyard and front porch. Then, for weeks, no one came by. (It was usually a salesman who rang the doorbell.) Our house stood apart. A gaudy yellow in a row of white bungalows. We were the people with the noisy dog. The people who raised pigeons and chickens. We were the foreigners on the block. A few neighbors smiled and waved. We waved back. But no one in the family knew the names of the old couple who lived next door; until I was seven years old, I did not know the names of the kids who lived across the street. (12-13)

Sandra Cisneros' prose poem "Those Who Don't" in The House on Mango Street describes boundaries around Esperanza's barrio that separate Anglo-American and Chicano culture. It is the obvious Otherness of the Rodriguez house and family life that establishes a border between the Chicanos and their white neighbourhood. Unlike those who grow up in a barrio and use Spanish within the community, Spanish for Rodriguez represented exclusively the language of home:

At the age of five, six, well past the time when most other children no longer easily notice the difference between sounds uttered at home and words spoken in public, I had a different experience. I lived in a world magically



compounded of sounds. I remained a child longer than most; I lingered too long, poised at the edge of language - often frightened by the sounds of los gringos, delighted by the sound of Spanish at home. I shared with my family a language that was startlingly different from that used in the great city around us. (16)

Rodriguez' paradise was not in rural Mexico, but in a house on Thirty-ninth Street in the Sacramento of the 1950s. The screen door of the house opening into the street separated the private from the public sphere. Since the family spoke only Spanish at home, Rodriguez barely spoke any English until he was nine. Worried about his silence in the classroom, the nuns from the private Catholic school, which Rodriguez and his siblings attended, convinced his parents to speak English at home. The invasion of the public sphere in form of the English language into the private sphere destroyed the intimate family life. It also irreversibly established the identification of English as the public and Spanish as the private language. The children stopped sharing their public lives with their parents. As a consequence, Richard's father retreated into silence while his mother "grew restless, seemed troubled at the scarcity of words exchanged in the house" (24). Richard's mother, whose English was more fluent than her husband's, became the public voice of the family. From that time on she would answer the telephone and talk to people at the front door. At the beginning of this period of transition the house would grow more and more silent, since children and parents no longer had a common language. Language turned into an instrument to express superiority and, however goodnaturedly, power. In an earlier version of the

chapter "The Achievement of Desire" with the title "An Education in Language," Rodriguez writes: "Too deeply troubled, I did not join my brothers when, as high school students, they toyed with our parents' opinions, devastating them frequently with superior logic and factual information" (134). By assigning the private sphere a subordinate role, Rodriguez buys into the patriarchal separation of public and private and the equation of private as female and public as male space. Since Rodriguez equates Spanish with the private, he subsequently regards it as inferior to English.

In his first years at school, Rodriguez not only became literate in English at the cost of losing his ability to speak Spanish, but he also acquired a public personality. He ceased being Ricardo and became Richard. This was not a smooth and easy process. During his first two school years Rodriguez could hardly wait to be back home in the afternoon. He was the problem student, would not answer the teacher's questions, would keep to himself in the schoolyard and not try to make friends. A crucial experience, however, made Rodriguez decide to change his identity.<sup>3</sup> One day, weeks after English had replaced Spanish at home, Richard witnessed a conversation between his parents. Only when they switched from Spanish to English as soon as they became aware of their son's presence did Rodriguez realize that they were speaking Spanish. The experience was traumatic for

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<sup>3</sup> Rodriguez uses these words to express the change in his life in an interview with Robert Fulford on November 13, 1985, TVOntario.

him:

Those gringo sounds they uttered startled me. Pushed me away. In that moment of trivial misunderstanding and profound insight, I felt my throat twisted by unsounded grief. I turned quickly and left the room. But I had no place to escape to with Spanish (...). My brother and sisters were speaking English in another part of the house. (22)

It was then that Rodriguez determined to learn classroom English with a vengeance and "committed" himself "fully and freely to the culture of the classroom" ("On Becoming a Chicano" 46). Unlike Esperanza's education, which consists in the teachings of older women and her peers as well as the confrontation with violence in the world around her, Rodriguez' was mostly formal. He acknowledged as authentic only that which he learned in the classroom. He was not a boy of the streets. Learning English and adopting a public persona implied a separation from Mexican culture. Once the Rodriguezes gave up speaking Spanish with their children, their entire life became more public. They had a telephone installed and Rodriguez' mother learned the names of all the people on the block. When Rodriguez and his siblings came home from school, there would often be neighbourhood children playing in the house. Rodriguez' story sounds like a story of successful social integration: not only did Rodriguez make rapid progress at school, but the family also became less isolated from their Anglo-American neighbourhood. Rodriguez does not speak much about Mexican culture in Hunger for Memory. He briefly describes his intimate relationship with his grandmother, whose favourite he was when he was a boy. And it is

almost solely through this grandmother that "ethnic" content finds its way into the book:

She was a woman in her eighties during the first decade of my life. A mysterious woman to me, my only living grandparent. A woman of Mexico. The woman in long black dresses that reached down to her shoes. My one relative who spoke no word of English. She had no interest in gringo society. She remained completely aloof from the public. Protected by her daughters. Protected even by me when we went to Safeway together and I acted as her translator. Eccentric woman. Soft. Hard. (36)

Knowing that "ethnic" anecdote brings autobiographies closer to fiction and makes them more attractive to the public, Rodriguez' editor suggested: "'You should write your book in stories--not as a series of essays. Let's have more Grandma'" (7). But that is not what Rodriguez wanted to write about, since it is not, as he puts it, his "most real life" (7). He claims that he is not a part of his grandmother's culture.

When Rodriguez explains that the culture of the classroom was completely "antithetical" ("On Becoming a Chicano" 46) to what his parents knew, he seems to be thinking of their lack of formal education. Circumstances forced his father to leave school in Mexico at the age of eight. Twelve years later, in the forties, he arrived in America where he worked in a succession of factory and warehouse jobs. Rodriguez' mother emigrated to America with her parents when she was a teenager. She was awarded a high school diploma "by teachers too careless or busy to notice that she hardly spoke English" (53). Encouraged by her success, she learned typing and shorthand and worked as a secretary in positions where "a knowledge of Spanish was

required." Unlike many Mexican-Americans at that time, Rodriguez' parents came to America with the intention to stay and integrate into American society. Their lack of formal education, however, limited their career opportunities and economic success. Acculturation, the acquisition of the dominant language and adoption of the dominant group's style of life, does not automatically lead to economic and political equality.

Although Rodriguez' writes his story as a chronicle of the transformation from outsider to insider, from immigrant to American, it is at the same time an assessment of the price that had to be paid for achievement. Rodriguez writes: "I grew up victim to a disabling confusion. As I grew fluent in English, I no longer could speak Spanish with confidence" (28) and he admits that he never stopped feeling guilty about having become a part of the Anglo-American world. Ironically, the dominant culture still regards Rodriguez--unlike Eva Hoffman--as a minority writer. Although he chose to leave one culture behind and live in another, Rodriguez could not and still cannot escape confrontation with his Mexicanness and the paradoxes involved in his situation. As a boy, Rodriguez was confronted directly with his parents' culture whenever visitors arrived from Mexico. Unlike his siblings who managed to say the "necessary words" (28), Rodriguez was unable to respond. Those visitors were taken aback by his inability to speak "'su proprio idioma'" and called him "pocho," (29) a derogatory name for a Mexican who, in assimilating into American society, tries to blot out his own

cultural background. His uncle blamed Rodriguez' parents for betraying their culture. Ironically, Rodriguez is the one with the darkest complexion in his family. He is, what he, in a recent article,<sup>4</sup> calls a "throwback":

I am the only one in the family whose face is severely cut to the line of ancient Indian ancestors. My face is mournfully long, in the classical Indian manner; my profile suggests one of those beak-nosed Mayan sculptures--the eaglelike face upturned, open-mouthed, against the deserted, primitive sky. (115)

Mexicans easily recognize in Rodriguez a fellow countryman. When he was a boy, it happened frequently that Mexicans addressed him in Spanish asking directions and, as he recalls an event in Hunger of Memory, an old woman steadied herself against him when she boarded a bus, murmuring something in Spanish and thanking him with a kiss. Rodriguez claims that he would have been happier about his public success had he not been reminded by these intimate sounds which were uttered in public of what his home used to be like before it lost its intimacy and privacy.

Rodriguez is obsessed with the distinction between private and public, individual and communal space. According to Victor Turner, the liminal phase in a rite of passage is characterized by the fact that the initiates are left to themselves when confronted with the initiating experience. They need to break away from society to return to the same or another society after a period of solitary trial. Rodriguez points out: "To succeed in the classroom, I needed psychologically to sever my ties with

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<sup>4</sup> "Mixed Blood," Harper's Magazine, November 1991.

Spanish. Spanish represented an alternative culture as well as another language-and the basis of my deepest sense of relationship to my family" ("Going Home Again" 17). The distribution of the four linguistic categories which Henri Gobard suggests to describe a person's relationship to language--vernacular, vehicular, referential, and mythic language--may vary from one ethnic group to another and from one individual of that group to another. Rodriguez claims:

Once upon a time the language I used at home was a rural Mexican Spanish, a working-class Spanish of limited vocabulary, which was playful, colloquial, richly emotional. Mine, I must stress, was an intensely private Spanish. It was a language rarely used in public by my family. ("An American Writer" 5)

Rodriguez argues in his autobiography that if the Spanish his family spoke at home had been a public Spanish, he would have had no problem becoming a "bilingual" student. He points out that what he needed to learn in school was that he had the right to speak the public language of the "gringos." If his classmates had been taught a second language like Spanish or French, they could have regarded it as another public language. But what Rodriguez could not believe is that he was able to speak "a single public language" (19). It was the exclusively private use of Spanish that made it inferior in Rodriguez' eyes. Since the family was completely cut off from the Chicano community, they never used Spanish as a vehicular language. In public, Rodriguez would be embarrassed by the fact that his father did not master English as a vehicular language:

There were many times like the night at a brightly lit

gasoline station (a blaring white memory) when I stood uneasily, hearing my father. He was talking to a teenaged attendant. I do not recall what they were saying, but I cannot forget the sounds my father made as he spoke. At one point his words slid together to form one word--sounds as confused as the threads of blue and green oil in the puddle next to my shoes. His voice rushed through what he had left to say. And, toward the end, reached falsetto notes, appealing to his listener's understanding. I looked away to the lights of passing automobiles. I tried not to hear anymore. But I heard only too well the calm, easy tones in the attendant's reply. Shortly afterward, walking toward home with my father, I shivered when he put his hand on my shoulder. The very first chance that I got, I evaded his grasp and ran on ahead into the dark, skipping with feigned boyish exuberance. (15)

Nor did Spanish serve the family as the language of literature in the form of fiction and poetry. Rodriguez explains in the prologue that, although he learned how to read Spanish at the university and has no difficulty reading Marquez and Lorca today, his parents have never heard of these authors. Their reading consists of the Bible, newspapers, and recipes. After the intervention of the children's school, however, English became the vehicular language which the family used at home instead of vernacular Spanish.

When Rodriguez abandoned Spanish as the private and embraced English as the referential language, the language of the classroom, he alienated himself from any community. English replaced--or in Deleuze and Guattari's words deterritorialized--Spanish at home. English, however, did not automatically take on the emotional quality of Spanish. For Rodriguez, English remained the language of culture, a written rather than a spoken language, a language that facilitated a bond with the British and Anglo-American literary canon but not with his peers or with



his family. Rodriguez opens his book with a reference to Shakespeare's The Tempest: "I have taken Caliban's advice. I have stolen their books. I will have some run of this isle" (3). Caliban gives this advice to Stephano whom he tries to encourage to kill Prospero and take his place as the ruler over the island. Caliban knows that Prospero derives his power from his books and ultimately from language. Like Caliban, Rodriguez realized that embracing the oppressor's culture, was the key to becoming like his gringo teachers. In struggling to achieve this goal Rodriguez turned into a "scholarship boy." Rodriguez takes this expression from Richard Hoggart's The Uses Of Literacy (1957) which he quotes extensively in his autobiography. The scholarship boy, according to Hoggart, is of working-class background. He is most often only moderately talented and is what child psychologists would call an overachiever. What sets him apart from other students is the fact that he "chooses to become a student" ("The Achievement of Desire: Personal Reflections on Learning 'Basics '" 242) because he knows that education will change him. "He [the scholarship boy] is at the friction-point of two cultures" (239), says Hoggart, and Rodriguez concludes that he "does not straddle, cannot reconcile, the two great opposing cultures of his life" (66), namely the culture of his teachers and that of his parents. A scholarship boy, according to Hoggart, is an anxious student who lacks self-confidence and is extremely ambitious. If he grows up in a language other than the language of the classroom, he

strives to approximate the accents of his teachers. His greatest wish is to become exactly like his teachers which takes him further and further away from home. Rodriguez describes his solitary routine in the following way:

After dinner, I would rush to a bedroom with papers and books. As often as possible, I resisted parental pleas to 'save lights' by coming to the kitchen to work. I kept so much, so often, to myself. Sad. Enthusiastic. Troubled by the excitement of coming upon new ideas. Eager. Fascinated by the promising texture of a brand-new book. I hoarded the pleasures of learning. Alone for hours. Enthralled. Nervous. I rarely looked away from my books--or back on my memories. Nights when relatives visited and the front rooms were warmed by Spanish sound, I slipped quietly out of the house. (51)

Rodriguez "became more comfortable reading or writing prose than talking to a kitchen filled with listeners" ("On Becoming a Chicano" 47). He points out that he "entered high school having read hundreds of books" (63). One day he came across a newspaper article about the retirement of an English professor which included a list of the hundred most important books which the professor claimed had made him an educated man. Rodriguez managed to read his way through the list within several months. His bookishness opened for him the door to prestigious universities. Rodriguez was the first in his family to leave home in order to go to college--a separation that confirmed physically the emotional distance between him and his parents.

Since it was British literature that interested Rodriguez most, he decided to specialize in the English Renaissance. It might have been the urge to trace his adopted culture back to its infancy that motivated Rodriguez to become an English

Renaissance scholar. He, however, obviously never felt inclined to become a scholar of Spanish Renaissance literature. When some "enthusiastic Chicano undergraduates" ("Going Home Again" 24) asked him to teach a course on the Chicano novel, he told them that the Chicano novel was not "capable of dealing with Chicano experience adequately," because "most Chicanos were not literate." Furthermore, since the majority of Chicano novels described only the individual "in transit between Mexican and American cultures" (24), the Chicano novel was not "true" to the "communal sense of life" that characterizes Chicano culture. Rather than presenting a plausible argument, Rodriguez' response reflects his unease with his ethnic background.

Just as Hoffman claims that her decentered vision made her an expert in identifying alienation in literature, Rodriguez claims that his sense of the divide between past and present made it easier for him than for most scholars to identify issues in Renaissance pastoral--"a literature which records the feelings of the courtly when confronted by the alternatives of rural and rustic life" ("On Becoming a Chichano" 47). In "An American Writer" Rodriguez says that the writers who taught him the most about the drama of his life are not American but British. And he tries to find the explanation in the fact that "a less racially diverse nation"--a very unrealistic view of contemporary Britain--realizes better that reasons for social inequity are economic and not merely ethnic. D.H. Lawrence, the son of a coalminer and a schoolteacher, is an example, without

which, according to Rodriguez, he would not have been able to write his own story. The attempt to bridge the gap between vernacular and referential language, the informal and the formal, that is personified by the character of Mellors in Lady Chatterley's Lover anticipates for Rodriguez his own dilemma of living between two cultures.

Not only did Rodriguez feel that the choice of his area of interest alienated him from his ethnic community, but also the choice of the academic discipline as such. In his autobiography he says that he knew that by studying literature and becoming a writer he "violated the ideal of the macho" (128). According to Rodriguez, the traditional Mexican ideal is that a man should be "feo," "fuerte," and "formal" (128), 'ugly,' 'strong,' and 'formal.' To be formal, means to be serious and reliable. Formal also implies a male discourse that is very different from female discourse. Mexican men, according to Rodriguez, do not gossip or chat, nor is their style confessional or confidential. Octavio Paz, in his book El Laberinto de la Soledad (1950), describes the Mexican man in the following way: "El 'macho' es un ser hermético, encerrado en sí mismo, capaz de guardarse y guardar lo que se le confía" (The Mexican man is a hermetic being, closed up in himself, capable of guarding himself and whatever has been confided to him [28]). Rodriguez admits that inside the house he was quiet, but outside the house there would be no end to his flow of words. He became chatty and an expert in small talk. The stories and poetry that he wrote in high school

expressing his feelings would be awarded high grades. He always felt that there might be something "effeminate" (129) about his attachment to literature. It was his father who teased him about his uncalloused hands, hands unfamiliar with physical work. His mother, on the other hand, would scold him, when he came home deeply tanned from playing in the sun. Dark skin implied poverty. She would ask him if he wanted to become like one of those braceros?<sup>5</sup> Rodriguez, however, would look "in awe" (113) at those tanned, muscled, "frightening and fascinating" (114) men who came to downtown Sacramento to shop on Saturday mornings. When he was a student at Stanford, he seized the opportunity of a summer construction job. At last, so Rodriguez hoped, he would gain admission to the male world of the labourer. He was able to do the hard work and even enjoyed the physical exertion and pain. But he also learned that a few weeks of physical labour could not teach him what it was like to be poor and socially disadvantaged. He observes that the Chicano construction workers whom he worked with that summer were not los pobres. A group of Mexicans, however, who received inadequate payment for the rough job they had particularly been hired for, struck him as utterly deprivileged. Being aliens without a knowledge of English, they were not able to stand up for their rights. Rodriguez argues that it is those people who need to be supported financially and by special educational

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<sup>5</sup> Bracero is the name for a Mexican who works with his brazos, his arms.

programmes and not those who are already part of the system.

Alienated as he might have been from his relatives and from his classmates, Rodriguez was a very successful student and was awarded scholarships even before affirmative action was implemented. In other words, after having been separated from his parents' culture he became "reaggregated" (Turner) into the academic community. For two reasons, however, he decided to turn his back on this community. When he and his fellow students applied for jobs in English departments all over the country, Rodriguez received numerous offers, whereas his colleagues remained unsuccessful. Rodriguez suspected that "his race had given [him] an advantage over other applicants" (168). One of his professors confirmed this suspicion by commenting that he was not surprised that Rodriguez was receiving so many job offers, since "'not many schools are going to pass up the chance to get a Chicano with a Ph.D. in Renaissance literature'" (169). Rodriguez argues that affirmative-action programmes did not really help those who needed help, but turned those who had already been successful on their own merits into token figures. There was yet another factor that prompted him to turn his back on academia. In order to avoid distraction from his work, Rodriguez went to London to finish writing his thesis. Here, in this heterotopic space of chosen exile, he experienced a kind of epiphany. After having done research for a couple of months in the reading room of the British Museum, it became obvious to Rodriguez that he had joined "a lonely community" (69). He

wondered if his dissertation was much more than "an act of social withdrawal:"

Whenever I opened a text that hadn't been used for years, I realized that my special interests and skills united me to a mere handful of academics. We formed an exclusive--eccentric!--society, separated from others who would never care or be able to share our concerns. (The pages I turned were stiff like layers of dead skin.) I began to wonder: Who, beside my dissertation director and a few faculty members, would ever read what I wrote? (70)

He started longing for a more "passionate" (71) and less lonely life. Rodriguez passed through a phase of nostalgia for the intimacy he had experienced in his early childhood and for a real community. Eventually, he entered a second phase of "reaggregation" by becoming a public opponent of bilingual education and affirmative action. Besides articles on education, Rodriguez has published articles and a book, Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father (1992) about Mexico and its mestizo culture. These articles and the book, so it seems, are an attempt at reterritorialization. They are an indication that he now grants Mexico more space in his life and that he is possibly coming to terms with the Mexican part of himself. In writing Hunger of Memory he also tried to connect with a community outside of academia, a community of middle-class readers. In "An American Writer" Rodriguez confesses:

I became a writer because I hungered for communal assurance. Applause. The good review. It was your understanding that I desired. Some way out of the single life. So I wrote of my Mexican house, but in the words of the city. (13)

And in his autobiography he imagines his reader as someone who "has had a long education and that his [sic] society ... is

often public (un gringo)" (182). In the process of writing his autobiography Rodriguez experiences the paradox of being most public when he is most private. He admits that he is writing about things his mother asked him not to talk about thereby betraying her sense of privacy. Rodriguez was inspired, so he says, by the diaries of the seventeenth-century Puritans. What impressed him most when he first read Protestant autobiographies as a schoolboy was that the Protestants were "so public about their spiritual lives." And this was because "they were otherwise alone in their faith" (110).

In the third section of Hunger of Memory, "Credo," Rodriguez describes his relationship with Catholicism. The Catholic Church is the only place where his private life and his public life merged. The Mexican Catholicism at home differed in some ways from the Irish Catholicism at school, but his parents felt "at ease" in the Irish-American church. The church "mediated between" (96) Rodriguez' private and public life. In going to church together every Sunday morning, the family could publicly celebrate their privacy. They were an intimate group and yet a part of the parish. Mass "mystified" Rodriguez "for being a public and a private event" (96). Each worshipper had the freedom to pray individually while he or she was still a part of the community responding in unison to the progression of the liturgy. Rodriguez' sense of belonging in the church community was strongest when he became an altar boy at the age of twelve. At this time Latin was still the official language of



the Roman Catholic Church. Latin, which here represents the "mythic" language of Gobard's tetraglossie, would "encourage private reflection" (99) since the words were familiar but not necessarily comprehensible to everyone. But then the priest's voice would call to public prayer, "the reminder that an individual has the aid of the Church in his life" (99). Rodriguez feels nostalgia for the time when the church service could still hold its private and its public aspects in balance. With the replacement of Latin by English as the language of religion, mass has become more public; it has become a ritual of words. The "mythic" language is no longer a language of the beyond: "One's focus is upon this place. This time. The moment. Now" (101). Roman Catholicism, too, has become assimilated, and as a result, less private and more public.

Catholicism has become part of Rodriguez' public life, just as Judaism is a part of Hoffman's. And just as Rodriguez in his assimilation process "blended Catholicism" with "insights from Sartre and Zen and Buber and Miltonic Protestantism. And Freud" (104), Hoffman developed an "equation" "between Jewishness and a kind of secular humanism" (144). Members of the self-made American intellectual elite, Rodriguez and Hoffman both grapple with the difficulty of constructing an identity that is simultaneously "American" and "ethnic." By writing their autobiographies they are trying to come to terms with their ethnic heritage. At the same time they celebrate their American identity writing for a white middle-class audience. Hoffman and

Rodriguez have come to the city to compensate for the loss of their origins and of their vernacular. Contemporary city dwellers seek their own micro-significations, private signs within the public sphere. Rodriguez claims: "And, in some broad sense, my writing is political because it concerns my movement away from the company of family and into the city. This was my coming of age: I became a man by becoming a public man" (7). Hoffman and Rodriguez write in the language of the city. Both autobiographies are rhetorically structured acts of public confession in a language that is very stylized. Both imitate conversational speech in their writing in order to create intimacy with the reader. Rodriguez' style is characterized by ellipsis and parataxis which are both typical of conversational language. The most salient typographical feature of his text is the excessive use of parentheses and italics. Rodriguez modifies his sentences by remarks which he sets aside by parentheses thus evoking the intimate tone of a letter or a diary entry. This sort of aside gives the illusion that there is still something more private to say. In Hoffman's autobiography the proliferation of dashes has the same function as the parentheses in Hunger of Memory. Both authors not only know but have experienced in their own lives the importance of language in the social construction of reality. Both argue in their autobiographies that literacy has social transformational power. Ethnicity and race stop being socially determining categories once formal education has performed its trick as the great

leveller. "In Beverly Hills," says Rodriguez, "will this monster make a man" (3), and Hoffman confesses that her public self is the "most American thing" (250) about her.

Neither Hoffman nor Rodriguez feel comfortable living in the "borderlands." They do not celebrate mestizaje. Both writers have the tendency to present reality in terms of binary oppositions. In their autobiographies they take for granted that the private and the public roles of the self are separable. Neither of them questions the role of institutionalized education in shaping the self and in perpetuating the interests of the dominant culture. While Cisneros and Mara demonstrate how society is split by gender, Hoffman and Rodriguez suggest that it is class which divides the world into the stigmatized culture of home and the privileged one of the classroom.

Chapter Four: Re-writing the Bildungsroman: Angelika Fremd's Heartland (1989) and Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth (1982)

For a language is like a human being, diffident at first and distant, difficult to approach, to understand. It has a resistance that goes with its instinct for survival. Yet there is a lot of sympathy in a language, and a willingness to co-operate, to allow newcomers to its secrets, and to its kingdom, which for every language is a different one. (Antigone Kefala, Alexia, a Tale of Two Cultures)

Learning by Heart: Angelika Fremd's Heartland

The Bildungsroman, the traditional genre for the depiction of a young man's spiritual and psychological development, has become a genre favoured by many contemporary women writers and many migrant women writers in particular.<sup>1</sup> The term Bildungsroman was introduced into the language of literary scholarship in the early nineteenth century by German scholar Karl von Morgenstern who applied it to the novels of Friedrich Maximilian Klinger "which he placed ... above Goethe's novels in terms of masculine strength of character" (Martini 9). For the humanist philosophical scholars in nineteenth-century Germany Bildung, a word which defies neat translation into English, implied the harmonious cultivation of the whole person through the exercise

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<sup>1</sup> A few examples are: Lisa Alther's Kinflicks (1975), Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman (1969), Verena Stefan's Häutungen (1975), Joan Barfoot's Gaining Ground (1978), Joan Didion's Play It As It Lays (1970), Margaret Laurence's The Diviners (1970), Marge Piercy's Fly Away Home (1985), Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street (1984), Isabella Rios' Victuum (1976), Katherine Vlassie's Children Of Byzantium (1987), Tina DeRosa's Paper Fish (1980), Antigone Kefala's The Island (1984), Toni Morrison's Tar Baby (1981), Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1983) and Beatrice Culleton's In Search of April Raintree (1983).

of reason and feeling. The idea of Bildung thus carries with it the assumption of an autonomous self which can be influenced by the environment but nevertheless has a certain freedom in its response. The Bildungsroman, according to Morgenstern, "...presents more the people and surroundings influencing the hero and explaining to us the gradual formation (Bildung) of his inner self which is to be presented" (Martini 17). Successful Bildung requires a social context that will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities, leading the young man from ignorance and innocence to wisdom and maturity. As Susanne Howe defines it, the hero of the typical Bildungsroman

sets out on his way through the world, meets with reverses usually due to his own temperament, falls in with various guides and counsellors, makes many false starts in choosing his friends, his wife, and his life work, and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively. (4)

The classic version of the Bildungsroman seeks to solve clashes between individual and society.<sup>2</sup> The critical discussion around the Bildungsroman has been unsatisfactory because there is no consensus on the meaning of the term. Most critics agree, however, that novels of education or development written by women differ in content and structure from the Bildungsromane

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<sup>2</sup> Howe, among others, has drawn attention to the differences between the German and the English Bildungsroman. The latter is more concerned with class conflicts than its German counterpart and generally deals with a more complex social and political reality because of earlier and faster industrial development in England.

written by men.<sup>3</sup>

The few early examples of novels of development written by women, from Fanny Burney's Evelina: Or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World (1778) to George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1860), show that the female protagonist's exploration of her social milieu is subject to all kinds of restrictions. Female education is inextricably linked to marriage.<sup>4</sup> In the early female Entwicklungsroman the aim of the heroine's development "is not life within the larger community as it is for the male hero, but rather marriage with the partner of her choice" (Baruch 341). The female novel of education in the early twentieth century is a tale of compromise and disillusionment. As the protagonist struggles to escape an oppressive childhood towards self-fulfillment, she discovers that life offers not limitless possibilities but is a permanent struggle in a hostile environment. Contemporary minority writers, and among them migrant writers, re-write the story of a young man's coming to terms with himself and society by self-reflexively reevaluating the goals of traditional Bildung and subversively restructuring

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<sup>3</sup> Melitta Gerhard was among the first to distinguish the Bildungsroman from the Entwicklungsroman (novel of development). She sees the Bildungsroman, which is mostly concerned with a male protagonist's formation, as a subgenre of the Entwicklungsroman.

<sup>4</sup> Elaine Hoffman Baruch claims: "From Emma to Jane Eyre to Madame Bovary to Middlemarch to Anna Karenina to Portrait of a Lady to Lady Chatterley's Lover and beyond, the novel presents a search for self, an education of the mind and feelings. But unlike the male bildungsroman, the feminine bildungs [sic] takes place in or on the periphery of marriage. That is its most striking characteristic" (335).

the traditionally male genre.

Female socialization and cultural assimilation processes both represent a marginal group's absorption into mainstream patriarchal society. The feminist and the migrant Bildungsroman turn into what can be called an anti-Bildungsroman in order to show how the dominant culture obstructs personal development. The woman of colour faces a variety of obstacles in the process of self-development. Migrant women of colour are doubly marginalized. As Sandra Cisneros and Rachna Mara demonstrate in their texts, they often have to contend with racism and sexism from the dominant culture as well as from their own family and community. The American or Commonwealth woman writer of European descent faces problems of a different kind. Despite her marginal position in the society she chooses to live in, she is, because of her European background, also implicated with the colonizer.<sup>5</sup> Writing from such a position she often displays an awareness of dislocation within the literary traditions of her cultural background.<sup>6</sup> The fiction of these writers tends to explore relationships on different levels of the text. Double allegiances find expression in a web of cultural and literary

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<sup>5</sup> One could argue that an Italian or a German migrant to the Americas or Australia is not clearly linked to the colonizers since his/her ancestors were not directly involved with the colonization of these parts of the world. I am using the word "colonizers," however, in a sense that white European-descended migrants do enjoy particular privileges which are contingent upon being white.

<sup>6</sup> See Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," World Literature Written in English 30.2 (1990): 38.

references. The Bildungsroman, which is concerned with the individual's position within a network of social forces offers itself as a form for such exploration.

Angelika Fremd's Heartland is divided into forty-four episodic chapters, each of which is built around a dilemma which the twelve-year-old protagonist Inge tries to solve. Although Inge's story follows a certain chronology, the individual episodes can be shifted around to a certain extent. This strategy, which reminds one of the picaresque novel rather than of the Bildungsroman, evokes a sense of fragmentation and disruption that mirrors Inge's search for identity as an adolescent girl on the threshold of womanhood and as a migrant in a new society. Inge is introduced to the reader as her family arrives in the small logging town of Eejon in Victoria in the summer of 1956 after the family has escaped to the West from East Berlin. Fremd describes Inge in her relationship to her eight-year old half-sister Monika, her pregnant mother Lisl and her stepfather Karl. Karl lost his job as a history teacher in Germany when it was discovered that he had been an SS member during the war. Ironically, he is--Fremd loves to manipulate cultural stereotypes--not a tall blonde Germanic type but a "swarthy, dark-haired man of medium height" (2). The family is later joined by Lisl's mother Emma. The relationship between mother and daughter, which lacks warmth and understanding, is central to the novel. Patterns of socialization repeat themselves in the three generations of women. Emma resents Lisl



for having Inge, an illegitimate child, and makes her marry Karl whom Lisl despises. Not having come to terms with her own sexuality, Lisl watches the physical changes of puberty in Inge with disgust. When a neighbour advises Lisl to buy Inge her first bra, Lisl's animosity reveals itself:

For a moment Inge saw in Lisl's eyes a look which she found hard to define. It remained though ever after, indelibly imprinted in her consciousness like a foreign particle, abrasive, tearing, cutting her off from her own feelings about herself. It was a look of envy, anger, tinged with hatred. Inge felt darkly that she and her mother were not of the same flesh as she had assumed, and that the loyalties she expected to be hers by birthright were being alienated by the dictates of the flesh. They had become rivals in the world of women. (54-55)

The family dynamics becomes obvious on the first page. When they arrive Inge picks an apple from the tree in the overgrown garden and holds it up to her mother. This gesture reveals Inge's most desperate need to meet with her mother's approval, which in spite of her efforts she never gets. It also casts her in the role of Eve, temptress and seductress, a role that is imposed upon her throughout the novel not only by the men, whose sexual victim she becomes, but also by the older women. The relationship of Inge and Lisl reflects the first role reversal between parent and child and between male and female. After all, Inge offers the apple not to her step-father but to her mother. Patterns of reversal abound in Heartland as one of the oppositional strategies<sup>7</sup> to colonial discourse.

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<sup>7</sup> Ross Chambers argues that oppositional behaviour "has the extremely tricky ability to erode, insidiously and almost invisibly, the very power from which it derives" (2). Reversal of discourse is, as Mikhail Bakhtin has demonstrated in his

The family members personify different migrant reactions to a new environment and culture: rage, arrogance and withdrawal, and the urge to reconstruct the old country. Where Monika fights her environment with anger--she almost kills her baby brother out of jealousy--, Lisl rebuffs her neighbours and becomes emotionally inaccessible to her husband and children. Karl is obsessed by replacing their weatherbeaten timber home by a Bavarian-style house with a peaked roof and a wooden verandah encircling the top storey.<sup>8</sup> Only Inge tries to assimilate by imitating her classmates and learning English with a vengeance. "Why can't you just fit in like I do," she confronts Monika and "Why do you have to be a fir tree amongst a forest of eucalypts [sic] ?" (43). "Fitting in" is a matter of survival for Inge. She has reached the critical age when adolescents seek role models. Since she cannot find a role model within her family she turns elsewhere for guidance.

How does Inge manage to "fit in"? Half way through the book Inge is described as having a revelatory experience in reading Henry Handel Richardson's novel The Getting of Wisdom (1910), the first Künstlerroman written in English by a woman.<sup>9</sup>

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theory of carnivalization, an effective strategy to subvert authority.

<sup>8</sup> In New World literature, the European man is often depicted as planning to build the dream house. F.P. Grove's Fruits of the Earth (1933) is an example that immediately comes to mind.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Beebe identifies Mme de Stael's Corinne (1807) as the model of the female Künstlerroman.

Richardson was an expatriate Australian woman writing under a male pseudonym.<sup>10</sup> Inge paraphrases the story:

It's ... about a girl who goes to a strict, posh girls' school. Her family is very poor and she has a hard time trying to fit in. I love the ending. She says that for each square peg, meaning herself, a suitable hole will ultimately be found. (80)

The irony in this last sentence escapes Inge. Richardson's novel tells the story of Laura Tweedle Rambotham, whose mother sacrifices her own life to be able to afford Laura's education at a Ladies' College in Melbourne. The Getting of Wisdom is in many ways an anti-Bildungsroman. The wisdom Laura acquires is that in order to succeed she must suppress her natural curiosity, spontaneity and imagination. To be able to "fit in" Laura has to do exactly what Monika accuses Inge of doing: "You crawl, Inge, and you lie to yourself. This isn't better than home. It's shabby and the kids at school are stupid, real country bumpkins. You just act as if everything is lovely to make yourself popular..." (44).

Heartland is a re-writing of The Getting of Wisdom from a migrant's perspective.<sup>11</sup> The issues of class are turned into issues of ethnicity. The fact that Fremd has Inge quote the passage from Richardson's novel out of context shows that Inge has not learned her lesson yet. Inge breaks off before the concluding paragraph which says that those who find it difficult

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<sup>10</sup> Richardson, born in Ballarat in 1870, lived in various parts of Germany from the ages of eighteen to thirty-three. Two of her novels and several short stories are set in Germany.

<sup>11</sup> See Sneja Gunew's review of Heartland.

to fit into society can find a more satisfying environment for their creativity only in the world of art, apart from society. Richardson here inverts Goethe's idea that life is an art which may be learned and makes it clear that for the woman writer there is no reconciliation between life and art. Richardson's heroine, at first taking the wrong path, is looking for a literary model for her own first attempts at writing to earn her membership to the school's Literary Society. After having dismissed Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879) as distasteful--this is ironic, since Ibsen was, next to Nietzsche, one of the writers whom Richardson most highly admired--Laura decides to write a romance modelled after Walter Scott. Her appropriation of the master plot turns out to be a complete failure. Her audience ridicules her for attempting to write about something she has not experienced and dismisses it as "second-hand rubbish" (224). In her third attempt, which this time meets with general approval, Laura describes an excursion to the hills of her home town with her brothers and sister "into which she had worked an adventure with some vagrant blacks" (226). Ironically, Laura's tale is not based on experience but an act of her imagination, the kind of romantic adventure that her audience wanted to hear. By having the Literary Society accept as truth what is fiction, Richardson unmasks the hypocrisy of its double standards. Richardson criticizes the school system that teaches girls to conform to the values of society, a system that stresses the importance of learning facts and historical dates and does not

encourage critical thinking. Laura decides to give A Doll's House a second chance and in a revelatory moment that is echoed in Inge's reading of The Getting of Wisdom, she gets a glimpse of what can be learned from Nora's experience. Richardson sardonically ends her novel with a glance at some of the most talented girls' futures: "Within six months of leaving school, M.P. married and settled down in her native township and thereafter she was forced to adjust the rate of her progress to the steps of halting little feet. Cupid went a-governessing, and spent the best years of her life in the obscurity of the bush" (271). Only the aspiring Laura, the end of The Getting of Wisdom gives hope to believe, will learn "über sich hinweg zu tanzen" as the Nietzschean quotation prefacing the last chapter seems to imply.

The Getting of Wisdom is not Inge's first attempt at finding a role model of womanhood in fiction. Like so many women, Inge grows up with stories which create images of the good and the bad mother, the beautiful and the ugly daughter fostering rivalry among women. Heartland abounds in allusions to the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm,<sup>12</sup> such as "Schneewittchen und die sieben Zwerge" and "Aschenputtel," which thrive on twisted mother-daughter relationships. Inge has not yet learned to tell her own story. It is only on the very last page that Inge awakens to her creative powers. In an earlier phase of role

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<sup>12</sup> Grimms' fairy tales, claims Gunew in her review of Heartland, "revealed the family romance as Gothic nightmare long before Freud" (8).

modelling "she became fascinated by female characters who were a source of comfort to the men they loved" (33) which she finds in titles such as Kathleen Winsor's Forever Amber (1944) and Mika Waltari's The Egyptian (1945). Carol Christ remarks:

Women live in a world where women's stories rarely have been told from their own perspectives. The stories celebrated in culture are told by men. ... Women have lived in the interstices between their own vaguely understood experience and the shapings given to experience by the stories of men. The dialectic between experience and shaping experience through storytelling has not been in women's hands. (4-5)

Some of the other texts that Fremd alludes to are Theodor Storm's Der Schimmelreiter, Schikaneder's Die Zauberflöte, and Carlo Gozzi's Turandot. They are stories of initiation in which at least one of the characters has to undergo a rite of passage. These texts--all written by men--are geographically and temporally dislocated, in that they are transplanted into the contemporary milieu of Fremd's text from eighteenth and nineteenth-century European culture. They serve Fremd as a storehouse of motifs, themes and images which she then assembles in new ways in the re-writing process. The white horse of Storm's Der Schimmelreiter haunts Heartland as a leitmotif. After Inge's confession of Karl's incestuous assaults, Lisl rides to her death on the white mare. Lisl, like the protagonist of Der Schimmelreiter, is defeated by the people and circumstances around her. She is a victim of her rigid upbringing and the events of the war that forced her to sell her body to Karl whom she does not love.

Along with Richardson's Heartland, Fremd uses another novel

as a model: A Difficult Love (1987) written by German-born Australian Manfred Jurgensen. Jurgensen's narrator talks about his love affair with the German-born Amalia, a story of fatal attraction. Amalia, mother of five children and twice married, is described as a nymphomaniac. Towards the end of the book, after Amalia had committed suicide, Jurgensen interrupts the narrator's relation in order to present Amalia's story from different perspectives. Her sister gives a six-page-long account of their childhood. Amalia's childhood closely resembles Inge's. The parallels are indeed too uncanny to be ignored. Fremd, however, tells Amalia's story from a woman's point of view and grants the story of Amalia's/Inge's "Bildung" more space in her own novel.

Unlike Amalia, Inge escapes from the life-denying atmosphere of her home with David, a not so handsome prince, on his motorbike--an ironic twist to the prototypical fairy tale ending. Inge throws most of her clothes and her German books away and takes only The Getting of Wisdom and 1066 and All That, Sellar's and Yeatman's satire on textbook history. According to the "Compulsory Preface" of the latter book, "[h]istory is not what you thought. It is what you can remember. All other history defeats itself" (v). Fremd dedicates her book to her children "for whom knowing the past will free them from repeating it." From her furtive reading of her grandmother's diary, which witnesses the sufferings of German women during the wars, Inge reaps a sense of her place in history:

By the time she had cried herself dry, she felt a sense of pride and history. She had been singled out to be different. A child fathered by war and destruction. Perhaps it was her task in life to overcome that history, to begin again, for herself and her family, to be a mender of shards, the broken fragment of their lives. The thought enthralled her and gave her hope. (137)

Although the reader is relieved to see that Inge is being saved from Karl, her escape can only be accomplished by accepting help from a man and by deserting her sister Monika. Before leaving her room Inge catches her reflection in the mirror: "Her image made her uncomfortable. 'You don't love him,' it hissed. 'He'll make you live his way, fill you with his foreignness. Take care'" (158). Inge disregards this warning and leaves. Inge's escape on the motorbike--lighting out for the territory--mirrors Laura's exhilarating run down the central avenue away from her younger sister Pin and the school in The Getting of Wisdom. In order to prepare for the run, Laura gets rid of her hat, gloves and books, the confining trappings of institutionalized womanhood and Bildung. Both novels demonstrate that the female quest for identity is not a socially sanctioned process but often anti-social and the result of compromise.

For women and migrants alike the alternatives are either to subscribe to conformity or to be ostracized. Monika is the only character who remains true to herself throughout the book, but she is left in the end with her brutal step-father and no hope for a better life in the future. She refuses to develop Inge's self-betraying skills of adjustment for the sake of social survival:



Artful at adjusting, chameleon-like in her outward expression, she [Inge] absorbed into herself the shapes, colours and sounds of her surroundings. She mimicked the monotonous speech rhythms she heard, feeling instantly and with dismay that faces grimaced when the rise and fall of her voice became too foreign, or an emotional phrase, calling for commitment in the listener, crept into her language. (59)

When Inge is having her first period, she also has an allergic reaction, which the doctor diagnoses as an ailment "that migrants were especially prone to" (34). Monika draws the connection that escapes Inge: "'If being grown-up makes you bleed and being a migrant makes your hands go purple, then I don't want to be a woman or a migrant!'" (34). By repeatedly drawing the analogy between the debilitating processes of female socialization in patriarchal society and those of assimilation into a dominant culture, Fremd rejects a melting-pot ideology as a form of integration. To succumb to assimilation and thus become a culturally blank slate is compared to a woman trading her body for social security or prestige. By contrasting Monika's and Inge's self-development processes and thereby demonstrating that there is no smooth and single way of integration into a new society, Fremd stresses the individual gains and losses in the process. At the same time, however, she makes it clear that the problems of integration cannot be overcome by an individual effort such as Inge's desperate attempt to assimilate. Monika is a disconcerting figure with a disturbing voice. She is completely exiled within the family as well as the school world and does not relate to anybody but Inge. The rest of the family more or less ignores her. Her

occasional acid and precocious comments on the other characters' behavior give her something of Günther Grass' Oskar Matzerath who beats his tin drum when he wishes to protest against the world of Bildung. According to François Jost, the traditional Bildungsroman has only one central character (129). By elevating the marginal(ized) Monika into the position of a second protagonist, Fremd undermines the convention of the single focus in the Bildungsroman. At school Monika refuses to speak. Her space is the edge, the backyard of the house, "where she started to build what she called an alternative home" (29). Unlike Inge she does not feel at ease with the Australian fauna and flora. Monika experiences a state of deterritorialization. She is facing cultural and linguistic deprivation without having the power or the wish to change.

Inge, on the other hand, has turned into a cultural "chameleon" trying to become as indistinguishable as possible from her Australian classmates. She is associated with the colour red, the colour of life energy and sexuality. She receives a red dress and a marcasite heart as gifts from two of her admirers. She is also closely associated with blood: her menstrual blood in the bed sheets, the blood that oozes down her legs after her defloration, and her nightmares about vampires sucking her dry of her life spirit. This colour coding links Inge to the Australian desert, Australia's heartland, whose earth is red. After her mother's death she moves in the family hierarchy from margin to centre. She now assumes Lisl's place at

the head of the table under the family crest. As Inge gradually takes the place of the mother, the adults regress into childhood under the pressure of the alien environment.

By leaving the Old World language and literature behind and by the sudden impulse to become a writer in the New World, Inge is taking a first step towards reterritorialization: "She caught the silvery tail of a word being drawn out of her subconscious: Write--I will--write. In time I will write it all down and then I will know what is true" (158). A sequel to the novel would show whether or not Inge will succeed. Both The Getting of Wisdom and Heartland refuse closure. By not giving their novels a sense of an ending, Richardson and Fremd subvert the form of the classic Bildungsroman which re-establishes some sort of traditional order in the end. Furthermore, Fremd's parody of the fairy tale's happy ending is a critique of such fiction.

Fremd subscribes to a poetics of bricolage and nomadology<sup>13</sup>--by criss-crossing literary references from both Old World and New World literature in nomadic fashion in her

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<sup>13</sup> I am adopting the term from Stephen Muecke's article "The Discourse Of Nomadology: Phylums In Flux" who applies the ideas of nomadic living from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's Mille Plateaux to the nomadism of Australian Aborigines. "For the nomad," Muecke points out, "Australia is still not divided into eight 'states' or territories, it is criss-crossed with tracks" (25). Furthermore, he explains that the Aborigines establish kinship in "rhizomic" relations: "Through skin-group [sic] categories virtually all blacks in Australia can establish significant and specific relations with one another. This, if nothing else, can be a basis of solidarity - as opposed to the power relations imposed on them by historians using the patriarchal and hierarchical model of the 'family tree'" (30).

text. The nomad who is always a bricoleur--someone who, according to Lévi-Strauss, uses the means at hand--does not appropriate territory but "is always coming and going" (Muecke). The concept of nomadology, taken literally, challenges European notions of settlement, and nomadology as a discursive strategy challenges notions of textual coherence and canonicity. While Cisneros and Mara resort to circularity and interweaving to undermine patriarchal discourse, intertextuality and reversal of discourse serve Fremd in subverting hierarchical structures. Family and institutionalized education, the traditional mainstays of western society, are shown to fail in Heartland. Unlike in The House on Mango Street and Of Customs and Excise, female bonding and the female community are not sources of alternative Bildung in Heartland. In Fremd's novel the relationships between women are just as life denying as those between the sexes. In re-writing the Bildungsroman Fremd demonstrates how inadequate the form and content of the male genre are to describe the experience of a migrant girl's coming of age. Writing and "writing back to" are shown as the only means to confirm identity.

Learning by Acting: Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth (1982)

In Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth the juxtaposition of Venice and Edmonton serves as the geographical trope that expresses the cultural difference between the Old World and the New. The narrator whose younger self is called Bianca and who seems to be in her late twenties at the moment of writing, lives in Edmonton, which she calls her "outer city" (46). Bianca left Venice, where she was born, at the age of eight when her parents decided to emigrate to Canada. She calls Venice her "inner city." The narrator describes her younger self as being "split into two seemingly inimical halves, not only between the time before and after, but through all my growing years: Italy in summer, Canada in winter" (76).<sup>1</sup> Language alienates her from both countries. Just like Inge in Heartland, Bianca is ostracized by her classmates because of her accent: "Gradually the mastery of the words, the proper understanding came. Mastery of pronunciation took longer. Th was particularly difficult.... 'Listen to her. DIS. Listen to her'" (78). Eventually, Bianca adopts English as her referential language and uses the vernacular Italian only to express her inner life, her emotions and desires. This makes it difficult for her to talk about art with Marco in Italian:

Still, when I tried to answer you, the words on my tongue were

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<sup>1</sup> In Anatomy Of Criticism Northrop Frye calls romance the mythos of summer and irony and satire the mythos of winter. I would like to argue that the narrator's younger self as represented in Italy is her romantic self and that the older narrator living in Canada is an ironist.

English. I paused, I stuttered, searched for the Italian equivalents. I was smooth enough with the phrases of family and home. But theory, abstract thought, seemed necessarily English, for it was the language in which I read....My mouth wouldn't open wide enough to let the words properly roll. The Canadian style, tight and reserved, had been coded into my body and could not be unlearned. (85)

As Bianca points out in the very last sentence of the book, she can speak Italian but she cannot write it.

Like Heartland, The Lion's Mouth is an "ethnic" text in Eli Mandel's sense. Whereas the self-reflexive quality of Heartland is partly created by extensive borrowing from other texts, Edwards creates a self-reflexive text by framing her narrator's story with a prologue and an epilogue, which are both situated in the present in the narrator's house in Edmonton.<sup>2</sup> The narrator interrupts the story in order to comment on her present life, the writing process and her past life in Canada, which excludes Marco. Edwards is self-consciously playing with the paradoxes that underlie all autobiographical writing. Shirley Neuman points at the paradoxes of veracity, historicity and alterity in autobiography. She argues that the autobiographer leaps imaginatively in the selection of the material thereby presenting a version of the self, not the total self. In this selective presentation the autobiographer may be

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<sup>2</sup> Patricia Waugh in Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction refers in her definition of the "frame" to Erving Goffman's definition in his Frame Analysis. She claims that the "frame" is one of the main devices of metafictional narratives. Some of such most obvious devices are the story within the story, chinese-box structures, and characters commenting on their own fictional lives. The method "of showing the function of literary conventions, of revealing their provisional nature, is to show what happens when they malfunction. Parody and inversion are two strategies which operate in this way as frame-breaks" (30-1).

looking "upon conventions for the presentation of the self or the interpretation of such a presentation" (322)--that is framing the self. The Lion's Mouth is a fictional autobiography camouflaged as both a fictional biography and a novel. And just as in the case of Biondi, Pirinççi, Cisneros, Mara and Fremd, Caterina Edwards' own ethnic background had an influence on the topic and the structure of this novel. Caterina Edwards was born in England to an English father and an Italian mother, and was raised in Alberta. In her youth she visited Venice frequently.<sup>3</sup>

In the biographical chapters of The Lion's Mouth, Bianca recounts three days in her Italian cousin's present life in Venice up to his nervous breakdown, which she learns about in her aunt's letter in the prologue. In writing Marco's biography, Bianca does not problematize the impossibility of having access to Marco's thoughts and feelings and of witnessing the events in his present life from the geographical distance. Still, in the prologue the narrator insists that she wants "to be the one who not only knows but illuminates the truth" (10). The description of the events during these three days is interspersed with flashbacks to the time that Marco and Bianca spent together during the latter's summer visits. There is a great epistemological distance between Bianca and the older narrator. The autobiographical 'I' becomes a she/Bianca in the retrospective Venetian chapters, a strategy which serves as another frame-breaking effect. While the narrator has

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<sup>3</sup> When I asked Caterina Edwards if she could have written The Lion's Mouth in Italian, she answered in the negative, although, she said, her spoken Italian was fluent.

come to terms with the Canadian environment to an extent that "in the deepest sense" (47) she feels at home in her house and the not yet "fully imagined" city of Edmonton, Marco's life and health have been deteriorating. He is unhappily married to Paola, his little son Francesco suffers from an incurable heart disease, his own health problems are worsening, and he unwittingly gets involved in a brigadist murder. The public assault has a traumatic effect on his young niece, who happens to be present at the scene of the shooting. Venice has lost its charm and dignity and does no longer represent the "safe harbour"--an illusion Marco desperately clings to. Venice has not only become the target of terrorist assaults but it is also on the verge of losing its aura by being disfigured by postmodern architecture. Growth and deterioration are opposite poles along which the narrative develops.

In migrant fiction written by women, a female character's psychological adjustment to a new country is often closely associated with her experience of living on the threshold of womanhood. At sixteen Bianca falls in love with the 24-year-old Marco. For the younger self of the narrator Marco is a model and a mentor. He lectures her on painting, music and politics. He also teaches her that in the Italian environment she "is not what she could be" (114). Marco's photographs make her see herself as she has never seen herself before: she feels beautiful. Marco draws her attention to the different ways of seeing and the fluid boundaries between art and reality. He also draws her attention to the fact, that her face, a "good, strong Venetian one" (114), which



seems "raw and Canadian" to her in its natural and unpolished expression, can easily be turned into a skilfully painted mask, "a beautiful creation," that nevertheless appears natural. Marco is Bianca's "Prince Charming" (179) who awakens her with a kiss into womanhood: "Then your lips met mine. The spell of childhood was broken. I was awakened" (179). By "teaching" her how to manipulate her appearance for certain effects on the observer, he also shows her how to play the conventional part of being a woman. She becomes an object of vision. John Berger argues that "[a]ccording to usage and conventions ... the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man" (Berger, Ways of Seeing, 45). He concludes:

One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object--and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (47)

The Lion's Mouth is very much a novel about how the gaze determines social relationships.

Like Fremd, Edwards uses the form of the Bildungsroman to explore the "liminal" space of growing up between two cultures and two languages. With the story of Bianca and Marco, Edwards re-writes aspects of the type of Bildungsroman which Charlotte Goodman calls "'the male-female double Bildungsroman'" (Goodman 30). Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights (1847) is one of the first novels representing this type. According to Goodman, the main structural difference between the prototypical Bildungsroman and

the male-female double Bildungsroman is that the former moves in a linear fashion, that is, it describes the hero's process through life. The latter ends in a circle. It describes the shared childhood experiences of a male and a female protagonist followed by their separation in adolescence. While the male, like the hero of the typical male Bildungsroman, goes on a quest "to seek his fortune ... the female is left behind" (30). Eventually the protagonists are reunited, however unhappily. Edwards inverts the male-female paradigm by ending the hero's career with a nervous breakdown in the old country, while the heroine manages to "exorcise her dream of Venice" (179) in the writing process and looks forward to a new beginning in Canada.

Just as Bildungsroman and gothic meet in Wuthering Heights and in a great number of female Bildungsromane, Edwards re-writes some aspects of the gothic novel in a self-reflexive manner. The gothic offers itself as a model for re-writing in migrant fiction, since both deal with characters in threshold situations. The setting of the gothic novel is often not the protagonists' home country. Ann Radcliffe, for instance, chooses Italy as the place where she exposes her heroines to gothic terror, since in the English literary tradition Italy represented the exotic and unruly. Gothic heroines live physically and emotionally in a state of displacement and exile. Another interesting feature of the gothic novel to be explored in this context is that the male heroes, that is the heroines' husbands-to-be, take on feminine qualities of passivity and

endurance, rather than the conventional hero's capacity for action.<sup>4</sup> The gothic is, among other things, a probing into the nature of masculine and feminine identity.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Gothic novels are novels about perception. In the female tradition of gothic fiction, particularly in Radcliffe's work, the deception of the heroine's senses is the true cause of what she misinterprets as supernatural phenomena. Once the protagonist enters the gothic world, his/her identity begins to collapse. One gothic convention which expresses the fragmentation of the self is the creation of doubled identities so that the relationship between self and other is transformed into the relationship between opposing aspects of the self. These opposing aspects of the self are often depicted as the male and the female energies at war within a character.

The narrative focus on Marco becomes meaningful when one regards Marco as Bianca's Italian self, her dark twin: "For you are within me, the emblem of my inner city" (46). Marco's more than average height and his blue eyes run counter to the ethnic cliché of a typical Italian. Like Fremd, Edwards is fond of subverting traditional ways of seeing by inverting paradigms and

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<sup>4</sup> Marco is described as someone whose tendency is to re-act rather than to act. Ironically, he is forced by the brigadists to act as the messenger to the assassin: "Now is the time of action" (135) to which the man replies: "a time of terrible beauty,"--a quotation from Yeats' "Easter 1916."

<sup>5</sup> This is a feature it shares with the male-female double Bildungsroman. Goodman argues that "the male-female double Bildungsroman dramatizes the limitations imposed on both the male and the female protagonist in a patriarchal society where androgynous wholeness no longer is possible" (31).

manipulating cultural stereotypes. In chapters 5,9,13, and 17 the narrator describes her various attempts to tell Marco's story, casting him in the role of a gothic hero. The variations that the plot of this story undergoes reflect her own emotional development and changing attitude towards the Canadian environment. In her first attempt, Bianca finds herself telling a story not about him but about a projection of herself, "'a sensitive Italian girl'" (75) who emigrated to the prairies, which ends with her mental and physical decay. Her hero Gianni, a fellow immigrant, returns to Italy to start a career as an opera singer. This plot is obviously modelled on the prototypical male Bildungsroman. The male protagonist succeeds, whereas the heroine dies. What makes Gianni survive and succeed in this story is his ethnic memory. The narrator describes him as a "fellow 'sensitive soul,'" "but one who retained, more, promoted gentle memories, old customs and habits" (75). It is the ethnic memory that makes the narrator succeed. She ends the prologue with the sentence: "It is time again to lift the pen. It is time to succeed" (11). By anticipating the positive result of the process of writing, Edwards, through her narrator, points out that ethnic storytelling is a necessary fiction. Ethnic truth is in narration.

In the second plot Gianni becomes more of a gothic hero. The heroine is an innocent Canadian traveller,--"a Joan Baez

look alike" (108)--<sup>6</sup> the hero a degenerate European. He seduces her and leaves her "set on the path of her destruction" (108). The Marco of the third narrative attempt is less of a type. The narrator is interested in the past that shaped his present. She tries to explore the influence that the bombings of Zara during World War II, which Marco witnessed as a child, had on his life and his health. In this plot the "Canadian girl with a Venetian background" (144) now becomes more of a symbolic figure. The narrator says "I still wanted her destroyed and wanted the destruction to spring from a genetic, a Venetian inadequacy in the face of the harshness of the new land" (144). This is European gothic inverted. It is not the Italian castles that are the place of terror and suffering but the Canadian prairies. All three plots deal with the power relationship of a man and a woman which manifests itself in the claim over homeground. The male protagonist succeeds, that is survives, because he is much more "at home" in the world depicted than the heroine is. The narrator herself felt "stripped of family, of friends, of familiar walls and buildings, of proper landscape" (76) when arriving in Canada.

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<sup>6</sup> It is ironic that the Canadian traveller should look like the American cult folk singer. When she contemplates her gradual adjustment to her Canadian environment, the narrator points out how difficult it is to feel at home in a country that has not become culturally independent: "I finally wanted to come to terms with the country I had been living in. I wanted to make her my country. But she was hidden, obscured. The history, the literature I was taught was English or American. The TV, the movies, the model for life was strictly American.... 'You--Canadians, you are too timid. You don't have the competitive edge.' 'You need us Americans, you need...'" (146).

The narrator claims that in her final version of the story she is "below the masks": "As I look over those three earlier novels, I see that my changing needs, my shifting perceptions and understanding, cast you in different roles, different masks.... This time I am below the masks" (46). Marco emerges as a complex character, scarred and disillusioned, and certainly not as a one-dimensional gothic Montoni. He is the representative of a decaying world burdened by history, wars, terrorism, class struggle and industrial pollution. It becomes obvious from the narrator's conclusion in the epilogue just how much her attitude towards the the Old World and the New has changed: "You are a Venetian. How can you not feel the exhaustion, the decay of the world? My kiss--hopeful and Canadian--could never awaken you from your sleep of negativism" (179). Edwards depicts the male protagonist as breaking down under the burden of life. The female protagonist, on the other hand, comes to terms not only with her Italian past and her Canadian present but also finishes her novel. Thereby she inverts the conventional gender pattern of the male-female double Bildungsroman. As I mentioned before, the position of the observer is one of power. The narrator watches Marco closely and in her imagination participates voyeuristically in his every move. Having been the object of Marco's gaze in the past, Marco now becomes the object of hers.

Marco is depicted as a "liminal" person in a "liminal" city. Venice is a labyrinth, a city full of twilight and mirror

effects. "Frail barrier," the narrator points out, was the original name of the city. The story takes place at Carnival--a "liminal" and transgressive time. On his way to the Bocca di leone, where, in a symbolic act, he denounces himself for his betrayal<sup>7</sup> and failure as husband, father, and citizen of Venice, Marco struggles forward through the masked carnival crowd. Crucial actions take place at "liminal" times of the day--the twilight of dawn or fading dusk. One of the numerous definitions of liminality which Turner offers is an apt description of Marco's life: "Liminality may be the scene of disease, despair, death, suicide, the breakdown without compensatory replacement of normative, well defined social ties and bonds. It may be anomie, alienation, angst, the three fatal 'alpha' sisters of many modern myths ("Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology" 78). Marco's mother writes in her letter to Bianca: "And I know only that my son is not getting better. He's suspended" (10). "Suspended," with all its possible nuances of meaning, expresses this uncertain state of temporary imbalance and passivity. Marco is also closely associated with "liminal" images and sites, such as windows, stairs, doorways, corners, the Venetian arcades and the canal.

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<sup>7</sup> Marco blames himself for having betrayed himself and his wife by having made love to the brigadist Elena, a childhood sweetheart, who in turn "betrays" not only him by exposing him to blackmail but also Venice by making it the scene of assassination. "No wonder," thinks Marco, "Dante reserved the lowest circle of hell for traitors. Canto XXXIII" (164). Betrayal of one sort or another is, as I will show in the next chapter, a recurrent theme in migrant fiction.

Chapter I begins:

He was drawn to the window like an addict to his source. As soon as he stepped into Adolfo's office he felt the pull. He felt himself edging toward the glass, upholding his part of the discussion, pausing to finger his boss's collection of antique carnival masks ... but still edging, edging.... The view was his, laid out for his needful eye.

Marco is unable to effectively isolate himself from his surroundings, thereby taking on and reflecting the qualities of everything that is put in front of him. Moreover, what goes on in the outside world, makes him physically ill. The bombings of Zara had such a traumatic effect on him that at the age of fourteen "instead of snipping away foreskin, they'd taken most of his stomach" (23). Marco cynically refers to the surgery as a "reverse initiation rite." Here the centre-periphery connection is embodied in the relationship between a body and a malignancy that inhabits its centre. Marco believes that he carries the genetic flaw that is responsible for the hole in his son's heart:

Only in abnormality was there individuality. The abnormality of Francesco who differed in something so minute as a chromosome. His defective son. The seed of his emptiness. ... He'd seen--oh yes--he'd seen inside. Blood, a strangely warm rain in the cold November air. The bodies split. Gashed. Hanging above him. Still fresh and hot. He knew. He could see. ... The pain across his chest was unbearable. Gulping air, Marco doubled over.... (24)

Marco's yearning for the centre lets him not only despair of his own emptiness, but draws him into the city's abyss. When playing in the palazzolazzo Morosoni as a boy, Marco is surprised by the sudden appearance of Count Morosoni, the owner of the palace, and hides himself in the secret staircase:



Bones. He was smelling the bones of the city. Caught. He doubled over, contracting his body so as not to touch the walls, so as not to cry out again. Caught. She had claimed her own. Swallowed him alive. He was caught in the mouth. Trapped in the rot. No way out. He could only go deeper inwards. Swallowed. No escape. (197)

La bocca di leone, "terror of the city, receptacle of denunciation, tool of the hooded inquisitors, purveyor of savage, unquestionable justice" (172) symbolically represents the malignancy in the centre.

Both Fremd and Edwards deconstruct the idea of the centre in an ironic way. "Heartland" designates the Australian geographical heartland and also the family as the nuclear cell of society. The Australian heartland, however, is the desert and family life within Heartland turns out to be life denying. In the context of her novel, Edwards seems to suggest that those living on the periphery survive, while those who live in the centre are destined to failure. The margin becomes a privileged point of view. Only those at the margin, looking from the outside into the centre, see with clarity and can restructure traditional patterns of ideas and beliefs. Those writing from the margin have access to the carnival spirit. Carnival, as Bakhtin describes it, is a festive celebration of the Other. The carnival spirit is opposed to all epistemological hierarchies. In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin claims:

All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (a l'envers), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations,

profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a 'world inside out.' (11)

By privileging the periphery, making it the centre, Edwards re-structures both margin and centre. It is the very peripheral little Barbara who is being sent from the Old World centre to her aunt in Canada to recover from shock. The decentering device in Bellini's painting The Miracle of the True Cross functions as a mise en abyme. When Marco and the brigadist meet in the art gallery and ponder the meaning of Bellini's painting, their attention is drawn to the black slave at the edge of the painting not the central figures. By making her cousin Marco--who is, so to speak, at the margins of the immediate family--the subject of the narrative quest for her roots rather than her parents or grandparents, Edwards, through her narrator, breaks with a typical pattern of migrant writing. As befits Edwards' oppositional practice, the texts from which she quotes in The Lion's Mouth contain elements of opposition and rebellion: Dante's Divina Commedia, Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, Yeats' "Easter 1916" and the old partisan song "O partigiano, portami via" (176).

Just as Edwards "writes back" to literary conventions in a self-reflexive way, she exploits the "double-voiced" nature of some words, that of "frame" and "edge,"<sup>8</sup> in particular, and makes the reader aware of their primary and secondary meanings.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the beginning of the first chapter of the book which I quote on page 181.

Furthermore, just as Marco subverts standard Italian by switching over to the Venetian dialect when arguing with Paola who looks down on dialect speakers, Edwards disrupts the dominant discourse by inserting Italian words into the English text. The Italian words appear italicized in the text which frames them, in effect. Thus Edwards playfully draws attention to the "centrifugal forces" of language that undermine linearity and fixed meaning.

Whereas Fremd foregrounds intertextuality, Edwards' major counter-discursive strategy is a form of hybridization. The Lion's Mouth is a "hybrid" novel. It re-writes aspects of the Bildungsroman as well as the gothic novel and the thriller and crosses, as shown above, the borderlines of genre. As in Heartland, writing is a technique of survival in The Lion's Mouth. The narrator's frequent border crossings between Canada and Italy and her exposure to two cultures which appear to her diametrically opposed in terms of their "ways of seeing" equip her with a creative imagination that is sensitive to the importance of context and perspective. The writing process which is an exercise in perspectivism and re-vision makes the narrator grow emotionally and intellectually and eventually leads her to self-knowledge and a sense of home.

CHAPTER Five: Re-writing the Male Quest: Josef Vondra's Paul Zwillling (1974) and Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal (1964)

By Contrast Rather than in Comparison: Josef Vondra's Paul Zwillling

### Borders

"My research suggests that men and women may speak different languages that they assume are the same."

Carol Gilligan

If we're so bright,  
why didn't we notice?  
The side-by-side translations  
were the easy ones.  
Our tongues tasted luna  
chanting, chanting to the words  
it touched; our lips circled  
moon sighing its longing.  
We knew: similar but different.  
(Pat Mora)

If you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if  
you wait-surrendering little bits of a reluctant self every  
year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past--  
you'll never belong, anywhere. (Bharati Mukherjee,  
Darkness)

Josef Vondra migrated from Austria to Australia as a boy with his parents in 1951. His novel Paul Zwillling "seeks to give an impression of the migrant's way of life" (vii) as Vondra claims. The first page of the novel juxtaposes a poem whose voice is that of Vondra's protagonist Paul Zwillling, and a short paragraph in which the author points out the significance of post-War migration for Australia's development as a nation. Vondra creates the illusion of a double voice throughout the novel by prefacing his narrative sections with historical information about Austria during and after the second World War.

This information, which is preceded by a historical date in each case, resembles the announcements in a newsreel or a historical documentary. The information given in the headings ranges from incidents of global significance such as "8 May 1945. The war ends in Europe" to incidents of local interest such as "5 May 1945. Vienna's first tram goes into operation." The dates are chronological and span the time between Paul Zwilling's birthday in June 1941 in Vienna and July 1950 when Paul Zwilling, his mother and step-father leave Bregenz for Hamburg on the first stage of their journey to Australia. There is no obvious connection between the headings and the subsequent text. The past and the present do not meet on the textual level. By writing his novel from the third person limited point of view, Vondra adopts a mode of telling that differs from the established discourse by and about migrants. Most migrant literature in the 1970s and earlier was written in the first person. Apart from these autobiographical and semi-autobiographical accounts, travel and documentary reports were the most common forms of describing migrant life. By juxtaposing document and fiction in his novel, Vondra--by contrast rather than in comparison--demonstrates how irrelevant the Old World document is in the New World and suggests that the migrant's conflict of identities can only be resolved in the form of fiction.

Paul Zwilling works as an advertising copy-writer in

Melbourne--Australia's cultural centre--,<sup>1</sup> which is also the home of his mother and step-father. Zwilling's father lives in Vienna. The book opens with Zwilling's trip from Melbourne to Parkes where he intends to visit the migrant camp in which his life in Australia began. His drive to Parkes can be seen as a quest. The quest is one of the major themes in Australian literature. It has haunted the imagination of Australian writers in the form of the voyage in search of Australia as testified by countless voyager poems, the quest for home in the Old World, and the journey into the centre of the country. Patrick White's Voss (1957) is probably the most widely known novel dealing with the voyage into the centre. In migrant literature the quest for home in the Old World is the most common of the three patterns.

The visit to the old migrant camp is Zwilling's second quest, a quest more self-reflective than active. The first quest took place five years earlier when Zwilling returned to Vienna for a year to live with his father in the twofold attempt to "fill[ing] in the past ... the year in which he has tried to fill the cultural vacuum of his existence in Australia" (82) and to "understand the stranger from whose loins he had sprung" (1-2). The description of Australia as a cultural wasteland has become a commonplace in contemporary Australian migrant literature. Rosa Cappiello's Oh Lucky Country (1984) and Ania

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<sup>1</sup> Melbourne and Sydney have long debated which of them is Australia's cultural capital. Melbourne has a claim made for the title on its behalf in that it is more closely connected with the interior, Australia's Centre, than Sydney with the Blue Mountains separating it from it.

Walwicz's prose poems<sup>2</sup> provide extremes, but the image of Australia as a cultural desert pervades a great variety of works from many different cultural backgrounds, such as Angelika Fremd's Heartland (1989), Manfred Jurgensen's A Difficult Love (1987),<sup>3</sup> and Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies (1991). Zwilling's second quest is closely related to his unsuccessful stay in Vienna which ended in a quarrel between him and his father.

Joseph Campbell provides the classic definition of the hero's quest in The Hero With A Thousand Faces (1973). He describes the hero's mythic journey as a threefold process of separation, initiation and return and gives Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's model of the rite of passage in ritual a

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<sup>2</sup> The first paragraph in Walwicz's prose poem "Australia" goes: "You big ugly. You too empty. You desert with your nothing nothing nothing. You scorched suntanned. Old too quickly. Acres of suburbs watching the telly. You bore me. Freckle silly children. You nothing much. With your big sea. Beach beach beach. I've seen enough already. You dumb dirty city with bar stools. You're ugly. You silly shoppingtown. You copy" (90-1).

<sup>3</sup> Jurgensen's German-born narrator muses: "What kind of a country was this? A place where people lived huddled together along a coastline reminding them that their continent was an island? England in antipodes?... What was I doing here? No one dared to venture into the interior, as if it contained the secret of their fate. They did not want to know it. They did not want to know themselves. Australians lived on the edge of reality, on the surface of a land they knew was not their own. They did not want to discover it because that would mean detecting things about themselves they could not face. Every man, woman and child in Australia, I felt, was carrying a hidden guilt. I too was running away from something. This alone had made me an Australian the moment I set foot in my new country. I sensed a fear in the cities, a determination to forget and to ignore. The seemingly confident skylines were a sign language of escapees celebrating their precarious freedom" (12).

Jungian interpretation:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (30)

The hero leaves a world that is familiar to him for a realm that is unfamiliar, unconscious, mysterious. Initiation, the second step, is, in modern terms, the "process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past" (101). Crucial to the phase of initiation, or, in Turner's words, the "liminal" phase, is the meeting with the "Queen Goddess" and the murder of or reconciliation with the Father. In this period of initiation the hero also has to battle dragons and solve riddles. At the end of the quest "the hero is the man of self-achieved submission" (16). Migrant authors have been re-writing this pattern of the quest from their own perspectives. Campbell's hero is "arrogant" at the beginning and "humble" in the end. Most migrant characters in literature, however, begin their journeys in the new country full of self-negation and with a lack of pride. In most cases of the female migrant Bildungsroman self-awareness and, above all, self-affirmation, are the goals which the protagonist achieves at the end of a quest.<sup>4</sup> In migrant literature written by men, however, the journey does not always end in success and the achievements,

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<sup>4</sup> This is true of Caterina Edwards' narrator in The Lion's Mouth, Sandra Cisneros' Esperanza in The House on Mango Street, Mala in Rachna Mara's Of Customs and Excise and the narrators of Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Sky Lee's Disappearing Moon Cafe to name only a few.



if there are any, are more dubious. Zwilling's urge to go on the quest in search of the old migrant camp is prompted by the recent breakup of his five-year marriage with Laura. The failure of this marriage makes him wonder if he, as a migrant, is predestined to fail in life. He wants to return to his place of origin in the new country in order to understand his condition better. The pending divorce also links him with his father, who not only divorced his mother but also four other women:

Ah yes, the faceless whisperers had said in their soft, soft voices in the caverns of his brain: see, he is his father's son, he leaves his wife.... He leaves her and starts on his father's path: six wives by the time he reached his sixtieth year. And the son not yet thirty-two. These whispers had haunted Zwilling in the insomniac hours at the hotel. He had lain on his narrow bed ... thought about genes, about the hereditary condition of man; more than anything, he had thought about his year in Austria with his father.... He thought about all these things ... he spent the whole morning typing a letter in painstaking German, a letter to his father in which he had tried to explain why his marriage failed. (56)

In the eyes of his father he is a failure. The first time the two have a serious talk, his father asks Zwilling why he had not completed university. He wants him to study for his doctorate in law and take over his practice. Australia, in his eyes, is not the place to start a career and lead a successful life.

Vondra's novel is a re-writing of the heroic quest from a migrant's point of view, or to be more specific that of a European male migrant of the pre-Baby-Boom generation. In Paul Zwilling the theme of the double, the Doppelgänger, is intricately interwoven with that of the quest. First of all, Paul Zwilling's name speaks for itself. The Paul of the New

Testament received his name after his spiritual rebirth and Zwilling means 'twin' in German: "I was born in June, June eleventh to be precise, which, according to the zodiac, makes me a Gemini" is the first stanza of the prefatory poem. The name is also expressive of Zwilling's struggle of being torn between Austria and Australia, the past and the present, a "fatherland" and a "motherland." Stories that deal with the double in the twentieth century seem to be written mainly by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures, writers such as Joseph Conrad, Frederick Philip Grove, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov. The double is a device also frequently to be found in Latin American expatriate and exile literature such as in works by Isabel Allende, Julio Cortázar, José Donoso and Ernesto Sábato. Australian non-Anglo-Celtic writers also seem to find in doubles and twins a way of expressing cultural dislocation. In Parallel Forces (1988) Indonesian-born Dewi Anggraeni, for instance, creates a story about the fate of the twin sisters Amyrta and Amyrra, who were born in Indonesia to a French mother and an Indonesian father and migrated to Australia with their parents. Amyrra is the reincarnation of the Indonesian queen Ken Dedes and doomed to relive her fate. Hong Kong born Brian Castro plays with the double in Birds of Passage (1983) and Double-Wolf (1991). Birds of Passage is set both in the mid-nineteenth century and the present and links the experiences of the two characters Shan and Seamus, his mixed-race descendant, in an antiphonal narrative. Seamus feels "at

times haunted by this Doppelgänger" (4) whose journal of his trip from China to Australia he translates, after having learned Chinese for that purpose, while living a life of social and emotional alienation in a racist Australia.

Zwilling's double is his childhood friend and drinking companion Willie Holzbein. Holzbein means 'wooden leg' in German and is an allusion to Willie's migrant condition which disables him even to a larger extent than Zwilling. Willie, his mother and step-father, who changed his name from Ruschinek to Holzbein--roughly translated, ruschinek in Croatian means somebody who 'tears down'--met Zwilling and his parents on the boat to Australia. The story of a migrant changing the family patronymic on entering the new country is a familiar one in migrant narratives. Usually a name is chosen that is easier to pronounce and does not betray ethnic origin. That the Ruschineks should choose a name that is so obviously of German origin at a time when animosity towards Germans is very strong is ironic, and may be interpreted as an omen of their poor luck in the Lucky Country. Willie is an unsuccessful television consultant. Unlike Zwilling,<sup>5</sup> Willie has neither been married nor has he been able to hold a steady job. The narrator describes Willie's work and love life as follows:

In the final stage he would resign, be fired, or simply not turn up for work one day, and that was the end of another phase of his life. So was he too with his women, his

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<sup>5</sup> The narrator keeps referring to Paul Zwilling as Zwilling, whereas Willie is always called by his first name which underlines the symbolic meaning of the name 'Zwilling.'

relationships with friends: the restlessness would appear sooner or later and he would cast them off. Zwilling had always thought him a fugitive, a fugitive from the realities of life, and this was no state for a man of thirty-three gifted with considerable intelligence. (61)

Willie's parents are German. Like Zwilling, he grew up not knowing his father and had entertained the thought of one day visiting him in Germany. But the man died before the reunion between father and son could take place. And "from that day on, Willie had turned his back on Europe and the European way of life. He wanted nothing more to do with Europe and the past life it represented and therefore set out to become totally Australian" (156), observes the narrator. Zwilling succeeded in forgetting his European past only at one point when he threw in "his lot with Laura's life-style" and lived for a "brief and ecstatic present" (83).

Paul Zwilling is as much Willie's story as it is Zwilling's. Willie is always on Zwilling's mind. And in narrative terms, he often acts as a diabolus ex machina. Whenever Zwilling's musings seem to reach a dead end or when he wants to be alone in his hotel room, it is Willie who crosses his mind or knocks on the door. Whereas Zwilling suffers very self-consciously from a feeling of displacement, Willie lacks Zwilling's capacity for self-reflection. Zwilling uses Willie's life vicariously to reflect on his own. In "Concepts of the Double" Albert Guerard writes:

Characters who seem occultly connected in the author's imagination (and such connection may take many forms) may also be referred to as doubles. A minor character may reenact a major character's traumatic experience.... A

strong feeling of sympathetic identification may lead to a sense of doubleness, an immobilizing recognition of the self one might have been. (3)

Robert Rogers refers to latent doubles as "secret sharers."<sup>6</sup> The characters representing doubles in these works, Rogers argues, have a "more or less autonomous existence on the narrative level ... and yet are patently fragments of one mind at the psychological level of meaning" (41). Rogers also speaks of "secret kinship" in this context. It is first of all this recognition of the self Zwilling "might have been" or that "secret kinship" that links him to Willie. The narrator observes: "There was of course a similar pattern woven into their backgrounds, particularly in the fact that both Zwilling's mother and the mother of Willie had married displaced persons" (93). The relationship between Zwilling and Willie is that of a disabling symbiosis. The bond between the two men is described in the following way: "he [Zwilling] loved this man, he knew, as he would have loved the brother he never had. They were joined together through invisible and visible bonds and would remain so until one was gone from the known world" (144). Since Willie is without money most of the time, Zwilling provides him with the necessary means to buy alcohol and sex, thereby feeding Willie's self-destructive drives. The narrator observes:

The more Zwilling gave, the more the other demanded. And the heavier the burden on the shoulders of Zwilling, the more he felt his own responsibility towards the man he could see was being torn apart. The spectacle of Willie

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<sup>6</sup> The examples he gives are Conrad's "The Secret Sharer" and Hawthorne's "Alice Doane's Appeal."

Holzbein, without hope, drunk most of the time, a man who had lost all dignity, somehow frightened Zwilling; it evoked feelings of disgust, of anger, of frustration. Most of all, as he watched the gradual disintegration of the man, he knew that he himself had all the ingredients of a Willie; it could be he, Zwilling, who stood before the world to be dismantled by forces beyond his control. And this image began to frighten him, shake him to the core. (62)

Zwilling takes a voyeuristic part in Willie's spiritual and physical deterioration. Willie, however, does not see Zwilling's pain and growing despair. In his eyes, Zwilling is a success at work and with women. He admits that he envied Zwilling for his, to all appearances, happy marriage and bourgeois way of life--a stability he has always lacked. At the time Zwilling decides to go on his "quest" to Parkes, he has reached the lowest point in his life. Laura whom the reader has reason to believe, Zwilling still loves, pushes for a divorce. His mother returns from her first trip to Austria in twenty years with news from Zwilling's father. Since she could not face her ex-husband personally--present and past once more do not meet--she gave him a call. In response to her question why he had not answered his only son's letters he replied: "After all my wife and I tried to do for him during his stay here? We got him a job, we gave him a home, we tried to teach him a few things. And what did he do? He cast us off as though we were nothing. He had to go back to Australia to live with the convicts" (134). When Zwilling's mother angrily assured him that her son had a good position in Australia, the older Zwilling retorted: "Just luck, that's all it was. He could just as easily have ended up a no-hoper" (134). In reaction to

his father's verdict, which comes close enough to the truth, as the narrator has the reader believe, and to his rude behaviour towards his mother Zwilling decides to write him a final letter, "a letter with a difference," which concludes: "I see now how you and I could never understand each other's way of life. But that is no reason why father and son should hurt, abuse and disrespect each other.... The least you can do as my father is write and answer my letters" (135).

The conventional phase of separation, the first phase of the quest, is for Zwilling not so much a departure from familiar ground but a loss of the ground under his feet. Life is "splitting him apart" as his mother puts it. Zwilling himself is afraid of going mad: "And what about his own crazes, Zwilling thought, his own drives of mania? Was Zwilling clean of the madness of a migrant's past? Could he square up to it, shoulders back, his chest full out taking blow after blow without crumbling?" (74). Zwilling has seen madness grow in other migrants. There is the former Bulgarian lieutenant, for instance, who settled down in Melbourne with his family cutting and sewing ties for retail stores until the business eventually failed. The last Zwilling heard of him was that he worked in a charity store and rode a bike eleven kilometers to and from work every day, a harmonica strapped to his mouth. Stories of migrant madness abound in this novel--a proliferation of doubles? Separation for Zwilling is an awareness of social disintegration and loss of identity. The ogres which Zwilling has to overcome

on his quest are those of his mind, the outgrowths of a disabling migrant past.

When Zwilling arrives in Parkes, this unfamiliar familiar place on the geographical periphery, he meets his Queen Goddess in the form of the local high school history teacher. Ironically--a history teacher is expected to know better--Robin Mason has never heard of the migrant camp. Neither do most of the people in Parkes remember it. This ignorance can be understood as criticism of Australian society which either denies parts of its not so pleasant history or is simply not that interested in the past with its "determination to forget and to ignore," to use the words of Manfred Jurgensen's narrator in A Difficult Love. Eventually Zwilling finds out that the camp was torn down in the early 1950s. He goes to see the site in the company of Robin. Robin is a "typical" Australian middle-class young woman with a sheltered childhood that stands in contrast to Zwilling's and Willie's. She is the only daughter of a school teacher. Robin's life, however, differs from the average Australian young woman's in that she spent two years teaching in Salzburg. Her German is almost fluent. But even her trip to Europe seems to Zwilling to be part of her Australianness:

It was the tale of an Australian girl visiting Europe; ... and yet...he understood the need, the terrible, hungry, obsessional need of Australians to go to Europe to rediscover life. Simply saying that they went in search of culture would be to oversimplify it; rather, it was a need for them to seek an alternative life, to understand another life-style other than the 'good life' in Australia. (23-24)

Zwilling and Robin end up having an affair. To Zwilling it seems



as if fate brought them together: "a strange feeling overcome [sic] him as if he had seen her somewhere before, a long time ago in a distant land" (11). And he had "a most nerve-tingling sensation that she really understood, understood the unreasoned reason which had made him drive all that distance just to gaze on the area where he had spent a few months during a formative period of his life" (11). What makes the sexual experience with Robin so satisfying for Zwilling is the fact that she speaks German to him in their most intimate moments. The narrator observes: "The English-speaking women he had embraced, they had always left a pang of hunger in his sexual ribs as though his belly had been three-quarters full and the rest was vacuum to be filled" (34). In other words, these women left Zwilling's emotional (and sexual) centre empty. Vondra here parodies one major element of the fiction of Patrick White who was obsessed with the Australian emptiness. Zwilling asked Laura to learn a few words of German "words she could say to him when he needed those echoes in his brain turned to reality, but she in her arrogance ... did not understand" (34). In White's Voss the significance of the hero's death in Australia's Centre is mediated by the understanding of his spiritual bride Laura--it seems to be more than coincidence that the two women are namesakes. Revelation in Voss derives from the Centre. Zwilling's first sexual encounter with Robin reaches him at his core and triggers his sudden realization of what is wrong with Willie Holzbein, what causes his "terrible woman hate." Willie

has rejected the past:

He [Zwilling] wondered if Willie ever listened to his childhood's echoes, if he had ever had the need to hold a woman close and hear those words in the German language? Of course he must have, Zwilling thought, of course he had these things within him, but Willie had rejected the heritage of his past. He had rejected the European side of himself and therefore suffered, for how else would he satisfy these inner cravings? (35)

Zwilling can trace the difference between his and Willie's attitude towards the past to their school days when Zwilling would be victimized by his fellow students whereas Willie would eventually be spared:

But where Willie simply outgrew the bashings, in that he moulded himself into the contours of the Australian way of life and the others gradually accepted him into their circle, Zwilling remained obstinate, refusing to change as quickly, refusing to give in. As Willie became more and more assimilated, changing his attitudes, his whole personality even, Zwilling remained on the defensive for much longer; he recalled quite vividly having to submit to these juvenile bashings as late as his fifteenth year. (41)

Whereas Willie never returns to Germany and is not interested in accompanying Zwilling on his trip to the migrant camp, Zwilling cannot let go of the past. Understanding the past is for him the key to understanding the present. Willie's denial of the past causes his final disintegration. In the last section of the book Willie's step-father dies, his half sister moves to Sydney and his mother returns to Germany all within a few days. After a night's carousing Willie loses his passport, certificates and references. When Zwilling tries to comfort him hinting at the possibility that the missing documents may be found Willie replies: "'But you don't understand. Everything I have is in

that bag. Birth certificate, passport, references, everything. Without it I'm a non-person'" (170). Willie's conscious severance from the past overtakes him in the form of the loss of his family and that of his documents. In the end he does not even have any proper clothes left to wear and appears dressed up in Zwilling's clothes at a party. Willie's denial of the past is also expressed in the loss of the family surname. Unlike Zwilling he does not carry his father's name. Ironically, however, it is Willie who speaks with a German accent. Zwilling on the other hand passes for an Australian. Only his name serves as a marker of ethnic difference. In court Laura's barrister has difficulty pronouncing his name: "'Now Mr Walling?' 'It's Zwilling.' A look of surprise on the face of the barrister. 'Ah, yes, so...Zwall-ing'" (75). Zwilling even prides himself of being able to put on different English accents:

But of course he was to all appearances Australian, spoke as one native-born - ah, here he caught himself. He noticed in his self-analysis that in hotels or other places where he thought his carefully chosen neutral English would not be appreciated he fell into a slur, a sort of common Australian dialect. Sometimes he thought [sic] of himself as a phony for using this dual dialect, in the sense that neither part of it was true to himself, but then Zwilling felt embarrassed by the cold stares he received when he had made a wrong decision in choosing his speech. (4)

Austrian-born, Zwilling is predestined to be sensitive to the difference between dialects. Austria has been a victim of cultural imperialism in as far as Austrian writers, for example, have often been subsumed under German Literature. The fact that Zwilling is Austrian and not German plays a significant role in the novel. Whenever Zwilling uses the German language, the

Australians automatically assume that he is German. His fellow high school students called him "Nazi, fucking German sausage" (39) and Zwilling shouted back at them that he was Austrian and not German. And when one of the two women whom Zwilling and Willie pick up tries to comfort Zwilling after Willie's emotional outbursts over the bombings he witnessed as a child: "It must have been awful for you.... Really awful for you German people" (68), Zwilling again needs to point out that he is Austrian and not German. One reason for the two men's different attitude towards the past may well be that the remembrance of the past is less shameful for the Austrian. He is spared the post-Nazi and pre-Waldheim generation's burden of a background laden with national guilt.

Ironically, part of the reason why Robin gets involved with Zwilling is that she can relive with him a relationship with her former lover in Salzburg. Zwilling's Austrianness makes her nostalgic for the love on which she turned her back. Robin's involvement with Zwilling in fact triggers a temporary reconciliation with her Austrian lover which results in her return to Salzburg. Since Robin represents the connection with the "fatherland," Zwilling confides in her and tells her about his father. On his way back to the hotel from the camp site Zwilling knows that "he would be haunted by the spectral image of his father" (30). He keeps asking himself why his father has not answered his letters and decides to send a "broadside" of telegrams to him and each of his four ex-wives to make sure that

the message will reach its destiny one way or another: "The thought gripped him in an iron clasp and he spent a sweat-soaked night floating between sleep and consciousness composing endless strings of words in both English and German. In a moment of madness he even contemplated rousing the girl on the motel switchboard and having her fire the telegrams off..." (30). After having sent the five telegrams to Vienna stating (rather than asking): "'WARUM SCHREIBT VATER NICHT'" (31), Zwilling is ready to get involved with Robin. As in the quest myth, Zwilling's relationship with his father and his sexual involvement with women are closely related. Zwilling married Laura right after his return from Austria. Just as his involvement with Robin duplicates, so to speak, his involvement with Laura, Robin and Laura are doubles in a certain sense. Just like Robin, Laura grew up in the country and had a sheltered childhood and like Robin she spent two years in Europe. For her/them life has never had the quality of the "life-and-death struggle" it had for Zwilling and Willie. As with the traditional hero, Zwilling's confrontation with the father takes the form of a battle, as becomes obvious from the militant word choice such as "broadside of telegrams" and "fire them off." Ironically, however, this battle takes place long-distance and on the father's terms, namely his refusal to communicate. The "fatherland" does not speak. As Sneja Gunew has pointed out, it has become a trope in migrant literature that in

shifting language and culture the migrant is placed once more in the position of the child. This child is required

to renegotiate an entry into the symbolic--needs to go once more through a form of the mirror stage, in which a putative subject is reflected by the gaze of the new host culture, and is quite other to any previous unified subject. ("Framing Marginality: Distinguishing the Textual Politics of the Marginal Voice" 145)

According to Jacques Lacan, the Imaginary, the period before the child enters into the Symbolic, corresponds to the pre-Oedipal phase, when the child believes itself to be part of the mother. The Oedipal crisis represents the entry into the Symbolic Order. This entry is linked to the acquisition of language. In the Oedipal crisis the father, representing the order of language and law, splits up the dyadic unity between mother and child and forbids the child further access to the mother's body. And from now on the imaginary unit with the mother must be repressed. Zwilling's "renegotiated" entry into the Symbolic takes place in the absence of the father in the country which becomes his "motherland." However, as the third term, Australia comes between Zwilling and the country of his birth, "the land which gave him nourishment as he lay curled in the womb" (2). Thus Australia is located in the Symbolic, whereas Austria is located in what Julia Kristeva calls the semiotic.<sup>7</sup> Does German then become the semiotic, erupting from the repressed unconscious in an unpredictable way? Zwilling does not conceive of Australia as

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<sup>7</sup> Kristeva claims: "Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element" (Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art 136).

his mother: the real mother--though repressed--is still Austria. Does the father consequently, in Antipodean fashion, change place with the mother and vice versa? Zwilling's mother tongue, after all, is now closely associated with the "fatherland" and the father. Zwilling's mother dissociates herself from her mother tongue in that she experiences "a real pleasure" during her disillusioning trip to Vienna when she has an opportunity to speak English again. And it is the mother after all, who leaves the country of birth and the father in order to start a new life with the step-father in Australia. Zwilling's renegotiated entry into the Symbolic is paralleled by the step-father's disruption of the unity between mother and son in the new country. Zoltan left the two in Parkes to make money as a fruit picker in the south. On his step-father's return a few months later, Zwilling felt "strangely out of place, unwanted, a stranger to his own family" (16) since the step-father resumes his legal and natural place as the mother's protector, a role Zwilling had gradually been growing into. The character of Willie as Zwilling's second self, intruder from the cultural background, is the manifestation of a self that had to go once more through a mirror stage. For Willie, more overtly than for Zwilling, women function as a substitute for the maternal body. The narrator explains the fact that Willie cannot be without the company of women in the following way:

He could not, with a male, stamp up and down in naked exhibitionism and yell about the crashing bombs, nor could he with a male obtain the intense, though fleeting, intimacy of sex. He could not suck a teat and with his

nuzzling release the whole series of childhood sufferings; he could not bury his head and body in soft, good-smelling flesh and feel as if the cushion of earth had swallowed him whole. He could not do these things with a male and therefore to him a woman was a perpetual necessity. (73)

This passage expresses man's wish to return to mother earth, to the security of the pre-Oedipal womb in retreat from an unresolved battle with the father. Just as past and present do not meet, neither do man and woman. The battle between father and son extends to that of migrant male and non-migrant female. Laura takes Zwilling to court to negotiate his maintenance payment. The reader gets the impression that the case is settled in a very unjust way to her advantage and that the system takes care of those who belong. The man with the unpronounceable surname who lectures the judge about Vienna's Roman name given to it because of the high quality of its wine apparently does not.

The hero in the quest myth eventually returns to his community with some "elixir for the restoration of society" (Campbell 197). Zwilling returns to Melbourne with empty hands. He has lost his Queen Goddess, so it seems, to the rival in Salzburg. The hero of the quest changes in the process, gaining wisdom and overcoming his egoism. Zwilling is unchanged. Upon arriving in Melbourne, the first thing he does is call Willie who tells him that his (most recent) "girlfriend" left him. There is no letter from Zwilling's father. Zwilling does not get an opportunity for "atonement with the father," or to murder him for that matter. The father remains inaccessible. There is,



however, a letter from Robin telling him that she did not marry the man in Salzburg after all and decided to move to Melbourne. Her letter expresses some hope for a new beginning of their relationship. Zwilling, however, does not share Robin's hope for the future since for him it will always be marred by the past:

Anger rose in his throat and it had the taste of bile. She would come back and they would take up their relationship as if nothing had happened, nothing at all, and it would end rosily...and sometimes at night when they were entwined in the act of love and they said words to each other in both languages, perhaps then there would be a grain of doubt, a bitter grain of cynicism in his thought about the words. (172)

The migrant seems indeed predestined to remain torn between the present and the past, between here and there. Unlike the Hungarians and the Chinese in the novel, Zwilling and Willie do not have an ethnic community. They have only their mateship to fall back upon. Toward the end of the novel, the gap between the sexes widens. Women become a commodity for the two men. The book ends with Zwilling and Willie waking up in the same bed next to the two women they picked up at a party the night before. Swapping partners Willie asks Zwilling why he is not joining in whereupon Zwilling answers that he does not feel like it. Willie's eyes meet Zwilling's and the narrator observes:

There was such cool understanding in those eyes, Zwilling knew, understanding of life and death and their way of life, that it almost shattered him. He wanted to reach out and touch Willie by the shoulder for he was conscious as never before of their role, an inseparable dual role, Siamese twins they were. 'We're Siamese twins,' he said to Willie and the other stopped his rhythm a moment and understood. (182)

Unlike the Grail knights, Zwilling can neither redeem his

own emotional nor the cultural wasteland which Australia represents in his eyes. His doom is repetition. The space between the cultures, between the generations, and between the sexes appears as an abyss, not as a space of possibilities. Proust's involuntary memory rather than the creative force of creolization and synthesis motivates the protagonist and with him the narrative process. Just as the Australian landscape reminds Zwilling "by contrast rather than in comparison" (1) of Austria, it is the contrast and not the similarity that determines this migrant's perception.

By Comparison: Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal (1964)

Henry Kreisel was born in Vienna in 1922. He fled to England with his family in 1938 after the annexation of Austria by the German Reich, was arrested in 1940, after Britain declared war on Germany, and deported to Canada as an "enemy alien." He was held in internment camps in Quebec and New Brunswick for almost a year and a half. Like many Jews of his generation, Kreisel is not only a migrant but also an exile. Webster's Dictionary and the O.E.D. define exile as forced separation from one's native country, expulsion from home, expatriation and banishment. Paul Tabori identifies an exile as:

a person compelled to leave or remain outside his country of origin on account of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; a person who considers his exile temporary (even though it may last a lifetime), hoping to return to his fatherland when circumstances permit-but unable or unwilling to do so as long as the factors that made him an exile persist. (27)

Henry Kreisel, however, never considered his "exile" as temporary but always as permanent. Unlike the German and Austrian Exilschriftsteller, that is authors who went into exile between 1933 and 1945,<sup>1</sup> Kreisel was not an established writer when he left his home country. The fact that Kreisel began his literary career as an internee distinguishes him from most exile writers. Unlike most of the authors I have dealt with so far,

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<sup>1</sup> I am thinking here of Bertolt Brecht, Herman Broch, Alfred Döblin, Lion Feuchtwanger, Bella Fromm, Oskar Maria Graf, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Ernst Toller, Franz Werfel and Carl Zuckmayer, to name only a few.

Kreisel was no longer a child when he arrived in the new country, a fact that gives his experience a different shape. His texts have, however, much more in common with migrant writing than with the texts written by the Exilschriftsteller mentioned above.

In his seminal essay "Language and Identity: A Personal Essay" Kreisel explains that dissociating himself from his childhood environment also entailed abandoning his mother tongue: "It was in a large, overcrowded army barracks in the little town of Pontefract, in Yorkshire, that I made the deliberate decision to abandon German and embrace English as the language in which, as a writer, I wanted to express myself" (119). As different as the two men's experiences are, Kreisel's transformation from Heinrich to Henry is strangely reminiscent of seven-year-old Ricardo Rodriguez' resolution to become Richard after the traumatic experience of his parents' switching from the language of home to the language of the Gringos when they became aware of his presence. In both cases the response to the emotional betrayal was reciprocated by a "betrayal" of the mother tongue. In the introduction to the "Diary of an Internment" Kreisel declares:

I had known the language for less than two years, a fact quite apparent in curious idiomatic usages here and there, but I felt it absolutely essential that I embrace English, since I knew that I would never return to Austria and wanted to free myself from the linguistic and psychological dependence on German. (21)

His decision not to return to Austria and to abandon his mother tongue, not only implied an understanding of the necessity to

acquire a new mode of expression but also to internalize "the traditions, the attitudes, the frame of mind of the people who speak the language" ("Problems of Writing in Canada" 132). Kreisel's is an imagination which Daphne Marlatt calls "the immigrant imagination" as opposed to "the emigrant imagination." The former "embrace[s] the new place it enters" and "struggles to pierce the difference, the foreignness, the mystery of the new place" whereas Marlatt identifies the latter with "the old-world nostalgia of the émigré" (Marlatt 219).

The themes of emotional exile and alienation figure prominently in Kreisel's work. He wrote a doctoral dissertation on "The Problems of Exile and Alienation in Modern Literature" in which he discussed works by Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf.<sup>2</sup> The plot of both his novels develops between the opposite poles of the Old World and the New: Vienna and Toronto in The Rich Man (1948), Vienna and Edmonton in The Betrayal. In The Rich Man Kreisel shatters the myth of the hero setting out for a New World and then successfully returning to the Old. The Old World fails the New, and the New World fails the Old. The gap cannot be bridged.

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<sup>2</sup> Kreisel comments on his choice of authors: "Conrad was clearly an exile figure, and I'd read Conrad quite a lot. D.H. Lawrence was a sort of double figure of both exile and alienation. Joyce was in one way the classic exile, and finally Virginia Woolf, who might seem a strange choice to you because she clearly was a member of the establishment and in no way an exile. Yet there is in her work, I discovered, a kind of inner alienation psychologically. I used her really for this inner kind of alienation" ("Certain Wordly Experiences: An Interview with Henry Kreisel" by Felix Cherniavsky 17).

Although The Betrayal does not deal with the experience of growing up between two cultures as most of the texts I am discussing do, the novel exists, in Eli Mandel's words, "at an interface of two cultures, a form concerned to define itself, its voice, in the dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self-creation, transformation, and identities" (Mandel 274).

The Betrayal is the story of two Austrian Jewish exiles who find refuge in Canada and a Canadian Jew who gets involved in their conflict. Joseph Held escaped with his wife and daughter from the persecution of the Nazis from Vienna to Canada. The family settled in Toronto, and after his wife's death, Held and his daughter Katherine moved to Edmonton. In order to save his wife and daughter, Held had acquiesced to hand over to the Nazis a group of Jews, among them Theodore Stappler and his mother, who had entrusted their lives to him. The novel is set in 1952, thirteen years after this tragic event, the year of the Korean War (23). Theodore Stappler had moved to Canada three years earlier. He came to Edmonton from Toronto, where he coincidentally learned about Held's whereabouts. Stappler is the only surviving member of the group and had been trying to track down Held whose deed he cannot excuse. Stappler, who had become increasingly distrustful of Held during the tragic train ride from Vienna to Saarbrücken followed the man and eavesdropped upon his dialogue with a Nazi officer to find out that the group was to be arrested. Since, paralyzed with fear, Stappler was

incapable of warning the others, he believes himself to be partly responsible for their deaths. Guilt made both men flee from themselves and from society.

Held and Stappler are represented as doubles in a certain sense. They are "secret sharers" in that they both escaped from a past replete with corruption and pain, a "hell" which Canadians, in Stappler's opinion, have been spared. Their two encounters, the first in Held's home and the second in the Victoria Hotel, end in a "stalemate" as if each man could see his own guilt reflected in the other. During their first confrontation Held learned about Stappler's failure to warn the others and turned this discovery against him in self-defense. Stappler comments on this first encounter in his conversation with Mark Lerner: "'I felt that I had come to a dead end. In a way we had reached a stalemate, Held and I. In a curious way we had found each other out. He found my weakness - by accident perhaps. But he found it. And I found his'" (124-25). During their second encounter, witnessed by Mark Lerner and Held's daughter, Held expresses their dilemma: "'We both live with our questions.... Each alone. I alone. You alone. I bore it, all alone. For all these years. I shared it with nobody. Not my wife, not my daughter. I took it on myself. I alone'" (181). Both men are not only crippled emotionally by being Holocaust victims and exiles from their home country but also professionally by being immigrants in Canada. Held, who was a successful lawyer in Vienna, sells real estate in Edmonton, and

Stappler, a former medical student, peddles encyclopaedias in Toronto. In the end, Held and Stappler, symbolic figures of the European past, both die tragically in the New World.

As in Paul Zwilling, Vienna and the New World city are juxtaposed. Whereas in Vondra's novel the two worlds never meet in the narrative present, Kreisel tests the New World by confronting it with the conflicts of the Old World. Kreisel highlights the difference between the Old World and the New in an elaborate net of parallel scenes and descriptions. For Joseph Held, Canada has been a place of anonymity and social isolation, but nevertheless a haven where he raised a daughter who has grown up Canadian protected from the knowledge of the horror of the past. As Held points out to Stappler he refrained from changing his name either as a precaution not to be tracked down by a survivor of the group or to claim a new identity in the New World. Held is relieved that his identity is confirmed in the act of the past catching up with the present. The only thing that keeps him alive, however, is to hide his part in the "betrayal" from his daughter.

Theodore Stappler came to Canada on a quest of vengeance which gradually turns into a quest for self-knowledge. Joseph Campbell's statement: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder" (30) becomes ironic when applied to Stappler's quest. The Europe of the late 1930s and early 1940s was definitely not a "world of common day." After the tragic events in Saarbrücken, Stappler had



briefly returned to Vienna and then escaped to Venice where he spent two years before illegally crossing the border to France. He was arrested in Lyon, marched off to the coast together with other so-called "enemy aliens," and in the bomb fire of Dunkirk managed to escape onto a British warship. He was first sent to an internment camp on the Isle of Man and then to camps in Quebec and New Brunswick from where he returned to England upon joining the Pioneer Corps. As common as a refugee's odyssey like Stappler's may have been at that time, it certainly could fictionally be represented as a heroic quest in itself. But The Betrayal has a different focus. Vienna, Stappler's place of birth, is not depicted as the city of the blue Danube where people waltz in the streets, but as a wasteland city and a Dantesque inferno.<sup>3</sup> Advised by a friend to hide since the danger of being arrested had become too great, Stappler, in a state of panic, sought temporary refuge in the zoo. Here the Three Beasts of the Dark Wood of Error of Dante's opening Canto of the Inferno greet him: "A leopard, a lion, and a wolf. I came there just before feeding time. The lion roared with hunger. He had an enormous head. The wolf drooled. The leopard looked at me as if he wanted to block my way" (66).<sup>4</sup> Stappler is still haunted by

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<sup>3</sup> The Betrayal, which is a highly intertextual narrative, abounds in allusions to Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Dante's The Divine Comedy. The juxtaposition of text and intertext invites the comparison of past and present. The intertexts are not used as counterpoints to the main text, such as the quest myth is, but as a set of images to which the main text reacts.

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas E. Tausky (331).

Vienna's "cobbled streets, little winding streets that lead [him] to a dark wood" (65)<sup>5</sup>. Canada, in contrast, is for many Europeans, as Stappler points out, "an unsophisticated country, incapable of producing subtle works. A country of mountains and vast spaces and Indians and the mounted police" (34). Asked by Lerner if he believed this to be true he avoids committing himself to a straightforward answer: "'In a way, yes,'... It is an innocent country" (34). Campbell's description of the space into which the hero proceeds on his quest as "a region of supernatural wonder" applies well to Canada as it is seen through these European eyes, namely as a place where man can experience the sublime in Nature. It is significant in this context that Edmonton and not Toronto or Vancouver is the place where the three men come together to pass judgement on the past. Stappler had always imagined his final confrontation with Held as happening somewhere in the desert: "'....Only sand and sky. And nothing else. And there we would meet - the man and I...'" (48). Stappler's desert echoes Kreisel's description of the prairie as the place of the "least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky" (107).<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> Kreisel remembers Vienna as "a city of light, but the light is always extinguished and darkness engulfs the city. It is a city of great music and dance, but the music becomes cacophonous and the dancers turn into grimacing and threatening figures. It is a city of elegant streets and smart shops, but suddenly the streets are full of frenzied, self-intoxicated crowds that turn murderous" ("Vienna Remembered" 57).

<sup>6</sup> Kreisel quotes W. O. Mitchell's opening sentence from Who Has Seen the Wind (1947) to bolster his argument that "all discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian west must

novel takes place in the dead of winter. Edmonton is covered with snow, and the temperature is well below zero. The freezing cold and its life-threatening potential, the fact that nature can turn against man, is very present in the novel. When Stappler arrives at the station in Edmonton, he tells Lerner, he heard a voice on the radio saying "'Edmonton, the Gateway to the North,'" and he thought that he had come "to the end of the world" and that he would "go out of the station and there would be a great mass of ice and people walking about with frozen faces" (55). The cold mirrors the characters' paralysis. Within the temporal and spatial distance of the events that are still haunting both men, the emotions, however, have spent themselves. The narrator comments on the deflating effect which the first encounter with his antagonist has on Stappler:

For the pitiable man, sitting there on the chesterfield, shrunk into himself, he could feel no hatred, but no compassion, either. The image of the man who had walked along the station platform in that faraway city to betray the people who had trusted their lives to him seemed the image of another man entirely, and it was increasingly difficult for Theodore Stappler to relate the two. (114-5)

The monster of the quest myth cannot be slain with the hero's conventional weapons. In the novel Edmonton is not described as the cultural wasteland, that Lerner's mother, from her Torontonion perspective, believes it to be. Edmonton's most essential qualities, according to Stappler/Kreisel, are its youth, its innocence and its potential for growth. In Lerner's

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of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind" ("The Prairie: A State of Mind" 107).

eyes, Edmonton so strongly identifies itself with the future that he finds it difficult to establish a link with the past in this city:

It is hard, for instance, to walk the streets of this growing unself-conscious western city, where I have now been living for two years teaching the turbulent history of Europe to young Western Canadians, and to realize that elsewhere the past is not merely history but something that touches sensitive nerves, evokes powerful responses. (2)

Thus Edmonton stands in sharp contrast to the decaying Old World cities.<sup>7</sup> As Stappler moves from one heterotopian space to another on his first day in Edmonton, from the station to the pawnshop, to the library where an old man stares at him and announces that "'.... It's all in the stars...'" (59) and eventually to the Victoria Hotel next to the Chinese restaurant in which he would sleep "protected by" the green and red neon dragon, and the sign in the window "Teacups Read Here. Madame Sonora" the city appears in a "supernatural" light. The question "And what brings you here?" with which Stappler is confronted whenever he makes human contact, assumes an ominous quality. Edmonton is the first city where--apart from Held--Stappler does not know anybody. In contrast to Vienna, where he was forced to hide from the SS officers, in Edmonton Stappler felt he had to "establish his identity again, make his presence known" (59).

Stappler meets his "Queen Goddess" in Edmonton in person of Joseph Held's daughter Katherine. Feelings of affection

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<sup>7</sup> The juxtaposition of burgeoning Edmonton and the decaying Old World city is reminiscent of Caterina Edwards' The Lion's Mouth.

replace his initial plan of using her as a pawn. Katherine, who has been kept in the dark about the past, is caught in the middle between her love for her father and for Stappler. Katherine does not have the seductive and potentially destructive powers of the "temptress" of the quest myth. She is neither one of the "bitch-goddesses in American literature" nor one of the "'mature' Venus-figures in European fiction" (Atwood 206-207) but a "Diana" or "Maiden figure" which, in Atwood's view, is a stock figure in Canadian writing (188). In Lerner's eyes she seems "so innocent and he [Stappler] obviously so experienced, so obviously the man of the world. For him she was clearly not the first" (41). Katherine embodies the innocent young Canadian who is not a match for the sophisticated, worldwide European Dandy. In the end Canadian innocence is saved: Katherine marries a young Canadian architect, moves to Vancouver and has three children. When Stappler realizes he has reached a point on his quest where he cannot "resolve the riddle" by himself, since his feelings for Katherine interfere with his wish to settle the accounts of the past, he makes Mark Lerner, assistant professor of history, who happens to be Katherine's teacher, his "secret sharer."

Mark Lerner is one of the numerous "observer-heroes" in twentieth-century fiction.<sup>8</sup> Joseph Conrad first developed this type of narrative in which a narrator tells a tale about a

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<sup>8</sup> See Lawrence Buell, "Observer-Hero Narrative," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 21.1 (1979): 93-111.

seemingly more interesting character in Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness and Under Western Eyes.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Marlow, Lerner does not have a European mind, although, ironically, he says in the "Postscript" that after seven years of research he published his book on intellectual cross currents in post-revolutionary France. Whereas the majority of these observer-heroes, such as Thomas Mann's Serenus Zeitblom, Nabokov's V. and Conrad's Marlow come to terms with their own past by telling the tale and reaching a certain degree of self-realization, Mark Lerner remains a relatively flat character. He is identified as an intellectual middle-class Canadian. His own past neither needs analyzing nor does it harbour any painful memories. Like Robin and Laura in Paul Zwillling, he is represented as a New World person without European depth, a depth he and the other two characters lack since their lives have not been tried by history. Unlike Marlow, Lerner does not need to dig up the "real" past, in contrast to his academic research on the past, since Stappler gradually reveals it to him. Lerner's Jewish background--his grandparents were emigrants from Warsaw--involuntarily makes him to a more intimate degree a secret sharer in the Holocaust aftermath. Lerner admits:

'Yet if my grandfather had not come here, then I, too, would have been caught up in the European holocaust and I, too, might have fled desperately from country to country, as Theodore Stappler had done. And so, even as I resented his being here with me, disturbing the peace of my existence, causing old ghosts to walk here, I had also to

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<sup>9</sup> The parallels between Under Western Eyes (1910/11) and The Betrayal have been worked out by Thomas E. Tausky.

accept him as if he were my more unfortunate brother. Part of me rejected him, but part embraced him.' (46-7)

Mark Lerner and Theodore Stappler are represented as doubles.<sup>10</sup> The two men are repeatedly referred to as "brothers," and there are numerous hints of an obscure bond and a fateful connection between them. First of all there is the racial bond: Lerner is Jewish and Stappler is half-Jewish. It is Lerner's recognition of what "might have been" (Guerard 3) if his grandparents had not emigrated, of what Guerard refers to as a minor character's reenactment of a "major character's traumatic experience," (3) or of what Rogers calls "secret kinship" (Rogers 41) that links him to Stappler. They are secret sharers since Lerner's refusal to judge at a crucial point and Stappler's passivity at the "crucial moment" in Saarbrücken are comparable in that they contributed to the decision over life and death. The relationship between Stappler and Lerner as confessor and witness is a power relationship similar to that of other narrators and their heroes. A certain submissiveness to the hero or psychological dependence on him usually manifests itself in the narrator. When Stappler tells Lerner that he had chosen him to be his witness, Lerner says that he was annoyed but that it seemed that he "had no choice in the matter" (51). Stappler goes on to explain the reason for his choice: Lerner is "an honest man" (47), "an impartial man" (50), and "a man of conscience. Of

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Greenstein observes: "The Doppelgänger motif linking Lerner and Stappler implicates the Canadian in the Holocaust by shrinking the phenomenological distance" (288).

conviction. Of principles" (108). In his judgement of Lerner's character Stappler equates impartiality and moral uprightness with being Canadian. Part and parcel of this Canadianness is also a certain puritan rationalism. "'You Canadians,'" Stappler tells him, "'You like to have clear answers to everything. Yes or no'" (50). Lerner also proves to be a Canadian in Stappler's/Kreisel's eyes in his reluctance to get involved, his tendency to distance himself from social concerns. Lerner admits:

I cannot, in all conscience, deny that part of me does not like to become too involved with others. Brian Maxwell once suggested that I like the study of history because it involves me in the acts and sufferings of humanity but at the same time allows me to keep involvements at arm's length. (46)

Unlike other observer-heroes, Lerner does not play any part in Stappler's death, who, in typical Canadian manner, finds his death in Nature--the ultimate monster.<sup>11</sup> It is debatable, however, if Lerner could not have prevented Held's suicide if he had committed himself to action. It was the moment of Held's departure from the hotel after the second confrontation with Stappler when Lerner decided that he "would set all this down, so that the act of writing would in itself be a kind of relief" (184). A relief for whom, the reader may ask. All that is left to do for Lerner is get rid of the medicine bottle, the evidence of Held's suicide, in order to protect Katherine from the truth. The motive of this action is also questionable. Lerner is more

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<sup>11</sup> See the second chapter of Survival. Strangely enough, Atwood does not even mention The Betrayal.



interested in what happened there and then than in what happens here and now. As a Canadian, Lerner finds his answer to "Where is here?" in collecting Canadian paintings. In the "Postscript," which sheds an ironic light on what Lerner has learned from his involvement with European reality, Lerner smugly explains:

I have gone on collecting paintings and the walls of the apartment are glowing and alive with the works of Canadian painters, some famous, some hardly known, but all of them acquired because I responded to them immediately, spontaneously. Last year, when I was in Toronto, I bought a Lawren Harris--one of those silent peaks, all white, rising out of a blue sea, all still, serene and yet curiously tense, as if at any time the white mass would shatter and break itself. In a way which I find hard to express, this painting seems to go together with my Emily Carr, and I have hung them together, side by side, in my bedroom, on the wall facing my bed, so that I look at them when I wake in the morning and just before I turn out my light to go to sleep. (205)

Lerner lives his life vicariously. Stappler leaves Katherine to him as a kind of legacy. To Lerner's observation: "'You are leaving Ophelia,'" Stappler replies: "'I leave her to you. Horatio will be kind to her...'" (160). But after a year's courtship, shortly before they were to be married, Katherine broke the relationship since she felt that the ghosts of the past would always stand between them. Lerner may be another Horatio with his scholarly attitude, lack of passion and imagination, but he certainly fails Stappler on his quest as another Virgil.

Before Stappler meets Lerner on the afternoon of his final confrontation with Held, he experiences what he believes to be a hallucination. He sees his father sitting in the Chinese restaurant in the booth facing him and stops himself from going

over and addressing him. Stapppler's father, a famous surgeon, "always spoke of his great responsibilities and of how conscious he was of them" (149). Stapppler tells Lerner that his father was a very distant man and that he had never been very close to him. But he was dreaming that one day he was going to be a famous doctor like his father and would work out a "Stapppler Methode" and "would entertain guests from remote countries like Canada. They would come to sit at the feet of the master!" (149-150). Stapppler's father had an affair with a young actress, and after she left him for a younger man drowned himself in the Danube. He was not Jewish, and if he had not killed himself, his wife and son might have been spared the horrors of the Holocaust. If one accepts the Lacanian concept of the symbolic order as a working hypothesis, whereby the subject is given a position in a cultural community through the name of the father, it is obvious that the name of the father failed to secure Stapppler a place in the symbolic order of that particular community. Ironically, "Stapppler" is a Jewish surname--in Yiddish stappeln means to 'stalk.' Thus the son was twice betrayed by the father. It seems that with his wish to destroy Held, which means 'hero' in German, Stapppler was also trying to murder the Father, as the quest myth would have it. Stapppler speaks English not with a German accent but "like an Englishman" (60). This is his own betrayal of the paternal culture. After Held's death Stapppler returns to the Old World and finds Vienna unchanged. He later tells Lerner: "'When I got there, it seemed like a city of the

dead to me. Like a sepulchre. The great Hapsburg palaces looked like tombs, monuments for a dead capital. The city was still occupied, still divided into zones...' (213-14). He spent months doing nothing but sitting in cafes. Then one day his old teacher Zeitelberger, "a man of great compassion and deep humanity" (214) crossed his path. Upon recognizing Stappler he cried: "'Stappler!... 'Du lebst noch! Du lebst noch!' ... He embraced me there, right there in the street, as if I were his son, you know, and he had just found me" (214). This spiritual guide and substitute father advised him to teach and heal people. Stappler followed the advice and went through his "Purgatory" of earning a medical degree and becoming a doctor.

His redemption had to take place in the Old World but he tells Lerner that he could not stay in Europe: "'....I had to come back to this country'". Stappler as "a new man" is going to start "a new life" (215) in the far North. The journey was one of descent and return. The descent into the Old World was radically transforming. Equipped with Old-World knowledge--although as far as his medical degree goes he has to do his examinations over again in Canada--Stappler is ready for a life of humanitarian action in the New World. His quest is now directed towards the experience of "the real." When Stappler stops over in Edmonton on his way north after eight years of absence, he sees the city as a promised land: "'It's magnificent to fly into this city at night. Suddenly, you know, out of an immense darkness there comes a great circle of light. God, how

marvellous!'" (211). But Stappler "had enough of cities" (215). Stappler does not choose to emigrate to Israel. The North is his place of healing and fulfillment.<sup>12</sup> Unlike many Canadian narratives written by Jewish Canadians and Americans, The Betrayal does not envisage Canada as a "stopping-place" (Gerson), like for instance Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation, but rather as a destination. A destination, however, does not automatically equal home. Stappler is still in emotional exile. It is only in this heterotopian space of the North that Stappler finds meaning in life. The North stands in opposition to the urban experience. Like the hero in the quest myth, Stappler returns to his community with some "elixir for the restoration of society" (Campbell 197). Lerner quotes from one of Stappler's letters: "'I must run,' he writes in one letter. 'I have to look after a fourteen-months old Eskimo baby.' Two days later he continues the letter. 'I stayed for ten hours to help the child, and now I am fairly sure that the child will live. I do what is possible'" (216). Unlike Paul Zwilling, Theodore Stappler can redeem his emotional wasteland. Like Dostoyevski's Raskolnikov, he experiences the North as a place for healing. The dead heart of the Australian desert and the empty arctic waste of the far

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<sup>12</sup> The flight to the North in pursuit of utopian dreams is a theme that pervades post-War Canadian literature, such as Harold Horwood's White Eskimo: A Novel of Labrador (1973), Claude Jasmin's Ethel et le terroriste (1964), and Yves Thériault's Tayaout, fils d'Agaguk (1969). In his perception of the North, Kreisel was influenced by the artists of the Group of Seven who saw the North as the place of loneliness and replenishment.

North do not have the same implications. The North takes on utopian qualities: "Time has been abolished, has been swallowed up in space" (217). Whereas Edmonton functioned only as a "stopping-place" for Stappler, the true North represents the end of his quest. Stappler learns to speak in yet another tongue: "Eskimo." He no longer feels like an exile. He finds "great peace" not only in the landscape but also in his interaction with the local people who become his new community. Towards the end of the novel Lerner appears much more a stranger to the place he calls home, Canada, than Stappler. He remains the detached observer standing back from the country, whereas Stappler--like Kreisel--exchanged not only one country for another but also a language and a "frame of mind."

But just like Paul Zwilling, The Betrayal does not redeem the space between cultures. Neither of the two texts engages in the "knitting [of] disparate and specific images from both places" (Marlatt 223), the cultural syncretism that pervades the works of Angelika Fremd, Caterina Edwards, Sandra Cisneros, Rachna Mara and Gloria Anzaldúa.<sup>13</sup> The absence of bricolage and hybridization or creolization in the two novels can partly be explained by the fact that Vondra's and Kreisel's novels were written two decades before these women's texts. Syncretism,

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<sup>13</sup> There is a curious utopian glimpse of hybridization in The Betrayal in the form of one of Stappler's patients: "Or he tells me of a small, fat man, whose father was a Portuguese whaler and whose mother was an Eskimo woman. 'The traits of both peoples go beautifully together, and here produced a man of great vitality. And great good humour, too'" (216-7).

bricolage and hybridization are modes of thinking and representation that have become foregrounded in the texts, music and painting of the 1980s and 1990s. At the same time, however, it seems easier for female migrant writers to accept a third term that blurs boundaries and questions binary thinking, a cultural "maybe" between the "yes or no" (The Betrayal 50).

## CONCLUSION

## IMMIGRANTS

wrap their babies in the American flag,  
 feed them mashed hot dogs and apple pie,  
 name them Bill and Daisy,  
 buy them blonde dolls that blink blue  
 eyes or a football and tiny cleats  
 before the baby can even walk,  
 speak to them in thick English,  
     hallo, babee, hallo,  
 whisper in Spanish or Polish  
 when the babies sleep, whisper  
 in a dark parent bed, that dark  
 parent fear, "Will they like  
 our boy, our girl, our fine american  
 boy, our fine american girl?"  
 (Pat Mora)

In comparative studies there is never a totally  
 "homogeneous" field. Thus it is always the observer's  
 viewpoint that gives a certain unity to the corpus studied,  
 and it is the analyst who decides which elements constitute  
 factors of homogeneity.

(Mattei Dogan and Dominique Pelassy 151)

The preceding analysis of ten texts written by migrants has  
 shown that not all of them employ counter-discursive strategies  
 to the same degree. Gender, the racial/ethnic and cultural  
 background of the migrant writers and the (multi)cultural  
 politics of their adopted countries give different shape to the  
 "space between."

## Racial/Ethnic and Cultural Background

I have included texts from both racial minority writers and

white/European immigrants in my study. There are differences between the texts written by Commonwealth women writers of European descent, such as Angelika Fremd and Caterina Edwards, and the texts written by women of colour, such as Sandra Cisneros and Rachna Mara. First of all, they approach intertextuality differently. The House on Mango Street and Of Customs and Excise enter into a dialogue with only a few other texts from their own literary tradition or those by other writers of colour. This dialogue sometimes becomes overtly political when the writer opposes the ideology expounded by a particular text. Thus, Sandra Cisneros, for example, "writes back" to male concepts of private and public space. The European-descended writer's reliance on a less focussed and more implicit intertextuality seems to spring from the fact that in spite of his/her marginal position in the new society, he/she is also implicated with the colonizer. The awareness of the ambiguity of power relationships and authority manifests itself in a manipulation of literary traditions in his/her text.

At the same time, the migrant woman of colour is more interested in the interplay of the two languages in which she lives: Mara and Cisneros employ oppositional strategies to a larger extent than Fremd and Edwards at the level of language. The mother tongue confirms itself in their texts through code switching and syntactic fusion. Mara and Cisneros are also more concerned with the exploration of individual and communal identity. The acknowledgment of the community as a support



system, however, goes hand in hand with the exploration of sexism and restrictive traditions imposed on women by their respective ethnic communities.

In contrast, Richard Rodriguez discounts the experience of race and ethnicity and claims that class and thus access to education is a much more decisive factor in forming identity in a new society. Neither Eva Hoffman nor Henry Kreisel represents Jewishness as a factor in the assimilation process. It is the backward glance to the atrocities of the Holocaust, the past intruding into the present, which shapes the lives of the older generation in the New World in Lost in Translation and particularly in The Betrayal. It would be a fascinating, though of course, highly challenging task to compare the Jewish experience in Australia, Canada and the United States to see if Jewish writers in the New World write more as Jews or as Australians, Canadians and Americans. Carole Gerson, for instance, claims that "[u]nlike their Canadian counterparts, Australian Jews tend to write more as Australians than as Jews" (Gerson 103).<sup>1</sup> The past and present immigration policies of

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<sup>1</sup> The stronger identification of migrants in Australia with the culture of their host country can be explained by the fact that Australia's nationalism and sense of cultural identity is much stronger than Canada's and that Australia is not such a substantially plural society as Canada. Australia's stronger national identity plays an important part in absorbing cultural minority groups into mainstream society by providing more clearly defined norms of societal behaviour than Canada is able to. R.W. Bibby in his book Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada (1990) claims that Canadians in trying to accomodate every culture have ended up with no glue that holds the nation together.

countries play an important part in the bias of these double or triple allegiances (to the writer's native country). A study, however, that could make a clear statement about the influence of cultural background on discursive practices would have to "compare" texts written by authors of the same cultural background in various adopted countries. In order to achieve valid results one would have to eliminate differences of class, age, and gender between the writers and the publication dates of their texts.

Cultural background shapes the text by way of the literary traditions which it re-writes. Franco Biondi, for example, reterritorializes a genre, namely the novella, which had its modern origin in Italy, and a story, namely that of Romeo and Juliet, which Shakespeare adopted from Italian novellas. Angelika Fremd disperses elements of German works of literature and Caterina Edwards quotes Dante and an Italian partisan song in her text. Culture also influences the choice of the setting of the text and of certain themes. Cisneros' stories, for example, take place in a Latino barrio and some of Mara's stories in India. The Betrayal and Lost in Translation deal with the aftermath of the Holocaust. Cultural background becomes a cultural burden in the texts written by German and Austrian-born writers such as Angelika Fremd and Josef Vondra. Their protagonists encounter the stereotype that German equals Nazi and the ensuing hostility of some members in their new communities. The writer's cultural background sometimes also

determines his/her political position within the new country. Out of solidarity with other foreign minorities in Germany, Franco Biondi avoids giving his protagonist a specific ethnic identity--but only as an Italian writer with a relatively well developed literary and political support system can he afford to do so. The fact that Akif Pirinççi is a Turk puts him in a different position. As a member of the "silent" and most alienated ethnic minority in Germany, he writes back to concepts of "Gastarbeiterliteratur" developed by other ethnic minorities in Germany. An unexpected conclusion of my study has been that the writer's gender is perhaps an even greater influence on discursive strategies than racial/ethnic or cultural background.

#### Gender

Marjorie Garber points out that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their study of male and female transvestism in modernist literature have found that while cross-dressing is described as empowering in the works of Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes and Virginia Woolf, it is viewed as "unsettling and degrading" (9) by male modernists like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence. Garber warns against falling into these old pitfalls of dividing along gender lines instead of "sexual orientation or any other cultural determinant" (10). Taking these warnings into consideration, I have shown, however, that there are differences along gender lines in terms of preference for certain genres or

discursive strategies in the texts I have chosen. Where male writers--and this is true of both mainstream and minority writers--have turned away from the Bildungsroman as a serious and valid form to explore the socialization of a young man, there has been a proliferation of the female Bildungsroman in the late twentieth century. The decline of the classic Bildungsroman went hand in hand with the rise of the anti-hero in fiction. While male writers have resorted to parodying the classic form of the Bildungsroman or transforming it into a picaresque novel, female writers have re-written the classic form by creating female heroes who are survivors of external battles with patriarchal institutional forces and internal ones with a split inner self.

Despite the post-structuralist refutation of logocentric categories, truth, authenticity and wholeness remain valid concepts for many female/feminist writers. The female migrant Bildungsroman is often at the same time a Künstlerroman. Grace Ann Hovet points out that the "voice metaphor" in female initiation stories contrasts with the "visual metaphor, with its emphasis on quest and sight" in male initiation stories (20). Angelika Fremd, Caterina Edwards and Sandra Cisneros stress the importance of their protagonists' ability to tell their own stories (in the Other language). Hovet concludes that the "voice model necessitates relationships and community in a way that the vision/quest model does not" (21). The relationship between the protagonists and the community is indeed pictured differently in

male and female migrant fiction. Even though she raises her own daughter according to different principles, Mala in Of Customs and Excise is eventually reunited with her mother and validates her story by telling it. The narrator of The Lion's Mouth finds her own identity by relating her cousin Marco's story, emancipates herself from male-defined images of herself and will help her young Italian niece to overcome the traumatic experience of having witnessed a murder. Sandra Cisneros' protagonist Esperanza finds support in the female community and, as a writer, will one day become a model for other women. In Angelika Fremd's novel, which has a less community oriented ending, Inge succeeds in freeing herself from a life-denying family and hopes to find healing in "write[ing] it all down." The texts written by male migrants end on a less hopeful note. Franco Biondi's text leaves it open as to whether his protagonist Mamo will die or be taken to jail. Theodore Stappler is buried by an avalanche and Mark Lerner resigns himself to the idea of spending the rest of his life alone after Katherine Held breaks their engagement. Paul Zwilling and Willi Holzbein will not find the happiness they seek in relationships with women because of their migrant past and Akif survives his suicide attempt bruised but not much wiser.

Women live in a "liminal" space as a consequence of their existence on the margins of patriarchal society. Like Caliban, Miranda has learned her language from Prospero. The art of adaptability, camouflage and oppositional practice is

characteristic of feminine discourse.<sup>2</sup> Since her tool is a colonized language, "becoming minor" in Deleuze and Guattari's sense is easier to achieve for the female writer. Talking about the biological base of logocentrism in the specialization of left-brain rational functions and the concomitant suppression of right-brain relational sense, Rosemary Radford Ruether claims that "[t]his biological tendency has been exaggerated by socialization into dominant and subordinate social roles. Dominant social roles exaggerate linear, dichotomized thinking and prevent the development of culture that would correct this bias by integrating the relational side" (Ruether 148). The female migrant writers whose works I have discussed feel more at home in the "borderlands." Mestizaje, mixing of languages, transgression of genre and hybridization are discursive strategies which are more extensively employed in the texts written by women than in those written by men.

The female short story cycle is another "belated" genre which, like the Bildungsroman, offers itself as a form to express the tension between personal and communal identity. Forrest Ingram in his study of early and mid-twentieth-century short story cycles incorporates only male authors in his study.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Alicia Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" and Lorraine Weir, "Toward a Feminist Hermeneutics: Jay Macpherson's Welcoming Disaster."

<sup>3</sup> Ingram discusses short story cycles by James Joyce, Albert Camus, John Steinbeck, Franz Kafka, William Faulkner and Sherwood Anderson.

The exclusion of female authors from his discussion is a sign not so much of androcentric bias as of the actual absence of short story cycles written by women from the literary scene at that time. In the late twentieth century, however, the short story cycle has been adopted particularly by women writers in post-colonial societies. The male migrant writers whom I discuss in my thesis, on the other hand, re-write the male archetypal quest, the Novelle and the picaresque novel. Both the Novelle and the picaresque novel used to be (and still are) genres favoured by male writers whereas there are quite a few early examples of the female Bildungsroman. Male migrant writers show a tendency to follow in the footsteps of their male predecessors, while female migrant writers are more experimental in their choice of genre.

Eva Hoffman's autobiography Lost in Translation differs from the other texts written by the migrant women whom I discuss in that it resorts to patriarchal discourse. Hoffman does not reflect on the androcentric tradition of the genre. On the contrary, adopting Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Alfred Kazin and Norman Podhoretz as her role models, she subscribes to the patriarchal separation between public and private life and the devaluation of the latter. Sidonie Smith points out:

If she [the woman autobiographer] inscribes a 'masculine' story of cultural significance she approaches the center of 'autobiography' from her position of cultural marginality; but she simultaneously becomes implicated in a complex posture of transvestism, becoming a 'man' and thereby promoting the ideology of the 'same.' In telling her life as a 'man,' she collaborates in the marginalization of woman and her story. (Smith 3)

Along with Hoffman's adoption of the male model of self-representation goes her adoption of the American story of successful assimilation into the melting pot. Hoffman who has lived in both countries, Canada and the United States, was never able to find a community in Canada. American immigration politics and, above all, the American ideology of assimilation made it much easier for her, so she claims in Lost in Translation, to find a place in that society.

#### (Multi)cultural Politics

I have found that the social attitudes which the newcomer meets and the language policies of the host country have an impact on the migrant's discourse. Whereas Canada and Australia have adopted multiculturalism as their official state policy, Germany and the United States have not. The Australian brand of multiculturalism, in particular, was legitimized in 1989 by the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia which guarantees "the right of all Australians to equality of treatment within carefully defined limits," "the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture..." and the government's commitment to "utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background."<sup>4</sup> The historical development towards

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<sup>4</sup> See Lois Foster and Anne Seitz, "The Politicization of Language Issues in 'Multicultural' Societies: Some Australian and Canadian Comparisons." Canadian Ethnic Studies 21.3 (1989), 59.



a multicultural society in Canada has been different from that in Australia because, first of all, Canada has two founding nations and two official languages. In 1988 the House of Commons proclaimed the Canadian Multiculturalism Act "for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada."<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Multicultural Council and the Office of Multicultural Affairs in Australia are, among other things, responsible for the allocation of funds for cultural and educational programmes, multicultural literature and arts projects, and grants for multicultural writers and artists.

In Germany, multiculturalism has been foregrounded in the discussion of the Ausländerpolitik since the late 1980s as a concept to counter new nationalist and racist movements.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the Australian and Canadian multiculturalism acts, the Deutsches Ausländerrecht (1990) does not guarantee equality of treatment to foreigners living in the Federal Republic.<sup>7</sup> Issues of integration are left to the initiative of the individual Bundesländer. Frankfurt am Main, which founded the

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<sup>5</sup> The Trudeau government had already entrenched the multicultural nature of Canada in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the expression "the multicultural heritage of Canadians" was enshrined in the Constitution in 1982.

<sup>6</sup> See 'Multikulturelle Gesellschaft' in Brockhaus Enzyklopädie in 24 Bänden, Vol. 15 (Mannheim: F.A. Brockhaus, 1991) 173-76.

<sup>7</sup> Approximately forty-five percent of the six million "foreigners" living in the Federal Republic, however, have been living there for more than fifteen years and sixty percent for over ten years (Gebauer). Part of the problem is that Germany does not permit dual citizenship.

Amt für multikulturelle Angelegenheiten in 1989, Stuttgart and Berlin have been in the political vanguard of procuring access to political participation for foreigners living in the Federal Republic.<sup>8</sup> A text written by an Italian migrant who lives in Germany is shaped by the political debate about the Ausländergesetze and the reality of the foreigner's inequality in the country. It thus reflects a different reality than texts written by Italians in Australia, Canada and the United States.

Countries sometimes adopt metaphors to express the ideologies which form their (multi)cultural politics. Although the melting-pot metaphor of the United States and that of the Canadian mosaic<sup>9</sup> have never appropriately reflected the historical reality, there are still obvious national biases toward universalism and pluralism respectively which go back to the history of the immigration policies of the two countries. Beginning with the nativist movement of the 1850s, the United States asked for a willingness to abandon ethnic culture and tradition as a proof of citizenship. Howard Palmer in his comparison of immigration and ethnicity in Canada and the United States and their alleged bias toward cultural pluralism and universalism respectively reminds the reader that there is "some truth to this distinction," but that it "oversimplifies both the

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<sup>8</sup> See Brockhaus Enzyklopädie.

<sup>9</sup> The term 'mosaic' is not an offspring of the multicultural debate of the last two decades but was, in fact, often used in the early twentieth century such as in John Murray Gibbon's book, The Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation (1938).

American and the Canadian experiences" (Palmer 487). In the United States the metaphor of the melting pot fell into disfavour in the 1960s when, in the wake of the civil rights and Black Power movements, European-descended migrants, too, became more conscious of their ethnic roots. Palmer concludes:

That ethnicity has remained a more significant aspect of Canadian life than of American is due less to the fact that Canadians have not demanded as much conformity as Americans, than to two other factors: circumstances worked to maintain a regionally concentrated French-Canadian culture; and during the twentieth century, immigrants have continued to come to Canada in substantial numbers in proportion to the total population. (527)

He mentions, however, two factors that might, after all, be responsible for differences in the ideology of assimilation between the United States and Canada. Canadians, according to Palmer, "were less able to define a norm of assimilation" (523) and "the question of reconciling ethnicity with individualism is a greater issue, however, in the United States than in Canada since individualism is a much more deeply rooted part of the American ethos" (521). The current debate in the United States between the "ethnicity school" and the "class, gender, race approach" (Wald) shows that the development of the new ethnicity in the United States and of multiculturalism in Canada and their concomitant discourses have gone separate ways. Richard Rodriguez' and Eva Hoffman's autobiographies attest to the failure of reconciling the experience of being an American citizen with a belief in the empowering force of ethnicity and the emancipatory act of "becoming minor."

## Intertextuality, Parody and Re-writing Genre

Mikhail Bakhtin regards intertextuality, or dialogism as he calls it in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics and later in The Dialogic Imagination, as the interplay between authors and works of literature. Bakhtin believed in the involvement of "two speaking subjects" (Dialogic 76) in dialogism, whereas Julia Kristeva, who appropriated some of Bakhtin's ideas and developed them from a (post)structuralist perspective, moves away from the notion of an autonomous subject and gives the text a much broader, semiotically grounded interpretation on which she bases her definition of intertextuality:

Nous appellerons INTERTEXTUALITÉ cette inter-action textuelle qui se produit à l'intérieur d'un seul texte. Pour le sujet connaissant, l'intertextualité est une notion qui sera l'indice de la façon dont un texte lit l'histoire et s'insère en elle." ("Narration et Transformation" 443)

In Desire in Language she argues that intertextuality is the site of plurality and subversion. Whereas some critics of postmodern literature suggest that intertextuality is a postmodern phenomenon, Bakhtin points out that the dialogue between Medieval and Renaissance authors with earlier texts (from other cultures) was a common phenomenon (Dialogic 68). Only if intertextuality becomes a self-begetting principle of the text can it be identified as a postmodern strategy. The foregrounding of the text's intertextuality as its central structural principle became a particular hallmark of American metafictional (or surfictional) writing which flourished in the

late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>10</sup> Linda Hutcheon prefers the term parody to intertextuality because the latter term is often understood, particularly in Anglo-American post-structuralist criticism, as dehistoricized recycling of past forms. In A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction she states:

What I mean by 'parody' ... is not the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories and definitions that are rooted in eighteenth-century theories of wit. The collective weight of parodic practice suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity.  
(26)

Hutcheon sees "an equally self-conscious dimension of history" ("Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History" 3) at work, in addition to self-reflexivity and intertextuality, in what she calls historiographic metafiction. She argues that "postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, denaturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations" ("The Politics of Postmodern Parody" 225). In some respects, my interpretation of re-writing comes close to Hutcheon's definition of postmodernist parody. Migrant re-writings also problematize the history and, in particular, the politics of representation. What makes Angelika Fremd's re-writing of The Getting of Wisdom or Franco

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<sup>10</sup> Writers such as John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Raymond Federman, William Gass and others practiced a style of writing that is cut off from agency. Furthermore, although postmodernist critics claim that metafictional texts subvert traditional belief systems and ways of seeing, it is important to keep Arun Mukherjee's observation in mind that "the metafiction of postmodernism stop having that effect because of our increasing familiarity with their stylistic manoeuvres" ("Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism" 4).

Biondi's of Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe different from a parody of Shakespeare's Hamlet in Tom Stoppard's Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are Dead or that of parts of Homer's Odyssey in Christa Wolf's Cassandra, is the fact that it is situated in a post-colonial context.<sup>11</sup> The oppositional thrust of migrant re-writing is directed against the metropolis, the centre of power and the discourses that emanate from it.

M.M. Bakhtin's notion of human agency in the process of intertextuality and Kristeva's broadening of the concept of text are essential to my interpretation of re-writing. Re-writing is an intentional, political dialogue with specific texts in the broad sense of cultural formation. I have found that the re-writing of genre and not that of a particular literary text is the most prevalent form of writing back in migrant literature. Whenever the migrant writer enters into a dialogue with a specific work of literature, he/she engages in a re-writing of that work's particular genre at the same time. In this respect the texts I have discussed differ from, for example, Jean Rhys's The Wide Sargasso Sea which cannot be said to be a re-writing of the novel, or from Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are Dead which is a tragicomedy but not a re-writing of tragedy.

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<sup>11</sup> Most post-colonial critics share the basic assumption that post-colonial literatures are the literatures which have been affected by the legacy of the European imperial domination and have developed certain strategies to unmask European authority. Since this legacy takes on different shapes in so-called settler/invasor countries and invaded countries, it is essential for the discussion of a particular text to determine the writer's position within the neo/post-colonial distribution of power.

Pavel N. Medvedev, a member of the Bakhtin group, claims that genre is a specific way of conceptualizing reality: "One might say that human consciousness possesses a series of inner genres for seeing and conceptualizing reality. A given consciousness is richer or poorer in genres, depending on its ideological environment" (Medvedev 134). In his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin does not restrict the term genre to literary phenomena. Literary genres are only one type of the more complex manifestations of "highly developed and organized cultural communication" (62) which he calls "secondary speech genres." The migrant writer's shift from one language to another and the psychological adjustment to another culture makes him/her sensitive to different ways of conceptualizing reality. This situation permits the writer, in Deleuze and Guattari's words, "to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (17). Once the migrant writer achieves linguistic fluency as well as a certain cultural ambi-dexterity, he/she becomes not only a "juggler of cultures" (Anzaldúa 79) but also a juggler of genres. Bakhtin claims: "genres must be fully mastered in order to be manipulated freely" (80). The migrant writers in my study do not foreground intertextuality as the self-begetting principle of the text. Self-reflexiveness in migrant literature lies in the self-conscious treatment of Self and Other, of personal and textual history.

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