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Living with the Dead:
Narrative and Memory in Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past" and Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone*

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In 1939, amid an increasing threat of war, Virginia Woolf began "A Sketch of the Past." In it, she meditated on the nature of memory:

> In certain favourable moods, memories—what one has forgotten—come to the top. Now if this is so, is it not possible—I often wonder—that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? ... I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen in to the past ... I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start. (77-8)

In remembering, can we directly access the past ("fit a plug into the wall . . . and listen in . . .")? Woolf seems to think that we can actually return to the past, be our younger selves once again, and hence be in a position to "live our lives through from the start"—to reverse or overcome time. For Woolf, memory is an always-available reservoir of insight and emotion. If, as she says, life is a "bowl that one fills and fills and fills" (75), then narrative enables the writer to remember, to dip into this bowl at will.

It might be wonderful (for some, at least) to dip or plug in to the past. However, narrative does not always help us do this. In fact, narrative can situate us in various ways with respect to the past. Telling stories can certainly help us to remember, "listen in" to the past, as Woolf demonstrates in "A Sketch of the Past" in returning to her first "rapturous" childhood impressions of St Ives. Yet this is not the only possible relation between narrative and memory. Sometimes, indeed, telling stories can help us to forget the past, to "get something off our chests." In "Sketch," for instance, Woolf

painfully recounts an early experience of sexual abuse at the hands of her half-brother as a way of freeing herself from this unpleasant memory and explaining her shame in looking at her own body in the mirror. Used thus, narrative becomes a device, not for remembering, but for freeing the present from the past.

In a third way that narrative can relate to memory, we can tell stories to both remember *and* forget, in order to work the past into the present, the ongoing text of our lives. Such narrative is *doubled* in meaning, offering up the past and its ghosts (normally forgotten or repressed) to be read between the lines of the present. In other words, such narrative is allegorical or palimpsestic in nature, divided within and from itself, resisting interpretive totalization and disorienting the reader.

In this paper I am interested, first, in exploring the above three general modes of relation between narrative and memory. I will draw upon Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past" in looking at the first two modes, narrative as a remembering versus narrative as a forgetting. In the second part of the paper I will consider, from a feminist perspective, the special work of memory in women's narrative, particularly women's life-writing or autobiographical narrative. Here I will focus especially on Daphne Marlatt's autobiographical travel text *How Hug a Stone*. This is a striking example of the third mode—narrative as both a remembering and a forgetting. I will argue that in such allegorical or palimpsestic narrative, in drawing up the past into the text of the present, a writer enacts a reconciliation with the ghosts—particularly parental ghosts—that haunt her. As a mode of rebuilding or reconstruction, palimpsestic life-writing is of value for women in rereading and reconstructing their lives.

* * *

Traditionally, the link between narrative and memory has been the line of time, "wriggling and interminable, the naked worm of time" (Forster 35-6). Narrative is a telling of a connected sequence of events (Baldick 145); it presupposes the line of time, chronology, even if it bends, interrupts or otherwise tampers with it. Meshed in many family stories, we take our place in lines—our life-story, our family line, our cultural history. The epic has traditionally been the mode by which a culture narrates its story, by which it remembers its

battles, migrations, and so on. Without the epic storyteller, a culture would lose its sense of continuity with its ancestors, with earlier ages. Such storytelling is linked to the stories told within families, tales that ensure continuity from one generation to the next. This is the kind of narrative we learn first as children at home and at school ("When you were a baby," "When your grandma was a girl"). Stories, then, give us our sense of being "at home," grounded in a familial and cultural network.

Such grounding within the past can also characterize life-writing, the narrative of a life (whether biography or autobiography). It certainly characterizes Woolf's return, in "Sketch," to the ground of her own being, her mother's body:

> Certainly there she was, in the very centre of that great Cathedral space which was childhood; there she was from the very first. My first memory is of her lap; the scratch of some beads on her dress comes back to me as I pressed my cheek against it. (94)

This ability to return to the concrete details of the past, in particular the texture and feel of the mother at the "centre" of it all, is a special power of narrative used as a "probe," a power that makes writing, for Woolf, an act "far more necessary than anything else" (84). An assumption of continuity between past and present grounds this view of life-writing as probe or plug into the past. And despite challenges to chronology in recent life-writing, such continuity remains the key assumption in writing a life.[1] As Marlatt puts it in *How Hug a Stone*, "without narrative how can we see where we've been? or, unable to leave it altogether, what we come from?" (19).

However, the intimate link between narrative and cultural/familial memory is not always desirable. The stories that ground us can come to entrap us. Traditionally, this has been the case for women, as Carolyn Heilbrun suggests in *Writing a Woman's Life*, and the important thing is to "dismantle . . . the past" by replacing old, limiting stories or scripts with "new narratives . . . and new ways of understanding old narratives" (60). As Marlatt puts it, we are "*all wrapped up*" in our stories and must "break out before [they] bur[y] us. stories can kill" (51). Yet she adds: "left open, flapping, wide to the wind, without narrative how can we see where we're going?" (15). We need narratives to maintain a sense of direction, but *we* must be the directors,

guides, in our own stories. Breaking out of old narratives means parting with our accumulated memories, "this plot we're in" (Marlatt 15). Living without memory is a difficult preliminary step toward forging new connections, new stories, new memories.

Against its traditional close link with memory, narrative can sometimes be a means of actively driving out unsettling memories. By telling stories, we can focus on these memories, repeat them and lay them to rest. In the psychoanalytic situation, for example, narrative is one means of reaching behind debilitating symptoms and resuscitating the "dead," the repressed, in order to efface symptoms once and for all. As Freud puts it, therapy is "a way of making symptoms disappear" by "transforming what is unconscious into what is conscious" (320-1). We seek to remember, but only in order to attain a final, desired forgetting and freedom from a hurtful past.

In "A Sketch of the Past," besides using narrative as a way of remembering, Virginia Woolf nonetheless at points uses narrative in this second (therapeutic) sense, as a way of forgetting. In her evocation of "moments of being" or presence, her vivid memory-work on childhood retreats to St. Ives—people, colours, sounds, all the sensuous details of childhood—she seeks a form of oblivion, a way of forgetting the demands of a present life of "non-being" (81), a way of forgetting a tiresome biographical project on painter and art critic Roger Fry, and the present reality of the Second World War ("London . . . being battered nightly," 136). Over and above these present needs, however, Woolf undertakes her narrative or memory-work as a way of laying a particularly insistent ghost to rest—the ghost of he mother, Julia Stephen—just as Woolf sought, in her life, to write herself free of the power and influence of her father, Leslie Stephen.[2] Narrative can efface the mother's ghost, even while, as we have seen, narrative can also provide a way back to the solid maternal body at the "centre" of childhood. In its treatment of the mother, "A Sketch of the Past" is marked by a fundamental ambivalence, a hesitation between the need to remember and the need to forget.

Woolf remembers how her novel *To the Lighthouse* came to her in a rush one day while out walking, and how writing it quickly, composing Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, helped her finally to forget her parents:

> I used to think of him & mother daily; but writing the
> Lighthouse laid them in my mind. (... I was obsessed by them
> both, unhealthily; & writing of them was a necessary act.)
> (*Diary* 208)

> Until I was in the forties—I could settle the date by seeing
> when I wrote *To the Lighthouse* . . . —the presence of my
> mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine
> what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings.
> She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so
> important a part in every life . . . I wrote the book very
> quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my
> mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her.
> I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for
> their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt
> emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to
> rest. ("Sketch" 94)

However, the mother's ghost must have been getting bothersome again, because in "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf had to write a number of pages exploring her mother's personality, the nature of her influence on others, and especially (in some detail) her death, the feel of kissing her dead face, first warm, then "iron cold, and granulated" (107). In just this tactile detail, as well, Woolf must lay the ghost of Gerald Duckworth, and the incident of early sexual abuse, to rest by retelling in minute detail his exploration of her body, "the feel of his hand . . . going firmly and steadily lower and lower" (79). Evidently for Woolf, and perhaps in general, the therapy offered by narrative is never complete or permanent. The dead, the past, must be retold, refelt and "laid to rest" again and again, in story after story.

So narrative can remember and totalize a life; it can create a sense of being at home in time and in place. This story of connection must sometimes be broken open, however, so that "unwritten, de-scripted, un-described," without memory or home, we can imagine a new reality, "make it say itself, make it up" (Marlatt 35). We have also seen that memories, when particularly troubling, can be erased, if only temporarily, by narrative. But narrative can go beyond either dwelling in the past or seeking freedom from the past. In the idea of allegory, a particular kind of narrative, we find one more way by which narrative can situate us in memory: here, we both recognize

the ghosts of the past and see them as alien, this double movement subverting a totalizing memory.

"Allegory" comes from the Greek word *allegoria*, meaning "speaking otherwise." As Paul de Man emphasizes, allegory, a narrative with at least two levels of meaning, is a figure of disjunction, "designat[ing] primarily a distance in relation to its own origin" (207). Its levels of meaning never merge, in contrast with the union of self and other, concept and object, effected by symbol. Allegory is also a figure of temporality, enacting our uneasy knowledge of time, the alienation of meaning in language, the disjunction, within the speaking subject, that introduces the other. "Allegory speaks (through) the voice of the other, whence the ghost-effect . . ." (Derrida 80): allegory is a "ghostly" figure which "phantomizes" meaning, creating a "phantom-text" (Derrida 80)—unstable, always already deconstructing or undermining itself.

What is the relation between allegorical narrative and memory? Derrida notes how the elements dis-joined, separated, in allegory—self and other, levels of meaning—are at the same time held together in a ghostly memory-structure:

> . . . one might say that between memory of being and memory of the other there is perhaps the disjunction of allegory. But let us not forget that a disjunction does not only separate . . . Even if it is defective, the cornerstone supports and joins, holds together what it separates. (79)

As both "memory of being and memory of the other," allegory both "holds together" past and present and "separates" them. Here we do not simply plug into "moments of being" from the past, as Woolf suggests; but neither do we banish the ghostly other, or mother, from our stories. Rather, in allegorical memory the past, the other, returns as part of the very texture of present being, both deepening and estranging our experience of the present.

Here the connection between allegory and the palimpsest comes to the fore. In a palimpsest, past layers of inscription are effaced yet still present under the present text. In allegory as palimpsest, the reading experience is disjunctive, discovering deeper levels of meaning beneath the surface traces of the text. Palimpsestic life-writing, then, recovers relics of the past, working them up into the present, the latest layers of the life-text. Such narrative brings the past into an uneasy relation with the present, marking it as dividing and

unstable. Palimpsestic writing can enable women writers in particular to open up their life-narratives, drawing forth the ghosts of their mothers in order to both enrich and destabilize their writing and their lives.

* * *

One work that can be explored as a palimpsest is Daphne Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone*, a short travel/autobiographical text narrating a trip the writer took with her son to England in the summer of 1981. As Phyllis Webb notes in her liner comments on the book, it can be read as poetry or as prose: it is a sequence of pieces, some brief and lyrical, some longer and more discursive, on relatives, houses, gardens, rural England in June, interspersed with maps locating the towns and villages visited. The writing follows the itinerary of the trip, from the Atlantic jet-crossing to London, then deeper and deeper into the maze of the English countryside, all the way to "the power thresholds of Stonehenge" and "the squat stone mothers of Avebury" (64)—the desired destination of a month's journeying—then back to London, then Vancouver again. In tracing this itinerary, Marlatt also explores the maze of the English language itself, comparing vocabularies and dialects, uncovering etymologies, celebrating words as material things.

Marlatt makes it clear at the outset that she is journeying to find her dead mother, her "parent material" (26), an insistent ghost (just as Woolf sought to come to terms with her own familiar spirit): "& perhaps i will come to understand my mother too" (11). She recognizes that there is an "enraged mother at the heart of [the labyrinth]: lost" (15). Like her mother, she also feels lost, increasingly disoriented in this maze of villages, this English June, meeting strange-yet-familiar relatives and nursing a sick son: "i feel lost, layer on layer of place, person . . . the nameless creature i am at the heart of this many-chambered shell is getting overlaid, buried under" (65). The daughter *is* the lost mother, and vice-versa; to find her mother is to find herself: "[F]eet on the red dirt of Devon bedrock we go back to the familiar: my mother's trace, these family pathways to negotiate, these still-standing walls of home" (26).

Journeying to the centre of the memorial maze, digging into the past, examining the relics at Stonehenge and at Avebury, the writer creates a palimpsestic narrative, an

allegory in which the present story (her journey as a mother with her son) recalls an earlier story (her journey as a child from Malaysia, to England, then to Canada, with her "soft & angry" mother). She recognizes that she has an ongoing need to recover the difficult, "subversive" ghost of this woman who, having had her "wings clipped growing up," "rag[ed] at the false front of society, tearing out the placid assumptions of family... & then laps[ed], controlled, into silence" (67). Like Woolf in "A Sketch of the Past," Marlatt as daughter must but cannot quite free herself from the influence of her mother, an influence linked with a dying curse: "avenging abdication, you said i would be sorry when you were dead, & i only understood it as a curse" (67).

Thus the daughter in *How Hug a Stone* must come to terms with the ghost of her mother, this angry, lost figure dividing, yet also empowering, her writing. But coming to terms with the ghost does not mean seeking to forget her, "the one with the untold story" (Marlatt 23). This story cries out to be told. So the daughter seeks to approach, even hold the mother, but in disjunction, in death. This simultaneous approach and distancing can be seen in the latter part of *How Hug a Stone*, in which the writer closes in on her mother, the mother tongue, the Great Mother (stone, earth). Approach is not achieved union, however. The mother emerges, comes to light, but she enters the present marked with her otherness— her death.

> in caves. she is in caves. but i don't feel her here. along this
> causeway, light bouncing brilliants off housefronts, evening
> strollers, off waves to the Dolphin, Fo'c'sle, off the Royal
> Marine—*we get our storms here.* she is not here, if anywhere,
> past cliffs to Wild Pear Beach where darkness gathers in cracks,
> slits, tidal caverns, gathering us up (& fascinated, wanting to
> go back in all the way, nose up against those walls of rock,
> musty with sea rank pebbles, sea wrack fear of old, being trapt
> by the sea) . . . (55)

The mother we seek—the basis of our speech and our being—is "in caves," hidden away and waiting to be drawn into the light. (We find a similar image of memory as hidden treasure in Book 10 of Augustine's *Confessions*).[3] Entering the sea-caves of memory, we seek re-entry into the mother's body ("tidal caverns"). Yet, like any uncanny object, the mother discovered in these memorial caves is both familiar and

unfamiliar, fascinating and fearful. And just as Woolf must kiss her mother's dead cheek again, in memory, Marlatt must put her mother's ghost to rest by retelling the action of scattering her ashes upon the sea: "we did, in the end, as she asked, on a different sea-coast off a different rock, lean from the boat to scatter bits of porous bone, fine ash. words were not enough. & the sea took her" (55).

The dead mother is also envisioned as a relic of an ancient culture, an archaeological find dug up in the form of the "Bride" whose "tomb-body" mingles with "pots, meat bones, flint implements, with stone, bone & shell beads. rubbish, *from which new life annually rises . . .*" (72). Uncovering the relics of the mother leads to new energy for the writer. Marlatt notes how women's old narratives can bind: ". . . that is the limit of the old story...left with a script that continues to write our parts in the passion we find ourselves enacting, old wrongs, old sacrifices . . ." (72). To break out of this script, women must resurrect their mothers' ghosts as part of "the endless struggle to redeem them, or them in ourselves...wanting to make us new again: to speak what isn't spoken, even with the old words" (72).

In a striking manner, Marlatt describes the final movement of approach to the mother's ghost as a grave-robbing. The mother material consists of "craniums & long bones...*matrix of chalk block walls arranged in the pattern of a spider's web*...& at centre, earth, only earth" (74-75). Our "ground and source," the other, the dead mother, is "earth, only earth," yet she informs our "enfolded present" (75). Narrative ("archaeological," palimpsestic) "*is a strategy for survival . . .* transformative," telling of the past in the present, pulling both into an opening future. The dead "mutter [mother] of stone" nonetheless has "*stei*-ing power" (75), emering from between the lines of the text. Reading, we seek neither to return to this other nor to forget it; rather, we listen to the uncanny "mutter," wary, attentive to its difference.

Through palimpsestic narrative, then, recovering the past in the present, women can write their lives anew. The process is not a comfortable one; it disturbs and divides the writer from herself. Yet through facing the family ghost within herself, she discovers the "ground & source" of all possibility, all meaning, the "pause (between the words) of all possible relation" (72). And what holds for women's writing is in some sense true of writing in general: without this inner

division by a familiar and familial other who is our source, we *cannot write*. Indeed, we write only in listening to this absent other.

Like Woolf, then, Marlatt can only imagine a future free of constraints, free to write, if she can free herself of family ghosts. In a sense, *How Hug a Stone* in its entirety is a gesture of discovering the other and letting her go. This double gesture is possible because the trip recorded repeats at each step of the way the earlier journey and sojourn in England of Marlatt's mother and her daughters. Under present events like feeding pigeons and taking trains, Marlatt reads the past— a shadow of failure, a fear: "i think of the shape of her life, her brooding silence...the struggle with her fear which i suspected of being so strong it could actually shape what happened to me. coming to meet it, I see what i've been struggling with here" (76). The traveller has "come to meet" the past in the present; by re-enacting the past, in the paradox of repetition, she both retains it and lets it go.

Perhaps the most important thing Marlatt's palimpsestic narrative can teach us is that we can never be entirely free of our ghosts—our symptoms, signs of loss and submerged desire. But in repeating them, telling them again, these ghosts emerge between the lines, becoming part of our present as we write our way into a freer future. As Marlatt says:

> i can do nothing but...beat out the words, dance out names at the heart of where we are lost, hers first of all, a wild mother dancing upon the waves...and the dance beats with you, claims of the dead in our world (the fear that binds). (79)

In the dance of memory, we acknowledge the dead, "the fear that binds," yet we write ourselves "free we want to be where live things are" (79).

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In "The Art of Mémoires," the second lecture in *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida concludes a discussion of the relation of allegory to remembering and forgetting by returning to a complaint ("I have never known how to tell a story") with which he prefaced his first lecture, "Mnemosyne":

> Yesterday, you may remember, I began by telling you that I suffer from an inability to tell a story...It is because I cannot tell a story that I turn to myth. But Mnemosyne, Lethe,

> Atropos or her two sisters are not only myths; they are also
> allegories in the strict sense, personifications of Memory,
> Forgetting, Death; and they are always family romances, stories
> of filiation, of sons and daughters. (86)

Unable to tell stories to remember the past, and yet unable to
forget the past either, the writer can turn to allegories, stories
in which the family romance emerges irresistibly between the
lines, in which sons and daughters wrestle witht he ghosts of a
past that has determined or written them, a past that they can
neither efface nor fully, simply, possess. Family ghosts, "so
familiar, *familia*" (Marlatt 27). Much life-writing will of
necessity be allegorical—or, as we have seen, palimpsestic—
as the furious, lost ghosts of the parents emerge and are
written into the ongoing text of the life. Despite the obtrusive
and often destructive presence of the father in many women's
stories, in women's life-writing the most insistent ghost to
emerge between the lines is likely to be that of the mother—
overworked, giving too much (Woolf's mother); angry,
constrained, crossed by circumstances (Marlatt's mother).

   In the palimpsestic life, then, narrative and memory are
linked in an ongoing reconstruction of the past in the present,
pulling a mass of emerging material—pots, shards, bones,
both rubbish and treasure—into an ongoing, open-ended text
and vision of the future. This reconstruction of the dead is for
women an essential precondition for rereading their lives and
thereby writing new stories, creating new personal and social
realities. In *The Aerial Letter*, Nicole Brossard imagines this
new story taking the shape of a new woman; a ghostly
hologram hovering at the edge of our "plural," many-layered
memories: "I thus come to imagine myself hologram, actual,
virtual, three-dimensional in the imperative of coherent light"
(100). "Hologrammic" or palimpsestic narrative enables us to
reintegrate our past into our present in order to go forward into
a new, ghostly future, paradoxically divided yet more whole.
As Marlatt puts it, "narrative is a strategy for
survival...transformative" (75). Narrating our lives, we turn
to our ghosts, our uncanny familiars, to write ourselves anew.

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NOTES

[1] Recent works of life-writing that question and undermine chronology include Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1987) and Gail Scott's *Heroine* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1987).

[2] As Woolf writes in a diary entry on Nov. 28, 1928, her dead father's birthday: "he would have been 96, yes, today;...but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;—inconceivable" (*Diary* 208). In contrast to the overt interference of the father, the mother's influence is more subtle yet just as devastating for the writing life. In "professions for Women," she personifies this interfering ghost as an "Angel in the House," domestic and timid, which a woman must kill again and again in order to take up her pen and write (237-8).

[3] Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960) 236-248.

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Preface to a Rhetoric of Reading Contemporary Canadian Literature

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I

Canadian critics are fast recognizing that an understanding of the theoretical context that surrounds and interpenetrates works such as *Burning Water, Coming Through Slaughter, The Handmaid's Tale*, and *What the Crow Said* may soon become regarded as a necessary focus of critical reading. Postmodernist authors characteristically conflate theory and literary practice; as Linda Hutcheon says at the University of Ottawa Symposium, "Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature,"

> In their literary work they don't separate theory from practice, and that is why it's so attractive to many of us. When we teach their works we have to teach theory. *They* teach theory (242).

I would emend slightly Hutcheon's position by adding, "When we teach their works we have to teach how to read. They teach *reading*."

"How do we read a novel which is self-consciously postmodern?" (229) asks Kenneth Hoeppner in his symposium paper on *What the Crow Said*; Elizabeth Seddon notes that when she reads a novel by Timothy Findley she doesn't "feel like an *audience*," she feels "like a reader, implicated, and it *is* personal" (213). And during the panel discussion at the Ottawa symposium, one participant, taking issue with Robert Kroetsch's remarks about the failure of the Canadian literary tradition, argues that "what has failed is not the text, which is simply 'there,' but the collective reading of the text" (Schellenberg, "Writer Writing" 23).

Such postmodernist criticism and commentary, fascinated with processes rather than products (change rather than stasis), constitutes a distinctive chorus and continually reminds us that it is real readers, not their encoded counterparts, who actually interpret texts. The dynamics of reading occurs interactively with the text, and despite the nagging authority of W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's "affective fallacy"—

what Steven Mailloux now calls the "'affective fallacy' fallacy" ("Introduction" 9)—the reading process and the role of the reader increasingly command critical attention.

Like the postmodernist texts that typically blur formal distinctions between reality and fiction, the developing rhetoric of postmodernist reading theory in Canada (and in North America generally) seems intent upon embracing what would appear to be two irreconcilable concepts of the reader: (1) the reader as a hypothetical construct "encoded" in the text, and (2) the actual reader in the act of reading the text. Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman present the proposition in the form of a paradox: "If a reader may be 'in' a text as a character is in a novel, he or she is certainly also in it in a train of thought—both possessing it and possessed by it" (vii). However ambiguous, such propositions promise a mysterious mix of aesthetic detachment and pragmatic relevance as the process of reading and the status of readers become the primary subjects of scrutiny. The internal contradictions may appear even more pronounced, though, when we note that by partially grounding their model of reading in phenomenology, postmodernist theorists and artists invoke notions of psychological realism while, at the same time, they call the conventions of realism (indeed, reality itself) into question.

The complexities of reading theory are daunting, and opinion is clearly divided over its ultimate significance: either the shift of emphasis from a mimetic to a pragmatic orientation offers a revolutionary change in the way narratives are written and read, or the new orientation provides simply a new repertoire of themes and metaphors—a new angle on an old story. Linda Hutcheon calls for the act of reading metafictional discourse to be viewed as "a creative, interpretive one that partakes of the writing itself" (*Narcissistic* 144); and Jane Tompkins argues "What began as a small shift of emphasis ends by becoming an exchange of world views" ("An Introduction" x). Yet others maintain, with Walter Ong, that "the writer's audience is always a fiction," a role cast by authors and divorced from "the rest of actual life" ("The Writer's" 12). Hutcheon and Tompkins seem to be describing the reading situation as pragmatic, a shared space for collaborative dialogue between writer and reader, while Ong insists that "Readers do not form a collectivity, acting here and now on one another and on the speaker as members of an audience do" (11). But, though the conventional distinctions

between oral and written discourse allow Ong to dismiss the collaborative power of the reader, he is nonetheless careful to note that the

> relationship of audience-fictionalizing to modern narrative prose is very mysterious, and I do not pretend to explain it all here (17).

The purpose of this paper is not to "explain it all," but to explore how the new focus on readers and the process of reading requires an exploration of reading's rhetorical dimension.

II

In calling for a "rhetoric of reading," this paper seeks to shift the current focus of critical attention away from texts as aesthetic objects to texts as interactive elements in the "contextualized production and reception of meaning" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* xv). This particular variation on a celebrated critical theme (that of discourse as *énonciation*) belongs to Linda Hutcheon, and, in a sense, what follows here constitutes both an elaboration and a critique of Hutcheon's critical stance. In the "Preface to the Paperback Edition" of *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox,* Hutcheon announces her intention to begin to describe "the 'poetics' of what we seem determined to call postmodernism" (xi). Poetics she defines as "that ever developing theoretical structure by which we order both our aesthetic knowledge and our critical procedures" (xi); and she sees the development of that poetics as dependent on textual innovations rather than on changing conventions of audience response: "The course of literary history is being altered, and, as always, it is being altered by texts, not the critics" (39).

Hutcheon's procedure here is primarily inductive: she seeks theory from within, just as in her second book, *A Theory of Parody,* she seeks to avoid "any theoretical structure imposed from without" (116). A focus on texts, of course, keeps the theorist's feet close to the ground, and I sympathize with Hutcheon's intention to keep her discussion as specific and practical as possible. But throughout both *Narcissistic Narrative* and *A Theory,* the author's claims are threatened by the limitations of her approach. *Narcissistic Narrative* attempts to delimit the term "metafiction" by treating it as "a technically

definable literary entity" (2), as a set of "new literary phenomena" (39). Similarly, her definition of parody (which subsumes metafiction) proceeds in terms of rigorous analysis and textual taxonomy of contemporary postmodernist texts. However, in the final chapter of *A Theory*, Hutcheon comes close to conceding the impossibility of fixing postmodernist genres in tidy, textually-defined categories:

> Since I believe that there are no completely transhistorical definitions of parody possible, it follows that the social or "worldly" status of parody can also never be fixed or finally and permanently defined (115).

Thus, while Hutcheon treats metafiction and parody as postmodernist examples of "process made visible" (*Narcissistic* 6), and while she claims that in "postmodernist art...its form remains to activate in the reader or viewer that collective participation that enables something closer to active 'performance' to replace the 'well-wrought urn' of modernist closure" (*A Theory* 99), she must admit finally that what "is needed here is a broader notion of the conventions of reading" (*A Theory* 116). For Hutcheon, however, conventions of reading are derivable "from the teachings of the texts themselves" (116).

If, as she says, postmodernist literary forms "require a certain institutionalized set of values—both aesthetic (generic) and social (ideological)—in order to be understood, or even to exist" (*A Theory* 95), then texts are not a matter of "process made visible"; rather, it is the texts that are made "visible" through the process of reading. Hutcheon's perception of the text as the concretization of institutional values and processes effectively cuts off serious consideration of these forces as anything more than extensions of the text. There are alternatives, however. As Jane Tompkins concludes in her thought-provoking article, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response," if we take seriously the theoretical assertion "that perceptual categories define the world and give reality the only shape it can ever have, then a shift of critical emphasis would seem to be in order, a shift away from the analysis of individual texts and toward an investigation of what it is that makes texts visible in the first place" (225-26). Tompkins is surely right in claiming that interpretation is not the only game in town, but we would be

wrong to conclude that interpretation has become an
anachronism inevitably tied to formalist critical practice. The
desire to achieve coherence, to understand meaning, remains
basic to human nature and, I argue, lies at the heart of the
reading process itself. We interpret because we are interested
in understanding as precisely as possible what others have to
say. We interpret to develop and maintain the very perceptual
categories we use to make sense of the world. What we need,
therefore, is an expanded definition of interpretation that
includes both the text's poetics and its surrounding rhetorical
context. Indeed, Hutcheon says as much when she
acknowledges in the Preface to her recent book, *A Poetics of
Postmodernism*, "I realized that the formalist and pragmatic
approaches I had used in the other two studies would need
expanding to include historical and ideological considerations .
. ." (x).

A Poetics of Postmodernism goes a long way toward
articulating the kinds of questions that need answering: How
do we define textuality? interpretation? theory? From what
position can we theorize? How does postmodernism challenge
our dominant, liberal humanist preconceptions? How do we
read? Postmodernist art and theory, Hutcheon suggests, must
be situated within two key contexts: "first, within the
enunciative act itself, and, second, within the broader
historical, social, and political (as well as intertextual) context
implied by the act and in which both theory and practice take
root" (75). While one might argue that the two "contexts" are,
at least in practice, inseparable, the logic of her new position
remains persuasive. Investigating the "enunciative act itself,"
the *processes* of writing and reading, constitutes an essential
aspect of reader-response to postmodernist literature.
However, throughout a good portion of *A Poetics*, Hutcheon
contradicts her theoretical premise and deals with "the
enunciative act" not as a process, but as a product in which
énonciation is thematized and both producer and receiver of the
text are considered "essential constitutive factors of the text"
(81). Having invoked the social dimension of empirical
readers and writers, Hutcheon turns around and treats reading
and writing as acts encoded within the text. Similarly, in a
single paragraph, Hutcheon moves from a call for non-
structuralist definition of "poetics" to a valorization of Tzvetan
Todorov's claim that "Literature is inconceivable outside a
typology of discourses" (qtd. in *A Poetics* 14).

The limitations and contradictions of Hutcheon's extended thesis are inherent in her concern to establish a "poetics" of postmodernism.[1] She is justified in arguing that "the art forms of our century have been extremely and self-consciously didactic" (*A Theory* 3), but she is misguided in presenting her case as though poetics alone can account adequately for the implications of postmodernism's didactic purpose. Traditionally, the art best suited to the study of audience and persuasion has been rhetoric. Indeed, as a brief historical review of rhetoric's relation to poetic illustrates, the dynamics of postmodernist reading are primarily rhetorical and only incidentally poetic—especially in the age of the "New Rhetoric."

III

Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the inspiration for later classical works by Cicero, Quintilian, Horace and St. Augustine, begins with the powerful assertion that "Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic" (1). Similarly, Aristotle offers the *Rhetoric* as a companion piece to his *Poetics*: readers of the *Poetics* are referred to the *Rhetoric* for discussion of *dianoia*, the art of framing speeches; "the *Rhetoric* refers us to the *Poetics* for a discussion of matters that are more fully dealt with" (Cooper, *Rhetoric* xviii), including discussion of grammar, diction, and style. The alliance of the two works, *Poetics* (with its focus on formal characteristics) and the *Rhetoric* (with its focus on the effect of form on audience), provides a comprehensive and influential program of study: "for many centuries to come the discussion of poetic diction was dominated by the criteria of good and bad style which Aristotle had established in the *Rhetoric*; as for . . . character sketches, we find them as early as Horace bodily transferred from *Rhetoric* to *Poetics*" (Solmsen "Introduction" xiii). For Aristotle, rhetoric was above all a study of audience based upon "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (1). If the *Poetics* presented a theory of structures, the *Rhetoric* provided the necessary supplement, a theory of processes (of "means").[2]

Given Hutcheon's persistent attempt to define a poetics in terms of formal features, we should note that, for Aristotle, "the distinction between the diction of public address and the diction of drama or epic, between prose style and poetic style, was not . . . fundamental" (Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric* 1).

More important to ancient philosophy was the question of human purpose and convention: "Rhetoric and poetic connoted two fields of composition, two habits of conceiving and ordering, two typical movements" (Baldwin 3). Genre was not (and is not) a property of texts but of social conventions. When we move forward, however, into the medieval and renaissance periods, rhetorical definitions of discourse become harder to find.

As C.S. Baldwin observes, the status of rhetoric was affected by changes in relations among the *trivium* of liberal arts (rhetoric, grammar, and logic).[3] The history of rhetoric may be thought of as a story of misapplication and extensions: in the middle ages, poetic constitutes a misapplication of rhetoric to style, while *ars dictaminis* (the art of letter writing) and *artes praedicandi* (the arts of preaching) constitute pragmatic extensions of rhetorical theory.[4] After the twelfth century, rhetoric's theoretical relevance deteriorated even further. It ceased to be taught as a liberal art, and it retained practical relevance only in the form of epideictic oratory. Classically, of course, rhetoric consisted of five related departments: invention, disposition, style, memory, and poetics delivery. By the sixteenth century, and with the publication of Peter Ramus' influential *Rhetorica*, rhetoric was divorced from dialectic and the province of rhetoric was accordingly reduced to *elocution* and *pronunciation*, style and delivery. Similarly rhetoric and poetics parted company. As Rosemond Tuve notes, "in so far as they were arts of thought, poetry [the focus of poetics] and rhetoric had not been divided prior to Ramus" (*Elizabethan* 339); after the sixteenth century, the increasing propensity to Balkanize the three liberal arts laid the groundwork for our modern notion of rhetoric and poetics as discrete branches of inquiry. Rhetorical definitions of discourse were soon relegated to handbooks on style as, more and more, words became objectified "ornaments" to be arranged and admired. Language became regarded less as a vehicle of human communication and more as an object of aesthetic contemplation.[5]

Twentieth century notions of rhetoric have altered significantly since the time of Aristotle's first formulation. Though the importance of persuasion remains central, the field of rhetoric has recently given emphasis to a world view holding that a text cannot be read or understood in isolation from a context of audience response. The "New Rhetoric"

rejects notions of textual autonomy, considering it the hypothetical construct of a naive poetics that threatens to separate discourse (especially literary discourse) from the world of human interaction, motives, and fallibility. I.A. Richards argues that meaning "floats upon a primitive raft of consents" (*Speculative* 4) and declares in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* that "Rhetoric . . . should be a study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (3); Donald Bryant argues that "Rhetoric is primarily concerned with the relations of ideas to the thoughts, feeling, motives, and behaviour of men" ("Function" 412); and, as Kenneth Burke summarizes in a 1951 essay,

> If I had to sum up in one word the difference between the "old" rhetoric and a "new" (a rhetoric re-invigorated by fresh insights which the "New Science" contributed to the subject), I would reduce it to this: The key term for the old rhetoric was persuasion and its stress upon deliberate design. The key term for the new rhetoric would be "*identification*" which can include a partially "unconscious" factor in appeal (203).

Rhetorical discourse thus defined becomes more than inducement to action; rhetoric becomes the study of human relations, of the means of identification and consubstantiation. As Burke explains in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, "You persuade a man only insofar as you talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his" (55). The New Rhetoric, then, accentuates the dynamics of human relations as men and women reach out, attempting to communicate, interpret, understand, and identify in an ever-shifting social, ideological, and linguistic environment. For ours is an age of uncertainty and indeterminacy. As Christine Brooke-Rose puts it in *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*,

> After Einstein's equivalence of matter and energy, after de Broglie's dual nature of particle and light wave, after Planck's demonstration that the energy is emitted in discontinuous quanta, and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle which replaced the determinism of classic physics with a state of probability and randomness, and showed that observable phenomena are affected by the instrument observing them, a certain tolerance of ambiguity was introduced into science, and man is now faced with a philosophy of indeterminacy and a multivalent logic (7).

While uncertainty has no place in, say, the structuralist's view of reality, the rhetorician would treat uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts as an understandable response to a world where uncertainty must be acknowledged and accommodated. In the words of Donald Bryant, rhetoric "exists . . . because a world of certainty is not the world of human affairs" (407); and as James Berlin continues,

> For the New Rhetoric, knowledge is not simply a static entity available for retrieval. Truth is dynamic and dialectical, the result of a process involving the interaction of opposing elements. It is a relation that is created, not pre-existent and waiting to be discovered. ("Contemporary Composition" 774).

For many readers, I suspect, there is little here in the "New Rhetoric" that appears particularly startling or "new."[6] Rhetorical notions of reality as a dialectical construct, although not universally accepted, have become so ubiquitous (especially in the writings of poststructuralist thinkers) that their relationship to rhetoric itself has become almost invisible. But while such seemingly diverse writers as Arthur Whitehead, Susanne Langer, Michael Polanyi, Michel Foucault, Thomas Kuhn, and Hayden White may seem to share little more than a plurality of textual strategies,[7] the principles of the New Rhetoric nonetheless suggest a controlling intellectual field:

> When taken together, writer, reality, audience, and language identify an epistemic field—the basic conditions that determine what knowledge will be knowable, what not knowable, and how the knowable will be communicated . . . . In Science and the Modern World . . . A.N. Whitehead sees this field as a product of the "fundamental assumptions which adherents of all variant systems with the epoch unconsciously presuppose" . . . Suzanne Langer, in Philosophy in a New Key, . . . calls it the "tacit, fundamental way of seeing things" . . . . Michael Polanyi uses the terms "tacit knowledge" in Personal Knowledge . . . . Michel Foucault, in The Order of Things, . . . speaks of the "episteme," and Thomas Kuhn, in Structure of Scientific Revolutions, . . . discusses at length the "paradigm" that underlies a scientific discipline. The historian Hayden White, in Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe, . . . has translated the elements of the composing process into terms appropriate to the writing of history, seeing the historical field as being made up of the

> historian, the historical record, the historical accounts, and an
> audience (Berlin, "Contemporary Composition" 767).

Similarly, reader-oriented critics, from Umberto Eco to Stanley Fish, reveal a sensitivity to the function of texts within "an epistemic field," though it must be noted that, like Hutcheon, many contemporary theorists follow the example of the so-called New Critics before them and continue to privilege one point of the rhetorical triangle at the expense of the triangle as a whole. Just as the New Critical banishment of the author and the reader effectively restricted the classical rhetorical focus on *ethos* (the author), *logos* (the word), and *pathos* (the audience) to *logos* alone, so recent theory seems intent upon viewing literature as a static, aesthetic product, rather than as a dynamic, interactive process of communication. Whenever a text is stripped of its pragmatic function as language in use, it becomes abstracted from human motives and relations, and understood only in terms of its own internal structure (its "poetics"). Deconstructive and reader-oriented approaches, which generally continue a text-centred focus, do not fully engage the rhetorical imperative implicit in their developing poetics. Or as Jane Tompkins explains it,

> What is most striking about reader-response criticism and its
> close relative, deconstructive criticism, is their failure to break
> out of the mold into which critical writing was cast by the
> formalist identification of criticism with explication.
> Interpretation reigns supreme both in teaching and in
> publication just as it did when New Criticism was in its heyday
> in the 1940s and 1950s. In the long perspective of critical
> history, virtually nothing has changed as a result of what
> seems, from close up, the cataclysmic shift in the locus of
> meaning from the text to the reader. Professors and students
> alike practice criticism as usual; only the vocabulary with
> which they perform their analyses has altered ("The Reader"
> 224-25).

But just as New Critical inquiry could not in practice avoid (however parenthetically) discussion of the reader, so the potential for reconciliation between rhetoric and poetics has always been imminent. As Donald Bryant notes, "Though sporadically the effect of critics and theorists has been to keep *rhetoric* and *poetic* apart, the two rationales have had an irresistible tendency to come together, and their similarities

may well be more important than their differences" (424). The rising interest in reader aesthetics, a phenomenon Elizabeth Freund has called "the return of the reader" (13), changes the dynamics of literary criticism and makes the division between poetics and rhetoric all the more difficult to maintain. As long as the focus remains on the structure of the text, rather than on the dynamics of its production and reception, literary analysis can focus on poetics alone. But the "more we speculate about the effect of a . . . literary work on an audience the more we become involved in metaphysical questions in which rhetoric must be involved" (Bryant 423). In many ways the reading of postmodernist texts provides the ideal occasion for the re-involvement of rhetoric.

IV

If Linda Hutcheon is right in her assertion that postmodernist narratives and theory teach us the rhetorical commonplace "that discourse is language as *énonciation*, involving, that is, the contextualized production and reception of meaning" (*Narcissistic* xv), then the reading of such narratives inevitably provokes questions of rhetorical response. Contemporary authors, especially Canadian writers such as Robert Kroetsch, seem to demand such a response as a way of overthrowing the reading conventions of realism. "I'm interested in sharing with the reader the fact that I'm making a fiction," says Kroetsch:

> One of the assumptions of old-style realism is that the novel isn't a fiction. Verisimilitude, the textbooks demand. And I'm no longer interested in that. I want the reader to be engaged with me in fiction making. I work a reader pretty hard . . . in that I want him to enter the process with me. Some writers fill in all the spaces, or they use all the conventions. They give all the details. I like the sense of process being fluid and open(Hancock 42).

Kroetsch's rhetorical position asks a great deal of his readers: he asks us to divest ourselves of old reading habits and to enter the process of fiction making. The "new" reading conventions promise a collaborative, dialogic experience; and, perhaps more importantly, they promise to shift critical attention from form to process—from the domain of poetics to the domain of rhetoric. Once this shift is accepted as a context for reading, conventional notions of the reader's role, of

character, and of the author's function as an intentional force also change. Instead of regarding narratives as autonomous mimetic entities, we are asked to abandon our conventional "realist" presuppositions about fiction and recognize the extent to which author, text, and reader collaborate in the production of literary meaning. Few would argue that form does not contribute toward our understanding of either character or the reader's possible relationships with the text and the author; what Kroetsch and others seem to be saying is that form's function must always remain subordinate to the rhetorical context of its reading. Form becomes "open" or "closed" according to the conventions of its production and reception, and it can only be said to shape those conventions after the fact.

Hutcheon's poetics, on the other hand, raises the question of process only to ignore it, ruling exploration of the reader's mind *ultra vires*. But in rhetorical terms, understanding the ascendency of process over product, a proposition so fundamental to current psycholinguistic theories of reading both literary and non-literary discourse, remains crucial to understanding the stance of many contemporary Canadian writers.

What I am proposing here is not a rhetoric of postmodernism, for, as Hutcheon's treatment of postmodernist poetics has already outlined, the conventions of postmodernism range far beyond the reading of texts, into the realm of visual arts, film, architecture, history and philosophy. What we need first is a "rhetoric of reading" to complement the rapid developments in text-oriented poetics that, despite a renewed interest in audience and process, continue to dominate contemporary critical discourse. A premature focus on product (on literary form) tends to eschew consideration of *énonciation* as a process—it ignores those writers whose work foregrounds the processes of reading and writing, writers who reach out, seeking to engage us in a dialogue about the interrelated nature of authors, texts, and readers. bpNichol calls this new rhetorical dimension of reading part of a "new humanism" that, as Stephen Scobie notes, "is simultaneously a celebration of the 'human community' in its most personal form, and a linguistic manifesto, in which linguistic inability is seen as the condition of our lives" (*bpNichol* 28).[8] Nichol's "Statement," first published in 1966, reads,

> now that we have reached the point where people have finally
> come to see that language means communication and that
> communication does not just mean language, we have come up
> against the problem, the actual fact, of diversification, of
> finding as many exits as possible from the self
> (language/communication exits) in order to form as many
> entrances as possible for the other . . . . there is a new
> humanism afoot that will one day touch the world to its core.
> traditional poetry is only one of the means by which to reach
> out and touch the other. the other is emerging as the necessary
> prerequisite for dialogues with the self that clarify the soul &
> heart and deepen the ability to love. I place myself there, with
> them, whoever they are, wherever they are, who seek to reach
> themselves and the other thru the poem by as many exits and
> entrances as are possible (qtd. in Scobie *bpNichol* 16-17).

Textual analysis and interpretation constitute an important
aspect of that dialogue. But they are not the whole story.[9]

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NOTES

1 In terms not specifically related to the study of postmodernism,
Jonathan Culler's "Prolegomena to a Theory of Reading" offers a
variation of Hutcheon's notion of poetics. After criticizing Northrop
Frye's attempts to establish a poetics of criticism as methodologically
inexplicit, Culler argues "that if the study of literature is a discipline, it
must become a poetics: a study of the conditions of meaning and thus a
study of reading" (49). Even here, however, the term "poetics" establishes
a problematic frame of reference: reading, for Culler, becomes a matter of
"literary competence"—a deep structure of linguistic and generic
predispositions inferable from the analysis of reading performances. Such
an approach, though true to the objectives of a "poetics," tends to leave
out a great deal. The author, the psycholinguistic processes of reading—
indeed, the whole notion of reading as an interactive *process*—become, for
Culler, peripheral objects of attention. Despite the pleasant fiction
suggested by the term "poetics," "conditions of meaning" are not stable
entities to be taxonomized; the conditions of meaning are best treated as
rhetorical situations, involving interaction among writers, readers, and
texts. Until we define in rhetorical terms the process of reading, the
notion of either a poetics of postmodernism or a poetics of literary
competence remains premature.

2 This "two-pronged" approach to literary theory, which William Ray describes as "Central to Eco's work" (124), is often acknowledged but seldom followed.

3 See Charles Sears Baldwin's *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic*, especially pp. 151-53.

4 Baldwin covers this topic in considerable detail in his *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic*; see pp. 191-95.

5 Robert Scholes also argues that rhetoric is crucial to our understanding of reading, and his argument also explores the implications of positing rhetoric against poetics (*Protocols of Reading* 105-08).

6 Let me note here that I am not assuming that classical rhetoric and the New Rhetoric delimit the current field of rhetorical studies. When we talk about contemporary rhetoric, we are really talking about multiple rhetorics, of which the New Rhetoric is but one. The New Rhetoric has been referred to variously as "social-epistemic," "transactive," and (significantly) "postmodern rhetoric" (Brummett). For a comprehensive discussion of contemporary rhetorics, see James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality*; and, for a useful survey and assessment of the literature on epistemic rhetoric, see Jeffery L. Bineham's "The Cartesian Anxiety in Epistemic Rhetoric: An Assessment of the Literature."

7 In his Preface to *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, Josué V. Harari argues against finding in post-structuralist critics "a coherent critical unity" (12); instead, he says, we should recognize "a plurality of strategies at work" (12).

8 Scobie is speaking here about both Nichol's "Two Words: a Wedding" and the 1966 "Statement," which he says balance and complement one another.

9 A shorter version of this paper was presented at A.C.U.T.E., The Learneds, Victoria, B.C., May 21, 1990.

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Stand This World:
A Legend to Map *Allophanes*

Susan MacFarlane

Exegesis is not an enterprise I admire; it is not what you are looking at, despite its pretension to reveal. Come to think of it, revelation is not particularly appealing either, accompanied by closure in the guise of authority and apocalypse. Theoretically, standing always shy of revelation and final definition is a much more creative position, open and potentially dynamic. In George Bowering's first (unpublished) novel, "Delsing," Bowering's earliest artist figure, George Delsing, finds indeterminacy more valuable than closure. "Probably, if something had come to me that I knew what it meant, it wouldn't have been worth putting down" (309), he claims. Seeking not to understand but to take provisional measurement of the world, of his place in the world (in his own terms as it were), the artist can continue refashioning his context, the intertext that is his (written) world. Bowering charts this intertextual indeterminacy throughout his work, but particularly in *Allophanes*.

Allophanes is a poem darkly obscured even to its self-contained and manifestly ideal reader: "He's ninety years old & he sits reading in the pitch black / night" ("XVII").[1] Reading night in the poem, he finds black print(ed) in the spaces of this text, "this prepronominal funferal, engraved and retouched and edgewiped ... as were it sentenced to be nuzzled over a full trillion times for ever and a night till his noddle sink or swim by that ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia"—here the reader of/in *Finnegans Wake* (120). Bowering's reader finds himself similarly devoid of illumination yet can see in the pitch the black night, window on the void he reflects upon.

        Not seeking to under
            stand this world
                                    (I am making)
        but to put his hands
            into it, to continue
                shaping what he is.
                                ("XXII").

Shaping what he is, the reader peers at this black night window-turned-mirror telling his own story: as he looks, "The writing finger moves on / & the sentence continues" ("II"), continues placing the reader and erasing prior stances, glances, establishing a provisional identity. While inconclusive, "If you dont understand the story you'd better tell it" ("XI")—it's vital. Such an opaque story draws attention to itself, to its expression, as to a stained glass window instead of a transparent window. Stories that are transparent pretend not to bring artifice to bear upon their subject, telling (the) objectivity of history, totalizing fictions that stand apart from both subject and reader. According to Jeanette Lynes, this separation enables readers to vandalise the text, pillaging it for plot; but good readers do not seek to totalize a text, and some texts disallow it. *Allophanes* is such a text. When the reader understands that, he can no longer seek to understand but to stand in, not history but his story, making it as the writing finger moves on.

> history is a thing. A dead language
> in which all words
> describe, & refer,
>
> you may understand history because you made it.
>
> You will never understand nature
> because you are nature,
> ("XXIII")

And, as nature, what the reader is is open, alive; he cannot be enclosed by an expression totalling his value. He's poet's work and, as Michel Foucault says in "Language to Infinity" (60), "a work whose only meaning resides in its being a self-enclosed expression of its glory is no longer possible." The work is not made, but its making is imperative—"Choose becoming / over being" ("XV")—accompanied by a self-directed awareness of paradox. We are led to choose the open, processual form of human life in which now "we are engaged. / Language rings us" ("XXVI") here, as readers writing, and we recognize the inescapable rigidities of language as a made system even as it articulates processual forms.

Networks of significance woven in threads of recurring images, symbols or speakers enable a reader to abstract from

Allophanes a formal model. Robert Kroetsch's model of a maze of stories and voices, where "voices threaten to override the voice" (65) is sound, here, where instances of parole destabilize any authorial Voice. The basic play of this game and, as Foucault claims, of all literature, is associative. In violating a work's integrity by severing lines and rejoining them to pieces from other texts a "void has been hollowed out in which a multiplicity of speaking subjects are joined and severed, combined and excluded" (42).[2] Both prolific and devouring, "Man is nature, devouring, / man is culture, fueling language" ("XV"). Which is why language, the medium of the poet, must be both the stock, self-contained *langue* and the dynamic, indeterminate *parole*. "Language, in this case English or French, is not spoken. It speaks" (*Craft Slices* 140). And the present participle recalls but alters the (finished) past. "The language / is not spoken, / it speaks" ("XXIII"). That is, "language is not spoken. It speaks" (*CCPA* 2). Where Bowering quotes himself, showing the "thingness" of the quote—its integrity as a unit—its status as a token is of the order of *langue* not *parole*, yet he is saying the language is not so given to precedent but to currency.

And this leads to a reformed concept of understanding—not as totalizing and closed, but as an appreciation of indeterminacy, of one's situation as open to revision. Understanding is "distinct from, though not opposed to, Reason," Bowering wrote in his notes for *Allophanes*. Reason is killed by contradiction; understanding is capable of vacillating in contraries without any irritable reaching after facts and certainties. An understanding of *Allophanes* depends upon perceiving the poem as a graph of contradiction—against the Word—denying the finitude of the Word while desiring it. This is a paradox arrived at by Kroetsch in contemplating *Allophanes*, among other Canadian long poems, in "For Play and Entrance":

> The problem for the writer of the contemporary long poem is to honour our disbelief in belief—that is, to recognize and explore our distrust of system, of grid, of monisms, of cosmologies, perhaps, certainly of inherited story—and at the same time write a long work that has some kind of (under erasure) unity.
> And yet the long poem, by its very length, allows the exploration of the failure of system and grid. The poem of that failure is a long poem. (118)

The poem of that failure leads the reader to realize the impossibility of what the poem says; successfully communicating its failure the poem asserts "*Credo quia absurdus sum*" ("XIII"), and is, itself, absurd. "The / purposefull suspension of disbelief / has about the chance of a snowball in hell" (Spicer 226). Believe it: "The snowball appears in Hell / every morning at seven" ("I"). That impossible snowball melts and renews itself throughout the poem, perpetually dying and being—well, being reborn.

The desire to comprehend despite one's disbelief in comprehension itself is a fascination with and avoidance of closure—especially the ultimate closure, death. In Bowering's notes for *Allophanes* he wrote that "understanding partakes of *Death* (disappearance of Discourse)." The continuity of discourse, as of writing, is *parole* discovering and moving towards the closure signed by comprehension where the signified will be apprehended and the signifier erased. Death figures (en)closure in *langue*. As old as the word, Foucault tells us (quoting Blanchot), is the desperate writing so as not to die and "it is quite likely that the approach of death—its sovereign gesture, its prominence within human memory— hollows out in the present and in existence the void toward which and from which we speak" (53). "Oh dread! what enters / to fill that space?" ("XXIV"). That void is the condition in which our speech is manifest; it is that absence whose trace stains all discourse. Hence, this phenomenology of *parole* posits it as *langue* marked by death. Where you "Open me not to find a beating heart / but the irregular book of my people" ("V"), this *parole* comes into being articulating its death and the perpetuation of *langue*. Language (as commonly used to denote both *langue* and *parole*) is understood, therefore, as the negation of he to whom it gives expression. Articulating his own self-negation, Bowering characterized "language as not self, but the first expression of that which is not self" in his notes for *Allophanes*. Erasing identity in language is a consequence both of the posture whereby *parole* speaks the death of its speaker and of the formalistic constraints imposed upon individuality by its expression in a shared medium. Clearly, *Allophanes* displays both means of erasure. Equally clearly, an understanding of this poem must be multi-faceted, palinodic rather than positivistic, and heterodox. There's no presiding rational order (as of a plot) external to the words themselves; the poem coheres by its

inter- and intratextual dynamic. In the multitude of quotations a riot of *parole*—I say "riot" to suggest the incongruous juxtaposition of verbatim James Joyce and devilish puns on pristine cultural figures ("& where has Maud gone?" ["VII"])—interrupts itself.

> Dr Babel contends
> about the word's form, striking
> its prepared strings
>   endlessly, a pleasure
>   moving rings outward thru
>   the universe. All
>   sentences are to be served.
>   ("I").

This constant diffusion is, of course, itself a form. Sharon Spencer catalogues works such as *Allophanes* as "open-structured," and "the creators of open-structured works aspire toward the approximation of diffusion; of flux; of constantly forming, dissolving, and re-forming among the elements of the work" (52). Flux as a form is inherently paradoxical. It would seem, simply because it has "unity"—however fragmented its structure—to graph closure and end, affirming death. In "A Fake Novel" Jack Spicer—a major voice in *Allophanes*—wrestles with formal resolution, agonizing that: "The dead are not alive. That is what this unattractive prose wants to stamp out. Once you see an end to it, you believe that the dead are alive" (152). Open structures (frictive, rough surfaces—unattractive as they are) do not ad(mir)ror the traditional beauty, yet invite polishing, finishing (not finished, but the present participle in process of understanding (inviting active participation by the viewer rather than the passive admiration as of one parenthesis for another ("The closed parenthesis reads: the dead bury the dead, / and it is not very interesting" (Olson, *Selected Writings* 161)), which is self-interested) incompletion) "the long ellipsis that is Bowering's poem" (Kroetsch 126) of ghostly echoes. Because of the open structure the reader is an integral element of the poem's order; its form is closed only should the reader be resolute.

Drawn out, the poem draws (with)in itself articulations which antedate and will postdate itself. Jorge Luis Borges writes "that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."[3]   Merely by quoting (or misquoting), Bowering

draws the source into his own work and makes it present, (here and now) whether the lines lead from bpNichol or Hermes Trismegistus. But what Borges is proposing is a more radical interdependence where Bowering creates his precursors by re-composing their work. This is possible in the specific case of authors as textual entities, as Foucault pointed out; the name of an author is unlike that of a fleshly being because what is an author but the sum of their works? I may say I read Spicer and I do not refer to blemishes or body language but to texts. Bowering, then, is bringing Spicer into the present poem, re-formulating his corpus and animating him as an author. "*Allophanes* then, emerges beneath two signatories, two proprietors: the author (George Bowering), whose proper name will authenticate the book, and a dictator, Jack Spicer, a disembodied voice, whose proper name re-formulates the deceased" (McCaffery 131). Nominal re-formulation by the orphic invocation of a name ("*Et verbum cano factum est*" ["X"]) furnishes a text with a proprietor marking spatial location because "a name is the same name that has a property. A property right" (Spicer 156). The name adds space, McCaffery agrees, adding that "to these names we will add the snowball in hell, as a blank, yet eponymous space, placed in *Allophanes* prior to all metaphoric operation and akin to the arche-sentence, providing the *condition*, not the sense of, *Allophanes* as a writing" (131-2). A poem built on condition and not sense is not given to rational understanding but relatedness, or an Einsteinian rather than Newtonian reason. From the point where Spicer's voice dictates the opening sentence, Bowering's poem is indeed conditioned by, and opened by, this arche-sentence. It is the opening of the field to chance, peripheral association and, above all, to vacillation between self-effacement and presentation. Just how seriously Bowering takes this sense of the "condition" of writing is clear when he says, "I think of myself as the audience, as listening to the voices as coming to me from wherever they're being dictated from, but not myself as the maker of the sounds that the audience is going to hear" (Eggertson). Hear, then, Kroetsch on "Bowering: the poem become notation," wherein "We try to read, not what is in the book (that failing), but the book itself. The poet, then, not as maker, but as bookmaker" (129), is here present(ed) to the reader.

Bowering's concern for the book certainly did extend to the making of the book—this book in particular. Proofs were

corrected and returned, but the book was printed without regard for the specifications Bowering had made for revising the spacing. So, Bowering appealed to the publisher of *Allophanes* (to Coach House, 3 May 1976) to "count the spaces carefully. They mean more to this poem than to any I've done (or will do)—in fact they're in many ways the content." This privileging of the container over its content is characteristic of architectonic writing as described by Spencer: "In architectonic books, words bear the same relationship to the whole as do bricks, stones, steel rods, and concrete blocks to a building. This relationship is more accurately structural than expressive. The meaning of the book, then, is no longer *in* the words, but arises ... from the tensions among the elements of the composition in their various juxtaposed arrangements" (169). But those arrangements, with their gaps—interstices, synapses—are compositions of a

> space in which the directions are by no means equivalent, a space encumbered by objects that distort all our trajectories, and where movement in a straight line from one point to another is generally impossible, a space with open or closed regions, the interior of objects [the primary snowball—O] for example, and above all, a space involving a whole organization of links between its different points—means of transport, references—so that the proximities we experience are not at all reducible to those of cartography. (Butor 22)

Hence Kroetsch's observation that voices threaten to override the voice—the points defy the cartography.

The map is not the territory, but we have a map before us, any point of which may lead intertextually to Joyce, Spicer, Yeats, Merleau-Ponty, Pope, as well as intratextually to other grid coordinates of the map; each pathway is crossed by others, some relatively distinct and others distorted by misquotation or playing obscurity. Within this matrix there are, as Butor supposed there would be, "closed regions" embodied in "the marginal sentence, phrase, or word," which "is not directly attached to something that precedes or follows it in the disclosure of the line, groove, or tape, but is rather the source of a certain illumination increasingly noticeable the closer one gets; it is like an ink spot which soaks in, which spreads. 'See the word made white & melting' ("X"), and which will be counteracted, contained, by the spreading of the next spot" (51). "It is the pattern of snowballs / thrown against

a maroon wall" ("XII"), *Allophanes* says of itself. Hence, in the space of this text a metaphysical space/time framework, understood in Newtonian and Euclidian rather than Einsteinian terms, is disturbed. In *Allophanes* "Space, as we experience it, is not at all the Euclidean space whose parts are mutually exclusive. Every site is the focal point of a horizon of other sites; the point of origin of a series of possible routes passing through other more or less determined regions" (Butor 37). "No place on Earth / is the centre of the world, / / it is the centre of the world" ("XVII"). Every site, then, radiates—is at once the "center and circumference" (Olson *Special View* 45), a focal point whose "edges," according to Butor, are "the words which immediately precede and follow it" (52). These "edges" are clearly relative and depend for their status on the (provisional) focal point, a point which is some other word's "edge." But this interdependence is neither trivial nor anomalous. "Any word or group of words embodies its own comment both upon itself and upon the adjacent words or phrases, even if they are simply listed next to each other," according to Spencer (75), who goes on to develop this logic with respect to quotation. "Any quotation necessarily incorporates a perspective on the subject of the book in which it is cited" (143), she says, and perspective and structure are, therefore, inseparable.

There are three basic structures which map the quotations in *Allophanes*: first, the palimpsest where a (prior) text is evident. Thus are the best mined, lines recognizably misquoted which "ne'erdowell / exprest" ("XXIV"). Second, at times one is unsure where the voice is coming from and may even wonder was that a real poem or did Bowering just make that up. This second structure I would graph as a discontinuous function, a line with a hole in it. The apparition of these faces is ghostly, indeed. Then, the latter problem leads to a further—feared quotation. As there are passages the reader is pretty sure lead (from) elsewhere, the intermittencies of the art are such that the entire text may be fraught with such passageways. With no verification of such a structure possible it is the graph of mere anarchy loosed upon the word—every word becomes a trace, an alibi, becomes suspected of being other than what it is presented as. Then what lies before you, this writing, is itself the product of "writing not in order to get closer to what is to be said, but in order to get away from it. Writing with the greatest application, I invariably end up wide

of the mark" (Michaux 31). Although wide of the mark it points to, with each attempt to grasp and understand that mark, writing notates the limitations of its reach—formal and traditional constraints come to the fore and the word can do no more than re-produce its longing and itself, its situation in relation to the world. When it is thus "Present only in its repetition the word becomes sensed as a *betweeness* [sic]" (McCaffery 141)—a betweenness whose meaning (denotation, reference) is absent but whose structure (grammatical conformity) is reproducible. Throughout *Allophanes* images, for a start, regenerate themselves as examples of such betweenness ("•," " "). So do words ("cano," "lives & lives & lives"), phonemes ("neo classical / Neal Cassady," "knee / oh / class / equal") and graphemes ("O," "I"). Morphemes become graphemes ("He," "He'll say that's what they all / say," "He'll freeze to death, he obviously needs help," "Hell," "Hermes," "Here I am," "Hera's clitoris," "Hear a / dead face," "Heaven," "headline in Hell," "Here is the theology"), multiplying the discrete, closed regions of the text. A word like "He'll" is seen to present a spatial juxtaposition of the morphemes "He" and "Hell"; in fact, all words appear to be montages of such graphemic units and invite decomposing through identification of the closed regions inscribed: "help" is a morpheme decomposed by its proximity to "Hell" and "He." Evidently, then, quotation is only one aspect of *Allophanes* which signalizes both the spatialization of the text and the rupture of that space. There are elements both larger and smaller than the quoted phrase which share this property.

In *Allophanes*, intertextuality is composed by re-inscribing prior alphabets, prior script—not only quotations. The poem draws its own history as well as drawing upon its history in present re-formulation. "A dead language / in which all words / describe, & refer," is not that of *Allophanes*. Even the artifacts of "dead" languages, like the aleph or the iconic Astarte, are vivified as contextualized anew. Bowering's notes for *Allophanes* say that a "poem presents a field, does not represent it": although the text bears witness to its antecedents, their inscription is made new. "You are not rereading," Bowering tells us in *Errata* (3), "pay attention— see? You are just reading." And, however aged the material, it is regenerated when situated in a different context. The artifacts of dead languages give the texture of montage to their present context and *Allophanes* is montage which is constantly

changing the reader's perspective. So the dynamism of their context alone ensures the revitalization of Astarte, the aleph, and the roman numerals. Far from dead letters in *Allophanes*, they nevertheless re-present "dead" languages and a necessarily abortive signification therein—abortive because these signals have become iconic—signs both of death and of an absurd drive to communicate. "A dead letter is there because / it has no longer real addresses," Spicer wrote (162). A dead letter is not going anywhere.

> This is not going,
> anywhere, not going,
> anywhere, not,
> going, I dont seem to be,
> going. Anywhere.
> ("XXI").

Not going anywhere—but doing so in the present participle—by its repeated inscription this phrase becomes a "closed region" of the text—isolated as an icon and intoned repeatedly it re-produces the structure of ritual. With such figures the text presents, according to McCaffery, a "meticulous re-staging of images which creates the effect of a weaving (the etymological source of the word 'text') that promotes an undecidability between an abstract, formalist pattern and a shifting representational meaning," an undecidability that is the condition of "the literary order, where the focus is not on explicating the productional operation of the developing text, but on the spatio-temporal play of the surface" (139-40). This is not progress but process: going—anywhere perhaps, or not—intransitively.

Spatio-temporal play is privileged over development in *Allophanes*—temporal progression is disrupted. Chronology is shown not in terms of development but difference; progress is replaced by an emphasis on accretion shown spatially. In the numbering of chapters, for instance, we move from "X" to "XI," "XII" and "XIII." The introduction of a new figure ("XIV") distinguishes one sub-group of chapters from another, much as the marginal justification of alignment among passages distinguishes. Two stanzas indented equally "speak" to each other as like to like—liking to find common ground. In this spatial feature the passage of time is calibrated, as it "is by shifting our gaze within a clearly imaginable space that we can actually follow the march of time, study its anomalies" (Butor

22). This is the principle illustrated by Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase"—a progression implied in a sequence presented spatially, it is also one moment identified in terms which compare it to another—the interdependence and simultaneity of spatial presentation. The numbering of chapters in *Allophanes* is made a spatial presentation of temporal movement by the selection of roman numerals instead of arabic ones; hence the phenomenon of accretion. But one cannot (at least I can't) miss the double duty roman numerals do as letters—both letters and numerals simultaneously.

Any text is a two-dimensional matrix insofar as the "book, as we know it today, is [...] the arrangement of the thread of speech in three-dimensional space according to a double module: length of line and depth of page, an arrangement which has the advantage of allowing the reader a great freedom of movement in relation to the 'unrolling' of the text, a great mobility which most nearly approximates a simultaneous presentation of all parts of a work" (Butor 42). Bowering sees his work as facilitating such mobility on the part of the reader through its spatial dimension. In a letter to Victoria Walker (19 Jan. 1976), he writes, "I just tool along, making the universe's work, and people see something there and something else there. All my poems are holographs you can walk around." In this initia(liza)tion of the reader into the text, according to Butor, the "text is immediately seen as compact or ventilated, amorphous, regular or irregular" (52) in its phanopœic dimension, and presents the "simultaneous exposure to our eyes of what our ears can grasp only sequentially" (40). This primary experience of a text as the trace of presence most nearly precludes interpretation and intellectualization of that text, insofar as "My consciousness cannot grasp what I see, my eye distinguishes but my mind sees all as a whole, is slow in individualizing one after the other in elements of the field of vision, in recognizing the objects. It is an effort to have to apprehend them rapidly and successively with their attributes, their function, their signification. To identify them" (Michaux 56). All appearances inhere simultaneously and are present(s) to the reader, varying with the capacity for reception in the altering eye. But the reader sees a numeral one time and a letter another—the same figure interpreted as being another symbol—which shows the active creation by the reader of the text and disrupts any authoritarian metaphysics of presence.

Blind readers trying to understand the snowball as a transcendent symbol independent of its multiple contexts are in a circle of hell, a hell filled with those who have "Lost their *parole vide*, / unable to serve their sentences in the dark" ("V"). Where one has no eyes is not *polis*, but hell.

Perspective structures the world, and language is a perspective on that world. "Language: the word as EYE": put simply by Kroetsch (16). In *Allophanes* we face a subject, the inscribed "I," composing with another I's words and making an other's language—the "irregular book of my people"—another eye. "Does not the eye altering alter all?" ("VIII"). It would appear to, but in abdicating control, refusing to subject, to dictate, the "I" ventures and risks any totalizing "vision" of the art work itself and, hence, its comprehension. The multiple, shifting perspectives compose a new unity (under erasure) in a work perpetually risking self-effacement. And "I" must "fail at suicide, / barely" ("X") for there to be any art work at all, any perspective at all.

> There is no perspective
> when the eye is transparent.
> When the author dies
> I disappear.
> ("III").

The reader's eye/I too affords a perspective structuring the text relative to itself. Thus the presence of an I actualizes the text, but no presence is ever definitive, nor is any reading (particular structuring). Rather, each exists as a palimpsest upon others, re-sorting to a mutable presentation of the text as holograph.

In privileging space over all else in this poem, Bowering emphasizes that it is not what the words say but their presence that signifies. That presence is not at all disembodied—quotations bring their own spatial identity into the poem. Hence, *Allophanes* is the site where books are made in a palimpsest; books whose text figures in *Allophanes* (and who can claim to enumerate every one of these?) point to their "antecedents" and so on in an endless genealogy. This genealogy fans at an exponential growth rate as each focal point radiates toward several "antecedents"—the text creates its own precursors, ideally reaching its origin in the Word, Logos itself. And here Foucault (67) points to "a dilemma: either all these books are already contained within the Word and they

must be burned, or, they are contradictory and, again, they must be burned" "—burn the books / burn the books" ("X") are the horns of this dilemma. "And thus the paradox: if we make a book which tells of all the others, would it or would it not be a book itself [67]?" Bertrand Russell formulated such a paradox dealing with a class of classes, asking whether such a class is itself one of its own members—can it circumscribe itself. If so, it confuses language and metalanguage or, as in this case, books and a book-about-books. Foucault claims that:

> Literature begins when this paradox is substituted for the
> dilemma; when the book is no longer the space where
> speech adopts a form (forms of style, forms of rhetoric, forms of
> language), but the site where books are all recaptured and
> consumed: a site that is nowhere since it gathers all the books of
> the past in this impossible 'volume' whose murmuring will be
> shelved among so may others—after all the others, before all the
> others (67).

The content of *Allophanes* creates just such a formal paradox, capturing (prior) texts which are made new. But the structure of—not merely the text—the book is itself a paradox. Any book, according to Butor, is a "diptych" merely because we are presented with two distinct pages at a single glance. *Allophanes* becomes a three-dimensional triptych due to a "profound discontinuity": "Through a fold in the paper, the cover's underside becomes a surface. The triangular excision in this way serves to frame a part of the cover's unexposed side. As a result of this cut and fold, the cover's recto-verso distinction collapses and a profound discontinuity is produced upon the cover's plane" (McCaffery 133) whereby the book itself is made a catastrophic site, folding upon itself and disturbing the unitary plane of a diptych.

The fold is the simplest of the catastrophes—"a discontinuity or instability in a system" (McCaffery 136)—and is evident in numerous dimensions of *Allophanes*. One such fold exists in *Allophanes* in the form of the received dictation: "The snowball appears / in Hell every morning at seven" ("XVII"). Hell-o. "At times the condition of change, at times the change itself, the sentence [...] will raise constantly the question of the productivity of its own significatory ground," hence, "where space explicates itself [...] hell's snowball is born into writing *as a writing*; a dictated and a written moment

that asserts its identity as its own rupture, signalizing the opening of the moment into the multiplicity of which *Allophanes* will be the trace" (McCaffery 132). This rupture, so identified, is what McCaffery designates the "matrix sentence"; it would be, for Butor, a "closed region":

> It enters the textual economy as a perverse 'fold' in the writing and similarly participates without membership. Rendering *all* quotations in *Allophanes* contaminated, this sentence further prevents the writing from being a first order operation. The writing cannot even gain an innocence but must inscribe itself and its implications inter-textually, with a constant referral to another voice beneath the surface of the writing, held absent but constantly recalled inside of the writing's shifting scenes. (McCaffery 135)

Re-staging its seens the I alters, all appearances inhering in the fragments—phanopieces—"the fragments (Heraclitus) of Bowering's *Allophanes*: all/appearances/sound/voice [...]. The poem with no more chance than. The poet as skilful alchemist who changes sound into silence" (Kroetsch 126). Transmuting aural experience to a written, silent one, the poem *shows* rather than *tells* of its re-construction of blown figures. Yet it transmutes again: here there are phonetic chains of rhyme, as usual in a poem; there are also chains of images, as in the metamorphoses of the snowball into "the word made white & melting" ("X"), into a "perfect smooth black orb" ("XII") and then into the physical recurrence of black dots on the page. In fact, McCaffery suggests that each appearance of "O" or "o" again recalls the melting snowball; we can "think of this letter as the snowball's anasemic state [...]. In acknowledging this anasemic element in *Allophanes* we open up the poem to a bewildering play within its own micro-structures. Wherever an O occurs (in 'god' and 'dog' for instance) then the catastrophic moment takes effect" (137). "Morphemes fall in flames from the tree" ("XVI") in this perfor(m)ative text whose elements—morphemes and phonemes—perform alchemical rites opening fissures and re-fusing "the fine étude of man" ("XIX")—*Fin*, again, is man—in punning, regenerative play. "Things fit together. We knew that—it is the principle of magic. Two inconsequential things can combine together to become a consequence. This is true of poems too. A poem is never to be judged by itself alone. A poem is never by itself alone" (Spicer 61). The poem is never

by itself—though distinguished as such—alone. "(Put the
contraries / back into mortal life" ["X"]). Recognizing
common ground yet without losing its uniqueness each poem,
each line, each morpheme is integral; is (a)part.
"Recognitions. Like coyotes, howling in the night. The way
the blood, then, moves differently" interests Kroetsch (9) as it
does Bowering. The simultaneity of recognizeably familiar and
unfamiliar, both in playful (in)congruity and intellectual
challenge approximates the form of *Allophanes*, where
"literature / must be thought, now" ("I").

> What off
> was Thoth
> but ne'erdowell
> exprest.
> ("XXIV").

This is literature, a creation at once familiar and de-
familiarizing—even threatening. "His thought threatens him,
it is / the perilous deterioration of dynamite" ("XII"), the
explosion of which initiates the thinker into a world without
icons where inspiration is associative rather than generative
and spirit is what you make of it. "The winds scatter
fragments of the exploded gods. / Fall leaves blowing about
one's feet. / Cross yourself" ("IX"). Exploding gods thrilled
Joyce, too. He said, "'The Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic
Church was built on a pun. It ought to be good enough for
me.' And, to the objection of triviality, he replied, 'Yes. Some
of the means I use are trivial—and some are quadrivial'"
(Joyce qtd. in Ellmann 546). "As Samuel Beckett writes in
Murphy, 'In the beginning was the pun'" (Ellmann 546n). In
this tradition, Bowering writes: "Where else may we find our
beginnings but in the language?" ("XVIII"). The Word is the
pun upon which our lines are founded. While the feet are
constant, you never step into the same quote twice; even idols
are re-composed when situated at a new contextual address.
They de-compose too, from what they were to what they are:
here, (in) Bowering's writing.

> 'He does what is done in many places;
> what he does other
>   he does after the mode
> of what has always been done.'
>   ("XXII").

The poem, then, can be the site of the divine where hieratic sounds emerge from the priests' commotion or the Muse sings heavenly, but with this apprehension of the Outside within its confines it becomes an extra-rational, amazing space itself. Far more than the sum of its parts, it is nonetheless the (evidently fragmented) parts which demonstrate this. *Allophanes* is a fragmented structure, "Not as a gesture of contempt for the scattered nature of reality. Not because the pieces would not fit in time. But because this would be the only way to cause an alliance between the dead and the living. To magic the whole thing toward what they called God" (Spicer 176).

"An argument between the living and the dead" is how Spicer defined the ghost, an (id)entity structurally repeated in Rilke's angel. As margins, the living and the dead are absolutely polarized; fixed each in their natural realm, the means of transmission from one to the other are supernatural. Alchemy is but one of a multitude of compositional—and decompositional—models (among them baseball, radioactive decay and concentric waves) alluded to in the poem which by their conjunction create a quibbling form, a disturbance from within which defies paraphrase and marks a perpetually quivering, electric, field. Accepting that this argumentative "disturbance" cannot be "Pure" poetry simply because "Pure poetry has no presence / but only its own being" ("XIX"), we nonetheless see that *Allophanes* does present a vibrant form the resonances of which (en)join us in the "endless murmuring we call literature" (Foucault 60). "One is not born alone, one borrows the earth, / a clay, formed anew. A language filled again / in an oast heated from an ancient flame"—this is "The fruitful void. Athanor" ("XVIII"). Primordial clay afresh made flesh is the Word Host of the Logos which can yet be no more than a Spicerian lowghost, instantly becoming fleshly rather than being the (last) Word. These fleshly, impure poems breed: "Poems should echo and reecho against each other. They should create resonances. They cannot live alone any more than we can" (Spicer 61). Concurrently a finitude and an étude for another composition, poems struggle with and through their margins, deconstructing their own presence.

Perpetually contextual, these works of language reflect their origin in mortal fear of closure:

> somewhat before the invention of writing, a change had to occur
> to open the space in which writing could flow and establish itself,
> a change [...] that forms one of the most decisive ontological
> events of language: its mirrored reflection upon death and the
> construction, from this reflection, of a virtual space where speech
> discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image and where,
> it can represent itself as already existing behind itself, already
> active beyond itself, to infinity. The possibility of a work of
> language finds its original fold in this duplication. (Foucault 55)

The possibility of a work of language, of the inscription of
langue, of an everyman, of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker
depends upon an author, who is defined by a work, and so on
back to where this ur-rhythm is recognized, where it grips
down and begins to awaken:

<div align="center">

H. C. E.
lives & lives & lives
reflected in the mirrors
along the wall.
("XX").

</div>

In showing the inconclusive nature of words, their infinite
capacity for re-writing, re-vision and appropriation in diverse,
even perverse contexts, *Allophanes* is a provisional finitude, a
completely incomplete text. "What is produced is not a
traceable theme but the graphic appearance of the *multiple* and
the impossibility of the single instance" (McCaffery 140-1), as
if "language can no longer avoid multiplying itself" (Foucault
65). But when multiple cites anarchically dis-place unity of
theme or even meaning the words are shells—skins.

When you've finisht with them words
throw the skins on the compost, will ya?

That is composition,
autobiologist.
("XVIII").

And they are fertile as such, them words; indeed, they are
prolific. The reader finds the poem fertile yet grounded in a
matrix: "You'll join in burying my poem / at some crossroads"
("VII"), addressing it to read therein a narrative. "Aw narrative
/ is a telling blow" ("VII").

Build, though,
with snow,
blow language
nummular
at the flame.
("XVIII").

Yeats appealed to "sages standing in God's holy fire;"
Bowering's sages are "standing in God's holy shit" ("VIII").
Literature is both purified and fecund, both prolific and
devouring: an old sow that eats her farrow.

Headed toward death, language turns back upon itself; it
encounters something like a mirror; and to stop this death which
would stop it, it possesses but a single power: that of giving
birth to its own image in a play of mirrors that has no limits.
From the depths of the mirror where it sets out to arrive anew at
the point where it started (at death), but so as finally to escape
death, another language can be heard—the image of actual
language, but as a miniscule, interior and virtual model. (Foucault
54)

Such an image is evidently illusory yet the surety of its
reflection in perpetuity is a guarantee of form at the expense of
reference, a guarantee of structural verity. "Myths
communicate / with each other, & men / seldom find out"
("II"). This "is the song of the bard who had already sung of
Ulysses before the *Odyssey* and before Ulysses himself (since
Ulysses hears the song)" (Foucault 54-5). "(They've already
printed / the date of your death" ["XXI"]), when and where
the book is fixed, printed—the final etching of the character in
stone closes the life and this moment is prefigured in each
word written, and when it comes "you'll say you have things
to do" ("XXI"), as indeed you do, not being finished
becoming. "*Allophanes* is weighty with its insistence that we
cannot write the word, only process it through a labyrinth of
re-writings" (McCaffery 141). So the "author" is dead and the
work is but a trace of the interface between a writing reader
and his textual world.

The work is henceforth
the author dead
the book, beside you
a face of the world
to which it was always leading

("III").

"'I know it's beautiful, what does it mean?'" (Spicer qtd. in Blaser 312).

"I know, I know. / it's all beautiful. / Tell me what we said on it" ("XXIV").

NOTES

[1] In "Allophanes" as printed in *West Window*, the line breaks after "pitch," not "black." All my references are to the Coach House publication of *Allophanes*.

[2] Julia Kristeva, in *Desire in Language* (66), commented upon the fact that any text is a mosaic of quotations. This quote became part of the mosaic of Kroetsch's *Labyrinths of Voice* which invokes Kristeva (through the translation of Leon Roudiez) pronouncing that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (6).

[3] This is from Borges (108). The dissemination of this quote itself throughout postmodern writing is intriguing; it was chosen by Foucault as an epigraph to *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*; it was also chosen as an epigraph by John Barth for his seminal essay on the literature of "Exhaustion."

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Resistance and Reception: Backgrounds to Theory in English-Canada

Heather Murray

> I believe that all vital teaching of English, with culture and
> enlightened citizenship for its object, must be conveyed directly
> through the literature of the language. . . . It is, of course, of
> the utmost importance that our pupils should be made
> acquainted with those few rules of syntax and analysis which are
> to be regarded as fundamental. But when all is said, it yet
> remains true of most of the English instruction of the day that
> it takes the pupil into the Valley of Dry Bones and sets him
> diligently to the task of bringing one bone unto another; but of
> the breath of the wind of heaven which is at last to quicken his
> work he finds no one to tell him anything. (Roberts 488)

Charles G.D. Roberts' essay on "The Teaching of
English" appeared in the progressive New York journal *The
Christian Union* in April 1888, accompanying the mournful
editorial announcement of the death of Matthew Arnold.
Roberts, then a junior professor of English (and French and
Political Economy—even, at times, Logic) at King's College
in Windsor, Nova Scotia, pleads for a distinctively "literary"
rather than rhetorical teaching; and, further, for the reading of
living authors, in a plan for English studies which is proudly
and explicitly Arnoldian. Roberts also makes an implicit case
for the inherent worth of English study, and one need look no
further for a reason than the bizarre but then-common
allocation of his teaching duties. Combining philosophic
rationale, pedagogic practicality, and institutional canniness,
Roberts provides an early example of what is to become a
distinctive if minor genre in literary studies, in Canada as
elsewhere: the visionary or revisionary programmatic polemic.
The history of "theory" in English-Canada, of its reception and
the resistance to it, is as long as the history of the discipline
itself; but this is a history with which most of us are barely
familiar.[1] Thus, when it has seemed necessary to analyze
what has and has not been the effect of theory in the 1970s,
'80s and '90s, we have relied upon analytical and historical
materials developed in and for England and the United States.[2]

These are sometimes helpful and sometimes inapplicable, but in either case cannot substitute for an indigenous institutional analysis.

In attempting to account for the variegated fate of theory in the English-Canadian academy today, this paper begins by surveying some influential accounts of the "resistance to theory," to determine their usefulness to the Canadian situation. From this I conclude that two forms of work have particular promise. First, it would be useful to outline the development of critical paradigms for the English-Canadian academy, with attention to national and local differences. (Here "paradigms" is defined in the most simple sense, as patterns or templates of disciplinary definition and method.) Second, it is necessary to analyse the relationship between the discipline of English and its institutions—that is, to relate critical and pedagogic structures to school, society, and state.(Such analysis also needs to examine literary study in its extra- or even contra-institutional settings).[3] But both these examinations require history and data currently lacking. With this paper, I hope to contribute to thinking on the first of these topics by sketching the development of paradigms for English studies in English-Canada (and by providing, in the discursive footnotes, some resource material). The multivarious "moment" of Charles G.D. Roberts prefigures the structure of English studies one hundred years later in its complexity of models and motives, and it is against this distinctively English-Canadian structure—with its dominant, residual, and emergent critical forms—that the contemporary resistance to theory, and the reception of it, can be read.[4] This paper attempts to provide, then, the backgrounds to "theory" in English-Canada; but the history of those resistances and receptions, incorporations and innovations, remains to be read, and written—and made.

Since theory is often seen by its practitioners as having intrinsic merit, the continuing resistance to it requires explanation.[5] Further, even where theory has received an acceptance of sorts, for the most part traditional disciplinary organization and assumptions have remained intact; thus the "resistance" to theory in Canada is less a case of critical blindness or neglect, and more a case of curricular superaddition. (A familiar example would be the grafting of a theory course, or a "theorized" course, onto a programme

otherwise resolutely euro- and male-centred.) The uneasy fit of "theory" to "field" and "institution" has occasioned a turn to the examination of field and institution themselves, as the texts that theory must read.

Because there is scant history and data about criticism and its institutions in Canada, there has been a tendency to turn to analyses developed elsewhere. Recent work offers three types of explanation for the phenomenon known as "resistance to theory."[6]

Argument number one is the argument from politics. Here theory is seen as inherently left and the academy (or its official representatives) as inherently conservative or even rightist. Thus the debate about theory becomes mapped onto national political issues; in turn, national political concerns are seen to be played out, microcosmically but mimetically, in the academy.

Argument number two looks to what may, for convenience, be termed "paradigms." A methodology or set of assumptions is seen as the "normal science" which theory cannot displace. For example, in the United States, new criticism is seen to prevent theory; in England, it is a residual Leavisism. Such resistance to theory may be configured, more broadly, as a resistance of semiology to rhetoric (de Man "Semiology") or as a resistance to any non-interpretive literary scholarship (Culler). In his "Presidential Address," J. Hillis Miller sees in the United States academy a turn to a crudely "historical" or cultural work; and warns that theory's own "triumph" may be in direct proportion to the degree to which it is becoming detheorized, generalized, and certain.

Argument number three, which follows, explains such resistances as part of an historical pattern. Gerald Graff, for example, countering a tendency to contrast current disciplinary upheaval to an imagined consensual past, outlines a history of contending paradigms for the United States academy (Graff 1987; Graff and Warner 1989). For Graff, English is by definition conflictual and resistant.

How adequately do these three accounts explain the resistance to theory? And how applicable are they to the situation in English-Canada?

The first argument, from politics, operates powerfully in the United States precisely because it equates institutional and national politics. This explanation seems most useful for describing a certain "structure of feeling" of theory

practitioners, and a situation where "theory" defines less one's work than one's institutional self-positioning. While Canadian proponents tend to view theory as "political," theory has not functioned as an exclusive carrier of such claims. (This is possibly because an unbroken legacy of progressive voices in the Canadian university, and a more recent orientation to English marxist work, have kept alive the question of social utility.) However, the fact that theory is seen as a "foreign" transplant raises nationalist concerns; similar problems are generated by the awkward fit of theory to indigenous literatures; and this is often expressed as a concern about the language of theory, with theory viewed as arcane, mandarin, or impractical. Finally, a continuing current of progressivism within the discipline, both in its writers and scholars, means that simple left-right divisions are never easy to maintain. Or, for that matter, to discern, since the Canadian academy has not (so far) been subject to the direct attacks made on United States universities (McCarthyite and Reaganite) or English ones (Thatcherite).

Argument number two, resistance by paradigm, has been the most influential. Such explanations, however, tend to reify the term to be opposed (such as new criticism) and to collapse the debates in that term's history. Further, such accounts cannot offer a satisfactory analysis of how this dominance is maintained, for to say that the paradigm has become a "normal science" is to beg the question. Again, the English "re-reading" work has much to offer, as it attempts through historical and documentary analysis to outline the mechanisms of paradigm maintenance—of a residual Leavisite legacy, for example. In Canada, however, it is difficult to discern a dominant paradigm against which the "new" must inevitably battle; and certainly theoretical resistance cannnot be explained solely in terms of new criticism or Leavisism. In addition, different forms of theoretical work have achieved varying degrees of acceptance or credence. (To offer one example: While "New French Feminism" elsewhere appeared incommensurable with an "Anglo-American" approach, here it quickly sparked the critical and creative work of both Québecois and English-Canadian women writers.)

Argument number three defines resistance as an endemic feature of English. Framed by Graff as a history of duelling paradigms, this explanation cannot account for materials and points of view that are excluded from the series of debates.

Further, Graff's disciplinary dialectic cannot account for the pluralized, or at least variant, state of English studies in Canada; a study which, as I am suggesting in this paper, may be more profitably viewed as a sedimentation of different "layers" of critical development. But Graff's work convincingly demonstrates the need to examine the operations of theories within their institutional settings.

In sum, the strengths and omissions of these explanations for the "resistance to theory" suggest two promising areas for work in English-Canada—that is, the detailing of disciplinary paradigms and the analysis of their institutionalization. The first can take direction both from recent archival and analytic work on disciplinary history (Baldick, Doyle, Eagleton, Gossman, Graff, Graff and Warner; Fee, Harris, Hubert, Johnson, Morgan for Canada) and from theoretical work on "disciplinariness" itself, such as Derrida's work on the "state" (in both senses) of philosophy and Samuel Weber's disclosure of the enclosures and exclusions of disciplinary categories. Institutional analysis is also needed to place English study in relation to universities and the state, and to interpret the ins and outs of the discipline in terms of these relations. (This work is needed both for theoretical "advance" and for effective defense of a beleaguered humanities study.) Again, the "re-reading" work of daily documents and practices is instructive. But this is a difficult analysis to undertake, since lack of disciplinary self-reflexivity makes the ordinary at times invisible; and the increasing size of the university, and the development of a separate academic managerial class, mean that fewer of us will have direct dealings with the administrative and governmental face.

The next part of this paper will attempt to contribute to the first of these two suggested areas, by sketching the vectors and factors of disciplinary paradigms in English-Canada. While the analysis is not historical, it follows a rough chronology intended to be suggestive.

During his tenure at King's College, Roberts was placed at a particular intersection of heritages and influences. Roberts' classical training was under George Parkin, a man with a particular gift for bringing classics and contemporary literature into dialogue. Roberts, as the son of a minister, engaged in debates over the "higher" Biblical criticism, which challenged the bedrock of religious authority by adding historical to

hermeneutic questions. He was attuned—as were the Maritime provinces of his day—to intellectual life in England and Europe and the Eastern seaboard.[7] (We need only read the works of the "Confederation" poet Roberts in *The Yellow Book*, or learn that "maple leaf" poet Bliss Carman was a first North American proponent of the symbolists, to see this attunement as more than a colonial yearning.)[8] There is also about Roberts a particular sense of *modernité*: his fascination with Wilde's aestheticism, with the bohemian, with the paranormal, with poetic experimentation. Roberts' notion of the "literary," then, was thoroughly up-to-date; he was a tireless booster as well of a nascent Canadian writing of which he was to become so representative a figure. His correspondence with Carman might sound oddly familiar to a junior academic today, with complaints about the entrenched study of linguistics, philology and the dreaded Anglo-Saxon, in letters detailing the saga of their unsuccessful attempts to gain jobs in American and Canadian universities which sought only the Johns Hopkins or Oxbridge educated (see Boone, Gundy). Roberts' vision of literature teaching is brought into conflict with traditional study in his essay of 1888. References to Arnold permit him to organize this mixture of traditions and modernisms into a coherent programme—a programme which was never enacted, but which marks a formative moment of English studies in Canada.

From the earliest years of the discipline several basic patterns of distribution and organization may be discerned, and they continue to function as structural principles.

As Henry Hubert has suggested (1989), the history of English studies throughout the nineteenth century is a story of contention between Scottish-based rhetorical utilitarianism and British belles-lettrism; a tale of low church and high church, liberal and tory, rhetoric and aesthetics. While several early and influential dissenting reformists made strong philosophical and practical cases for the social value of rhetorical study—in Thomas McCulloch's *The Nature and Uses of a Liberal Education* and the Pictou Academy, Egerton Ryerson's *Inaugural Address* and Victoria College—this was not to persist as the dominant direction in higher education. As Nan Johnson has discovered, British belles-lettristic theory—including an examination of classical precedents and the inculcation of "Taste"—characterized the curriculum until the end of the nineteenth century and in some cases even beyond,

in contrast to the American development of a primarily pragmatic approach. While a more "practical" study continued at the primary and secondary levels and in low-church colleges (or colleges modelled on them), and was later to be introduced at western institutions concerned about the skills of applicants, rhetorical study was displaced in the eastern and central universities.[9] The alignment of British-model education with the anglican elite of the Maritimes and Canada West is one reason for this development; another is that belles-lettristic and later aesthetic literary study was readily accommodated to the idealism which was the prevalent, almost determinant, intellectual direction of the nineteenth century in Canada (see McKillop 1987, and Shortt).[10] But it should also be noted that rationales for literature and aesthetic study were able to succeed to the degree that they could incorporate, or at least address, the agenda of education for individual and national improvement laid down by those practically-minded educational founders.

Thus the institutionalization of literary study is not a matter of the academy alone. While in the late 19th century and the early 20th the universities were more independent than they now are (there was no elaborate superstructure of university-government relations),[11] they were, in the public eye and their own, more closely attuned to the public system of education overall, with university professors characteristically producing public lectures, programmes for humanities studies, and even lower-school curricula and texts.[12] This is more than a top-down directing of education (although it was that, too); it is also an important source of disciplinary self-definition in Canada. The late development of graduate studies and resultant lack of expectation of scholarly productivity caused an orientation to teaching that remains strong, even in institutions now isolated from the school systems and internally stratified.

The above characterized the discipline in its early years, and its basic (and continuing) structural features. A programme of education for citizenry provided an early rationale for liberal arts study, and a specifically vocational education was late to develop; literature study was institutionalized through demonstrations of its value for this purpose.[13] The legacy of the European romantics (and particularly their focus on national literatures) could be accommodated to this home-grown programme, as is apparent in the writings of early reviewers and critics (see Fee). "Most

striking about the early efforts," writes Len Findlay "is the shrewdness and clarity with which they established the topics that have remained at the centre of Canadian theoretical debate: the possibility and desirability of a distinctive Canadian literature and the nature of literature's contribution to the national life" (1227).

The pre-disposition to English educational ideas, and the indigenous development of a programme for national education and its social utility, laid the groundwork for an interested reception of the ideas of Matthew Arnold, especially with his 1884 speaking tour (see Opala). That these ideas did not always travel under the name of "Arnold" is a sign both of a ready assimilation—and of an irreverent appropriation for domestic purposes. Recent concentration on the centrality of Arnold to state and colonial education (Baldick; Doyle) can easily obscure the ways in which his ideas were seized by nationalist and progressive literary forces here. For example, not only Roberts, but "Fidelis" (Agnes Maule Machar) advocated an Arnoldian study; while, in a neat turn, the "nativist" fighters for a Canadian appointment in English at Toronto could accuse the conservative forces of not knowing their Arnold.[14] This adoption was not unique to Canada, but there seems to have been a particularly ready fit of Arnold's ideas to the national education programme here. In turn, Arnoldianism provided a compelling series of rationales that allowed English to move into the centre of humanities study in Canada and to retain that position for many years (Jasen 1987; 1988). (That Canada's universities are public institutions meant that the potential applicability was sensed at all levels.) Arnoldianism, it might be said, provided a solid bridge between the demands of colonial education and the belles-lettrism and idealism of an evolving study.

The discipline in English-Canada went on to develop in a markedly distinctive way. Early critical work was eclectic, and most often intended for public consumption. This "amateurism" of study remained a feature until, perhaps, the end of the Second World War; kept in place in large measure by the restriction to undergraduate teaching and the lack of an infrastructure—grants, journals, libraries, professional associations—that make sustained activity possible (see MacLure). (And some notions of the inherent "gentlemanliness" of English still remain.) Concern over the "professionalization" of literary study through increasing

specialization, either of teaching or inquiry, has worried English-Canadian academicians for some decades now (at the same time as it has provided powerful disciplinary self-justifications). But this accceptance of interdisciplinarity in the early years of the discipline merits examination.[15]

David Galbraith has remarked that departments of English seem to be able to drift only in one of two directions—to history, or to philosophy.[16] The Canadian choice is emblematized by the fact that Toronto, Queen's and Western had dual chairs in English and History until 1894, 1910, and 1920, respectively (Klinck 329-30) and that Toronto maintained a joint programme until 1936, at which point it chose independence rather than membership in the then-new honours course in Social and Philosophical Studies (see Harris). Some early tendencies to develop an aesthetic criticism were overshadowed by what was to become a dominant and unique disciplinary directive—the placing of literary texts in relation to history and intellectual history.[17] It is a development which begins with the wide-ranging work of Sir Daniel Wilson, which is developed by such scholars as Malcolm Wallace, and which is institutionalized in the person and policies of A.S.P. Woodhouse. As early as 1889, the curricular relationship of historical to aesthetic approaches is adjudicated, with W.J. Alexander's address on *The Study of Literature.* According to the timetable developed by Alexander, students should study works, then history, then criticism, with the "aim of forming a complete image of the thought of an age" (30); and since Toronto was for many years almost the sole trainer of the professoriate, Alexander's "natural method" (25) underlies many curricula even to this day.[18] This disposition to historical study is strengthed by the embeddedness of early Canadian literary work in a context of historical study: as Carl Klinck notes, "literary history . . . had made a start, albeit a slow one, under conditions similar to, and influenced by, contemporary research in general Canadian history" (327). And, as Northrop Frye has pointed out, this historical orientation is to underpin later work which seems on the surface dramatically different. Harold Innis, he reminds us, began with historical studies of the economics of fish and furs; while Frye took as a point of departure the "history of ideas" work characterized by Woodhouse. ("It seeemed to me that these "ideas" were really elements or units in what Tillyard calls a world picture . . ." [33].) This historical orientation,

specific to English-Canada, may be seen to provide a third and perhaps dominant level of the disciplinary strata, as well as a distinctive "identity" to the work done in this country.

However, while English-Canadian criticism was developing in strength and definition, by the late '40s it was becoming clear that a stronger support would be needed if Canadians were to take a place in the scholarly world; this becomes apparent in the surveys undertaken by Brebner, and by Kirkconnell and Woodhouse. The founding of the Canada Council from the 1951 Massey report is a turning-point here; as is the 1957 establishment of the Association of University Teachers of English (later ACUTE), which in its early form devoted considerable attention to professional and pedagogic matters (see Garson). (It enters, of course, later into the narrative of "theory" as one of the main forums for the formulation and debate of the topic.) The post-war establishment of graduate education and expansion of universities and hiring accelerated these processes of development and stratification and initiated a more complex relationship between university and government. One feature of the discipline at this time was its centrality to humanities study, coming in part from the Ryersonian educational agenda and in part from the figures drawn from English (Woodhouse to Priestley to Whalley to Frye) who have been able public defenders of humanist study. This helped English to maintain its footing even during post-World War II calls for practical education for national prosperity. How English gained, and then lost, this position provides matter for rueful reflection.

If the years between the wars are marked by general developments in the discipline, the post-World War II period is characterized by local differences and specializations. This differentiation was accelerated with the rise of new universities and the expansion of existent ones and the consequent hiring. The legacy of this time is what may be considered the distinctive "flavour" of different departments: some more Leavisite than others; some new critical; some devoted to textual or editorial work, in differences institutional and individual. (For example, new critical perspectives could find a ready home at some institutions—especially those hiring, and sometimes from the United States, in the '60s—while its relationship to other departments was famously embattled.)[19] It is normally to this top-level of paradigm development that

we pay attention when thinking about departmental politics and disciplinary resistances.

While the pros and cons of both new criticism and Leavisism fuelled debates in the university quarterlies, other forms of critical work were forming in a distinctively Canadian context; each, in some sense, prepared the ground for theory. Three varieties of new work may be discerned—the communications theory of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan (and, at points, Dennis Lee); the synthesizing work of Northrop Frye; and the taxonomic thematics of a developing "Canlit" criticism. Distinctive as these forms may be, they had some common consequences for "theory." Each offered, from different perspectives, a challenge to discriminations and choices based solely on "aesthetic" criteria; and posed questions not directed to interpretive ends. Each validated approaches based on social or national (that is, extra-literary) considerations.[20] All pushed the walls of an already elastic disciplinary boundary; all kept alive the notion of English's "inner" interdisciplinariness.

The moment of the entry of "theory" to the academy was thus as richly complex as the moment of the formulation of English studies—a dominant critical mode by which literary questions are referred to historical considerations; a residual aestheticism at war with a residual pedagogic mandate forged in democratic concerns and rhetorical study; an emergent theoretical and proto-theoretical work. And it is to be hoped that an equally complex admixture some quarter-century later—its critical impulses generated within and without the English-Canadian community—will provide the tensions and extensions that keep theory self- "resistant" in the way de Man has configured ("Resistance").

This chronology takes English studies up to the point of entry of "theory," and here it deliberately stops, for the purpose is not to provide a history of theory in English-Canada, nor of the debates surrounding it, but rather to display "theory" against the existent terrain of the discipline in English-Canada.[21] What lessons might be learned from the above?

First, the continuing close connection of English in Canada with public education, and attention to pedagogic principle, means that theory's "teachability" demands reflection and

demonstration. These are questions which cannot be sidestepped.

Second, and related, it may be possible to make connections between theoretical activity and more traditional disciplinary directions; for example, the early formulation of rhetorical study as a precondition for informed and active citizenship. A redescription and redefinition of the project, from the teaching of "theory" to the teaching of "reading," might be in order.

Third, it might be fruitful to see to how great an extent the idea of "theory" as social thinking and cultural work can be aligned with a strong existent sense of public responsibility, and a predisposition for contextual work. That would be to ally "theory" firmly to both past and current defenses of humanities study in this country.

Fourth, perhaps too much attention has been paid to the "top" level of disciplinary manifestation (new critical or Leavisite orientations) and too little to the historical orientation of the discipline. The "resistance" to theory in Canada may not be a case of resistance to "theory" at all, but resistance to theory-as-philosophy. To how great a degree has the popular equation of "theory" with "deconstruction" re-mobilized sentiment in favour of the historical?

Fifth, it is, I believe, a mistake to see "English" as inherently conservative. It may be wise—and good for "theory" itself—to connect theory to an inherent and indigenous strain of academic progressivism.

Sixth, turning "theory" onto our own daily practices and documents will help us to locate better the arguments and rationales to be developed at the national and local level.

And last—appeals to the heritage and immutability of the way things are ought to be countered by reference to past change and always-present diversity.

University of Toronto

NOTES

1 One of many available examples is the recent issue of *University of Toronto Quarterly* [58,4 (summer 1989)] on the topic of "professionalism." It was interesting to note that the writers who are English professors made their arguments almost solely with reference to English and United States intellectual history. This says less about the

orientation of the writers themselves than it does about the difficulties of casting arguments with reference to the discipline in English-Canada, given the absence of material on the subject.

2 Historical material would include disciplinary histories by Baldick, Doyle, Eagleton, and Gossman (in England), and Graff, most influentially, in the United States. Analytic material used in Canada includes English "re-reading" work (Batsleer et al., Brooker and Humm et al., Widdowson et al., the journal *Literature/Teaching/Politics*); and U.S. debates on professionalism, left criticism, and disciplinarity, for example. It is also worth noting that a number of these analyses focus on the development of English at Oxbridge; by which time English in Canada had been firmly established for at least fifty years.

3 In my opinion, there is a tendency in some "re-reading" work to see literary study as inherently or intrinsically linked to state social reproduction; this predisposition is caused, in part, by the focus on Oxbridge. Understanding the place of literary study in populist and progressive education will help to give a more complex picture of the discipline and its potential.

4 It is Raymond Williams' idea that emergent and residual, as well as dominant, cultures may be present in any given formation.

5 Some terms also require definition. There are marked differences between types of theoretical work, as well as variances in the degree of acceptance they have received. The place (or lack thereof) of feminist literary theory and post-colonial theory, to give two examples, is clearly overdetermined.

It should also be noted that this examination is specific to English. The situation of theory in departments of comparative literature, for example, is very different.

Last, on the term "resistance": here I am less concerned with the question of why "theory" as a separate subject area is or is not taught, and more with the limited effect of the theoretical challenge to canon, curriculum, and pedagogy.

6 This paper omits two very popular but "untheoretical" accounts. An argument from personality, which sees "resistance" as stemming from powerful personal figures (Walter Jackson Bates, by synecdoche) is less applicable to a Canadian situation where figures, either "pro" or "con," lack comparable clout. This argument may describe departmental-level politics but cannot give a general account. A second argument, from perceived national characteristic, sees resistance as coming from an innate American anti-intellectualism or inculcated British commonsensicality.

This has all the limits of any stereotype; it seems to function best as a gesture of exasperation. But—to give the argument momentary credence—it does not apply here if, as Margaret Atwood suggests, English-Canadians have a "synthetic habit of mind" (illustrated by Innis, McLuhan, Frye and, one would add, Atwood herself). "Give the same pattern to a model American, a model English and a model Canadian critic: the American will say 'This is how it works'; the Englishman 'How good, how true to Life' (or, 'How boring, tasteless and trite'); the Canadian will say 'This is where it fits into the entire universe'." (Atwood 62-63). Surely theory should have found a ready home here.

7 On intellectual culture in the Maritime provinces of the day, see Malcolm Ross.

8 Carman's *Behind the Arras*, for example, shows traces of his earlier translations of Verlaine (M. Miller 151); more influentially, he and Richard Hovey used their journal *The Chap Book* (probably the first little magazine in the United States) to introduce the symbolists to North America.

9 An interesting example of a twentieth-century (1927-28) incorporation of rhetoric/composition instruction into the curriculum is provided by the University of Alberta (see Broadus).
    The emphasis on composition in the later-founded universities helps to account for the concentration of creative writing programmes in the western universities.

10 The life and career of James Cappon of Queen's provides a good case study of the overlap of idealist philosophy and a nascent English study; see Shortt's "James Cappon: The Ideal in Culture."

11 Axelrod provides an interesting history of university-government relations for the province of Ontario.

12 In Ontario, in particular, the intrication of university professors with secondary education in English was significant. George Paxton Young, a professor of moral philosophy, was also at times a school inspector (see Morgan); most notably, W.J. Alexander prepared curricula and such teaching texts as the many editions of *Select Poems* and *Shorter Poems*. Various members of the Toronto staffs and other universities (such as O.J. Stevenson of Guelph and James Cappon of Queen's) were also involved with pedagogic development and texts; this was made possible, in part, by the 1886 formation of the Modern Language Association of Ontario, which dealt with education at all levels. Even in provinces where there was little or no direct influence, early scholarly work

characteristically took the form of public lecturing and speeches and publication for non-academic audiences.

13 While the concern of this paper is with critical developments, it should be noted that this "public" face to education allowed two important forms of representation. In Canada as elsewhere, women were enthusiastic early entrants to the discipline (see Neatby, and "Women in the Modern Languages"); and there has always been a high proportion of creative writers among departmental staff (an important component of the "progessive politics" of the discipline—see mastheads of the *Canadian Forum*--and of nationalist debates). Both groups are part of the "hidden history" of the discipline.

14 The controversy (which was to result in the appointment of W.J. Alexander) occupied the Toronto papers in November and December 1888 and January 1889; on some days, as many as seven letters to the editor would appear.

15 G.G. Sedgewick's 1928 talk on "The Unity of the Humanities," delivered to an early conference of English professors, is an interesting example of this interdisciplinary impulse.

16 In conversation.

17 On aesthetic criticism, see J.D. Logan's 1917 *Aesthetic Criticism in Canada.*

18 Graff cites Douglas Bush's 1948 MLA Presidential address, calling for historically-based study, as a major critical movement in the American academy. In her review of Graff and Harris, Groening points out that the Toronto-trained Bush was simply advocating what was already-standard practice in Canada.

19 For an instance of new criticism in Canada, see Marchand's biography of McLuhan. For the memoirs of a Canadian Leavisite, see Keith.

20 In formulating his criticism of Frye's "verbal universe" (91-96) Terry Eagleton appears unaware of Frye's pedagogic writings—and of the social gospel movement.

21 For recent critical and theoretical surveys, see Cameron, Fee, Findlay, and Rajan.

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Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition.* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1988).

Canadians who recall 1967 can remember the focus on national identity provided by a centennial. 1988, the bicentennial of the arrival in Australia of the first fleet, was a similar event for that country. Still, the times being what they are, it was even more important because in the intervening twenty years the western world had become a much more self-critical place. The murmuring complaints of 1967, shown in items such as George Ryga's attack on Canada's treatment of native peoples, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, had turned to a much more general confrontation. In Australia in 1988 the boosterism of Expo '88 was met by a number of reflections on and by those who were forced to suffer the effects of those "first arrivals," the Aborigines. The anniversary conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature was devoted not to celebrations of identity but to reassessments of the role of the Aborigine as object, subject, and writer of Australian literature.

White women cannot be placed in the same category as Aborigines, in that they were arrivants as well, but they played many similar roles. The title of Anne Summers' history, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, suggests their moral positions as objects of male discourse. In the present study, Kay Schaffer argues that rather than whore the evil woman was perceived as the bad mother, but the originating position, the convict woman, seems to reflect Summers' term. Like the Aborigine, the convict woman represented a chance to indulge the "natural" and yet at the same time a fear that such indulgence could lead to destruction.

As Schaffer notes, some of the central texts on women in Australia can be associated with International Women's Year, 1975. It is fitting, however, that *Women and the Bush* should come so much later. There is an element of revisionism in Schaffer, as she suggests that Summers and Miriam Dixon's *The Real Matilda* have "retarded" the study of women's history. First through once more exploring that history in a "separate sphere." And second, through relying on "liberal social theories."

The former is an inevitable point of controversy. It is part of the ongoing argument over the institutionalization of

women's studies and some recent shifts to gender studies. It is that rejection of liberal humanism, however, which seems most important in this case. Schaffer is very much interested in contemporary textual theories, and depends on numerous allusions to such critics as Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Lacan. In the introduction she claims her field to be "language as discourse, or the cultural production of meaning."

The obvious shift from earlier approaches in Australia is from a concern for what women were and are, in opposition to how women were and are represented, to an analysis of the position of Woman in Australian dicourse. Thus Schaffer's second chapter, "In Search of a National Identity," says very little about women or Woman. Instead, it explores a number of recent studies which consider Australian culture from a similar perspective, particularly Graeme Turner's *National Fictions*, Sylvia Lawson's *The Archibald Paradox*, and Richard White's *Inventing Australia*. The result is to show how a number of different tactics construct an idea of Australian discourse.

Schaffer's decision to avoid liberal humanist models enables her to choose her points of attack as they suit her needs, with no attempt to be all-inclusive. Thus, the dominant source for her study is the poet and short story writer Henry Lawson (the index gives him more space than even "landscape" and "national identity"). This is not because his value exceeds all others but because the discourse has chosen his works as the central texts of Australian identity. When Schaffer turns to "a dissident voice" she chooses Barbara Baynton, who has often been presented as the feminist alternative to Lawson. But while Schaffer offers an extensive explication of one Baynton text as an examination of the law of the Father, she rather emphasizes the commentary on Baynton by A.A. Phillips, one of the, perhaps *the*, most important critics of Australian literature. One might say it is less Baynton's story than Baynton's story in the story.

That reference to patriarchal rule suggests the importance in this study of Lacan and Irigary. Some might see Schaffer's use of such theories as superficial but I think the explanation is rather the limited presence of such theoretical methods in mose analyses of Australian culture. Schaffer is placed in the uncomfortable position of employing Irigrary with the

awareness that few of her readers will have a basic knowledge of the theoretical background.

Perhaps a more useful point to confront might be not Schaffer's play with the Europeans, which is not as able and deep as her context allows, but her failure to do more with other colonials. Her bibliography provides an insightful look at the brightest recent Australian theorists, along with her European authorities and their commentators (Moi on Kristeva, Jameson on Lacan) but the only North Americans are those who can be perceived as part of that central theory push, such as Kaja Silverman and Alice Jardine.

Why not some attention to recent American theorizing on the same subject? Annette Kolodny's study of woman as American metaphor, *The Lay of the Land*, which would seem a basic resource, is here seen only in a footnote (in an unfortunate typo as *Lady of the Land*). This is doubly strange given that Schaffer's book originated as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh. This seems yet another example of the tendency in all of the postcolonial realms to look only to self and Europe. There is seldom an inclination to cast a glance at the other Others.

This is a book which should be done again in ten or fifteen years time. As it stands it is a good, at times excellent, analysis of a problem basic to postcolonial culture, but it needs a bit more support to reach what it can be. Like Turner, Lawson, and White, like the various recent theoretical approaches to Canadian culture (very much including my own work), the methods are too new to the subject to be as productive as they can be. If that future sophistication can also be blended with a cross-cultural awareness of what analysts of the national cultures are doing in Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and elsewhere, important works such as Schaffer's will become that much better.

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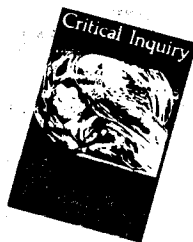
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