

PAYING ATTENTION TO PUBLIC READERS OF CANADIAN LITERATURE:
POPULAR GENRE SYSTEMS, PUBLICS, AND CANONS

by

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ABSTRACT

Paying Attention to Public Readers of Canadian Literature examines contemporary moments when Canadian literature has been canonized in the context of popular reading programs. I investigate the canonical agency of public readers who participate in these programs: readers acting in a non-professional capacity who speak and write publicly about their reading experiences. I argue that contemporary popular canons are discursive spaces whose constitution depends upon public readers. My work resists the common critique that these reading programs and their canons produce a mass of readers who read the same work at the same time in the same way.

To demonstrate that public readers are canon-makers, I offer a genre approach to contemporary canons that draws upon literary and new rhetorical genre theory. I contend in Chapter One that canons are discursive spaces comprised of public literary texts and public texts about literature, including those produced by readers. I study the intertextual dynamics of canons through Michael Warner's theory of publics and Anne Freadman's concept of "uptake." Canons arise from genre systems that are constituted to respond to exigencies readily recognized by many readers, motivating some to participate. I argue that public readers' agency lies in the contingent ways they select and interpret a literary work while taking up and instantiating a canonizing genre.

Subsequent chapters examine the genre systems of three reading programs: *One Book, One Vancouver*, a public book club; *Canada Reads*, a celebrity "book brawl"; and *The Complete Booker*, an online reading challenge. Chapter Two explores how a reading public and canon are called forth by organizers and participants of the *One Book, One*

Vancouver genre system. Chapter Three analyzes public readers' collective literary selection within the canonizing genre of the *Canada Reads* brawl. Chapter Four investigates how participants in *The Complete Booker* genre system instantiate the canon of the Man Booker Prize in ways that construct distinct subject positions of public readers who can evaluate the Canadian Booker winners in meaningful ways for their imagined public. My conclusion proposes that paying attention to public readers offers us new insights into reading as shared practice and Canadian literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Paying attention to public readers of Canadian literature¹

Public readers of Canadian literature have demanded my attention. Persistently, they have insisted, *Watch us. Listen to us. Read what we have to say.* In this way, they have compelled me to consider the role they play in contemporary processes that canonize Canadian literature. I frequently encounter these readers, and perhaps you do as well.

Public readers stand up to pose a question to Jen Sookfong Lee after an author reading at their local library. They direct a comment to a panel during Halifax's *The Word on the Street* or Vancouver's *International Writers & Readers Festival*. They post comments to CBC Radio One's *The Next Chapter* after Shelagh Rogers interviews Russell Smith.

Public readers post to-read lists on their book blogs when the shortlist for the Scotiabank Giller Prize is announced, and they publish their reviews of Laurence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* on *Chapters.ca*. Such readers often seek out other readers in person and online, searching for those who share their enthusiasm for reading more than their opinions about authors and texts. Reading for them is a social activity, a pleasure to be shared. They may describe themselves as 'voracious readers' or 'book addicts,' but not public readers. This is my term. By public readers, I mean a category of readers who have emerged in late twentieth-century Canada: readers acting in a non-professional capacity who choose to speak and write publicly about what they read, why they read, and what it means to be a reader.² What motivates some readers to engage in public talk about literature? What

¹ This research study has been conducted under the approval of The University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. See Appendix A: UBC Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval.

² Heather Murray applauds the "current book-club phenomenon" (including public book clubs) as "a new and welcome return of the pendulum that swept literature into the lecture hall a century ago." Heather

cultural work are they performing in the literary “sphere of activity” (Bakhtin 60)? These are the central questions that inform my project.

Today, given the dramatic changes in how media inform the ways in which literature is circulated and discussed, we have an unprecedented opportunity to listen in on what public readers of Canadian literature have to say to one another. Readers most commonly discuss recent Canadian texts, but they discuss older works as well, as in the book blog, *Roughing it in the Books* (Alexis and Melanie "Roughing"), where Alexis and Melanie are publishing their reviews of the entire New Canadian Library (established in 1958). Elsewhere online, readers discuss Canadian literature and literary events on book blogs and *You Tube*, on bookseller websites like *Amazon.com*, and on social networking sites like the reading-focused *Bookcrossing.com* and the more general *Facebook* and *MySpace*. These popular locales, as Elizabeth Long observes, attest to “how tenacious the practice of gathering to discuss books remains, despite important changes in the universe of communications” (xviii). They also provide readers with the means to participate publicly in what M. M. Bakhtin calls the literary sphere. What is more, these locales offer us as scholars occasions to listen attentively to what they have to say and consider what this might contribute to our current understandings of Canadian literature.

In studies of Canadian literature and Canadian canon studies more particularly, readers are an ongoing, implicit concern. Theorists who approach canons through the lens of print culture or postcolonial theory, through diasporic studies or queer theory do so on behalf not only of Canadian writers but Canadian readers. Readers are part of what motivates Terrie Goldie to approach canonization as “a balance of powers” (383) and

Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement! The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 169.

theorists like Barbara Godard and Rinaldo Walcott to advance canons that are distinct from “the Canadian canon” as a means to, in Walcott’s words, “challenge the normative narratives of the nation” (19). Carole Gerson’s work on a canon of early Canadian women writers is concerned with the power of “canonical gatekeepers”—the publishers, media, and academy—in comparison to the power of “writers and readers” (“Anthologies” 56-57). Still, a concern on behalf of readers, while both necessary and generative, is not the same as paying attention to what readers of Canadian literature actually say and why they say it. In film studies, Stephen Prince has marked how “flesh-and-blood moviegoers don’t have much of a place in our discipline’s theoretical realm” (18). This too may be said of Canadian literary studies, where we typically do not seek out and attend to “flesh-and-blood” readers.

Of course, some scholars of Canadian literature do study reading and readers. Heather Murray focuses on the history of reading in Canada as “a social practice” (“Readers”) and a “quest for self- and mutual improvement, through literature” (*Come* xi), specifically in what is now called “Canada” prior to 1840 (“Readers”), nineteenth-century literary societies (*Come*; “Readers”), and The Canadian Literature Club of Toronto from 1915-1973 (“Canadian”). Focusing on nineteenth-century Canada, Carole Gerson examines readers and the reception of the novel through published texts written by a “a cultural elite” as a means to infer “the unexpressed views of the mass of Canadian readers” (*Purer* xi). Clarence Karr studies readers’ responses to popular Canadian fiction in the early twentieth century through fan mail from readers to writers (*Authors*; “Fan”). Daniel Coleman offers a meditation on how his own reading “has evolved from a private pleasure into a publicly oriented, politically engaged activity” (34). And Danielle Fuller

and DeNel Rehberg Sedo examine contemporary “mass reading events” in Canada as well as the United States and United Kingdom to advance our understanding of reading as a shared practice (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Reading"; Fuller "Listening"; "Reading"; Rehberg Sedo). Alongside these scholars, I argue that Canadian literary studies should include—explicitly—readers.

Studies of Canadian readers join a larger body of scholarship on reader studies that includes work on print culture, book history, reader response, reception studies, and literary genre theory. As my focus is on public readers who pursue the pleasures of reading as a shared activity, I highlight some of the scholarship concerned with reading as a social rather than an individual act. As Murray argues, if reading continues to be “configured as private, interior, and therefore unrecoverable, readership history and theory will remain (as it is) the underdeveloped segment of literary and book studies” (*Come* 161). Working against such a configuration, Don McKenzie advances a view of the “sociology of the text,” a perspective that sees texts as collaborative. He writes, “Meanings are not therefore inherent, but are constructed by successive interpretive acts by those who write, design, and print books, and by those who buy and read them” (in Finkelstein and McCleery 10). In a related argument, Jerome McGann advocates socializing the study of texts as a means to approach texts as “social acts.” Both McKenzie and McGann call attention to how readers’ encounters and responses to texts are always situated.

Janice Radway examines reading as “a social activity pursued within a specific context” (*Reading* 1), as does Bethan Benwell, whose work “conceives reading as a socially situated, localized activity, contingent upon the context in which it is produced”

(300).³ Hans Robert Jauss also approaches reading as a socially situated act: “In the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part. No chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees” (19). Illustrating that readers evaluate canonical texts differently from one historical period to another, Jauss demonstrates how interpretations of literary texts are never fixed. His argument against universal meanings is also demonstrated by Long in relation to individual readers within book clubs: she argues, “Attention to the socially situated nature of readers, as well as to what they are looking for in each reading experience and what aspects of a book’s ‘face’ or presence they attend to, demands an understanding that readings of even the same book can be profoundly different” (28). Readers’ interpretations and evaluations, Jauss and Long show, are always historically contingent.

Roger Chartier stresses the connection between historically-produced meanings and textual *forms* (*Edge* 85), a pivotal connection that I pursue in this dissertation through *genre*, a theoretical concept that comprises simultaneously situation and form.⁴ Indeed, Franco Moretti describes genres as “Janus-like creatures, with one face turned to history and the other to form” (*Graphs*). Stanley Fish contends that textual forms arise from communities of readers or *interpretive communities*, a position that informs Radway’s

³ In another formulation, Benwell argues that reading is “a socially situated, *localized* action, conditioned and constrained by the interactional contingencies of the setting.” Bethan Benwell, “‘A Pathetic and Racist and Awful Character’: Ethnomethodological Approaches to the Reception of Diasporic Fiction,” *Language and Literature* 18.3 (2009): 300.

⁴ Chartier sees book history as a means to reconstruct and interpret “the conditions of the encounter between the world of the text – which is always a world of forms, supports and objects – and the world of the reader – who is always a reader socially defined by the competency, conventions, expectations and practices of reading that he shares with others” Roger Chartier, “The End of the Reign of the Book,” *SubStance* 82 (1997): 10.

work on *Reading the Romance*.⁵ However, Bakhtin argues—and I agree—that genres evolve in relation to spheres of human activity. A rhetorical view of genres as historically contingent sees genres evolving not in relation to interpretive communities but rather in relation to recurring situations within these spheres of activity.

To study contemporary public readers of Canadian literature, I bring together new rhetorical and literary genre theory as my theoretical and methodological approach. Specifically, I attend to how public readers respond to recurring situations in the literary sphere of activity with public speech (instances of public genres) that is recognized—or not—by others as fitting given the social needs (or *exigencies*) and constraints of these situations. My qualitative, observational means of studying flesh-and-blood readers offers another method for the study of readers. Other methods employed by reader scholars include archival work by Gerson on literary publications (*Purer*), Murray on papers of literary societies (*Come*), and Moretti on graphs of historical cycles of readers' selections of literary genres (*Graphs*). Studies of contemporary readers have engaged print surveys of reading groups (e.g., Hartley), online surveys of face-to-face and online book clubs (e.g., Rehberg Sedo "Readers"), observational research of book groups in person (e.g., Radway *Reading; Long*) and through recording and transcription (Benwell), and the study of mass-reading events through interviews, focus groups, observational research

⁵ Fish explains, "Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around." Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 171. Radway makes a related claim: "there are patterns or regularities to what viewers and readers bring to texts in large part because they acquire specific cultural competencies as a consequence of their particular social location. Similar readings are produced [...] because similarly located readers learn a similar set of reading strategies and interpretive codes that they bring to bear upon the texts they encounter." Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 1991 ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 8.

and a quantitative questionnaire (see Fuller "Reading" for an overview). Contemporary genre theory offers another method to observe the encounters between text and readers that Chartier foregrounds: Sebastian Domsch illustrates the efficacy of this approach in his study of generic change in the literary review as facilitated by computer-mediated communication.

To pursue the questions of why some readers engage in public discourse about Canadian literature, and what cultural work their literary talk performs, I draw upon both new rhetorical and literary genre theory. New rhetorical genre theory allows me to study public readers' talk about literature as "situated expressions" (Giltrow "Meta-Genre" 196) that enact certain *social actions* (Miller "Genre"). Both Radway and Long's research has focused on readers' "*ways of talking*" about literature (Allington and Swann 225 emphasis theirs): I posit that these "ways" or "types" of book talk can be productively examined as genres through new rhetorical genre theory. Literary genre theory enables me to focus on the dynamics between what public readers say about literature and the literary works themselves, genre instances that carry out social actions of their own. For me, this continual interplay between talk about Canadian literature and Canadian literary works recognizes, re-evaluates, and recirculates texts' symbolic value. Accordingly, a major undertaking of this dissertation is to propose a new way of thinking about canons and canonical processes: a genre approach to canonicity. I posit that contemporary canons are discursive spaces comprised of publicly circulating and re-circulating literary texts *and* talk about these texts.

These discursive spaces, I propose, are produced by genre systems, setting-specific "interrelated genres" (Bazerman 97) that accomplish particular activities (Devitt

57), such as the selection, celebration, evaluation, and/or discussion of a particular literary work or works. Canons arise from genre systems whose organizers identify (by happenstance or intent) and harness pre-existing, multiply determined exigencies recognized by significant numbers of people who are thus motivated to participate. In this dissertation I focus on three genre systems that are taken up enthusiastically by public readers. These are: *One Book, One Vancouver*, Vancouver Public Library's city-wide book club; *Canada Reads*, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Radio One's annual "battle of the books" (CBC "CR 2005 - Battle"); and *The Complete Booker*, an online reading challenge hosted by a public reader, Laura, in which participants read and write reviews of all the winners of the Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

My argument is that within these systems, uptakes by public readers participate in the ongoing re-evaluation of Canadian literature and re-estimation of other canonizing agents' credibility. Further, I submit, these readers' participation in canonical processes enables each to construct very distinct subject positions as public readers with the requisite cultural capital to evaluate literary works for their imagined public. In asserting the canonical agency of public readers within these three systems, I trouble a lament for reading frequently expressed by the media and academics: namely, contemporary reading programs and their canons produce homogeneous sets of readers who read the same work at the same time in the same way (for examples, see Lee 343; Radway *Feeling* 221-46; Bérubé et al. 420).⁶

⁶ As Michael Bérubé et al. have observed, "For some members of the *reading class*, laments about the state of reading go hand in hand with a deep distrust of community reading and of collaborative imagination more broadly" (emphasis mine, Michael Bérubé, Hester Blum, Christopher Castiglia and Julia Spicher Kasdorf, "Community Reading and Social Imagination," *PMLA* 125.2 (2010): 420. The "reading class" is Wendy Griswold's term for a "self-perpetuating minority": a "narrower, social base" of readers who read for pleasure. Griswold, *Regionalism and the Reading Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 66.

In this dissertation, *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads* and *The Complete Booker* are not to be understood as representative of how all literature or how all Canadian literature is canonized today. That said, when considered together, they point to a recognizable pattern: a genre system of canonized, canonizing, and meta-genres, which coordinates participants' selections, discussions, and evaluations of literary works. The many participants of canonizing genre systems imagine and instantiate interdependent reading publics and canons.

Chapter One, "A Genre Approach to Canonizations of Canadian Literature," advances a view of literary canons through the double lens of new rhetorical and literary genre theory. I contend that a contemporary canon is not a collectively imagined list of literary works, as it is commonly perceived, but a discursive space in which literary texts *and* evaluative talk about these literary texts circulate. To present this argument, I incorporate Michael Warner's work on *discursive publics* into genre theory to foreground how both the literary texts and discussions of these texts are instances of public genres. Warner calls the process by which public texts assemble reading publics *uptake*, a term that genre theorist Anne Freedman also selects to describe the "bi-directional relationship" (42) between texts (e.g., a reader review and a war novel or a long-list prize announcement and a must-read list). Uptake, I submit, is the means by which public literary works and public talk about these works interact and circulate within genre systems. Indeed, uptake is the means by which participants in these genre systems instantiate publics and canons. I view the theoretical work of this chapter as a means to my primary ends, which is to take seriously the work of public readers as agents of

canonization. Later chapters work through the particulars of public readers' agency in popular canonizing systems.

Chapter Two, "The Popular Genre System, Public, and Canon of *One Book, One Vancouver*," explores how a reading public and canon are called forth by participants of a canonizing genre system. Annually, the Vancouver Public Library selects a text written by a Vancouver author, and hosts events to "bring readers together around one great book" (V. P. Library "One"). In this chapter, I study the first three years of *One Book, One Vancouver* (OBOV), during which time the library selected Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* (2002), Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* (2003), and Joel Bakan's *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Power and Power* (2004). Throughout, I show how the discursive efforts of the library are reciprocated by readers who respond to the exigencies and social actions of this public book club in ways that constitute the *One Book, One Vancouver* public and canon.

Chapter Three, "Canonical Selections by the Celebrity Readers of *Canada Reads*," focuses on a collaborative process of literary selection within a popular canonizing genre system. CBC Radio One's *Canada Reads* is a five-day broadcast debate in which a celebrity panel discusses the merits of five Canadian literary works and eventually selects one text for Canadians to read. I compare the celebrity debates of 2005 and 2006 as representatives of the rhetorical situation, paying particular attention to the discussions surrounding the final contenders: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, which lost to Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound* in 2005, and Al Purdy's *Rooms for Rent in the Outer Planets*, which was defeated by Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness* in 2006. My thesis is that within this recurrent situation of literary selection, the canonical process

by which a panel selects a literary text is relatively consistent, but the outcome is not. Within the genre system's constraints, we see the canonical agency of these celebrity public readers in the literature they promote, the motives they express, the interpretive strategies they deploy, evaluations they make, and the ways in which they perceive the *kairos* (the timeliness or opportunity) of recommending a particular literary work to Canadian readers.

Chapter Four, "Canonical Agency of Public Readers in *The Complete Booker*," investigates how individual participants in a canonizing genre system influence and are influenced by contemporary canonical processes. Online reading challenges are a relatively new addition to the literary sphere. In these challenges, hosts issue public invitations for others to join them in reading particular texts and writing about their reading experiences on collective blogs. For *The Complete Booker*, over 45 readers to date have committed to read and write publicly about the popular canon of winners of the Booker Prize. My primary focus is on reviews written by four public readers—Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor—of the Canadian works that have won this prize: Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*, and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*. My argument is that uptakes by these four readers "convert" (as James English would say, drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu) symbolic capital of both the texts and the prize to capital of their own, enabling each to construct themselves as distinct public readers who possess the literary know-how to re-estimate the value of the three canonized Canadian texts in a way that is meaningful to their imagined public.

In my conclusion, I re-examine Murray's question—"What follows when reading is viewed as a group and public activity, rather than an individual or interior enterprise?"

(*Come* 158)—through the lens of genre theory. Specifically, I suggest how genre helps us observe why and how readers “do things with texts” (*Come* 163-64) and how meta-genre (“situated language about situated language” (Giltrow "Meta-Genre" 190)) offers us glimpses of how readers variously understand what Fuller calls “contemporary meanings of reading” (Fuller "Reading"). I propose that my genre approach to the canonical agency of public readers can be extended beyond a Canadian context and further—beyond a literary context. Finally, I close with examples of how paying attention to public readers may offer us new insights into some persistent questions posed by Canadian literary scholars.

CHAPTER ONE: A GENRE APPROACH TO CANONIZATIONS OF CANADIAN LITERATURE

Current approaches to canonizations of Canadian literature

The subject of literary canons and canonical agency has generated much debate in Canadian literary studies. In recognition of how canonical processes are motivated by local contexts, I place my genre approach to canonicity within Canadian canon debates for their sensitivity to the sociohistorical context of my research sites: the public book club, *One Book, One Vancouver*; the annual literary debate, *Canada Reads*; and the online reading challenge, *The Complete Booker*. The Canadian canon debates more recently include voices from the past twenty years, such as (but certainly not limited to) Donna Bennett, George Elliot Clarke, Peter Dickinson, Frank Davey, Carole Gerson, Barbara Godard, Robert Lecker, Roy Miki, Laura Moss, Cynthia Sugars, Imre Szeman, and Rinaldo Walcott. My desire to understand the social actions of public readers in the literary sphere prompts me to join their discussions. I too am interested in some key questions under debate. What is a canon? Who holds canonical agency? How is this agency constituted? What motivates agents of canonization to select certain kinds (or genres) of literary works? And what limits canonical agency?

Contemporary Canadian scholars have rejected the notion of the canon, advanced by Matthew Arnold, as including “the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind” (17).⁷ Gerson, for instance,

⁷ See, for example Carole Gerson, "Anthologies and the Canon of Early Canadian Women Writers," *Reappraisals: Canadian Writers*, ed. Lorraine McMullen (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990) 56, Terry Goldie, "Fresh Canons: The Native Canadian Example," *English Studies in Canada* 17.4 (1991): 376,

views canons as historically situated and politically and socially responsive ("Changing" 888). A canon, she argues, is "a malleable entity frequently reshaped by changes in taste and the appearance of new authors" ("Anthologies" 56). Terry Goldie, too, focuses on the shifting shape of a canon as a necessary means "to bring the writings into play, into discussion," but, he cautions, "the canon must always be, to use Derrida's words, *sous rature*, under erasure" (383). From the vantage point of genre theory, I propose that canons are public discursive spaces in which literary works and evaluative talk about these works circulate. The production and consumption of both sets of texts are always situated and sensitive, as Gerson notes, to the exigencies of a particular moment and particular locale. Because the situated motives of each person reading and writing these texts are so varied, canons are not sites of consensus but rather, as Goldie argues, of contest.

While references to *the* canon surface occasionally in Canadian canon studies (e.g., Goldie 383; Lecker "Canonization" 657), my own position is that "the canon" is never constituted. Sometimes it may appear as an illusion when we encounter a text like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (*Handmaid's*), which has circulated within and across many different canons over many years, including academic, popular, Canadian, speculative, dystopic, high-school, and feminist canons. Other times dominant publics may grandly claim "their" canon as "the canon" in social actions that ignore or simply fail to see the presence of other canons. Many scholars of Canadian literature have drawn attention to the numerous canons of Canadian literature.⁸ Goldie, for example,

Roy Miki, "The Future's Tense: Editing, Canadian Style," *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 1998) 37-38.

⁸ Work has also been done on the canonization of particular Canadian writers. For examples, see Lindy A Ledohowski, "Andrew Suknaski and the Canadian Literary Canon," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 30.2

emphasizes the hierarchical structures of canons of different scales, and argues that canonization must be constantly examined “as a balance of powers” (383). He approaches canons as “a series of power relationships” (374) and canonization as “a political strategy” (378). For instance, a central “Native” canon may be “acceptable” despite the heterogeneous histories of First Nations peoples as a strategy to assert the presence of and direct attention to First Nations; this Native canon may better represent “calls for Native sovereignty” (375) if it remains distinct from a “Canadian canon.” Does “mainstreaming”—Goldie’s term for the re-introduction of forgotten or marginal literatures into a national canon (373)—open a canon up to be more inclusive and representative of the nation? Peter Dickinson adopts a mainstreaming strategy by rereading already canonized texts to make queerness a more “*manifest or embodied presence*” in Canadian literature (6). Or is mainstreaming merely a form of “repressive tolerance,” understood by Goldie as “the way in which the dominant culture allows an unthreatening level of activity from the dominated in order to repress any truly revolutionary potential” (381)? Rinaldo Walcott takes this position in his critique of George Elliott Clarke’s recuperation of black Canadian texts not to “challenge the normative narratives of the nation” but rather to “suture[e] into the normative nation” (19). Instead, is a political strategy of ““separate space”” (373)—the production and protection of a distinct canon—more productive, as in Barbara Godard’s position that feminists should take “a backward step” to reactivate/revitalize “archaic forms, cast aside by the main tradition” (“Mapmaking” 14), that is, to recover instances of other literary genres and re-value “other knowledges” (ii). In her study of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis

(2005), Mark Silverberg, "The Can(adi)onization of Al Purdy," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 70.Spring (2000).

women's writing, Julia Emberley argues that a distinct canon of women's writing poses a different power relationship, one that favours white, privileged women over lower-class, racialized women.

Within these debates over the power relationships between and within canons are more specific debates over the political effects of canon-makers' agency. But what is canonical agency? For the purposes of this study, canonical agency is the authority to produce and circulate canonical value: the authority to publicly evaluate literary works, or to challenge or reject other canon-makers' evaluations of these works. In considerations of who holds this agency, discussions have often focused upon the institutional agency of the university and Canadian literary scholars. In 1991, Lecker argued that "the canon" is an "institutional construction" ("Canonization" 657) brought about by certain powerful canonizing uptakes including McClelland and Stewart's *New Canadian Library* first published in 1957 and Carl F. Klinck's *The Literary History of Canada* published in 1965 ("Canonization" 656). The canon, he continued, is maintained and circulated by the university in general and Canadian literary studies in particular ("Canonization" 657). Goldie concurred: "today it is the university that is the repository of the canon" (377). More recently, Szeman argued that following World War II, links between national identity and a national canon were forged by academics.⁹ In response to Lecker's claim, Davey directed attention to the many other inter-connected yet variously motivated "canon-constructing actors" in Canada, including newspapers, churches, author associations, publishers, schools, literary prizes (676), "levels of government,"

⁹ Referring to English-Canadian literature, Szeman writes, "it is difficult to see the impulse to read literature in terms of its nationalist orientations as anything other than an imperative of literary criticism rather than as a determinate feature of the literature itself." Imre Szeman, "The Persistence of the Nation: Literature and Criticism in Canada," *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation* (Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 163.

universities, and booksellers (677). Lecker countered that the academic institution “is the most potent agent of canon-formation because its members are in a unique position of power” (“Response” 684). His position (in my terminology) was that not all acts of literary selection are equal in their ability to secure the necessary chain of uptakes that include or erase a particular author, work, or literary genre. And I agree: not all canonizing uptakes wield equal power.

However, I wish to revisit Lecker’s assertion, made twenty years ago now, as to academics’ “unique position of power.” Increasingly, other canonizing agents are also able to motivate significant numbers of people to read Canadian literary works. *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads*, and the Booker Prize are but three examples. We might also reflect upon the power of Chapters bookstore “The World Needs More Canada” campaign or the annual winner announcement of the Giller Prize. Many organizers of these newer canonizing genre systems harness the power of mass media and computer-mediated communication to reach readers (see Rehberg Sedo “Richard”) in ways that the university and its literary academics do not. In paying attention to these new—or newly empowered—canonizing systems, I suggest that we also learn about the readers whose uptakes determine their success or failure.

My own research focuses upon popular canons. I define popular canons as those in which the public, evaluative talk about literature is primarily addressed to *and* uttered by readers. I focus on the addressees and producers as a means to shift our attention from a canon as an “institutional construction” (Lecker “Canonization” 657) to a canon as a discursive space of circulating texts that are, in Warner’s terms, imagining and (typically) reaching a certain kind of public. This view, rather than seeing only canonizing

institutions, includes the many other people who, with varying degrees of power, produce canonizing texts of their own.

How is the agency of “canon-makers” (Bennett 133) realized? Rather than approaching this question in terms of institutional power, I wish to put it differently: if a canon brings some literary texts into play and erases others, then how is this power of inclusion and exclusion instantiated? This agency can be discerned in how canon-makers take up literary works within recognizable types—which is to say genres—of public literary talk. While Canadian scholars do not include canonizing texts in their definitions of a canon, many do foreground the texts through which canonizing agents wield power. Returning to Gerson’s “canonical ‘gatekeepers,’” she argues that they confer “status by deciding what gets published and reviewed and who gets onto course lists and into anthologies, reprint series, textbooks, and reference sources” (“Anthologies” 56-57).¹⁰ Course lists, anthologies, reprint series, textbooks, reference sources: to this list Davey adds conferences on Canadian literature (673), newspaper and church publications, reviews, school readers and textbooks, magazine selections, periodicals, trade and academic books (676-79). Lecker refers to these types of texts as “canon objects” (“Canonization” 658). My term is canonizing genres, public genres that take up literary works and whose range of social actions hold the potential to affirm, contest, or reject the symbolic value of a literary work. In this dissertation, I identify other canonizing genres circulating within popular systems, including literary debates, prize announcements, and reader reviews.

¹⁰ See Peggy Kelly for a study of the process of canonization in the context of English-Canadian poetry anthologies published between 1920 and 1950. Peggy Kelly, “Anthologies and the Canonization Process: A Case Study of the English-Canadian Literary Field, 1920-1950,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 25.1 (2000).

In addition to identifying types of canonizing texts, Canadian scholars also highlight how different genres of literary works are repeatedly selected or rejected. Sugars, for example, details how English-Canadian anthologists and literary historians continually seek out “quaint” French-Canadian literary forms (“Reading” 121) to meet an exigence for “a distinct Québécois identity” (“Reading” 120). Miki recounts how anthology editor Gary Geddes removed the section of Concrete poetry from his *20th Century Poetry and Poetics*, an “excision” made “in the [editorial] dis/guise of ‘taste’”: Miki reads Geddes’ explanation of his editorial decision as “a familiar justification for denying the place of a materialist or textualist poetics in Canadian writing” (36).¹¹ These examples, for me, foreground how canonical acts of selection and rejection take place through “uptake” (Freadman 40; Warner 87): the editors of English-Canadian anthologies bring particular French-Canadian forms into play and set others aside; the poetry anthology editor erases concrete poetry. Uptake, which I discuss at length shortly, is a further means to pursue the questions both Sugars and Miki pursue: What motivates editors to select certain literary genres? And how do their editorial decisions (or social actions) shape canons?

Finally, alongside Canadian literary scholars I ask, what limits canonical agency? Miki identifies “social, cultural, historical, and linguistic constraints” which “on the one hand” make literature “possible, and on the other, assign them value in literary institutions” (37-38).¹² Added to Miki’s set of constraints are those economical

¹¹ For another example, see Bennett’s discussion of the rise of Prairie realism in the 1920s, that is, the recurrent selection of this literary genre by Canadian publishers. Donna Bennett, “Conflicted Vision: A Consideration of Canon and Genre in English-Canadian Literature,” *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*, ed. Robert Lecker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 142-48.

¹² Miki has expressed a desire for “a theory of textuality to account for the contextual relationship of literary works to social, cultural, historical, and linguistic constraints—constraints which, on the one hand, make them possible, and on the other, assign them value in literary institutions.” Roy Miki, “The Future’s

constraints put forward by Goldie (377) and considered in detail by Moss together with temporal constraints.¹³ I illustrate in subsequent chapters how these constraints vary across situated uptakes of Canadian literature in different popular canons.

I argue that the questions asked here—what is a canon? who creates it and how? why are certain kinds of literary works selected over others? what limits canonical agency—can be further pursued through genre theory.

A genre approach to popular canonizations of Canadian literature

Literary genres, canonizing genres, and meta-genres

To begin, what do I mean by *genre*? Bakhtin, referring to both literary and non-literary forms, posited genres as “*relatively stable types*” of utterances within particular spheres of activity (60).¹⁴ Contemporary genre scholars also theorize genre as recurrent social strategies, rather than mere recognizable forms. Genres are situated “social actions,” to engage Miller’s phrase. Ralph Cohen approaches literary genres as “historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences, and critics in order to serve

Tense: Editing, Canadian Style," *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing* (Toronto: Mercury Press, 1998) 37-38. Genre theory, when brought to bear on issues of canonicity, accounts for this relationship between literature and constraints. Lloyd Bitzer’s situational constraints inscribe both limits and possibilities, which shape literary selection in *Canada Reads* as I illustrate in Chapter Three.

¹³ Moss argues, “The possibilities of canonical expansion are at least in part governed by the sheer volume of work published, publishers’ restrictions on page lengths, permissions drawbacks, and a lack of time for any one critic. So, limitations arise in temporal and economic factors. It is not, as I once thought, all political. Or, time and money are [also] political.” Laura Moss, “Playing the Monster Blind? The Practical Limitations of Updating the Canadian Canon,” *Canadian Literature* 191 (2006): 9.

¹⁴ Bakhtin insists that the utterance is “the *real* unit of speech communication” His explanation of the utterance’s boundaries stresses the importance of what Freadman later calls uptake. He writes:

The boundaries of each concrete utterance as a unit of speech communication are determined by a *change of speaking subjects*, that is, a change of speakers. Any utterance [...] has, so to speak, an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others (or, although it may be silent, others’ active responsive understanding, or, finally, a responsive action based on this understanding). The speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other’s active responsive understanding. M. M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” trans. Vern W. McGee, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986) 71.

communicative and aesthetic purposes” (210), and fellow literary scholar Michael Prince argues that “specific uses of any given genre serve local ends” (455). Lloyd Bitzer, in his work on “rhetorical situation,” observed that “comparable situations” prompt “comparable responses” which produce comparable forms, or genres (“Rhetorical” 13; “Functional” 36). Today, new rhetorical genre theorists, following Bitzer, “understand regularities of form as motivated by regularities of situation” (Giltrow “Meta-Genre” 202).¹⁵ If, as I am proposing, canons are comprised of literary and canonizing genre instances, then genre theory prompts us to attend to local contexts of literary selection and reception.

In the canons of *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads*, and the Booker Prize, another type of motivated speech frequently circulates amidst literary and canonizing genres: meta-genre. Janet Giltrow describes meta-genre as “situated language about situated language” (“Meta-Genre” 190). At the borders of the genre systems I study, meta-generic texts sometimes appear to advise people on the “proper” or “decorous” instantiation of canonizing genres, as when Laura publishes a welcome post that explains to possible *Complete Booker* participants the range of genres they can publish on the collective blog (“Complete”). Her meta-generic talk “administers” the new situation (as Giltrow would say) of an online reading challenge. At other times, talk about genre may

¹⁵ Miller, rejecting Bitzer’s materialist understanding of situations, emphasizes instead that what recurs is the intersubjective “construal of a type.” Carolyn Miller, “Genre as Social Action,” *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, eds. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994) 29. She defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based on recurrent situations. Miller, “Genre,” 31. Bazerman sees genres as “typified utterances” that develop “through repeated use in situations perceived as similar.” Charles Bazerman, “Systems of Genre and the Enactment of Social Intentions,” *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, eds. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994) 82. But Giltrow insists that situation and genre cannot be uncoupled: she recasts genres as “situated expressions, motivated by their contexts of use.” Janet Giltrow, “Meta-Genre,” *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change*, eds. Richard Coe, Lorelie Lingard and Tatiana Teslenko (Cresskill NJ: Hampton, 2002) 196.

be heard when public readers discuss literary works: during *Canada Reads 2005*, Olivia Chow characterizes *Oryx and Crake* as “a love story” to meet an exigence of hope that her fellow panelists attempt to address, and in 2006, Nelofer Pazira dismisses *A Complicated Kindness* as “a coming-of-age-tale” that does not address an exigence to learn. In these examples, we glimpse how public readers’ meta-generic talk interprets literary works in ways that (mis-)align them with exigencies of the canonizing situation.

Pivotal to the argument I am presenting regarding canons and public readers is the view of genre as historically contingent: genre theory focuses on “the contingencies of situation” (Giltrow "Legends" 363). This is significant in bolstering Canadian scholars’ efforts to replace the illusion of “the canon” as the natural by-product of certain writers’ literary genius and certain canon-makers’ literary taste. To understand how genres evolve, thrive, and perish, literary and new rhetorical theorists take a Darwinian approach. Miller and Dawn Shepherd suggest genres arise from a “dynamic, adaptive relationship between discourse and *kairos*.”¹⁶ Bakhtin places generic evolution within specific spheres of human activity:

The wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex. (60)

The role of writers in generic change is foregrounded by Miranda Burgess who argues (in support of claims made by Clifford Siskin, Moretti, Michael McKeon, and Cohen) that “sentimental and gothic romance, romance and historical novels” of the late-eighteenth-

¹⁶ For a detailed summary of new rhetorical genre theorists’ work on genres’ “dynamic, evolutionary nature,” please see Miller and Shepherd’s subsection, “Kairos of the blog.” Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd, “Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog,” *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, eds. Laura J Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff and Jessica Reymann (2004).

century should not be viewed as “prefigurings and successors” but rather as “actively mixing, clashing, competitor forms” (*British* 115). Moretti calls attention to the role of readers in his “Darwinian history of literature” whereby “forms fight one another, are selected by their context, evolve and disappear like natural species.”¹⁷ This literary history is a “dualistic process”: first, generic variations evolve by chance; second, generic selections are made by “the ruling class” (“Literary” 266). Later, Moretti redirects his focus from genre selections by the ruling class to genre selections by generations of readers (*Graphs* 21).

Moretti’s theory of generic selection does not include genres that take up literature: people must take up literary forms in other generic instances, whether verbal or textual. His inattention to public talk about literature might be attributable to considerations of such talk as ephemeral, as in the Habermasian public sphere where new works were evaluated through discussions in coffee houses, *salons*, and societies (Habermas 34, 36). Murray notes the difficulties in finding historical records of readers’ literary selections, interpretations, and discussions (*Come* 162). But in Canada today, as I have shown with help from canon scholars, public talk about literature appears in many textual forms, from anthologies to newspaper reviews, broadcast literary debates, and book blog reader reviews. Moreover, people motivated to publicly take up Canadian literature, as Davey has argued, rarely seem to hold “common goals” (676). Cohen also stresses “the contrasting aims of contemporary readers” (209), but he does not illustrate

¹⁷ Both Moretti and Burgess offer detailed studies of recurrent textual selection particular to a sociohistorical moment. Moretti argues that literary genres have both spatial and temporal boundaries, as seen in the recurrent selection of modern tragedy in post World War II Germany. Franco Moretti, “The Moment of Truth,” *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, Revised ed. (London: Verso, 1988). Burgess argues that in the late 1790s, a new literary genre, the national tale, was selected to “naturalize Ireland as a cultural entity” and thereby retain its “national character.” Miranda J. Burgess, “Violent Translations: Allegory, Gender, and Cultural Nationalism in Ireland, 1796-1806,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 59.1 (1998): 33, 35.

what these aims (or motives) might be. To foreground how readers with contrasting motives repeatedly select Canadian literary works within canonizing texts, I engage Freadman's work on uptake.

"Uptake" as a canonizing interaction

Uptake continues the story of genre contingency. Freadman's theory recalls Bakhtin's conceptualization of a generic instance as an utterance at once responsive and assuming a response (69-75). Genre, she contends, is "more usefully applied to the interaction of, minimally, a pair of texts than to the properties of a single text" (40). She argues that "the text is contrived to secure a certain class of uptakes"—it assumes a response—and "the interpretant, or the uptake text, confirms its generic status by conforming itself to this contrivance," or, importantly, modifies or denies its status "by taking its object as some other kind" (40).¹⁸ For example, in 2005 the majority of the *Canada Reads* panelists read *Oryx and Crake* meta-generically as an instance of dystopic fiction, a literary work that contrives a class of uptakes that will further its social actions of warning its readers and urging them to stop environmental destruction and rampant capitalism. Chow's defense of Atwood's text modified its generic status to a love story, an interpretive strategy certainly unexpected by her fellow panelists. Importantly, Chow's meta-generic uptake *also* contrived certain responses from her panelists, but she was unable to position *Oryx and Crake* as the clear choice for Canadians to read. As Bakhtin argues, "Any utterance is

¹⁸ Freadman takes her notion of the "interpretant" from Charles Peirce. C.S. Peirce, "On a New List of Categories," *The Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, vol. 2 (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1982). Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko describe Freadman's uptake this way: generic discourse "requires a minimum of two genres and two 'players' who anticipate and 'uptake' one another's moves. Each move, moreover, embodies various desires, attempts to induce a set of desired uptakes" Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard and Tatiana Teslenko, "Genre as Action, Strategy, and Difference: An Introduction," *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change*, eds. Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard and Tatiana Teslenko (Cresskill NJ: Hampton, 2002) 6.

a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (69). The “bidirectional relationship” between text and interpretant (here, the literary work and Chow’s *Canada Reads* defense) Freadman names “uptake” and a series of uptakes is a generic “sequence” (42) (which we see in the panelists’ preceding uptakes of Atwood’s work and subsequent uptakes of the text and Chow’s defense).

Uptake is translation, a “local event” of crossing or mediating a boundary (Freadman 43), and a generic sequence relies upon “memory” to make it intelligible as a sequence (42). Importantly, Freadman argues that uptake as “infinite semiosis” is not translated “in a single dimension, but can ramify in multiple ways” (50): chains are not linear, but rather complex and multidirectional.¹⁹ For instance, the official announcement that *The English Patient* had won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction led to uptakes not only in the form of sales receipts, but also articles in the British and Canadian press, online reader reviews of the novel, and Chapter Four of this dissertation. Uptake, Freadman insists, is not “automatic.” Rather, it “selects, defines, or represents its object” from a pool of “possible others.” Uptake’s memory is selective: it blocks the memory of the “heterogeneous antecedents and sequels of an utterance” (48) to produce the illusion of a “seamless narrative” that is not natural but “a product of ideology” (43). Genre sequences are in fact fraught with contingency: each generic instance marks possible others left behind and simultaneously anticipates various responses including the unexpected. If canons are comprised of complex genre sequences, then canons are

¹⁹ Analyzing the last judicial execution in Australia, Freadman details how a sentence of execution leads not only to a corpse but to other uptakes, including articles in the popular press and literary works such as *Dead Man Walking* by Sister Prejean and the film adaptation by the same name. Helen Prejean, *Dead Man Walking* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994).

contingent discursive spaces whose outskirts include texts pushed aside for now and those jostling to be taken up.

I find uptake a very productive concept when considering canon formation. When Godard calls upon feminists to take “a backward step” to reactivate/revitalize “archaic forms, cast aside by the main tradition” (“Mapmaking” 14), she draws our attention to uptake as a deliberate—not natural—act of selection. She wishes to recover the “possible others” that Freadman describes as a means to reevaluate, in her words, “other knowledges” (ii); in doing so, she seeks to reevaluate the writers and readers of these Canadian texts. Uptake highlights the range of interpretive responses a literary work anticipates and the range of responses (hoped-for and unanticipated) this work receives. In stressing the heterogeneity of both contrived and actual responses, uptake marks the agency of both writers and readers. Further, because uptake is situated, a “local event” (Freadman 43), the resulting genre sequences circulating within canons are trans-local, capable of expanding across time and locales, understood here as both geopolitical (such as the city of Vancouver) and virtual (such as a book blog). *The Complete Booker* is a nexus of complex sequences: over 45 readers from locales around the world (but mostly from the United States) publicly take up literary works written by Commonwealth writers that won the Booker from 1969 to today, and in turn, their literary uptakes are publicly taken up by others, including myself. Canonical genre sequences are expansive because their genre instances include public texts that are oriented towards reaching strangers (Warner 106).

Publics and public genres

For a canonizing text to hold power in the literary sphere, it must be public. Moss' personal opinion that Lynn Coady's short story "Play the Monster Blind" is "one of the best short stories recently published" ("Playing" 7) does not enter a canon's discursive space unless she selects the story for her anthology co-edited with Sugars or publishes her opinion in an editorial in *Canadian Literature*.²⁰ My genre approach to canons must include a consideration of its texts as instances of *public* genres. New rhetorical genre theory, for all its careful scholarship on genre and community, has yet to focus on genre and publics. Elsewhere, I have begun to address this gap, both alone and together with Elizabeth Maurer, by incorporating Warner's work on publics into genre theory (Grafton and Maurer "Public"; "Engaging"; Grafton). I continue this undertaking here.²¹ I see the bringing together of discursive publics and genre as mutually beneficial: Warner enables us to theorize public genres, and new rhetorical genre theory offers us a means to understand further the nuances of uptake within discursive publics.

Warner makes a distinction between two senses of public that are pertinent for my study: the public and a discursive public. The public, he suggests, connotes a social totality, "the people in general" (65) such as Canadians or Vancouverites, whereas a "discursive public" (121) exists only "*by virtue of being addressed*" (67 emphasis his),

²⁰ Due to "practical limitations," Moss does not include Coady's story in the anthology, where it would have realized a large reading public, but she does state her opinion of "Play the Monster Blind" in a *Canadian Literature* editorial, which expands the story's public more modestly. Moss, "Playing."

²¹ Warner's theory offers genre scholars an alternative to tying genre to rhetorical notions of community. Unlike members of John Swales' discourse community, participants in a public do not share "a commonality in goal." John M. Swales, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 25. Rather, what binds "otherwise unrelated people" together as a public is that they have taken up the same texts "at different times and in different places." Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (NY: Zone Books, 2002) 68. Warner's public is similar to Miller's rhetorical community, "a virtual entity, a discursive projection, a rhetorical construct." Carolyn Miller, "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre," *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, eds. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994) 73.

such as the *One Book, One Vancouver* reading public. In this way, it is distinct from the bourgeois public sphere as “the sphere of private people come together as a public” to make “public use of their reason” (Habermas 27). My primary interest lies in discursive publics, which exist only “in relation to texts and their circulation” (Warner 66).

Warner’s theory of contemporary, discursive publics is a theory of circulating public texts: I am modifying it to a theory of circulating public genre instances.

Warner introduces the concept of “active uptake” (87) to explain how the “fiction” (15) of a discursive public is perpetuated. “Between the discourse that comes before and the discourse that comes after one must postulate some kind of link,” he writes, and (in words that recall Freadman’s) “the link has a social character; it is not mere consecutiveness in time but an interaction” (90). As with Freadman’s uptake, the next link may be solicited or unanticipated. Similar to Bakhtin’s addressivity, “the quality of turning to someone” (99), for Warner, a text turns to a *public* someone, anticipating an uptake that it may or may not receive. Laura’s public challenge to join *The Complete Booker*, for instance, succeeded in conjuring a public, but some reading challenges are not taken up. Genre sequences that include public texts, I propose, are more contingent than others due to their reliance on strangers. Warner continues: a public “*is constituted through mere attention*” (87 emphasis his): people who take up a text, however fleetingly, however distracted, are members of its public. The CBC-produced *Canada Reads* texts imagine a public of Canadian readers willing to take an interest in Canadian literature. The degree to which public participants pay “attention” ranges widely, from knowing about the broadcasted book brawl, to writing down the shortlist titles, to reading one or more of the competing works, to listening to the celebrity debates, to debating the texts’

literary merits online with other public readers. Importantly, Warner's "public" does not signify 'public members,' but rather the discursively enacted relations amongst these members.

In literary scholars' considerations of how the shared reading of circulating texts produces relationships amongst strangers, Benedict Anderson's work on "imagined communities" has been important.²² In his later work, he distinguishes between two types of imagined communities, which he renames "collective subjectivities": bound and unbound serialities. Bound seriality is produced by such governmental systems as elections and censuses, and is "exemplified by finite series like Asian Americans, *beurs*, and Tutsis" ("Nationalism" 117) or, I add, Canadians. Anderson's bound seriality is Warner's social totality, the public (65). Unbound seriality is "unenumerated" ("Nationalism" 127) and "exemplified by such open-to-the-world plurals as nationalists, anarchists, bureaucrats, and workers" ("Nationalism" 117) or, I add, readers. Anderson's unbound seriality or "planetary series" ("Nationalism" 133) is similar to Warner's discursive public. However, I underline a key difference between them.

Warner argues that for public texts, those addressed (the public imagined) may differ from those who pay attention (the public constituted) because of the text's "circulatory fate" (114), actual uptakes (or the absence of uptakes) that are outside of its control. This distinction between an imagined and constituted public is apparent in *One Book, One Vancouver*, where Bakan's *The Corporation* imagines an international reading public and yet is also taken up by a city-wide reading public. For Anderson, print texts facilitate readers' imaginings of nations by depicting the "meanwhile," strangers living

²² While Anderson's primary concern is nations, he proposes that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991) 6.

simultaneously in empty homogeneous time (*Imagined* 25). His chosen literary examples, though, address readers who belong to the same community as that imagined by text. An example is José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, which Anderson argues addresses Filipino readers and constructs a Filipino community (*Imagined* 26-28): Anderson does not ask what it means that he, a non-Filipino reader, reads this novel. What community does *he* imagine when reading Rizal's text? Nor does Anderson choose texts where the novel's fictionalized community differs from its imagined readers, such as Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (shortlisted for *One Book, One Vancouver* 2004), which fictionalizes Kitamaat but addresses readers from elsewhere: "Find a map of British Columbia" (4), readers are told, "To get to Kitamaat, run your finger northeast, right up to the Douglas Channel, a 140-kilometre-long deep-sea channel, to its mouth" (5). What community or communities might non-Kitamaat readers imagine? And what communities might Kitamaat readers imagine when the text calls their attention to readers from elsewhere? Anderson's theory, unlike Warner's, does not account for unforeseen responses.

This distinction between the public a text imagines and its contingent "circulatory fate" (Warner 114) is crucial for my task of constructing a genre understanding of contemporary canons. Warner illuminates how a literary text can readily circulate amongst various publics and canons, as in *Life of Pi*, which moves amongst the publics and canons of the Man Booker Prize, *One Book AZ* in Arizona ("One Book AZ"), and *One Book, One Brampton*, to name but a few. He also explains how a text can be taken up by a public different than the one it anticipates, as when English's critical engagement of contemporary prize culture, *The Economy of Prestige*, was taken up in a speech by the

chair of the 2007 jury to applaud the Booker's "signaling value" as a "prominent and well-maintained" prize (H. Davies).

Warner posits, "the notion of a public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity" (11-12). Here is my proposal. The public reflexive circulation of literary texts and texts about literature forms both a reading public *and* a canon. While there certainly can be publics with no canons, if a canon exists so too must its public: *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads*, and the Booker have at once a public and a canon. Even *The Complete Booker* does not build a new public around an existing canon, but rather attracts current and new members of the Booker's public to the new online challenge. Both the texts within a public and canon and the people who take them up can—and do—move from public to public, canon to canon. I want to suggest further that popular publics and canons are delivered by canonizing genre systems. To do so, I return to genre theory.

Canonizing genre systems

While generic selection and uptake emphasize relationships between genre pairs and across genre sequences, genre theorists also focus on how genres operate within systems. Many literary genre theorists examine how, as Burgess describes, each genre "defines itself dynamically in competition with others, its borders fixed by the contiguous claims and assumptions of particular writers and readers" (*British* 26). Cohen insists that a literary genre must be understood historically "in relation to other genres, so that its aims and purposes at a particular time are defined by its interrelation with and differentiation

from others” (207).²³ In Chapter Three, I illustrate how the presence of different literary genres constrains how *Canada Reads* celebrity readers interpret the social actions of each literary text. An example: some panelists position *A Complicated Kindness* meta-generically as a “satire” of fundamentalist religion to characterize its social action as important in relation to a “war novel,” Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*. While literary scholars focus on the historical relationships amongst literary forms, the more particularly situated example from *Canada Reads* highlights how this contemporary genre system (as well as that of *One Book, One Vancouver* and *The Complete Booker*) constitutes readers’ “contiguous claims and assumptions” as uptakes in canonizing genres (a literary debate) and meta-genres (characterizations of a “satire,” a “war novel”).

Charles Bazerman, for my purposes, offers a more expansive definition of a genre system as a “complex literate activity constructed through typified actions” (79). A genre system, he suggests, is “the full set of genres that instantiate the participation of all the parties”: “This would be the full interaction, the full event, the set of social relations as it has been enacted” (99). In the case of *One Book, One Vancouver* (as I show in Chapter Two) its genre system instantiates not only the participation of library organizers but also “parties” that include authors, publishers and agents, Vancouver booksellers, community partners, and, crucially, readers. Amy Devitt narrows Bazerman’s definition to distinguish between genre set (the changing set of genres that serve a particular group’s needs) and genre system:²⁴

²³ Other literary scholars explore how genres interact within particular sociohistorical moments. Siskin illustrates the “mutually productive” relationship between the Romantic-era rivalry of “system” and “novel.” Clifford Siskin, “Novels and Systems,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34.2 (2001). Moretti details the relationship between the novel in England and the modern tragedy in Germany after World War II. Moretti, “Moment.”

²⁴ Devitt characterizes a genre set as one that “functions for [a] group, and the interactions among those genres affect the functioning of each genre.” Emphasizing how genre sets evolve, she explains, “As the

The term *genre system* I would reserve for a genre set identifiable by those who use it that has clearly linked genres with a common purpose. Calling such genre sets “systems” implies more rigidity than they actually have, but the term does capture the regularity and often rule-governed nature of the interaction of genres within a distinct activity. (56)²⁵

Devitt notes that “linked genres” are genre sequences and that meta-genres help oversee genre interaction. Her examples include genre systems for “assigning grants or bids,” “a job search,” “writing class assignments,” and “a wedding”: each system, she notes, “can be described in terms of a particular activity it accomplishes” (56-57). My own examples of *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads*, and *The Complete Booker* are genre systems that accomplish activities of selecting, sharing, evaluating, and celebrating books.

These systems, which I call popular canonizing genre systems, include more public genres than those that Devitt suggests or Bazerman and David Russell study.²⁶ As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, public texts are not fixed within these systems, but (as Warner’s theory would predict) are sometimes taken up by different systems to meet different social needs (or exigencies). Popular canonizing systems—like the canons and publics they call forth and perpetuate—are therefore not discrete, but rather overlap with other systems. Russell has demonstrated that a single text can perform different social actions within different genre systems (228). In my own research, I think of how *Stanley*

needs of the group change, the genre set changes to reflect those needs, thereby also changing the larger context of genres.” Amy Devitt, *Writing Genres* (Southern Illinois UP, 2004) 54.

²⁵ Bazerman also emphasizes that genre systems do not exclude “evolution, novelty, and the multiplicity of human life,” and reminds us “to look to local circumstances” for the meanings of recognizable social actions. Bazerman, “Systems,” 99. And Russell illustrates the range of motives readers may have in taking up the same text within a genre system. David R. Russell, “The Kind-Ness of Genre: An Activity Theory Analysis of High School Teachers’ Perception of Genre in Portfolio Assessment across the Curriculum,” *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre*, eds. Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard and Tatiana Teslenko, Research and Teaching in Rhetoric and Composition (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2002) 226, 40.

²⁶ Bazerman explores the patent system. Bazerman, “Systems.” Russell, in relation to student portfolios, analyzes the classroom and the state assessment systems, and also points to an “imagined” genre system or systems within “real life” beyond high school. Russell, “Kind-Ness.”

Park circulates in the *One Book, One Vancouver* system to “bring a city together” (V. P. Library "Vancouver") and in the *Canada Reads* system to “capture the imagination of an entire country” (CLA). Viewing genres as part of systems, Russell suggests, “may allow us to see the range and depth of human activity that a single text may mediate, as it operates as different genres among different people with different motives and objects, immediately or over time” (240). Viewing genres as part of systems, for me, is a means to consider the various motives public readers have in taking up canonized and canonizing texts. Further, it is a means to discern what agency public readers have in the contemporary canonizations of Canadian literature.

Exigence, motive, and agency

To understand public readers’ motives and agency, we must first begin with *exigence*. Bitzer originally proposed that exigence is “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (“Rhetorical” 6). Miller countered that exigence is instead “a form of social knowledge,” which “must be located in the social world, neither in a private perception nor in a material condition” (“Genre” 30). While the social actions of individual genres press upon individual or multiple exigencies, the social actions of genre systems do as well: for example, the *Canada Reads* genre system addresses a situated exigence: choose a book. Exigence captures “the feeling that something ‘should’ be done in this situation,” Giltrow explains, while motive is the “feeling that it’s you who should do it!” (“Exigence”). In public situations like *Canada Reads*, the distinction between exigence and motive helps us theorize the degree to which people “pay attention” (in Warner’s

terms) to its public genre instances. While a wide public might recognize that *Canada Reads* is about choosing a book, only some will experience the feeling that they should actively participate in the canonizing processes of the genre system (e.g., by reading the books, discussing them with friends, publishing reviews, posting rank orders to their books, listening to the debates, etc.).

In the above example, we see how genres are not only “sites of action,” as Anis Bawarshi explains, but also “sites of subject formation” (78). In taking up *Canada Reads* in various genres, participants present themselves to friends or strangers as particular kinds of readers. Bawarshi follows Kenneth Burke, who argued that language is symbolic action, action that is so inextricably tied to persuasion that language is *motive*. Motive, for Burke, does not arise from individuals or agents, but rather from the interrelationships amongst what occurs (“act”) where and when (“scene”), who performs the act (“agent”) and how (“agency”) and why (“purpose”) (Burke *Grammar*; Bawarshi 16). Bawarshi, building upon Burke’s motive, defines genres as “discursive sites that coordinate the acquisition and production of motives” (17).²⁷ In other words, genres not only help rhetors “articulate motives or desires” through writing, but also help rhetors “obtain motives and desires to write” (12). Motive “frames the ideological boundaries that socially define and sanction an appropriate ‘range of conduct’ within a particular situation, thereby regulating the possible ways we can act” within that situation (89). In Chapter Four, I show that Lisa’s encounters with other people’s challenge reviews on *The*

²⁷ Other genre scholars have foregrounded the importance of motives: recall Cohen’s “purposes” and Prince’s “uses.” Bazerman proposes that we draw upon genres “to advance our own interests and shape our meanings in relation to complex social systems,” and through these forms, “we are able to grant value and consequence to the statements of others.” Bazerman, “Systems,” 79. Similarly, Miller sees genre as “a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent.” Miller, “Genre,” 37. In Miller and Bazerman’s models (versus Burke and Bawarshi’s), interests or intentions are not social but the generic means of satisfying them are.

Complete Booker motivate her to revise her own reviews of *The Blind Assassin* and *Life of Pi* that she had already written in her reading journal to make them more “appropriate” for the situation of the public challenge. Genre, as Miller states, motivates (“Genre” 37).

Genre shapes but does not determine our discursive actions: it limits but also enables our creativity (see Devitt 4; Bawarshi 92). As I show in Chapter Four, Lisa’s adapted reviews are very distinct from those written by fellow challenge participants, Jill, Wendy, or Trevor on the same Canadian texts, and as a result portray her as a different kind of reader than the others. The unique instantiation of a genre (such as a reader review) attests to the writer’s agency. Bawarshi explains,

Each textual instantiation of a genre is a result of a unique negotiation between the agency of a writer and the agency of a genre’s conditions of production. Because of this ongoing negotiation, generic conventions always exert influence over but do not completely determine how writers think and act because these conventions rhetorically maintain larger social motives (predispositions or desires to act) which writers acquire, negotiate, and articulate when they write. (79)

Giltrow agrees that genres cannot be deterministic because exigence, “the feeling that a certain sort of writing *should* be done, *now*,” arises from diffuse sources. Our experience of exigence develops not from a singular purpose, but rather “from the articulation of multiple scenes of activity, these articulations themselves capable of linking across great distances, social and spatial” (*Curious*’ 2). This description of linkages, for me, brings to mind genre sequences of uptake. She continues: “To be this kind of robust, conscientious action, genres have to be manifestations of consciousness overdetermined by multiple scenes of social interaction” (*Curious*’ 16). I suggest that vast and complex genre sequences relay accumulated social memories of exigence from multiple scenes to a new scene in which someone like Lisa perceives exigence of shared reading in all its tacit complexity and then experiences it as motive.

Both Bawarshi and Giltrow are interested in writers. My own examination of public readers also concerns writers, for public readers write (and speak) about reading. In my three sites of inquiry, public readers' motives include a shared sense that something should be said or written, now (in a literary debate, a challenge reader review) and a shared sense that something should be *read*, now (this kind of Canadian book, this Booker-prize winning canon). Readers, as Cohen has reminded us, also have different historical purposes for selecting the genres they do. Accordingly, I study the motives of public readers in taking up literary texts, particularly in the *Canada Reads* debates featured in Chapter Three. A heightened sense of readers' motives, I suggest, will add to our theoretical understanding of genres. If each speaker or writer assumes a "responsive understanding," as Bakhtin argues (69), then we as genre theorists must attend not only to the motives and agency of those who utter a genre instance but also to those who hear or read it.

Canonical Agency of Public Readers

Public readers' agency may be found in the contingencies of situation: paying attention to a public, taking up a genre, instantiating that genre. Within canonizing situations, public readers' canonical agency may be discerned in the literature they take up, exigencies they address, interpretive strategies they use, and evaluations they make. But if canonical agency is the publicly recognized authority to evaluate a literary work, then how is this authority established in the literary sphere? This question is particularly pressing when considering those public readers who lack professional credentials or those whose credentials are unknown. It is further complicated by the fact that these readers' public

social acts of evaluation happen in front of strangers. How do their discursive publics recognize and legitimate their canonical agency? To pursue questions of cultural prestige and competencies (e.g., to explain the possession or recognition of a literary reputation; the desire for or pursuit of literary qualifications), many literary scholars turn to symbolic and cultural capital, concepts first put forward by Bourdieu.²⁸ I too find these terms productive in pondering how a public reader somehow acquires status and exercises this cultural authority in the literary sphere.²⁹

The “accumulation of symbolic capital,” for Bourdieu, is “the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability” (*Distinction* 291).³⁰ In *Canada Reads 2005*, Roch Carrier was treated deferentially by both the referee Bill Richardson and fellow panelists as a “national notable,” as Bourdieu would call him (*Distinction* 291). If symbolic capital is prestige, then cultural capital is cultural competence. Bourdieu writes, “A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded”

²⁸ English applies symbolic and cultural capital in his work on contemporary literary prizes James F. English, “Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art,” *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 33.1 (2002), James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). Lorraine York engages these terms in her study of literary celebrity in Canada. Lorraine York, *Literary Celebrity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). Janice Radway also works with them in her analysis of The Book-of-the-Month Club. Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill, N.C: U of North Carolina P, 1997). And DeNel Rehberg Sedo engages cultural capital in her study of contemporary book programs that engage convergent media. DeNel Rehberg Sedo, “‘Richard & Judy’s Book Club’ and ‘Canada Reads’: Readers, Books and Cultural Programming in a Digital Era ” *Information, Communication and Society* 11.2 (2008).

²⁹ I find the concepts of symbolic and cultural capital also valuable as a means to further Canadian canon scholars’ inquiry into how canon agents acquire and perpetuate their powers of legitimization.

³⁰ Elsewhere, Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as “‘prestige’ or ‘authority’”: symbolic capital is “economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a ‘credit’ which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic’ profits.” For cultural professionals, “the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or the theatre manager, the only legitimate accumulation [of capital] consists of making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark or signature) or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.) and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson, ed. Randal Johnson (Polity Press, 1993) 75.

(Distinction 2). In Bourdieu's model, cultural capital (the possession of the code, the literary know-how) "is accumulated through a long process of acquisition or inculcation which includes the pedagogical action of the family or group members (family education), educated members of the social formation (diffuse education) and social institutions (institutional education)" (Johnson 7). Carrier's cultural capital came in part from his reputation as a canonical Canadian author and former National Librarian: the panel's recognition of his capital was apparent in their appeal to his expertise and attentiveness to his evaluations.

While Carrier entered the 2005 debate arm-in-arm with his importance as a reader of stature, Sherraine Mackay did not. Promoted and introduced as an Olympic fencer, Mackay had no apparent literary credentials, but rapidly showed her cultural competence in her preparation for the debate and discussion of the books. When the panelists and listeners learned that she had majored in English in university, this background information explained her "credentials." In Bourdieu's terms, her dispositions developed in response to her "institutional education" (and other forms of training) were discursively identifiable. But in genre terms, as I show in Chapter Three, Mackay's canonical agency may also be discerned in the ways in which she instantiated the literary debate and took up the competing texts meta-generically as types. Freedman explains how each generic utterance "marks its place in the sequence by recording the previous stage in a narrative report or description, and only then does it perform an act: it turns back, then turns forward" (Freedman 42). Uptake, I suggest, is one means of considering how symbolic and cultural capital are accumulated through people's everyday encounters with texts.

Uptake's role in the accumulation of literary credentials and prestige is further suggested in studying the public readers of *The Complete Booker*. While some have had institutional and/or professional education in the literary sphere, Laura, the host, displays no signs on her book blog or the reading challenge of possessing literary qualifications in Bourdieu's sense. Why did strangers respond to Laura's public challenge to read the Booker winners? I want to contend that her uptake of the prize and its canon credited her with symbolic capital. As I show in Chapter Four, her challenge essentially declares, 'I am the kind of reader who reads books valued by this kind of prize.' People who are members of the Booker's public recognize the capital of the canonizing texts she takes up (e.g., the annual winner's announcements and surrounding genre sequences), and recognized her as a person of taste. Laura's numerous reader reviews on the challenge then add to her symbolic capital ('I am the kind of reader who reads these kinds of books'), and her competent instantiation of the genre adds to her cultural capital. I can picture other challenge hosts writing reviews on their collective blogs that instead reduced their cultural capital. Uptake as a bi-directional relationship between two texts also explains how the success of *The Complete Booker* now furthers the prestige of the prize itself in the eyes of its public members: Laura's challenge transfers capital from the prize and the books to the collective blog, and the subsequent explosion of reviews on the challenge and its own growing readership transfers capital back to the prize ('We are the kind of prize that spawns this kind of challenge').

In making these claims from the perspective of uptake, I recognize that my approach credits capital not only to readers and prize organizers but to canonizing and canonized texts: uptake's memory is transferring capital from (in Freadman's terms)

utterance to interpretant and from ‘utterer’ to ‘interpreter.’ In making this move, I turn to English and his work on prizes. English asks: How is “prestige produced, and where does it reside? (In people? In things? In relationships between people and things?) What rules govern its circulation?” (*Economy* 3). He argues that the prize, “an instrument of cultural exchange,” facilitates complex transactions (*Economy* 12) to achieve *capital intraconversion* (*Economy* 10), converting, for instance, symbolic fortunes into economic capital or economic wealth into symbolic capital.³¹ Public book clubs and literary debates, in English’s terms, are also instruments of capital intraconversion. Such instruments, trading in literature as both art and commodity, “can be, at one and the same time, both more dubious—more of a joke—than they used to be, and more symbolically effectual, more powerfully and intimately intertwined with processes of canonization” (J. F. English “Winning” 118). I share the “joke” (but, like English, do not always join in the laughter) of *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads*, and the Booker in subsequent chapters. For now, I wish to propose uptake as a means by which prestige is produced and circulated in relationships between people and texts.

Over the chapters that follow, I investigate public readers’ canonical agency through a detailed analysis of how they speak and write about Canadian literature. I illustrate how their public evaluation of literature sometimes receives significant uptakes, as when the majority vote for Day’s *Rockbound* led to the sales of 25,000 copies (“Rockbound”), and other times more modest responses, as when Jill’s review of *The Blind Assassin* elicited five comments (Jill “Blind”). I show how their agency sometimes challenges that of other canon-makers, as when the canonization of *Rockbound* rescued it

³¹ Capital for English designates “anything that registers as an asset, and can be put profitably to work, in one or another domain of human endeavor.” English, *Economy* 9.

from a pool of forgotten texts, and other times affirms the prestige of another agent, as when Lisa testifies to the literary merits of *The Blind Assassin*. And I demonstrate how their participation in these canonical processes enables them to publicly accumulate and display literary credentials that position each as a distinct public reader. In doing so, I foreground how within situated contingencies, public readers exercise canonical agency.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POPULAR GENRE SYSTEM, PUBLIC, AND CANON OF *ONE BOOK, ONE VANCOUVER*

A shared motivation to discuss books

The Vancouver Public Library's *One Book, One Vancouver* is a public book club whose annual celebration of a chosen literary work has attracted a substantial number of readers over the past nine years. On its website, the library tells the story of the program's beginnings:

The first One Book, One Vancouver was held in 2002. The idea for a city-wide book club came from a Vancouver Public Library staff member who had heard about the success of similar projects throughout the United States. Enthusiastically, Vancouver Public Library agreed that this would be a great program for the city of Vancouver.

Here, we learn that *One Book, One Vancouver* (OBOV) is in fact an adaptation of other *One Book* programs in America (the first were hosted by libraries in Seattle, Chicago, and Los Angeles).³² We are told that these projects have been successful, but we do not yet know the criteria by which their organizers or the Vancouver Public Library (VPL) measure success. What exigencies do these *One Book* programs meet in other communities, and how does the library see these social needs manifested in Vancouver?

As the library continues its narrative, these questions are partially addressed:

The next step was to decide on a book for the program. Any book chosen for a city-wide book club should be interesting, engaging, and easy to read; have ideas, history, and discussible themes that would bring readers together; and, preferably, an author who was willing to engage in discussion with readers. With that in mind, Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* was a natural match as the inaugural choice for the program.

³² Elsewhere, the Vancouver Public Library explains that they chose to follow the "success of similar initiatives in cities like Chicago, Los Angeles and Seattle." Vancouver Public Library, "What Is One Book, One Vancouver?", 2004, www.vpl.ca, Available: <http://www.vpl.ca/MDC/obov/program.html>, November 9 2004.

Success, it seems, depends on bringing readers together and literature is a means to accomplish this goal.

The ways in which a literary text engenders this gathering of readers are tied to exigencies of promoting reading (a book that is “interesting, engaging, and easy to read”) and civic dialogue (a work that is “discussible” with an author and fellow readers). These exigencies are not unexpected, given that the public library as a civic institution promotes and fosters reading as well as encourages and facilitates dialogue amongst the citizens it serves.³³ Notably, the “natural” choice for a Vancouver book club is a book set primarily in Vancouver and written by an author raised in Vancouver, Wayson Choy. Why this emphasis on locality “fits” (in Bitzer’s terms) this rhetorical situation is left implicit. For now, I will note that not all *One Book* programs select home-grown works and writers.

To return to the narrative, the library concludes with the results of their 2002 program:

The success of the first [year] was outstanding. The inaugural book was checked out 7,000 times; between 1,500 and 2,000 people attended OBOV events; 215 people registered their participation; 6,000 copies of the book were sold in BC; and the book was catapulted onto the BC Bestseller list for 13 weeks! (V. P. Library "What")

We see that the library measures success by the number of people reading their literary selection (illustrated through circulation, sales, and bestseller statistics) and congregating to discuss it (demonstrated by OBOV program registration and event attendance). Of

³³ In 2002, Jennifer Young-Roy, the VPL’s director of communication, told *The Vancouver Sun* that part of the library’s mission is “to promote a love of reading.” Yvonne Zacharias, "Making Vancouver One Big Book Club: Library Picks the Jade Peony," *The Vancouver Sun* March 14 2002. Vancouver’s mayor, Gregor Robertson, noted in 2008, “Our libraries strengthen the urban fabric of Vancouver by providing public space for people of all viewpoints to engage in discussion and debate and to build understanding. As a vital civic institution, libraries embody many of the most admirable qualities of a democratic society.” Vancouver Public Library, *Annual Report 2008*, 2008, Available: http://www.vpl.ca/images/uploads/file/pdf/AR_2008.pdf, December 10 2009.

course, sales and circulation of the text do not translate directly to readership: some people borrow the text from friends, others already own it or have read it, and others still acquire the work but never actually read it. As well, some people attend events without having taken up the work itself, motivated simply to see Choy in person or to join a friend for a literary outing. Regardless, these figures are noteworthy. Since Choy published *The Jade Peony* seven years earlier in 1995, the 2002 statistics can largely be attributed to *One Book, One Vancouver*, and be seen as evidence that the program does address exigencies of promoting reading and civic dialogue.

For me, the significance of the library's story of *One Book, One Vancouver* lies in the social actions that literature is first assumed to perform and then actually carries out when reading is enacted as a public rather than private practice. These assumptions are held by the library organizers, who select literary works as a means to local ends, and then—crucially—are affirmed by its public members, those readers who choose to read the works and assemble to discuss them both inside and outside library events.³⁴ Readers' motivations to share reading experiences, I argue, arise from recurring rhetorical situations across time and space: oral storytelling and reading recitals; families, librarians, and teachers reading aloud to children; discussions in *salons*, literary societies, coffee shops, book clubs, and classrooms; participation in reading festivals, author events, and online literary sites; involvement in professional and scholarly literary organizations and conferences; and informal shared reading experiences amongst family, friends, and strangers (see Long 8-10). This wide-spread recognition of reading as a shared practice that “develop[s] both the properties of individuals and the character of communities” (Murray *Come* 163) motivates people to take an interest in programs like *One Book, One*

³⁴ I allude to the discrepancy between the circulation/sale figures as compared to attendance figures.

Vancouver. Moreover, this recognition of reading as social (as also argued by Benwell, Chartier, Fuller, Hartley, Long, Murray, Radway, and Rehberg Sedo) is significant in its challenge to the persistent view of reading as private, what publisher Yvonne Hunter of Penguin Canada describes as a “solitary indulgence.”³⁵

In this chapter, I ask how library organizers and readers call forth a public and canon through the popular canonizing genre system of *One Book, One Vancouver*. To investigate this question, I study the first three years of OBOV’s operation, when the library took up *The Jade Peony* in 2002, Taylor’s *Stanley Park* in 2003, and Bakan’s *The Corporation* in 2004. I begin with a summary of popular and scholarly criticism of One Book programs in the United States and Canada, and then outline the One Book phenomenon through a brief history, an analysis of its genre system, and a survey of Canadian programs. I then analyze the first three years of *One Book, One Vancouver* in chronological order, beginning with the 2002 selection of *The Jade Peony*. Throughout, I consider the following: How is the program’s genre system deployed to promote reading and community as well as other exigencies put forward by stakeholder groups and the literary works themselves? Where do we find reader agency within this system? And what happens when a literary genre instance is deliberately taken up by this genre system to perform social actions unanticipated by the work itself?

‘Meta-generic atmospheres’ surrounding One Book programs

To date, these questions have been largely unasked by both cultural critics and academics, although the One Book programs have certainly been critiqued in the United

³⁵ Ron Charles has insisted, “real engagement with books demands contemplation, independence and solitude.” Ron Charles, “Harry Potter and the Death of Reading,” *Washington Post* July 15 2007.

States and Canada. Rachel Lee in her article on New York's selection of Chang Rae

Lee's *Native Speaker* provides a useful summary of American criticism:

the most interesting (and slippery) objections to the selection of *Native Speaker* came from commentators who voiced distaste for the very "mass" or "group think" qualities of the reading program itself: "these mass reading bees [are] rather like the idea that we are all going to pop out and eat Chicken McNuggets or something else horrid at once," said Harold Bloom in an oft-quoted snippet (Angell 27). Bloom, among others such as Verlyn Klinkenborg, voiced concern that reading itself would be degraded by this civic program, transformed from a "passionate," "secretive, profoundly private," and elective experience (Klinkenborg A24), into a coercive, collective, and politically correct activity that diminished the autonomy and agency of the reader. As Philip Lopate put it, "It's a little like ... 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' or something (Angell 27)." (343)

Above, we see what Giltrow describes as meta-generic "atmospheres of wordings and activities" ("Meta-Genre" 195) surrounding the situation of American One Book programs: we hear Bloom, Klinkenborg, and Lopate warning readers of this "group think" activity, and advising them to stay away.³⁶ Similarly in Canada, cultural critic and novelist Hal Niedzviecki characterizes *One Book, One Vancouver's* 2003 selection of *Stanley Park* as symptomatic of larger "schemes libraries adopt to promote reading as fun and inclusive." If meta-genre is "a complex indication of social context" ("Meta-Genre" 187), then what do these wordings indicate? What motivates this genre talk? Significantly, as Lee highlights for us, these meta-generic wordings are designed to protect "reading itself" from programs that degrade reading from something it is ("profoundly private") to something it is not ("collective"). These speakers protect "the autonomy and agency of the reader" by presupposing that readers who join in these

³⁶ Radway documents similar warnings regarding the dangers of literary selection committees for book clubs like the Book-of-the-Month Club: "The book club critics feared not only the massing of the huge, amorphous, uncritical audiences assembled by the new media but, equally, the unprecedented consolidation of highly centralized, commercially motivated cultural agencies aiming to address and to lead them. The book clubs and the literary experts they employed looked so threatening to their critics because they appeared to have the power as a cohesive and well-organized group to impose their own tastes on an even larger social body that itself lacked the critical capacity for assessment and the will to resist their influence." Radway, *Feeling* 228.

activities have no agency. The disdain of these critics for popular reading programs and, by extension, the readers who take part *also* bolsters their own capital as literary experts and, by extension, that of all professional readers.

Other American academics are more receptive to public reading events than Bloom, Klinkenborg, and Lopate (e.g. Griswold, McDonnell and Wright 135; Putnam, Feldstein and Cohen 51-52). Members of Penn State's Center for American Literary Studies, Michael Bérubé, Hester Blum, Christopher Castiglia, and Julia Spicher Kasdorf, began a Community Read in 2007 that includes both members from the university and the larger community. Contemplating their experiences, they write:

In coming together to listen to, write, or discuss literature, we ideally develop and hone the skills (of listening to, evaluating, and critically engaging others' arguments and articulating rhetorically effective positions of our own) that make civil society pleasurable and productive. These sound like the learning outcomes of any contemporary course in the humanities, but they have particular importance when sites of public interaction are so dramatically curtailed that the very concept of publicity, much less civility, is becoming virtually unthinkable. In the face of such diminishment, yearning for social interaction becomes keen, and that desire often seeks satisfaction in places of literary exchanges: bookstores, reading groups, blogs, the Oprah Book Club." (422)³⁷

My own findings show that while "social interaction" indeed motivates public readers to participate in *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads*, and *The Complete Booker*, an exigence of "skills"—prominent in the university classroom—is rarely raised or discussed by non-academic program organizers or participants.

³⁷ Academics have also examined the political (potential) contributions of the most famous public reading program, Oprah's Book Club. Kimberly Chabot Davis argues that "Oprah's Book Club selections do not provide solutions to social problems concerning race and gender, but they do offer intense emotional engagement that is an essential ingredient of political engagement." Kimberly Chabot Davis, "Oprah's Book Club and the Politics of Cross-Racial Empathy," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7.4 (2004): 414. Ted Striphas commends the club for its engagement with "recalcitrant social problems such as racism, misogyny, economic injustice, colonialism, child abuse, and genocide," yet worries over "whether the group's confrontation with some of the most compelling political concerns of our time will press beyond the purchasing and reading of books and develop into even more engaged, broad-ranging acts of intervention." Ted Striphas, *The Late Age of Print* (Columbia University Press, 2009) 139.

One Book programs have excited little critical commentary from Canadian academics, with the exception of Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo.³⁸ While their publications to date have focused on *Canada Reads* (the CBC's national adaptation of One Book programs), their three-year *Beyond the Book* project surveys a wide array of "mass-reading events" in the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada, including two local One Book programs, Waterloo Region's *One Book, One Community* and *One Book, One Vancouver* (Fuller "Reading"; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "About"). Acknowledging that motivations for shared reading are certainly not new, as Murray shows us, Fuller and Rehberg Sedo suggest that these events signal "a new urge to form communities of understanding around printed texts—especially literary fiction" ("Reading" 8). Their research project asks, "Why do mass reading events cause people to come together to share reading, and do these events attract marginalized communities, foster new reading practices, enable social change?" (Fuller "Reading" 212). I see my genre approach to what "urges" or motivates public readers to take up Canadian literature within popular canonizing genre systems as complementary to the work of Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, particularly our shared interest in how readers sometimes resist events by interpreting and using the literary works in unexpected ways (see Rehberg Sedo "'Richard'" 188-89; Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Reading" 7).

³⁸ As I discuss in Chapter Three, Smaro Kamboureli, Moss, Fuller, and Rehberg Sedo have studied *Canada Reads*. Smaro Kamboureli, "The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy," *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy and Canadian Literature*, ed. Cynthia Sugars (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004). Laura Moss, "Canada Reads," *Canadian Literature*.182 (2004). Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, "A Reading Spectacle for the Nation: The CBC and 'Canada Reads'," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40.1 (2006). Rehberg Sedo, "'Richard'." Danielle Fuller, "Listening to the Readers of 'Canada Reads'," *Canadian Literature* 193. Summer (2007).

One Book programs

A brief history

How did the *One Book* trend begin? In 1998, the Seattle Public Library's since retired Executive Director, Nancy Pearl created a program called *If All Seattle Read the Same Book* (now *Seattle Reads*). Chicago then implemented a *One Book* program in 2001 (C. P. Library), and other cities (e.g., Pasadena, California; Cincinnati, Ohio), counties (e.g., Palm Beach County, Florida; Peoria County in Illinois), and states (e.g., Alaska and Oklahoma) throughout the United States followed suit. The adaptation of these programs is promoted and facilitated by the Library of Congress' Center for the Book, which retains an online public record of the programs in operation and selected works (Congress), and the American Library Association, which offers a "how to" guide to launch a *One Book* program, published in 2003 (A. L. Association).

A press release issued for *Oklahoma Reads Oklahoma* enthusiastically depicts an America unified by the "One Book, One State craze [that] sweeps readers from sea to shining sea":

In the seaside town of Falmouth, Massachusetts the locals read *To Kill A Mockingbird* while 3,000 miles away in the coastal town of Cannon Beach, Oregon groups gather in homes and libraries to discuss *A River Sutra*. Along the Gulf of Mexico in Galveston, Texas, citizens are on the same page with *Tortilla Curtain* while Alaskans connect with each other through the page-turner *Any Small Goodness*. (James)

In this meta-generic description of the programs' aggregate effects, the emphasis is on how One Book programs meet an exigence of civic dialogue. The utopian vision advanced by this commentary to praise reading as shared practice can equally be satirized with a dystopic vision to decry it, as seen in Canada's *Geist*:

One Book, One Vancouver touts itself as “Vancouver’s only city-wide book club, promoting reading and encouraging a culture of discussion in Vancouver by bringing people together around one great book.” This description conjures up an image of everyone on the bus, in line at the passport office or sitting on the toilet, reading the same book at the same time, and every conversation being about that book. (Osborne)

Amidst these meta-generic battles over what Fuller calls “the contemporary meanings of reading” (“Reading” 211), the popular appeal of these programs seems clear. By 2004, Seattle’s One Book program had been “adapted to almost 200 communities across the world, from Boone, N.C. to Omaha, Neb., from Perth, Australia to Toronto, Canada” (S. P. Library “Library”). To this list we can add *One Book for Stevenage* (S. B. Council) and *The Great Reading Adventure* (S. G. Council), both in England, and *One Book One Brisbane* (2002-2005) in Australia (B. C. Council). In 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) launched a “Big Read” program in the United States, and by June 2010, more than 800 grants had been awarded to communities hosting Big Reads (Arts “About”). Many of these American communities seem to have run their programs only for a short time, however, as the NEA lists 75 communities participating in 2010/2011 (Arts “Participating”). Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo estimate that there are over 500 One Book programs in operation around the world in 2010 (Fuller *Citizen*). The many readers who take part in these international programs call on us to take their motivations and social actions seriously.

The One Book genre system

One Book programs, as well as *Canada Reads*, the Booker Prize, and *The Complete Booker*, are all popular canonizing genre systems. These systems enable the instantiation of publics in concert with canons by circulating complicated genre sequences of meta-

genres, canonized genres, and canonizing genres (public genres that evaluate literary texts). Together, these genres perform the cultural work of selecting, interpreting, evaluating, and discussing a particular literary text or set of texts. The genre system of One Book programs is the means by which library organizers, various stakeholders, and readers shape and advance their interests (to paraphrase Bazerman) while simultaneously granting “value and consequence to the statements of others” (79). Organizers and stakeholders are not the only ones whose interests are met within One Book programs: the system also adapts to accommodate readers’ motives. To provide a sketch of this system, I return to the how-to guide. I do not mean to suggest that this particular text shaped *One Book, One Vancouver* (indeed Vancouver library staff may not have read it). But if, as the VPL has reported, organizers looked to already-operating American programs as their inspiration, then they produced *One Book, One Vancouver* within a known framework of how to launch and manage a successful city-wide book club. For a meta-generic text such as the planning guide to exist, there must be a genre system recognized by seasoned and prospective One Book program organizers.

I identify a sampling of genres within this system to illustrate the many different groups that a library works with while ensuring their various exigencies are addressed. While some of these text types appear to be sequential, joined together by uptake to accomplish a specific activity, others point to how sequences are multidirectional, as genres expected and unforeseen are taken up by system participants. One activity, planning an annual program, involves genres such as timelines, budgets, book orders, funding proposals, and author letters of agreement (A. L. Association 8-11). Another activity, selecting a book, requires meetings, debates, and votes. To promote a One Book

program involves media releases, posters, bookmarks, in-library and bookstore displays, and website genres such as “about the book” and a “calendar of events” (25-30). During the program’s run, genres are recruited to discuss books, including public lectures, author readings, group discussion sessions, and meta-generic reading guides and book-group guides (21-24).³⁹ Readers also take up other genres of discussion, such as coffee-shop conversations with friends, fleeting discussions with strangers on the bus, and rants about the program on a book blog. And for the library to assess the program, they enlist evaluation forms, program statistics, and final reports and recommendations (8, 40-44). We see just how multifarious this system is in coordinating the work of One Book programs.

Through these genres, this system coordinates the needs of stakeholders including different levels of government, corporations and businesses, the book industry, the media, and authors. In negotiating mutual interests amongst these groups (consider the letter of agreement between a library and an author), genres within this system are deployed not solely for the library’s exigencies, but also those of other groups. For instance, a local bookstore chain may agree to have One Book in-store displays and host author readings that coincide with the program run, in return for the exclusive rights to sell the chosen work at all library-hosted events. The library’s interests in promoting the program and directing people to events are met, as well as the bookstore’s interests in bringing people

³⁹ One Book sets for private book clubs typically include copies of the selected literary work and reading guide questions. While these questions no doubt constrain literary interpretations within the rhetorical situation of the book club, my research in Chapters Three and Four indicates that this reading guide genre would not *determine* readers’ response to the text. Readers would exercise agency in varied ways, including ignoring one or all of the questions, taking up a question in a way unanticipated by the prompt (i.e., as an occasion to discuss a completely different text), rejecting the question, or modifying it to better suit the local context of the group discussion. We might think of a similar situation of a university literature classroom, where questions posed by the professor shape but do not determine students’ varied responses to the text.

into their stores and sell more books: the canonizing system facilitates the promotion of reading, fostering of community, and sales of books.

The entanglement of these genres in *One Book, One Vancouver* illustrates Bakhtin's important observation that all speakers and writers are oriented toward the "actively responsive understanding[s]" of their listeners and readers (69). In this particular locale, we can envision how a library organizer's generic instance is oriented toward the responsive understanding of a bookstore owner, how a bookstore employee solicits responsive understandings from a customer, how a literary author contrives a range of responses from readers, and how a reader anticipates responsive understandings from a friend. While these speakers and writers design their genre utterances to solicit a certain range of uptakes, their listeners and readers take up their texts in both anticipated and unanticipated ways. If we approach a canon as produced by a genre system and comprised of genre sequences of canonized and canonizing texts, then we are reminded that each text within this discursive space is at once responsive and soliciting a response. I want to emphasize that the readers who participate within a canonizing genre system adopt what Bakhtin calls an "active, responsive attitude" (68) towards the canonizing texts and the literary texts within the system. Our current theories of literary canons need to be revised to include readers' responsive understandings—or uptakes—of canonized literature and canonizing texts about this literature. To illustrate how a genre theoretical approach foregrounds the role of readers in constituting a canon within situational contingencies, I turn now to the Canadian One Book programs.

Canadian One Book programs

The One Book genre system has been adopted locally by different Canadian communities. In Canada, *One Book, One Vancouver* was “the first of its kind” (“What Is”), but other programs shortly followed: Waterloo Region (also in 2002); Chatham-Kent and Hamilton (2004); Renfrew County, Medicine Hat, and Yellowknife (2005); Edmonton and Burlington (2007); Toronto (2008) and City of Kawartha and Brampton (2009).⁴⁰ *Canada Reads*, the “CBC’s answer to the One Book, One City program” (E. P. Library “Book”), launched in 2002, and Radio-Canada’s *Le Combat Des Livres*, self-described as “la version française de Canada Reads” (Radio-Canada), launched in 2005. Three of the twelve local programs though have been subsequently cancelled: Yellowknife, Chatham-Kent, and Renfrew. These failed instances highlight how simply transplanting a genre system into a new local context is not sufficient to make it persist: its success is contingent on a wide array of factors including which genres are included

⁴⁰ In 2002, Waterloo Region launched *One Book, One Community*. Lynn Haddrall, “One Book One Community Choice Should Resonate Locally,” *The Record* April 26 2008. Chatham-Kent initiated a *One Book, One Municipality* program, and Hamilton launched *One Book, One City*, both in 2004. “Lori Lansens to Visit Dresden and Chatham Branches of the Chatham-Kent Public Library Saturday November 27th, 2004,” *cktimes.ca* November 23 2004. Caledon Institute of Social Policy, *Hamilton’s ‘One Book, One City: Tackling Poverty through the Arts’ Project* (Hamilton: 2007). Then in 2005, Renfrew County and Medicine Hat each started a *One Book, One Community* program, and Yellowknife launched *One Book, One Yellowknife*. Marylea Burt, “Ontario Council Dates and Data: Ontario Council Newsletter” (Canadian Federation of University Women, 2006). Medicine Hat Public Library and Medicine Hat College, *One Book One Community*, October 30 2009, Available: <http://www.mhc.ab.ca/library/oboc/>, December 11 2009. The Center for the Book, *‘One Book’ Reading Promotion Projects* (Library of Congress, 2008). The Edmonton Public Library launched *Edmonton Reads* in 2007, the same year that *One Book One Burlington* began. Edmonton Public Library, *Welcome to Edmonton Reads*, 2008, *Edmonton Reads: One City One Book*, Available: <http://www.epl.ca/EdmontonReads/edmontonreads.cfm>, December 11 2009. Burlington Public Library, *One Book One Burlington: One Really Big Book Club!*, 2008, Available: <http://www.bpl.on.ca/obob/onebook08.htm#top>, December 11 2009. As of 2008, the Toronto Public Library now hosts *Keep Toronto Reading One Book*. Toronto Public Library, *Keep Toronto Reading One Book 2008*, 2008, Available: <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/ktr/onebook/index.html>, December 11 2009. And in 2009, City of Kawartha Lakes in Ontario began its *One Book, One Community* program, and *One Book One Brampton* was launched. City of Kawartha Lakes, *‘One Book, One Community’ November Events*, October 26, 2009, Available: <http://www.city.kawarthalakes.on.ca/news/one-book-one-community-november-events>, December 11 2009. Brampton Public Library, *About One Book One Brampton*, Available: <http://www.onebookonebrampton.ca/about.html>, December 11 2009.

and how they are instantiated, which books are selected and how they are promoted, and which exigencies are raised. One Book programs depend upon the motivated uptakes of readers.

Organizers of Canadian One Book programs are able to marshal the system to address broad exigencies of reading and community as well as more specific social motives particular to a historical moment. For example, Hamilton's *One Book, One City* 2006-2007 program imagined a public of both adults and children through its selection of Deborah Ellis' Governor-General's award winning novel, *Looking for X*, whose narrator Khyber lives in Toronto's Regent Park housing project. The program sought to tackle "poverty through the arts," and an estimated 7,800 residents took up Ellis' text in many related "arts and reading activities," including a month-long arts showcase of readers' responses in the form of "film, readings, cultural and culinary exhibitions, discussion forums and visual arts presentations" (Policy 2). In a second example, a Vancouver-specific exigence of local enthusiasm for the 2010 Olympics prompted library organizers to select two literary works: Janet Love Morrison's *The Crazy Canucks*, a chronicle of "Canada's legendary ski team," and a children's picture book about hockey, *The Farm Team* by Linda Bailey and Bill Slavin (V. P. Library "About"). The selection of Canadian literary works by both *One Book, One City* in 2006-2007 and *One Book, One Vancouver* in 2009 recurs in all Canadian One Book programs.

Canadian programs' literary selections

Canadian One Book programs also vary in how they select an author and text to form the centerpiece of their annual reading events. Vancouver organizers have repeatedly selected

a contemporary work by a writer from Vancouver or British Columbia to form a canon:⁴¹ in addition to *The Jade Peony* (2002), *Stanley Park* (2003), and *The Corporation* (2004), they have also taken up Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (2005), Patrick Lane's *There is a Season* (2006), Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (2007), Karen X. Tulchinsky's *The Five Books of Moses Lapinsky* (2008), and in 2009, *The Crazy Canucks* and *The Farm Team*. When these OBOV selections are compared to those of other programs, patterns emerge.⁴² First, all the programs select Canadian literary works, although surprisingly, *One Book, One Vancouver* is the only program to publicly restrict their selections to local authors

⁴¹ As I complete this dissertation, The Vancouver Public Library has just announced the literary selections for *One Book, One Vancouver 2010*, and they are a significant departure from the first eight years of this public book club. Rather than choosing a work by a Vancouver author, organizers have selected "three amazing iconic novels," and are asking the public to vote for their choice online. The three texts are Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Vancouver Public Library, *One Book, One Vancouver: Three Amazing Iconic Novels, Infinite Event Possibilities and One Vote... Yours!*, 2010, www.vpl.ca, Available: <http://www.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/obov/index.html>, July 29 2010. I suspect this major shift in selection criteria addresses an exigence to attract new participants.

⁴² Waterloo Region requires that the winning title must be "written by a Canadian who will visit Waterloo Region and talk about the book." Haddrall, "One." Over the years, they have selected Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* (2002), Alistair Macleod's *No Great Mischiefs* (2003), Nino Ricci's *Lives of the Saints* (2004), Robert J. Sawyer's *Hominids* (2005), Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2006), Elizabeth Run's *Smoke* (2007), Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon's *100-Mile Diet* (2008), and Laurence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2009). The City of Waterloo, *One Book, One Community, City of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada*, 2009, Available: <http://www.waterloo.ca/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=1296>, December 12 2009. Hamilton seems to seek a living Canadian author, as it chose Mary Lawson's *Crow Lake* in 2004 prior to their 2006 selection of *Looking for X*. Rod Charles, *What's New: Hamilton Uses the Power of Art to Tackle the Issue of Poverty*, November 21, 2006, Available: <http://www.cfc-fcc.ca/news/news.cfm?intNewsID=891>, December 12 2009. Medicine Hat stipulates that the chosen book "should be by a Canadian writer, available in paperback, and substantial enough to generate discussion and debate"; to date, they have selected Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (2005), Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness* (2006), Joan Clark's *An Audience of Chairs* (2007), Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* (2008), and Elizabeth Hay's *Late Nights on Air* (2009). Library and College, *One. Edmonton Reads* focuses on "an exceptional work of Canadian fiction," and has taken up Rawi Hage's *De Niro's Game* in 2007 and Ted Bishop's *Riding with Rilke: Reflections on Motorcycles and Books* in 2008. Edmonton Public Library, *Edmonton Public Library Launches Major Community Book Project – Edmonton Reads: One City, One Book*, 2007, Available: <http://www.epl.ca/EPLRelease.cfm?id=25>, December 12 2009. Library, *Welcome. One Book One Burlington* chooses "works of fiction by living Canadian authors" including Lori Lansens' *Rush Home Road* (2007), *The Stone Carvers* (2008), and Vincent Lam's *Bloodletting & Miraculous Cures* (2009). Library, *One*. Toronto's program has selected works set in whole or part in Toronto: Michael Redhill's novel *Consolation* in 2008 and Glenn Downie's poetry collection *Loyalty Management*. Library, *Keep*. In 2009, The City of Kawartha Lakes chose *Silverwing* by Canadian writer Kenneth Oppel. Lakes, 'One'. That same year, Brampton picked Martel's *Life of Pi*. Library, *About*. Neither the Kawartha Lakes nor the Brampton organizer states its selection criteria.

(although both of Toronto's literary selections to date have been set in that city).⁴³

Second, there is an overwhelming appetite for author appearances (e.g., Waterloo Region, Medicine Hat, Burlington), which is not surprising in our current North American *kairos* of celebrity (see Miller and Shepherd) which includes author as celebrity, as illustrated by Lorraine York. This craving might be heightened but is not new to the literary sphere, as seen in The Canadian Literature Club of Toronto, whose readers invited authors to speak at their events (Murray "Canadian"). The exigence for a living author is predictably accompanied by recurrent selections of more recent works: *Obasan*, published in 1981 and chosen by both Vancouver and Medicine Hat, is the oldest work selected. I attribute organizers' initial preferences for fiction that has already been canonized in other systems (e.g., *Obasan* and *No Great Mischief*) as a strategy to attract readers who are already members of these authors and works' publics to a fledgling One Book public. A second reason for new programs to take up established authors and texts is to "convert" the symbolic capital of the authors and prizes to capital for the new public book club, an argument I lay out in Chapter One. My contention is supported by the fact that once One Book programs have established a public and capital of their own, they then begin to select lesser-known authors and texts. These more varied selections (such as *Hominids*, *Riding with Rilke*, *Loyalty Management*, and *100-Mile Diet*) cumulatively expand the book club's appeal to a wider variety of people and call for a larger public of readers to pay attention. The canon of *One Book*, *One Vancouver* also reflects these basic trends,

⁴³ A study of how American programs are adapted in different locales and what literature they select is outside the scope of my research. I note that they too seem to focus primarily on national literary works. For instance, by 2004 Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* had already been chosen 25 times by different One Book programs. Library of Congress, *Local/Community Resources: One Book Projects*, 2009, Available: <http://www.read.gov/resources/>, May 5 2005.

with its canonical beginnings in *The Jade Peony* and its 2009 selection of *The Crazy Canucks*.

To illustrate one way that literary works circulate amongst different canons, I show how One Book literary selections are informed by prior selections of other international and national canonizing systems. For example, the Man Booker Prize for Fiction could have played a role in Brampton's 2009 support of Martel's *Life of Pi*, which won the prize in 2002. Nationally, One Book selections seem influenced by the Canadian literature academy and its recurrent uptake of authors also selected by One Book programs (e.g., Kogawa, Macleod, Urquhart, and Vanderhaeghe) and the Scotiabank Giller Prize, which Lam's *Bloodletting & Miraculous Cures* (selected by Burlington in 2009) won in 2006 and Hay's *Late Nights on Air* (selected by Medicine Hat in 2009) won in 2007 (Prize). One Book programs have also selected works that previously won the Governor General's Literary Awards: Ricci's *Lives of the Saints* (1990), Ellis' *Looking for X* (2000), Toews' *A Complicated Kindness* (2004), and Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* (2008) (*Englishman's*) (C. Council "Winners").⁴⁴

By choosing authors and works with recognized symbolic capital in the relatively small Canadian literary sphere, the One Book programs interpolate prospective participants as members of already existing publics and canons: for instance, the public of Joseph Boyden, *Obasan*, "the Booker," "the Giller," "the GGs," *Canada Reads*, etc.

⁴⁴ I am aware that other genre systems of canonization play a role in many of the One Book selections, particularly more localized systems, which I address in OBOV's selection of *The Jade Peony* and *Stanley Park*. Of the systems I highlight above, I only map the literary works which won these prizes, and therefore do not capture the finer nuances by which shortlists and longlists also influence selection committees and public votes (for instance, *The Stone Carvers*, selected by Waterloo (2002) and Burlington (2008), was a finalist for both the Giller and the Governor General's Award). Jane Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers* (Vancouver: McClelland & Stewart, 2002). While other canonizing genre systems influence local One Book programs, the reverse may also be true. For example, Jim Cuddy's decision to defend *Stanley Park* in the all-stars version of *Canada Reads 2007* might have been swayed by the 2003 selection of Taylor's work by *One Book, One Vancouver*.

Further, organizers construct new canons by taking up instances of canonizing genres already in public circulation, such as prize winner announcements and newspaper reviews. Libraries' public texts such as One Book press releases and promotional posters "presuppose forms of intelligibility already in place" (Warner 73): they draw upon established publics and canons to construct a new public and canon of their own. In this way, the public book clubs ensure that people will, to quote Warner, pay attention.

One Book, One Vancouver

One Book, One Vancouver 2002 and The Jade Peony

In 2002, the Vancouver Public Library explained to its imagined public that the new "book club for the entire city" would "cultivat[e] a culture of reading and discussion in Vancouver" through the shared reading of "the award winning book, *The Jade Peony* by Vancouver's own Wayson Choy" ("One" emphasis mine). Through the definite reference "the," the library assumes that this Vancouverite public mutually shares what Herbert Clark and Catherine R. Marshall describe as *particular* knowledge (36) of "the" book and its author, yet the additional descriptors "award winning" and "Vancouver's own" acknowledge and enable those readers on the periphery of the city's literary sphere to readily infer the symbolic capital of this book and its author. "Vancouver's own" Wayson Choy was raised in Vancouver's Chinatown and studied Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia ("Choy").⁴⁵ By the time the Vancouver Public Library selected his first novel (published in 1995), Choy had accrued significant symbolic capital. *The Jade Peony* had been taken up in academic as well as popular national, provincial, and city canonizing systems, and his memoir *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown*

⁴⁵ Choy may also be claimed as "Ontario's own" for he has lived there since 1962.

Childhood (Paper) had also received critical acclaim.⁴⁶ Organizers of *One Book, One Vancouver* leveraged the public and recognized capital of Choy and *The Jade Peony* to begin their imagining of a new One Book public and canon.

The publics and exigence of The Jade Peony

When the *One Book, One Vancouver* genre system took up *The Jade Peony* to imagine a public and accomplish social actions, the literary work brought along public imaginings and social actions of its own, which complemented and competed with those of the system. Readers' responsive understandings to both the text and the genres of participation motivated their contingent responses to the rhetorical situation of the public book club. *The Jade Peony* imagines different publics than only Vancouver readers, members of which share varying degrees of *common ground*, Clark's term to describe how language use "rests in a foundation of information that is shared by the participants" (xvii). Increased common ground is a means to create an enriched sense of community amongst OBOV participants. I analyze Choy's text's imagined public through Clark's

⁴⁶ *The Jade Peony* was on the Globe and Mail's national bestseller list for six months following its publication in 1995. "Choy, Wayson," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica-Dominion, 2009). That same year, it tied with Margaret Atwood's *Morning in the Burned House* for Ontario's Trillium Book Award, an award for Ontario writers. Ontario Media Development Corporation, *Celebrating 20 Years of Trillium Book Award Winning Ontario Authors*, 2007, Available: <http://www.omdc.on.ca/Page3299.aspx>, December 28 2009. Ontario Media Development Corporation OMDC, *Trillium Book Award*, 2009, Available: <http://www.omdc.on.ca/Page3217.aspx>, December 28 2009. Then in 1996, *The Jade Peony* won the City of Vancouver Book Award, a prize for the best fiction, non-fiction, poetry or drama work about Vancouver. City of Vancouver, *City of Vancouver Book Award Past Winners and Finalists (1989 - 2009)*, 2009, Available: <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/cultural/gasp/awards/book/pastwinners.htm#1996>, December 28 2009. City of Vancouver, *Vancouver Book Award. General Information - Eligibility and Evaluation Criteria*, 2009, Available: <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/cultural/gasp/awards/book/eligibility.htm>, December 28 2009. *Paper Shadows* was a 1999 *Globe and Mail* notable book of the year, nominated for the Governor General's Literary Awards (Non-fiction) the same year. Canada Council, *Cumulative List of Finalists for the Governor General's Literary Awards*, 2009, Available: <http://www.canadacouncil.ca/NR/rdonlyres/899EEA97-EB33-430F-8462-A65D1D658FFF/0/cumulativefinalists2009.pdf>, December 28 2009. It was also the 2000 winner of the Edna Staebler Creative Non-Fiction Award. Laurier Library, *Winners of the Edna Staebler Award*, 2007, Available: <http://libserve.wlu.ca/internet/prizes/winners.html>, December 28 2009. More recently, Choy's *The Jade Peony* was shortlisted for *Canada Reads 2010*, where it was defended by Dr. Samantha Nutt.

theory of *audience design*, how speakers “design their utterances for their particular audiences as a way of accomplishing their goals” (xvii). In genre terms, audience design is a means by which texts solicit a range of uptakes from their readers.

Choy’s novel is the tale of an immigrant family living in Vancouver’s Chinatown in the late 1930s and 40s, as narrated by the three youngest children—Jook-Liang, Jung-Sum, and Sek-lung. Early on in Jook-Liang’s tale, she introduces readers to the shared history of many old men living in Chinatown. As I show, through the repeated supplementation of given information (that assumed to be part of the narrator and readers’ common ground) with new information, Jook-Liang divides her audience into three groupings: first, those who know the history of these men, but recognize that others do not (e.g., Chinese-Canadians, especially those familiar with Vancouver); second, those who do not know this history, but should (Vancouver residents and Canadian citizens); and third, those who are unfamiliar with this history, but recognize that other readers know it (non-Canadian and non-Chinese readers). Choy’s audience design in *The Jade Peony*, Sarah Banting argues, foregrounds readers’ “differential claims to local knowledge” (1).

Readers are first positioned as unfamiliar with China, specifically the locale where most “Chinatown people” are from: Jook-Liang presents as given “the dense villages of southern Kwangtung province,” and then immediately presents this province as new with the appositive, “a territory racked by cycles of famine and drought” (*Jade* 16). She next positions readers as unfamiliar with (or ignorant of) Canada’s labour contract brokers’ call “for railroad workers” in the 1880s, which prompted men to leave their homes and families in Kwangtung to be “indentured” for “dangerous work” in the

Rockies. Readers are then provided with a history lesson of the fate that these men met in “Gold Mountain” following Canada’s Chinese Exclusion Act:

Thousands came in the decades before 1923, when on July 1st the Dominion of Canada passed the Chinese Exclusion Act and shut down all ordinary bachelor-man traffic between Canada and China, shut off any women from arriving, and divided families. Poverty-stricken bachelor-men were left alone in Gold Mountain, with only a few dollars left to send back to China every month, and never enough dollars to buy passage home. Dozens went mad; many killed themselves. (*Jade* 17)

The common ground that all Canadian readers share—that July 1st is “Canada Day”—is unstated, and instead Jook-Liang presents the anniversary of Canada in a way that deliberately destabilizes Canadian readers’ sense of common ground: “The Chinatown Chinese call July 1st, the day celebrating the birth of Canada, the day of Shame.” Also presented as new are laws that impacted these bachelor-men living in “make-shift huts” in the “city dump” or in “overcrowded rooms” on Pender Street: “There was a local Vancouver by-law against begging for food, a federal law against stealing food, but no law in any court against starving to death for lack of food” (*Jade* 17). For Chinese-Canadian readers, this history and its effects—summarized here and then unfolded over the course of the novel—is finally recognized by other readers, while those Vancouver and Canadian readers who have been ignorant feel shame before both Chinese-Canadian and newly informed international readers.⁴⁷

Based on this audience design, one of the social actions contrived by *The Jade Peony*, I suggest, is to educate readers about the exigence of the historical treatment of

⁴⁷ Banting, reflecting upon how the novel constructs a “social” relationship between its narrator and its readers, proposes the effects of its common ground: “if *The Jade Peony* is in search of a ‘public,’ its social relationship to this imagined public is characterized by difference. Since the characters in *The Jade Peony* are Chinese-Canadian, and since they describe their encounters with the racism of white Canada when they move beyond the borders of Chinatown, this difference might be felt as a racialized one, by some readers.” Sarah Banting, “Why ‘Common’ Ground? Vancouver Theatre and Local Audiences,” *English Department Seminar Series* (University of British Columbia, Vancouver: 2009), 6.

Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Canadians. Within its range of solicited uptakes, the literary work seeks interpretants (uptake texts) whose social actions have the potential to solicit redress as a fitting response to this rhetorical situation of historical injustice. While *The Jade Peony* addresses three distinct audiences to perform this social action, the library addresses a uniform public of Vancouverites. Given organizers' solicitation of a Vancouver public and motivation to foster a local community, their decision to not address an international public does not seem surprising, but their address to Vancouver readers as a homogeneous entity does. This foregrounds the challenge of public address, what Warner calls its "fruitful perversity." He explains, "Public discourse, in the nature of its address, abandons the security of its positive, given audience. It promises to address anybody. [...] It therefore puts at risk the concrete world that is its given condition of possibility" (113). In appealing to "the entire city," these public texts fail to capture the heterogeneity of the city's citizens.

The public texts promoting One Book events also do not consciously address an exigence of Canada's historical treatment of Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Canadians, which sets aside a key social action contrived by the novel and indeed lessens its significance. However, given that readers recognize their "partial nonidentity with the object of address in public speech" (Warner 78) in the OBOV discourse, they take up *The Jade Peony* in ways that vary from how the novel is taken up in the promotional and event genres. Accordingly, at the actual events held to celebrate the novel, certain participants such as those with Chinese heritage and those from Chinatown would situate themselves as distinct from others in attendance. And equally, some participants would be differently recognized and accommodated by their fellow attendees.

The public and exigencies of One Book, One Vancouver

Where the motivations of organizers and Choy did overlap was to reach a Vancouver public. A press release launching the new public book club took up the inside-cover copy of *The Jade Peony*, which foregrounds the novel's ongoing negotiation of two cultures, Canada and China, within the Vancouver neighbourhood of Chinatown and against an international backdrop of World War II:

Mingling with the realities of Canada and the horror of war are the magic, ghosts, paper uncles and family secrets of Poh-Poh, or Grandmother, who is the heart and pillar of the family.

Wayson Choy's Chinatown is a community of unforgettable individuals who are "neither this nor that," neither entirely Canadian nor Chinese. But with each other's help, they survive hardship and heartbreak with grit and humour.

In the release, the library's Acting Director Eric Smith modifies the complex publics imagined by this summary to a uniform public: "VPL in conjunction with Vancouver booksellers are inviting Vancouverites to take part in the program by reading *The Jade Peony*" ("Secret"). As Warner argues, only when "a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and when a responding discourse can be postulated, can a text address a public" (90). The announcement of *One Book, One Vancouver*'s launch, which could not yet assume an OBOV public, had to address pre-existing publics of Vancouverites, Choy, and *The Jade Peony*.⁴⁸ In appealing to existing publics, *One Book, One Vancouver* secured a certain amount of attention from some groups (e.g., members of Vancouver's

⁴⁸ In addition, the announcement listed OBOV strategic partners, including *Word on the Street*, an annual book and magazine festival promoting reading in the community. Vancouver Public Library, *The Secret Is out - Vancouver Public Library Launches One Book, One Vancouver*, 2002, May 5 2005. At *Word on the Street 2002*, Choy joined a "panel discussion" and the library gave away signed copies of *The Jade Peony*. Vancouver Public Library, *VPL Board Minutes: September 25, 2002* (Vancouver: 2002). These texts included stickers for the literary social networking site *Bookcrossing.com*, which encouraged readers to pass *The Jade Peony* along to friends and strangers. The overlap of the *One Book, One Vancouver* and *Bookcrossing* canonizing genre systems illustrates how both readers and texts circulate amongst different systems.

literary sphere and those interested in Vancouver history and/or Asian heritage) more than others (e.g., members of Vancouver's sports, environmental, or business sphere).

People could participate in *One Book, One Vancouver* through uptakes of responsive understandings on the borders of this genre system (for example, reading the book on their own or posting a review of *The Jade Peony* to *Chapters.ca*), but organizers encouraged people to interact directly with the library. To cultivate “a culture of reading and discussion,” branches hosted OBOV ‘book discussion groups,’ and the Central Library branch hosted an author reading, and held a documentary screening of Michael Glassbourg’s *Wayson Choy: Unfolding the Butterfly* (“Summer”).⁴⁹ Although *The Jade Peony* contrives uptakes about the political history of Chinatown, many events foregrounded instead the cultural history of Choy’s work. The library offered Chinese genealogy workshops because family is a “key theme” in *The Jade Peony*, and they invited participants “to play the Chinese game featured in *The Jade Peony*” through ‘game lessons’ entitled “Mah Jong 101” (“Summer”). By making the library the locus where exigencies of reading and community are met, it strengthens its role as a public institution, a social motive most keenly recognized by librarians.

Beyond library walls, organizers also offered readers recognizable ways to participate in the genre system. The library arranged walking tours based on the book (“Summer”), and Dim Sum in Chinatown with Choy and his friends (“Wayson”). Choy made further appearances at an author reading at the Carnegie Centre (which borders on Chinatown) and in Chinatown’s Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden. Here, a sense of community amongst One Book participants is fostered through shared experiences of a

⁴⁹ The library attempted to facilitate online discussions about *The Jade Peony*, but people did not take up their question prompts. Almost 7,000 people did visit the website though, indicating that participants saw its social action as providing information rather than cultivating discussion. (10 June 2003)

particular culture and neighbourhood. Importantly the Chinatown imagined by *The Jade Peony* is different from the Chinatown imagined through these genres: these pre-packaged experiences are far removed from Poh-Poh's family's experiences of prejudice and violence as well as magic and love. Participants in these events who had read Choy's work would recognize their various distances from the common ground being invoked. Put another way, given uptake's bi-directional operation, these events interpreted *The Jade Peony* as they were being interpreted by *The Jade Peony*. I propose that the literary work's disturbance of these events did not simply undo OBOV's attempts to foster civic dialogue, but instead met it in a more complex manner by motivating participants' intersubjective recognition of their differential relationships to the city they call home. The exigence is addressed, but perhaps in ways unforeseen by organizers. In this very local situation, we see that through readers' responsive understandings, literary texts perform social actions unanticipated by the popular canonizing systems that take them up.

Social actions of 2002

After *One Book, One Vancouver*'s inaugural year, the Vancouver Public Library staff was awarded the BC Library Association's Merit Award for Programs and Services for their efforts. They attributed their achievement to “the sense of community engendered by the program” and “its local appeal” (V. P. Library "Receives"). As the circulation, sales, and attendance figures that I cited at the start of this chapter attest, the OBOV genre system succeeded in instantiating a public, fostering a love of reading, and enhancing common ground amongst its participants to increase a “sense of community.” While accomplishing these goals, the program also addressed a social action of *The Jade Peony*

to call attention to the history of how Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Canadians were treated in Canada. Given that popular canonizing genre systems contain neither their genre instances nor their participants, the 2002 circulation of *The Jade Peony* would have sparked intricate genre sequences of private and public texts, some of which may have performed social actions that sought redress.

One Book, One Vancouver 2003 and Stanley Park

Having launched their program with a well recognized author and canonical work that enabled them to build a public, the library next chose a more recent work that was being taken up in multiple canonizing systems, *Stanley Park*. This shift indicates the library's confidence that their new *One Book, One Vancouver* public would continue to grow and a belief that newer works would attract more participants to the book club. The library's 2003 launch release introduces the author and novel as new information to the accumulating common ground of its public:

Timothy Taylor, a former banker, burst onto the literary scene in 2000 when he won the 2000 Journey Prize for short fiction. In 2001, his debut novel *Stanley Park* published by Vintage Canada, a division of Random House of Canada Limited, was short-listed for The Giller Prize, The Rogers Writers Trust Fiction Prize, the BC Book Awards, and the City of Vancouver Book Award. ("Vancouver")

The release makes clear that the work's literary value has been established by both national canonizing systems (The Giller, the Rogers Writers Trust) and those more local to Vancouver (the BC and the City of Vancouver Book Awards). As a canonizing genre, the release links back to the shortlist announcements to draw upon the established symbolic and cultural capital of these prizes and growing symbolic capital of *Stanley Park* itself as a means to advance the reputation of *One Book, One Vancouver* as a book

club that selects literature that readers will enjoy. The release contrives responses—“Oh, I should read that!” or “Yes, I’ve been meaning to read that”—which hopefully motivate readers to participate in the program. Texts produced by library organizers in 2003 were taken up publicly in articles by the *Vancouver Courier*, Simon Fraser University’s *The Peak* (Calhoun), and *The Carnegie Newsletter*: the genre system was achieving the necessary “reflexivity” (Warner 90) to form a public of *One Book, One Vancouver*.

The press release positions *Stanley Park* meta-generically as “a brilliant mix of comedy, social commentary, mystery, and eloquent prose *alive with the places, sights, sounds, and smells of Vancouver*” (“Vancouver” emphasis mine). An uptake text, Freedman explains, has the power to modify the “generic status” of its object (40): the press release modifies the cumulative social actions of these literary genres (“comedy,” “social commentary,” “mystery”) to meet the local ends of OBOV organizers. A text *alive with Vancouver* can be used by the genre system to bring “the book alive” (“2003”) *in Vancouver*. Readers who participated in this shared experience would not only bring *Stanley Park* alive in the private act of reading, as reader response would predict, but also in public acts of reading.

The publics and exigence of Stanley Park

In its second year, the library was more explicit about why it was selecting works set in the city: “By focusing One Book, One Vancouver on local content, the Library is able to celebrate our city’s history, people, and landmarks through the book, and through programs based on the book” (“2003”). The implication is that a love of reading and a sense of community arise from the ways in which literature celebrates, rather than

critiques, “history, people, and landmarks.” And yet organizers’ selection of a work of “social commentary” suggests that library organizers were more complexly motivated than the word “celebrate” might imply.⁵⁰ Taylor’s novel satirizes forces of globalization and capitalism as they impact Vancouver, a city that is “a blaze of activity” with many of its citizens distracted and alienated from the land upon which they live. The novel’s social action of critique is directed to an imagined public that includes but is not limited to Vancouverites.

Taylor’s audience design, as seen in the novel’s opening scene, is for readers with a passing familiarity with Vancouver and its major landmark, Stanley Park, as well as readers who know the city intimately. The work begins: “They arranged to meet at Lost Lagoon. It was an in-between place, the city on one side, Stanley Park on the other” (*Stanley* 3). The proper noun Lost Lagoon assumes an audience who know this place, but the sentence that follows also allows those unfamiliar with this particular locale to determine that the lagoon lies somewhere between the city and the park. Readers soon learn that “They” refers to Jeremy Papier, a “young chef,” and his father “the Professor,” who is an anthropologist: the two have been in “rare contact” (*Stanley* 3) over the past ten years since the death of Jeremy’s mother (*Stanley* 6).

The narrator then describes Stanley Park at dusk, a portrayal that deliberately unsettles some readers’ experience of common ground in a way that recalls *Jook-Liang*’s reference to Canada Day as “the day of shame” (*Jade* 17). Taylor writes,

⁵⁰ Organizers, for instance, later nominated Maggie de Vries’ *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister* for the public vote of OBOV 2004. de Vries’ memoir is about her adopted sister, Sarah, a sex-trade worker and drug addict who was one of the many women who disappeared from the Downtown Eastside during the 1990s. Vancouver Public Library, *One Book, One Vancouver*, 2004, www.vpl.ca, November 9 2004. This uptake illustrates organizers’ willingness to promote literacy through works that did not merely “celebrate” Vancouver, and to foster community through discussions of exigencies that included homelessness, addiction, conditions of sex-trade workers, and violence against women.

Now Jeremy lit a cigarette and watched an erratic stream of homeless people making their way into the forest for the night. When he arrived there had been seawall walkers and hotdog eaters, birdwatchers, rollerbladers, chess players returning from the picnic tables over the bowling greens. Then lagoon traffic changed directions like a freak tide. The flow of those heading back to their warm apartments in the West End tapered to nothing, and the paths were filled with the delusional, the alcoholic, the paranoid, the bipolar. The Professor's subjects, his obsession. The inbound. Four hundred hectares of Stanley Park offering *its bleak, anonymous shelter* to those without other options. (*Stanley* 4 emphasis mine)

In this passage, “its bleak anonymous shelter” is assumed (through definite reference) to be part of readers’ common ground: to those readers for whom this is new information, its addition is discomfoting. We are unused to conceiving of the park as a home for the city’s dispossessed. As Siwash observes in the novel, “The others, the ones on the seawall and in the paths [...] They come, they go, but they are never truly here” (*Stanley* 329).

We sense Jeremy’s unease with Stanley Park’s transformation—paralleling our own—while noting his father’s obsession with the park’s residents. We come to understand through the Professor that these residents, represented by Caruzo, Siwash, and Chladek, do not need to be rescued but heeded: what they have to say ““is something that concerns us all”” (*Stanley* 23). This too is discomfoting, for Vancouver readers in particular and middle-class urban readers in general are used to public appeals for “us” to help the homeless. To grasp the Professor’s belief that Stanley Park’s homeless can help all of us requires readers to understand the park not as a leisure destination but a home.

This lesson about the importance of home is one of the social actions the novel seeks to perform in response to an exigence of globalization. Taylor has described his novel as ““a personal manifestation of globalization”” (Covert), and elsewhere has written, “What interests me, as a writer, is that while some people celebrate the opportunities this new mobility affords, others are concerned with what may be lost in

this friction-free existence” (“Hand”). Taylor captures the tension between mobility and locality metaphorically between Crip and Blood cooking, with the former understood as post-national fusion fare and the latter as food “linked to ‘local,’” a reminder to people of ““what the soil under their feet has to offer”” (*Stanley* 32). Over the course of the novel, Jeremy, a Blood cook, eventually connects his preference for local ingredients to the “larger significance” (*Stanley* 23) of home, which culminates in his subversive Blood “tribute” (*Stanley* 347) to family, friends, and local ingredients at the opening of the Crip palace, Gerriamo’s.

A popular celebration of Stanley Park

As we saw with *The Jade Peony*, library organizers’ public uptake of *Stanley Park* narrows its public to that of Vancouver readers, and focuses on one of its social actions, stressing the importance of home, which coincides with promoting community, while setting aside another, critiquing globalization. In the *One Book, One Vancouver* 2003 launch release, the library interprets the novel as “about authenticity, about how to discern the genuine, both in food and in human relationships” (“Vancouver”). This uptake of the novel advances one reading of Taylor’s work. However, participants who actually read the text would have adopted “active, responsive attitude[s]” (Bakhtin 68) toward the text, interpreting it in other ways, and brought these divergent understandings to the events that celebrated *Stanley Park*.

Many of the genres within the canonizing system were re-instantiated in 2003: author readings (by Taylor himself and others who have written about Stanley Park), walking tours of cross-town (Jeremy’s neighbourhood) and Stanley Park, and a

screenings of the documentary *Stanley Park's Hidden Secrets with Mike McCardell* (V. P. Library "2003").⁵¹ New genres were also taken up by the canonizing system as fitting responses to the 2003 literary selection. Not surprisingly, many of these took place in what the Professor calls the “great locus of civic pride” (*Stanley* 135), Stanley Park. Three fundraiser dinners for the Vancouver Public Library Foundation were held in Dubrulle’s Dining Pavilion in Stanley Park (“Wine”): “One Book, Three Chefs” was a tip of the hat to fictional Blood chefs such as Jeremy, Jules, and Fabrek. In another example, CBC Radio in conjunction with the library presented an “on location” interview with Taylor entitled “Picnic in the Park with *Stanley Park*.” This public uptake shows the ambitious nature of publics: the canonizing picnic was broadcast by the BC-focused *North by Northwest* (CBC “North”) and the national *Sounds like Canada* (V. P. Library “CBC”), and invited people beyond Vancouverites to pay attention to and become members of the *One Book, One Vancouver* public as well as that of Taylor and his text.

While these events celebrated *Stanley Park*, I note that as we saw in events surrounding *The Jade Peony*, they did not enable participants to be, as Siwash puts it, truly “here.” One particularly imaginative event designed to give participants an

⁵¹ The cross-town tours were led by local historian John Atkin, and the tours of the park were organized by the Stanley Park Ecology Society and Vancouver Parks and Recreation. The four walking tours were as follows: first, an exploration of “the forest plants that West Coast First Nations peoples used for food”; second, a discussion of “some of the traditional ways plants and trees were used” by the Coast Salish Peoples; third, a walk down “Stanley Park Memory Lane” to discover the park’s “best-kept secrets”; and fourth, a tour of “the award-winning bio-filtration wetland by Lost Lagoon that treats the storm water discharge from the Stanley Park causeway.” Vancouver Public Library, *2003 One Book, One Vancouver Events*, June 21 2003, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20030621173156/www.vpl.ca/MDC/obov/events.html>, May 05 2001. A public discussion was also held between Taylor and a police sergeant about “The Mystery of the Babes in the Woods,” a narrative strand within the novel that is based on an actual unsolved case from 1953 when the remains of two children were found in Stanley Park. Vancouver Public Library, *Murder, Forgotten Cemeteries, and Buried Treasure: One Book, One Vancouver Takes a Walk on the Dark Side of Stanley Park*, 2003, September 4 2005. As well, the library hosted three public lectures: Peggy Imredy on the history of the park; “Who Were the Very First Dwellers in Stanley Park” by Dr Jean Barman; and “How Were the Totem Poles of Stanley Park Carved & Why” by Vicki Jensen. Library, 2003.

“authentic” experience highlights this. The library held a trivia contest where winners attended an “exclusive” sleepover to experience Stanley Park at night (“Murder”). As the contest details explained, winners were to “build their own shelters out of tarps, ropes, trees, logs and anything they [could] get their hands on”; this supposed simulation of park residents’ experiences was tamed (with no public hint of irony) by the library’s promises that this “overnight adventure” would include “a horse-drawn carriage ride through the trees, a sumptuous candlelight dinner at Prospect Point, a lantern-lit forest walk, music and storytelling by the campfire with Vancouver artists, and a refreshing breakfast” (“Murder”), making the sleepover an adventure of privilege for middle-class readers. I argue, though, that many people who had read *Stanley Park* prior to reading the contest promotion or attending the sleepover noted this ironic and problematic juxtaposition of the coddled guests with the inhabitants of the park. Readers’ responsive understandings of the novel influenced their responses to the sleepover, just as readers’ responsive attitude toward *The Jade Peony* informed their responsive understandings of a walking tour. The ways in which literary works trouble attempts to constrain the interpretive strategies of their readers, I propose, also applies to other literary situations, such as the uptake of a novel in a university lecture hall. Students’ responsive attitudes toward the novel inform their divergent responsive understandings of a lecture. In these rhetorical situations of reading, the contrived social actions of a literary work and the contrived social actions of a canonizing genre (the sleepover or the lecture) produce a dialogic effect.

“Cultivating a culture of reading and discussion”

In taking up *Stanley Park*, the library cultivated “a culture of reading and discussion” (“One”) through a combination of genres whose social action was facilitating conversations about the chosen work (e.g., reading guides, group discussions, author readings) and genres whose social actions aimed to simulate experiences of the novels within their literary settings (for instance, a sleepover in Stanley Park). The following year, library organizers revisited how they were facilitating a culture of shared reading, and changed their genres of participation so that the program fostered dialogue about the selected literary work, *The Corporation*

One Book, One Vancouver 2004 and The Corporation

While the library consistently aimed to promote reading and foster community by bringing “people together around one great book” (“Which”), the reasoning as to how public uptakes of a literary work would address these exigencies shifted significantly in 2004. Rather than designing programs that brought literature “alive” in Vancouver’s neighbourhoods, the library instead stated that *One Book, One Vancouver* aimed to “increase our sense of community by creating a common topic of conversation” (“Which”). The library’s repositioning suggests, for me, a reconsideration of how the genre system’s social action of discussion could further “the love of reading” (“Vancouver”) and a sense of community. Accompanying this revision was a change to how the annually fêted literary work was selected. The library asked members of their *One Book, One Vancouver* public to vote, indicating their confidence that this public now existed. At the same time, the new voting format was also a strategic means to increase their public, generating further public uptakes (e.g., *Straight.com* (Burns), *Carnegie*

Newsletter ("News"), and *The Delta Optimist* (Westell)), which prompted new members to pay attention.

Four literary works vied for public votes: two works of fiction—Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000), and Tim Bowling's *The Paperboy's Winter* (2003)—and two of non-fiction—Bakan's *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (2004) and Maggie de Vries' *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister* (2004). The inclusion of a broader range of genres (as seen in other Canadian One Book programs) is a strategy to attract new members to the book club, those who circulate in other spheres of activity (e.g., business, politics, social advocacy) and other publics (e.g., the public of contemporary corporate corruption, the public of the victims of a serial killer in Vancouver's downtown Eastside). The public could "cast its vote" at a library branch or online ("Asks"). Instead of increasing the public and symbolic capital of just one literary work, the 2004 vote increased the public and capital of all authors and works.

When Bakan's *The Corporation* was announced as the 2004 winner of *One Book, One Vancouver*, a library release proclaimed, "The votes are in and the people of Vancouver have chosen" ("Public"). Canonical agency is attributed not to the specific individuals who voted, but to all Vancouverites, an attribution that further positioned the program as "a book club for the entire city." City Librarian Paul Whitney explained the rationale behind the vote: "By giving people a chance to decide which book they want to explore and discuss, we hope to encourage even more people to read and participate in *One Book, One Vancouver*. Inviting public participation in the process will raise awareness and create more interest in the program" ("Asks"). If community is fostered

through conversation, then through this new format the canonizing system encouraged two sets of dialogue: the first about which text to choose, and the second about the winning title. While readers in OBOV 2002 and 2003 participated in canonical processes through their diverse uptakes of *The Jade Peony* and *Stanley Park*, the 2004 vote enabled readers to participate in literary selection itself, albeit from a predetermined pool of four works.

The 2004 winner announcement introduces the author of *The Corporation* to its imagined public as a Vancouver resident with substantial symbolic capital in the legal sphere: “Joel Bakan is professor of law at the University of British Columbia. A Rhodes Scholar and former law clerk to Chief Justice Brian Dickson of the Supreme Court of Canada, he holds law degrees from Oxford, Harvard and Dalhousie Universities”

("Public"). To profile the work, the library adapted its jacket copy:

The winning choice [...] is a brilliantly argued account of the corporation’s pathological pursuit of power. [...], Bakan contends that the corporation is created by law to function much like a psychopathic personality whose destructive behavior, if left unchecked, leads to scandal and ruin. Despite the structural failings found in today’s corporations, Bakan believes change is possible and outlines an extensive program of concrete, practical, and realistic reforms through legal regulation and democratic control. ("Public")

This summary posits an exigence of unchecked corporate power and presents the social actions of Bakan’s work as accounting for and criticizing the corporation’s “pathological pursuit of power” and outlining a program of reform. The release explains how the book is “the basis for the highly acclaimed, award-winning documentary film *The Corporation*,” and (citing the text’s promotional material once again) its inclusion of “in-depth interviews with such wide-ranging figures as CEO Hank McKinnell of Pfizer, Nobel Prize-winner Milton Friedman, business guru Peter Drucker, and critic Noam

Chomsky” (“Public”). In comparison to *The Jade Peony* and *Stanley Park* whose symbolic capital was signified publicly through their canonizing uptakes by literary prizes, *The Corporation*’s symbolic capital is drawn from Bakan himself, his interviewees, and the documentary, written by Bakan and co-directed by Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott (Achbar and Abbott).

The impact of the documentary on the 2004 voting results cannot be underestimated. Readers’ selection of Bakan’s account of unchecked corporate power is a significant departure from Choy and Taylor’s novels. The win could be read as a progression from *Stanley Park* and its concern with international corporations in a *kairos* of globalization, represented by the business maven Dante Beale and his chain of Inferno coffee shops: voters who were part of the 2003 public may have wanted to continue conversations about local effects of corporate greed. A more probable explanation is that Bakan’s text won because the enormous publicity surrounding the documentary had already called forth a public for *The Corporation* that far surpassed the established publics for the other three works.⁵² When the first press release featuring the 2004 shortlist circulated in March, *The Corporation*’s win seemed assured, despite the library’s public update announcing that the four titles were “running neck and neck” in mid-March (“Which”).

The publics and exigence of The Corporation

⁵² Prior to the voting period from March 15 and April 15, 2004, the documentary premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2003 and one month later at the Vancouver International Film Festival, and then opened in Canadian theatres in January 2004 to sold-out audiences. As Vancouver film critic Katherine Monk observed, “The Corporation has been riding a wave of great buzz and good vibes that can make a film-maker drool.” Katherine Monk, “The Corporation as ‘Psychopath,’” *Vancouver Sun* October 4 2003. The film set sales records for both Canadian indie and documentary films. Ken Eisner, “Corporation Taxis, Lifts Off Triumphantly,” 2004, May 17 2005.

As in previous years, the selection of a new work introduced new exigencies into the *One Book, One Vancouver* genre system. As the library's summary of *The Corporation* indicates, the book's desired social actions are threefold: to understand, critique, and suggest reforms to the corporation as an institution. Bakan imagines a public that includes "the lay reader and the professional" who are interested in the corporation, defined as "the large Anglo-American publicly traded business corporation, as opposed to small incorporated business, or small and large not-for-profit or privately owned ones" (3).⁵³ He emphasizes that while his focus is the Anglo-American corporation, his argument is not restricted to an Anglo-American readership:

the world's largest and most powerful corporations are based in the United States, and economic globalization has extended their influence beyond national borders. Elements of the Anglo-American model also increasingly shape its counterparts in other countries, especially in European nations and Japan. For these reasons, the analyses and arguments presented in this book have important implications for the rest of the world. (3)

Vancouver readers, while never addressed in the text as a distinct public, can see local effects of global corporate power in two of Bakan's personal anecdotes: the first when a prominent Kia sponsorship overshadows his visit to the Vancouver Children's Festival with his son (118-19) and the second when he attempts unsuccessfully to protect students' civil rights during their protest of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit at the University of British Columbia (140). In ways that would vary amongst Vancouver readers, textual encounters with these incidents would invoke experiences of common ground (e.g., those who know this annual festival and those who have also seen its corporate sponsors' displays; those who know this university and those familiar or intimate with the APEC protests). By emphasizing the local impacts of

⁵³ Because Bakan (unlike Choy and Taylor) explicitly outlines his imagined public, I report it here rather than conducting a close reading of his audience design.

corporations for its imagined public, the work orients itself to uptakes that will meet an exigence of international corporate power.

A forum for readers of The Corporation

In keeping with the library's renewed focus on the social action of stimulating discussion, *One Book, One Vancouver* was reconceived as a forum for discussion rather than a program of activities. “*The Corporation* is a stimulating read and will provide opportunities for some fascinating dialogue,” said Whitney, “We're excited to be able to provide a forum for exploration of some of these very current issues” (“Public”). Here the library's uptake confirms the generic status of Bakan's work in its urgent call for people to discuss its “very current issues.” Organizers' heightened focus on discussion reappeared on the homepage for *One Book, One Vancouver*, where an introduction to Bakan's book was prefaced by the following:

Self-serving. Greedy. Amoral. Is this today's corporation?

Some say, if left unchecked, corporations are greedy monsters that can swallow civilization. Others have a much more optimistic view of the corporation's role. What do you think? (“One”)

Here, organizers publicly modify a social action of *The Corporation*, taking it up as an invitation to discuss both negative *and* “optimistic” views of the institution, rather than an invitation to discuss how to change an institution that is, in Bakan's account, fundamentally self-serving, greedy, and amoral. Readers are invited to discuss issues within the text and also to evaluate its overall argument. While *The Corporation's* orientation towards uptakes of discussion doubtless contributed to this major shift within *One Book, One Vancouver* to re-prioritize dialogue about (over celebrations of) the text, I

suggest that readers' previous instantiations of the genres surrounding *The Jade Peony* and *Stanley Park* also changed how organizers viewed the city's book club.

Many events "held in appreciation of the book" enlisted genres already familiar to us: facilitated book discussions, walking tours (this time "through Vancouver's downtown core"), online discussion board threads, an author interview (broadcast on CBC Radio's *BC Almanac*), and an author appearance ("2004 One"). I highlight one event to illustrate the library's heightened emphasis on the social action of dialogue. The VPL hosted "Can We Do It Better? A Panel Discussion On The Future of The Corporation," which featured three local business people: Nick Geer, "past President and CEO of ICBC & former Pattison Group Executive," Deb Abbey, "CEO of Real Assets Investment Management," and Ben West, "Board Member of the Aurora Institute" ("2004 One"). These panelists illustrate how the genre system's uptake of *The Corporation* attracted new participants and met new exigencies of the business sphere, as seen in the questions that the panel and its audience addressed: "How can we shape the future of tomorrow's corporations? What alternatives do we have? What role can corporations play in our society?" ("2004 One"). The library uses "we" and "our" to emphasize participants' agency to take up the text beyond the confines of the panel discussion in ways that may impact the exigence of corporate reform. This is similar to how *One Book, One Vancouver* participants hold the potential to meet Choy's exigence of the historical treatment of Chinese immigrants and Chinese-Canadians, or Taylor's exigence to counter the local effects of globalization.

Reluctant readers

Although the social actions of *One Book, One Vancouver*'s third year, in my mind, acknowledged and encouraged reader agency more than the celebrations of *The Jade Peony* and *Stanley Park*, readers themselves did not respond favourably to the uptake of Bakan's work. The final 2004 circulation figure of nearly 3,000 was substantially less than the 7,000 circulation figure of both preceding years ("Thank"). Perhaps people watched the documentary instead and came to OBOV events, as the event attendance figure of over 2,000 people was similar to that of 2002; however, if this was the case, then an exigence to promote reading was not met.⁵⁴

An indication of why the circulation figures of *The Corporation* were low may be found in a text that organizers posted to the *One Book, One Vancouver* website near the end of the 2004 season: "Why Read *The Corporation*? Confessions of a reluctant reader" by "Former reluctant reader, Sharon Lou Hing" (Lou Hing). Lou Hing addresses those who, like her, resist reading a book about the "business world" (that is, a sphere that is unfamiliar) or "tackling a subject" that seems "boring" (in genre terms, a work addressing exigencies that fail to motivate you as a reader)⁵⁵ She encourages others to "pick up a copy at your trusty library, and give it a read. You may be pleasantly surprised" (Lou Hing). I suggest that this "confession" was a response by library organizers to various feedback they received from former OBOV participants and hesitant newcomers. Opening up the canon to include more diverse works is a means to invite new people to join the public, but it also risks the possibility of losing current public members.

⁵⁴ Event attendance figures for 2003 are not publicly available. No sales figures are provided for *One Book, One Vancouver* 2004, presumably because the impact of OBOV on sales cannot be separated from overall sales of *The Corporation*, which was also published in 2004.

⁵⁵ She explains her new appreciation of *The Corporation* as a work that altered her perception of her daily activities: "The car I drive; my all time favourite pastime, hockey; and even the water I drink – for good or for bad, corporations are a huge part of our lives and to know how they impact us is more important than I had first thought."

Conclusion

The results of 2004 reflect the impossible challenge the Vancouver Public Library has set for itself in selecting one work to appeal to such a broadly imagined reading public. The relatively poor outcome of 2004 might offer one explanation as to why in 2005 the library again selected a fictional work set in Vancouver: Kogawa's *Obasan*. And yet today, the *One Book, One Vancouver* canon reflects varied literary tastes, encompassing both fiction and non-fiction works by Vancouver authors that are sometimes set in the city and other times are not. While the literary selections vary from year to year, the library's vision does not: the encouragement of reading and community dialogue through shared reading practices. And it falls to readers to decide from year to year to what degree they are willing to pay attention to this public book club and participate in its canonical processes.

Applying Freedman's work to the dynamic between literary and canonizing genre instances we see in *One Book, One Vancouver*, I contend that readers are not uniformly motivated by public texts produced by library organizers, as *One Book* critics would have it. Uptake explains the textual interplay between a walking tour of Chinatown and *The Jade Peony* or a literary picnic and *Stanley Park*. In the rhetorical situation of a *One Book* event, readers interpret the canonizing genre as an interpretant of the literary text. Then, based on their own responsive understanding to the literary work (that is, how they perceive its status as a genre), readers estimate the extent to which this interpretant conforms, modifies, or rejects the generic status of the literary work. This estimation, distinct to each reader, then motivates uptakes of an event: for example, one reader might ask Choy over dim sum for his views regarding what constitutes fair government

compensation, and another might ask the guide of a walking tour to show her the office locations of global corporations.

The ways in which this canonizing genre system accommodates divergent responses is put in sharp focus when we reflect on how many readers participate in *One Book, One Vancouver*. While it is difficult to compare statistics over the three years, more than 13,000 people participated in the 2003 program alone. These numbers indicate that the growing canon was not called forth by library organizers alone, but also instantiated through the many uptakes of readers. As a result, the canon of this public book club is not a discursive space of coercion produced by the library in collusion with capitalist forces, but a discursive space of contest constructed by multiple parties, including readers.

CHAPTER THREE: CANONICAL SELECTION BY THE CELEBRITY

READERS OF *CANADA READS*

“How on earth did they pick that book?”

If, as I am arguing, contemporary canons are discursive spaces comprised of publicly circulating literary texts and talk about these texts, then how are literary works selected to be canonized? In this chapter I ask what motivates public readers to select a particular literary work within a canonizing rhetorical situation. This selection process is typically private in One Book programs, where the chosen work is usually determined by staff or a selection committee, and purposefully mysterious in most literary prizes, where the deliberations of esteemed judges take place far from the curious gaze of the media and public. But in *Canada Reads*, CBC Radio One’s annual celebrity debate over five Canadian literary works, the canonical processes of literary selection are put on public display. As Zsuzsi Gartner, writer and former *Canada Reads* panelist, wryly observes,

The ranking of fiction is a mug’s game – ask any Governor General’s or Giller Prize jury. Stories of squabbling and compromise are legendary and yet the jurors are largely unaccountable. They deliberate behind closed doors and maintain a Masonic secrecy, unlike the Brits who relish a good bun fight after each Booker Prize announcement, with judges breaking ranks to voice their unhappiness. The very public cut and thrust of *Canada Reads* is an anomaly in this country.

In a similar vein, journalist Brian Bethune suggests that part of *Canada Reads*’ charm is that it “shed[s] light on the notoriously murky world of literary prizes” by answering the “oft-asked question: how on earth did they pick that book?” (52). To restate: how are Canadian literary works canonized? I pursue this “oft-asked question” through a genre analysis of *Canada Reads*, comparing the 2005 celebrity panel’s literary selection of

Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound* to the 2006 panel's selection of Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*.

I argue that when presented with a broad exigence from the CBC, choose a book for Canadians to read, the celebrity readers debate more specific exigencies, which motivate their final literary selection. These exigencies arise from how panelists within this canonizing situation perceive *kairos* as a "rhetorical void" (Miller "Opportunity" 84) that a literary work can help fill, and how they interpret the competing literary works' social actions and symbolic capital in relation to this *kairos*. Panelists' shared sense that, to paraphrase Giltrow, a certain kind of literary work should be read by Canadians *now* determines which of the competing titles is, in Bitzer's terms, the most "fitting response" for that particular year. This selection process takes place in both 2005 and 2006, and, I contend, all years of this broadcast debate. While the selection process is consistent from year to year, the results are contingent: within the constraints of this system of canonizing genres, celebrity readers hold agency in the literary works they promote, the interpretive strategies they engage, and the *kairos* they articulate, all of which influence the annual outcome. In 2005 an exigence for a non-canonical author was combined with an exigence for a work of "hope," which motivated the panel to select Day's *Rockbound* over runner-up *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. And in 2006, a canonical exigence for comedy was combined with an exigence to reflect upon the contemporary social and political effects of fundamentalist religions to prompt the panel to select Toews' *A Complicated Kindness* over Al Purdy's poetry collection *Rooms for Rent in the Outer Planets*.

Panelists' talk of exigence, as I show, is a salient meta-generic activity that surrounds the *Canada Reads* debates and motivates literary selection. From a genre

perspective, these explicit public discussions of exigence are surprising, given that exigence in other rhetorical situations is often tacit, an intersubjective recognition of a social motive that is implied rather than discussed. I posit that meta-generic debates over exigence are characteristic of all canonizing genre systems where the process of literary selection is collective rather than individual, such as One Book programs, literary prizes, reading lists for co-taught courses, and co-edited anthologies. I argue that rather than approaching canonical selection in these rhetorical situations as either “objective” or “subjective,” canonical selection is “motivated.” The commonplace canonical exigencies to choose the “best” or most “representative” literary work are too broad to account for people’s motivations to select one particular literary work over another. In order for canonical agents to move from a recognition that something should be done in a canonizing situation (choose a book) to a feeling that *they* should—and can—do it, they put forward and debate more specific exigencies that motivate them rhetorically. Adding to the complexity of canonical situations, people engaged in collaborative literary selection are aware that they are choosing a literary work or works on behalf of others. Their canonizing text (whether a winner’s announcement or an anthology) solicits a range of uptakes from their imagined public to confirm its contrived social actions (such as promoting nationalism or “marginal” literary voices). Accordingly, members of a selection committee construe the social action(s) of their chosen literary work as soliciting a similar range of uptakes, generating genre sequences of responsive understandings that will press upon the exigencies that motivated their literary selection. *Canada Reads* offers us a peek behind “closed doors” to study the motivations of its celebrity canon-makers.

Canada Reads is a “book brawl” (“Will”) launched in 2002 and fashioned after a popular reality TV show, *Survivor*: during the week-long show, five Canadian celebrities each champion a literary work for Canadians to read, and over the course of a five-day debate, they vote books off until only one remains, the sole “survivor,” the book that Canada reads. The Canadian panelists are typically famous in spheres other than the literary; their literary talk is presented as representative of other readers interested in Canadian literature. The genres of this canonizing system have called forth a substantial public of Canadian readers willing to take an interest in Canadian literature, and instantiated a canon that includes the following winning texts: Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of the Lion* (2002) (*Skin*); Hubert Aquin’s *Prochain Épisode* (2003); Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *The Last Crossing* (2004) (*Last*); Frank Parker Day’s *Rockbound* (2005); Miriam Toews’ *A Complicated Kindness* (2006); Heather O’Neill’s *Lullabies for Little Criminals* (2007); Paul Quarrington’s *King Leary* (2008); Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes* (2009); and Nicolas Dickner’s *Nikolski* (2010). Six years ago Laura Moss called for those of us working “on or in” Canadian literature to pay attention to *Canada Reads*; she argued that it was “quickly becoming one of the most important prizes in Canadian literature,” adding, “It may not be high on prestige, but the economic and cultural spin-off is enormous” (“Canada” 7-8). By way of example, *The Toronto Star* reported that 80,000 additional copies of *In the Skin of a Lion* sold in 2002 as compared to 2001 (Stoffman), and *Rockbound*, which had been selling approximately 200 copies per year, has sold over 25,000 copies since *Canada Reads 2005* (“Rockbound”).⁵⁶

Today, most people who write, critique, or read Canadian literature would attest to the literary program’s cultural and economic power, but the “prestige” of “the

⁵⁶ For additional sales figures related to *Canada Reads*, see Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, “Reading,” 27.

notorious ‘Canada Reads’ contest,” as Cynthia Sugars has called it (“Postcolonial” 17), remains low amongst many of those in the professional literary sphere. This is partly because the radio program is self-styled as an irreverent and enjoyable “game” (as the original host Mary Walsh described it in 2002) played by celebrity readers, and partly because some professional readers are discomforted, amused, or offended that celebrities’ literary judgments—more so than our own—inform contemporary public impressions of Canadian literature.⁵⁷ For instance, Russell Smith of *The Globe and Mail* contends, “If it were really about literary values it wouldn’t involve actors and singers.” Significant to my study of public readers and canonicity, I highlight that within Smith’s explicit protest of the incursion of celebrity culture into the Canadian literary sphere lies an implicit dismissal of readers in discussions of “literary value.”

Feelings of unease, titillation, and disgust over celebrity readers are not groundless: sometimes panelists have not read all the books being debated, as Molly Johnson confessed in 2005 (CBC “2005: Day 5”); sometimes they vote “Survivor-like” against a work they enjoyed to advance their own interests, as Glen Murray did in 2004 (Walker); and sometimes, as Moss argues, they “celebrate” or “damn” a work without engaging it in depth (“Canada”). Many critics also respond to the jury’s assigned task of selecting one book that will foster nationalism through a shared reading experience as either naïve or culturally irresponsible. These critical uptakes were (perhaps) unwittingly invited by CBC Radio, who initially posited the show’s exigence in 2002 as a moral

⁵⁷ Moss reflects on why she is “a bit uneasy about the game” of *Canada Reads*. Moss, “Canada,” 7. Journalist and novelist Kate Taylor notes sardonically, “this contest to recommend reading material for the whole country is not being decided by the ivory tower or the newsroom cabal.” Kate Taylor, “Cultural Contests out of Control,” *The Globe and Mail* 2005. And Fuller experienced her colleagues’ amusement over *Canada Reads* at the 2005 *TransCanada* conference, which I also experienced in 2009 at the 50th anniversary gala for *Canadian Literature*. Fuller, “Listening,” 11.

imperative—choose “the title all Canadians should read” (“CR 2002: Is”)—that understandably did not sit well with those who have dedicated their careers to the plurality of Canadian literature. In 2003, the CBC dropped the “should,” but its initial presence continues to shape many professional and popular responses to the program.⁵⁸ Aritha van Herk charged *Canada Reads* with “reducing the whole rainbow of Canadian Literature to Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*” (qtd in Fuller “Listening” 11-12). Smith, noting *Canada Reads*’ ties to both the Oprah Book Club craze and the One Book phenomenon, opined, “I don’t think these things encourage a love of literature, they encourage patriotism,” with citizens motivated to read the annual selection by an exigence of nationalism. Rather than performing one social action or the other, the genre system of *Canada Reads*, similar to those of One Book programs, contrives to do both: encourage “a love of literature” and “patriotism.”⁵⁹

Much of the criticism of *Canada Reads* stems from how celebrity readers’ talk about literature often differs from the commentary cultivated and prized by many professional and academic critics in the literary sphere. Vanderhaeghe found this marked difference refreshing: “One of the things that I have found particularly appealing is the passionate and amusing way the books are discussed. If you’re in the ‘book business’ you rarely hear that kind of talk” (qtd in Stoffman). But other critics are less amused. Taylor disapproves of celebrities’ frequently expressed “notion that artistic value lies mainly in our personal interaction with art”: she implies that readers who value their personal

⁵⁸ For example, the Wikipedia entry for Paul Quarrington who won in *Canada Reads 2008* currently reads “*King Lear* was named the book that everyone in the nation *should* read” (emphasis mine). *Paul Quarrington*, March 29 2010 2010, Wikipedia.org, Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Quarrington, March 30 2010.

⁵⁹ In keeping with its social actions to encourage people to read and discuss literature, *Canada Reads* also supports an exigence of literacy by asking the shortlisted publishers to donate books to libraries and the winning publisher to make a “financial donation to a national adult literacy organization” CBC, *Canada Reads 2010*, 2010, CBC.ca, Available: <http://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/>, March 30 2010.

connections and responses to a literary work are not ‘properly’ motivated to meet exigencies that she perceives are important. Listening to the first day of the inaugural 2002 debate, Smaro Kamboureli found celebrity readers’ “process of elimination to be as whimsical and arbitrary as the rules of Ondaatje’s *Elimination Dance*” (36; *Elimination*). Readers’ motivations fail to meet literary exigencies that Kamboureli perceives and values. My comparison of the 2005 and 2006 *Canada Reads* debates shows that panelists’ process of elimination and selection is far from “arbitrary” or impulsive. As genre theory would predict, in the rhetorical situation of the *Canada Reads* debate, the celebrities’ situated talk about literature is motivated. This finding is significant, for if we approach all evaluative talk about literature as motivated, then we may move beyond a critical stance that some literary talk is more meaningful than others, a stance that can limit what we consider to be the proper concern of Canadian literary studies. To present my argument, I first place *Canada Reads* in a history of CBC Radio’s uptake of Canadian literature, then examine the public and canon of this genre system, and lastly analyze the rhetorical situation of the 2005 brawl and compare it to that of 2006.

CBC Radio, Canadian literature, and Canada Reads

The popular *Canada Reads* program is a descendent of a long tradition of CBC Radio’s engagement with Canadian literature. As Sheila Latham observes, “CBC Radio has contributed to the history of book production and reception in Canada by encouraging and developing writers, commissioning works, editing texts, publishing and promoting books and reading, and adapting books for radio audiences.” During the 2006 debate, Susan Musgrave reinforces this, crediting her reputation as a poet and that of many other

poets to the national broadcaster, and claiming “the CBC creates Canada” (“2006: Day 4”). CBC Radio’s canonizing activities perform two prominent social actions: first, (as Musgrave alludes) foster nationalism through the shared reading of cultural texts, and second, promote a love of reading amongst the nation’s citizens. These social actions fall within the CBC’s mandate (as expressed in the 1991 Broadcasting Act) to “contribute to shared national consciousness and identity” (“Mandate”), and to many, these are laudable aims: 2006 panelist Maureen McTeer returned to Musgrave’s discussion of “the role of the CBC in Canada, writ large” to thank *Canada Reads* host Bill Richardson: “you do us all a service when you do this kind of thing” (“2006: Day 5”).

Responding to the success of *Canada Reads 2002*, Adrian Mills, CBC Radio's executive director of Programming, declared: “It’s a prime example of the type of programming CBC Radio is committed to producing: innovative, entertaining and significantly relevant to Canadian society. No other radio broadcaster would have been able to achieve on a national level what we have done with this project” (CBC “Due”). Mills’ claim is founded in part on the success of past CBC Radio One engagements with Canadian literature.⁶⁰ This history begins with the 1928 Aird Commission, which was charged “to define the organization and regulation of Canadian broadcasting” (De Souza 927) in response to two main concerns: first, private stations were being established by a religious group that was later named Jehovah’s Witnesses, and second, American programs dominated Canadian airwaves. The resulting Aird Commission Report recommended a national broadcasting system be established for ““fostering a national spirit and interpreting national citizenship”” (New 145): the Commission sought control

⁶⁰ For a useful summary of this history with an emphasis on changes to “program format and coverage of Canadian writing” over the past 60 years, see Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, “Reading,” 17-18.

over who was imagining publics and what kinds of publics were being imagined. The CBC was subsequently established in 1936 alongside its French-Canadian counterpart Radio-Canada to imagine the nation through the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural texts via radio. Its success later prompted Frye to observe, “The CBC is one of the major defenses behind which a Canadian culture can survive” (qtd in Fink 930).

During the 1940s and 1950s, the “golden age” of Canadian radio broadcasting, CBC Radio “was the largest publisher of Canadian writing, with a cultural monopoly in literary talent and national audiences that numbered in the millions” (De Souza 927), and a powerful agent in the canonization of Canadian literature.⁶¹ Robert Weaver, who joined the CBC in 1948, was responsible for much of this programming, and also launched the *CBC Literary Awards* (1979-present) to foster Canadian literary talent in categories that have included poetry, short story, essay, radio drama, and children’s stories.⁶² These awards illustrate the CBC’s history of employing prizes to encourage the writing and reading of Canadian literature: the *CBC Literary Awards* supports the former, while *Canada Reads* promotes the latter. De Souza documents the diminishing of the role that CBC Radio played in the selection, circulation, and evaluation of Canadian literature, brought about by the 1951 “Massey Report” by the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, which redefined “the relation between radio and literature” through its successful recommendation of a national television

⁶¹ G. De Souza provides examples, which include *Canadian Short Stories* (first aired in 1946), featuring “readings” by both new and established writers; *CBC Wednesday Night* (1947-63), including “literary talks,” “poetry,” “short stories,” and radio “adaptations”; *CBC Stage* (1944-79) with “adaptations” of Canadian fiction (classic and contemporary); and the *Jake & the Kid* radio series (1950-56) of W. O. Mitchell’s “sketches.” G. De Souza, “Radio and Literature,” *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, ed. W.H. New (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 927-28.

⁶² For a history of the Awards, see CBC Radio-Canada, *CBC Literary Awards - About the Awards*, 2005, CBC, Available: www.radio-canada.ca/prizlitteraires/english/history.shtml, August 8 2005. As of 2001, the CBC has combined its French and English-language competitions to form the CBC Literary Awards/Prix littéraires Radio-Canada. Radio-Canada, *CBC Literary*.

service and national funding council. He describes how CBC Television, launched in 1952, drew financial resources, literary talent, and literary publics away from CBC Radio, and how the Canada Council, formed in 1957, assumed responsibility for patronage of the literary arts (929).

Despite these changes, CBC Radio remained a significant canonizing agent in its promotion of Canadian literature as a means to strengthen Canadian identity.⁶³ CBC President and CEO Robert Rabinovich, in a 2002 interview (the year *Canada Reads* first aired), identified an exigence of “foreign programming” that needed to be met with “culturally relevant” discourse delivered by the CBC:

‘Today, we live in an interactive, multichannel, specialized broadcasting universe where foreign programming makes up a growing portion of what’s available to Canadians. This new reality raises a critically important question—*how do we protect Canadian identity* in the face of such a bombardment of foreign images and foreign perspectives?’

Clearly, the answer lies in ensuring Canadians have a ‘Canadian public broadcasting space’—a space where *culturally relevant* information, entertainment and learning is possible. A strong and vibrant CBC/Radio-Canada can deliver just that.’ (ACS emphasis mine)

While the “bombardment” particulars have changed since the Aird and Massey Report (“foreign” texts arriving from farther-flung places, circulating through increasingly diverse channels), the CBC’s response to this assault has not: “protect Canadian identity” through “culturally relevant” texts, including literature. In addition to *Canada Reads*, there are currently two national radio programs dedicated to Canadian literature: *Between the Covers*, which serializes Canadian novels and short stories (including the *Canada Reads* contenders), and Shelagh Rogers’ *The Next Chapter*, which features interviews

⁶³ Other prominent programs included *Anthology* (1954-85), a literary magazine featuring talks, poetry, and short stories, and *Our Native Land*, originally titled *Indian Magazine* (1964-85), the first weekly program dedicated to Native issues that imagined a national public and featured “storytelling,” “legends,” and “literary readings.” *Ideas* (1965-present) first launched by Phyllis Webb and Bill Young continues to feature Canadian literature. De Souza, “Radio,” 929-30.

with “Canada’s now and future literary stars.” These programs are now also available online as podcasts, digital audio programs, which enables them to circulate beyond ‘real time’ and therefore reach broader publics (CBC "Books"). *Canada Reads*, also now available as a podcast (CBC "CR Podcast"), is the third program on CBC Radio One for listeners interested in Canadian literature.

At the same time *Canada Reads*, as a discursive strategy, is a significant departure from previous CBC literary program in its deliberate popular appeal to a new generation of CBC listeners. When the show launched in 2002, the recurring exigencies of nationalism and encouraging reading were combined with a more situated exigence to solicit a broader public for CBC Radio. The conception and launch of *Canada Reads* coincided with the release of CBC Radio Three in 2000 and its web-based counterpart in 2002, which Rabinovitch described as “interactive internet-based programming for youth” (ACS). This effort to expand CBC Radio’s public to younger people may also be found in non-literary programming that pokes fun at the stereotype of “serious” public broadcasting, such as the 2002 renaming of CBC Radio One’s pop-culture show from *Brand-X* to *DNTO* (Definitely Not the Opera). The annual debate resists being type-cast as an overly earnest attempt to “enlighten” Canadians (CBC "Mandate"), as illustrated by its recruitment of ‘hip’ judges like then-*Barenaked Ladies* lead singer Steven Page and *Blue Rodeo*’s Jim Cuddy, and its tribute to the pop-culture phenomenon *Survivor*. This CBS series, which debuted in 2000, was enormously popular during the inception of *Canada Reads*.

Survivor was a citable moment in the history of North American popular culture, particularly for the younger generation of adults that the CBC was soliciting. In *Survivor*,

contestants stranded in a remote setting vote one person off until only one remains, the sole survivor. In the early years of this series, these locales were islands, and it became commonplace for many people to joke that someone was “so off this island” if they made a mistake in a social setting. Within this historical moment, the creators of *Canada Reads* were motivated to take up the vast chains of public uptakes spawned by this show, instantiating the public of *Survivor* as a means to constitute a public of its own. The generic ties between the CBC’s “competitive quest” and the American TV hit were discernable in the 2002 launch announcement’s description of how “[d]ay by day” panelists “vote a book off the list until only one remains” (CLA).⁶⁴ The success of *Survivor* lies in the scheming, sometimes scandalous public process of determining a winner more than the final fêting of a champion, which, I argue, is also the case with *Canada Reads*. Indeed, the show has been billed as a “battle of the books” (“2004: Day 2”), a “literary rumble” (“2006: Day 4”) and “a good title fight” (“CR 2010”). As the show’s creator and former executive producer Talin Vartanian said unabashedly, ““We don’t pretend to be highbrow”” (Caldwell).⁶⁵ *Canada Reads* illustrates how canons are conjured by uptakes that meet situated exigencies such as, in this case, nationalism, love of reading, and a younger listenership. At the same time, as I have argued in Chapter Two

⁶⁴ The CBC responded to the popularity of this antecedent genre (and the ongoing success of the *Survivor* series) by heightening its generic ties in later seasons. In the 2005 launch release, for instance, the CBC wrote that panelists will be “asked to vote one title ‘off the island’ until only one book remains.” CBC, “Will the Truth Be Stranger Than Fiction? Canada Reads 2005 - Feb. 21 to 25,” February 8 2005. These ties are then reinforced in the popular press where, for instance, a 2004 headline read, “How CBC spun sexy, Survivor book series; Most effective selling tool since Gzowski,” a reference to the late Peter Gzowski’s ongoing promotion of Canadian literature as CBC Radio host of *Morningside* (1982-97). Judy Stoffman, “How CBC Spun Sexy, Survivor Book Series; Most Effective Selling Tool since Gzowski. Blue Rodeo Singer Picks National Winner,” *The Toronto Star* February 31 2004.

⁶⁵ Rehberg Sedo demonstrates how the recognized prestige of a mass-reading event is relative to other events in the literary sphere. In her comparison of *Canada Reads* to the United Kingdom’s *Richard & Judy’s Book Club*, she argues, based on “listeners’ interactions” with the programs, that the two “work differently to create and maintain cultural taste hierarchies. At a very basic level, ‘Richard & Judy’ can be classified as popular culture and ‘Canada Reads’ as high culture.” Rehberg Sedo, “‘Richard,’” 191.

and demonstrate in Chapter Four, public literary talk that circulates within canons' discursive spaces *also* addresses a wider array of social motives, including those exigencies that canonizing genre systems do not foresee.

From its inception, the CBC has positioned *Canada Reads* as more entertaining than educational. In their 2002 launch release, the senior producer at the time, Peter Kavanagh noted, "Of course, the biggest question is the one we can't answer yet: 'What's the book?' Well, there isn't a perfect book and there isn't a perfect way to pick the right book, but we've come up with a plan that is fun, engaging and more than a little bit surprising." He explained that *Canada Reads*, as an adaptation of the One Book programs, was "the first time [it had] been tried for an entire country" (CLA). From a genre standpoint, one marked difference between One Book programs and *Canada Reads* is between the "common purpose" (Devitt 56) of the genre systems: in One Book programs, as I show in Chapter Two, genres are assembled to discuss a book, whereas in *Canada Reads*, genres work together to pick a book. Another related difference is that the One Book programs I have surveyed do not publicly question their social motive, but the CBC immediately and deliberately undermined its exigence, choose a book for the nation, by asking, "*IS IT POSSIBLE TO FIND A SINGLE BOOK THAT CAPTURES THE IMAGINATION OF AN ENTIRE COUNTRY?*" (CLA; CBC "CR 2002": "Is").

The press release conjures the nation as multiregional, multilingual, multicultural, and multiracial—impossible to capture in a single work of literature—while simultaneously imagining a public who will take up this quest, connecting Canadians through the process of debating the merits of the selection process and the literary texts more so than through the shared reading of a winning title. As Kavanagh explained in an

interview, “If people want to disagree with the shortlist or with the winner, we’re perfectly comfortable with that. [...] One of the things we wanted to explore was whether there even was a book that all of Canada should read” (Errett). This sentiment continues to permeate *Canada Reads*, as expressed on the 2010 program website: “We don’t expect you to love every title on our short list, any more than we expect the panelists to love them all. Books are a matter of personal taste, and each one has its detractors and its fans” (CBC “CR 2010: FAQ”). Public genres instantiated by the *Canada Reads* staff and panelists turn to their listeners for a range of uptakes that include those of disagreement. This *intentional* strategic impossibility of *Canada Reads*—annually reinforced by its host and organizers—has been routinely misunderstood or not taken into account by many critics and (often) some panelists.⁶⁶ These foundational social actions of dissent are central to my analysis of the genre system of *Canada Reads*: it constitutes shared reading as a process that necessarily includes disagreements over what to read, how to read, and why we read, which work is better and on what grounds, and why one work is more appropriate than another for a given historical moment. I argue that this radio broadcast, to return to Bethune, “sheds light” on the contentious character of all contemporary canons. That said, the *heightened* controversy that I document in this chapter is distinct to *Canada Reads*.

Meta-generic talk generated by the *Canada Reads* team, host, and panelists repeatedly typify the main public genre that canonizes Canadian literature (the five-day

⁶⁶ During the five days of debate, some panelists become so impassioned about their selection that they champion it as though it is the only one in contention worth reading, as Donna Morrissey does in 2005 and Nelofer Pazira in 2006; other celebrities like both John K. Samson and Maureen McTeer in 2006 continually remind their fellow contestants and imagined public how impossible and even unnecessary the assigned task is of selecting one book.

debate) as a “brawl,” characterized by unruly arguments that are not resolved, rather than a “debate,” marked by reasoned discussion of different positions that are resolved through a vote. This meta-generic positioning certainly meets the exigence of CBC Radio to appeal to a broader and younger range of public participants (a literary brawl promises its listeners “good radio,” an entertaining week). However, I argue, this talk about *Canada Reads* also signals to listeners that the translation of a shortlist of titles across five half-hours of debate into a single book for the nation to read is contentious, even questionable, and not to be taken too seriously. It is, after all, a “bun fight.” For example, the meta-genre of daily ‘recaps’ of the debate that are posted to the *Canada Reads* website gleefully emphasize contestants going “down swinging” like soprano Measha Brueggergosman (“2004: Day 5”); “furious days of debate” (“2005: Day 5”); and “sore losers” like panelist Nelofer Pazira (“2006: Day 4”). Past panelists Will Ferguson and Gartner (2004) publish articles that bare their battle scars for Canadians to see. And Richardson underscores the role of strategy, not cultural capital, in successfully championing a *Canada Reads* winner: “This is a battle of books: it’s won not with brute force or fancy footwork alone, but also with cajolery, confabulation, conniving and connoption fits!” (“2006: Day 3”).

Amidst this cultivated air of confrontation, *Canada Reads* depicts its social actions of promoting nationalism and reading as the result of a democratic process panelists achieve through debating and respectfully disagreeing with one another; casting secret ballots that they then reveal and justify to their imagined public; and accepting the group’s decision, although often with more grousing than grace. This scrappy spectacle of democracy, though, is performed *for* the people rather than *by* the

people: the celebrity panelists stand in for the nation, and the *Canada Reads* public is relegated to the bleachers, cheering for a pre-taped and edited match (see Ferguson), urging on competitors who cannot hear them, hoping for an outcome they cannot influence.⁶⁷

Despite listeners' inability to participate in the literary selections, they are invited to participate in canonical processes. As Bakhtin argues, all speakers are oriented toward "an actively responsive understanding" (69): the host and panelists turn to listeners for their responsive understandings, soliciting uptakes that will continue the "very cut and thrust of *Canada Reads*" (Gartner). While some canonical texts generated by other systems in the literary sphere solicit uptakes that affirm their social action of literary evaluation (e.g., the *One Book, One Vancouver* press release announcing the selection of *The Jade Peony*; the sticker on *The Book of Negroes* declaring it to be "Heather's Pick"), instantiations of the brawl genre invite—and receive—uptakes of dissent. For example, Fuller's detailed analysis of public postings to the *Canada Reads* 2005 "People's Choice" feature shows that almost "all readers chose books that [had] not yet been featured" on the show ("Listening" 22, 23-26), and my study of John Mutford, a book blogger who hosted online debates amongst readers in parallel with the 2006 and 2007 programs,

⁶⁷ Each year, the five-day brawl is pre-recorded and carefully edited, and the *Canada Reads* website genres of public participation have no effect on the annual winner selection. After *Canada Reads 2003*, the CR team reduced rather than increased the genres of public participation within the canonizing system due to technical and budgetary concerns. Initially the public was encouraged to participate in online discussion forums (shut down by CR 2004) and a "People's Choice" contest that ran from 2002-2004. By 2005, there was no venue for online public participation other than the "People's Choice" section, which had been restricted to an invitation to send "a note about any work of Canadian fiction you've enjoyed, and tell us why you think it would be a good choice for Canada Reads"; a "selection" of these letters was then published online. CBC, *Canada Reads 2005 - People's Choice*, 2005, CBC.ca, Available: http://web.archive.org/web/20060827091849/http://www.cbc.ca/canadareads/cr_2005/peoples-choice.html, March 29 2010. The overall effect was that the public had no democratic counter-voice to the "official" winner, *Rockbound*. In 2006 though, the People's Choice poll was reinstated, and members of the *Canada Reads* public chose Boyden's *Three Day Road*. CBC, *Canada Reads 2006 - Your Say*, 2006, CBC.ca, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060526003055/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/yoursay.html>, March 29 2010.

details how his “public engagements with *Canada Reads*” produced public texts that circulated “an alternate viewpoint on the literary event” (“Engaging” 56). I argue that while the particulars of these public readers’ uptakes could not be foreseen by *Canada Reads* organizers, their social actions fall within the range of uptakes contrived by the CBC through this canonizing genre system: here, exigencies of nationalism and reading are met by bringing people together to disagree about Canadian literature. Genre theory shows us that situated moments of public literary selection depend upon genre sequences of uptakes, including those of public readers, to constitute a canon.

The Public and Canon of *Canada Reads*

How do the many social actions facilitated by this canonizing genre system bring people together? How does *Canada Reads* instantiate a public? The uptake of *Survivor* was a canny strategy to interpolate the vast Canadian public of the television series and ask its members to pay attention to the new CBC battle of the books. As I have also shown in Chapter Two, an appeal to an existing public is a means to call forth a new public.

Canada Reads also appealed to other publics through its selection of celebrities such as Canada’s first female Prime Minister, Kim Campbell (2002), opera singer Measha Brueggergosman (2004), and guitarist and singer Dave Bidini of *The Rheostatics* (2008), who already had publics of their own.⁶⁸ The descriptor ‘celebrity’ can seem a misnomer

⁶⁸ Evidence of organizers’ belief in the sway of famous Canadians to retain existing listeners and attract newcomers may be seen in their emphatic refusal to allow Mutford, a popular Canadian book blogger and *Canada Reads* enthusiast, to appear on the 2008 jury as the “average Canadian” despite his own growing public as demonstrated in the over 650 signatures of support he gathered on a Facebook group he created for his campaign. See John Mutford, “Canada Reads 2008 - A Geek's Mission, Part 4,” *The Book Mine Set* (2007), vol. 2008, John Mutford, “Canada Reads 2008 - A Geek's Mission, Part 6. (the End?),” *The Book Mine Set* (2007), vol. 2008, Kathryn Grafton and Elizabeth Maurer, “Engaging with and Arranging for Publics in Blog Genres,” *Linguistics and the Human Sciences* 3.1 (2007): 56. The CBC apparently judged

though, and prompt people to joke “at least ‘world-famous coast to coast’” (Martin "Just"). But organizers’ annual selection of panelists aims to attract publics from different spheres of activity (e.g., the political, literary, sports, and musical sphere), different regions (e.g., Glenn Murray from Manitoba (2004) and Lisa Moore from Newfoundland (2008)), and different races and ethnicities (e.g., Nalo Hopkinson (2002), Nancy Lee (2003), and Zaib Shaikh (2008)). These same considerations are reflected in the annual shortlist, where the texts are also a cross-section of topical, geographical, cultural, and ethnic representation.

This careful selection of the jury and competing literary works addresses the CBC’s mandated exigencies to reflect “Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences” and “the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada” (CBC "Mandate"). The need for “balance” is so familiar to members of the CBC public that its reappearance in *Canada Reads* is satirized: a blogger for *This Magazine* mocks the 2005 panel announcement, “it’s the usual CBC mix of regional and racial voices, the obligatory French Canadian, but – whoa! – only one male. [...] But then, only two of the authors are women. CBC – always getting that balance” (Andrew). The blogger highlights the recurrent efforts of the CBC in general and *Canada Reads* in particular to be inclusive of French-Canadian culture through its panelists and debated works, although these gestures are sometimes more well-meaning (or “obligatory”) than well-executed. For example, Moss writes of *Canada Reads* 2003, “Contrary to Aquin’s own positioning as a radical Quebec separatist, *Prochain Épisode* was rather ironically reconfigured as a ““bridge

that another celebrity, as compared to this “average” reader, would prompt more people to pay attention to the annual brawl.

between the literary solitudes of French and English Canadian literature” (“Canada” 9).⁶⁹ Consistent representation of Canada’s First Nations has seemed considerably less a priority, with no panelists featured over the past nine years, and only two literary works: Thomas King’s *Green Grass Running Water* in 2004 and Boyden’s *Three Day Road* in 2006.⁷⁰ Overall, seeing the panelists and titles as metonymic for the nation’s citizens, the portrait of Canada painted annually by *Canada Reads* is not of a nation united in its diversity but one marked by disparate—but not uncompromising—views.

Given this portrait, the canon of *Canada Reads* is a fittingly unstable public discursive space. As I have argued in Chapter One, all canons are sites of contest, and the *Canada Reads* canon epitomizes how this is so in its public uptakes of literary works. The winning titles are never unanimous amongst the panelists or the *Canada Reads* public: the online “People’s Choice” award typically goes to a different book than the official *Canada Reads* winner, and the website is overrun with alternative reading recommendations from the panelists, other famous Canadians, and the general public. The system succeeds in soliciting canonical uptakes of dispute. And yet the winning literary works circulating within this contested canon constitute a broader public than those that were shortlisted or those that also clamor for public attention. The *Canada Reads* staff and host memorialize the list of past winners on the website and during the

⁶⁹ As I discussed in Chapter Two, the CBC launched a parallel program in 2004, *Combat de Livres*, for its Francophone listeners, which usually includes a bilingual panelist and work in translation. Radio-Canada, *Le Combat Des Livres a Christiane Charette*, 2009, Radio-Canada.ca, Available: <http://www.radio-canada.ca/radio/christiane/combat2009/jour5.shtml>, December 11 2009. For example, McTeer defended Frances Itani’s *Deafening* on both *Combat de Livres* and *Canada Reads* in 2006. Frances Itani, *Deafening* (Toronto: HarperPerennialCanada, 2003).

⁷⁰ In 2009, though, the National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA) was the national literacy organization to receive the winning publisher’s financial donation. Nation Talk Project, *National Indigenous Literacy Association Chosen to Benefit from Canada Reads 2009 Challenge*, 2009, NationTalk.ca, Available: <http://www.nationtalk.ca/modules/news/article.php?storyid=15652&keywords=nan>, March 31 2010.

debate, bestowing these works with greater cultural value and a larger sales push. Because the genre system of *Canada Reads* overlaps with genre systems of the book industry, the social action of promoting reading is met by high-profile uptakes by publishers and national booksellers to sell first the shortlist and then the winner, uptakes that muffle the “possible others” (to engage Freadman’s phrase) at play before, during, and after the brawl. In the public canonical processes of *Canada Reads*, uptake is both a means to attract a wider audience to pay attention to a wider array of titles *and* a means to focus public attention and sales on a handful of Canadian literary works. To analyze how the winning literary works are selected, I now turn to a comparative analysis of the 2005 and 2006 literary brawl.

Canonical processes of literary selection: a comparison

By the launch of *Canada Reads 2005*, the CBC could bill its program as “the country’s most provocative and irreverent annual book event” (“Will”). The fourth-season launch release addressed a public already familiar with the self-styled “battle of the books”: an explanation of its selection process—necessary background knowledge for an audience new to the event—appeared only in the third paragraph, as compared to the first paragraph in the 2002 release (“Will”). The CBC imagined a broad *Canada Reads* discursive public with confidence, given evidence of radio listenership, website visitors, public participation in the popular *Canada Reads* “People’s Choice” award, library circulation, and book sales. Canadian readers, too, could imagine a *Canada Reads* public, given the public uptakes that surrounded them: starbursts emblazoned on the covers of shortlisted and winning titles, dedicated bookstore displays, related library events, articles

in the popular press, and people around them reading the debated Canadian texts. A few weeks after the 2005 debate, a blogger in Ottawa noted its public impact:

You wouldn't think that a silly literary contest run by the CBC once a year would have the effect it does.

Over the last week, I have seen people all over the place reading shortlisted books: *Volkswagen Blues* on the bus, *Rockbound* in the mall, everywhere.

I just put my name on the waiting list for *Rockbound* at the library. I am 158th in line. Not at all bad for a book that was shrouded in obscurity only a few weeks ago. (Ransom)

This post constitutes the *Canada Reads* canon in a complex manner, circulating not only the “silly literary contest” but also a composite of other people’s public uptakes of the literary works (on the bus, in the mall, in the library). The blogger offers us a snapshot of how, in 2005, the canon is being instantiated in this particular Canadian community, Ottawa.

Moss has suggested that unlike other canons of Canadian literature, in which literary works are chosen based on “representativeness or artistic merit,” literary selection within the *Canada Reads* canon is based on “whether it is the most durable depiction of Canada and whether it is championed by a persuasive and popular advocate” (“Canada” 10). She illustrates how the winning texts from 2002 to 2004 “reinforce certain popular notions of Canadianness,” with Ondaatje’s text representative of “multicultural Canada,” Aquin’s of “the tension of Quebec in Canada,” and Vanderhaeghe’s of “Western history” (“Canada” 7). In the debates of 2005 and 2006, a panelist’s social, linguistic, and cultural capital is certainly one determinant of which book wins: *Rockbound* champion Donna Morrissey proved to be an assertive and committed defender, and *A Complicated Kindness* champion Samson was a thoughtful and quietly convincing advocate. However, as I show, these titles each won primarily because of exigencies advanced by *other*

panelists. Further, the need to select a “durable depiction” of the nation is but one of many exigencies debated in 2005 and 2006. This might well suggest that later panelists felt the canonical groundwork had been laid by their predecessors. But the presence of many exigencies in both 2005 and 2006 also suggests that literary selections are never based upon a single criterion—an argument I am advancing here—, particularly in rhetorical situations that are constrained by the presence of multiple jurors with different exigencies and multiple literary works with varying social actions.

Canada Reads 2005: responsive understandings of hope

In the final round of *Canada Reads 2005*, Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, defended by politician Olivia Chow, was defeated by a little-known work from 1928 by Frank Parker Day, *Rockbound*, championed by writer Donna Morrissey. *Rockbound* and *Oryx and Crake* were in competition with three other titles: Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* (1966), represented by singer Molly Johnson and the first to be voted off; Jacques Poulin’s *Volkswagen Blues* (1984; translated by Sheila Fischman in 1988), promoted by author Roch Carrier and the second book sent back to the shelf; and Mairuth Sarsfield’s *No Crystal Stair*, endorsed by Sherraine MacKay (an Olympic fencer) was the third book to be defeated. As seen through genre theory, *Canada Reads 2005* is a rhetorical situation where a panelist, Sherraine MacKay, perceived the *kairos* of the brawl as a particular opportunity to offer her imagined Canadian public “hope” for “our country that has had its troubles” (“2005 - Panelists”), a reference initially to Canada’s struggles with the realities of multiculturalism. She sought, in Miller’s words, “an opening in the here and now, in order to achieve something there and then” (“Opportunity” 83). Her fellow

panelist, Roch Carrier, similarly motivated by an exigence of troubled times, recognized this rhetorical void but in the context of globalization, an exigence raised by *Oryx and Crake*. Both Mackay and Carrier were motivated to select a literary work that solicited responsive understandings from readers of hope, and neither felt that Atwood's work would elicit these responses. After their own literary selections were voted off, they perceived *Rockbound* as the most fitting for Canadians to read now. *Canada Reads 2005* offers an interesting example of how the exigence of one literary work (*Oryx and Crake*) can motivate readers to meet it with a different literary selection (*Rockbound*).

The 2005 book choices

In both *Canada Reads 2005* and *2006*, instances of another public canonizing genre aired prior to the five-day book brawl: short clips in which celebrity jurors introduce their literary selection to their imagined public. This genre was taken up within the system in 2004 to make the canonical processes more public as prior to this the shortlist was determined by an unseen jury: in the first three years, each panelist was asked to submit a list of titles that they were willing to defend as *the* book for Canadians to read, and from this list the jury assigned them one (see Stoffman; CBC "CR 2004 - About"; Ferguson). One example of how the CBC jury's initial intervention may have influenced the final result is in *Canada Reads 2003*, when Justin Trudeau "surprised" fellow panelists in the final round by voting against his assigned work, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, in favour of *Prochain Épisode*, explaining that "he had come to Canada Reads table with an open mind, and been convinced to choose a book that would be a revelation to readers outside Quebec." Trudeau's mind was "open," I argue, before he entered the ring: his list

of proposed titles suggests a situated motive, choose a Québécois book new to English Canadians: two are by French Canadian writers, Gaétan Soucy's *The Little Girl Who Was Too Fond Of Matches* (*La petite fillie qui aimait trop les alumettes*) and Michel Tremblay's *The Fat Woman Next Door is Pregnant* (*La grosse femme d'a coté est enceinte*). Trudeau's decision to abandon his own book was not quite the "move that confounded all" that the *Canada Reads* team publicized and continues to memorialize; rather, he was predisposed to select a Québécois winner ("CR 2003 - Panel"). In comparison, the 2005 "participants were asked to defend their first, and only, book choice" (Caldwell) likely to make the shortlist selection process more transparent and the celebrity panelists more committed to and accountable for their literary choices.⁷¹

As I illustrate, instances of the book choice genre are often marked by meta-generic commentary about panelists' literary selection for the benefit of other readers, such as sharing interpretive strategies for the text or advising readers why the kind of work they selected is better than another competing work. This meta-generic talk is noteworthy for genre theorists: as Giltrow shows, talk about genre is often for the benefit of writers and speakers rather than readers and listeners ("Meta-Genre"; "Legends"). This distinctive meta-generic activity surfaces not only in the book choice and brawl genres of *Canada Reads 2005* and *2006* but also in challenge reader reviews on *The Complete Booker*, as I show in Chapter Four. Its recurrence suggests that it is a distinguishing feature of contemporary canonical processes. I study how each 2005 panelist instantiates the book choice clip, seeking exigencies that motivated their initial literary selection.

⁷¹ Panelists supplied 'recommended reading' to the website, but these works were presumably lower on their list than the one they were defending.

In Johnson's book choice clip, it becomes (surprisingly) evident that she is not motivated to promote *Beautiful Losers*, a selection made by singer/songwriter Rufus Wainwright, who bowed out of the panel after his choice had already been announced, promoted, sold, and read in anticipation of the February 21-25 show. Organizers searched for a celebrity who would defend Wainwright's choice, and Johnson "in a weak moment" agreed to do so, with less than a month left to read all five works ("2005 - Panelists"). Johnson instantiates the book choice genre as a personal narrative of how she came to defend a work that she had "vaguely" remembered as containing "some naughty bits," only to discover upon rereading that "it's almost *all* naughty bits, with a little bit of aboriginal folklore, Catholicism, swirling madly through it all" ("2005 - Panelists"). Johnson's flippant gloss omits its symbolic capital in Canadian Literature as a work described by Ondaatje in 1970 as "the most vivid, fascinating and brave modern novel" he had ever read (qtd in Dragland 268), and hailed by Stan Dragland as "one of the most important novels written in this country" (269). It also omits how *Beautiful Losers* has been decried as obscene by Robert Fulford who deemed it "the most revolting book ever written in Canada" and *The Globe and Mail* who dubbed it "verbal masturbation" (qtd in Cohen and Clarkson). Johnson's lack of motivation was not only a significant factor in why Cohen's work was the first to be voted off the *Canada Reads* island, but also reduced her cultural capital in the eyes of her fellow panelists. Ultimately, she played a minor role in determining which work won. This suggests that it is not enough for someone to be appointed a canon-maker: they must be motivated by the situational exigence, choose a book, to exercise canonical agency.

As compared to Johnson, Carrier was highly motivated to defend his selection of *Volkswagen Blues*, the story of a writer on a road trip in quest of his brother. Its author Jacques Poulin is a Quebec author whose work circulates widely in French-Canadian canons but much less so in those of English-Canada. For his interpretation of the book-choice meta-genre, Roch Carrier engaged a pop-culture form: the Top Ten List made infamous by *Late Show with David Letterman* (CBS), a fitting uptake for the unapologetically popular *Canada Reads*. Abridged here, his top five reasons were as follows:

5. *Volkswagen Blues* is not about denouncing chauvinism or other injustice.
4. *Volkswagen Blues* is not announcing the end of the world.
3. *Volkswagen Blues* is not preaching.
2. *Volkswagen Blues* is a pure pleasure of listening to a story.
1. *Canada Reads*, it's an opportunity of introducing to Canada a *great writer*. ("2005 - Panelists")⁷²

From this list we see that Carrier knew his shortlist competitors before recording his pitch: he aims heavy-handed jabs at the work he perceives to be his biggest threat, *Oryx and Crake*, a tale that announces “the end of the world” and denounces “chauvinism” and “other injustice” in its depiction of Oryx as a global sex trade commodity and exotic object exhibited online before a voyeuristic North American audience. By characterizing

⁷² His other five reasons for selecting Poulin's text are the following: “10. The author is a nice guy, and nice guys should not finish last”; “9. *Volkswagen Blues* is music”; “8. *Volkswagen Blues* is about exploring territory and books”; “7. *Volkswagen Blues* is about adventure and discovery”; and “6. *Volkswagen Blues* is about *tenderness* in a tough world.” CBC, “Canada Reads 2005 - the Panelists,” 2005, CBC.ca, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20050404151220/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/panelists.html>, November 10 2006. Letterman's “Top Ten Lists” debuted on NBC's *Late Night with David Letterman* on September 18, 1985 (“The Top Ten Things That Almost Rhyme With Peas”). According to the Wikipedia entry for “The Late Show Top 10 List,” Letterman's lists “were added as a way of mocking *People* magazine, which routinely featured such lists (as well as ‘Worst 10’ lists). David Letterman had made an off-hand remark on his show that he found the lists to be annoying, and began his own lists as a way of ridiculing what had by then become an increasingly recurring trend in other periodicals and magazines.” The iconoclastic Letterman Top 10 lists became so popular that they became an iconic feature of the show, and were eventually collected and sold as books. “Late Show Top Ten List,” *Wikipedia*, March 16 2010 ed. (2010). I argue in Chapter Four that recurring lists in the literary-sphere are meta-generic, instructing people what literature to read and how to read it, an argument I would also apply to Carrier's list.

Atwood's tale as didactic, he meta-generically advises his listeners to read for pleasure rather than instruction: reading *Volkswagen Blues* is "pure pleasure." His top motive on this list is canonical: "*Canada Reads*, it's an opportunity of introducing to Canada a *great writer*" ("2005 - Panelists"). Carrier realizes the power of this canonizing system to bestow Poulin's text with symbolic capital and circulate it amongst a vast public of readers unfamiliar with the Quebec writer.⁷³ Carrier's motive to insert new writers into the *Canada Reads* canon foreshadows his votes against two authors who had already been taken up in many canonizing systems, Cohen and Atwood, and his eventual selection of Day who had not been taken up by any popular contemporary canonizing systems prior to 2005.

In MacKay's book choice talk, she describes Sarsfield's *No Crystal Stair*, the story of an African-Canadian widow and her three children in 1940s Montreal, as "a bittersweet story of a part of Canadian history that we otherwise never hear of" ("2005 - Panelists"). MacKay, imagining a Canadian reading public, posits an exigence of the national imaginary in relation to African-Canadian history (a similar argument is mounted by Pazira with regards to Cree history in her 2006 defense of *Three Day Road*).⁷⁴ The main exigence MacKay addresses through her literary choice, though, is nationalism. She describes Sarsfield's work as "incredibly hopeful" in the way its

⁷³ Carrier's motive to promote relatively unknown writers, particularly Quebec writers, is also evident in his recommended reading listed on the *Canada Reads* website: all four are recent works by relatively new authors and two of these are set in Quebec. Sheila Heti's *Middle Stories* (2002), Gordon Sheppard's *HA! A Self-Murder Mystery* (2003), Gerry Turcotte's *Flying in Silence* (2001), and Alissa York's *Mercy* (2003). Sheppard and Turcotte's works are set in Quebec.

⁷⁴ MacKay blames the influx of American culture, stating that "throughout history" Canadians have only heard "the American side of black history," an uptake that erases other literary works of Canadian "black history" by writers such as Dionne Brandt, Austin Clarke, and Wayde Compton. Bill Richardson does not remind the panel or the listening public of the *Canada Reads* 2002 debate over *Whylah Falls*. MacKay's social motive, though, is in keeping with the CBC's desire to serve as a counter-hegemonic force against American cultural imperialism.

characters rise above their circumstances including “muted Canadian racism,” and anticipates that its uptakes will “unite” Canadian readers. MacKay contends: “I think that this is a story that pulls people together. And, in our country that has had its troubles, it really unites different cultures, and unites our sense of multiculturalism [sic]” (“2005 - Panelists”). MacKay seeks to affect an exigence of nationalism with a work of hope that fosters and furthers Canada’s multiculturalism. Significantly, after *No Crystal Stair* is the third work to be voted off, her motivation to address an exigence of nationalism through a “multicultural” text cannot be met by Atwood or Day’s texts. MacKay continues to seek a work of hope, but now addresses troubled times of globalization, an exigence of *Oryx and Crake*. To meet this social motive, she classifies *Rockbound* as a work of hope because of its portrayal of the “human spirit” (“2005: Day 5”). In a very local context, MacKay’s uptake illustrates Cohen’s characterization of genres as “historical assumptions” constructed by readers to serve “communicative” purposes (210): she creates a genre category of ‘works of hope’ to elicit uptakes from readers that will give them optimism for Canada’s future.

Chow, a Toronto city councillor at the time, selected fellow Torontonians Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.⁷⁵ In her instantiation of the book choice genre, she posits reading as pleasurable, and accordingly explains why “everyone would love reading” Atwood’s work, a novel in which the narrator, Snowman, believes he is the only surviving human on a decimated planet, spared by a mad genius to protect the Crakers, a new designer race who are to populate the planet anew. Unlike Carrier, MacKay, and

⁷⁵ Chow is an avid reader of Atwood, and has been a fan since she was a student, encountering the writer through a canon circulating in the school system: “The first book that I read when I came to Canada in terms of in literature, in school, was a Margaret Atwood. And since, I’ve read every single one of Margaret Atwood” (“2005: Day 5”).

Morrissey, Chow addresses a broader public than Canadians, an uptake of her novel, which turns towards an international readership, whereas the other shortlisted texts construct an audience design that explicitly includes Canadian readers. She first positions Atwood's work meta-generically as "a love story" ("It's actually a love triangle. Two very close friends falling in love with a woman") and then continues with generic descriptors that recall dystopic fiction—"it's about control that leads to the destruction—environmental, people, animals, humanity"—and speculative fiction—"Can we in fact decide, and who are we to decide" our fate as a species. Chow anticipates that *Oryx and Crake*'s exigence of future "destruction" will "inspire[e] all of us to take action" ("2005 - Panelists").

Finally, in Morrissey's book choice generic instance, she does not perceive an exigence of troubled times. She chose *Rockbound*, a tale of an orphaned fisherman David who seeks to claim his inheritance of a small share on the tiny island of Rockbound, for "its passionate narrative," suggesting an exigence of affect. She instantiates the book choice genre as a personal recommendation, emphasizing reasons why *she* "loves" the novel rather than why "everyone" would love it, as Chow does. Throughout, Morrissey is highly aware of her broadly imagined public of Canadians. For instance, although the story takes place in a fictionalized version of the actual Nova Scotian island of Ironbound, Morrissey positions *Rockbound* as representative of a larger region, "Atlantic Canada," to expand its public appeal. *Rockbound* is, she argues, "the vigorous story of the life of a fisherman, in Nova Scotia—PEI, Newfoundland, uh, anywhere in Atlantic Canada" ("2005 - Panelists"). Simultaneously, she positions herself as an expert interpreter of the novel due to her ethos as someone raised in Newfoundland who lives in

Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her explicit motivation, promote a book that she loves for its emotional appeal, is intertwined with a secondary motive to advance a book that comes from her part of Canada, a motive she shares with Carrier (and possibly Chow).⁷⁶ While meta-generically constructing *Rockbound* as emblematic of Atlantic Canadian literature, she also describes it in terms that recall Frye's focus on the universality of 'great literature': "I love how despite the harshness of this kind of life and on this island, that the character, David, is able to see beauty and love and to sit and ponder his meaning and a sense of identity in this miniscule place on this earth" ("2005 - Panelists"). Morrissey later heightens this universal characterization of the novel to strategically position *Rockbound* as a work that meets MacKay's motive to select a work of hope for the public of *Canada Reads*. Morrissey shows us how speakers can purposefully use meta-genre to position the social actions of literary works in relation to exigencies of other canonizers.

*The 2005 brawl*⁷⁷

When the brawl begins, the exigencies that motivated panelists' original literary selections and book-choice pitch all enter the *Canada Reads* ring where they vie for supremacy. On the first day of the debate, the panelists are noticeably consistent in how they introduce their work. Speaking first, Johnson again positions herself not as an

⁷⁶ When Carrier later asks "How did you find that book?" she explains that a friend gave it to her because she is "an islander" and the work is "very like the Newfoundland story" CBC, "Canada Reads 2005: Day 3," February 23 2005 2005, audio, Available:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20050226040020/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/debate/day3.html>. This motive to promote literature from her home may also be seen in her recommended reading list, three of the four of which are set in Newfoundland. Morrissey recommends *A Complicated Kindness*, which went on to win *Canada Reads 2006*. The rest, Leo Fury's *The Long Run*, Joel Hynes *Down to the Dirt*, and Michael Winter's *A Big Why*, are all set in Newfoundland.

⁷⁷ Fuller offers an alternative reading of the *Canada Reads 2005* debates by studying the panelists' on-air reading practices, including Chow's "highly mimetic" practice, Carrier's focus on aesthetics, and Morrissey's "passionate, personalized, and identificatory readings." Fuller, "Listening," 17-21.

advocate but discussant of *Beautiful Losers*, sealing the work's fate by describing it unenthusiastically as "disturbing," "annoying," "boring," "evocative," "difficult," and "challenging" ("2005: Day 1"). Morrissey's introduces *Rockbound* with an emphasis on both its universal theme, man as a "courageous, beautiful animal," and local setting, with its Nova Scotian geography "so exacting" of Newfoundland where she was born and raised. Chow argues that *Oryx and Crake*, as a "tragic love story, about survival," encourages "us to think and feel" in relation to our present-day *kairos*. MacKay emphasizes that rather than advocating a work about where she is from ("the Prairies"), she seeks to address nationalism by motivating Canadians to read about other times and other places (1940s Montreal), particularly "stories of hope." Carrier laments that it is "unfortunate" that a "superb" and "unique" writer like Poulin is "not known in English-speaking Canada" nor his work *Volkswagen Blues*, "a very good and well done story" ("2005: Day 1"): the panel's selection of Poulin's work would bring a French-Canadian writer and text into an English-Canadian canon. Faced with a rhetorical situation that continually shifts over the five days of debate, panelists reshape and re-articulate their exigencies, aligning them with different shortlisted titles once their book is voted off, recognizing and feeling motivated by someone else's exigence, and describing the literary works in meta-generic terms that position them more or less favourably in relation to the motives of others. As "functionally motivated" speech (Giltrow "Meta-Genre" 203), panelists' meta-genre talk of exigencies and literary genres seem to mobilize divisions and coalitions that impact their final literary selection. In what follows, I focus on how panelists' initial exigencies are rearticulated, strengthened, and modified in their specific exchanges over the two finalists, *Oryx and Crake* and

Rockbound. These two works are ultimately judged by whether or not they can be construed as literary generic instances whose social action will give readers hope for the future of Canadians.

Oryx and Crake: a “love story” or (inaccessible) “dystopia”

In debates surrounding *Oryx and Crake*, a new exigence of literacy emerges in an ongoing exchange between Chow and Carrier. Both recognize *Canada Reads*’ potential to affect an exigence of literacy by promoting reading, but hold different opinions as to how this might be achieved. Chow imagines a “huge young audience” (“2005: Day 1”) that would join the *Canada Reads* public if her selection won given its emphasis on gaming and the internet. Later, sensing that as former National Librarian, Carrier supports the cause of literacy, she exclaims, “*You* of all people, Roch, should know, we need our young people—young men—reading books” (“2005: Day 4”). Chow argues that the literary selection of Atwood’s work, with its young protagonists and emphasis on internet gaming, will appeal to “young people” (particularly men) and motivate them to read. Chow’s emphasis on “young men” is likely a uptake of literacy campaigns in Canada that she has encountered as a citizen and a politician: Fuller notes that increasing literacy among young men is the primary exigence that “librarians in all northern industrialized countries” address (“Listening” 17). I suggest that here Chow also addresses CBC Radio One’s exigence to attract a younger audience through programming like *Canada Reads*. Carrier resists Chow’s attempts to create a *Survivor*-like alliance to advance a literacy agenda. While he also perceives this social motive, he seeks to address it through an “accessible” book like *Volkswagen Blues*. He later makes clear that this motivation

contributed to his eventual support of Day's work: "I want more people to read. And I think that the book, *Rockbound*, like I believe that with *Volkswagen Blues*, that book will be—accessible—to everybody" ("2005: Day 5"). *Oryx and Crake*, for Carrier, does not meet this literary value of accessibility not because it is too complex in its style, as we might expect for an exigence of literacy, but because it sends "young people" an inappropriate message: its "troubling [...] lack of hope, and lack of love" ("2005: Day 5") does not truly capture the human condition. While Chow is motivated to encourage young people to read, Carrier is motivated to encourage young people to read a certain kind of work: one of hope. The exigence advanced initially by MacKay now also motivates Carrier. Adopting a paternalistic stance (similar to Chow's), Carrier implies that while he can hear the work's "powerful voice" saying "it's time to think about it, it's time [...] to change" ("2005: Day 1"), younger people will not. Ironically, a work that satirizes its troubling historical moment and solicits uptakes to bring about social change is positioned by Carrier as unable to transform young people. A work that is "accessible" and elicits uptakes of "hope" will motivate Canadians to read and seek positive change. Here, we see how the literary works themselves shape the exigencies and desirable social actions being debated: *Oryx and Crake* posits an exigence that is valued but is judged not to address it appropriately.

Chow takes up Carrier's critique that *Oryx and Crake* lacks hope and love, exclaiming, "It's a love story, Roch." Other panelists meet this genre descriptor with incredulity and scorn: "a love story," Morrissey mutters sarcastically. Chow seems bewildered, "It's a love story," she repeats, "How could you say there's no love between [Jimmy] and Oryx?" "I didn't see love," adds MacKay. Chow, baffled by their refusal to

engage her interpretive strategy, repeats again, “It’s a love story. I, uh, how ... there are so much love involved in there” (“2005: Day 1”). For Chow the storyline of Jimmy’s obsession with Oryx, one side of a tragic love triangle that includes his best friend Crake, was central to her reading of Atwood’s work. But for Morrissey and MacKay, the love story genre was not a dominant reading strategy given *Oryx and Crake*’s strong generic ties to dystopic fiction (“2005: Day 4”). With these interpretive strategies firmly in place, they cannot reread the text as a different genre, as Chow requests. This moment highlights how when interpreting the same work, readers turn to different genres: these varying strategies may limit their ability to discuss a text together in a meaningful way. And because this moment takes place within the constraints of the *Canada Reads* brawl, Chow’s competitors are not motivated to support her interpretation. In a later exchange, Morrissey exclaims, “Love, romance didn’t come into my *mind* when I was reading *Oryx and Crake*,” and MacKay seconds, “Not at all” (“2005: Day 2”). Accordingly, Chow’s meta-generic defense seems illogical to them and as a result is ultimately ineffective.⁷⁸ While it may be tempting to dismiss Chow’s talk about genre as amateur, as her fellow panelists do, Cohen reminds us that people identify texts for “different reasons” (205), which is to say that all meta-generic talk about literature is motivated. Given Chow’s demonstrated ability in her book choice presentation and her brawl introduction to read Atwood’s work through several generic lenses, I argue that her repeated efforts to promote *Oryx and Crake* as a “love story” is in direct response to MacKay’s call for “stories of hope” and Carrier’s condemnation that it lacks hope. Only a love story will

⁷⁸ The panelists were not the only ones surprised at Chow’s reading strategy. The blogger John Mutford wrote in relation to CR 2006, “Each year there’s always a panelist who makes you think “what the heck book were they reading?” Olivia Chow remains the ultimate example of this from the time she tried to claim that *Oryx and Crake* was a love story. Say what?” John Mutford, “Canada Reads - Day One,” *The Book Mine Set* (2006), vol. 2007.

meet the panel's emerging consensus that the most fitting response is a work that offers readers hope. But Morrissey and MacKay's meta-generic retorts pronounce *Oryx and Crake* an *un*-fitting response to *Canada Reads 2005*, and cast Chow as an outsider to literary expertise.⁷⁹

Richardson senses that Chow's love story defense without meta-generic talk of speculative fiction to augment it (or perhaps, to correct it) will fail. A speculative reading, for him, suggests that hope lies less in the book itself and more in the author's faith in her imagined public: Atwood anticipates readers' responsive understandings, hoping that they, like Carrier, will hear the novel's "powerful voice" and affirm the text's contrived range of desirable uptakes by seeking social change. When Chow does not re-engage the dystopic genre, Richardson attempts to do it for her, suggesting "it makes, I think we can safely say, a political kind of point" ("2005: Day 2").⁸⁰ But when he asks Chow (a politician) if she seeks a political statement in a book, she instead states that she seeks a good read, something that "you cannot put down." Here, Chow marks through meta-

⁷⁹ Morrissey and Chow's debate over the love story genre continues into a discussion of *Rockbound*. When Day's work is criticized for its "fairytale ending" (Chow "2005: Day 3"), a "perfect ending" that was "too much" (MacKay "2005: Day 3"), Morrissey insists to Chow that this is a convention of Romance:

Morrissey: You don't understand, you don't *understand*. This is a Romance. You were talking about love in *Oryx and Crake*. This is an actual romance story, likened to *The Tempest*, where ... *all* Romance have a happy ending ...

Chow: *Really?*

Morrissey: Yes, absolutely

Chow: What about *Romeo and Juliet*? [Morrissey: Was that a Romance?] That wasn't a happy ending ... (emphasis theirs, "2005: Day 3")

In this heated and amusing moment, Morrissey asserts her ethos of literary expert, meta-generically directing Chow who she perceives and publicly casts as an inexperienced reader. As the exchange reveals, they do not share an understanding of "Romance," which Morrissey sees as a trans-historical category in which "*all*" member texts share the happy-ending convention, and Chow perceives as a small-r romance, synonymous with "love story," a genre in which, for her, not all instances have a happy ending and can thus include *Romeo and Juliet* and *Oryx and Crake*.

⁸⁰ While Richardson is both host and referee, he also assumes an ongoing role as expert reader, offering reading strategies, providing plot details and background information about the authors for listeners, and positioning works within Canadian literary history. His voice, combined with clips from the authors themselves, adds an authoritative air to the show that augments (and sometimes compensates for or directs) the literary talk of these public readers.

genre readers' literary value of immersion, what Radway describes as "a sense of boundaries dissolved" (*Feeling* 114). This value, as I show in Chapter Four, is raised by some the public readers of *The Complete Booker*. Stymied, Richardson turns next to Carrier, who has already noted the work's prophetic tone, and asks what "effect" Atwood's book may have on the "Canadian psyche," and whether there is a "prescriptive element" that "might be useful ... as its warning?" Carrier, in response, allows that "the book should be read" by some but not by an imagined public of all Canadians: "is it the book that should be suggested by us to be read *by all*? I'm not sure about it, because it's really one-track minded. [...] everything turns to its worst. I think there is in the world more positive aspects than that" ("2005: Day 2"). Giltrow illustrates how meta-generic commentary for writers can "appear at moments when deviance is encountered, or the ideal imagined" ("Meta-Genre" 194). In this rhetorical situation Carrier, on behalf of readers, meta-generically marks Atwood's "deviance" from a work of hope, and imagines "the ideal" *Oryx and Crake*, one characterized by "balance": "I would like to see the tension between this tragedy [...] and those who are working and who are not going *that way* to be more balanced, in a way" ("2005: Day 2"). Atwood's narrative focus on those who have engineered (wittingly and unwittingly) this global disaster, he argues, should be balanced by protesters who seek an alternate future from environmental degradation, genetic engineering run amok, a global sex trade, corporate-run compounds, and urban wastelands.

MacKay concurs, arguing that the main voice of dissent, Jimmy's mother, did not play a large enough role: "It was a very futile storyline, and you just felt let down" ("2005: Day 2"). She later returns to this critique to argue that *Oryx and Crake* does not

adequately reflect human nature: “I just find it hard to believe that even in a dystopia there wouldn’t be more people with more compassion who would raise their voices, who would try to do something, and the fact that she’s saying at *the end of the world*, the only people left are without emotions” (“2005: Day 4”). Morrissey too expresses dissatisfaction with the ending—did Jimmy connect with the human survivors he discovers on a beach, or did their lack of trust lead them to kill one another?—to which MacKay exclaims, “Yeah, did he or didn’t he? Margaret Atwood doesn’t even say!” Richardson, exasperated at the meta-generic implication that readers are not active agents, weighs in to contend that an essential voice of protest belongs to the reader:⁸¹

Well, she’s a writer. I mean, she’s not going to give everything away [...] this is the job of the reader ... to work with the writer in that way. Right? To enter the imaginative world, to make up your own mind about those kinds of things. I’m supposed to be the impartial moderator. But the pleeblands are *full* of people who are protesting. I mean, it’s not as though the voice of protest is extinguished in this novel. (“2005: Day 4”)

Richardson reminds the panel that a literary work assumes Bakhtin’s “responsive understanding” (69) to elicit a certain set of desirable uptakes. Johnson, who ultimately voted in favour of *Oryx and Crake*, reflects “Man oh man, *Oryx and Crake* is a pretty compelling story, it changed me” (“2005: Day 3”).⁸² But as Richardson notes, “some people have a hard time with the idea of speculative fiction. They just think, ‘I don’t want to go there’” (“2005: Day 4”). Or, as Atwood dryly states in a clip that Richardson airs, “when it’s a choice between a limited piece of bad behaviour, which is what you find in

⁸¹ He does so once again in response to Morrissey’s critique that the book, unlike *Rockbound*, is “godless,” a criticism that is meant to underscore MacKay’s claim that *Oryx and Crake* doesn’t address human nature and therefore isn’t “a very enlightening read.” “This book is *all* about God. This book is *entirely* about God” (“2005: Day 4”), Richardson protests, seemingly frustrated that a book about an extreme consequence of “human nature” (our desire to play God) is blasted for being devoid of human nature.

⁸² Johnson also takes up Richardson’s question regarding Atwood’s “political point” on Day Five, but after the other panelists’ have already cast their last votes. Her responses are essentially ignored due to her lacklustre defense of *Beautiful Losers* and overall lack of participation (on Day Five, she admits she only finished *Rockbound* the night before, *after* she had already voted against it in favour of *Oryx and Crake*).

most novels, and the extinction of the human race, people blink” (“2005: Day 5”). On behalf of their imagined public, MacKay and Carrier determined not “to go there,” not to address the literary work’s exigence of the potential “extinction of the human race.” Their decision to “blink” shows again how uptake is “the taking of an object” rather than “the causation of a response by an intention”; they chose to select a different kind of work from the “possible others” available (Freadman 48): *Rockbound*.

Rockbound: an unknown work of “realism” and “universal” truths

The 2005 selection of *Rockbound* is an interesting example of how a literary work that was produced in the context of one historical moment (Nova Scotia in 1929) is selected to meet exigencies specific to the context of another (Canada in 2005). *Rockbound* ultimately triumphed as a work of hope that addressed an exigence of troubling times, chillingly rendered for panelists by *Oryx and Crake*’s projection of a speculative future. Morrissey’s original motivation to promote a story that moved her and represents where she is from had to be modified to meet Carrier’s lobbying for a non-canonical text and MacKay’s search for a work of hope. Introducing the unknown Day to her imagined Canadian public, Morrissey imbues him with authenticity—he spent each summer fishing (“2005: Day 3”) and thus “lived the life” (“2005: Day 5”)—and positions him as both a Nova Scotian hero who “raised” and “commanded” a battalion in World War I and a cosmopolitan figure who was “a Rhodes scholar” and “worked at many universities abroad” (“2005: Day 3”). She is motivated (and possibly encouraged) to construct this dashing reputation to pit the unknown Day head-to-head with the literary icon, Atwood. Chow attempts to counter her fellow panelists’ motive to select a non-canonical author by

arguing that Canadians' "inferiority complex" prevents us from celebrating our "internationally known writers" ("2005: Day 5"). When Richardson contends that nobody "takes Margaret Atwood 'for granted,'" Chow counters "I've heard in the last few days that 'oh, everybody's going to read her anyway, so don't worry about it'" ("2005: Day 5"). Atwood's literary works circulate in so many canons that the uptake of *Oryx and Crake* by the 2005 panel seems, to Chow's competitors, an unoriginal way to bring Canadians together for a shared reading experience. Chow's motive to celebrate the best opposes Carrier's motivation to promote a new (or in this case, forgotten) writer and work, competing social motives that recur in many meta-generic discussions of canon formation.⁸³

In the early days of the debate, Chow and MacKay mark their distance from Day's work due to his use of "dialect." Chow initially had "difficulty" reading *Rockbound* because she could not "understand" the dialect despite attempts to read it aloud, and MacKay too had to read it "out loud" ("2005: Day 2") and suggests that Day "should have had a glossary" ("2005: Day 1").⁸⁴ Morrissey interprets this early focus on

⁸³ The exigence to promote a relatively unknown work over one with recognized canonical value is also raised on Day Four of *Canada Reads 2006*. Just prior to the final vote between *Rooms for Rent* and *A Complicated Kindness*, Richardson focuses on the popularity of Toews' novel: "it won the Governor General's award, it's been on the bestseller list for a long time,... over 200,000 copies sold in Canada (which is, like, a *lot* of copies) ... is it not a book that Canada *already* reads?" Responses spill forth. Musgrave jokes, "Barely 5 copies sold: Al Purdy!" and Samson underscores the oxymoron, "Canadian bestsellers ... Canadian bestsellers ... *come on!*" When others agree that they knew of Toews' work before the brawl, Samson argues that just because you "hear about things" does not mean that you "read them," which is to say that people can belong to a work's public without having actually read it. Musgrave emphasizes, "200,000 of a population of 35 million is not a lot." Samson continues, "I think it appeals to the worst in our ... in our national character... to dislike something [...] because people *like* it," a sentiment that Thompson heartily supports ("2006: Day Four"). Samson's argument is similar to that of Chow, but here it is put forth more persuasively by someone perceived as holding more cultural capital, and is in defense of a writer other than Canada's foremost literary icon.

⁸⁴ Morrissey at first dismisses their criticisms, suggesting readers eventually "key in" to dialect like viewers adapt to subtitles, a misleading comparison in that subtitles adapt the work to non-native speakers, whereas dialect asks non-native speakers to adapt to the work. Her comparison also erases the varying distances between the 1920s "Rockbound" dialect and panelists' comfort with English, which Richardson marks: dialect can be "problematic" if English is "a second language" (as it is for Chow and Carrier) and, he adds,

dialect as a criticism that the regional specificity of *Rockbound* is not “accessible” enough for a national public. Over the course of the brawl she accordingly takes care to argue that Day’s work marries the “regional” with the “universal” so that a 1929 instance of Nova Scotian “realism” can facilitate the social action of promoting nationalism. She meta-generically classifies Day’s work as “realism” to argue that it “really deserves a place on the classical Canadian literary book shelf” (“2005: Day 4”), a place that the panelists can secure if they choose it for the influential *Canada Reads*. Offering a lesson in Canadian literary history to her imagined public, Morrissey explains that after World War I, “two types of literature” were published, “the great war novels” and “novels like *Rockbound*, where the author was trying to get back to reestablish some of the values that had been destroyed for them in the war. And they’re trying to get back to being grounded again in reality” (“2005: Day 5”).⁸⁵ Canonizing Day’s work would re-build national literary history, recovering a generic instance of Canadian realism. Day’s realism moreover, is *personally* important, as Morrissey could readily see “how it related to [her] father’s past.” Through realism as her interpretive lens, she maps her motivation to honour her father and her heritage to the nationalism exigence of *Canada Reads*: “these were the kind of men that built nations, and I would just want to share with Canada these proud Atlantic Canadian men from our past” (“2005: Day 5”). The other panelists do not—and likely cannot—experience Morrissey’s motivation, which is informed by her personal experiences. Instead, Mackay and Carrier support *Rockbound* as a fitting response to their

“can seem kind of slighting in a way.” Dialect can make a literary work too distant from some readers’ background knowledge. CBC, “Canada Reads 2005: Day 2,” February 22 2005 2005, audio, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20050302015648/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/debate/day2.html>.

⁸⁵ Morrissey’s assessment appears to be an uptake of the Canadian reviews of *Rockbound* when it was published. Gwendolyn Davies takes these up in the *Afterword* of the 1989 edition of Day’s work, particularly a letter by Archibald MacMechan, who declares, Day “has caught the life of Lunenburg. Absolutely. Enter Realism on the amateur stage of Canadian fiction.” Gwendolyn Davies, “Afterword,” *Rockbound* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 317.

mutually-perceived exigence to bring hope in difficult times and to Carrier's exigence of introducing a new writer to Canadian readers.

Throughout the debate, Morrissey uses the meta-generic descriptor of *Rockbound* as "regionalism" in a way that is purposefully inconsistent, a classification alternately engaged and rejected to serve her local end of winning the brawl. Although she frequently promotes the text as Nova Scotian and Atlantic Canadian fiction, Morrissey is also at points an apologist for regionalism, contending that Day's narrative structure "keeps it from sinking into the regional aspect" and "raises it above being regional" through its uptake of highly canonical English intertexts (the Bible, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and the legend of Faust and Mephistopheles). Day's characters, she argues, represent, "great values of humanity" with David as "Truth," Mary as "Honesty," and Uriah as "Greed" ("2005: Day 3"). These intertexts and characters, she continues, "take" *Rockbound* beyond that "sense of constraint" ("2005: Day 4"). Morrissey perceives that a "regional" text may be construed by her competitors as an inappropriate selection for an imagined public of "all" Canadians. And so when Chow engages the descriptor "regional" to dismiss Day's work, Morrissey completely counters her prior esteem for *Rockbound* as Nova Scotian literature to meta-generically present universalism as the interpretive key to Day's text: "Truth is regional? The values of truth is ... regional?" ("2005: Day 4"). While this outburst can be read as a rejection of regionalism for universalism, we could also read it through Frye's perspective that regional works (properly wrought) invoke universal continuities which merit their canonization.⁸⁶ Either way, Morrissey is quick-witted in her meta-generic

⁸⁶ Robert Kroetsch argues that Frye is "trying to assert the oneness, the unity, of all narrative." Robert Kroetsch, "Disunity as Unity: A Canadian Strategy," *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, eds. Ajay Heble,

deployment of interpretations to place *Rockbound* favourably in relation to the exigencies at play. Her positioning of *Rockbound* as a timeless study of human nature invited other panelists to perceive it as a work of hope.

When the final votes were tallied, *Rockbound* emerged victorious because a coalition comprised of Morrissey, MacKay, and Carrier together refined and supported three exigencies that made Day's work seem an inevitable choice over *Oryx and Crake*. Foremost, Day's work held the potential to unite Canadians during a difficult time through its positive depiction of humanity. MacKay rejected *Oryx and Crake* for asking "questions about *issues* of our day" rather than "questions about human nature," and supported *Rockbound* as a text "about human nature" ("2005: Day 4") that is "more sincere" to the "human spirit" ("2005: Day 5"). Secondly, the selection of Day's work inducted a forgotten author into this popular Canadian canon (Carrier's priority) and recovered a part of Canada's literary history (Morrissey's argument). And finally, *Rockbound* addressed the exigence of encouraging people to read a work that is "accessible" to a broad spectrum of Canadian readers (championed by Carrier). Critically, although Morrissey was declared the champion debater, Carrier and MacKay did not band around *her* motives; rather, when their own works were voted out, they sought out an alternative that would fulfill *their* motives, and Morrissey cannily shifted her positioning of *Rockbound* to meet their expressed needs. I also direct attention to how the prevailing exigencies were honed in relation to a significant situational constraint: *Oryx and Crake*. MacKay and Carrier's dialogic perception of the social action of Atwood's

Donna Palmateer Pennee and J. R. (Tim) Struthers (Peterborough: Broadview P, 1997) 357. Frye contends, "The purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them." Northrop Frye, "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres," *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 247-8.

work—the dire warning of a dystopic tale—shaped their assessment of *Rockbound*'s social action as giving readers hope, a social action that other readers in other rhetorical situations may not have attributed to Day's work. Ultimately the 2005 panelists sought an affirmation of human goodness to counteract *Oryx and Crake*'s dystopic rendering of our current historical moment.

What does this rhetorical situation teach us about canonical selection? First, jurors are quite constant in their motivations to address certain exigencies; second, given the constraints of instantiating a canonizing genre (a work must be selected), they seek to address these social motives through different texts; and third, literary works serve as situational constraints, positing exigencies (e.g., *Oryx and Crake*'s social change), and suggesting social actions (e.g., *No Crystal Stair*'s responsive understandings of hope) that can be fulfilled by competing texts.

Canada Reads 2006: responsive understandings of laughter and learning

A comparison of *Canada Reads 2005* to *Canada Reads 2006* reveals that the selection process to choose a literary work for Canadian readers recurs. As I will demonstrate, panelists articulate exigencies in their book choice pitch which are then debated and modified during the brawl—due to the situational constraints of the competing literary works and the panelists' varying motives and sense of timeliness—until eventually a coalition forms around a shared sense that a certain kind of work is the most fitting choice for Canadians. The jury's talk about literature is motivated to achieve a consensus around their selection criteria and choose a work that meets these standards. This

recurrent process suggests, as I have claimed, that similar processes occur in other rhetorical situations of collective canonical selection.

As the debaters and literary works of this recurring rhetorical situation of *Canada Reads* change, so too do the exigencies debated. Four panelists shared a sense of *kairos*, seizing on the opportunity of the 2006 brawl to rhetorically address a post-9/11 historical moment of the War on Terror and Canada's military presence in Afghanistan, but disagreed on what type of work would best address this exigence. On the final day, three jurors selected *A Complicated Kindness* because they believed it would elicit responsive understandings of laughter and increased awareness of the potentially damaging social and political effects of fundamentalist religion. As literary genre theorists have shown in synchronic studies of readers' literary selections (e.g., Burgess British; Moretti Graphs), diachronic canonizing uptakes are also motivated by local contexts: both the 2005 and 2006 jurors sought to address exigencies of early twenty-first-century Canada through literature.

In *Canada Reads 2006*, the competing celebrities and literary titles were as follows: John K. Samson, a singer, songwriter, poet, and publisher, chose *A Complicated Kindness* (2004); poet Susan Musgrave nominated Al Purdy's *Rooms for Rent in the Outer Planets: Selected Poems, 1962-1996* (1996); Nelofer Pazira, a filmmaker, journalist and author, selected Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* (2005); lawyer and author Maureen McTeer put forward Frances Itani's *Deafening* (2003); and comic performer and writer Scott Thompson supported Mordecai Richler's *Cocksure* (1968). *A Complicated Kindness*, the story of Nomi Nickel growing up in a Mennonite town in southern Manitoba, was voted the book that Canada reads. Purdy's selection of his best

poems, *Rooms for Rent*, came second; *Three Day Road*, the intertwined tales of a Cree medicine woman, Niska, and her nephew Xavier and his best friend Elijah, came third; fourth was *Deafening*, an account of Grania, a deaf girl living in small-town Ontario before and during World War I; and *Cocksure*, a satire of corporate power and political correctness in 1960s London, was the first book sent back to the shelf. The panelists debated three key exigencies in response to the *Canada Reads* organizers' high-level directive to choose a work for Canadians to read: choose a literary text that educates Canadians about Canada in a time of war, choose a work of comedy, and choose one of poetry.

The social need for comedy, which contributed heavily to *A Complicated Kindness*' win, was proposed by Scott Thompson and heartily seconded by Richardson. As with MacKay's 2005 lobbying for a work that offered Canadians 'hope,' a panelist (Thompson) other than the winner's champion (Samson) promoted the situated motive that most influenced the final result. The second exigence, for poetry, which kept Purdy's volume in contention until the final round, was proposed by Musgrave and persuasively supported by Samson. And the exigence to learn about Canadian's history of war was initially argued by McTeer and earnestly championed by Pazira.

Because the perceived exigencies of comedy and poetry are presented as correctives to the established *Canada Reads* canon, these social motives did not surface in 2006 for the first time: they recur throughout the history of the brawl. Thompson's call for comedy recurs in past years of *Canada Reads*. Gartner, having unsuccessfully defended Richler's *Barney's Version* (*Barney's*) in 2004, offered future panelists various tips "to make sure your book isn't KO'd," one of which highlighted the lacklustre career

of comedy not only in the “battle of the books” but, she asserts, other canonizing Canadian literary competitions:

Avoid Humour: All three winning Canada Reads books (*In the Skin of a Lion*, *Next Episode*, and *The Last Crossing*) lack a funny bone. The unwritten rule in Canadian literary competitions is that if a book has plenty of yuks it lacks *gravitas*. (We've got the Leacock Award for books considered funny and thus insignificant.) (Gartner; T. S. L. Association)

The 2005 panelists continued this tradition, voting for the relatively sombre *Rockbound*, ignoring the humour in *Beautiful Losers*, and dismissing the “yuks” in *Oryx and Crake*.⁸⁷

An exigence for comedy might have motivated the *Canada Reads* organizers to select Thompson as a panelist, a comic actor and writer who would likely defend a work of humour, but the addition of amusing and sharp-witted panelists also serves the social action of creating an entertaining program for CBC listeners. In 2006, the exigence to usher a work of humour into the *Canada Reads* canon illustrates that literary selections are also responsive to and constrained by prior canonizing uptakes.

The 2006 exigence for poetry had also arisen in earlier episodes of *Canada Reads*. For example, when the shortlist for *Canada Reads 2002* was announced, Robert Lecker accused the CBC’s “process of selection”—asking panelists to select works of fiction—of suppressing certain literary forms: “‘These kinds of discussions tend to expose the fairly established values that are held by different constituencies,’ he observed, ‘They also tend to reveal the resistance by those constituencies to experimental work.’” He advanced his claim:

⁸⁷ Morrissey stated that Atwood’s “language kept [her] from taking [the] book seriously” as a “literary novel,” and Johnson agreed that Atwood’s many language puns were “sort of teenager-y”: the work lacked “*gravitas*” and was not worthy of canonical selection. CBC, “Canada Reads 2005: Day 4,” February 24, 2005 2005, audio, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20050226041508/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/debate/day4.html>.

‘What’s revealed already in the process of selection is what I would call genre suppression. It completely marginalizes the short story, and yet one could easily argue that it is in the short story that we have more excellent writers than any other form. What happens to a writer like Alice Munro? Novels are the preferred bourgeois form, and Toronto, being a predominantly bourgeois city, prefers the bourgeois form. They would never think of having a book of poetry that everyone should read.’ (Errett)

The Toronto middle class (whom Lecker views as the literary taste-makers not only in *Canada Reads* but Canada writ large) repeatedly selects one form over another.⁸⁸ Lynn Henry, executive editor of the shortlisted *Whylah Falls*, publicly called attention to Lecker’s oversight that George Elliott Clarke’s work, which went on to be the runner up to Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*, is “a book of poetry, and a brilliantly experimental, not to mention a bestselling one, at that.” Nevertheless Lecker’s claim largely held true, for by the end of 2006 only three of 25 shortlisted works were not novels: *Whylah Falls* (2002), Munro’s short story collection, *The Love of a Good Woman* (2004), and Purdy’s *Rooms for Rent* (2006). Furthermore, between 2002 and 2004 when panelists proposed five books from which a *Canada Reads* jury picked one, only one title other than Clarke’s and Munro’s was not a novel: Lee Henderson’s short story collection *The Broken Record Technique*, nominated by Gartner who herself is a short-story writer. This suggests—as Lecker argued—that the novel’s domination of *Canada Reads* reflects a contemporary Canadian preference for—and comfort with—the category, a preference both shaped by and reflected in other canons.

⁸⁸ From a genre theoretical perspective, Lecker’s term “genre suppression” is too broad since novels, poetry, and short stories are literary categories whereas genre is particular to time and place, as scholars including Burgess, Kathleen Jamieson, Miller, and Moretti have demonstrated. Miranda J. Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order: 1740-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Kathleen M Jamieson, "Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraint," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975). Miller, "Genre." Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, 2007 ed. (Verso, 2005).

The 2006 Book Choices

In their uptakes of the “book choice” meta-genre, panelists revealed the exigencies and motivations of their literary selections. Samson’s reasons for choosing *A Complicated Kindness*, a “hilarious and brave and progressive book,” were nuanced and various. On aesthetic grounds, he lauds the book’s voice of Nomi Nickel as “intense and honest and heartfelt and compelling and funny and real.” On kairotic grounds, he argues that “at a time when the reactionary religious right is on the rise throughout the world,” Toews’ work demonstrates “what authoritarianism and fundamentalism actually do to individuals.” And on canonical grounds, he dubs Nomi the successor to Hagar Shipley, the “fallible” narrator of Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel*, and crowns Toews the “inheritor of Mordecai Richler’s greatness.” Samson bases the link between Toews and Richler on their satiric skills, describing both as “funny, iconoclastic, lively, humane, and not afraid to take swipes at their own conservative religious communities” (“2006 - Panelists”). Samson interprets *A Complicated Kindness* as addressing an exigence of “authoritarianism and fundamentalism” through humour: a positioning that leads to its final selection.

Susan Musgrave’s “hope” is that “by giving Canadians a taste of poetry here on *Canada Reads*, they will no longer be able to live without it.”⁸⁹ She solicits uptakes from Canadian readers of Purdy’s work specifically and poetry generally: she perceives the temporal dimensions of *kairos*, grasping the rhetorical opportunity of the brawl to spawn genre sequences that will influence Canadian readers’ future literary selections. Musgrave

⁸⁹ Musgrave prefaces this with a quotation from the American poet, Jane Kenyan: “A poet’s job is to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, in such a beautiful way that people cannot live without it.” qtd by Musgrave CBC, “Canada Reads 2006 - The Panelists,” 2006, CBC.ca, Available: http://www.cbc.ca/canadareads/cr_2006/panelists.html, November 20 2006.

seems motivated by twinned exigencies: Canadians need poetry *and* poetry needs Canadians. The literary form needs uptakes by readers to flourish. Musgrave explains that she chose this particular poetry collection in part because it is accessible (if people need to acquire a “taste,” then “Al Purdy is a good place to begin”): here, as in 2005, we see the meta-generic value of accessibility with regards to a broadly imagined public of readers. She also selected *Rooms for Rent* because Purdy was “the voice of the land,” enabling Canadians “to know each other; like the CBC, [his work] connects with all parts of the country” (“2006 - Panelists”): the selection of Purdy’s work would meet a recurrent Canadian (and CBC) exigence of nationalism through the simultaneity of a shared reading experience. Musgrave’s instance of the book-choice genre foregrounds how an imagined public (e.g., Canadians) constrains canonical agents’ literary selections (e.g. an accessible work that addresses nationalism); if these agents were asked to select a literary work for a differently imagined public, they might prioritize different literary values and address different exigencies.

The other three panelists put forward motives in their instances of the book choice meta-genre that ultimately influenced the final selection of *A Complicated Kindness* over *Rooms for Rent*. Pazira and McTeer both selected historical novels about World War I, *Three Day Road* and *Deafening* respectively, and saw their social actions as teaching Canadians about Canada’s history, particularly its history of war (“2006 - Panelists”). Both imply throughout the brawl, without making overt claims, that these novels will solicit responsive understandings from *Canada Reads* listeners that will press upon particular exigencies of the current historical moment, the War on Terror and Canada’s military work in Afghanistan. Pazira and McTeer approach reading as an occasion for

learning and the shared reading of *Canada Reads* as a chance for mutual-instruction; in comparison, Samson, Musgrave, and Thompson describe reading as an occasion for pleasure. Thompson makes his approach to literary selection clear in his book choice monologue, stating three reasons for choosing Richler's "masterpiece" *Cocksure* (Cocksure): "Number 1, it's hilarious, and Number 2, it's dirty, and Number 3, it's dirty and hilarious." He is fully cognisant, though, that while *Canada Reads* might just be a brawl, it is a brawl over 'great' books, for he moves his tongue slightly away from his cheek to utter a fourth reason why *Cocksure* should win: "it attacks everybody without prejudice, and it never lets anybody off the hook," which to him "is a sign of a great satirist" ("2006 - Panelists"). With this, Thompson meta-generically positions Richler's work as a specific kind of comedy—a satiric novel—a genre designation that he later applies to *A Complicated Kindness*. In what follows, I trace how these main exigencies—a time of "authoritarianism and fundamentalism" and the lack of comedy and poetry in popular Canadian canons—are refined over the five days of literary debate. While the exigencies are different from those of 2005—troubled times of globalization and a need to canonize new or forgotten authors—the process by which they are debated to determine a final winner is consistent.

The 2006 Brawl

"Learn, damn it!"

The 2006 brawl provides an occasion for us to listen in on how these particular readers view reading, and how their divergent viewpoints inform their canonical selections. The panelists, as I mentioned, are divided regarding their motivations to read, which creates a

rift: should they choose a work that they believe Canadians will enjoy (a position advanced by Samson, Musgrave, and Thompson) or one from which Canadians will learn something meaningful (as proposed by Pazira and McTeer). On the first day, McTeer suggests that the *Canada Reads* public “should try” to read all the contenders “because it’s through reading that we begin to understand different points of view, different places, different perspectives” (“2006: Day 1”). Thompson disagrees that one should, as a good Canadian, read for self-improvement. For instance, when McTeer reiterates her vehement position that *Cocksure* is not funny, Thompson responds, “you shouldn’t approach books whether they’re good for you. I think you should approach books whether they’re good to read” (“2006: Day 1”), a motivation that Samson supports. Thompson furthers his point when he describes reading *Deafening* as being “force fed” and told to “learn, damn it!” (“2006: Day 3”). Pazira draws the panel back to the exigence they have been given, choose a work for Canadians to read, arguing that if the panel is asking Canadians “to take some time of their busy schedules and read a book” then it should be something that “as a Canadian,” one “ought to know” (“2006: Day 3”): Pazira reiterates the initial *Canada Reads* exigence to choose a work that Canada “should” read. For her, *Three Day Road* was worth her time because, as someone “coming from outside” of Canada (Pazira is Afghani), Boyden’s work taught her “something of Canadian history” that she did not know, “the involvement of the Native community in the larger history of this country,” World War I. Samson disagrees utterly with her pedagogical focus: “I don’t think books should be didactic. You shouldn’t read fiction because you want to *learn* something. It should be the other way around. You should happen to learn something because you love the book.” McTeer suggests that the panel’s differences with regards to reading motives

illustrate how “subjective and personal this process is” (“2005: Day 1”). And yet, I emphasize, their motives as readers are not individual but *social*, informed by their divergent forms of education and spheres of activity in which they circulate. Their motives are further influenced by the literary genres and meta-genres that they take up, which—as social forms—both enable and constrain panelists’ social actions within the *Canada Reads* canonizing system. Ultimately, the panelists decide that Toews’ work, as a satirical commentary on how religious fundamentalism affects individuals, is both educational and pleasurable.

Canadians need more comedy

The panelists also debated the exigence of humour as a gap in Canadian canons that their literary selection could fill. In an audio clip played by Richardson, Richler focused upon the genre of satiric novels, and characterized the exigence of humour as unique to the Canadian literary sphere, as both Gartner and Thompson had contended:

Satirical novels are probably least seriously treated in Canada—they’re much more seriously [...] reviewed in ... in America or in England, either well or badly; I don’t mean necessarily in [...] fulsome terms—because, in Canada, there’s a shaky or insecure attitude about [...] culture so that ... it’s a kind of gaucheness, so that people feel like ‘culture is a very serious thing.’ And a duty. And it connotes earnestness, and, [...] moral uplift. And they haven’t got enough confidence to realize that something ostensibly funny may be of the highest seriousness. (Interview with Robert Fulford, qtd in CBC “2006: Day 2”)

The selection of satiric novels by reviewers, Richler implies (or, in this context, this generic selection by *Canada Reads* panelists), would address not only a canonical need for humour but also a broader exigence of Canadian “confidence” in their national “culture.” Thompson, Samson, and Richardson advance this exigence throughout the 2006 debate. On Day One, Thompson declares, “Canadian Letters are devoid of comedy”

due to “a prejudice in this country,” which he feels is “sad and self-destructive” for “we produce the funniest people in the world” but “give them nothing to do.” He chose *Cocksure* because Richler, as a great satirist, saw in 1968 “where we would end up” today: in a historical moment of “political correctness” that threatens to “strangle us all” (“2006: Day 1”).⁹⁰ Interestingly, for Thompson, Richler’s instantiation of the satiric novel genre four decades ago anticipates this present-day moment. It is an opportune text. As when *Rockbound* was re-interpreted as a work of hope to meet the Canadian historical moment of 2005, a literary work is once again selected from another time period and re-interpreted to meet a contemporary exigence, political correctness. These recurring moments of strategic literary selection are important for literary genre theorists: they complicate our view of generic evolution, selection, and interpretation as addressing the same historical exigencies, a view resulting from studies of contemporaneous selection of literary genres.

Samson aligns himself with Thompson’s motive: *A Complicated Kindness* “can make you weep and laugh at the same time and, I think that’s—like Scott said—[...] quite rare in Canadian literature” (“2006: Day 1”). Before the panelists’ first vote Richardson steps out of his role as impartial referee to make “a special plea” to “think about humour”: “there has been a history in *Canada Reads*, and if ... if *Cocksure* is the first to go, it will be part of an honourable tradition of humour being voted off the list first” (“2006: Day 1”).⁹¹ McTeer, who has already declared she would not recommend

⁹⁰ Thompson read *Cocksure* at sixteen because he “heard it was dirty” (“2006: Day 1”), the same reason Johnston read *Beautiful Losers* in high school: both admissions conjure a canon of scandalous works that teenagers read on the sly.

⁹¹ More accurately, there were no works of satire in 2002; *Sarah Binks* was eliminated first in 2003, Richardson’s first year as host; *Barney’s Version* survived the first round only to be voted out second in 2004; and in 2005, *Oryx and Crake* made it to the final round. Paul Hiebert, *Sarah Binks*, 1995 ed. (Toronto: New Canadian Library, 1947).

Richler's work to anyone, interjects: "That assumes you think *Cocksure* is funny."

Richardson continues his passionate plea, "I don't know why I'm telling you this ... except that ... in my heart of hearts—in my heart of *hearts*—I would like to see it last a little past the first round." The panelists erupt in protest—"vote for the book you want, but make sure it's not this one!" cries McTeer—, and bluster that his "charge" is unfair. Richardson is attempting to place a new rhetorical constraint on the process of literary selection to meet an exigence of humour. Thompson strenuously objects, "I don't need anyone defending it," even rejecting Richardson's offer to give him the final word so as to avoid the panel being "prejudiced" against him. Musgrave insists, "Purdy is very funny," and McTeer adds, "Miriam's book is very funny," to which Richardson responds that "satire" is a "hard sell," satire is absent from the current *Canada Reads* canon of winning books, and satire is represented on the panel by *Cocksure* alone ("2006: Day 1"). Toews' work, for Richardson, is not an instance of a satiric novel.

His plea goes unheeded. McTeer and Musgrave both vote against Richler's work, and Samson, when forced to break a tie between *Cocksure* and *Rooms for Rent*, stays true to Purdy as his declared second choice. Richler's work is out of contention. Thompson cries out, "You've all just proven me right," and exclaims, "Wow ... Canadian Literature does hate comedy." Samson counters, "Oh come on Scott, my book is hilarious too," reminding his opponent that his exigence is still at play ("2006: Day 2"). This indicates that in situations of canonical selection, panelists recognize other people's exigencies, and position their selections favourably to address them, just as Morrissey did in 2005. It also shows us that while people select a different work when their choice is eliminated (indeed, this is a constraint of canonizing genres of collective decisions), they do not

readily dismiss the exigencies they support or the social actions they hope to solicit from their imagined public: Mackay continued to seek a work of hope when *No Crystal Stair* was voted off, and Thompson continues to seek a work of comedy. However, panelists do experience new social motives in addition to old ones, as when Carrier added the exigence to address troubled times to those of accessibility and non-canonical authors. Similarly in 2006, Thompson and Richardson's call for comedy seems to eventually have a significant effect on McTeer. After her choice of *Deafening* is voted out, she positions Toews' work as a fitting selection for humour even though she had just voted against *A Complicated Kindness*:

McTeer: I have a question for Scott. Do you think this was a humourous book?
Thompson: Yes, I did. Yeah, I thought it was the second funniest book.
McTeer: So there's still hope. There's still hope humour might ...
Thompson: This is a very funny book, yes. ("2006: Day 3")

After this exchange, fellow panelists and listeners know Thompson will support *A Complicated Kindness* as the 2006 book that Canada reads and McTeer may be persuaded to follow suit.

Canadians need a "taste" of poetry

The 2006 call for comedy is accompanied by a similar canonical call for poetry. On the first day of the brawl, Richardson highlights that "for the first time we have a collection of poetry on our shortlist" ("2006: Day 1"), Purdy's *Rooms for Rent*. The fact that he does not take up *Whylah Falls* as a previously debated work of poetry (albeit not a poetry collection) illustrates how selective uptake's memory can be, and how canonizing genre sequences shape the symbolic capital of literary works: the canonical value of Clarke's work in 2002 is not re-circulated throughout a 2006 *Canada Reads* public, whereas that

same day, the canon of winning titles was memorialized by Richardson, an uptake which re-testifies to their literary worth and expands their publics. Subsequent conversations during the debate about an exigence for poetry focused on the difficulty or *impossibility* of debating poetry alongside novels, a concern that may have been alleviated or discredited if Richardson had informed the panel that their predecessors in 2002 had not only debated a work of poetry but had voted it through to the final round.⁹²

The meta-generic discussions administering the reading of poetry within the 2006 brawl are familiar from other rhetorical situations in the Canadian literary sphere. Musgrave, for example, blames Canada's education system, which "put" everyone "off" poetry including her, as she had to memorize some poems for punishment and "count metaphors" in others. These punitive and pedagogical uptakes of poetry, she suggests, prevent people from feeling motivated to take up poetry outside the school system. When she discovered Purdy's poetry, she recalls how it was such a departure from this school-based poetry canon that she was astonished: he writes "how people speak," he writes about "her world," and he writes about things she can "understand" ("2006: Day 1"). Her implication is that poetry that is not written "how people speak" or about "her world"

⁹² Alice Munro's short story collection *The Love of a Good Woman* was debated in 2004, but was voted off first when Richardson (as per the rules at the time) had to break a tie. As the 2004 website summarized the event, "Bill makes a difficult decision. He casts his vote against his literary idol Alice Munro, only because he believes it will be too difficult to contrast a book of short stories with four novels. The Love of a Good Woman is gone." CBC, *Canada Reads 2004: Day 2. The Battle of the Books So Far...*, 2004, CBC, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20040921181206/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/debate/day2.htm>, March 30 2010. This same phenomenon took place in the 2007 "All Stars" round, when Jim Cuddy argued that it was too challenging to compare novels to a work of short stories. David Bezmozgis' *Natasha and Other Stories* defended by Steven Page. David Bezmozgis, *Natasha and Other Stories* (Harpercollins Canada, 2004). When Bezmozgis' collection is voted off, Richardson memorializes his 2004 decision in his new *Canada Reads* blog. CBC, *Canada Reads: Bill's Blog - Day 4*, 2007, CBC.ca, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070603050517/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/debate/day4.html>, April 4 2010. The repeated articulation of this belief—that one cannot compare the major forms—by otherwise sophisticated and motivated public readers suggests to me that this impossibility is instilled in the education system, where syllabi are often tidily divided into distinct groupings of poetry, drama, fiction, and short-fiction.

cannot motivate Musgrave (or at least a teenage Musgrave) to take it up. For Musgrave, *Rooms for Rent* does not belong to the world of high art and the literary elite but to the people, including her imagined public of *Canada Reads*. Purdy's collection is a fitting choice for her previously articulated literary value of "accessibility." Thompson, though, reinscribes the notion of poetry as high art, *inaccessible* to him as one of "those Philistines" ("2006: Day 1"), a subject position understood in relation to the literary elite. He "just didn't feel it was fair" to have poetry on the panel: he "had to work at it," to "force himself" to read the volume ("2006: Day 2").⁹³ Again we hear meta-generic talk from pedagogical rhetorical situations, where students complain about being "forced" to read poetry.

⁹³ After Musgrave reads a poem aloud for the panel and CR public, Thompson asks, "what makes that a poem ... not, not a paragraph?" Musgrave counters, "oh, because it doesn't rhyme," and Thompson, protesting that he's "not that much of a vulgarian," explains he is in earnest. Musgrave then falters, "I don't know how to explain that." Thompson rephrases, noting his sense of a cultural hierarchy of poetry over prose, with the former holding more symbolic capital than the latter: "because the words are arranged on the page in the form of a poem, why is that all of a sudden more important than if it was just a paragraph?" Musgrave does not answer directly, explaining instead that she chose Purdy's "narrative poetry" deliberately for its accessibility ("a lot of people will find this easier to read" than, for instance, "lyric poetry"). She rereads the excerpt, and Thompson says, "If it was written on the page, and it wasn't punctuated and formed like a poem, I would just read that as a cool sentence" to which Musgrave allows, "well, you can read it that way." (2006: Day 4).

Thompson's question resonated with members of the *Canada Reads* public: a "Poetry vs. Prose" feature, added to the website after the brawl, begins, "In the heat of the discussion, Susan Musgrave didn't have a chance to answer [Thompson's question], and we've received many letters from people who want to know." They then quote from one in which the writer, Kim Bollozos argues that Musgrave and Richardson in fact dismissed Thompson: "Yet, I think this is a very important question. If we want to make poetry accessible to Canadians, we need to explain such things and not assume that everyone should know the answer. So to give Purdy a fair shot, explain this for us." Note the recurrence of "accessible" here as an indicator that this value holds meaning for this reader. In Musgrave's carefully crafted response, she writes, "It troubles me that others worry about this distinction (between what is poetry and what is prose): either the poem affects you, or it does not." Musgrave appeals to other Canadian poets—Patrick Lane, Marilyn Bowering, Tom Wayman, and Brian Bett—to explain poetry to the *Canada Reads* public, and then shares their responses. From these, she concludes that they agree with Ezra Pound's definition of poetry as "intense language," adding a "caveat" from Bett: "poetry is where the language is as important as the story." In this instance, I sense a great cultural potential of *Canada Reads* as facilitating dialogue about Canadian literature: perplexed Canadian poets explaining their art to bemused Canadian readers, both sides motivated, both sides attentive. CBC, *Canada Reads 2006 - Poetry Vs. Prose*, 2006, CBC.ca, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060812061727/www.cbc.ca/canadareads/poetry.html>, November 11 2006.

Pazira also rejects poetry's place on the panel, but on very different grounds than Thompson. She "grew up" with poetry, "loves it," and thinks that "it is an essential part of living," meta-generically informing her imagined public that one ought to read poetry (and that Thompson is indeed a Philistine). But she does not support Musgrave's social action of giving readers "a taste." Rather, she argues that "it's very difficult to try and keep a balance between novels and poetry" ("2006: Day 2"). "Poetry is a planet of its own," she declares, and is inappropriate for this rhetorical situation: "not on this panel, not on *Canada Reads*." One implication is that the right readers already read poetry (those who know the "essential" ingredients for living), and another is that readers (those properly motivated) need to discover this "planet" on their own. For Pazira, the public spectacle of the book brawl is unseemly for poetry but not for novels: poetry should not be dissected publicly but savoured privately. Her claim is significant, for it marks what she sees as a boundary of shared reading experiences: poetry should be read and contemplated in private.

Samson, justifying his vote against *Cocksure*, counters Pazira's position with equal conviction: "I think it's really important that poetry is a part of *Canada Reads*. It's been overlooked for years. And I don't agree that there should be a distinction between novels and poetry. They should be treated on *exactly* the same level; they should be treated with as much respect" ("2006: Day 2"). Samson, like Musgrave, seizes the rhetorical opportunity to shift the prevailing hierarchy of literary forms, recognizing the potential power of the panel to reshape Canadian literary tastes. He stops short, though, of supporting *Rooms for Rent* in the final vote, remarking on how the constraints of the brawl genre make him feel forced to vote against Purdy. Instead, he stays true to his

initial selection of *A Complicated Kindness*, a work that is timely but not a radical departure from the novel as “the preferred bourgeois form.” Musgrave fails to motivate a majority to support *Rooms for Rent*: her exigence of nationalism is not timely enough, and she does not reposition Purdy’s collection successfully as a fitting response to the prevailing exigencies of a need for comedy and a time of “authoritarianism and fundamentalism.” In the end—ironically—Pazira supports *Rooms for Rent*. Her vote remains puzzling to me: perhaps—as her words below suggest—it was a vote against *A Complicated Kindness* more than for Purdy’s collection. While the brawl’s genre constraints motivate Samson to vote against a literary work that he *does* recommend to Canadians, they also motivate Pazira to vote for a literary work that she *does not* want to select. While other collective canonizing situations are not billed as a “game,” we can imagine similar choices: two professors have to cut a literary work they want to team teach from their syllabus because they cannot include all of their initial selections; a juror on a literary prize has to select one of the remaining two titles because her peers have already voted out her preferred choices.

Final Vote

On Day Four, the panelists deem *A Complicated Kindness* a fitting choice for *Canada Reads 2006*. For McTeer, Richardson’s “plea for humour” prompted her to reconsider *A Complicated Kindness* and vote against *Three Day Road*, a book she finds “about as funny as a torture chamber.” Pazira allows that Toews’ work may be “witty” and full of “humour,” but belittles it as “very much a coming-of-age story,” a meta-generic indictment also applied by Morrissey to *No Crystal Stair* in 2005. *A Complicated*

Kindness will not elicit the kinds of uptakes from Canadians that she seeks to bring about meaningful change. Pazira again questions the exigence that should govern the panel:

“Do I feel good about sitting back and reading a book that will make me laugh for a day, or do I really want to read something that [...] would make me think,” emphasizing that this choice is “part of the responsibility” the panel is bearing (“2006: Day 4”). She reiterates the commonplace assumption that Richler despaired: a literary work that makes people laugh cannot *also* make people think. Samson completely disagrees that Toews’ work “isn’t timely and isn’t important just because it’s funny” (“2006: Day 4”).

Thompson joins him to argue that Toews’ depiction of “a fundamentalist Christian community” will have “resonance” with Canadian readers as particularly fitting the historical moment:

one of the greatest issues that we face today, is fundamentalism, and fundamentalism, regardless of where it comes from, whatever religion it is, whatever doctrine it is—it can be any -ism—it’s usually lacking in humour. And [...] that’s why people that are fundamentalists are terrified of humour, and irony. And I think that that portrayal of that community shows the dead end of fundamentalism, and how eventually it will destroy ... the *heart*. (“2006: Day 4”)

I argue that Thompson interprets Toews’ work as a satiric novel, given his earlier definition of the genre’s social action as taking “the prevailing beliefs” and extending them “to their utmost conclusion” (“2006: Day 2”). This generic interpretation addresses both “humour” and “the dead end of fundamentalism” as exigencies. Like Mackay who fulfilled her motivation by interpreting *Rockbound* as a work of hope, Thompson fulfils his motivation by interpreting *A Complicated Kindness* as a satiric novel, and anoints Toews a satirist worthy of the hitherto unattainable *Canada Reads*’ crown.

Implications

Canada Reads, the battle of the books, is a self-consciously problematic undertaking pursued by the CBC: an impossible task of choosing a work for all Canadians that assumes its social actions will be furthered by the on-air *and* off-air debates more than by uptakes of the final announcement of a winner. The hotly contested *Canada Reads* canon conjures a public with dispute utilized not as a force to drive public participants apart but a catalyst to gather them together. This style of dispute is both a distinguishing characteristic of *Canada Reads*, and—I want to argue—a hyperbole of the process of literary selection that recurs in other situations where a group of canon-makers choose a literary work(s) from a larger pool of possible others. I am not suggesting that *Canada Reads* is a satire of other canonizing situations (although at times it seems to be), nor am I suggesting that *Canada Reads* is an improbable farce that should be disregarded (although at times it feels that way). Rather, I am proposing that the CBC book brawl is an “extravagant exaggeration” (“Hyperbole”) of canonical processes that has much to teach us about contemporary literary canons.

Canada Reads, as analyzed through genre theory, offers us a better understanding of the “oft-asked question” of collective canonical selection: “how on earth did they pick that book?” When given a broad exigence such as “pick the best work” or “a book for Canadians,” jurors debate specific exigencies that will motivate them to do this cultural work. These exigencies are suggested by an array of influences including the canonizing genre system itself, past literary selections within this system and other systems, jurors’ sense of the historical moment, their views on why people read literature, their assumptions about their imagined public, and social motives advanced by the literary

works under consideration. As works are eliminated, some jurors remain committed to the exigencies they initially sought to address and seek alternative works that they anticipate will meet these social needs. During the deliberations, some jurors are newly motivated by an additional exigence advanced by a peer, and others strategically reinterpret their preferred work to sit favourably with the motivations of others. In this way, majorities are achieved: the panel arrives at a consensus, a shared feeling that this sort of work should be read at this time by this imagined public.

CHAPTER FOUR: CANONICAL AGENCY OF PUBLIC READERS IN *THE COMPLETE BOOKER*

“Welcome to *The Complete Booker*”

The Complete Booker is an online reading challenge where readers from various locales around the world assemble to share their experiences reading the canon of winners from the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, a prize annually awarded to “the best novel” (Foundation "About") by a writer from the Commonwealth or the Republic of Ireland. A reader, Laura, issued a public challenge in 2007 for people to join her in the shared experience of reading this canon (Laura "Complete"): many international readers have taken up her challenge, and new readers continue to join. Why, in a study of public readers of Canadian literature, do I turn to an international challenge based on a Commonwealth prize? *Complete Booker* (TCB) enables me to study a popular canonizing genre system that takes up Canadian literary works beyond national borders. This online challenge also enables me to study how some non-Canadian readers encounter, interpret, evaluate, and re-circulate Canadian texts for an imagined public of international readers. Three Canadian works have won the Booker (as it is commonly called) over the years: Ondaatje's *The English Patient* in 1992, Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* in 2000, and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* in 2002. My main interest in this chapter is what motivates *individual* public readers to participate in canonical processes. Accordingly, I focus on four challenge participants who have reviewed two or three of these prize-winning Canadian texts: Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor.

These four public readers are part of a much larger community. Approximately 55 people to date have committed to read and then publicly write about all the winners of the Man Booker Prize for Fiction from its inception in 1969 to today.⁹⁴ These readers are from locales around the world, such as Helen from Moss Vale, Australia (Helen); Tammy from Tallahassee, USA (Tammy), and Abhinav from Thane, India (Abhinav). In comparison to event attendees of *One Book, One Vancouver* and celebrity readers of *Canada Reads*, the public readers of *The Complete Booker* (TCB) participate unofficially on the outskirts of a major canonizing genre system, The Man Booker Prize for Fiction, through a genre system of their own. The genre system of the Booker facilitates participants' contrivance and instantiation of a literary canon, a discursive space in which circulates both the selected literary works and the public evaluative talk of these works. The canonizing system of the challenge strategically overlaps with that of the Booker, instantiating and re-circulating its canon while constituting and expanding its public. What motivates some people to join this new canonizing system? How do they know how to take an interest within this reading challenge? In taking up the Booker's public, how do they conjure a public of their own? And given that *The Complete Booker* is a "satellite" system, on the periphery of a dominant canonical power, what is the canonical agency of challenge participants?

Participants' primary motivation in joining seems to be that *The Complete Booker* provides them an occasion to share their reading experiences by connecting with fellow book lovers and "Booker" fans who are all similarly motivated to read the canon of Booker-winning titles. Laura features a list of these literary works prominently on the

⁹⁴ Since *The Complete Booker* is a perpetual project, extending over an unspecified number of years with new participants joining on an ongoing basis, each year a new winner is added to the reading list.

blog ("Booker"). Importantly, none of *The Complete Booker* participants use the word *canon*.⁹⁵ Sometimes they use descriptors like “‘Booker’ books” (Mel "Introduction") and more commonly they refer to the Booker *list*. RoseCityReader’s introduction provides us an example: “I am a ‘compulsive list reader’ -- if it won a prize or made it to a ‘Must Read’ list, I’ll want to read it” (Reader). “Lists” abound in the prize world of the longlist, shortlist, and list of contenders. In popular culture, there are bestseller lists, top ten lists, “best” and “worst” dress lists, and “list” publications like the book series, *1001 things you must do before you die* (Boxall). And lists recur throughout the blogosphere, understood here as the interconnections amongst blogs (including *The Complete Booker*) and the many texts taken up within blogs (including the “list” of Booker winners). Bloggers post recurring lists (or blogrolls) of—for example—fellow bloggers, books read, movies watched, places visited, bands enjoyed, and foods eaten. Some book bloggers and hosts of reading challenges, like Laura, even summarize their month or year of reading with book lists (Laura "Sunday"; Laura "TCB: 2008").

I argue that reading lists like the Booker winners are instances of another canonizing genre in the literary sphere, advising people what to read and when. Recalling examples from Chapter Three, the *Canada Reads* shortlist (as the blogger Ransom reported) prompted some people in Ottawa to read *Volkswagen Blues* and *Rockbound* following the 2005 debate; the shortlists of 2005 and 2006 similarly motivated John Mutford and others to read these literary works prior to the broadcast debates so that together they could hold a meaningful parallel debate. Literary lists produced by canon-makers solicit uptakes that recognize “these works are important” and also anticipate subsequent uptakes of the literary works themselves: they motivate some people to think,

⁹⁵ On June 1, 2010, I searched *The Complete Booker* for “canon” and the term did not appear anywhere.

“These are important: I should read them.” Some lists connote a greater sense of urgency than others: in the genre system of the Booker, the annual shortlist urges people to read and debate these works before the winner is announced, whereas the Booker list of past winners recommends these works to people as worthy of future consideration. By creating the genre system of *The Complete Booker*, Laura takes up this winners’ list and places this canonical genre instance in a new rhetorical situation, an online reading challenge, which gives it new urgency: we should read these works together, now. For those who take up her challenge, the list initially represents what these public readers need to do (signifying their ambition) and later represents what they have done (signifying their accomplishment).

To understand what motivates these readers to join the challenge and what canonical agency they exercise with regards to the three Canadian novels, I first examine the genre system of *The Complete Booker*, including its primary canonizing genre, the reader review, and then look at two genre antecedents, school and library reading challenges and the book blog. Next I review The Man Booker Prize and its uptake of *The English Patient*, *The Blind Assassin*, and *Life of Pi*. I then study the main motivations of *The Complete Booker* participants to join the challenge, and finally analyze the specific motives and agency of Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor.

The Genre System of Online Reading Challenges

I begin with an overview of this new genre system in the literary sphere and its adaptation by many kinds of challenges.⁹⁶ In these online challenges, an individual rather than a public institution acts as host: this host suggests the challenge's focus, texts, and time constraints (if applicable), and invites those interested to participate. For example, Laura as host of *The Complete Booker* issued this challenge: "Welcome to The Complete Booker. This is not so much a reading challenge, but a long-term project in which the participants aim to read all 42 books that have won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction. There is no time limit" ("Complete"). Some hosts' invitations achieve multiple uptakes and constitute a reading public, as Laura's did, while others receive few responses. As with the One Book programs addressed in Chapter Two, it is not enough to adapt a reading challenge genre system for a new local context: challenges depend upon multiple uptakes of other public readers. Successful hosts are motivated by pre-existing, well-known exigencies that are recognized by others, many of whom decide to participate. A key distinction between *One Book*, *One Vancouver* and *Canada Reads* as compared to *The Complete Booker* is this: the Vancouver Public Library and the CBC as public civic institutions are motivated to meet an exigence to *promote* reading, whereas voluntary hosts like Laura are motivated to *share* reading.

Online reading challenges may be divided into types by time and canonical focus. *Timed* challenges are constrained by a time limit set by a host, while others, like Laura's,

⁹⁶ To date, I have encountered no scholarly articles on online reading challenges, and only one brief magazine feature. "Tip Sheet/the Checklist. Our Top Picks for the Week: Surf," *Newsweek* December 1 2007. Studies have been conducted on virtual book clubs and LibraryThing. See DeNel Rehberg Sedo, "Readers in Reading Groups: An Online Survey of Face-to-Face and Virtual Book Clubs," *Convergence* 9.1 (2003). Richard Newman, "Librarything: The Book Club You Can 'Win'," *Australian Journal of Communication* 35.3 (2008).

are *ongoing* or *perpetual* challenges with no time constraints. In the former, participants must read books within a set period of time in order to complete the challenge ‘successfully,’ a constraint that fosters a communal sense of participants reading together in time despite their different locales. This simultaneity—Anderson’s “meanwhile”—facilitates the imagining of an online community of like-minded readers. Hosts of the latter often distance themselves from time-based challenges through the label “project,” as Laura does: “This is not so much a reading challenge, but a long-term project” (“Complete”; also see “Pulitzer”; “Orange”). In perpetual challenges, participants feel a strong sense of community because of their shared purpose, a long-term commitment to read the same books. Online reading challenges may be further divided by their focus on different types of canons (examples include author challenges, genre challenges, geographic challenges, and prize challenges).⁹⁷ Canons are a means by which challenge hosts interpolate existing publics of readers who will be motivated to read and discuss particular sets of texts. Similar to how *Canada Reads* organizers instantiated the public of *Survivor* to prompt people to pay attention to the new public of the CBC book brawl, Laura constitutes the public of the Booker to call forth a new public for the reading challenge. While some challenges bring an international public into being, others appeal

⁹⁷ Author challenges include *Shakespeare Reading Challenge* and the *Anything Agatha Challenge*. *Shakespeare Challenge*, 2009, Available: <http://biblioshake.blogspot.com/2007/10/shakespeare-challenge.html>, May 28 2009. *Anything Agatha Challenge 2008*, 2008, Available: <http://thoughtsofjoyblog.blogspot.com/2008/02/anything-agatha-challenge-2008.html>, May 28 2009. Genre challenges include the *Graphic Novels Challenge* and the *Short-Story Reading Challenge*. *Graphic Novel Challenge*, 2008, Available: <http://gnchallenge.blogspot.com/>, May 28 2009. *The Short Story Reading Challenge*, 2008, Available: <http://theshortstorychallenge.blogspot.com/>, May 28 2009. And geographically-bound challenges in which readers from anywhere read works by writers from or texts written about a particular geographic locale include the *Africa Reading Challenge* and *The Canadian Book Challenge, Eh?* hosted by John Mutford. *Africa Reading Challenge*, 2009, Available: <http://tukopamoja.wordpress.com/africa-reading-challenge/>, May 28 2009. *The 2nd Canadian Book Challenge, Eh?*, 2009, Available: <http://bookmineset.blogspot.com/2008/05/2nd-canadian-book-challenge-eh.html>, May 28 2009.

to a national public, such as the *Canada Reads Challenge* launched in 2009 by bloggers Alexis and Melanie of *Roughing it in the Books* ("Canada").

The Complete Booker is one of a subset of online reading challenges centred on the canons of major literary prizes: readers can, for example, join *The Pulitzer Project* or *Read the Nobels*.⁹⁸ These literary prize challenges were launched in 2007 or 2008 by women, the majority of whom—like Laura—live in the United States.⁹⁹ The presence of this kind of challenge suggests that hosts have great confidence in major literary prizes, recognizing prize judges as holding the necessary cultural capital to select literature that both hosts and participants will enjoy.¹⁰⁰ Hosts also astutely assume that these prizes and their canons have established reading publics large enough to attract people to their challenges.¹⁰¹ A key inducement to organize and administer these challenges seems to be

⁹⁸ I am using the title “awards challenges” because even those hosts who name their challenge a “project” refer to the set of perpetual challenges as “challenges.” For example, Laura maintains a list on the left-hand side of her book blog entitled “challenges.” Laura, *Musings*, 2009, blog, Available: <http://laura0218.livejournal.com/>, March 31 2009.

⁹⁹ 3M, a female “near Omaha, US” hosts *The Pulitzer Project* to read the winners of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. 3M, *About*, 1morechapter.com, Available: <http://1morechapter.com/about/>, May 28 2009. *The Pulitzer Project*, 2009, Available: <http://pulitzerproject.blogspot.com/>, May 28 2009. *The Pulitzer Prizes*, 2009, Available: <http://www.pulitzer.org/>, May 28 2009. Aloï in Quezon City, Philippines hosts *Read the Nobels* to read books authored by Nobel Laureates in Literature, an international prize administered in Sweden. Aloï, *Screamingbanshee*, 2009, aNobii, Available: <http://www.anobii.com/people/aloi/>, May 28 2009. *Read the Nobels*, 2009, Available: <http://readnobels.blogspot.com/>, May 28 2009. *Nobel Prizes*, 2009, NobelPrize.org, Available: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/, May 28 2009. Sharon GoForth of South West Ohio hosts two challenges: the *National Book Award Project* to read works from the fiction category of the United States’ National Book Awards and the *Costa Book Award Project* to read the winners in all categories of the Costa Book Awards for writers based in the UK and Ireland. Sharon Goforth, *About Me*, 2009, blog, ExLibris, Available: <http://exlibris.typepad.com/about.html>, May 11 2009. Sharon Goforth, *National Book Award Project*, 2009, online reading challenge, TypePad, Available: http://exlibris.typepad.com/national_book_award_proje/, May 11 2009. *National Book Foundation*, 2009, website, Available: <http://www.nationalbook.org/index.html>, May 11 2009. Sharon Goforth, *Costa Book Award Reading Project*, 2009, online reading challenge, TypePad, Available: http://exlibris.typepad.com/ex_libris/costa-book-award-reading-.html, May 11 2009. *Costa Book Awards*, 2009, Available: <http://www.costabookawards.com/>, May 11 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Long’s findings are similar: “women’s book groups, like individual readers, use cultural institutions of opinion formation to sift through individual titles.” Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 121-23.

¹⁰¹ Before launching their respective challenges, these prize-challenge hosts were all prominent book bloggers with established capital and publics, suggesting that hosts need credentials in the book blogosphere before they can issue a challenge successfully. For example, people from 110 different

the pleasures of shared reading. One host Sharon urges, “Most importantly, have fun! This is meant to be an exercise in expanding your horizons, not a burden” (Goforth "Costa; National"). Aloi, the host of *Read the Nobels*, also highlights pleasure, enthusing, “Have fun and here’s to our adventure in reading!” (“Welcome”). Laura similarly presents pleasure as the primary motivator for TCB participants, “Above all, have fun!” (“Complete”). These hosts are motivated to share their reading with a community of like-minded readers.

Their word choices “horizons” and “adventure” suggest that they are also motivated to become more ‘worldly.’ In Chapter Three, we heard similar motivations from MacKay and McTeer: both expressed the view that reading widely increases the common ground amongst people. As McTeer said, “it’s through reading that we begin to understand different points of view, different places, different perspectives” (“2006: Day 1”). In the context of *Canada Reads*, this increased common ground amongst citizens addresses an exigence of nationalism; in the context of international reading prizes, expanded common ground of global texts amongst global citizens addresses an exigence of globalism, the intensification of intercultural exchange. Because the hosts themselves participate in this “adventure,” expanding *their* “horizons,” they are also motivated to

countries have visited 3M’s blog. 3M, *Imorechapter.com*, 2009, Available: <http://1morechapter.com/>, March 31 2009. And 1,234 comments have been posted to Laura’s blog, *Musings* since January 2007. Laura, *Musings*. All these hosts participate in networks of fellow book bloggers, including directories, webrings, and salons that publicly declare the presence of this blog type. Examples include *Book Blogs*, 2009, Available: <http://bookblogs.ning.com/>, May 28 2009, *Book Blog Blog*, 2009, Available: <http://bookblogblog.blogspot.com/>, May 31 2009, *Booksandblogs*, 2009, RingSURF, Available: <http://www.ringsurf.com/ring/nr551/>, May 31 2009, *My Year of Reading*, 2009, Available: <http://www.domynoes.com/rings/reading/>, April 15 2009, *The Sunday Salon*, 2009, Available: <http://dhamel.typepad.com/sundaysalon/>, May 31 2009. By maintaining libraries at *LibraryThing* and reviewing books on sites such as *Amazon.com* and *NovelsNow*, hosts increase their recognized symbolic capital and expand their reading publics. *Novels Now: New Books, New Views*, 2009, Available: <http://www.novels-now.net/>, May 31 2009. All hosts maintain a book blogroll, a list of fellow book bloggers who frequently cite one another, and participate in many challenges, including one another’s prize-based challenges. Of note: every host that I have referenced participates in Laura’s *The Complete Booker*.

become more ‘cultured.’ And they anticipate uptakes by other readers who recognize this exigence to increase their personal symbolic and cultural capital. Like the literary societies of nineteenth-century Ontario that Murray studies and the members of The Book-of-the-Month Club in the United States that Radway analyzes, these new reading challenges are “a prime mechanism for self- and mutual development” (Murray *Come* xi) in early twenty-first-century virtual locales where international readers meet. They are a new rhetorical means to meet established needs—improving one’s social standing through the accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital—but online challenge participants, unlike nineteenth-century society readers, display their increased cultural competence *publicly*.

Hosts, for example, provide “buttons” or “badges” to participants: challenge logos that they can display on their personal blogs that link to the challenge. These buttons enable participants to declare membership to a given challenge and accordingly claim a certain amount of symbolic capital (I am the type of reader who participates in this type of challenge). These buttons address an exigence in the blogosphere that demands a response: for people to be recognized by others as ‘their sort of reader’ (the kind of reader who reads the Booker canon as compared to the canon of John Grisham),¹⁰² they need to digitalize their *habitus*, Bourdieu’s term for people’s “schemes of perception and appreciation” (*Field* 64).¹⁰³ Face-to-face, a new neighbour invited over to someone’s

¹⁰² I am not valuing one canon more highly than another, but rather making a distinction between instantiating one reading public and canon over another. Currently, 303,502 people “like” the “Official John Grisham Page” on Facebook. Doubleday, *Official John Grisham Page*, Facebook, Available: <http://www.facebook.com/johngrisham>, June 1 2010. Many readers belong to both the public of the Booker and the public of Grisham, including my father and sister.

¹⁰³ In *Distinction*, Bourdieu explains, “The habitus, an objective relationship between two objectivities, enables an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between practices and a situation, the meaning of which is produced by the habitus through categories of perception and appreciation that are themselves produced by an observable social condition” Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of*

house can see on a bookshelf the kinds of literary works his neighbour reads, and someone who joins a new book club can casually include in her formal introduction and informal chats the types of things she does in the literary sphere and the kinds of works she reads. But online, a challenge participant has to self-consciously display her habitus to enter a literary conversation, and a book blogger appealing to an imagined public is motivated to display his habitus for all to see.

To both suggest and fulfill these exigencies of self-improvement and (for international prize challenges) globalism, the genre systems of online reading challenges take up a variety of meta-genres whose social actions administer this new situation, instructing or giving guidance to people on how to participate in the reading challenge and/or read the literary texts. Host meta-genres include welcome posts and comments, as well as guideline posts and corrective comments, utterances that specify what to read and how to share reading experiences. Reference posts, meta-genres that demonstrate “precedents” and “sequestered expectations” (Giltrow "Meta-Genre" 195) for successful participation in the challenge, often include a blog archive of previous posts; a blogroll or list of challenge participants with links to their blogs if available; and lists of prescribed or recommended books. These host meta-genres convey the acceptable range of conduct that participants are expected to work within. The various genres available to participants include introductions, progress updates, and completion reports as well as the primary canonizing genre of the reader review. Participants may post their instantiations of these genres to the collective blog, their personal blog with a link to the challenge, or to both. While the above genres recur across different online reading challenges, the ways in

the Judgement of Taste, trans. Richard Nice, 1984 ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979) 101.

which they are interpreted and uttered by public readers differ, which gives these readers some agency within the reading projects' constraints.

The canonical agency of one reader review by a single book blogger in comparison to the mass-media spectacle surrounding the winner announcement of the Booker prize is modest—even miniscule. But as I have also shown in Chapters Two and Three, the announcement of a winning text is not enough to canonize a literary work. Canons depend upon the many genre sequences of uptakes by readers for their constitution. The genre system of *The Complete Booker* provides us a sense of the collective canonical agency of public readers. This online reading challenge assembles these public readers, who collectively instantiate the Booker public and call on others to pay attention to both the Booker and their blog. As of June 2010, they had published just over 370 texts on *The Complete Booker*: 21 introductions, 45 progress reports, 30 reference posts, 91 reader reviews of longlist or shortlist titles, and 185 reviews of the 43 winning novels. This includes 15 reviews of the three Canadian titles: one of *The English Patient*, ten of *The Blind Assassin*, and four of *Life of Pi* ("Complete"). This substantial body of cultural work does not even include the many reader reviews and challenge updates posted to participants' book blogs that are difficult to calculate but available through hyperlinks on introduction and progress report posts as well as many comments.¹⁰⁴ The social actions exerted by their collective canonizing uptakes (uptakes that express differing opinions) hold the potential to influence how readers of the challenge interpret and evaluate the Booker prize-winning texts.

¹⁰⁴ It is difficult to estimate how many posts in the book blogosphere are uptakes of *The Complete Booker*. Some participants post an introduction to the challenge blog, and then only post their reviews and progress reports to their book blog with no links back to the collective blog. And other participants only introduce themselves on the challenge blog once they have a substantial body of reviews to contribute.

Some readers of *The Complete Booker* arrive by happenstance through search engines, seeking out information about the Booker or reviews of a Booker-winning text. TCB participants also deliberately try to expand the public of their challenge. For her part, Laura encourages participants and visitors to subscribe to a *Complete Booker* feed, “a regularly updated summary of content along with links to full versions” (“Google”) of its posts and comments, and also invites people to “Follow” the site through *Google Friend Connect*, a tool that urges followers to “evangelize” for the site by “inviting their friends and publishing their activities to their social networks” (“Google”). Further, she helps her imagined public of readers find reviews of a given novel in an archive on the right-hand side of the blog (e.g., “1992 – The English Patient”). Alongside the efforts of their host, TCB participants encourage people who come to their personal blogs to visit the reading challenge through several means: displaying a button with corresponding hyperlink; listing the reading challenge in a blogroll; writing a post about joining the challenge that recommends it to others; and posting Booker reader reviews to their blogs with hyperlinks to the challenge. Participants have already conjured a public: as of May 2010, *The Complete Booker* is ranked the 39th most influential literary blog in the UK and Irish blogospheres (Wikio).¹⁰⁵ And in addition to its approximate 55 participants, it has 59 followers (some of whom also participate), many people who comment, and an unknown number of people who read but do not comment upon the group blog.

¹⁰⁵ Wikio explains their rankings, which in my terms are based on uptake (as shown by links): “The position of a blog in the Wikio ranking depends on the number and weight of the incoming links from other blogs. These links are dynamic, which means that they are backlinks or links found within articles. Only links found in the RSS feed are included. Blogrolls are not taken into account, and the weight of any given link increases according to how recently it was published. We thus hope to provide a classification that is more representative of the current influence levels of the blogs therein.” Wikio, “Top Blogs - Literature,” May 2010, Available: <http://www.wikio.co.uk/blogs/top/Literature#>, June 1 2010.

The majority of posts that attract readers to *The Complete Booker* are challenge reader reviews. The challenge reader review arises from what Jamieson describes as antecedent forms, genres that readers have encountered in other contexts as writers and readers that they then adapt to the new rhetorical situation of the online reading challenge. The challenge review evolves from antecedents of the public professional and academic review and the private reading-journal entry or book-club review.¹⁰⁶ Like the book brawl of *Canada Reads*, instantiations of these canonizing reviews often include meta-generic talk in their persistent efforts to translate “tacit know-how” about reading literature into “discursive knowledge” (Giltrow "Meta-Genre" 190) to benefit fellow readers. The potential of the challenge reader review to perform an array of social actions (e.g., sharing interpretive strategies with peers, advising less-experienced readers, evaluating a literary work, recommending it (or not) to others) enables public readers to present quite distinct and complex subject positions.

In challenges like *The Complete Booker*, participants design their reader reviews for two audiences: their fellow participants who have committed to read these texts regardless of their peers’ opinions (as in reviews for a private book club), and a broader group of people who may be influenced by their review to read the literary work or not (as in a professional or scholarly review). To further complicate the issue of audience

¹⁰⁶ Many other popular reader reviews circulate online, sister canonizing genres such as the social networking review (e.g., *Facebook*, *MySpace*), and the online bookstore review (e.g., *Chapters* or *Amazon*). Here, I make a distinction between these and the challenge reader review as I suspect that the situational and formal constraints differ to a degree that their motives and social actions would also vary. Sebastian Domsch offers a genre study of the evolution of literary criticism through computer-mediated communication, with a focus on Amazon’s customer reviews. Sebastian Domsch, "Critical Genres: Generic Changes of Literary Criticism in Computer-Mediated Communication," *Genres in the Internet: Issues in the Theory of Genre*, eds. Janet Giltrow and Dieter Stein (Benjamins, 2009). Ann Steiner also studies readers’ reviews on Amazon, approaching this form of evaluation as “private criticism.” Ann Steiner, "Private Criticism in the Public Space: Personal Writing on Literature in Readers' Reviews on Amazon," *Particip@tions_5.2* (2008).

design, TCB participants often have written their reviews for another rhetorical situation before they joined the challenge (typically their book blog; sometimes a social-networking site), and then later add a link from the challenge to this review or post a copy of it to the challenge blog. Comments found on *The Complete Booker* reader reviews suggest that their public is motivated by the social actions of recommendation (should I read this? I stopped reading this, but should I continue?) and sharing (who else has read this? what do others think? with whom can I share my opinions?). As I illustrate, the reviews written by Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor have the potential to influence how some readers interpret and evaluate the Canadian Booker novels.

Antecedents of online reading challenges

Given that online reading challenges are a new cultural phenomenon, with most launched between 2007 and 2009 (e.g., "Orange;" Pulitzer;" "Read;" "Complete"), what motivates prospective participants to join? How do they know how to take an interest within these canonizing systems? Jamieson's work on antecedent genres is helpful in this regard.

While she focuses on how people initially view unprecedented situations through already-familiar genres, I extend her theory to how people approach new situations through recognizable genres *and* genre systems of the literary sphere. While online reading challenges certainly draw upon participants' recognition of a wide range of literary activities including coffee houses, literary societies, and book clubs, I focus specifically on school and library reading challenges and book blogs: the name online reading

challenge is a direct nod to the former, and these challenges are a type of collective book blog.¹⁰⁷

Reading challenges hosted by schools or libraries—prevalent in Western English-speaking countries—are genre systems whose “overarching purpose” (Devitt 55) is to motivate school-age children to read.¹⁰⁸ In these challenges, children may be asked by their teachers and librarians and encouraged by their families to read a certain set of titles (Challenge),¹⁰⁹ or a given quantity of books (“2009”), or a specified number of minutes (R. P. Library) within a set period of time. Here, we find antecedent constraints of time-based and prescribed-reading online challenges, indicating a somewhat surprising transfer of regulated reading to non-scholastic locales, in which adults voluntarily read in restrictive ways. While school and library challenges all promote reading, as the particular exigencies vary, so too does the situated language. By way of example, the Forest Glen School in Moncton, New Brunswick aims to foster a “love for” and “joy of” reading (F. G. School), and River Elm School in Winnipeg, Manitoba similarly holds their challenge to “celebrate” reading (R. E. School). Principals issue annual challenge

¹⁰⁷ For studies of another possible antecedent system, online or virtual book clubs, see Long, *Book* 206-16, Rehberg Sedo, “Readers.” My survey of *The Complete Booker* participants’ introductory posts revealed only one public reader who also belongs to an online book club, Lisa.

¹⁰⁸ I offer examples from different countries. In New South Wales, Australia, there is a *Premier’s Reading Challenge 2009 Premier’s Reading Challenge*, 2009, website, Available: <https://products.schools.nsw.edu.au/prc/home.html>, April 10 2009. In the United Kingdom, public libraries host an annual *Summer Reading Challenge* for children over the summer holidays. The Reading Agency Read, *Summer Reading Challenge*, 2010, Available: <http://www.readingagency.org.uk/children/summer-reading-challenge/>, June 3 2010. And in the United States, their library-based *Global Reading Challenge* now overlaps with a Canadian library-based *Reading Link Challenge* to allow cross-border competitions amongst children by video conference. Seattle Public Library, *Children: Global Reading Challenge*, 2009, website, Available: http://www.spl.org/default.asp?pageID=audience_children_global, May 8 2009. Reading Link Challenge, *Canada Wins the 2008 Global Reading Challenge!*, May 16 2008, website, Available: <http://readinglink.bclibrary.ca/news/canada-wins-the-2008-global-reading-challenge>, May 8 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Set reading lists recall Guillory’s emphasis on how canons are enlisted for the institutional regulation of reading and writing. John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, 1994 ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 18.

invitations with the promise of a spectacle of silliness that unseats their own authority if students meet the goals: for example, he or she will lasso a calf, kiss a pig, or drive an eighteen-wheeler. In a different example, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, in partnership with local libraries, challenge schools to compete with one another for the most books read. These challenges address an exigence of crime prevention “since low literacy rates are linked to those who commit crime” (Comeau). The assembled types foreground role models who meta-generically “offer advice” about and “explain good practice” (Giltrow "Meta-Genre" 187) for reading: in school assemblies RCMP members stress the importance of reading ("Wow") and in special reading sessions, local celebrities like hockey players read with the children (Comeau). These instances demonstrate how institutions recruit reading challenges to inculcate in children exigencies of social and civic responsibility, and they also, I add, instill in some children an appreciation of the pleasures that accompany reading as shared practice. These traditional reading challenges offer one explanation as to why adults voluntarily take up online reading challenge invitations issued by strangers who otherwise hold no obvious cultural power to persuade them to join.

While some participants may be familiar with the genre systems of school and library reading challenges from their youth or in their roles as parents and grandparents, my close examination of prize-challenge hosts and *The Complete Booker* participants indicates that the vast majority are intimate with another antecedent, individual and collective book *blogs* (a website with posts that usually appear in reverse chronological order) within the book blogosphere. Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs have argued that it is in the blogosphere, “a distributed, decentered, fluctuating, *ad hoc* network of individual

Websites that interrelate, interact, and (occasionally) intercreate with one another,” not in individual blogs, “where the power of blogging is situated” (in Goggin 63).¹¹⁰ I propose that from the perspective of uptake current definitions of the blogosphere overlook the fact that bloggers do not simply take up texts produced by other bloggers, but *also* take up texts circulating online and offline in Bakhtinian spheres of activity.¹¹¹ Returning to the *book* blogosphere, I argue that its power lies in its networked ability to circulate blog posts within different publics and canons: book bloggers and the readers who comment on their blogs continually take up texts circulating within the literary sphere—literary works, criticism, reviews, prize announcements, and so on—and in turn, their posts are increasingly being taken up by texts beyond the book blogosphere, including this dissertation, instantiating publics of their own.¹¹² While prevailing definitions suggest that the “power of the blogosphere” lies in the motives and agency of book bloggers to interact with one another, my redefinition underscores that these public readers are *also* motivated to instantiate and recirculate publics beyond the book blogosphere. Their agency extends to the wider literary sphere of activity.

In the book blogosphere, some *Complete Booker* participants maintain personal blogs with posts on a range of topics including literature (e.g. Jill "Magic"), but most

¹¹⁰ Bruns, Axel and Joanne Jacobs. “Introduction.” *Uses of Blogs*. Eds Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs. New York: Peter Lang, 2006. 5

¹¹¹ Bruns and Jacobs also gloss the blogosphere as “the totality of all blogs and the communicative intercast between them through linking, commentary, and trackbacks.” in Gerard Goggin, "Blogging Said: Public Intellectuals in the Internet Age," *Edward Said: The Legacy of a Public Intellectual*, eds. Ned Curthoys and Debjani Ganguly (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne UP, 2007) 63. Wikipedia similarly defines the blogosphere as “a collective term encompassing all blogs and their interconnections. It is the perception that blogs exist together as a connected community (or as a collection of connected communities) or as a social network.” *Blogosphere*, 2009, wiki, Wikipedia, Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogosphere>, May 11 2009. Neither definition focuses on the overlapping of the blogosphere with other spheres of activity.

¹¹² For example, *Publishers Weekly* wrote an article on a high-profile book blogger, Jessa Crispin of *Bookslut*, and *Newsweek* profiled an online reading challenge. Claire Kirch, "Jessa Crispin Rewrites the Rules of Reviewing," *Publishers Weekly* January 14 2008. "Tip."

publish *litblogs* (see, for example "Litblog"), or—as these public readers more commonly call them—*book blogs* (e.g. Laura "Musings; Wendy "Cariboumom"), blogs dedicated to reading literature. In blog studies, many scholars have focused on blog types including diary blogs (McNeill; Karlsson; Zuern), hoax blogs (Jordan), anonymous knowledge-worker blogs (Schoneboom), queer blogs (Curtain; Rak), academic blogs (Goggin), and homeless blogs (Maurer). To this growing list I add book blogs. I want to argue, though, that these various kinds of blogs are not themselves genres, but rather collections of genres that include blog rolls, profile pages, archives, and different kinds of posts. Reading challenge blogs are examples of “group” (Fessakis, Tatsis and Dimitracopoulou) or “collective” (Khiabany and Sreberny 573-77) blogs, in which multiple authors, at the host’s invitation, write and publish posts to a single blog.¹¹³ The collective blogs of online reading challenges, I argue, are genre systems in that the genres they assemble have “a single, well-delineated activity as their reason for being” (Devitt 58): to share reading experiences of a set of literary works.

I have argued elsewhere for genre studies of blogs to direct attention from blog types to blog posts: entries that typically include a date, headline, body text (sometimes with corresponding hyperlinks), author name, time stamp, permalink, and a section for

¹¹³ Online reading challenges are primarily hosted on blogging sites: *The Complete Booker*, for example, uses the popular publishing program, *Blogger*. *Blogger*, 2009, Google, Available: <https://www.blogger.com/start>, May 11 2009. Little scholarly work has been done on collective blogs. For an analysis of educational uses of “group” blogs, see Georgios Fessakis, Konstantinos Tatsis and Angelique Dimitracopoulou, "Supporting "Learning by Design" Activities Using Group Blogs," *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* 11.4 (2008). For insights into “collective” blogs in Iran, see Gholam Khiabany and Annabelle Sreberny, "The Politics of/in Blogging in Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27.3 (2007): 573-77. Two articles on collaborative education blogs address (in the terms of this dissertation) students’ online uptakes of literary works, and how in these blog posts students were motivated to construct different subject positions than those they instantiated in traditional classroom genres. Cathie English, "Finding a Voice in a Threaded Discussion Group: Talking About Literature Online," *English Journal* 97.1 (2007). Kathleen C. West, "Weblogs and Literary Response: Socially Situated Identities and Hybrid Social Languages in English Class Blogs," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 51.7 (2008).

others' 'comments.' This list of formal features, appearing in both academic (e.g., Herring et al. Table 7) and popular (e.g., Hourihan) discussions, positions the post as a component of the blog's form. However, I maintain that the post is a site of many different genres—and I now add meta-genres—that perform diverse social actions (Grafton and Maurer "Engaging" 53-54; Grafton 86). By way of example, Laura's posts on her book blog include reader reviews ("Laughing"), statistical summaries of her reading over a given period ("Sunday"), and personal narratives about in-person "meetups" with fellow book bloggers ("Weekend"). In the case of individual book blogs, each post "provides a piece of the always-under-construction self (adding, contrasting, restructuring, reinforcing), and together, posts present a multifaceted, mediated portrait" (Grafton 89) of the public reader. The post's significance, for me, is that in these generic instances we can "glimpse the intentionality of each mediated self, seen in the varying publics engaged, situations defined, interpretants selected, and exigencies affected" (106). My study of *The Complete Booker* directs attention to specific reader review posts by Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor to discern what motivates them to take up this canon, how they display and accumulate symbolic and cultural capital to construct themselves as canon-makers, and what canonical agency they possess in evaluating the Canadian literary works selected by the Booker. I turn now to the Booker itself to position the genre system of *The Complete Booker* in relation to this major literary prize.

The Man Booker Prize and its Canadian winners

The Man Booker Prize for Fiction is generally considered to be the most well-known—and to many, the most prestigious—literary prize in the world (Todd; J. F. English

Economy; "In Nasty"). At the same time, the prize is described in unflattering terms by the Canadian press as "a night when literature descends into the bearpit of sport" (Wallace "Canadian") and "the literary world's answer to no-holds barred wrestling" ("In Nasty"). English argues that this polarized reputation is a result of how literary prizes problematize the rhetorically patrolled border between "mass" and "high culture" ("Winning" 127). This border reappears in *The Complete Booker*: Trevor reviews *Life of Pi* as a work of high-culture for an imagined public of readers he presumes view this top-selling novel as representative of mass culture, given "the assumption," as York explains, "that best-sellers rank lower in cultural capital and must therefore be seen as a sellout" (105).

The infamous prize was initially backed financially by Booker plc, and then the Man Group plc became a sponsor in 2002 (Foundation "Sponsors"). According to the Booker Prize Foundation, the charity that organizes and operates the prize ("FAQS"), the Man Booker Prize "promotes the finest in *fiction* by rewarding the very best *book* of the year," and more specifically rewards "the best *novel* of the year written by a citizen of the Commonwealth or the Republic of Ireland" ("About" emphasis mine) and published in the United Kingdom ("Rules"). With the elision from "fiction" to "book" to "novel," Lecker's claim that novels "are the preferred bourgeois form" of the historical moment of early twenty-first-century Toronto (Errett) is also applicable in this local context of the Booker Prize in the United Kingdom. The first prize was awarded in 1969, and as of June 2010, there have been 43 winners.¹¹⁴ In 1992, Ondaatje became the first Canadian to win

¹¹⁴ There was a tie for first place between Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* and Stanley Middleton's *Holiday* in 1974 and again between Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Barry Unsworth's *Sacred Hunger* in 1992. After the 1992 tie, the rules were changed so that Booker juries can no longer award a tie. Booker Prize Foundation, *How the Prize Works*, April 10 2009, website, Available:

the Booker: *The English Patient* (English) tied with Barry Unsworth's *Sacred Hunger*. Ondaatje's novel recounts the intertwined lives of four people, the English Patient, Hanna, Kip, and Caravaggio, who are brought together in an abandoned nunnery towards the end of World War II. In 2000, Atwood won for *The Blind Assassin*, in which eighty-two year old Iris Chase records her life story for her estranged granddaughter, Sabrina. And in 2002, Yann Martel won for *Life of Pi*, a tale narrated by Pi Patel of his adventure adrift in the Pacific Ocean with a Royal Bengal tiger.¹¹⁵ Currently, the winning author is awarded £50,000, but the Foundation and its supporters are quick to emphasize that the financial reward is much greater: a winner is "guaranteed" a substantial increase in both sales and rights. The winning author is also guaranteed fame, as the Booker announcement is taken up in television, radio, and print worldwide ("FAQS"). The Booker, as English argues, is "an instrument of cultural exchange" (*Economy* 12), converting authors' increased symbolic capital into economic capital, and in turn leveraging the success of authors and texts to accumulate further symbolic capital for the prize and its sponsors. I argue that *The Complete Booker*, as another "instrument of

<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/about/how-the-prize-works>. There was originally no prize awarded in 1970, a gap that was addressed retrospectively with a special prize, "The Lost Man Booker Prize," awarded in May 2010 to J. G. Farrell's *Troubles*. Booker Prize Foundation, *Troubles Wins Lost Man Booker Prize*, May 19 2010, Available: <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/news/stories/1418>, June 1 2010.

¹¹⁵ Since the inception of the Man Booker Prize, Canadian writers also have been shortlisted—without winning—14 times: Mordecai Richler twice for *St Urbain's Horseman* (1971) and *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1990); Alice Munro for *The Beggar Maid* (1980); Robertson Davies for *What's Bred in the Bone* (1986); Rohinton Mistry three times for *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1996), and *Family Matters* (2002); Michael Ignatieff for *Scar Tissue* (1993); Carol Shields twice for *Stone Diaries* (also 1993) and *Unless* (2002); and Margaret Atwood four times for *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), *Cat's Eye* (1989), *Alias Grace* (1996), and *Oryx and Crake* (2003). The pool of Canadian novels eligible for the prize is limited in that texts must be published and submitted by a United Kingdom publisher, and no French-Canadian novel has ever been shortlisted because English translations are not eligible. Booker Prize Foundation, *Rules and Entry*, 2009, website, Available: <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/about/rules-and-entry>, May 7 2009.

cultural exchange,” further converts the symbolic capital of the authors and prize to capital of the challenge and its participants.

How did the Booker prize affect the symbolic and economic capital of the three Canadian authors who have won this prize? Before his Booker win, Ondaatje was certainly well known in certain literary circles, but as Tim Adams observed, *The English Patient* made “Ondaatje a name that does not require any categorization” (qtd in York 137).¹¹⁶ The international attention of the prize and its media followers made him what York, following Richard Dyer, calls a *star text*, “an intertextual construct produced across a range of media and cultural practices” as glossed by Christine Gledhill (qtd in York 12; also see York 123-44 regarding Ondaatje). Atwood had already been shortlisted three times for this major prize, and was recognized internationally, but the Booker accolade further increased her capital in the literary sphere (see York 99-122).¹¹⁷ Familiar with the Booker media circus, she was careful to characterize the social action of the prize winner announcement as increasing readership rather than crowning celebrities, reflecting “I think the good thing about prizes like this is that they help lots of readers to read books

¹¹⁶ By 1992, Ondaatje was already the co-editor of *Brick, a Literary Journal* and had published numerous texts: ten poetry collections, two novels, one memoir, two works of criticism. *Brick, a Literary Journal*, 2009, Available: <http://www.brickmag.com/>, May 19 2009. As well, he had adapted three of his novels for the stage and edited seven collections. *Michael Ondaatje (1943 -)*, 2009, website, Poetry Foundation, Available: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=5142>, May 19 2009. *The English Patient* is an uptake of his previous 1997 novel, *In the Skin of the Lion*, a story told by the protagonist, Patrick to a young Hana that includes their family friend, Caravaggio. This earlier novel was, if you recall, the first winner of *Canada Reads* in 2002, nominated and defended by singer Stephen Page. Its sequel, *The English Patient* was awarded the Governor General’s Award for Fiction (1992) and the Canada-Australia Prize, in addition to the Booker.

¹¹⁷ Prior to winning the Booker in 2000, Atwood had an internationally renowned multi-generic canon of nine novels, 15 published volumes of poetry, five short story collections, four children’s books, five non-fiction titles, five edited collections, three television scripts, and one radio script. Margaret Atwood, *O.W.Toad: Margaret Atwood Reference Site*, website, Available: <http://www.owtoad.com/>, May 13 2009. Her work had been translated into many different languages, taken up in numerous critical volumes, and won many literary awards; her texts were widely taught in both Canadian and transnational high schools and universities as parts of feminist, science fiction, and Canadian canons; the *Handmaid’s Tale*, published in 1985, was adapted for film in 1990. *Handmaid’s Tale*, dir. Volker Schlöndorff, 1990.

they otherwise wouldn't know about or read" ("Margaret"). In comparison to Ondaatje and Atwood, when Yann Martel won he was "hardly a household name" (Menzies "Author").¹¹⁸ Likening the jury's decision to winning the lottery ("Canadian Author"), he nevertheless downplayed his soon-to-come financial rewards when he, like Atwood, focused upon an increased readership: "I'm most happy that this will bring more readers to my book, and I don't care if they buy it. They can get it out of the library" (McLaren and Martin). The Booker's canonical power, for these readers, lies in its ability to increase the public of their respective works. In keeping with English's argument, the Booker converted these writers newly increased symbolic capital to economic capital: Canadian publisher Louise Denny's reported that *The English Patient* and *The Blind Assassin* both sold between 80,000-100,000 copies in Canada after their Booker win (Menzies "Following"), and Random House reported that *Life of Pi* had sold over 200,000 copies in Canada just four months after it won the prize ("Film").¹¹⁹ Such statistics not only confirm the Booker's enormous clout as an "instrument of cultural exchange" (J. F. English *Economy* 12),¹²⁰ but also illustrate the power of an international prize to affect sales in Canada. The canonizing texts of the prize winner announcements and media coverage are taken up in national and local genre systems (such as *One Book*,

¹¹⁸ Martel had published a well-received short story collection in 1993, *Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios*, which won the Journey Prize, and in 1996 his first novel, *Self*, was promoted as part of Random House's New Faces of Fiction and shortlisted for Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award. *Life of Pi*, his second novel, was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction and won the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction in 2001, before winning the Booker in 2002. Random House, *The New Face of Fiction: Yann Martel, New Face of Fiction 1996, 2006*, RandomHouse.ca, Available: <http://www.randomhouse.ca/newface/martel.php>, May 13 2009.

¹¹⁹ Martel earned additional economic capital from his Booker win: he reportedly received a three million-dollar advance for his next work. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo provide a short history of how winning the Booker prize affected his symbolic capital and how the power of the media turned him into a literary celebrity. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, "Reading," 26-27.

¹²⁰ For specific information about paperback sales in the United Kingdom after *The English Patient* tied for the Booker, see Todd (20; 66; 109). For other Booker-related statistics (prior to 1998) as well as an extensive history of the prize see Richard Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* (London, England: Bloomsbury, 1998).

One Brampton's selection of *Life of Pi* in 2009), and affect the literary works' canonical status in Canada.

The significant cultural power (or, in genre terms, the social actions) of the Booker and other major literary prizes is recognized by English, Graham Huggan, and Richard Todd, who all identify a critical need for further studies. English argues that rather than disputing *who* should determine literary value, we should seek to understand *how* it is determined (“Winning” 127): how—in my terms—canonizing genre systems operate within the literary sphere. I take up English’s call as it relates to *readers’* evaluations of prize-winning texts, a perspective that his otherwise thorough analysis does not explore. Huggan, in his studies of the Man Booker Prize’s commodification of “Commonwealth” literature, identifies a need to recognize “the constitutive role played by readers in producing the value of literary work” (427)—which is to say, their role in canonical processes—an area of study that he too does not pursue.¹²¹ Todd does study readers, specifically the impact of “contemporary literary canon-formation” on “the general reader” (9) through statistical analyses of how the Booker’s “commercial canon” (71) impacts book sales and bestseller lists. My qualitative genre approach differs from Todd’s quantitative study in its close readings of what actual readers (rather than “the general reader”) say about this prize and its canon of literary works.¹²² I suggest that an increased understanding of readers’ roles would counteract a tendency amongst some

¹²¹ Huggan’s concern is that the Booker’s commodification of “Commonwealth” literature is “a levelling out of different (hi)stories, and an aestheticized celebration of diversity that disguises the lack of socio-historical change.” Graham Huggan, “Prizing ‘Otherness’: A Short History of the Booker,” *Studies in the Novel* 29.3 (1997): 425.

¹²² Todd defines ‘the general reader’ as “a reasonably sophisticated, largely but not exclusively professional readership with an interest in, but not unlimited time for, the leisured consumption of full-length fiction.” Todd, *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today* 3. I respect the utility of “the general reader” for Todd’s quantitative analysis; however, my own work emphasizes the varied motives and agency of public readers, and I seek accordingly to avoid generalizing gestures.

literary critics to hazard astute guesses or—worse—state disparaging assumptions about readers who take up literary works selected by these prizes. For instance, Anthony Daniels argued in *The New Criterion* that the Booker’s 2004 selection of D.B.C. Pierre’s *Vernon God Little*, would “actively reduce the cultural level of readers” (27), attributing an astonishing level of power to “a savage who has picked up a pen” (26), and very little, if any, agency to readers themselves.

Motivations of *The Complete Booker* participants

What kinds of readers flock to *The Complete Booker*, and what motivates them to take up this challenge? My review of participants’ personal blogs and profile pages reveals that the majority are middle-class, educated, primarily female, white-collar workers or retirees. They have benefited from familial, formal, and informal schooling, which in turn has provided them both with the tacit genre know-how and the multiply determined motivations to take up this genre system of canonization.¹²³ To investigate the exigencies to which these readers respond, I study participants’ introductory posts and comments:

¹²³ Before joining *The Complete Booker*, some participants participated in the two other online forums that take up the Man Booker Prize. Intergalactic Bookworm belongs first to the Yahoo! BookerPrize reading group, where members “read one novel a month, choosing from among the long-listed, short-listed and winning novels of the Man Booker Prize, honouring the best British, Commonwealth and Irish novels each year.” The group was established January 25, 2001, and as of May 2009, there were 223 members. See comment on Laura, “The Complete Booker,” 2009, blog, *The Complete Booker*, Available: <http://completebooker.blogspot.com/2007/08/complete-booker.html>, April 10 2009. *Booker Prize: A Reading Group Focused on the Booker Prize*, 2009, Yahoo! Groups, Available: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BookerPrize/>, May 31 2009.

Some participants including Jill and Megan encountered a time-based challenge first, the *Man Booker Challenge*. Megan, *Megan's Intro*, February 10, 2010, Available: <http://completebooker.blogspot.com/2008/02/megans-intro.html>, June 1 2010. This challenge was hosted by a public reader, Dewey: participants chose “6 books that [had] won the Man Booker Prize, or [had] been shortlisted or longlisted,” and read them within the calendar year. Dewey’s challenge included a button that expresses its social action of promoting reading with tongue firmly in cheek, “I’m in ur blog challenging ur reading’ Man Booker Challenge.” Dewey, *Man Booker Challenge*, 2007, Available: <http://web.archive.org/web/20071209015418/http://deweymonster.com/?p=478>, June 1 2010. Now, Laura hosts the *Man Booker Challenge* as part of *The Complete Booker*, rather than maintaining two separate collective blogs. Two satellite canonizing genre systems that instantiate the same public and canon now overlap.

over three-quarters of the participants have taken up Laura's invitation to introduce themselves and "tell us about any Booker Prize winners you've read previously" ("Complete"). Across these responses, three social motives recur that have also been identified in other reader studies: a reliable source for reading recommendations (e.g., Todd; Rehberg Sedo "Richard"); shared reading experiences (e.g., Long; Hartley); and recognition as serious readers (e.g., Radway *Feeling*; Murray *Come*).

Many participants explain that they decided to read the Booker's literary canon as a reliable source for reading recommendations they would enjoy. Manda, by way of example, reports her realization that she had already read and enjoyed books that were Booker winners; she then deliberately sought out other winners to read that she similarly appreciated. From this experience, she concluded that the Booker canon holds cultural currency for her (Laura "Complete"). While Manda took up the challenge based on her past reading experiences, Terri assessed the Booker's cultural capital based on texts she would *like* to read, "Of all the myriad challenges out there, it has the most books that interest me." Terri already belongs to the publics of many of these canonized works, likely due to the Booker's international press. She is also challenge-oriented, responsive to an exigence to read a set of literary works with others, surveying the various kinds of challenges online to find a canon she is motivated to instantiate.

In Todd's quantitative study of how (in my terms) the Booker canonizing genre system is deployed to address an exigence to sell literature, he proposes,

The Booker shortlist, however controversial, acts as a consumers' guide. Together with a further loose grouping of titles that have been touted by reviewers, promoted by bookstores as possible contenders, and publicized to a greater or

lesser extent on the appearance of the actual shortlist and after the award of the prize, the entire constellation forms a kind of commercial ‘canon’ [...]. (71)¹²⁴

Manda, Terri, and other participants of *The Complete Booker* indeed seem to use the Booker as a source for recommended reading. And for many of these public readers, the prize’s value, as Todd suggests, extends beyond its winners (see Mel "Introduction"; Terri; Redheadrambles; Trevor "My"). As Katrina writes, “I haven’t always agreed with the choices but they always have a great long list” (Laura "Complete"). I note though that Katrina and others refer to “the Booker” as “they”: this indicates that these Booker fans have a more intimate relationship with the prize than, for example, prospective car buyers have with a consumer guide such as *Consumer Guide Automotive* (Howstuffworks).

Rehberg Sedo’s term, a “trusted other,” seems more suitable than “consumers’ guide” to explain the relationship between the prize and *The Complete Booker* participants: a trusted other is “someone who has proved in the past to have similar tastes” as the reader (“Richard” 198). She extends this concept to book programs such as *Canada Reads*: “The television and radio personalities [...] can act as a sort of ‘trusted other’ [...]. But this would only be the case if the reader places significant cultural value on the program, and/or the hosts or celebrities involved, and/or the books that are highlighted” (“Richard” 200). We have seen already that *The Complete Booker* participants recognize the symbolic capital of the program and the selected literary works: Katrina’s “they” indicates that some readers also place “significant cultural value” on the annual panel of judges as canon-makers. Listening to why public readers turn to the Booker as a trusted other, we hear the opposite perspective to that of critics of public

¹²⁴ I note how integral the reviewers, bookstores, and publicists’ generic uptakes are to the instantiation of Todd’s “commercial ‘canon’”: I emphasize again that the literary works *and* these kinds of canonizing uptakes constitute the Booker canon.

reading programs and major literary prizes. The meta-generic commentary of critics repeatedly expresses anxiety and frustration that these much publicized canons motivate readers to take up a mere handful of literary texts from the vast array of published works, but these readers are motivated to find a trusted source to help them choose from the overwhelming number of works available to them.¹²⁵

Complete Booker participants could, of course, read Booker winners without participating in an online challenge. Not surprisingly then, many articulate an exigence to do so with similarly motivated readers: Marieke explains, “I had already decided I wanted to read Booker prize winners, when I discovered the fantastic world of reading challenges.” Some had already begun reading this Booker canon before they discovered the challenge (for example, Alisia). As Trevor recounts,

This past year I set the goal of reading all of the Booker winners and shortlist, but I felt alone. The Booker Prize is my favorite literary prize, and even when I don't like the book, I usually at least appreciate it and recognize the depth of the experience I had with it. And now to be able to share that with other avid Booker junkies--I'm very excited!" ("My").

Trevor expresses his delight at seeking out and discovering like-minded readers online, what reception-studies scholar Lena Karlsson terms the “pleasures of identification.” Her survey of regular readers of women’s diary blogs found that they reported “looking for ‘likeness’ in the first place” (137) and described their first encounter with these blogs as “a moment of recognition” (148). *The Complete Booker* participants express delight in encountering “other booklovers!” (Tiv) with whom to share their reading experience:

Dana exclaims, “Hooray! I’m here! *skips about gleefully*” and Kristen enthuses, “Can’t

¹²⁵ In Janice Radway’s important study of *The Book-of-the-Month-Club*, she explains that post-World War I, these kinds of book clubs appeared to their critics to be “poised to eradicate the deliberations of those individuals who constituted the public sphere, that is, disinterested, public-oriented, reading subjects. They threatened to replace them with the regimented actions of a thoroughly policed, wholly coerced mass of mindless automatons.” Radway, *Feeling* 238.

wait to check out everyone else's reviews!" A major difference between the readers that Karlsson studies and the readers of *The Complete Booker* is that the former is motivated to read *about* people like themselves and the latter is motivated to read *with* people like themselves.¹²⁶ These readers, like the prize-challenge hosts, value reading as a "public and social" experience (Murray *Come* 5).

As the introductions of *The Complete Booker* participants indicate, these public readers take their commitment to the challenge quite seriously. Their instantiation of the challenge introduction post addresses an exigence to be recognized as a passionate yet serious reader of literary fiction. English argues that the Booker's success in attracting its significant public is in no small part due to the "annual flurry of scandal that attends it in the dailies and in the literary press" ("Winning" 113). And yet surprisingly, participants seldom take up the prize itself in their posts and never its many scandals. Instead, participants focus almost exclusively on the texts' literary merits. This seems at odds both with the Booker's self-portrayal as a public abuzz with "controversy" (Foundation "Hitting") and English's illustration of the literary industry's current-day complicity in circulating and sometimes manufacturing "mock scandal" ("Winning" 118).¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Another key difference in comparison to the readers that Karlsson studies is that these public readers define likeness as a shared appreciation of literature and the Booker, whereas the diary blog readers identified with writers who were of similar "age, race, class, gender, occupation, and place of residence." Lena Karlsson, "Desperately Seeking Sameness: The Processes and Pleasures of Identification in Women's Diary Blog Reading," *Feminist Media Studies* 7.2 (2007): 149.

¹²⁷ The Booker website even helpfully summarizes each scandal for its imagined public in a section entitled "Hitting the Headlines," which begins, "The Man Booker Prize has always attracted – and to some extent courted – controversy." Booker Prize Foundation, *Hitting the Headlines*, April 10, 2009 2009, website, Available: <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/perspective/articles/1017>. English convincingly argues that controversy (or the "modern scandal") has been replaced by the postmodern *mock-scandal*, a turning away from "sincere fiction" of "socially unmediated aesthetic value" to a new discourse that acknowledges—in a nudge-and-wink manner—how complicit the supposedly scandalized commentators are, that is, the extent to which their local ends converge with those who have a more obvious stake in the prize. English, "Winning," 118. The mock-scandal still enables commentators "to rehearse Enlightenment pieties about 'pure' art and 'authentic' forms of greatness or genius, and thereby to align themselves with 'higher' values, or more symbolically potent forms of capital, than those which dominate the (scandalously impure)

Guesswork and insinuation may have enticed these readers to pay attention to the Booker's public, but these types of uptakes apparently do not sustain their interest. Later I address an exception, Trevor, but the majority of these participants do not take up the annual public circulation of speculations and scandals in their public posts. By way of illustration, Valentina concludes her challenge introduction with the question, "any idea who's going to win this year?" but receives no response. Participants' lack of uptake, I argue, educates challenge newcomers about which topics are unseemly and outside the range of acceptable conduct. *The Complete Booker* participants may wish to shrug off the commonplace understanding, captured succinctly by Kris Cohen, of book bloggers as 'wannabe' journalists (163)—in this case 'wannabe' cultural critics—by interpreting the challenge introduction and reader reviews in ways that construct subject positions of informed and serious hobbyists.

In their quest to be recognized as serious readers, participants are motivated to accumulate and exhibit symbolic and cultural capital, motives suggested and facilitated by the challenge's genre system where English's "capital intraconversion" (*Economy* 10) takes place. In response to Laura's invitation to share which Booker Prize winners they have already read ("Complete"), participants list and often quantify them, digitalizing

prize economy as well as the journalistic field itself." The unseemliness of the prize, he continues, derives its value from our "collective belief" in 'true' artists and their art. English, "Winning," 116.

A 2002 scandal—an "international controversy" (Martin "Booker")—took place when immediately after his win, Martel was accused of plagiarising Brazilian writer Moacyr Scliar's 1981 novella *Max and the Cats* (e.g., Paul Gessell, "Canadian's Booker Win Generates Bad Blood in Brazil," *CanWest News* (2002), "Booker Prize Brouhaha Brings Brazilian Novelist Belatedly into Spotlight," *Canadian Jewish News* 2002, Michele Orecklin, "Literary Feud, Part 2: A Feline Furor," *Time* 160.21 (2002). Canadian journalist Sandra Martin responded to this controversy with an article that compares Scliar's novella to Martel's novel and concludes that the media-hyped charge of plagiarism is false, levelled by those who have never actually read both texts. Sandra Martin, "Booker Uproar a Tiger in a Teapot [Life of Pi] [Max and the Cats]," *The Globe and Mail* 2002. Martin omits, though, that she too promoted this "uproar" by writing earlier of the supposed scandal. Sandra Martin, "Controversy Envelops Booker-Winning Novel [Life of Pi] [Max and the Cats]," *The Globe and Mail* 2002. The Martel-Scliar scandal was driven, in part, by a prevailing belief that high art is inspired by pure genius rather than being simply derivative, the means by which mass art is conceived.

their habitus for their imagined public of virtual readers. The number ranges from Vasily who has read none to Lisa who has read 25 ("Lisa") of the 43 winners. Participants seem to assume that each canonized text will be perceived by their fellow participants and imagined public of readers as a testament to their symbolic capital (they are widely read) and by extension their cultural capital (they are skilled at evaluating literature). In English's terms, the symbolic capital of the winning texts is converted within the reading challenge to symbolic and cultural capital of the readers. As I suggest in Chapter One, this conversion is facilitated by uptake: uptake's memory transfers capital from a canonizing genre instance such as a winner announcement to these introduction posts in which participants present themselves and are recognized as seasoned readers of literary fiction.

Those who have read less than four prize winners comment self-effacingly on their *lack* of capital, publicly recognizing that other readers in this rhetorical situation hold more symbolic capital. Tiv confesses, "I've read one of the books so far, *Disgrace*, (which is disgraceful, I know)." Dana jokes, "There you have it. The impressive (snort) list of already read Bookers" (Dana); and Josette laments, "Unfortunately, I've not read any of the books on the list. Sad, sad, sad!" (Laura "Complete"). These public admissions indicate that readers recognize their various positions in relation to the ideal common ground of having read all 43 literary works in this canon. But Tiv, Dana, and Josette do not seem overly concerned with their relatively lower standing amongst this community of public readers, indicating that they are confident in their standing in *other* rhetorical situations in the literary sphere (e.g., other challenges where they have read a larger percentage of the works) and/or they are confident that their current standing will

improve over the duration of the challenge (e.g., when they finish the challenge). For instance, Valentina exclaims, “I can’t wait to be able to say, proudly, I’ve read EVERY Booker prize!”

Canonical Agency of Four Public Readers

In my analysis of postings by Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor, these three exigencies raised by their *Complete Booker* peers recur: a trusted other for reading recommendations, a shared reading experience, and self-improvement.¹²⁸ My study of their challenge reader reviews of the Canadian literary works also illustrates how these four readers call forth and accommodate their imagined public and how they convey their habitus and demonstrate their cultural capital to present themselves as agents of canonization. Further, I examine some literary values they use to evaluate the works, their (lack of) attention to the texts as *Canadian* literature, and their resistance to the commonplace binary of high and mass culture.

¹²⁸ I selected these participants from a corpus of introductions, progress updates, and reviews that cited the three Canadian texts. In all, five participants had read, four intended to read in the coming year, and one had reviewed *The English Patient*; 15 had read and eight had reviewed *The Blind Assassin*; 13 had read, six had reviewed, and two planned to read *Life of Pi* that year. Of note, Laura indicates that Atwood’s text came second to Anne Enright’s *The Gathering* in total reviews posted to TCB at the close of 2008, a testament to the scope of Atwood’s reading public. Laura, “The Complete Booker: 2008 Year in Review,” December 27, 2008 2009, blog, *The Complete Booker*, Available: <http://completebooker.blogspot.com/2008/12/complete-booker-2008-year-in-review.html>, April 16 2009. In total, 15 reviews of the Canadian texts had been written to date, some of which were posted on TCB, while others were posted on individual blogs with links from TCB. Seeking a means to study subject positions constructed over different reviews, I selected participants who had written two or more reviews of the Canadian texts. Of the resulting six participants, I selected those who had posted one or all to TCB with the assumption that these readers were more invested in the challenge’s social motives and actions, which left me five, and of those, I omitted one, Michelle (also known as 3M), to produce a broader range of geographic locales (three participants from America and one from Australia) and gender (three females and one male).

Jill: a literary value of immersion

Jill presents herself as a public reader who is trained in academic interpretations yet evaluates all three Canadian literary works based on the literary value of immersion. On her blog, *The Magic Lasso*, she presents herself as a “married mother of two sons” living in Florida, where she works as a “marketing manager” for a health care system (“User”): Jill is a member of the middle class, benefiting from different forms of schooling that have provided her with the ability and motivation to instantiate popular genres and meta-genres in the literary sphere. Her evaluation of *The Blind Assassin*, written as a blog reader review and later linked to from *The Complete Booker*, begins,

The Blind Assassin is the type of novel that my English professors would have assigned to me if I was a college student right now. The book encompasses everything my forward-minded professors adored in modern literature: complicated plots, creative storytelling, literary allusions, symbolism and foreshadowing – all wrapped up into a neat yet complex package.

Jill displays her habitus: as a university graduate who studied English, she possesses the cultural code necessary to offer a worthwhile literary interpretation for her imagined public. We also sense, though, that the literary values her “forward-minded professors adored” are not necessarily those she will engage to interpret Atwood’s work. She has been trained to recognize them, but she may not hold these values. She shares her own experience reading *The Blind Assassin*: “For this reader, I enjoyed the book’s story-within-the-story style” of “Iris’s perspective” interwoven with “a fictional book,” and yet, she continues, “To be honest, I could have done without the sci-fi element. I wonder why it was even included except to show some symbolism” (“Blind”). She reads “the sci-fi element” through her professors’ value of “symbolism,” and still finds it wanting. Although she “enjoyed” the work “overall,” she wonders “if Atwood, at the top of her

game, produced *The Blind Assassin* robotically – its literary conventions are almost too perfect; the story, predictable; and the ending, done before.” Here, the terms “robotically” and “predictable” imply that for Jill, a literary value of immersion has not been met. However, after this pointed critique of the novel as formulaic, Jill softens her final assessment, “Perhaps that’s the magic of the whole thing – and a grand show of force from a writer who can do it all. (★★★½).” I speculate that Jill’s recognition of Atwood’s symbolic capital—a writer who has “earned such literary praise” and is “the favourite writer of many avid readers”—and her knowledge that *The Blind Assassin* has won “prestigious awards” (“Blind”) like the Booker restrain her from giving the text less than three-and-a-half stars (a rating system that recurs as a salient feature across different types of popular reviews). In the rhetorical situation of *The Complete Booker*, the symbolic capital of both text and author are significant constraints on her literary review.¹²⁹

In Jill’s review of *Life of Pi*, she also evaluates Martel’s novel based on an implicit value of immersion. She pastes her reader review of *Life of Pi* (which she originally wrote for the literary social-networking site *Library Thing*) into her introductory post to *The Complete Booker*. Through phrases such as “I was drawn to,” “I was also disappointed,” and “I missed hearing about” (“Jill’s”), Jill relays to her imagined public what Radway describes as “the emotional weather set off by the interaction between book and reader” (*Feeling* 33). Jill characterizes Martel’s text as a survival tale, the story of “how a young man, Pi Patel, survives on a lifeboat with a deadly Bengal

¹²⁹ In 2000, the year Atwood won the Booker, *The Blind Assassin* was nominated for Canada’s Governor General’s Award, named best fiction novel by *Time* magazine, and won the Dashiell Hammett Award for Literary Excellence. And in 2002, it was nominated for both the Orange Prize for Fiction and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. *Blind Assassin*, website, McClelland.com, Available: <http://www.mcclelland.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780771008634>, May 13 2009.

Tiger.” Her generic interpretation then acts as Burke’s “terministic screen” (45), filtering how she evaluates the novel: she dismisses parts of the text that she cannot read through this generic lens, including “the first 100 pages” before Pi’s ship sinks and “the algae-filled island” that made the novel “too long-winded” and “very unrealistic.”¹³⁰ She closes her review unfavourably: “Many lost parallels, unnecessary details and side stories made this entire novel very weighty. It’s too bad because the story’s premise is brilliant” (“Jill’s”).¹³¹ Her term “weighty,” which might be a positive literary value for some readers, appears here as a negative.

Jill wrote her reader review of *The English Patient* for the reading challenge (to date the only review of Ondaatje’s novel posted to *The Complete Booker*). She compares the text to the film adaptation by Anthony Minghella that followed Ondaatje’s Booker win. The film *The English Patient* (Minghella) won nine Academy Awards in 1997 (including Best Picture), and (similar to how the documentary *The Corporation* increased the public of Bakan and his book) greatly expanded the public of Ondaatje and his novel. The film was Jill’s first experience with the “story” of the English patient, and she makes it clear that the literary work does not meet her expectations as a reader: “Sometimes, a movie can do a story better justice than the book.” Jill connects with her imagined public by detailing the rhetorical situation in which she consumed the film: “I was hugely pregnant, curled up on my sofa and enraptured by this Oscar-winning film of war, love

¹³⁰ Burke argues, “Not only does the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another. Also, *many of the ‘observations’ are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made.* In brief, much that we take as observations about ‘reality’ may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms” or (I add) genre classifications. Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 46.

¹³¹ When Jill pasted her review to *The Complete Booker*, she accidentally or purposely omitted her original ranking of *Life of Pi* on *Library Thing* of three stars. mrstreme, “Mrstreme’s Reviews: The English Patient,” *LibraryThing*, Available: http://www.librarything.com/profile_reviews.php?view=mrstreme, May 5 2009.

and sacrifice.” The word “enraptured” marks a literary value of ‘rapture’ or ‘transport,’ which the film meets. She finds the war story genre that she engaged to interpret the film a useful reading strategy for the novel (“War is hell on everyone, and this story drove this point home very well”); however, in this new rhetorical situation, she is frustrated by her attempts to interpret Ondaatje’s novel as an instantiation of the love story genre. She explains, “the English Patient and his beloved Katherine remained a secret to me. I could never wrap my arms around their relationship. It seemed destructive and loveless, but so little was written about it that I could never tell. To me, this gap was too large to ignore.” In the genre sequence of *production*, Minghella creates the “gap” between how the love story genre is constituted in the novel as compared to the film; however, in this genre sequence of *reception*, Jill experiences the generic discrepancy as the novelist’s failing rather than director’s interpretation.

Closing with a recommendation of the film over the novel, she advises, “If you are a fan of Booker winners”—an appeal to *The Complete Booker* participants that recognizes their common ground—“then *The English Patient* might be one for you; however, I believe the movie is a better way to witness this story. The book, in effect, fell short for me. (★ ★ ★)” (“English”). Despite her critique, Jill still gives *The English Patient* three stars, suggesting that indeed, a text’s recognized capital constrains her re-assessment of its literary worth. This recurrence suggests that although the public readers of *The Complete Booker* constitute their own genre system to declare their affiliation with and independence from the sanctioned canonical activities of The Man Booker Prize, their uptakes of the Canadian literary works are nevertheless constrained by the canonical evaluations of the Booker judges.

Jill's reviews also offer us additional insights into the role of meta-genre in canonical processes. Giltrow argues that when academic writers offer meta-generic commentary on academic writing, they use certain terms (e.g., “argument” and “specifics”) to “generalize discursive values”; these terms “appear at moments where deviance is encountered, or the ideal imagined” (“Meta-Genre” 194). I extend her argument to rhetorical situations of readers reading. When public readers offer meta-generic commentary on canonical literary works, they use certain terms (like “rapture”) to generalize *literary* values and other terms (including “predictable,” “robotic,” “long-winded,” “weighty”) to mark when these literary values are not met. The canonizing texts of public readers publicly circulate not only their evaluations of literary works (evaluations may challenge those of other agents of canonization) but *also* their literary values (values that may be similarly resistant to those of others).

Lisa: adapting reviews of “Canadian” novels for a new rhetorical situation

Many readers on *The Complete Booker* share reviews they wrote prior to joining the challenge by providing a link to or copying the review into a challenge post, as Jill does. The reviews written by Lisa are noteworthy in that she self-consciously adapts reviews she wrote for her reading journal to the new rhetorical situation of *The Complete Booker*. Unlike most participants of the reading challenge, Lisa does not maintain a personal or book blog (neither does Mel "Introduction"). She does, though, have experience in the literary sphere as the co-founder of ANZ LitLovers, “an online reading group for Australian and New Zealand lovers of literary fiction” written by “a Kiwi or an Aussie” or “set in Australia or New Zealand” (“About”). The Booker canon is not new to her, for

she has read 25 of the winning texts, information she includes in a progress report which also stands as her introduction to *The Complete Booker*. She offers a tally, “Ok, I’ve finished posts of 17 Booker Prize winners: all 15 Bookers I’d read and journalled prior to joining this Challenge, and 2 that I read in 2008,” and explains that she has read but not reviewed eight other winners, ones that she read before she began her “reading journal in 1997” (“Lisa”).

Her extensive contributions to the prize challenge are appreciated. Laura publicly thanks Lisa for all her “thoughtful, well-written reviews,” observing, “Your reading journal must be an amazing sight to behold!” (Lisa “Lisa”). Laura publicly recognizes Lisa as a dedicated public reader whose cultural capital adds value to the participants and readers of the collective blog. Another person responds to Lisa’s progress report, which features a photograph of her bookcase (another example of the digitalization of habitus): “I did a double-take because your shelves look a lot like mine. Books and Bookers everywhere” (Lisa “Lisa”). This uptake, with its focus on Karlsson’s “likeness” (137), further constructs Lisa dialogically as a fellow avid reader and Booker fan.

Lisa’s repeated references to her “reading journal” point to a private print journal. When she joins the online reading challenge, she adapts her original genre of reading-journal reader reviews for the new rhetorical situations of *The Complete Booker*, now imagining a public and contriving a new range of uptakes.¹³² Written originally for her

¹³² When she makes her entries public, she preserves the personal context by ending each with where she read and wrote about the text: of *The Blind Assassin*, she writes, “I finished reading this book and journalled in on 31.3.2002.” Lisa, “Lisa: 2000, the Blind Assassin by Margaret Atwood,” January 7, 2009, Available: <http://completebooker.blogspot.com/2009/01/lisa-2000-blind-assassin-by-margaret.html>, May 12 2009. For *Life of Pi*, she notes, “I read and journalled this story while on holiday at Carlyle House in Rutherglen,” and adds parenthetically for her imagined readers, “(one of Victoria’s lovely wine regions) on 4.11.02.” Lisa, “Lisa, 2002, Life of Pi by Yann Martel,” January 7, 2009, Available: <http://completebooker.blogspot.com/2009/01/lisa-2002-life-of-pi-by-yann-martel.html>, May 12 2009. I find

benefit, Lisa's challenge reader reviews pay close attention to characters, symbolism, and plot, and are extensive in comparison to those by her challenge peers. When making her reviews public, rather than abridging her journal reviews, Lisa accommodates those readers who have not yet read the novels by adding a formal feature of popular reviews, "spoilers." "Beware: lots of spoilers if you haven't read the book" ("Lisa: 2000") prefaces her review of *The Blind Assassin*, and her review of *Life of Pi* warns "there are still spoilers below if you have not yet read the book" ("Lisa, 2002"). The use of spoilers does not often occur in academic reviews but they are a recurrent feature of newspaper and magazine reviews as well as book blog and challenge reviews. These spoilers are meta-generic commentary, instructing people how (and if) to read the genre of the challenge review. Other public readers like Wendy and Laura instantiate the genre with no spoiler alerts, choosing instead to omit any details that will 'spoil' the literary work for other readers.

Lisa also adapts her journal reviews for her newly imagined public by coupling her favourable opinion of both Canadian novels (presumably in her initial journal reviews) with reference to their established symbolic capital (likely added for her imagined readers). For *The Blind Assassin*, she presents the text within the author's larger canon of works, "This story is superb. Atwood is one of the best writers of our time, and everything I've read of hers (*The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Robber Bride*, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Penelopiad*) has been terrific" ("Lisa: 2000"; *Penelopiad*; *Robber*). Lisa's reference to "our time" assumes that Atwood's star text circulates in a canon of world literature, one instantiated by this Melbourne reader and by her fellow challenge

it interesting that she read these two Canadian titles within two weeks of one another, but she does not comment on why she did so.

participants in various international locales. By adding references to other Atwood works she has read, her canonizing uptake positions this “superb” story within a “terrific” canon by “one of the best writers” of contemporary fiction: Lisa is not alone, she makes clear, in her positive evaluation of this novel. Her accommodation of *The Complete Booker* public is even more apparent in her introduction to Martel’s text:

Life of Pi is probably the most popular of all the recent Booker winners, still on prominent display in most of the independent bookshops I patronise, and often featuring in polls of favourite books. There’s a recent illustrated version, too, which is probably going to become a collector’s item, but I don’t like it even though it’s beautiful. I prefer to imagine the story and settings for myself. (“Lisa, 2002”)¹³³

This opening appeals directly to her fellow Booker fans, and demonstrates Lisa’s symbolic capital as an active member of the literary sphere, frequenting independent bookshops and following “literary polls” (another canonizing meta-genre). She also underscores that *Life of Pi*, touted by the Booker Prize Foundation as one of the “biggest selling Man Booker Prize winners in the prize’s 40 year history” (“Canongate”), has been lauded by many prior canonizing uptakes, to which she links her own uptake of affirmation: “As a fantastic story, it’s splendid. Some parts are a bit gory and unpleasant but the prose is beautiful [...] and it’s often funny indeed” (“Lisa, 2002”). We are reminded that private evaluations of literary works are not canonizing. It is when Lisa adapts her journal reviews to public challenge reviews that she participates in canonical processes as a public reader, affirming the established symbolic capital of Atwood and Martel’s texts, and recirculating the literary works (and the other Atwood titles) within her imagined public. Lisa’s adapted reviews also confirm that the genre system of *The*

¹³³ In 2007 an illustrated edition of *Life of Pi* was published, the product of a much publicized international competition to find an illustrator. Tomislav Torjanac of Croatia won. Yann Martel and Tomislav Torjanac, *Life of Pi*, Illustrated ed. (Knopf Canada, 2007).

Complete Booker thrives because it taps into flows of motivations across different locales in the literary sphere. In Lisa's case, she was already motivated to write privately about her reading, as seen in her reading journal, and she was already motivated to share her reading experiences, as seen in her co-founding of another public book club, ANZ Litlovers.

Lisa's reviews are also significant in that of the ten reviews of the Canadian novels posted to *The Complete Booker*, she is the only one who comments in any detail on the Canadian-ness of these works, and only with regards to *The Blind Assassin*.¹³⁴ She writes, "In class-conscious Britain, the Chase family would have been dismissed with a haughty sniff as 'Trade,' but in Canada, in the backblocks beyond Toronto, theirs was a respectable old family with a successful manufacturing business and the girls had to 'marry well'" ("Lisa: 2000"). She also provides a timeline for "the period" of the novel, referencing the Depression, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II ("Lisa: 2000"), giving her readers a sense of the historical moment that motivates and constrains the actions of Atwood's characters. Why is Lisa the only reader to "locate" any of these Canadian novels in her reviews? She seems keenly aware of the dynamics between centre and margin, perhaps because she, unlike Jill, Wendy, and Trevor, is a member of the Commonwealth, situated on the margins albeit in a relatively privileged western nation. She also has extensive experience reading literature in a national framework for her online reading group, ANZ LitLovers, which may make her more aware of how a novel's

¹³⁴ Wendy mentions Canada in passing in her review of *Life of Pi*, noting "Pi's family decides to move to Canada" Wendy, "Life of Pi - Wendy's Review," June 24, 2008, Available: <http://completebooker.blogspot.com/2008/06/life-of-pi-wendys-review.html>, May 12 2009. Lisa's uptake of *Life of Pi* also provides a specific historical context—"the family sets sail for Canada to escape Indira Gandhi's Emergency" and Pi is "finally rescued in Mexico"—but she does not comment further on this historical moment in India, perhaps because the majority of Martel's tale occurs outside of national borders and beyond socially-determined time. Lisa, "Lisa, 2002."

historical context constrains possible interpretations. Huggan has expressed concern that a significant effect of the Man Booker Prize's commodification of "Commonwealth" literature is "a levelling out of different (hi)stories, and an aestheticized celebration of diversity that disguises the lack of socio-historical change" (425). My survey of the other reviews of these Canadian novels indicates Huggan is right in his unease. 3M, Kirsten, Jill, Wendy, and Trevor from the United States, Jackie from England, and Aloï from the Philippines publicly circulate these three Canadian novels with no reference to the local context of their production or setting. But these public readers *also* demonstrate that the consumption of literature as a global commodity does not result in *homogeneous* interpretations of this literature by international readers. Jill and Lisa's reviews, as well as those of Wendy and Trevor, attest to this.

Wendy: the symbolic capital and constituted public of a public reader

Wendy, like Lisa, is an extensive contributor to *The Complete Booker*, providing 26 posts within a twenty-six month period. She originally wrote her review of *The Blind Assassin* for her blog (Caribousmom "Blind") and then linked to it from her challenge introduction (Wendy "Wendy's"), and she wrote her review of *Life of Pi* for the imagined publics of both her blog and the reading challenge, and cross-posted it to both (Wendy "Life; Caribousmom "Life"). The example of Wendy, I argue, shows that the genre system of the reading challenge not only converts symbolic capital of the prize and the literary works to that of *The Complete Booker* and its participants, but also converts the symbolic capital of some well-established book bloggers to that of the challenge. Further, as I will show, we see how the canonizing uptakes of the challenge participants are not only

aggregated in the collective blog but also distributed across the book blogosphere, appealing to different publics and circulating new evaluative interpretations of the Canadian novels.

Wendy is an extremely active online public reader, taking part in all prize challenges previously mentioned; hosting *The Orange Prize Project* ("Orange"); contributing reader reviews to different websites (e.g., *Amazon.com* (2009) and *NovelsNow* ("Novels")); participating in networks of book bloggers (e.g., *Weekly Geeks* ("Weekly")); and posting regularly to her book blog *Caribousmom*.¹³⁵ Based in Northern California ("Wendy Robards"), Wendy does not appear to be a professional member of the literary sphere, but she has been recognized as possessing significant symbolic and cultural capital through her extensive online activities. *Caribousmom*, launched in February 2007, has received 224,510 visitors over three years ("Caribousmom"), which demonstrates that she has been very successful in calling forth a public for her book blog.

As further testament to her social actions within the book blogosphere, she received the 2008 BBAW Award (Book Blogger Appreciation Week Awards) for "Best Literary Fiction Blog" (Amy) and was nominated for the same award in 2009 ("Caribousmom"). She displays these award winner and nominee buttons on her blog, evidence that others recognize her symbolic and cultural capital as a public reader.¹³⁶

Awards within the book blogosphere attest to English's observation of prizes' "feverish proliferation" in recent times (*Economy*). They also bring to mind Frye's quip that "there

¹³⁵ *The Orange Prize Project* is based on both the *Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction* and the *Orange Broadband Award for New Writers*. *Orange Prize for Fiction*, 2009, Available: <http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/home>, May 28 2009.

¹³⁶ For another example of prizes within the book blogosphere, see "A Roar for Powerful Words," awarded to Aloï, another participant of *The Complete Booker* and host of *Read the Nobels*. The Shameless Lions Writing Circle, *A Roar for Powerful Words!*, 2009, Available: <http://theshamelesslionswritingcircle.blogspot.com/2007/11/roar-for-powerful-words.html>, May 31 2009.

are so many medals offered for literary achievement that a modern Canadian Dryden might well be moved to write a satire on medals, except that if he did he would promptly be awarded the medal for satire and humour” (“Conclusion” 216). This practice of peer recognition amongst readers is not new though: in her study of the Canadian Literature Club of Toronto, Murray reports that in the late 1930s, the format of reading groups included “the presentation of polished reviews by members” and “prizes for book reviewing” (“Canadian” 167). Like the prizes of the Canadian Literature Club, the annual BBAW awards perform significant cultural work in English’s “economy of prestige” including public acknowledgment of the cultural power of certain book bloggers like Wendy.

In her review of *The Blind Assassin*, Wendy identifies various literary genres—a memoir (“a memorial of sorts to the life of two women”), a “mystery” story, a story of war (“a small town setting within the bigger context of World War II”), a Gothic text (“a tale Gothic in feel”)—, and privileges the genre of memoir by opening with a quotation from Iris:

*Why is it we want so badly to memorialize ourselves? Even while we're still alive. We wish to assert our existence, like dogs peeing on fire hydrants. We put on display our framed photographs, our parchment diplomas, our silver-plated cups; we monogram our linen, we carve our names on trees, we scrawl them on washroom walls. It's all the same impulse. What do we hope from it? Applause, envy, respect? Or simply attention, of any kind we can get? At the very least we want a witness. We can't stand the idea of our own voices falling silent finally, like a radio running down. (Cariboumom "Blind"; *Blind* 119, emphasis Wendy's)*

This quotation, in my own reading, asks what motivates people to select genres of memorial (displays of memorabilia, monograms, graffiti) by outlining their possible exigencies—applause, envy, respect, attention, witness—as a means to prompt readers to speculate on Iris’ intentions in writing her memoir. We can assume that Wendy finds this

quotation particularly representative of the novel, for she dedicates more than a quarter of her review to it; however, unlike Jill and Lisa, Wendy does not interpret the literary text in detail. Instead, her awareness that in this rhetorical situation some members of her imagined public have not read the novel constrains her four-paragraph review, which ends, “To give more details about the novel would be to reveal spoilers – and so I will simply say “Read it.” Highly Recommended” (Caribousmom "Blind"). Wendy’s cultural capital in her review is assumed rather than demonstrated. Her meta-generic uptake of multiple literary genres suggests that she has the necessary cultural code to read *The Blind Assassin* through these lenses, but she does not actually demonstrate how to use this interpretive strategy. This suggests that public readers who offer detailed genre readings (like Jill and Lisa) may risk greater capital by publicly displaying their interpretive struggles, as when Jill dismisses elements of *The Blind Assassin* and *Life of Pi* that do not fit her selected genres, which some people reading her reviews may have interpreted and appreciated differently.

Wendy also engages a multi-genre framework for her response to *Life of Pi*. Initially characterizing the novel as “one of survival,” she then undercuts this genre reading as overly simplistic. “*Life of Pi* is not really about a boy castaway and a tiger” she asserts authoritatively, “Instead it is an exploration of faith and tolerance. Pi is literally set adrift with only himself and God to chart the waters of survival” (Wendy "Life"). Wendy presents the “real” social action of the novel, “an exploration of faith and tolerance,” as unequivocal. She is an expert public reader, meta-generically administering the situated interpretations of less experienced readers: this self-presentation contrasts

with Jill's subject position as a public reader sharing her personal interpretive approach with others.

In Wendy's final paragraph, however, she backs away from her position as a figure of authority. "So how did I like *Life of Pi*?" she asks on behalf of her imagined public, "It was a unique book and one which took me almost 100 pages to really sink into and begin to appreciate." This statement recalls Jill's similar impatience with the introduction: both readers share the literary value of immersion (signified here by the words "sink into") and mark through meta-genre their encounters with Martel's "deviance" (Giltrow "Meta-Genre" 194) from this value. Rather than expressing the same impatience with the novel as Jill, Wendy suggests instead that she needs to engage with it further: "I can't say I enjoyed it – although I did respect the writing and felt it was one of those novels which should be read and digested, and then read again." She restricts her recommendation to "those readers who like a thought-provoking book," and gives it three and a half stars (Wendy "Life").¹³⁷ I argue that when *Life of Pi* fails to meet Wendy's literary value of an immersive experience, she turns to other literary values such as an aesthetic "respect" for the writing and a "thought-provoking" work as a means to understand why Martel's text was selected for the Booker canon and why it has been taken up by so many readers. Wendy also indicates through "those" (a distal demonstrative that points away from her position as a speaker) that she is *not* one of "those readers" who likes "a thought-provoking book" if it fails to immerse her in its fictional world. Her recourse to the literary values of others further suggests that the

¹³⁷ On *Caribousmom*, Wendy provides a "rating system," in which three stars are equivalent to "Okay read" and four are "Good/Very Good," suggesting that she views *Life of Pi* as a "good" book. Wendy, *Caribousmom*, 2009, Available: <http://www.caribousmom.com/>, May 28 2009. If we apply Wendy's system as a guide to Jill's star-ratings (which may or may not be the same), then she evaluated *The Blind Assassin* a "good" read at three-and-a-half stars and *The English Patient* as an "okay read" at three stars.

established capital of “Yann Martel’s Booker Prize winning novel” (Wendy "Life") prevents Wendy, as well as Jill, from significantly de-valuing this canonized work. These reviewers, writing on the outer reaches of the Booker’s canonizing genre system, are constrained by the prior interpretations of judges.

Despite this constraint, Wendy acts as a canonizing agent through her reviews of *The Blind Assassin* and *Life of Pi* and the genre sequences of comments that follow. Her instantiations of the canonizing reviews combined with uptakes by members of her public re-estimate and circulate the literary value of the Canadian works. For instance, comments on Wendy’s review of *The Blind Assassin* focus repeatedly on whether Atwood’s work successfully immerses readers in its fictional world, indicating that others share this literary value. Respondents are either “sucked in,” which affirms the novel’s symbolic capital, or never “get into” the novel, which questions its canonical reputation. This situated meta-generic exchange highlights how canons are sites of contest, not consensus. However, in comparison to *Canada Reads*, the tone is not one of combat but respectful exchange, for the exigence is not to win, but to share. When one respondent who abandoned *The Blind Assassin* asks Wendy whether to attempt it once again, instead of asserting her opinion, she respectfully accommodates disparate views, positioning herself as discussant rather than expert. She writes, “as you can see, I liked it quite a bit – but I do know that a lot of other readers didn’t enjoy it as much as other Atwood books. [...] I hope you get through it and let me know your thoughts!” (Caribousmom "Blind"). This comment shows that despite her instantiation of the reviews as opportunities to assert her cultural capital, Wendy is in fact highly motivated to connect with others, envisioning future discussions with fellow readers.

Turning to responses to Wendy's review of *Life of Pi*, Jill credits Wendy's review as "fair," and RoseCityReader, another participant of *The Complete Booker*, disagrees with Wendy's view that it is "thought-provoking" for she found that it "didn't stick" with her (Wendy "Life"). This is another literary value that recurs in public readers' meta-generic commentary: good literature makes a lasting impression. Three other public readers paste or link to their own reader reviews of *Life of Pi* on other blogs and websites, literary evaluations that differ from Wendy's own. Wendy's reviews publicly circulate her re-assessment of the novel's symbolic capital as well as those of other readers. When we recall that Wendy is one of 55 other public readers, we can see that the collective blog of *The Complete Booker* is the hub of this canonizing genre system. The larger impact of this reading challenge in contemporary canonical processes lies in how the challenge blog is linked by uptake to many reviews on other book blogs and social networking sites, each with their genre sequences of canonizing comments and links. These genre sequences are also apparent in Trevor's book blog, *The Mookse and the Gripes*.

Trevor: resisting the binary of high and mass culture

I end with an analysis of contributions from Trevor, a public reader whose instantiation of challenge and blog posts resists the easy binary of high and mass culture that the Booker prize troubles. Through his posts genres, he constructs a dual subject position: skilled reader of the Booker canon and fan of the "scandalous" prize. Trevor maintains a book blog entitled *The Mookse and the Gripes* ("Mookse"), a reference to James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. In taking up this famously difficult text, he signals to his imagined public of similarly informed readers that he is a sophisticated interpreter of literary

works. While the name of his book blog implies that Trevor favours academic interpretive practices and literary values, his introduction to *The Complete Booker* emphasizes his delight to be among other “avid Booker junkies” (“My”), a decidedly popular characterization of his fellow challenge participants. Publicly presenting his habitus (as Jill did), Trevor explains that he is studying law but used to teach English literature; he states that amidst the demands of law school, he has “never allowed it to alienate [him] from great books, especially those honored by Booker” (“My”). He is a Booker fan because he perceives the prize as a “trusted other” to recommend “great books.” His word choice, “honored,” indicates that Trevor perceives the prize and its selected titles as high culture. Initially listing the nine winning and six shortlisted titles he has already read in his introductory post, he then demonstrates his commitment to the challenge by rapidly adding ten more titles. He reads and reviews a book a week for ten weeks, returning to update his challenge introduction with titles and links to his reviews within the challenge (“My”). Laura publicly acknowledges the significance of his contribution in furthering the social action of the challenge as a public “resource”:

“Trevor was the most prolific reviewer this year [2008], with 30 posts since joining in April. Wow! Thanks, Trevor, for writing such thoughtful reviews and being so instrumental in making this blog a valuable resource for anyone interested in the Booker Prize” (“TCB: 2008”). Her comment recognizes Trevor as a public reader with significant symbolic (he is “instrumental) and cultural (his reviews are “thoughtful”) capital.

Trevor has written reviews for both *The Blind Assassin* and *Life of Pi*, but since my interest lies in how his subject position of literary sophisticate and Booker junkie resists the border dividing high and mass culture, I focus on his uptake of Martel’s novel

in which he takes up the prize directly. This review opens with a reflection on how *Life of Pi* has affected him as a reader:

This book keeps returning to me. In the last few years it is one of the only books I've reread (there's just so much out there to get through). Not only is the story deeply interesting, but what Martel has to say about religion, particularly about how religion glosses human experiences and makes these experiences survivable, is astounding and enlightening. At least, that's one thing I got out of the book. The book also stands alone as an engaging adventure story with an incredible ending. ("Martel's")

We learn that Trevor has actually reread Martel's novel: he is one of "those readers" who likes "thought-provoking" literature. Unlike RoseCityReader's experience with *Life of Pi*, the novel does "stick" with Trevor, "returning" to him and motivating him to reflect on it further. He also indicates why he needs a "trusted other" like the Booker: "there's just so much out there to get through." Trevor seems both excited by and anxious about the prospect of so many literary works he has yet to read. Conscious of not spoiling *Life of Pi* for his fellow readers, he briefly summarizes the text through two genre lenses, a religious treatise of the nature of faith and an "adventure story." In Wendy's engagement of the religious genre, she presented her interpretation as definitive, one that overturns the validity of an "adventure" genre reading. Trevor does not devalue the adventure story genre, and presents his reading as something *he* "got out of the book," leaving room for others' interpretations in this rhetorical situation of shared reading.

He then discusses *Life of Pi* in relation to the Booker, revealing how he is both paying attention to and participating in the "flurry" of scandalized uptakes (J. F. English "Winning" 113):

Unfortunately, because this book has become such a huge commercial success, some people deride it as unworthy of the Booker. After all, how can such a book that appeals to the masses be all that intelligent? To an extent, I understand this. Some of the book looks like it was written for shock value rather than to further

along any underlying discussion. But the book is a lot of fun. Even some of the more unbelievable parts fit to make a mood of a classic adventure/survival story. In a way, this made it refreshing. This book is a worthy prize winner—one of the best in my opinion. And there is much embedded in it to recommend it even to those of us who expect challenging, provocative literature.

His review imagines a public different from those that Jill, Lisa, and Wendy call forth in their posts: Trevor's public is constituted by those "who expect challenging, provocative literature," including himself. He also anticipates a range of uptakes of his review that will dismiss the prize-winning text as belonging "to the masses" and call Trevor's cultural capital into doubt.

Trevor's defense of Martel's work as 'worthy' is a link in a genre sequence that stretches back to an earlier rhetorical situation of literary selection: in 2002, the Booker jury publicly called for less "serious" Booker contenders, an exigence that prefaced their selection of *Life of Pi*.¹³⁸ His review foregrounds how Martel's novel problematizes the tacit agreement that a work holds either literary *or* commercial value, where an author has 'sold out' if they create a best-seller (York 105). The prize's conversion of symbolic to economic capital diminishes a text's canonical value in the eyes of some readers.

Trevor's uptake of this scandal suggests that, by extension, readers who typically read works of high art (*Finnegan's Wake*, for instance) may be perceived by their peers as 'selling out' if they read a best-selling text, especially a genre such as "a classic adventure/survival story" that holds little symbolic capital among many people in the professional literary sphere. This genre category is devalued in the same way that "coming of age" tales were denigrated by Morrissey and Pazira in *Canada Reads* and

¹³⁸ The 2002 prize jury publicly "complained they were asked to read too many 'pretentious ... and pompous' novels." Bruce Wallace, "Nationality a Part of This Year's Pre-Booker Buzz," *CanWest News* (2002). They ultimately selected *Life of Pi*, Martel's interpretation of decidedly less "pretentious" forms such as the survival story and cannibal tale.

“sci-fi” works were belittled by Morrissey and Jill. This type of meta-generic commentary affirms and re-circulates assumptions that certain literary genres are not worthy of canonization. Defending himself pre-emptively against the charge of sell-out, Trevor contends that *Life of Pi* problematizes established binaries of high and popular art, “the masses” and the literati, and “commercial” and literary “success.” In doing so, he renders credible—even enviable—his self-positioning as Booker “junkie” and literary sophisticate.

As Trevor’s challenge introduction and review of *Life of Pi* make apparent, he is drawn to the unseemliness of this major literary prize. He also recognizes that the range of conduct circumscribed by *The Complete Booker* genre system and affirmed by its participants does not solicit or accommodate his more scandalous motivations. Instead, he turns to his blog. In a post entitled “The Man Booker Prize,” Trevor invites his public to discuss the Booker, an invitation that supports Todd’s observation that the prize thrives “precisely by ‘getting it wrong’” (64):

The Man Booker Prize is one of my favourite book prizes not because it always chooses an excellent book (or even a good book, for that matter) but because it has become a bookreading institution. I know of no other prize that stirs up a much conversation as the Booker Prize does with its longlist and shortlist. I still remember during the 2004 shortlist season (the best of recent shortlists – perhaps the best of shortlists) speaking to my cabdriver in London about whether *Cloud Atlas* should win the prize. I love the shortlist displays in Great Britain bookstores. Indeed, August to October are better for the Man Booker Prize. On this page I want to welcome any comments about Booker, any winner, any shortlister, longlister, contender. For those of you who are interested, I recommend visiting and potentially joining [The Complete Booker Challenge](#). Click here for the [Man Booker website](#). Click here for a [list of past winners](#). ("Man")

In this new rhetorical situation, Trevor sets out to instantiate a public of Booker fans, fans not only of the selected Booker literary works (*The Complete Booker*’s main focus) but of

the prize itself. He succeeds in cultivating a conversation amongst four other respondents, who self-identify as male: together, they produce a genre sequence of twenty comments that speculate on the prize: together, they rank the 2009 shortlist; debate and critique the panel's qualifications; and exchange largely negative impressions of the 2009 winner, *The White Tiger* (Adiga). Where the reading challenge's genres of introductions, progress reports, and canonizing reader reviews do not invite scandalized uptakes of the prize, these posts of rank orders, debates, and gossip do.

At the end of this exchange, Mel from *The Complete Booker* posts a long comment that begins, "Thanks for your work reviewing the novels on the 2008 Booker long list. Since I enjoy reading the books on each year's short list, your comments have been and continue to be quite helpful to me" (Trevor "Man"). In the past, Mel has attempted unsuccessfully to generate discussion about the prize itself on *The Complete Booker*: for instance, he posted announcements about the Best of the Booker, including a winner's announcement for *Midnight's Children* (Mel "Midnight's"), soliciting uptakes of debate and critique. I suspect that he encountered Trevor's posts on the challenge site, recognized a like-minded "Booker junkie," and deliberately sought out Trevor's book blog, for he posts the identical comment to *The Complete Booker* in response to Trevor's post on the 2008 longlist (a rank-order meta-genre unanticipated by the genre system of the challenge ("Trevor's")). On Trevor's blog, Mel finds a means to read and contribute scandalized uptakes. As already seen in the comments exchanged between Wendy, Jill, and RoseCityReader on *Caribousmom*, this exchange between Trevor and Mel on *The Mookse and the Gripes* demonstrates again that the canonical power of *The Complete*

Booker is not located exclusively on the collective blog, but rather distributed through genre sequences across a network of participant blogs and their readers.

Conclusion

What do the introductions of *The Complete Booker* participants and reviews of Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor teach us about the motivations and canonical agency of public readers? As was the case in *One Book, One Vancouver* and *Canada Reads*, these public readers are motivated to share their reading experiences with others, and they exercise agency in choosing to pay attention to the Booker public, constituting its canon, and expanding its canon by circulating their public canonizing texts that evaluate the winners of this major literary prize. In the genre system of the online reading challenge, we have a more intimate view of the exigencies that readers seek to address, including the social motives of shared reading, a trusted other, and self-improvement. In *The Complete Booker*, we also can observe more closely how public readers instantiate, contribute to, and re-circulate this canon through their introductions, progress reports, and reader reviews; as I have emphasized, these posts are not only published on the challenge blog but are also posted to and taken up by a distributed network of blogs and social networking sites in the literary sphere. Jill, Lisa, Wendy, and Trevor's public reviews circulate interpretations and evaluations of the Canadian texts that both affirm and resist the symbolic capital of these texts in the contested discursive space of the Booker canon. Importantly, I have also suggested that their recognition of the established capital of both prize and texts acts as a situational constraint of their reviews, limiting the extent to which they counter the literary works' symbolic capital. Lastly, I have demonstrated that

The Complete Booker participants' meta-generic commentary about these three Canadian works circulates literary values that tacitly resist those of many professional readers.

CONCLUSION: “WHAT FOLLOWS ...?”

In the conclusion of *Come, Bright Improvement! The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, Heather Murray asks, “What follows when reading is viewed as a group and public activity, rather than an individual or interior enterprise?” (*Come* 158). Such a question also seems fitting for my genre study of public readers of canonical Canadian literature. Murray responds by redefining readers as more than “‘recipients’ or ‘consumers’” of texts (*Come* 159); rather, readers “do things with texts: they become speakers, writers, producers, performers, and critics” (*Come* 163-64). The same may be said of the descendants of these literary society readers. They too speak and write about texts, bringing forth discursive spaces in which circulate Canadian literature and texts that discuss, celebrate, debate, and evaluate this literature. And they do so in the context of public reading programs that are, as Fuller argues, “reshaping the use of Canadian literature” (“Listening” 13). Pursuing her question further, Murray redefines reading as something more than encountering, decoding, reacting, or responding affectively to a text—all of which reinforce the notion of reading as an “interior” act—and argues we should see readers as “operating in public (even when they are in ‘private’)” (*Come* 161). Contemporary readers, in comparison to their nineteenth-century counterparts, have the potential to instantiate much broader publics through new technologies including (most prominently) the internet, as we see in the readers who constitute and re-imagine the public of The Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Today’s readers also have greater access to public genres, such as the reader reviews within the online reading challenge, *The Complete Booker*. Some readers, those I call public readers, take full advantage of these

situational resources, and actively participate in canonizations of Canadian literary works, as exemplified by my three research sites: the popular canonizing genre systems of *One Book*, *One Vancouver*, *Canada Reads*, and *The Complete Booker*.

In this dissertation, I have examined public readers' motives and agency within these systems through a genre approach to canonicity. This approach builds upon recent understandings of Canadian literary canons while departing significantly from views of canons as housed largely within the academy, dominated by institutional agency, and comprised of literary works. My departure has been facilitated by genre theory's important reminder that speakers and writers are oriented toward the "actively responsive understanding[s]" (Bakhtin 69) of others and listeners and readers take "an active, responsive attitude" (Bakhtin 68) toward generic instances. Our current theories of literary canons must be revised to include *readers'* responsive understandings (or "uptakes") of both the canonized literary works and the canonizing texts about these works. Accordingly, I have contended that contemporary canons are discursive spaces in which complex genre sequences of canonized, canonizing, and meta-generic texts circulate, including the public texts of readers. To restate, I have advanced a view of canons in relation to genre networks and the meta-genres that accompany them. Many readers recognize the exigencies that these canonizing systems address, and some are motivated to participate by taking up genres offered, anticipated, and unforeseen by organizers of these systems. Public readers' agency, as I have shown, may be found in the contingent ways that they take up and interpret a literary work while taking up and interpreting a canonizing genre. For instance, Donna Morrissey takes up *Oryx and Crake* as mere "sci-fi" within the book brawl of *Canada Reads* to devalue Atwood's work as

one not worth reading as compared to her choice of *Rockbound* for Canadian readers. In the local context of this public reading event, Morrissey's canonical agency lies in her motivated literary interpretation and constitution of the brawl, publicly judging one literary work to hold more value than another.

By focusing on how public readers exercise agency within the constraints and opportunities of canonizing genres, I have sought to challenge the recurrent expressions of anxiety and dismissal that accompany these public canonizing genre systems. These meta-generic wordings warn us that readers who participate in programs like these are robbed of their agency and motivation to read what they want, when they want, and how they want. Critics see the high-profile canons of these systems as depriving readers of the vast array of Canadian literary works available. Indeed, *One Book, One Vancouver*, *Canada Reads*, and the Booker motivate certain people to read the same work of literature at once. But my findings counter the assumption that they are equally motivated to read this work and interpret it in an identical way. When readers assemble together to discuss these works within and on the outskirts of these systems, they exercise agency in terms of which motives they experience, interpretive strategies they deploy, and canonizing genres they engage. Moreover, in these situations of collective reading, readers discuss literary works that have not been selected by the system's organizers. For example, Lorraine, a public reader from British Columbia, recently posted a review of *The Blind Assassin* to *The Complete Booker*: "The novel reminded me slightly of Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* as the narrators – Hagar and Iris – are near the ends of their lives and looking backwards." Here, Lorraine circulates another Canadian novel—one outside the Booker canon—within her imagined, international public. She

also reminds us that readers and texts circulate amongst different reading publics and canons. Genre theory urges us to see these genre systems and their canons as more than the products of institutional force (that of the Vancouver Public Library, the CBC, the Man Booker Foundation) by reminding us that the texts produced by organizers turn to and depend upon participants' active, responsive understandings.

Genre theory offers additional responses to Murray's question, "What follows when reading is viewed as a group and public activity [...]?" Literary genre theorists have long been interested in questions of readers and reception, approaching reading as a public act that is responsive to its historical moment (for examples, see Burgess *British*; R. Cohen; Jameson; Jauss; Moretti *Graphs*). Additionally Freadman's theory of uptake, Warner's theory of publics, and the work of new rhetorical scholars on genre systems (including Bazerman; Russell; Devitt) offer us ways to study contemporary readers' textual uptakes of literary works, as Bakhtin might have encouraged us to do. Alongside other methodological approaches to reader studies, we can use genre to observe the many ways readers "do things" with texts, such as the uptakes of *Stanley Park* within a literary picnic, those of *A Complicated Kindness* in the CBC's brawl genre, and those of *Life of Pi* in online challenge reader reviews. A genre view helps us understand the motives that prompt readers to do these kinds of things with these kinds of texts by directing our attention to the rhetorical situations of reading and canonicity. By better understanding readers' situated motives, we can also form a stronger sense of how they engage the genres available to them in the literary sphere as "sites of subject formation" (Bawarshi 78). For example, Wendy of *The Complete Booker* instantiates her book blog and challenge reader reviews in ways that display her accumulated symbolic and cultural

capital for her imagined, virtual public and attest to her position in the book blogosphere as an agent of canonization. Genre theory's emphasis on motives offers fresh insights into how readers are, to quote Long, "using literature, in Kenneth Burke's memorable phrase [...] as 'equipment for living'" (131). She continues,

"This is a rich and evocative notion, urging consideration of literature less as a platonic ideal than as something that is pressed into service for a task beyond itself, a tool employed in the construction of human lives. As such, it opens our vision of literature to encompass the people who read it and the various contexts that influence the variable nature of people's engagement with books." (131)

My project contributes to the ongoing project undertaken by reader scholars to open up our vision of literature and expand our definition of literary studies.

Giltrow's concept of meta-genre allows us to pursue Murray's question even further, for the lively meta-generic activity that surrounds these popular canonizing systems offers us glimpses of how public readers and literary professionals variously understand what Fuller describes as "contemporary meanings of reading" ("Reading" 211). To adapt Prince's observation regarding the genre talk of early eighteenth-century Britain to the historical moment of early twenty-first-century Canada, "Critical debates about the proper management of genres"—and, I add, genre systems—mask "struggles to control the frameworks for interpreting texts" and interpreting "society" (455). In the meta-generic wordings that surround One Book programs and *Canada Reads*, for example, we see polarized debates that, on the one side, declare reading to be an "individual enterprise" (e.g., Niedzviecki protests Canadian libraries' "schemes" to "promote reading as fun and inclusive") and, on the other side, declare reading to be a "public activity" (e.g., the library's assumption that *One Book, One Vancouver* could "bring readers together around one great book" ("One")).

Meta-genre also allows us to listen to readers' views on reading within the canonizing genres themselves: for example, Carrier and Musgrave's call for "accessible" works; Jill's rejection of literary works that fail to "immerse" her in their fictional world; and Pazira's declaration that a "coming of age tale" will not elicit uptakes of social or political significance to Canadian society. Meta-generic talk amplifies readers' encounters with and participation within what Benwell calls "cultural regimes of value" (301). Observing these rhetorical situations, we also get a sense of what participants believe shared reading can do (e.g., foster a community; encourage nationalism; address exigencies of corporate power, authoritarianism, and religious fundamentalism), and what it cannot (e.g., address poetry meaningfully or discuss "inappropriate" texts like *Beautiful Losers* and *Cocksure*). These meta-generic samplings offer reading studies scholars indications of how complexly readers today view reading as shared practice. We could seek out meta-generic wordings surrounding other situations of public reading to add to the understandings I have offered here.

I have placed my study in the context of Canadian literature, which offers particularly rich examples of readers' roles in contemporary canonicity, given the popularity of *One Book, One Vancouver, Canada Reads*, and the current international reputation of Canadian literature, promoted in part by prizes like the Booker. As a genre theorist situated in Vancouver Canada, I can better understand the rhetorical situations of my research sites, given how they respond to the historical moment of early twenty-first century Canada. While the insights put forward in this dissertation are specific to contemporary public readers of Canadian literature, I have developed my genre approach with an eye to how this methodology may be applied to other situated moments of

canonicity. I can envision this approach being adapted, modified, and extended for other literary contexts because genre stipulates that we attend to the specificity of local circumstances in order to understand publics imagined, motivations acted upon, social actions contrived, and responses elicited. This approach could travel even further to other spheres of activity such as theatre, visual arts, television and film, and music, where public cultural works are selected, evaluated, and circulated through public discourse. In these spheres, we might also contemplate the motives and agency of individual ‘users’ in contemporary canonical processes.

I close, though, with a return to my context of Canadian literature. Why would those of us who study Canadian literature pay attention to public readers? My first response is simply because we now can. Today, we have a unique opportunity to watch, listen, read, and join readers as they do things with texts. I have suggested that we revisit a hierarchical view of some canon-constructing actors as more powerful than others, and its problematic inference that these actors are somehow more worthy of our study. Some public readers of Canadian literature may have different motives than those that recur in other rhetorical situations of reading, but we should study and critique public readers’ practices with the same intellectual rigour that we direct to others who participate in the literary sphere. In paying attention to what public readers say about Canadian literature and why they say it, we can gain new perspectives on some persistent concerns of our discipline. I offer three examples: the canonization of Canadian literature, the global circulation and reception of Canadian texts, and the relationship between Canadian literature and national identity.

Public readers might inspire us to reexamine prior significant moments of canonization to seek the responsive understandings of readers. Examples include the four major surveys of Canadian literature that were published in the 1920s (Gerson "Canon" 47-48) and the publication of the New Canadian Library series of academic paperbacks, launched in 1957 by McClelland and Stewart (Davey 674).¹³⁹ We could pose familiar questions in new ways in the hopes that they might yield new responses: What meta-genres accompanied these publications, and what might these indicate about contemporary views of Canadian literature, Canada, and reading? What exigencies did the editors perceive? What were their situated motives? Who did they turn to for uptakes of responsive understandings? What range of responses did these canonizing genre instances contrive? And what textual responses did they elicit from their readers?

Public readers might also provide fresh perspectives on the question of how and why Canadian literature is read internationally. To accompany studies of canonizing genres instantiated outside of Canada such as anthologies, scholarly articles, and bookstore promotions, we could study reviews of Canadian literature by non-Canadian readers on book blogs, online reading challenges, and social networking sites. How do they hear of certain Canadian authors and works? What canon does their selected text seem to circulate within? What genres do they engage to interpret a work? In their reviews, do readers note if an author is Canadian, a character is from Canada, or a text is set in Canada? If so, what motivates them to include this information? If not, why not? Do they take up a Canadian literary text to meet an exigence particular to their locale?

¹³⁹ The four surveys are: "Archibald MacMechan's *Head-Waters of Canadian Literature* (1924), J.D. Logan and Donald G. French's *Highways of Canadian Literature* (1924), Lionel Stevenson's *Appraisals of Canadian Literature* (1926), and Lorne Pierce's *Outline of Canadian Literature* (1927)." Carole Gerson, "The Canon between the Wars: Field-Notes of a Feminist Literary Archaeologist," *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*, ed. Robert Lecker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) 48.

We can, of course, also ask these questions for Canadian readers of Canadian texts. And further, for those interested in Canadian studies more broadly, we can ask questions with regards to Canadian readers of texts from elsewhere. Does their local context of reception inform their literary selections and interpretations of international literature?

Public readers might reinvigorate studies of the relationship between Canadian literature and Canadian identities. Genre systems that appeal to a Canadian public through Canadian literary works also elicit discussions from readers regarding the contemporary meanings (to paraphrase Fuller) of Canadian literature and the formations and definitions of Canadian identities. I encountered a memorable example of this in the *Canada Reads 2007* debates. During the brawl, panelist Denise Bombardier had objected to the inclusion of Anosh Irani's *The Song of Kahunsha* on *Canada Reads* on the grounds that Irani's text, the story of Chamdi, an orphan who lives in Bombay, is not about Canada. Her objection pressed upon a well-recognized exigence of Canadian identities that motivated an extensive genre sequence of uptakes by *Canada Reads* listeners on the online discussion board, who publicly debated their views on national literature and national identity (CBC "CR 2007"). I report some of this exchange here. A listener, Valerie, mistook Bombardier to mean that Irani was not Canadian, and posted to the discussion board that her expectation of *Canada Reads* is that she "will be reading books by Canadians." Another listener, author Madeleine Thien, responded:

To clear up a point; all the Canada Reads selections are written by Canadians. Anosh Irani "is" Canadian. Denise Bombardier said that Canada Reads books should be "about" Canada. Bombardier's contention is that Anosh Irani's book should not be considered by the Canada Reads panel for the simple fact that it is not set in Canada.

A point with which I strenuously disagree. Which means also, I think, that I strenuously disagree with Denise Bombardier's definition of what Canada is, and how we define ourselves and our literature.

Would she also make the same objection to Yann Martel's 'Life of Pi', Michael Ondaatje's 'Anil's Ghost', Rohinton Mistry's 'A Fine Balance', Camilla Gibb's 'Sweetness in the Belly', Rawi Hage's 'DeNiro's Game', Ying Chen's 'Ingratitude', Keith Maillard's 'Gloria', Dennis Bock's 'The Ash Garden', Barbara Gowdy's 'The White Bone', Thomas Wharton's 'Salamander', Timothy Findley's 'Not Wanted on the Voyage', Rabindranath Maharaj's 'A Perfect Pledge'?

I could go on. To eliminate these books from the definition of 'Canadian' would be to suffocate the literature that I know and love.

Thien's rejection of Bombardier's criteria to evaluate literary works within the rhetorical situation of the CBC book brawl is a rejection of her criteria to evaluate what is "Canadian." Thien's uptake of Canadian literary works set elsewhere resists the "set-in-Canada" canon implied by Bombardier. Another listener Chris, offered this understanding of the *Canada Reads* canon: "Regarding the definition of Canada Reads, I always assumed if it was literature by a Canadian writer, it qualified, no matter where the setting. And I'm okay with that!" In the context of this discussion, Chris' unqualified acceptance of the selected literature is an unqualified acceptance of Irani's 'Canadian-ness.' To share one last response in this thread, Paz Pino wrote,

I have to say that I was quite disappointed by the comments that Denise made regarding her reasons for voting off [*The Song of Kahunsha*]. Should the works of Canadian immigrants be denied recognition because of where their characters are placed? I would think that one of the privileges of being Canadian (for those of us who immigrated to this great country) would be the safety in being able to share the reasons on why we left our home countries, painful or not and knowing there would be other Canadians willing to hear our tales, laugh with us and cry with us. (CBC "CR 2007")

We see the power the celebrity panelists have to not only canonize Canadian literature but to characterize Canada and Canadians for their listeners. But we also see how listeners can choose to resist these characterizations publicly. While Paz Pino called forth a much smaller public through this post than Bombardier did through the brawl, this uptake offers an alternative image to Bombardier's vision of Canadians learning about

their nation through a canon of literature about Canada. Instead, we imagine immigrants sharing their “tales” (whether *The Song of Kahunsha* or others) with fellow Canadians, contriving and eliciting responsive understandings of shared laughter and tears.

Public readers like Paz Pino have much to say. Let’s pay attention.

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APPENDIX A:

UBC RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL



*The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road,
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3*

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL
RISK AMENDMENT**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Janet L. Giltrow	DEPARTMENT: UBC/Arts/English	UBC BREB NUMBER: H05-80880
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution		Site
UBC Other locations where the research will be conducted: N/A		Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Miranda J. Burgess Laura Moss Kathryn Grafton		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) - "Public Consciousness in a Global Age: An Examination of the Interplay of Local, National, and Global Imaginaries"		
PROJECT TITLE: Unseemly Reading Publics and their Public Readers: A Genre Approach to Contemporary Canonizing Uptakes of Canadian Literature in English [B05-0880] Note: this is a revised title.		

Expiry Date - Approval of an amendment does not change the expiry date on the current UBC BREB approval of this study. An application for renewal is required on or before: March 4, 2010

AMENDMENT(S):	AMENDMENT APPROVAL DATE: April 15, 2009
Document Name	Version Date
Other: Amendment The Complete Booker I have not included any website content here or as an attachment for it is a very large site. Should the website change, I could still access it via the Internet archive service, Wayback Machine , as could members of the BREB.	

The amendment(s) and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

***Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
and signed electronically by one of the following:***

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair