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*The afterlife of survival: a thematic guide to contemporary Canadian short fiction*

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# THE AFTERLIFE OF SURVIVAL

A thematic guide to contemporary Canadian  
short fiction

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Dedicated to

Terry Skelton

1932 – 2005

Matthew Skelton

1966 – 2009

Alistair MacLeod

1936 – 2014

## ABSTRACT

Felicity Skelton

Submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

‘The Afterlife of *Survival*: A thematic guide to contemporary Canadian short fiction’

Margaret Atwood’s *Survival: a thematic guide to Canadian literature* was originally published by House of Anansi Press in Toronto in 1972. In spite of the mixed reception, *Survival* became a key text in the study of Canadian Literature. Although it is now taught as a historical curiosity, it is possible to trace the ideas in it, and their reconfigured functions, through contemporary Canadian short fiction.

It is my contention that the ideas and themes which Atwood describes have rooted themselves in the Canadian imaginary, and that they have taken on a truth value which was originally disputed. Thus it is relatively easy to trace the continuing life of, for example, ‘Settlers and Explorers’ (*Survival*, Chapter 5) in contemporary Canadian short fiction. This is a synchronic study, not merely tracing the appearances of Atwood’s themes, but looking at how they are refigured in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, using stories published since 1972 to illustrate the argument.

The potential impact of the research will be the re-evaluation of Atwood’s forty-year old text, which with Frye’s *The Bush Garden* were the ‘parents of CanLit’ (Fee, 2013, pers.comm.), and the exposure of the continuing arguments in literature in Canada about national identity, in the light of an increasingly multicultural population, and the growing neo-colonial awareness of the ‘behemoth to the South’ (Chilton, 2003).

It will also bring a neglected body of work to international attention, and most particularly to the UK. Although Atwood, Alice Munro, and to a lesser extent, Alistair MacLeod are known both inside Canada and abroad, Mark Anthony Jarman, Thomas Wharton, Hiromi Goto, Lisa Moore, Joseph Boyden, Lynn Coady, Patricia Young, Lauren B. Davis, Diane Schoemperlen, Matt Cohen, D. W. Wilson and Leon Rooke are known only to dedicated readers of the short form, and these are the writers I have chosen to focus on here.

The Afterlife of Survival: a thematic guide to  
contemporary Canadian short fiction

Felicity Skelton

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

This thematic study of contemporary Canadian short fiction is based on the observation that the themes Margaret Atwood identified in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, first published in 1972, have survived to the present day.

There are several reasons for the afterlife of *Survival*'s themes. Firstly, Atwood's guide was both read by the general public and taken up by schools and colleges, as both she and Anansi, the publisher, intended. Secondly, Atwood's core thesis is to prove the existence of a Canadian literature and counter the 'Colonial Mentality' and the 'belief that the Great Good Place was, culturally speaking, elsewhere' (2004, 5)<sup>1</sup>. In Canada the question of national identity, although out of fashion now, still haunts the debates on literary production, and on wider culture. Thirdly, as Mark Anthony Jarman says of Atwood 'she is such a presence that any book by her is there like your Chinese whisper' (email correspondence, 11/2/15 pers. comm.).

It is the contention of this thesis, therefore, that Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* has influenced not only the reading but the writing of English-Canadian short fiction since its publication in 1972. It may be difficult to prove the influence on an individual writer, but given the contentious reception of the text, it is remarkable that the literature written since shows such clear evidence of the same themes. If Atwood got it right, there is no reason why these themes should not be recurring, unless social and political forces since 1972 have altered the national context to such an extent that they no longer have any relevance. Clearly, the context is constantly shifting, and the changing emphasis in social policy and the tensions of political changes have an effect. However, some changes are foreseen by Atwood, such as the increasing influence of the USA, and others are not so radical that they have a major impact on the essence of what it is to be Canadian. Atwood attacks the American

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<sup>1</sup> Page numbers are those in the 1972 first edition, unless otherwise indicated.

influence on several occasions in *Survival*; for example: ‘For French Canada after the English took over [survival] became cultural survival, hanging on as a people ... in English Canada now while the Americans are taking over it is acquiring a similar meaning’ (1972, 32). And on the Canadian consciousness she says ‘I’m talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It’s that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost’ (26). The sense of having a self which is lost is an experience of the uncanny; ‘space in which we find ourselves lost’ is almost exactly what Freud suggests when he says ‘the uncanny would always be that in which one does not know where one is, as it were’ (2001, 931).

For the First Nations, this lost space is the result of the seizing of land and destruction of their culture by European settlement. The position of the First Nations in relation to the state may be slightly ameliorated by Justin Trudeau’s policies, but they still have a long way to go before they can be regarded as equal partners in the Canadian project. The influence from America may be as overwhelming as Atwood feared in 1972, and though the emphasis may be perceived to have moved to a more gradual financial and cultural takeover and a more defensive stance on what the USA see as under-regulated immigration and unease about multiculturalism, Canada’s financial and cultural power is still under attack from the ‘huge aggressive neighbour to the south’ (Atwood 2004, 7)<sup>2</sup>.

It is also true that *Survival* can be read as an extension of the work of Northrop Frye; in particular, the ‘Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada’, first published in 1965. *Survival* can be read almost as a summary, an easier read, but with the addition of Atwood’s ‘victim positions’ and her wry humour. The texts she discusses are not always the same, although her reading list reinforces an emerging canon of CanLit. Frye’s influence is clear throughout, and he is the forefather who has had the most influence on the academy and on the critics. The contentious nature of *Survival* failed to relegate it to the footnotes of literary criticism, in part because Atwood herself rapidly became, and remains, a

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<sup>2</sup>In an interview at the Canadian High Commission in London in 2013, Leonard Cohen summed it up thus: ‘We watch America the way that women watch men – very, very carefully’. The comment also, incidentally, places Canada in a typical male/female hegemonic relation to its neighbour.



recognisable public figure in Canadian literary production, as a poet, a novelist, a short fiction writer, and essayist.

This work nevertheless takes Atwood's *Survival* rather than Frye's 'Conclusion' as its starting point, the driving force, for the following reason: among its contemporary 'guides', *Patterns of Isolation* (Moss, 1974) is still to be found on many PhD and some undergraduate reading lists, and *Butterfly on Rock* (Jones, pub. 1971) is referred to much more seldom, although there were reprints during the 1970s. Atwood's text, however, appears on many, as does Frye's<sup>3</sup>. Atwood's alone is still re-issued for a general readership, is reviewed by the popular press, and is the only one of the four available on Kindle. Neither *Butterfly on Rock* nor *Patterns of Isolation* appears to have been re-issued, and *The Bush Garden* was re-issued with an introduction by Linda Hutcheon in 1995. *Survival* has been re-issued three times. This suggests that where Frye's text is encountered by university students, *Survival* has been consistently widely available since its first publication. The reasons for this may not be simple, but Atwood's fame – some would say, notoriety – and the fact that she is known outside Canada and that her novels are read across the globe, makes her a canonical author in Canadian literature. Her pre-eminent position in the Canadian literary sphere causes admiration and suspicion and resentment among less well-known Canadian writers. Her novels, poetry, essays and forays into digital fiction and other online experiments keep her in the public eye, and not just in Canada. In a typical salvo, Mark Anthony Jarman includes a funny but jaundiced story in his collection *19 Knives* (2000), titled 'Love is all around us'.

I hop the WestJet and Margaret Atwood is the stewardess, Margaret Atwood pointing out the four emergency exits, Margaret Atwood asserting that no one has ever really seen those plastic oxygen masks yet we cling to our belief that masks are actually there, waiting for us like a parent, our Lacanian masks waiting to drop.

Margaret Atwood says, Maybe my message is bleak because it needs to be bleak. She says the seat belt parts fit into each other like a hook into an eye, my hook, your eye. ...

I sigh and peer out the plane's tiny window, look down miles and see Margaret Atwood's giant face on the side of an orange United Farmers of Alberta grain elevator. Her giant face is live, mischievous, moving, gnomish (21-22).

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<sup>3</sup>For example, the lists at York (Toronto), New Brunswick, Calgary, Wilfrid Laurier, Queen's, Algoma, and McMaster.

The mention of ‘Lacanian masks’ suggests that it is Atwood who has given Canadians their identity, and in *Survival* she says

[T]he large number of mirrors and reflection images contained within [Canadian] literature suggest a society engaged in a vain search for an image, a reflection that will answer it ... To know ourselves, we must know our own literature; to know ourselves accurately, we need to know it as part of literature as a whole (16).

This is a good description of Lacan’s Mirror stage: we acquire the mask of identity by seeing ourselves as other, and as others see us<sup>4</sup>. Identity is a crucial focus for any debate about Canadian culture, and the formation of the canon is partly based on the desire ‘to know ourselves’. *Survival* performed the function not only of introducing the Canadian public to its own literature, but of suggesting some definitions of what it means to be Canadian.

After several encounters with Atwood on his trip, in a cowboy hat, on the tannoy system, singing in a club with a guitar, the recorded voice on his answering machine and more, the narrator of Jarman’s story concludes:

Then Margaret Atwood is fading, a statue folded into a blizzard, she is sinking under the ice, she is going west on a jet. It's snowing and snowing; snow is general over Canada. Peggy! Peggy! we call from our wretched snowcaves, shivering, shrinking into our winter skin. Don't go! *Without you we are lost* (25 italics in original).

It is worth mentioning that the narrator’s journey is to visit Kurt Waldheim; the connection is implicit. While Waldheim rose to international prominence as Secretary-General of the UN, his dubious record during World War Two meant that his standing was compromised. In Atwood’s case, her influence on Canadian Literature has been seen by some as potentially malign (see, for example, Gutteridge 1973, Moss 1974). Although heavily ironic, the last line is a recognition of the lasting influence of Atwood’s writing on Canadian self-identification and on its literature.

The focus here, however, is not on *Survival* itself, but on how the themes appear in the short fiction published since the first edition. It is not part of this project to go back to short fictions published before 1972, to assess *Survival*’s

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<sup>4</sup> see, for example, Fink (trans) (2005) *Écrits*, , 75 passim

accuracy or lack of it, or the influence on it of previous texts such as Frye's or Jones's. The focus here is on contemporary short fiction by English Canadian writers published in the forty years since, rather than the poetry and novels on which Atwood concentrates, for reasons explained below. The fact is that writers born between approximately the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s will nearly all have been taught Canadian literature through the prism of *Survival* either in school or in college; those born before or since have almost all taught *Survival* in their 'day job', either as a thematic guide or as a historical curiosity, or as a key text in the literary history of the nation. This contact with – some would say contamination by – the text may well have made Atwood's assertions self-fulfilling, her tropes entering the Canadian imagination insidiously, an example of 'influence', of cultural colonialism by stealth. In dialogue with the text, writers in Canada have absorbed, reinvented and subverted her themes. For example, Mark Jarman does not consider himself to have been consciously influenced (email correspondence with the author, 11/2/15 pers. comm.). However, his story, 'My White Planet' (2008) is barely conceivable without a familiarity with *Survival* (See Chapter Two, below).

D. J. Gutteridge, in the now defunct *Canadian Forum*, was concerned about the use of *Survival* in the classroom. 'Without intelligent and in-depth criticism by those who plan to use this book as a "thematic guide", the results for teaching could be disastrous' (1973). In his review of Atwood's novel, *Surfacing*, which appeared the same year, Val Clery comments

*Surfacing* and *Survival*, I have no doubt, will be adopted and emulated by many young nationalist writers. Despite her disclaimers and qualifications, the arbitrary theme of her guide is laid down in terms too incontrovertible ... to be ignored by any peer-fearing radical. We can expect a flood-tide of stories and novels, replete with ecophobic male-chauvinist Americans and victims, both human and animal (1972, 46).

To the extent that the editor of *Books in Canada* foresaw the lasting influence on writers, my thesis is not so much a new idea, as a test of Clery's prediction.

It is not the intention here, either, to attempt a diachronic analysis of the development of the themes across the forty years since the publication of *Survival*. This would result in an emphasis on the chronologically detailed context of cultural production and would need to show how Canada's relations with itself

and with the world have gradually altered in the intervening period since 1972. What is more interesting is that the themes themselves remain visible, whether five, ten, twenty or forty years on, and this is where my focus lies. As Atwood herself says, in ‘What, Why, and Where is Here?’, which comes between the Preface and ‘How to use this book’

[*Survival*] is not a treatment of historical development ... It’s more helpful to start with a recognition of the situation you find yourself in, whatever it may be, and then look back to see how you got there ... Most though not all of my examples are drawn from the twentieth century, and many from the last few decades (1972, 12).

This thesis looks forward from *Survival* to see where contemporary short fiction is, and what echoes there are in Canadian short fiction, drawing on examples from the last forty years.

Neither have I distinguished specifically between literatures from different regions. There are some differences, clearly, in that the stories of Lisa Moore, for example, focus more on winterity, those of Alistair MacLeod on isolation, and those of Thomas Wharton and Hiromi Goto on the wilderness and the mountains, and that these themes may be more prevalent in relation to the setting: Moore’s Newfoundland, MacLeod’s Cape Breton, Wharton and Goto’s foothills of the Rockies. However, these themes also appear in the settings of Munro’s Huron County and Boyden’s Vancouver, so a discussion of regionalism would take the thesis in another direction.

*Survival* is not without its shortcomings, particularly in its tendency to take few examples from female-authored texts. Other areas which are not examined by Atwood include gay or non-binary gendered texts, and writing from First Nations authors, which I explain further below. I have corrected the first of these, and included many stories by women writers, but I have not used many by First Nations writers, and only one of the authors whose work is discussed writes about gay sexuality, although the story by Hiromi Goto I have chosen concerns relationships in a stereotypically heteronormative family. Either of these omissions would be addressed in a longer work, but the amount of material I considered was such that the danger of too wide a focus was ever-present.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on Canadian LGBT fiction, see, for example, Terry Goldie (2003), Susan Billingham (2010), Andrew Lesk (2006)

There are several short fictions mentioned in *Survival*, but more poems. The decision to focus on the short form is motivated by a desire to open the discussion to a neglected literature, neglected if not by Atwood, by readers and critics in the English-speaking world. Canada has a particularly rich heritage of short fiction writers, and their work is as multi-faceted and as enlightening as the novels or poetry. In 2007, Reingard M. Nischik observed that

the English-Canadian short story is a relatively recent literary phenomenon, spanning a little more than 100 years ... The crucial ascendancy of the Canadian short story, however, began in the 1960s, raising the quality, diversity, and prominence of the genre in Canada to new levels. The short story is today generally considered to be a particularly vital genre, if not the flagship genre of Canadian literature (2007, 1).

‘In contrast [to its success], surprisingly little literary criticism has been devoted to [it]’, Nischik continues (2). ‘[T]he annual Governor General’s Award ... Canada’s most important literary prize, has for almost thirty years been granted one out of three times to Canadian short-story collections rather than to novels’ (2). Most recently, in 2015 Guy Vanderhaeghe won the Award for *Daddy Lenin and Other Stories*. It is apparent that the form is granted a status in Canada which is lacking in other countries, and some collections, such as Alice Munro’s, may now be considered canonical, and yet the readership is, with the exception of Munro’s, almost entirely domestic.

### **Methodology**

The argument is that the themes in *Survival* have been absorbed by Canadian writers, and recur in a modern context, in contemporary short fiction. There is also a lasting strain of literature with a historical setting, in which the themes are easily identified with Atwood’s thesis. In that sense, *Survival* may well have contributed to the formation of the Canadian canon, as well as now becoming a part of it. As the canon emerges, those texts which echo established beliefs about the national literature take their place in it, and *Survival* has played a part in constructing the self-image of Canadian literature. Atwood’s *Thematic Guide* has certainly influenced the way that Canadian writers describe the Canadian experience, and the way it is taught. The canon, however, with few exceptions, tends to consist mainly of novels and poetry, those forms of writing which are

considered serious and weighty. In foregrounding what might be considered Canadian about the short story, as Atwood defined ‘Canadian’, the under-representation of short fiction becomes apparent.

The ideas and themes which Atwood describes have rooted themselves in the Canadian imagination, or symbolic order, and have taken on a truth value which was indignantly rejected or discounted by many critics, both specialist literary critics and those in the popular press, at the time of its publication. This has come about because *Survival* was read by a wide public, grateful for a guide not only to their literature but also to their place in the world. As Terry Eagleton comments in *Trouble with Strangers* (2009), which uses Lacan to investigate ethical theories, ‘[t]he imaginary is a realm in which things give us back ourselves, if only we had a determinate enough self to appreciate it. It is a prelapsarian domain, in which knowledge is as swift and sure as a sensation’ (2009, 3). The ‘determinate self’ which, at the time it was written, *Survival* was intended to develop may be another reason why the immanence of the text was ‘as swift and sure as a sensation’, and lasts to this day.

‘The Afterlife of Survival’ carries the implication of something uncanny: that which is dead and at the same time, not dead. My title is predicated on the theory that the themes, schemata, identified by Atwood in 1972 have lodged in that place in the Canadian unconscious which constitutes, or attempts to constitute a Canadian identity for the subject, and are still capable of discovery in contemporary texts, albeit in altered forms. The effect of *Survival* on its readership was ‘swift and sure’, a recognition of what they had feared was true, that they were lost. This uncanny recognition, or precognition, of what is always already known, contributes to the element of uncanniness in the literature.

Freud’s *unheimlich* suggests that which is both familiar and unfamiliar, both seen and hidden, and the foregrounding of incidences of the uncanny is the central theoretical process here. The uncanny ‘is that class of the terrifying which leads us back to something long known to us, once very familiar’, Freud says (2001, 930). He summarises the conclusion of an earlier study, ‘*Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen*’ by Ernst Jentsch.

[T]he essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness [is] intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always be that in which one does not know where one is, as it were. The better orientated

in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it (931).

The resonance of this suggestion with Frye's 'Where is here?' is striking (1971, 222). The opposite of *unheimlich* is, of course, *heimlich*, or 'homely', but Freud goes on to explain how the pragmatic distinction between the two words can be blurred. In quoting an example of usage from a German dictionary, he tells us that *heimlich* can also be used when something is secretive or untrustworthy. '[It is] like a buried spring or dried-up pond. One cannot walk over it without having the feeling that water might come up there again' (2001, 932). Returning to the uncanny, Freud includes a further quotation which says it 'is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... hidden and secret and has become visible' (933). It is in these senses, of something which should be, or may have been, hidden but has become visible rather than the terrifying, that the uncanny provides a theoretical framework for this study. '[A] recurrence of the same situations, things and events', Freud argues, can 'awaken an uncanny feeling, which recalls that sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams' (2001, 941). '[T]his factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds with an uncanny atmosphere what would otherwise be innocent enough, and forces upon us something fateful and unescapable' (2001, 942) could also refer to the 'involuntary repetition' of taking Atwood's *description* for a *prescription* for Canadian literature. As she says, 'there is a distinct archaeological motif in Canadian literature – unearthing the buried and forgotten past', and her suggestion is that this comes from a desire to find 'mythic ancestral figures for the symbolic purposes of unity and identity, with the past and with the social group' (1972, 112). The unearthing of the past, as in the Munro story discussed in the following chapter, can only result from an 'intellectual uncertainty' about a situation 'in which one does not know where one is' (Freud 2001, 931). The search for 'unity and identity' in literature produced by English Canadians is likely to fail, as not only has Canada never been politically happily united as an entity, but neither has it ever been able to settle on an identity to aim for.

Thus, the situation of Canada and of its literature carries within it the immanent seeds of the uncanny. Freud comments that the return of the dead, or an uncertainty about whether an object is animate or inanimate (Freud 2001, 935),

also allows the uncanny to be felt. The reiterations of *Survival* may be uncanny, in that they are also involuntary. The literature may also contain an unconscious awareness that the source material is itself unreliable, given the reception of the text, but as Atwood herself says in hitherto unpublished manuscript material, ‘I wrote *Survival* [because] nobody else had ... [there was] no cheap, easily available book on CanLit at all’ (Atwood, n.d. unpublished manuscript, 6). As the first popular, easily accessible description of the national literature, it was hungrily consumed, and sold in large numbers, approximately 100,000 for the first edition, according to Atwood (2016, pers.comm.). There is, nevertheless, a sense of unease and uncertainty which permeates the fiction and makes Freud’s theory an obvious choice of methodological framework.

### **‘Is Canada postcolonial?’**

The position of Canada in relation to postcolonial literatures is problematic. There is an argument which suggests that Canada is a neo-colonial nation, rather than postcolonial, in the sense that it is both colonising and being colonised, as it has a place in the developed world, financially and militarily, while at the same time being increasingly influenced by the USA’s financial, cultural and political expansionism. There is also the question of whether, as a settler nation, rather than imperial, Canada’s history is more that of coloniser than of colonised. Some argue that the continuing disadvantaging of First Nations peoples, and Canada’s continuing relationship with Britain and growing military and financial links with the USA, suggest that it remains, in that sense, a colonising power rather than a postcolonial nation (see Coleman, 2007; Findlay 2007) These questions, while being subsidiary to the main thrust of the thesis, contribute to the discussion of cultural production in Canada. The position of Québec within the nation is particular, but there is not the scope to discuss Québec or Québécois literature here.

The argument around Canadian belatedness concerns the ‘anxiety of influence’ (Bloom, 1997) on a nation which is not one, once a colony of the British Empire and the French, and now under the greater North American hegemony, where the USA holds the power. As Frye puts it ‘English Canada was first a part of the wilderness, then a part of North America and the British Empire, then a part of the world’ (1995, 221). However, it is that becoming ‘part of the



world' which is still in progress. In order to define a national culture, Canada has to insist on its not-Americanness as well as its break from its British past<sup>6</sup>. This leaves Canadian culture and Canadian nationhood constantly trying to define its difference, inside borders which in other countries have been defined by revolution against former colonists. Ian Angus, among others, discusses the difficulty of understanding the legitimate, separate existence of the nation, saying 'Unlike most New World nations, English Canada has never had a revolution, which is a main reason why it has a weak national mythology' (1997, 114). 'The performance of independence comes down to a difference between being let go and having to insist on the matter' (2013, 171). That insistence, the break with the former master (it is no accident that Hegel is so often quoted in discussions of Canadian cultural and national identity), is what delivers determinacy; in Canada's case, still partially bound to Britain, and in an unequal trade and industry partnership with the USA, independence and individuation are problematic.

As a colony, Canada has always been on the periphery, dependent. 'Four relations are gathered in the border: US/Canada, self/Other, human/nature, and said/unsaid' as Angus puts it (1997, 127-8). At the same time, Canada has its own colonial record, though it is sometimes forgotten. This is what Daniel Coleman terms 'the Canadian trance' – a definition of difference which turns on the British-influenced civility of the nation, thus opposing itself to the brasher, more violent USA. However, this is a White civility, conveniently omitting the many acts of state repression of resistance by those not white enough, which have been, and are still being, perpetrated. In a long list, Coleman cites both Louis Riel's execution and the Iraq war, as well as the treatment of First Nations peoples and of immigrants (Coleman 2007, 25-43).

In his discussion of white civility and the Canadian trance Coleman also suggests that those imagining themselves British-Canadian suffer a sense of belatedness.

[T]he Canadian trance of civility ... fears itself to be belated ... [I]t makes Canadians feel belated – belated in comparison to the advanced

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<sup>6</sup> The French influence is mainly felt in Québec, and as explained, there is not the space here to examine French-Canadian literature. However, the existence of Québec adds to the sense of Canada as a less than cohesive nation state.

sophistication of the metropolitan centres of Europe and the United States, but also belated, in a different register, in relation to First Nations people, having arrived after them in the New World and lacking the authenticity of being Indigenous (2007, 35).

Belatedness arising from the self-hypnosis of the trance contributes to the insecurity about what it is which defines Canada and its culture, and to what Alan Lawson (2004) has termed the Second World, neither postcolonial nor colonial. The insecurity, or inability to move on from the attempt to define, is clearly visible in the short fiction.

### **Limitations**

Using a forty-year old 'easy-access book' (Atwood 2004, 5) as a template for a PhD thesis results in some simplifications. *Survival* itself fails to cover many areas which are of interest in the literature, and there are gaps which Atwood could not have easily filled at the time. In her review of two stories by Thomas King (first pub. 1990), she addresses the question, saying that, at the time, she 'could not find any [poetry and fiction]' (2005, 119) by Native writers in English. She questions why she overlooked Pauline Johnson, and suggests it was perhaps 'because, being half-white, she somehow didn't rate as the real thing, even among Natives' (2005, 120).

Apart from a brief mention of *The Well of Loneliness* in a section in which Atwood lists Canadian characters as found in other literature (1972, 16), there is no reference to writing from a gay or lesbian or non-binary gendered perspective. These two limitations on the original text have been followed here, as my task was to interact with *Survival*, rather than to fill in the gaps.

Limitations here which are not imposed by Atwood's text include the selection of short fiction from English-Canada only. In order to analyse French stories my command of the language would have to be a great deal stronger than long-ago A' level study permits, and reading in translation does not allow a full understanding of the subtleties. In addition, the culture and history of French-speaking Canada is quite different from that of ROC, and would entail a whole separate area of research. Another self-imposed limitation is the decision not to write specifically on 'Animal Victims' (Chapter Three of *Survival*), as the plots

Atwood addresses are ones in which the animal is central, such as the stories of Ernest Thompson Seton. (2004, 74-5), and this tends not to be the case today. Clark Blaise has written an unpublished story about a car accident with a moose calf, which he read at the 13<sup>th</sup> International Short Story Conference in Vienna in 2014 and there are animals and animal imagery in the stories discussed below, but the focus of the chapters in which they appear is different. Jarman's polar bears could be seen as the heroes of his story. They are certainly the survivors. But Moore's weasel, the 'imaginary' bear in Munro's story, and the woman who reminds Matt Cohen's protagonist of a wolf, do not take centre stage in the stories, in the way that Atwood's animals tend to. For all its brevity, *Survival* covers a large number of themes, not all of which have lasted into contemporary literature in the same way as those I have examined in the following chapters.

### **Selection of themes**

'The Afterlife of Survival' is a thematic study. The themes selected are all found in *Survival*, although there is not the space here to examine all of them. Chapter two gives an introductory overview of the themes with examples, Chapter Three focuses on Chapters Six and Seven of *Survival*<sup>7</sup>; Chapter Four on Chapter Two of *Survival*; and Chapter Five on Chapters Five and Ten.

The chapters I have been less able to build on include Chapter Four, 'First People', as Atwood discusses only 'settler' texts and the settlers' view of the Indian. I look at a story by just one First Nations writer in Chapter Four. There could have been more: 'Bertha' by Lee Maracle (1999) and 'A Short History of Indians in Canada' by Thomas King (2005), among others. However, space and the emphasis on interaction with what is actually considered in *Survival* prevented a further exploration. Chapter Eight, 'The Casual Incident of Death', is referred to rather than examined in detail; there are accidental deaths in contemporary writing, such as the death of the grandfather in Hiromi Goto's 'Camp Americana' (see Chapter Four, below), and they are covered where they occur rather than in a separate Chapter. Chapter Eleven of *Survival* discusses the literature of Québec, which would require a much greater scope to give it sufficient weight. In Chapter Twelve, 'Jail-breaks and Re-creations' Atwood

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 for the table of contents of *Survival*

begins to assess the 'new ways of writing' (1972, 238) which may be rooted in the same traditions but 'break new ground' (241). I have not included examples explicitly tied to her assessment of 'new ways of writing', as the thesis is concerned specifically with recent fiction, and thus follows the work she begins to consider in that chapter.

In Chapter One, Atwood distinguishes between 'bare' survival and 'grim' survival, 'of a crisis or disaster' (1972, 32). Her grim survival is clearly seen in the Mark Jarman story, 'My White Planet' (2008). Grim survival in the face of cultural and economic advances by the USA is also examined in later chapters. There are also contemporary texts which relate to 'bare survival', sometimes set in the historical past of explorers and settlers, but also set in modern urban locations. The struggle of the First Nations in cities is one aspect of bare survival; white 'settler' texts also feature survival in 'the face of "hostile" elements'. '[Survival] is a multi-faceted and adaptable idea', Atwood says, and in that phrase suggests the disjunction between signifier and sign. Atwood continues:

There is another use of the word as well: a survival can be a vestige of a vanished order which has managed to persist after its time is past, like a primitive reptile. This version crops up in Canadian thinking too, usually among those who believe Canada is obsolete (1972, 32)

Atwood's 'primitive reptile' emerges whenever the subject of national identity – or for that matter, *Survival* – is discussed, and identity and survival are closely linked. The desire for identity may be 'a vestige of a vanished order which has managed to persist after its time is past', but it is there; the frequent appearances of the primitive reptile in Canadian criticism up to the present day are testament to its afterlife. The vanished order, in this case, would be the colonial identity as an increasingly self-sufficient part of the British Empire, through confederation to independence while remaining a part of the Commonwealth. It was not until 1982 that the Canada Act was passed by the British Government, allowing the country to change its own constitution without the consent of the British Parliament. Canada still has a Governor-General, appointed by the British Queen as her representative in an independent realm. The effects are felt differently in Québec, and French Canada has its own distinct history and debates.

The anxiety, or *lack*, of independent identity in English-speaking Canada, both political and literary, is felt, it is real, and is as urgent today as it ever was, as I discuss below. A trivial example is the row in March 2016 over a Canadian supermarket chain's decision to stock Heinz ketchup rather than French's, which is made with Canadian tomatoes. The public outcry, in the press, social media and in items on CBC News (14/3/2016), quickly led to the reinstatement of French's ketchup. The dismay was not caused merely by a wish to defend Canadian tomato-growers, but by the replacement of a Canadian brand with one from the USA, which is always seen as a threat to Canadian national autonomy.

The persistence of the 'vanished order' is an uncanny existence, 'something long known to us, once very familiar' (Freud 2001, 930). The 'primitive reptile' is not only the survival of the individual in a hostile landscape, but the survival of Canada as an autonomous nation, as an idea and politically. Atwood says that Canada has no secure identity, no certainty about itself as a cohesive unit, that (quoting Frye) the question is not Who am I? But Where is here? 'It is what a man asks when he finds himself in unknown territory, and it implies several other questions. Where is this place in relation to other places? How do I find my way around in it?' (1972, 17). Atwood suggests that *Survival* is a guide to help readers see 'how [they] got here', which seemingly contradicts the suggestion that Canada is an unknown location. However, this kind of paradox is typical of the arguments about identity in Canada and in its literature and its criticism. It takes us back to the uncanny. Here and elsewhere, Atwood chimes with Freud, in an uncanny echo of simultaneous familiarity and strangeness. As Freud expresses it, 'an involuntary return to the same situation, but which differ[s] radically from it in other respects, also result[s] in the same feeling of helplessness and of something uncanny' (Freud 2001, 941-2). Where the primitive reptile, the vestige of the anxiety about identity, rears its head, the text enters the realm of the uncanny.

Of course, this is not to dispute Adam Carter's summary of recent debate, which views the idea of a 'national identity' as 'outmoded, a legacy of the eighteenth century and, in particular, the Romantic period, of which we have now divested ourselves' (2003, 6). In relation to Canada, Carter suggests

Canadian literary and cultural criticism over the last number of years has emphasized the view that Canadians have no single, definable national identity, except, perhaps, insofar as Canadians' peculiar awareness of multiplicity and difference might itself be said to constitute an identity in contrast to the more statically and totalizingly conceived identities of other nations (6).

Carter also quotes from W. H. New, that '[c]riticism, too, edged away from seeing literature as foremost an expression of a single national character' (Quoted in Carter 2003, 6). Suggesting that Canadians share an *ironic* sense of identity, Carter goes on 'To assert an ironic identity or the absence of identity may indeed be one very traditional way of aestheticizing a particular nation's character and of privileging this people as the more universal people and the nation of the future' (7). The implication here is connected to the difference in attitude of the First Nations in Canada, whose identity remains under threat from the 'the more universal people', who are those I am calling 'settlers'.

Canada is a more complex nation than those outside it sometimes appreciate. Officially multicultural, the nation holds within its borders three aboriginal groups who have some form of self-governance: the First Nations, the Métis, and the Inuit. All other Canadian nationals are immigrants, and a mere handful of 'settler' Canadians can trace their family roots in Canada back more than two hundred years. At Confederation, in 1867, there were approximately three and a half million people listed in the census, and today there are thirty-six million, of whom almost one and a half million are Aboriginal Peoples (*Statistics Canada* Accessed 16.1.16). According to *Statistics Canada*, in 2011, 60% of Canadians were born in Canada to parents who were born in Canada. There seem to be no statistics for fourth, fifth or further generations.

The contention in this thesis is not that it might be possible to identify a single national character, but that the literature is contextualised against an uneasiness, a discomfort, with the lack of one, and that it repeatedly examines the issue, as proposed by *Survival*. As Joel Baetz puts it: 'Absence, innocence, silence, emptiness, negation, deficiency, belatedness, and blankness have all been popular tropes when it comes to discussions of Canada's national identity' (Baetz, 2004, 64).

Although Atwood was writing at a time when the free trade agreements with the USA were fiercely opposed by liberal, academic, and cultural Canadians

as a threat to Canada's viability as a nation, both financially and culturally, the threat has not gone away. Notwithstanding President Obama's 2015 cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline, which posed a threat to First Nations lands, to wildlife, and to ecological well-being, Canada still fears the power of its Southern neighbour to obliterate its selfhood, if not literally and materially, then by stealthy cultural appropriation and eventual absorption.

The thesis does not slavishly follow Atwood's text, which could result in a cataloguing of recurrent themes. Rather, it attempts to unearth and then extend her ideas. It is relatively easy to trace the continuing life of, for example, 'Settlers and Explorers' (*Survival*, Chapter Five) in contemporary Canadian short fiction. Here, I have taken the liberty of extending Atwood's literal Settlers and Explorers into the metaphorical realm, and in stories set in post-settlement Canada I have used the terms to describe two types of male characters, those who attempt to impose their will on the landscape and their surroundings, and those who seem unaware of, or confused by, the world in which they have arrived. Atwood describes two main types of female characters, the old hag and the ice maiden, and in stereotyping the male characters I have attempted to level the ground.

Atwood comments 'There is a sense in Canadian literature that the true and only season here is winter: the others are either preludes to it or mirages concealing it' (1972, 49). To take an obvious example from the Canadian canon, the winter elements play their part in plot and setting in stories as varied as Alice Munro's 'A Wilderness Station' (1992) and 'The Painted Door' by Sinclair Ross (1968). It is a meteorological fact that most of Canada gets several feet of snow every year, so it might be unsurprising that snow and ice feature in the literature. However, the quotation from *Survival* also hints at more than a simple record of the weather. Canadian texts 'sense' that winter is the only true season, that spring and summer are 'mirages concealing it' and the fall a harbinger, or prelude. The winter is seen not only as 'the true' season, but that even when unseen, it is present, concealed or waiting to reveal itself. Winter is both sensed and experienced, both familiar and supernaturally expected, temporarily just out of sight. It becomes the basis for identification with national and personal identity, so that, for example, the stories of Lisa Moore use ice as a figure connecting sexuality with identity, even when the setting is summer in Newfoundland, which is not considered part of the North in Canada.

Thus the winter, or to use Daniel Chartier's term, winterity (*hivernité*), becomes a part of the Symbolic Order. The search for identity, particularly desperate in Canada's case, for reasons which will be explained in later chapters, seizes on the symbolic chain, which includes the *idea* of winter as being the one true season. Winterity and nordicity (*nordicité*)<sup>8</sup>, overlapping but not identical, both form part of the chain of signification, and are absorbed into the unconscious. The North includes not only the locations which are generally thought of as Northern, such as Finland, Iceland and those parts of Russia and Canada which lie above the Arctic Circle, but the imaginary North, seen in the self-identification of Québécois literature with the North. The idea of Northernness is what Chartier refers to as nordicity, taking the term from the work of Québécois geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin. Winterity, on the other hand, is that recognition of cold, ice, snow and frost as not merely elements of winter, but of the *northern* winter, so that, for example, Toronto, hot during the summer, and in the south of Canada, on the same latitude as northern Spain, becomes a northern city in winter. Snow and ice become the signifier of winterity and nordicity, which is where the two concepts overlap; but North is white (colourless), abstract, empty. This raises the problem of how one is to identify oneself against an absent Other.

My argument is new, although the themes addressed, and the text of *Survival* itself, tend to be regarded with bored scepticism by Canadian literary and cultural critics. For example, Neil Besner questions the contemporary relevance of discussions of Canadian identity:

They are the kind of questions that produced, or so we understand it in our current narrative, the thematic criticism we say we have moved on so far beyond, including the reflections of Frye and, on this account, under his tutelage, many other small-Frye. This is the kind of thinking that opened out towards the cultural moment that produced the deadpan, bestselling critical comedy *Survival* twenty-nine years ago, and that now has produced, in its turn, our utter rejection of *Survival* (Besner in Moss 2003, 41-2).

However, the subject is still open to question, and the following is an attempt to push through the older arguments, and focus on the present; to misquote Frye 'Where is here, *now*?' Thus, the thesis will open up many topics disregarded by

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<sup>8</sup> These terms, borrowed by Chartier from Hamelin, are further explained in Chapter 4



or unavailable to Atwood in 1972, and raise important questions about Canadian nationalism and the place of Canadian literature in Western cultural space.

If there were any doubt that the question of identity is still very much in the Canadian mind, there was an exchange between Justin Trudeau, who had recently been elected Prime Minister of Canada and a BBC interviewer in November 2015. Evan Davis asked ‘When you look at Canada today, it’s interesting because you’re *not* the United States, clearly *different* to the United States and a whole lot of respect, right? Do you feel Canada’s closer to the UK? Or to the United States?’ (BBC *Newsnight* 25/11/15. Transcribed by the author). The discussion had been about the problems in Syria and the terrorist attacks in Paris, and whether Canada would be likely to ally itself with either its historical partner or the superpower across its Southern border in its response. There were many ways Trudeau could have responded. What he said was revealing.

I think the time of Canadians worried that there is no Canadian identity has passed. I mean we have succeeded in creating a (*sic*) extraordinary country based on shared values and approach, and an optimism about the world that quite frankly leaves us a little less um ...[a long pause] ... needy in terms of external recognition or external definition.

*Davis*: That’s interesting. I mean, obviously you’re not going to join the United States and become the next half dozen states of the US.

*Trudeau*: No, but if they ever wanted to join us as provinces, we could probably talk about that.

It might be asserted that the Prime Minister is dismissing the identity question, which was not actually the question Davis was asking, but Trudeau remains aware that the issue is still of interest, and assumes that Davis is looking for a comment on it. Even the joke with which the interview concludes is acknowledging the unequal relationship between Canada and the USA.

I justify the thematic approach by reference to an article by Terry Goldie, ‘Signs of the Themes: The value of a politically grounded semiotics’ (in Moss 1987, 85-93). Goldie reports that he ‘like so many of us, had spent years battling thematic criticism ... which so clearly wanted killing’ (86). On the other hand, he decides that ‘[it] was something vital in the literal sense, something which strikes where we live’ (86). After quoting from Dennis Lee’s 1977 book-length essay, *Savage Fields*, where Lee refers to ‘the conflict between nature and civilization in contemporary fiction: “it was no longer merely a ‘theme’; the books seemed to

treat it as the context of everything that occurred” (86), Goldie ponders the extension of thematic criticism to include ‘an immediate concern for meaning but as the context of “everything that occurred” (86). ‘We tend to separate themes from form, and to dismiss as “merely thematic” those analyses which present an immediate concern for meaning’ (86). ‘This ... impulse’, Goldie concludes, ‘to seek meaning beyond what are usually considered to be themes, is a very valuable one’ (87). Alan Lawson says that in Canada thematic criticism ‘contributed a sense of cultural wholeness, a unity, and, in the battles for institutional recognition, a curricular coherence’ (2004, 161). ‘The Afterlife of Survival’ takes thematic criticism beyond merely listing incidences of the themes from *Survival*, and beyond the assumption that the dominant culture in a settler nation is a singular one, and considers how these themes have survived in contemporary literature, and what their continued existence might say about the condition of Canada as a nation and of Canadian literature in the twenty-first century.

In addition, there are other critical approaches which contribute to the analysis of the texts. Canada is often said to be ‘haunted by ghosts’, although ‘It’s only by our *lack* of ghosts we’re haunted’ is the often referenced quotation from Earle Birney (“CanLit”, 2014. Emphasis in original), which might seem to suggest the opposite; either assertion clearly asks for juxtaposition with Freud’s theories of the uncanny. In addition, studies by W. H. New, Sherrill Grace, and others have contemplated the self-identification of Canadians with the space(s) in which they are located. These spaces are, for most writers and readers, historical, imaginary spaces, in the sense that ideas of the wilderness and of the North still haunt the Canadian imagination, while the overwhelming majority of Canadians now live in cities and towns along a Southern band close to the border with the USA. Many have never been ‘north’; as Atwood says, quoting Stephen Leacock, ‘I never have gone to James Bay; I never go to it; I never shall. But somehow, I’d feel lonely without it’ Quoted by Chartier, 2006, 34). ‘North’ can be either a geographical term, indicating the North-West Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon, or alternatively, above the Arctic Circle, or even anywhere more than one hundred miles north of the Canada-US border. Both ‘North’ and ‘wilderness’ carry imaginary force, and city life in Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver is lived against the idea that ‘out-there’, as with the winter, is only ever just not quite visible, yet. This elemental haunting also contributes to the sense of the uncanny.

Many critics, including Frye (1971), Angus (1997, 2013), Godard (2008), Miki (2000) and others have discussed Harold Bloom's idea of 'belatedness' in relation to Canadian anxieties about their literature, and it may be that the survival of *Survival* is a form of (post)colonial angst. Bloom's 'anxiety of influence' (1997) connects the Freudian uncanny with the anxieties of belatedness, when he uses *Apophrades*, the return of the dead, to discuss the presence of precursors' influence in later work. '[T]he uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself has written the precursor's characteristic work' (1997, 16). Thus, the stories examined here are conscious of the precursor, and 'held open' (1997, 16) to *Survival*, so that while the anxiety may be repressed, the uncanny effect is to demonstrate the inescapability of Atwood's work.

Also repressed but inescapable is the repeated returning to the source, to the beginnings of the nation. The preoccupation with national identity finds expression in what Linda Hutcheon terms 'historiographic metafiction'. As Hutcheon says:

... this kind of metafiction represents something beyond a post-colonial Canadian need to reclaim the past ... Instead, postmodern novels appear to signal another need: the need to investigate the ontological nature as well as the function both of their literary products and the process that created them (2012, 73).

Hutcheon is not here denying the 'need to reclaim the past', but in her suggestion that the investigation is also of the ontology, the actuality of the meaning and form of the texts, and the process of their production, she further suggests the questioning approach to actuality which is a part of the Canadian writer's search for a firm and constant identity as Canadian subject. The examples here are taken from 'A Wilderness Station' by Alice Munro and stories by Mark Anthony Jarman discussed in Chapter Two.

More surprising, perhaps, is my examination of what Bakhtin termed the 'grotesque body'. However, when taken together with the preoccupation with man's battle against the wilderness, and the more spiritual battle for survival which frequently ends in death in the North, the degeneration and reduction of the body to its most basic state is not so surprising after all. In Diane Schoemperlen's story 'On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men' (2001), the stripping of the

male body to the bare bones, seen most clearly in the ‘found’ illustrations, is not only grotesque but uncanny, *unheimlich*.

The examination of gender relations in examples of short fiction calls on Atwood’s suggestion that earlier European male arrivals (eighteenth to early twentieth century) were either settlers or explorers; by extending her categorisation into the metaphorical realm, it is possible to arrive at some conclusions about Canadian masculinity, especially as represented by female authors. Both settlers and explorers are prone to accidental early death, although explorers sometimes escape by refusing to engage in the world of the text. Settlers are antagonists in their relations with the world around them; explorers accept without comprehension the lives which they find themselves leading. Atwood also divides the female presence in Canadian literature into two main types, the Ice Maiden, and Hecate, the sinister hag. My analysis of contemporary texts finds that these types survive in writing by male authors, an example being the Ice Maiden in ‘My White Planet’, but seldom in the stories by women. The reason for these apparent survivals and disappearances is likely to be both the rise in feminism since the 1970s, and, in *Survival*, the lack of writing by women in the texts that Atwood examines.

### **Selection of authors**

As the purpose of the thesis is to analyse the instances of Atwood’s themes persisting in contemporary literary texts, inevitably some important writing is under-represented. For example, there is not enough opportunity within this framework for discussing in detail the ever-growing body of work by First Nations writers, whose viewpoint on the Canadian project is necessarily quite different from that of European settler Canadians, and from the experiences of more recent immigrant writers. Where possible, their work is included, and it is certainly not the intention to privilege the writing of European Canadians. Atwood’s chapter on the First Nations ‘First People: Indians and Eskimos as Symbols’ addresses the way indigenous people have been seen and metaphorically represented by white writers, and lists only five texts by First Nations writers themselves in the bibliography at the end. She comments ‘All the books in this chapter are by white people. What the Indians themselves think is another story, and one that is just beginning to be written’ (1972, 106). In ‘What

did we think we were doing?’, a radio interview with Paul Kennedy (2016), she explains further.

There was something missing in the CanLit landscape of that time [the 1960s] ... In fact I devoted a whole second chapter to it, because at the time I was writing *Survival*, although Canadian Literature had started out with people writing about First Nations themes, and with First Nations authors – *Wacousta*, indeed, Pauline Johnson, and writing about – there’s Mair’s long narrative poem, *Tecumseh* from the nineteenth century – people had been doing that but they weren’t doing it any more, at that time, and there were no First Nations authors of poems, plays, or novels. That hadn’t happened yet. I predicted in *Survival* that it would, and now it has, and one of the first things to happen was that people ... turned back to those parts of history ... and we now have an idea as to why there were no people writing in that period, and it has a lot to do with the Residential School system and the attempt to deculturate the First Nations and Inuit people. But now we are living in an age when those people have really blossomed – and I’m thinking of people like Tomson Highway, Joseph Boyden, and a whole bunch of others (2016).

In Chapter Four, ‘Wilderness Haunting’, I have been able to turn Atwood’s description of the wilderness as experienced by white writers inside out, as it were, and include study of the city as wilderness, as experienced and explored by a First Nations writer mentioned by Atwood, Joseph Boyden.

For reasons of space and practicality, I have also omitted Québécois stories. *Survival* includes ‘Québec: Burning Mansions’ as Chapter Eleven, and Atwood finds some similarities in theme between English and French Canadian writing. However, I have used the theoretical work of Daniel Chartier, in the section on northern imagery, and applied what he says about Québec to literature from other provinces.

Neither is there room here to describe in detail what a short story *is*. The texts analysed in the following chapters are literary fiction, published under the heading of ‘short fiction’, and do not include prose poems, or examples of non-fictional short pieces, orature, or any of the short prose writings sometimes included in short story anthologies, although an early version of Atwood’s ‘Liking Men’ has been described by her as a prose poem (1982, 373). There is some discussion of form in Chapter Five in addressing Diane Schoemperlen’s ‘On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men’ (2001), which begins to approach the question of what constitutes a story.

The authors whose work is examined below were chosen for several reasons. In the case of Mark Anthony Jarman and Alice Munro, it was the similarities in theme between the two very different stories which was striking; in fact, it was the comparison of these two stories – one, a postmodern, playful use of Canadian themes, and the other a metafictional historiography – which first sparked the idea for the rest of the exploration. There are no other stories by Munro included here, as she is the one Canadian short fiction writer who most people have heard of, and her work is constantly analysed by students and critics. The stories of Alistair MacLeod are known to short fiction readers and writers in Canada, but little known outside; his writing is lyrical, and carries the rhythms and biblical references of the earlier Scottish settlers. It was form and structure which often dictated which stories and which writer would make an interesting subject for analysis.

For example, Diane Schoemperlen's work pushes the boundaries of what narrative can do, how we read prose as fiction when there is no obvious 'story' in it, how we, as readers, construct stories out of sometimes apparently unconnected clues. On the other hand, Lisa Moore's writing is more conventional narrative, but rich in imagery, and the schema revealed in the image patterns which can be traced through her work are revealing, in the way she uses Atwood's themes in exploring modern, urban, life and relationships. D.W. Wilson is a young writer, who studied at UEA, and still lives in England, but whose tough, Western Canadian men and women, are dealing with wilderness, both literal and figurative, in lives which are tied to the geography of British Columbia.

Leon Rooke is a well-known novelist in Canada (as Mordecai Richler is supposed to have said 'world-famous in Canada'), but less well-known for his short fiction, which breaks boundaries, in its approach to form and story-structure, with elements of magic realism, of the surreal, and of grotesquerie. His stories require an attentive reader, one ready both to laugh and to decipher, and they repay the close attention needed to completely understand them.

Students of the short form commonly look not for simple realism, but for experiment, for lyrical prose-poems, for prose which breaks the conventions found in most novels. The form itself allows for linguistic and structural experiments in a way that longer prose does not. The length of the novel requires the reader to be invited to take a journey with rest stops; the short story can pull

the reader down the rabbit hole, and release her only at the point at which she might otherwise wish to escape by closing the book. The stories analysed here all present challenges to the reader, in their form, in their structure, in imagery, in the way that they bend the rules of the narrative line, the rejection of simple mimesis.

### **Forefathers (*sic*)**

*Survival* was not the first or the only guide to Canadian literature to appear on the heels of the upsurge in nationalism. There were three major thematic guides published during the 1970s, and one minor one, in a flurry of national and literary self-examination, all of them inspired to some extent by Northrop Frye's 'Conclusion' to the *Literary History of Canada* (1965).

The first of the four was D. G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock: Images in Canadian Literature* (1970). In 1972, The House of Anansi Press published Margaret Atwood's *Survival*; in 1973, *Survey: A Short History of Canadian Literature* by Elizabeth Waterston appeared, more an annotated bibliography than criticism; and *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction* by John Moss was published in 1974. This last is an early reaction against Frye rather than favourable, whereas Jones, Atwood and Waterston acknowledge the debt to Frye's work. For evidence, in Part One, 'The Mentality of Exile', Moss writes of Frye's 'garrison mentality':

When Northrop Frye and others who have commandeered his facile epithet – I am thinking in particular of D G Jones in *Butterfly on Rock* – when such critics refer to the "garrison mentality" that permeates the Canadian experience, their observation is accurate, in my opinion, but incomplete as a basis for literary analysis (15).

He also has a dig at Atwood, in Part Three 'Irony and the Individual Consciousness':

Literary analyses according to the dictates of rigid systems tend to omit much and to distort what they do reveal. The victim-survival concept *imposed* on our literature by Margaret Atwood, in *Survival*, is an exciting vehicle for authorial insights, for example, but excludes a great deal of material to which it does not apply (198 my emphasis).

Moss's suggestion that Atwood imposed her vision in *Survival* on the literature ironically supports my thesis, if we accept that that imposition was successful.

Some reviewers refer to Atwood's close following of Northrop Frye, her mentor at the University of Toronto, in particular, Frye's conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada* and his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). For example, Malcolm Ross, in *The Dalhousie Review* (1973).

*Survival* has penetrating things to say about writers who are susceptible to Miss Atwood's approach. But I fear that Miss Atwood has taken Northrop Frye's suggestive but elusive notion of 'the garrison mentality', expanded it, and bent it into a stiff, metallic, cup-shaped and capricious formula which is then clamped down hard on the wriggling body of Canadian writing (160).

Also occasionally mentioned are the similarities with *Butterfly on Rock* (pub. 1970) by D. G. Jones. Shortly after the publication of *Survival* John Moss published *Patterns of Isolation* (1974). All three of these texts concern themselves with what is 'Canadian' about Canadian literature, the Canadian identity and 'where is here?'

*The Bush Garden: essays on the Canadian imagination*, was first published in 1971. It includes not only 'Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*' and essays on poetry, but essays on painting. Frye was known not only in Canada but, unusually for a Canadian,<sup>9</sup> across the Western world for his work on myth and the literary imagination. His book, *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), a study of William Blake, won him international recognition. The prestige of Frye's thinking nevertheless reinforced a significant mythic trend in Canadian poetry in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the work of such former students as Jay Macpherson, James Reaney and Margaret Atwood (Ayre, 2014). As Atwood was to be, Frye was criticised for his thematic approach to the study of literature, and literary forms. His influence on his pupil (Atwood studied under him at Victoria College, University of Toronto, in the late 1950s) is clear, and readily acknowledged by Atwood.

In 'Conclusion to a *History of Canadian Literature*', Frye expounds on his theory that the Canadian imagination is founded in a 'garrison mentality'. This theme is what the 'Conclusion' is most known for. However, a reading of

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<sup>9</sup>A well-known Canadian joke goes 'Boy meets girl in New York, you've got a story. Boy meets girl in Winnipeg and who cares?' (anon.)



the essay reveals a voice which is witty and ironic, often at the expense of Canadian literature, and which is echoed in Atwood's style in *Survival*. For example, 'the literary, in Canada, is often only an incidental quality of writings which, like those of many of the early explorers, are as innocent of literary intention as the mating loon' (Frye 1971, 216).

This humorous comment could easily have been written by Atwood herself. Again: 'We have included the writings ... even of emigrants whose most articulate literary emotion was their thankfulness at getting the hell out of Canada' (Frye 1971, 216). However, unlike his disciple's text, the 'Conclusion' is not criticised for its occasional informality.

Themes which Atwood appears to borrow from Frye, and sometimes reformulate, include the geographical nature of Canadian society: the 'wilderness', in which small isolated communities are cut off from one another and confronted on all sides by incomprehensible space. Frye talks about this as constituting 'a part and condition of one's whole imaginative being' (222). Atwood picks up from Frye's comment that Canadian poetry often has 'a tone of deep terror in regard to nature' (227), and writes a chapter on 'Nature the Monster'. Frye discusses 'the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it' (226): this phrase is quoted by Atwood (1972, 60). Atwood accuses settlers of drawing straight lines across the landscape: 'So the Canadian pioneer is a square man in a round whole; he faces the problem of trying to fit a straight line into a curved space' (120). 'The imposition of the straight line on the curve' (122).

Atwood also refers to the garrison: 'The basic Canadian town is laid out like a checkerboard, perhaps on the model of the garrisons from which such towns often sprang' (120). In fact, most of Atwood's themes are present in Frye; his influence is everywhere in her text. It could almost be said that large parts of *Survival* are a popularised version of the 'Conclusion'. There is little point in listing them all here, but while Atwood's text shows Frye's influence, it was *Survival* which brought the idea of a Canadian literature to a wider readership. Atwood quotes directly, or references, *The Bush Garden* six times, overtly. For example, in 'First People', her chapter on 'Indians and Eskimos as symbols', Atwood quotes *The Bush Garden* in suggesting that 'the Indians represent humanity in the state of Nature and are agents of its unconscious barbarity' (Frye, quoted by Atwood, 1972, 93). Those critics (Ross, 1973; Mathews, 1973; Anon,

*Open Letter* 1973, for example) who complained of an over-reliance on Frye made a valid point. The fact that many critics, particularly those in the public press, did *not* mention Frye perhaps bears out my point that *Survival* was read by the general public and *The Bush Garden* only by academics.

D. G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (pub. 1970) also preceded *Survival* and takes Frye's 'garrison mentality' as its starting point. Jones is a lyric poet, and his book of criticism focuses mainly on Canadian poetry, although he also includes some novels. Many of the texts and almost all the writers he discusses are those also discussed by Atwood, suggesting that these were considered canonical at the time. Atwood quotes from one of his poems in *Survival* but does not mention *Butterfly on Rock*. Jones discusses the absent Canadian identity at some length in Chapter One:

Many voices now agree that our chimneys are haunted. Mr Brian Stock, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1964), argues that he cannot be accused of betraying Canada by leaving it; on the contrary, Canada has betrayed him by failing to provide him with a sense of identity, a sense of *patria* (1979, 13).

Rather than use both Frye and Atwood's 'parent' texts in the examination of contemporary short fiction, this thesis will take *Survival* as a summary text, and as the most contentious of them all.

### ***Survival*, its intention and reception, and Canadian canonicity.**

The reason for discussing *Survival*'s canonicity is that while the text was accused of being inaccurate, biased, and outdated in its methodology, it nevertheless has not only lasted, but has been widely influential on the way Canadian literature and the national character have been thought about since.

One of the drivers behind the production of *Survival* was the nationalist mood in Canada in the mid 1960s and early 1970s. It seemed that it was more vital than ever before that a coherent identity for Canada be assumed. The formation of a national canon is partly predicated on the identification of those texts which say something about the national character, national history, and an idea of a commonly shared culture. As Robert Lecker suggests 'Literature

becomes a means through which Canadians can know themselves and verify their national consciousness. The value of Canadian literature is that it reflects the value of the nation' (1990, 662).

*Survival: a thematic guide to Canadian literature* was published by House of Anansi Press in Toronto in 1972, reissued in 1996 and 2004 by McClelland and Stewart, and by House of Anansi again in 2012<sup>10</sup>, and there have been other reprints, both by Anansi and print-on-demand. In spite of the mixed reception, *Survival* has sold many thousands of copies, and became a key text in the study of Canadian literature. Exact sales figures have proved impossible to obtain, but Atwood says that 'in its first incarnation (the black cover with the red square) it sold @ 100,000 copies, in multiple printings. Anansi paid their bills with it for years' (14/04/16 email pers.comm). For Canada in the nineteen-seventies, this is an astonishing figure.

In 1972, Margaret Atwood was on the board of publishers at House of Anansi in Toronto, and like small presses everywhere they needed money. They had recently had a bestseller with a book on how to avoid VD, and Atwood suggested that 'a VD book' on Canadian literature might be a way forward (Atwood 2004, 6). She reports that the board felt 'there would be no harm in our trying, though CanLit might not exert the fascination of – say – a venereal wart' (2004, 7). The book sold well, but received mixed reviews. In general, the public press and media reactions were favourable, if bemused by the idea that they were all victims.

Some Canadian literature was already taught in Canadian schools and universities in 1972, but was overshadowed by literatures from Britain and the United States. One of Atwood's intentions in writing the *Thematic Guide* was to respond to being asked whether CanLit really existed (2004, 5).

The two questions I was asked most frequently by audience members were, "Is there any Canadian literature?" and, "Supposing there is, isn't it just a second-rate copy of *real* literature, which comes from England and the United States?" ... [it was] part of a tendency to believe that the Great Good Place was, culturally speaking, elsewhere (2004, 5 emphasis in original).

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<sup>10</sup> McClelland and Stewart, for many years the biggest and most influential Canadian publishing company, were taken over by Random House Canada (an offshoot of the US firm) in 2012. The rights to *Survival*, which had been sold to MandS in 1993, reverted to House of Anansi. Sales from the reissue again helped save the financial viability of Anansi.

So a part of Atwood's purpose was to counter the cultural hegemony of colonial and neo-colonial forces in Canadian life, and while debates about Canadian nationalism and fears about the encroachment of the USA, financially and culturally, were in the news, the timing was good. *Survival* became part of the curriculum, an ideological guide to the study of CanLit, in spite of being criticised almost unanimously by the academic press for focussing on Anansi authors, and for being insufficiently academically rigorous.

In the Preface to the original edition Atwood lists five things the book is *not*. They include an exhaustive or all-inclusive treatise on Canadian literature. She points out that there are several listed after the Preface. She has not tried to give 'a balanced overview of what's been written in Canada'; she goes on to say that she is a writer rather than an academic or an expert – though as she was educated at the University of Toronto and at Harvard, and had been teaching at York University, Toronto, her lay status is debatable. She also says that it is not evaluative. It is not particularly original. 'My book stands in relation to [scholarly articles in journals] as a vitamin pill to a gourmet meal: it has the virtue of being cheaper to acquire and faster to swallow, but it misses out on a lot of overtones and refinements' (1972, 12-13). 'It bypasses, too,' she continues, 'many ripe nits that could well be picked; but I leave the plucking of these to others who perhaps find such pursuits more enjoyable' (13).

She was probably unwise in implying distaste for academic research. Certainly the backlash was savage. In fact, in the 'Tributes' after the title page of the original edition, she concludes 'the sloppy generalizations are my own' (1972: 6) and much of the academic criticism suggested that 'sloppy generalization' was one of the book's main faults.

She was no more reverent towards the institution of the academy in the Introduction to the 2004 edition, published by McClelland and Stewart.

The few dedicated academic souls who had cultivated this neglected pumpkin patch over the meagre years were affronted because a mere chit of a girl had appropriated a pumpkin they regarded as theirs (2004, 4).

‘Some critics who couldn't read very well – a widespread occupational hazard, it seems – thought I was somehow *advocating* this state of affairs’, Atwood says (2004, 9 emphasis in original).

The academic journals were less kind than the public press. In spite of Atwood’s disclaimer that *Survival* was not intended to be an academic text book, that it was merely a ‘short, easy-to-use guide to Canadian literature, largely for the benefit of students and of those teachers in high schools, community colleges and universities who suddenly find themselves teaching a subject they have never studied: “Can-Lit”’ (1972, 11), academic reviewers complained on several grounds.

Firstly, they did not like the informal style, and occasional authorial intrusion. Atwood’s voice breaks into the text several times, with wry comments, and it is partly this which makes the book saleable outside the academy, and contributed to its wide readership. For example, when discussing ‘magic babies’ (207), Atwood comments ‘The baby which terminates Sinclair Ross’s *As for Me and my House*, for instance (if they think *that’s* going to save their marriage they’re crazy)’ (207).

Secondly, the comparatively large percentage of books published by Anansi and discussed by Atwood led to accusations of partiality and bias. Two of the novels are those by Atwood’s partner, Graeme Gibson, and this also caused some complaints. Atwood was on the board of Anansi and the book was written as a means of boosting the coffers of the small independent company, with the intention that it should be read by the general public. However, given the size of the company, the fact that only the biggest Canadian publisher, McClelland and Stewart, has more credits is suggestive. Obviously, there is less of a problem with copyright permissions, but the critics had a point.

Thirdly, it was said that Atwood had only chosen those texts which supported her thesis. This is true, but is common practice among academics. If the texts exist, the thesis can be supported; the writer is not duty bound to demolish her own argument by looking at contrary examples. However, *Survival* does make some assumptions about the Canadian psyche and the Canadian national identity on some flimsy evidence. The more specialist literary and academic critics, like Robert Fulford (1972), Frank Davey (1973), Don Gutteridge (1973), and Gary Geddes (1973), also complained that many of the most respected

writers, such as Stephen Leacock, Robertson Davies, Earle Birney, Mordecai Richler, and Morley Callaghan, were not included in the discussion. In fact, the latter three authors do appear in the text, as they do in Frye's 'Conclusion', perhaps bearing out Atwood's comment that 'critics ... couldn't read very well' (2004, 9). It can be seen that academic criticism was not always fair, and when fair, missed the point of the book, as described in the Preface. In spite of the distaste with which it was greeted in academic circles, *Survival* was too useful to ignore, and became a key text on most university reading lists. Her thesis itself upset many Canadians, academics and public alike. Many protested that they did not see themselves as having a victim mentality, or as being 'born losers' (1972, 34). Nevertheless, in 2006, M. G. Vassanji wrote:

Canadian literature ... would be characterized in this traditional picture by something essentially Canadian; it would explore, address the core of what Canada is and means; you might think of the theme of survival; you might think of nature – the cold, the wilderness, the prairie, the mountains, the Atlantic; of a certain, privileged kind of colonial experience. We all know the Prairie-grandmother novel; the growing-up-in-Newfoundland-or-Nova Scotia, walking-along-the-beach-with-an-ancestor novel; the World War I novel; the cool-thirtysomething-or-fortysomething Vancouverite novel. (2006, 8)

The point he makes in the article is broadly, that as long as CanLit is defined like this, a writer from a different cultural background may struggle to be accepted as 'Canadian' – but the point still holds. Vassanji *is* Canadian, and this is how he sees CanLit defined.

The reception of the first issue in 1972 was heavily permeated by gender bias, not unusual for the period, as well as a suspicion that a mere writer should not be discussing 'literature'. Examples from reviews of the first edition include John Ayre's comments, 'the poet and novelist Margaret Atwood, silent and radiantly poised in a long evening gown ... throwing back her long ringlet-like hair' (1972, 23-24). An anonymous column in the *Leader-Post* in Regina, Saskatchewan called her 'the 33-year old brunette', and Paul Varnai called her 'Margaret Atwood, the well-known and popular poetess...' (n.d. *Canadian Literature* 1). These remarks on her appearance seem remarkable today, given Atwood's reputation for the acerbic rebuttal.

Nevertheless, *Survival* was written for a purpose. In 1994, an article by Steven Totosy de Zepetnek quotes the observation by Chuck Cook, the Member of Parliament for North Vancouver, who reportedly said of Canadians that a) they do not read, and b) they do not read Canadian authors. ‘The MP maintained that he reads about three books per week, but "not too much Canadian stuff...because it's just not good enough"’. In *Open Letter*, the accusation was that ‘[T]he approach leads her to seek “Canadianism” within literary themes – which is the central and discrediting error of the book’ (unnamed author, 1973).

Yet this ‘Canadianism’ is precisely how the texts on the reading lists of universities, where these academics teach, are prescribed. Maybe *Survival* is to blame? Course descriptions most frequently stress investigations around national identity, and what it means to be Canadian. For example, from one course description: ‘What is Canada? Who is a Canadian? And what do we imagine when we speak about a “Canadian” identity?’ (Simon Fraser University, 2015). However, academic ‘Canadianism’ is more likely to date back to Frye, whose demand for a specifically Canadian criticism for an emerging Canadian literature which had ‘produced no author who is a classic in the sense of possessing a vision greater in kind than that of his best readers’ (Frye 1971, 215-6) provoked a debate. Some scholars argued that Canadian literature should be judged alongside other literatures, by the same standards. There were also apologists such as George Woodcock, in his historical survey ‘Possessing the Land’ (1977, 69-96) who explains that ‘at certain stages in literatures, when they emerge from a kind of colonialism to take on their own identity, an emphasis on content rather than on form may be necessary and is to be encouraged’ (83-4). Brian Parker, in ‘Is there a Canadian Drama?’ (1977, 152-187) gently defends Canadian writing by suggesting that ‘its focus is neither local nor universal, but somewhere in between’ (161).

However, more Canadians, both academic and public alike, accepted Frye’s insistence that Canadian literature was not good enough to be judged on the world stage. For example, E. K. Brown, deploring the fact that so many Canadian authors either emigrate or set their work in cities or countryside which could be in America or in Britain, says that ‘the author who was satisfied to truckle to mediocre taste, living in Canada and writing about Canadian subjects, was perfectly compatible with making a living by one’s pen’ (1971, 30). He goes

on 'Canadian books may occasionally have had a mild impact outside Canada; Canadian literature has had none' (31). Brown explains the economics of book sales to a small and scattered Canadian population; this is a difficult situation which has become worse since NAFTA. However, Atwood was more interested in provoking the Canadian public to appreciate its national literature, than arguing about its relative merits. What she says in the introductory chapter of the original edition is 'In Canada there are many authors and many books, but few obvious classics' (1972, 11). The book is intended as an alternative to scholarly journals, 'cheaper to acquire and faster to swallow' (12-13). It attempts 'to help you distinguish this species from all others, Canadian literature from the other literatures with which it is often compared or confused' (13). Her stance is clearly a nationalist one, but she does not engage in argument about whether Canadian literature is better than that of other nations, merely stating that it exists and has 'key patterns' (13) which identify it as Canadian.

It is clear that to be canonical in Canada is to be judged by Canadian criteria. With inclusion comes alteration, both of the international canon itself, and of the literature making up the canon. In 'Surviving the Paraphrase' (1976), in which he complains about the focus on thematic criticism, Frank Davey says 'the anti-evaluative thematic criticism of Frye, Jones, Atwood, and Moss looks away toward alleged cultural influences and determiners' (5).

[Canadian criticism] has seldom had enough confidence in the work of Canadian writers to do what the criticism of other national literatures has done: explain and illuminate the work on its own terms, without recourse to any cultural rationalizations or apologies (1976, 5).

Davey recorded his dissatisfaction with *Survival* in 'Atwood walking backwards' (1973); the implication of his criticism is that studying national themes precludes the literature from taking its place in the wider world, and that Frye and Atwood are to blame. In response to these views, Atwood herself notes that 'to say Canadian Literature is not to exclude. It is to stand at a certain distance. A microbiologist does not deny a zoologist who does population studies' (Atwood, n.d. unpublished manuscript, 20).

Robert Lecker, in 'The Canonization of Canadian Literature: an inquiry into value' (1990), is not alone in implying that the thematic criticism of Atwood,



Moss, D.G. Jones and before them, Frye, is related to the formation of the canon in Canada, which he describes as consisting of those works (he mentions only novels and poetry) which are realist and mimetic: 'a conservative, historically oriented model aligned with nationalism and mimesis' (666). He alleges that the same male critics who were lambasting *Survival* were in charge of constructing, and restricting, the canon. By his own definition, *Survival*, conservative, historical and nationalistic, has now taken its place alongside Frye.

### **The thesis**

The analysis of the short fiction is contextualised against the national cultural and historical background. It is divided into four chapters, plus the introduction and conclusion. The first, 'This White Planet: Rewriting Canada', sets out the beginnings of the argument, by analysing a 'A Wilderness Station' by Alice Munro (1995) alongside 'My White Planet' by Mark Anthony Jarman (2008) and examining the overarching themes of survival, wilderness and victimhood, and themes around woman-as-Nature, settlers and explorers, how Munro appears to bear out Atwood's thesis and how Jarman has refigured these ideas and used them in a truly postmodern story. This chapter lays out the themes which will be revisited in later chapters.

Later chapters discuss 'The Reluctant Immigrant' (Chapter Seven in *Survival*), expanding on the use of Freud's theories of the uncanny. This chapter, 'Making it home: Locations of the *unheimlich* in Canadian diasporic short fiction', focuses on the stories of Alistair MacLeod, which concern the lives of displaced Scots in Nova Scotia, who refuse to become fully Canadian, and hang onto the Gaelic language in times of stress. 'Wilderness Haunting: National mythology of wilderness and the North' (drawing on chapters two and ten of *Survival*), looks at women and men's relationship to the natural world in stories by Lisa Moore and others, as well as the First Nations writing of Joseph Boyden, investigating how First Nations writers express the 'wilderness' theme, and their omission or, at best, 'othering', in earlier Canadian writing (see Chapter Four of *Survival*). Lisa Moore's characters, living in Newfoundland, are connected with snow and ice and 'winterity' in a particular way. Chapter Five is 'Timber!!! Logging the Canadian male, and his women (and vice versa)' (see Chapter Ten of *Survival*), and focuses on the carnivalesque, *unheimlich*, writing of Canadian women and

the depiction of men (see Chapter Five), as well as male authors Matt Cohen, D. W. Wilson, and Leon Rooke's male characters' relationship with women. The conclusion, Chapter Six, draws together the argument expounded throughout.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **This White Planet: Rewriting Canada**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter serves as a further introduction to the central idea of the thesis. In comparing and contrasting the treatment of Atwood's themes in two stories published either side of the millennium, 'A Wilderness Station' by Alice Munro (1995), and Mark Anthony Jarman's postmodern 'My White Planet' (2008), it is possible to summarise the argument around the different ways traces of *Survival* are still appearing in contemporary short fiction. Themes from *Survival* which do not feature in these two stories include First People, reluctant immigrants, and paralyzed artists, as well as the typical family structures in much of the literature which Atwood identifies. The thesis addresses reluctant immigrants and family structures in Chapter Three, and First Peoples in Chapters Three and Four. There is little discussion of 'paralyzed artists' here, although there is a (literally) paralyzed musician in Chapter Five, below, as I see them as a subset of Explorers, and space will not allow a fuller examination.

#### **A brief introduction to two stories and how they connect to *Survival***

Atwood focuses on poetry and novels, but she does look at five stories and four short fiction writers. One of the four is Alice Munro, whose first collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, was published in 1968. Most of Atwood's points are centred on 'The Peace of Utrecht' from that collection. Mark Jarman's first collection, *Dancing Nightly in the Tavern*, was not published until 1984, and his work is all post-*Survival*.

My analysis of Munro's 'A Wilderness Station' (in *Open Secrets*, 1995) begins to illustrate how twenty years after the publication of *Survival*, Atwood's themes of woman-as-nature, ice maidens and crones, wilderness, death by nature, settlers and explorers, archaeology and survival still appear to be key themes in Canadian short fiction. It also demonstrates the dialogue with the past which, as Atwood says, is a feature of Canadian writing.

Atwood compares Canadian history with British and French, the former colonial powers, and with USAmerican<sup>11</sup>, who she sees as present and future imperialists. Her examination is one example of where Atwood's text does not stick precisely to thematics, but strays into aesthetic and structural considerations, and this thesis will follow her.

In Chapter Five of *Survival*, the chapter on 'Ancestral Totems: Explorers • Settlers', Atwood observes that:

Part of where you are is where you've been. If you aren't too sure where you are, or if you're sure but don't like it, there's a tendency, both in psychotherapy and in literature, to retrace your history to see how you got there.

... There is a distinct archeological (*sic*) motif in Canadian literature – unearthing the buried and forgotten past ... you can dig up only what is down there. And in this country, when you've gone through a thin topsoil of immediate ancestors, what you hit will not be Richard the Third or the American or French Revolutions; it will probably be either a Settler or an Explorer (134-5).

In the two stories discussed here, Munro unearths a Settler; Mark Anthony Jarman's 'My White Planet' reveals a group of Explorers. In his 'Conclusion', Frye suggests 'the Canadian imagination has passed the stage of exploration and has embarked on that of settlement' (1995, 236). Part of this 'settlement' is a continuing attachment to the Canadian myth extrapolated by Atwood, and the revisiting of the past in order to retrace the journey to the present is Munro's frequent approach; however, the exploration of what constitutes the 'Canadian imagination' persists as resistance against the political and cultural acceptance of the influences of the USA in Jarman's writing, as in other Canadian postmodern writers. The examination of aspects of postcolonial Canada, which do not merely retrace the steps on the way to now, arriving always at the same point of obscurity, but push through the borders surrounding the myths and begin the story in the present, occurs also, for example, in the stories of Thomas King, Hiromi Goto, and Théodora Armstrong.

Mark Anthony Jarman's 'My White Planet' (in *My White Planet* 2008), reveals historical themes, but in a playful, self-aware rewriting of earlier fictional

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<sup>11</sup> 'USAmerican' is a convention to remind us that Canada and Mexico are also a part of the North American continent, and it recognises that the USA does not have sole occupation of the land mass. I have not used it throughout, preferring 'USA' for simplicity.

manifestations. One difference between Munro and Jarman's stories is that his male characters are Explorers rather than Settlers. In 'A Wilderness Station', the dialogue is with nineteenth-century settlers, and the spread of nation-building outside the garrison. In 'My White Planet' the dialogue is with Britain, the former colonial power, and with Canada's future as a satellite of the US. Although these relationships are not Canadian themes identified in *Survival*, they are a constant thread through Atwood's thematic guide, and relate to the 'anxiety of influence' which *Survival* identifies, although without using the term. As Atwood says her book needed to prove several points, including 'that [Canadian literature] was not just a feeble version of English or American' (2004, 6).

[T]he inevitable question will be raised, sooner or later, in one or another of its forms: "Why are we studying *him* (instead of Faulkner)?" ... Or, in its true shape, "What's Canadian about Canadian literature, and why should we be bothered?" (1972, 11).

Atwood describes an anxiety in readers rather than writers, but it is the same fear, that the former and neo-colonial powers have more right to speak, and that they speak from a position of authority. As Harold Bloom says, you do not have to have read Shakespeare or attended a performance to have internalised his power (1997, xviii), and this is the way *Survival* has survived.

### **Updating the approach to Atwood's themes**

Munro's story can be described as what Linda Hutcheon (2012, 13) terms 'historiographic metafiction', which I link to Atwood's 'archaeological motif'. Atwood's archaeology is a re-examination of the history, and is *Survival's* version of Linda Hutcheon's historiography. Both Munro's and Jarman's stories are metafiction, in that Munro uses palimpsestic overwritings of the historical narrative to ambiguate the 'truth', and Jarman's work is 'bricolage', as Tamas Dobozy points out (2007, 323-330). The extensive intertextuality, which is typical of Jarman's writing, draws on apparently random material selected from advertisements, popular song lyrics, and British children's books. 'My White Planet' is not itself a historical story, being set in an uncertain future, but Jarman's 'Swimming to America' (2008) is about a crucial incident involving the 'all-Canadian failed hero' (Atwood, 1972, 167), Louis Riel, and is one of several

of Jarman's stories with a historiographic approach; 'Night March in the Territory' and 'Assiniboia Death Trip' from the same 2008 collection are historiographic metafiction, and 'Skin a Flea for Hide and Tallow' from *19 Knives* (2000) is another. These five stories share Atwood's archaeological motif. The stories in *Knife Party at the Hotel Europa* (2015), while set mainly in Italy, also discuss Italy's past, from the Caesars to Mussolini, and occasionally refer back to Canada's colonial past for comparison. However, 'My White Planet' itself obliquely acknowledges Canada's past, in its references to British culture, as well as, and often intermingled with, an expected but unwanted future as a colony of the USA. This links it with the 'increased U. S. domination' Atwood comments on in the Introduction to *Survival* (2004, 9), and 'the United States as an imperial master' which she identifies as one of the 'political realities' (1972, 241) she finds in the two 'recent' stories she discusses in her final chapter, 'Jail-breaks and Re-creations', as well as the identification of key national symbols she makes in Chapter One, where she compares 'The Frontier' as American, and 'The Island' as English (1972, 31-32).

The two short stories in the final chapter of *Survival*, where Atwood asks 'What do you do with a tradition once you discover you have one?' (1972, 237), are both postmodern, 'Cape Breton is the Thought-Control Centre of Canada' by Ray Smith (1969), and David Godfrey's 'The Hard-Headed Collector' (1967). Linda Hutcheon comments on Canadian postmodernism as being inextricably tied to national identity and national history. 'Canada's major historical figures look like almost deliberately postmodern creations: Louis Riel may be an archetypal marginal ex-centric, both inside a dominant culture (French-speaking and church educated) and outside it (Métis and a renegade rebel) (2012, 4). The 'marginal ex-centric' is a typical Jarman protagonist, and Munro's 'A Wilderness Station' centres round the life of Annie, who is another.

### **The authors**

Alice Munro, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013, should need no further introduction. She is unusual, in that she has written only short fiction, although *Lives of Girls and Women* is occasionally spoken of as a novel, for example, by Nicholas Lezard in the review in *The Guardian* (24.03.15), and on the cover of the Vintage editions of the book. The stories are linked by having the

same narrator, and the collection is more properly referred to as a short story cycle.

Mark Jarman is less well-known; he is a short fiction writer and travel writer, though he is mainly known in Canada for his hockey novel, *Salvage King Ya!* (1997). He also published a volume of poetry, *Killing the Swan*, in 1986. In an interview with Mary Stein in *Numéro Cinq* in 2011, he says

After I published *Killing the Swan*, I had the feeling it had gone into a vacuum, and decided to put the same images and ideas into prose if I could manage. There are things in poetry you can do that you can't in an essay or story, but I feel it's a very good influence on the latter in terms of editing, compression, attention to language, imagery, odd juxtapositions, implication, developing an eye and ear, etc. (2011, 4)

His 'images and ideas', 'compression...odd juxtapositions, implication' is very much present in his prose. In fact, this could stand as a definition of bricolage, very much the technique which Jarman's stories employ (Dobozy, 2007). Levi-Strauss discusses myth in this context. 'Mythical thought is ... a kind of intellectual 'bricolage' – which explains the relation which can be perceived between the two' (1962, 27). Linking myth and bricolage is particularly useful when reading Jarman through *Survival*, which links the Canadian mythic imagination and thematic structures. The metanarrative of Canadian culture and identity is, as Adam Carter explains, ironic, 'characterized by doubleness and an awareness of the plural, differential, discursive and hence unstable nature of identity ... or that which most problematically attempts to encompass all of these – nation' (2003, 6). Linda Hutcheon refers to postmodern irony, and parody, by which she means intertextuality, as the key features of postmodernism (2012, 2-9). Bricolage, as Jarman uses it, is a form of parody. 'Canadian writers have ... had to deconstruct *British* social and literary myths in order to redefine their colonial history' (Hutcheon 2012, 6 italics in original), and Jarman's bricolage is parodic deconstruction, not merely of British myths but of American myths, as well as parody of the Canadian themes in *Survival*. Hutcheon also stresses that this rebellion against the centre 'whether that centre be seen as elsewhere (Britain, the United States) or as localized in, say, Ontario' (2012, 4) 'the centre is paradoxically both acknowledged and challenged' (4). '[T]he aesthetic and the social, the present and the past, are not separable discourses' (2012, 14), and

Jarman's archaeological thematics involve not merely the bringing to light of the past, but setting it among and against the present, an acknowledgment and a challenge to the Canadian myth as proposed by *Survival*.

Jarman's six short story collections share themes of sport, masculinities, drinking, drugs, rock music, the pursuit of women, travel, and violence. They often return to a fascination with Canadian history, retelling historical events using modern stylistic devices, with poetic imagery and disrupted chronology, and intertextual references from twentieth-century literature.

Linda Hutcheon defines this postmodern playfulness as 'historiographic metafiction'.

[It is] intensely, self-reflexively art, but is also grounded in historical, social and political realities ... These works are not quite historical novels in the traditional sense, for they are also very metafictional in their attention to the processes of writing, reading and interpreting. They are both self-consciously fictional but also overtly concerned with the acts (and consequences) of the reading and writing of history as well as fiction (2012, 13-14).

In both the Munro story and in Jarman, 'historiographic metafiction' is an alienation technique which disorientates the reader, who is unable to reach certainty about how, when, or even whether, the events actually happened, and this very uncertainty also links back to the uncertainty about the finite definition of the nation. Although Munro is frequently described as a realist writer, 'A Wilderness Station' and *The View from Castle Rock* (2007) are postmodern in their self-consciousness. This is an extension of the thematic link with Atwood's archaeological motif, as she explains in her final chapter 'Jail-breaks and Re-creations', which considers two short fictions which can be described as postmodern. As Atwood says, they ask 'What do you do with a tradition once you've discovered you have one?' (1972, 282)

[Y]ou need not discard the tradition nor do you have to succumb to it ...nor need you decide that in order to be truly Canadian you have to give in and squash your hero under a tree. Instead, you can explore the tradition – which is not the same as merely reflecting it – and in the course of it you may find some new ways of writing' (282).



### **‘A Wilderness Station’**

In ‘A Wilderness Station’ (1995), a young orphan girl is sent to marry a settler, Simon, and live with him and his younger brother, George, in the forest where they are clearing trees to build a homestead. Soon after his wife arrives, Simon is killed, possibly by accident, probably murdered. The main action takes place in the 1850s, and it is perhaps not surprising that, even though the story was published more than twenty years after *Survival*, the same images and topoi appear and contribute to meaning, and thus link the story clearly to Atwood’s text. The threads drawn together in *Survival* often have their roots in the settler texts of the early Canadian canon, and Munro’s story purports to have been written in large part by characters who were alive, and sometimes writing, in the mid-1850s. In fact Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing it in the Bush* was published the same year, 1852, that provides the central plot event for Munro. The final scenes are related in 1959, but have taken place in 1907. The development from unexplored wilderness to the beginnings of urbanisation and the modern world is explicit, but this is an old story, obsessively revisited by Canadian pre-post-modern writers; even when the story events take place in the late twentieth-century, there seems to be a block on forward movement. It is as if belatedness and the uncertainty about Canada in the present has become stasis. ‘A Wilderness Station’ refuses to acknowledge forefathers, in its focus on clearing virgin forest and making a home on the land, but this very refusal, not present in the source material as explicated in *The View from Castle Rock*, holds an anxiety of its own.

This should not be read as criticism of Munro on these grounds. It is common for a writer to revisit their own past for subject matter. MacLeod does the same. Neither is it a simple generational issue; Leon Rooke and Atwood herself are the same generation as Munro, and neither dwells on historiography in their recent stories. On the other hand, other, younger, writers such as D. W. Wilson, retell the nation’s history. As Bloom observes:

[T]he strong dead return, in poems as in our lives, and they do not come back without destroying the living. The wholly mature strong poet is peculiarly vulnerable to this last phase of his revisionary relationship with the dead (1997, 139-40).

It is not necessary to be temporally mature, and Munro, MacLeod and Wilson are all 'mature strong poets'. However, where Canadian literature parts company with Bloom's argument is that the living are not destroyed; the anxiety is transformative, and shows itself partly through the use of historiographic metafictional techniques in modernising the inherited themes.

Munro's narrative is epistolary in form, which gives her the opportunity, as she often does (for example in 'Carried Away', also in *Open Secrets* (1995)), to question the veracity of any one historical account of events. In this, the story is similar to Jarman's historically set stories such as 'Swimming to America' (2008), in which by unsettling the reader, Jarman also poses the question of what actually happened, and what we can actually know of Canada's origins and national character. This is one aspect of the meta-theme of Canadian writing: what is Canada? And who am I? To repeat Frye again: 'Where is here?' It is also essentially historiographic metafiction; the metanarrative of settlement in Canada, conveniently omitting previous residents, now displaced; writing which is haunted by how and why this nation comes to not-quite exist; obsessively rewriting the beginnings; reliving the accident of arrival just here, in just this place. As Atwood says, this aspect of Canadian postmodernism is not an unaltered repetition of the tradition. 'A writer ... can explore it further, dig out all its implications; or he can play variations on it' (1972, 241-2). Munro 'explore[s] it further', and Jarman plays variations on the theme; in his case, showing 'what can result in literature when the Canada-as-collective-victim theme surfaces or becomes conscious' (Atwood, 1972, 239).

Munro's story can be seen as most specifically historiographic metafiction in that, as with the stories in *The View from Castle Rock* (2006), it is based on an incident from the author's own family history. As Michael Carbert comments in his review, 'At best, *The View from Castle Rock* is a brilliant reimagining of fiction and history's complementary relationship, shedding new light on Munro's earlier work' (2009, 75). The stories in this collection, says Munro in the Foreword, 'were not memoirs but they were closer to my own life than the other stories I had written' (2006, x).

In 'The Wilds of Morris Township', from *The View from Castle Rock*, Munro quotes from an 'account of the settlement in Morris' (2006, 117) written by Big Rob, who set out with two brothers, his cousins, to build lives for

themselves in Morris. However, in the foreword to *The View From Castle Rock*, Munro warns that, although she had collected her ancestors' letters and written recollections, 'almost without my noticing what was happening, [the material] began to shape itself, here and there, into something like stories' (2006, ix). '[T]he part of this book that might be called family history has expanded into fiction, but always within the outline of a true narrative' (2006, x).

Giving a series of conflicting accounts, the text of 'A Wilderness Station' is a palimpsest of overwritings. Not only do the different letters and written memoirs contradict or clash with each other, but it is evident that Munro has herself rewritten the documentary evidence from her ancestors' histories, firstly in 'The Wilds of Morris Township' and again in 'A Wilderness Station'. But that in itself is inaccurate: the (probably) more fictionalised version was actually published more than ten years earlier than the first, thus the developmental line from 'documentary truth' through fictionalised biography to the fiction of the story loops back on itself, confounding the truth value of the visible writing further.

The first section of 'A Wilderness Station' is a letter from the matron of the 'House of Industry, Toronto, to Mr. Simon Herron' (1995, 190). The Toronto House of Industry existed; it was founded in 1837, and was a more humane version of the British workhouse. Although the Canadian version was inspired by the British Poor Laws, the harsher provisions of it were rejected in Upper Canada (*Toronto's House of Industry*, 2010). The matron's letter tells the respondent of two eighteen-year-old girls who are no longer in the House of Industry, but apprenticed to a milliner. She recommends the less pretty of the two as being more 'suited to the hard work of a life in the bush' (191), as the other, Annie's friend, Sadie, has consumption.

The second section is from a local newspaper, and is an account of the recollections of the brother, George, written in 1907. This section begins with the story of the two brothers setting out to 'try our fortunes in the wilds of Huron' (191), and is therefore a flashback in the narrative chronology to before Simon came to write to the House of Industry. George's account illustrates the Settler motif explored by Atwood. He tells how the two brothers were left alone 'our father first, and then our mother dying of fever within five weeks of landing in

this country' (192). When they arrive in Carstairs, which is 'just under way' in its construction (192), they board at the inn.

We began to underbrush a road to our piece of land and then we got it marked out and cut the logs for our shanty and big scoops to roof it ...

After the small trees and brush was cleared out a bit, we set to chopping down the big trees ... Henry Treece sent us a very large and comfortable bearskin for our cover in bed but my brother would not take the favour ... We walked to Walley and brought back flour and salt fish on our back ... There were no bridges then and all that winter not a good enough freeze to make it easy going over the rivers (193-4).

There are several topoi here which relate to Atwood's themes, and also to themes in Jarman's story, 'My White Planet'. In Jarman's story modern technological 'communications' feature as a theme; in Munro's, it is the isolation and difficulty in communicating with the outside world, as evidenced by the letters which go astray (see below). As George recalls, communication with the outside world is difficult. We note that for Annie, too, communication is always, and continues to be difficult, although it is George who is unable to speak at their final meeting.

Marking out and laying roads and cutting down trees are all settler activity as *Survival* describes it. 'They do not move through the land, they go to one hitherto uncleared part of it and attempt to change Nature's order ... into the shape of human civilization: houses, fenced plots of ground with edible plants inside and weeds outside, roads' (Atwood, 1972, 122).

Canadian settler figures are less likely [than American pioneers] to see their activities as the construction of a new world built according to their free fancies than the implementation of an order that is "right". The imposition of the straight line on the curve tends to get seen by those doing the imposing as part of the Divine Plan (122).

But this 'imposition' has to be seen in conjunction with the theme of failure, a key word in Atwood's definition of the Canadian national character. The imposition of the straight line ultimately fails, and Nature reasserts herself, as will be seen below, in Chapter Four. In Chapter Eight of *Survival*, 'The Casual Incidence of Death: futile heroes, unconvincing martyrs and other bad ends' Atwood says that there is no possibility of constructing a Canadian hero, as all men are doomed to fail. Her chief example of the futile hero is Riel, who she

describes as ‘the perfect all-Canadian failed hero – he’s French, Indian, Catholic, revolutionary and possibly insane’ (1972, 167). In ‘A Wilderness Station’, the brothers first place the fireplace and the chimney in the middle of their newly built house, as Simon ‘had heard from some French-Canadian fellows ... that in the lumber camps the fire was always in the middle of the shanty’ (193). However, on their first night in the house with a fire going, they wake to find the house and its roof are burning, so they decide to build the chimney ‘in the ordinary way in the end of the house’ (193), imposing the natural order of what is “right” on wilderness living. As Atwood says, ‘the Canadian pioneer is a square man in a round whole’ (1972, 120). Erecting the chimney in the wrong place almost results in catastrophe; these ‘square men’ are forced to rethink how they fit into the new setting.

The echoes of Big Rob’s recollections as recorded in *The View from Castle Rock* are ever-present here. In ‘A Wilderness Station’, George tells us ‘We began to underbrush a road to our piece of land and then we got it marked out and cut the logs for our shanty and big scoops to roof it’ (1995, 193). In ‘The Wilds of Morris Township’, Big Rob writes ‘We began to underbrush a road to John’s place, as it was the nearest to where we boarded and then we cut logs for our shanty and big scoops to roof it’ (2006, 112).

Big Rob’s story of the fire is

When we went to our hemlock bed, we put on a big fire and when some of us awoke through the night our lumber was all ablaze and some of the scoops were burning very briskly also. So we tore down the chimney and the scoops were not hard to put out as they were green basswood. That was the last we heard of building a fire in the middle of the house (2006, 113).

In the 1995 story, George tells how

We went to our hemlock bed with a good fire going, but waking in the middle of the night we saw our lumber was all ablaze and the scoops burning away briskly also. We tore down the chimney and the scoops being green basswood were not hard to put out. As soon as it came day, we started to build the chimney in the ordinary way in the end of the house and I thought it best not to make any remark (193).

The similarities are striking throughout 'A Wilderness Station', and it is clear that however fictionalised the narrative in *The View from Castle Rock*, Munro changed it very little when writing the earlier story, merely moulding history into a more satisfactory, more stylistically polished, fiction. Thus, 'A Wilderness Station' is a historiographic metafiction based on fictionalised history. The metafiction lies not only in the collected written or reported narratives of the several narrators, which draw attention to the act of reading, as the reader is positioned as eavesdropper, or spy, and in the case of one particular narrative (discussed below), apparently as the actant in that we appear to have intercepted an undelivered letter; there is also the fact that large sections of the story are drawn from historical manuscripts, although the manuscripts' existence does not become known to readers of the story until some years later, on the publication of *The View from Castle Rock*. 'A Wilderness Station' is also historiographic, in that it contains a *selection* of documents which tell a particular story, and which cover the period from 1852 to 1959, although not chronologically. Munro digs down 'through a thin topsoil of immediate ancestors' and unearths settlers; this is how the Munros 'got there', as Atwood says (1972, 112).

George's narrative continues

Around Christmastime my brother said to me that he thought we had the place in good enough shape now for him to be bringing in a wife, so we should have somebody to cook and do for us and milk a cow when we could afford one (1995, 194).

The woman is ordered by letter from an orphanage, as one might hire a servant.

He wanted one between eighteen and twenty-two years of age, healthy and not afraid to work and raised in the Orphanage, not taken in lately, so that she would not be expecting any luxuries or to be waited on and would not be recalling about when things were easier for her (194).

His ideal wife is thus a victim from her introduction into the story. An orphan, rootless, without history or expectations, she is appropriated by Simon. Annie is a type of virginal 'Diana-Maiden', (Atwood, 1972, 199). Frequently, the Diana-maiden turns out to be as destructive as the crone, an ice maiden who kills. Annie survives, without children, and grows old in Munro's story, and is a crone by the end. However, whether she is an ice maiden who kills is left unresolved at the end

of the story. There is probably an actual murder, but we are never certain, and not only the author's text but the survivors themselves refuse to disambiguate their accounts of what happened. Isla Duncan (2003) and Ildiko de Papp Carrington (1996) both try to assert what they believe to be the 'truth' of what occurred, but it is irrelevant.<sup>12</sup> Munro's point is that we can never be certain, that memory and testimony are both flawed, and no-one can ever know what motivates anyone, including ourselves, to do what they do, or even to be sure what has been done. The only certain fact in the text is that, although Atwood suggests that squashing your characters under trees is not always effective as 'the victim recovers' (1972, 55).Munro's does not.

The accident (or murder) while tree-felling is the turning point in the more fictional version of the event given in 'A Wilderness Station', but only another incident in the story of the settlement in 'The Wilds of Morris Township', where there is no suggestion that the cousin is murdered. In 'A Wilderness Station' George tells us that Simon was killed when a tree branch fell on him. 'We just heard the little branches cracking where it fell and looked up to see it and it hit Simon on the head and killed him instantly' (1995, 195). In the 2006 text, Big Rob writes:

I went to help John with the building, and as we were falling a tree, one of its branches was broken in the falling, and thrown backwards, hitting James on the head and killing him instantly (2006, 116).

James' death is another example of the perils and trials of settling the bush in 1852. In Annie's story, also set in 1852, the accident is followed by a snowstorm, and George and Annie bury the body while they can. George tells how he married his neighbour's daughter, and Annie went away to Walley, their nearest town. The death of her abusive husband is what provides the turn in the narrative, throwing the emphasis on Annie, and the mystery of what actually happened to Simon. Munro's version of the story in 2006 provides a further questioning of the 'truth' of historical facts, as the reader cannot tell how far the 2006 version is from the original document found by the author, nor how far the narrative as related by Big Rob sixty years after the event can be trusted. Thus, our reading of both Munro's versions of the story are complicated by distance in time from any actual events,

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<sup>12</sup> Carrington distrusts Annie's account; Duncan finds her sympathetic.

and in 'A Wilderness Station', by the palimpsestic revisiting and overwriting of Big Rob's (fictionalised) recollections.

These rewritings are a clear example of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction. As she says:

[P]ostmodern historiographic metafictionists, who also deal with 'events already constituted' (sic) ... are constrained by the demands of the narrative fiction as much as by those of historical events. They must deal with literature's intertexts as well as history's documents (2012, 66-7).

As readers, we are not privy to the 'events already constituted', as it is Munro's research into her family's history which has uncovered them, and she has not published the papers and documents in their original form. At the same time, we know that there is no objective historical truth, since every narrative emanates from the particular subjective viewpoint of the narrator, so that even were we to have the original documentation we would be unable to authorise the events as related. As Hutcheon says 'Foucault and Jameson have repeatedly stressed [that] in a very real sense history, while it had a real "referent" once upon a time, is accessible to us now only in textualised form, that is, through documents' (2012, 66). In Munro's text, we do not have access to the referents, but to her interpretation, selection and exclusion only. To this extent, Munro herself, as author, intrudes into the text. This, of course, applies only after we have read *The View From Castle Rock*, or a review or interview with the author in which she reveals that the story is based on her historical research into her family. As a 'virgin' reader of the first edition, one can take the text as entirely fictional, with its layers of doubt and meaning entirely self-contained in the story.

Hutcheon explains that 'in many of these [historiographic metafiction] there is a clearly defined and precisely situated narrating voice that overtly addresses a reader' (64), and as Munro's story consists entirely of letters and George's recollections as published in a newspaper, there is necessarily an addressee, the reader being placed in the position of recipient and subscriber.

Hutcheon further explains that in historiographic metafiction the second technique is 'not to have one overt narrating voice ... but many' (64-5). Giving Rudy Wiebe's novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* as an example, Hutcheon points to how readers 'are left to pull together the various and fragmentary points



of view we have been offered and, like the jury at the end of the novel, we ... must make an evaluation and interpretation of all we have been told' (65). There is no definitive version of what exactly has happened to Simon in 'A Wilderness Station', although as readers we tend to side with Annie's version, as written to Sadie, her childhood friend. Her letters have difficulty in getting through, the first two being intercepted by the Clerk of the Peace, in whose care Annie remains while she is in gaol. He encloses them in letters to the Minister, and the text of them is laid out in his letters. They are brief, and merely request that Sadie should visit her.

After the second, the Clerk of the Peace is informed that the Minister has died, and Annie then writes a longer letter, laying out her side of the story. It is addressed to Sadie and she adds 'Finder Please Post'. At the end she says that she has enclosed it with the 'the curtains I am making for the Opera House' (1995, 215). However, we still do not know whether Sadie ever received it and there is no explanation in the narrative for its appearance in the text. The reader is placed in the position of 'Finder', but with no way of completing the transaction. This device adds to the lack of transparency in the 'truth' of the text, as might be found in a realist fiction. We have been told that Sadie had consumption, and so may have died.

Between George's recollections and these exchanges, we read letters in which the Scottish Presbyterian minister in Carstairs describes how after Simon's death Annie could have gone to live with the neighbouring family as George has done, but she declined. His description of her life on her own at the homestead is of some disorder.

Her brother-in-law being removed, there was no order imposed on her days. When I visited her the door was open and it was evident that animals came and went in her house. ... Those who caught sight of her said that her clothing was filthy and torn from scrambling about in the bushes, and she was scratched by thorns and bitten by the mosquito insects and let her hair go uncombed or plaited (198-9).

Munro talks of order not being imposed on Annie's days, in the same way that Atwood suggests that settlers impose order on the natural world. Annie is not bringing civilisation and order to the wilderness, but rather using it to hide in, becoming wild herself. She is 'bushed', or has 'gone bush'. Rather than the

wilderness being a place to which men go to subdue it or die, it becomes a shelter for her. She has become 'Woman-as-Nature' (1972, 202). Atwood says that these metaphors are most often found in prose, where 'Nature-as-Woman' figures occur mainly in poetry. She is again referring to Graves' *The White Goddess*, in which he explains that 'the Triple Goddess is not only the Muse but also Nature' (Graves 1972, 200). However, *Survival* is as hard on the female figures as it is on the men; even innocent Diana-maidens have a tendency to turn hard and cold, to become ice-maidens and Hecates.

Atwood quotes from *One-Man Masque* by James Reaney at the beginning of her chapter 'Ice Women vs. Earth Mothers':

They saw her as an incredible crone  
The spirit of neglected fence corners,  
Of the curious wisdom of brambles,  
And weeds, of ruts, of stumps and of things despised (1972, 197).

The extract concerns a young woman who has sex with young men in the open air, and lives a disordered life. The link with Annie is implicit, and the intertextuality evident. However, Munro is not describing Reaney's 'incredible crone' who is a threat to the normal processes of civilisation, but Annie as having returned to a state of nature, of grace, almost. She has become a wild animal, but in the pure natural sense. She has been reclaimed by the natural world.

In his reply to the minister, a court official, the Clerk of the Peace, explains that Annie has arrived in Walley and asked to be locked up as she has committed a murder. She tells him that she has lost her temper and hit her husband on the head with a rock. In this letter, he comments 'I am a member of the Church of England, but have a high regard for the work of other Protestant denominations in bringing an orderly life to this part of the world we find ourselves in' (1995, 202). This is the Canadian imposition of the Divine Plan, just as Atwood describes it (1972, 122).

When the minister replies to this message, he concludes with a quotation from Thomas Boston, the (real) eighteenth century Scottish Presbyterian preacher and theologian, and it is from the second of these quotations that the story's title is taken. '*This world is a wilderness, in which we may indeed get our station changed, but the move will be out of one wilderness station unto another*' (Munro,

1995, 204, italicised in the original). This quotation describes the literal relationship of nineteenth-century Canadians to their natural surroundings, as well as their spiritual agonies, and could also be applied to later urban and rural immigrants, refugees from pogroms, poverty, and starvation.

When Annie writes her own story to Sadie, halfway through the text, it is the first time we hear her speak for herself, unmediated by authority figures (other than Munro, the author, unless Annie's letter is also a found document); all the previous narrators in the story (apart from the matron of the House of Industry) are male. In her account, Annie tells how she takes charge; for the first time, she has control of events. She calms George down.

When I got him to sleep I laid down on the bed beside him. I took off my smock and I could see the black and blue marks on my arms, I pulled up my skirt to see if they were still there high on my legs, and they were (213).

These are presumably the result of Annie having been raped, which we might think is grounds enough for her to have murdered Simon. However, it is apparent from her narration that George has killed his brother by hitting him on the back of the head with an axe. 'And then I saw, I saw where the axe had cut' (209), Annie says. We are inclined to believe this version of events, perhaps because her narration is naïve in style. It begins

George came dragging him across the snow I thought it was a log he dragged. I didn't know it was him. George said, it's him. A branch fell out of a tree and hit him, he said. He didn't say he was dead (208).

The lack of artifice in her account, poorly punctuated and giving us her thought processes suggests that this narrator is not constructing a story, but giving an unadorned account. It is also written less than a year after the death; although the date is not given, we know from her previous, undelivered letter, that she is 'making curtains for the Opera House' (207). That letter is dated December 20 1852, and Simon has died in April. Annie's account was probably written in the spring of the following year, whereas George's recollections do not appear in the newspaper until 1907, fifty-three years later. This is the year in which the final narrator, Christena Mullen, takes Old Annie to visit George, when he appears to be suffering from dementia. We are not privy to their conversation.

I asked Old Annie if Mr Herron could understand her when she talked to him, and she said “Enough.” I asked if she was glad about seeing him again and she said yes. “And glad for him to get to see me,” she said (225).

Christena tells us ‘There were lots of old people going around then with ideas in their heads that didn’t add up – though I suppose Old Annie had more than most’ (225). Again, the text undermines its own authority, through the multivocal narrations and perspectives. George has apparently given his own account of Simon’s death to the newspapers only a few months before Annie’s visit ‘but then he had got sick’ (221). ‘He did not seem interested in us’ Christena tells us (223).

This final section of the story is written in 1959, by the granddaughter of the Clerk of the Peace, Christena Mullen. Her family has employed ‘Old Annie’ as a sewing woman, and she reports Annie’s story about her marriage and what happened to her husband. According to ‘Old Annie’, he was killed by a bear in the woods, and the Clerk of the Peace had killed the bear ‘and wrapped her in its skin and taken her home from the Gaol’ (219). This is an interesting use of the bear; Atwood suggests in Chapter Three that animals in Canadian literature are victims, and that the Canadian psyche identifies with this victimhood. ‘[T]heir identification with animals is the expression of a deep-seated cultural fear’ (1972, 95). Here the authority figure who takes Annie in from the bush and ‘tames’ her, wraps her in the skin of the bear which makes her a victim; this may also raise an ambiguity about whether in fact it is Annie who has killed her husband, but she has portrayed herself as a victim (she is presumably imagining this scene), and this justifies her retaliation. This extreme identification with a slaughtered animal, which in turn could have been either Simon’s murderer, or Annie’s construction of her husband as a wild animal, wraps victim and murderer together.

Christena takes Annie to visit George. They go out to what has become a ‘civilised’ wilderness, and Annie is struck by the changes. ‘...there didn’t used to be a bridge there ... Look at the big fields, where are the stumps gone, where is the bush? And look how straight the road goes, and they’re building their houses out of brick!’ (219). So although the wilderness is gone, it lives on in Annie’s mind. There is now a bridge which connects ‘out there’ to ‘in here’ and the present to the past, the spatial to the temporal. This is another example of what Frye calls

Canadians being ‘obsessed with communications’ (Hammill, 2014, 11). In the ‘Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada’, Frye points out that ‘it is in the inarticulate part of communication, railways and bridges and canals and highways that Canada ... has shown its real strength’ (Frye, 1995, 224). Even where the structure is present, it seems that the message is hard to decipher, unarticulated.

After lunch, the two old people – George who is ill and can no longer speak, and Annie, whose memory is unreliable – sit face to face on the porch, and fall asleep; so that what actually happened that day in the woods remains ambiguous.

### **‘My White Planet’**

Mark Anthony Jarman tells a different, but related story, and it is in the differences and similarities between the two that the survival of Atwood’s themes, and Frye’s before her, in contemporary Canadian short fiction can most clearly be seen. ‘My White Planet’ lends itself to an analysis of the self-conscious playfulness with which Jarman employs or references *Survival*. The story features dreams, bears, and a woman, possibly an orphan: the narrator repeatedly refers to her as ‘our orphan’. She is, like Annie, stranded in the wilderness outnumbered by men: ‘...our farm-girl concubine...our charcoal-eyed dream girl...our long-lost daughter...our very sad orphan...our very own child’ (2008, 25-45, passim). All these possessive and diminutive references occur in the first three, short, pages. Here, of course, we have a male writer and narrator, and a masculine objectification of the woman's body. It would be easy to read the story as simply misogynistic, but it’s more complex than that.

In ‘My White Planet’ the thematic structures constitute the narrative, and the *plaisir du texte* is to be got largely from recognising them. ‘My White Planet’ is, in that sense, a highly metatextual and metafictional story. Where Munro’s story uses palimpsest to overwrite original documents, Jarman’s text is bricolage as described by Levi-Strauss, in *The Savage Mind*.

[The bricoleur’s] universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’, that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to

maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions (1962, 22).

Mythical thought builds structured sets by means of a structured set, namely, language. But it is not at the structural level that it makes use of French ‘des bribes et des morceaux’, or odds and ends in English, *fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or a society*. The relation between the diachronic and the synchronic is therefore in a sense reversed (1962, 26-27 my emphases).

Reversal of the diachronic and synchronic in what Levi-Strauss terms bricolage is another way of describing what Mark Jarman does in his historiographic metafiction, where temporal and spatial dimensions are conflated, so that in any place, at any time, any discourse may appear. In the same chapter, Levi-Strauss aligns ‘mythical thought’ with bricolage. He does not explicitly define what he means by ‘mythical thought’, but he presumably intends that way of remembering information which is:

the generalization of ... relation [which] may be rewarding from the theoretical and practical point of view for a very long time even if it has no foundation in reason ... even a heterogeneous and arbitrary classification preserves the richness and diversity of the collection of facts it makes (1962, 21).

Derrida extends Levi-Strauss in ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’ (1978): ‘If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is bricoleur’ (1978, 360). In the persistent reuse of themes from *Survival*, Canadian short fiction of the last forty years can be criticised for having ‘no foundation in reason’, but seen in the context of belatedness and as bricolage, the ongoing search for identity and for a literature which is Canadian in its particularity, it begins to make sense.

The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual ‘bricolage’ – which explains the relation which can be perceived between the two (Levi-Strauss, 1962, 11).

Bricolage thus draws together the metatextuality that Jarman employs, Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction and the thematic repetition of myths constructed by Atwood. Critics talk of 'the riot of verbal invention'; Jarman is 'intoxicated with words and the playful ways they can be strung together' (Glover 2012, 114), but Glover analyses this riot as rhetorical, frequently using classical figures to make an effect. Tamas Dobozy has also noted 'the improvisatory aspect of Jarman's writing' (2007, 323), drawing on Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Dobozy looks particularly at Jarman's argument with corporate culture, 'institutional and societal laws ... in their artificial and isolated "sales pitch"' (329).

Relishing their de-situation, their non-presence, the inability to come up with a language that speaks *from* them, Jarman's characters, or, better, voices, mix the signals that surround and interpenetrate them. In this act of linguistic *bricolage* they testify to an agency in the midst of an extreme colonization, a mobility that cannot be arrested, but one which, lacking a place to stop and testify to itself, is dependent upon the materials made available to it, like ghosts on a forced march through walls made to arrest them (2007, 329, italics in original).

It is clear from this attempt to analyse, made by a fellow writer – Dobozy is a prize-winning author of short fiction, including *Siege 13* (2013), a linked collection – that Jarman's technique is hard to pin down; 'de-situation' is a good term for the non-realisation of place and space in Jarman's metafictional narratives. A good example is Jarman's 'Swimming to America' (2008).

In the west we share the vivid new river, share the giant red continent, forest and shale and schist and sin and sweet sun, ate it all, sorry I ate the soft plum, the berry pies, the ducks and goose and dried meat, the blue night lightning, the stars and piebald horses, ate the whole stricken world (99).

The reference to William Carlos Williams' 'This is Just to Say'<sup>13</sup> pulls the reader away from the nineteenth-century Canada-US border and into the present. This is the penultimate paragraph of the story, and it marks a change of tense from narrative past to the present.

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<sup>13</sup> 'I have eaten/ the plums / that were in / the icebox [...] Forgive me / they were delicious / so sweet / and so cold' ('This is Just to Say', , (online) (2016).

The story, set in 1870, concerns the execution of Thomas Scott, a real historical event, ordered by Louis Riel, the Métis leader of the Red River rebellion against the Canadian government. The execution misfired and Scott was seen as a martyr ‘for Anglo-Protestant liberty against the French and Catholic Riel’ (Bothwell 2006, 221). Riel escaped retribution by fleeing to the United States. However, fifteen years later, after persistently causing problems for the government, he was tried and hanged.

Jarman’s text describes Scott’s execution as ‘a botched job’ (2008, 95) and his first person narrator, a witness to the shooting, says ‘They will want revenge. The Ontario papers will adopt this boyo. He came west for adventure and a new country, and now we all have that, now we are all starting an adventure, an undiscovered country’ (94). This encapsulates the de-situated no-place of mythical thinking and historiographic intertextuality. Linda Hutcheon comments on specifically Canadian postmodernism as being inextricably tied to national identity and national history. As Frye says, ‘One wonders if any other national consciousness has had so large an amount of the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested, so built into it’ (1995, 222). Joel Baetz suggests that since Frye, ‘scholars and critics are more likely to view our cultural lack as something to be aimed for rather than avoided’ (2004, 64). In his stories, Jarman exposes the undigested, the unrealized, and the unknown.

It was after the Riel rebellion that the province of Manitoba came into being. The narrator appears to be a part of the rebellion, and may come from the United States, but the textual border between the two countries and nationalities is porous, as it was at that period. A woman who has also witnessed the shooting insists that Scott is still alive, even after his body is laid in a coffin. On seeing the coffin carried away, the narrator (we assume) is given this strange, indented, paragraph; a reverie or stream of consciousness passage.

Yoo-hoo, are you alive in there?  
I can’t quit you, baby, which bothers me.  
Where will they put you?  
Enquiring minds want to know.  
Under the ice? (2008, 97)



This anachronistic, postmodernist disruption is typical of Jarman's playfulness and use of bricolage. 'I can't quit you, baby' is a Led Zeppelin track, from a blues song by Willie Dixon. It goes on 'So I'm gonna put you down for a while' (1969). Led Zeppelin was a British band. 'Enquiring minds want to know' is a phrase which probably originated as a well-known advertising slogan for the American tabloid, *National Enquirer*. 'Under the ice' is the title of a song by a German band called Blind Guardian, from 2002; the lyrics include the line 'Wake up it's time to cross the border', and 'Under the ice you will believe/ Under the ice you will be free' (2002), and includes references to blood and slaughter. These international cultural references underline the influences on a Canadian cultural identity which is felt to be yet to come to maturity. As de Certeau and Levi-Strauss describe it, bricolage is 'making do' with whatever is available.

In Jarman's stories there is an ever-present awareness both of Canadian history and the nation's foundations, and also of a present Canada as a location as distinct from other nations of the world, and this cannot be simply dismissed as 'belatedness', but shows an awareness of 'Canadianness' which is new and unusual in the literature. This Canadianness is formed from the dialogue with Canada's colonial past, and in the resistance to an increasingly Americanised future. Jarman is far from alone among Canadian writers in his rewriting of the nation's history, the archaeology discussed by Atwood, but his insistence on setting historical events in the modern world is new.

In 'My White Planet' Jarman rewrites, not only the wilderness story, but 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarves'. There are explicit references to the men as being 'Seven men and our Snow White' (2008, 26). One of the films they have on video is Disney's *Snow White*. When the VCR finally is 'dead' (35), the narrator comments 'Snow so industrious on the screen' (34). This is Atwood's snow 'as a death or termination image' (1972, 65). In this case, the snow indicates the termination of the image on the screen, and foreshadows both the death of modernism and its technology, but also the men's inevitable death. The videos the men have mostly watched are historical, in that they are the 1937 US American Disney film from which the narrator's self-identification comes, and old hockey games, the results of which they already know, and which identify them as Canadian, in spite of the film being an early example of the world-wide influence of US culture.

A further mention of the Grimm's tale comes near the end, after the girl has become a media celebrity in the USA. 'At the Emmys she gives us a message. Big hi to the seven dwarves if they're watching; they'll know who they are' (44). It is significant that she uses the future tense in conjunction with an elided modal auxiliary ('they'll know'), though its use in this instance is as an expression of probability. The modal could be omitted – 'they know who they are' – and the semantic meaning would be the same. However, the text here references the playfulness with the story's positioning in time and its chronology. It could also be argued that the men 'will know' at some time in an unspecified future who they are, and also indicates a possible time lag between the transmission of her message and its reception, as well as the attempt by the text to identify the Canadian experience as it affects the formation of a settler community arising from stranded explorers. This is an instance of the temporal aspect of belatedness; caught between the historical influence of the European settlers and the more recent influences of the USA, the settlers find it hard to identify themselves. This stranding leaves them as perennial explorers, finding nothing, as Atwood defines them, which prevents their maturation into becoming settlers.

Ian Angus says 'Canadian identity has been a matter for self-preservation and its definition a problem for self-reflection since Confederation' (1997,105). As the influence of USA culture grows, partly through the girl's leaving for Los Angeles, Jarman's dwarves begin to accept their fate. They learn who they are: subjects of the North American behemoth. As Angus defines it, 'the existence of English Canada has been predicated on distinguishing ourselves from Americans' (1997, 113). Thus the archaeology results in a bricolage constructed from both former and future imperialism, to reveal in a new way the anxiety of influence.

The identification as 'dwarves' also says something about the uncertainly mature masculinity of the Canadian explorer, and more widely, Canadian males in general as seen in the literature. As figurative 'dwarves', they are capable of being overlooked or overseen by women, being not fully grown or confident of their place in the world, of being marginal figures.

Thus it could be said that figuring the explorers as 'dwarves' is a characterisation of Canadian identity, when it is compared with the USA as in the girl's message, or with the frozen wilderness in which they find themselves.

As Munro's story concerns the nightmares which arise from a lack of authority in the narrative and an undermining of the historicity of the social context, Jarman's story opens with a similar uncertainty about what is real and what is dreaming. The third paragraph reads:

I dream of her and then she is really here, inside a bubble boat, closer and closer to seven of us stumbling on the shingle beach (there used to be more of us, but the bears snatched one and Gingras<sup>14</sup> died from eating liver and the ice opened and took two), this garden of stone and ice abutting water's wind-wrenched green map, our world a snapping laundry line, her clothes stripped from her and floating in the corner and her marble white body washing and tossing inside an enclosed self-righting lifeboat, arms out, hair askew, awash in icy seawater, an orphan under glass (2008, 25-6).

This is the first 'reversal of the diachronic and synchronic' (Levi-Strauss, 1962, 28), in that the dream presages the arrival of the girl; this paragraph is preceded by a shorter one which runs: 'I have a final golden vision of her at a microphone, many microphones aimed at her, rented jewels on her sunny neck' (Jarman, 2008, 25). Here the narrator dreams what will happen towards the end of the narrative, before the girl has actually materialised. The uncertainty is also uncanny, in the Freudian sense, the dream of desire which may not be a dream, and before it is fulfilled in actuality.

There are many echoes of Munro's story, even though her wilderness is forest and Jarman's is the Arctic. Here the girl is represented as ice-maiden, literally frozen, marble and white. She is also mute, whereas in Munro's story it is the settler, the probable murderer, who becomes mute. The girl is the central mystery in Jarman's text. She may be a type of ice-maiden, cruel and destructive. She may figure the wilderness, the frozen waste in which the men are trapped. She may be a map, a location-finder by which the men could identify their position. She may be, at different times, all of these things. Atwood comments 'Mention of charts or maps – those direction-finding devices which attach names to place diagrams – is one clue that you're dealing with an exploration poem' (137-8). In Jarman's story, the 'direction-finding devices' are radio and the lost satellite. However, maps, first mentioned here where the sea is described as

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<sup>14</sup>Gingras is the name of a well-known hockey player, who retired in 2006, two years before the publication of *My White Planet*. Jarman, as a hockey aficionado, will have used the name deliberately.

‘water’s wind-wrenched green map’ (26), also make a later appearance, when the narrator tells us ‘I want her for me or for no-one, don’t want all their chapped hands on her blue route-map of veins and fine skin’ (28).

She could also be capitalism, particularly that of the USA, and the fact that she is washed up in a lifeboat from an oil-rig adds to this possibility. Although Canada has large reserves of oil and exports to the USA, in many cases, such as the Alberta tar sands, American oil companies also have a stake in its extraction and in the profits. There may also be a Trojan horse suggestion here, that the United States is able to cross the border into Canada, bearing cultural gifts. This becomes clearer after the girl leaves and communicates with the surviving men from Los Angeles. She may be a presage of the future. She may be either a siren or a mermaid, sent to lure the men to their deaths, both cultural death and the death of an independent Canada. It is impossible to make a definitive reading of her figurative role, and that is really the point. She is loaded with fractured, plural, meanings. She carries all meaning for the explorers, and is a fetish object, totemic of a power that they have failed to develop for themselves. When they dress her in their clothes, they project their fantasies onto her, envious of her status and singularity.

It appears that world events have resulted in the men being cut off above the Arctic Circle, and the bears are not the grizzlies in Munro's tale, but polar bears. The narrator describes one of the bears: ‘its feet huge and almost square, I can’t get over feeling it’s a person in a costume’ (30). This recalls Old Annie in the Munro story reportedly saying that ‘my grandfather had killed the bear, and wrapped her in its skin’ (1995: 218).

We carried her from the beach to shelter, my hand inside her senseless scentless thigh, happy to carry her; we were serious and happy, her skin ice-water tight, her hip, her perfect white shores, her ears seeming to listen to us grunting (Jarman, 2008, 28).

She is transformed from a frozen ice-maiden to a frozen landscape, an icy wilderness to be explored, equated with the landscape they inhabit – so far, so typical; although in this near-future setting, there is also an argument about how far this wilderness should be protected when the men agree not to have sex with her. Nevertheless, the narrator seems to get closer to her than the other men.

The narrator tells us 'Now in the afternoons I read to her, our orphan, from old British picture books and periodicals. She is a blank slate for me to write on, to create' (29). So perhaps she is not the USA, but colonial Canada. This is the process, or re-enactment of colonisation. Perhaps Jarman's story is a 'writing back', where Canada imposes its own history on its more powerful neighbour, figured as this frozen girl.

We think of the way Simon Herron acquired his wife, and how he treated her, beating her and probably raping her. Jarman's male characters lust after the girl, but agree not to infringe 'her perfect shores', neither do they name her. In this way, they are showing themselves to be explorers, as Atwood defines them, when discussing a poem called 'The Unnamed Lake'. '[I]t's the attitude of the explorers that's interesting: they come, they look, they don't do anything or "discover" anything beyond the lake itself, they go away *in silence*, and their leaving the lake without a name amounts to refusal to name' (1972, 115 italics in original). While settlers impose order on the natural world and abuse their women, explorers leave the world as they find it, unknown, unaltered, and unnamed.

In 'My White Planet', 'wilderness is not experienced as something to be transformed into civilization, but as a limit to the civilizing project, both an external limit – an outside – and a limit of depth ... [which requires] acceptance of a kind of abandonment, abjection' as Ian Angus explains it (2013, 11). In 'A Wilderness Station', Annie's encounter with the wilderness incurs 'a kind of abandonment', while for the male characters it is a civilizing project; the men in Jarman's text accept their abandonment, and reach a state of abjection which is common in literature set in the Arctic, but is also Atwood's 'failure', a 'doomed exploration' (1972, 118).

There is a similarity between the women in these two stories, in that neither woman has much of a recorded history before her entrance into the story. Munro's Annie has grown up in the Home (as the matron refers to it in her letter); we are told that she was 'born legitimately of Christian parents and [was] placed in the home due to parental death ... The darkness of her eyes and hair and brown tinge of her skin is no indication of mixed blood, as both parents were from Fife' (1995, 191). 'Mixed blood' references the Métis, descendants of First Nations or Inuit, and French settlers. They are now recognised as an aboriginal people, with official status as a nation within Canada. The Métis Nation of Ontario was

recognised in 1993. Munro's text ironically recognises the (continuing) marginalisation and repression of First Nations in Canadian civility, and this repression contributes to the uncanniness of the national identity, as will become clear in the next chapter.

Little though it is, the relation of Annie's history is a lot more than we are told about Jarman's girl. She arrives mute, unconscious and naked, and lacking memory, and we never learn her name – if she has one. Neither woman is allowed to speak for herself until late on in the story, and then only as they reassume their places in so-called civilised (patriarchal) society, in the order of language, which Jarman depicts as being no advance on the bears and the bleakness of the Arctic. In both stories the woman is alone and virginal, an 'Ice-Maiden'; she is taken to (or washes up in) the wilderness, she is raped by the settler, or objectified and lusted after by the explorers, and kills him, or leaves them, and goes to jail and is reabsorbed into a hierarchical 'civilised' system, or becomes a celebrity, reabsorbed into 'civilised' society. Jarman's girl is not just male fantasy, but is pure metaphor. It is striking that the men agree not to touch her; these are men who have not seen a woman for years, though it is not specified how long. The men avert their gaze from the object of desire.

It is true, of course, that the male characters in both stories have little recorded history either, but we do at least know how the brothers in 'A Wilderness Station' arrive in their wilderness (and if we conflate the story with the version in *The View from Castle Rock* we are told even more). The reason for Jarman's men being stranded is never explained, and they themselves do not know what has happened; in fact the text underscores their isolation with hints:

We inhabit a listening station secretly functioning after the accord, but something went dead after June 11. Our dishes and software seem without flaw, but our screens remain blank, thoughtless ... We are paid puppets, but no one is pulling the strings and no cheque is in the mail (2008, 26-7).

Just when the story is set, the details of 'the accord' and the reason for their 'listening' are never explained.

In both stories, the lack of historical context for the women symbolizes the absence of a coherent history for Canada. Godard points out 'the preoccupation with documents in the search for origins and essence will lead to

an undoing' (2008, 79-80). Leaving aside the point that Godard may be doing just that in her essay, the repeated revisiting of an 'always already' origin to Canadian identity as a nation and as a nationality figures the Lacanian desire which can never be fulfilled. Put simply, as long as Canadian culture looks backwards to discover itself, the present will slip by undefined. As the search for an origin is muddied by influence, the answer may remain undecipherable.

Munro's story is the clearest example of this obsession, but despite his apparent 'newness', when it is seen that what Jarman is doing is deconstructing old themes merely to reconstruct them in a (post)modern mode, the revisiting of past trauma and absences also prevents any real progress in the formation of a new cultural context.

The narrator tells us

I remember childhood fields clad in yellow grain, and now they seem surreal. Did I really live there? Was the farm real? Such vivid yellow blue red green and that Hutterite vibe. This ice the only real world, an afterlife, on ice, but the only world that counts (Jarman, 2008, 33).

This questioning the survival of Canada, a dream of Canada, which seems already history, is a rewriting of Frye: 'Where is there?' rather than 'Where is here?' In his article on globalization and 'the spectral nation', Roy Miki comments:

Who needs the identity of the nation's time ... when there are commodities about to be born with the potential to overtake time ... in a post-ethnic, post-historical, post-contemporary, post-future, post-whatever time ... Against this soporific temptation of the atemporal, the estrangement of altered states, in a transformative iteration, turns and returns the affects of what Homi Bhabha had once called the "unhomely" that marked the arrival of the post-colonial. The "unhomely" is the event of a disjuncture, a crisis in spatialized time, between here and there, near and far, one's own and one's alien, internal and external; the "I" as doubled, subject and object, in the alterior spaces between shifting formations. When the influx of globalization makes the nation strange to itself, the present takes on the face of the uncanny and what was (now previously) in place is set adrift – to encounter the spectres of loss, nostalgia and liminality (2000, 47).

This long extract raises several points in connection with Jarman's story. Most obviously, the uncertainty about not merely 'where is here' and 'where is there', but also 'when is here?' connects with the 'post-whatever time' which Miki

suggests is one of the effects of global capital, not only the influence from American multinational businesses, but the outward-facing Canadian corporations which fall into line with the global market. This Canadian identity, as a potentially global market force, delivers a shock to the comfortable self-identification of Canada as a backward nation, isolated above the 49th parallel, under several feet of snow and ice every winter, and blasted by hot winds from the south in summer. As Miki says ‘the present takes on the face of the uncanny and what was (now previously) in place is set adrift – to encounter the spectres of loss, nostalgia and liminality’ (47), and this is what is encountered in Jarman’s ‘secret listening station’. The girl has drifted in, the men are drifting through the days, and nothing that they believe to be true is any longer without uncertainty. The narrator is nostalgic for ‘childhood fields clad in yellow grain, and now they seem surreal’ (Jarman, 2008, 33) and he asks himself if he ever really lived there; this combination of the homely and the unhomely is the *unheimlich* as Freud defines it. The girl falls in love with material, multinational culture. The proper, and eventual, spatial and temporal context for her is LA. ‘A Wilderness Station’ ends with Annie remarking ‘I did used to have the terriblest dreams’ (Munro, 1995, 225), a comment which gives the uncertainty of her history an uncanny element.

After the men have revived the girl and agreed not to penetrate her (in itself, typical ‘failed explorer’ behaviour; a settler would have raped her without compunction, and raped the landscape too), for a long section of the text, the girl is not mentioned. The men go about their daily lives, watching videos, gambling on the outcome of the taped games they’ve seen before, dodging bears, shooting pool, playing cards, listening to taped music.

The gambling also signifies the repetition of failed scenarios in Canadian masculinity. There is no suggestion that the men hope for a different outcome to the games, merely that they are compelled to repeat and forget and repeat the trauma. Eventually, when the video machine breaks, one man (named Rasmussen, significantly) suggests they do take it in turns with her: ‘she can be Eve, create a new race’ (2008, 35). He is forced to apologise after the other men ‘shun Rasmussen for seven weeks; he slips and gets concussion and can’t get around, but still we won’t speak to him’ (36), and later goes out into the storm, saying ‘*I may be gone some time*, edges out into the blizzard with his flowering concussion’



(38, italics in original), and they only find the bits of him that the bears don't want to eat. The italicised quotation from the documented historical exploration tragedy of Oates and Captain Scott's polar expedition underlines that nothing here is new – even sacrificial death cannot be original but must be copied from the imperial forefathers.

Rasmussen's suggestion affects all the men. 'We thought it had been decided that she didn't really exist' (36). The narrator tells the girl to wear snow pants over the long johns which have been showing her anatomy. She speaks for the first time, asking why. She seems oblivious to the danger she is in.

Although stranded on a listening station which is no longer receiving orders, the men have still some technology which works intermittently, and this is their bridge to civilisation. However, where in 'A Wilderness Station' the bridges which have been built to connect the settlement to the town are signifiers of progress and modernity, here the twentieth-century technology is already obsolete, useless. The intermittently functioning television begins to bring them capitalist, USA culture.

First a video channel, then a shopping channel. Ads for heroic pickup trucks bashing and splashing through rivers, the mad colours of a lost world ... Did the world go away or did we?

... The world seems ridiculous to me, but she watches the miraculous screen, fascinated ... She watches videos with tall models and turquoise swimming pools; she takes on new moves, mannerisms, dances in her socks (my socks!). She is in love. After a while she doesn't really want to read books with me, sorry, doesn't really want to walk to our wooden ship, doesn't find our dead rat all that romantic (2008, 38-9).

For the narrator, the past is not yet dead, although it may appear as remnants and frozen remains, but for the girl, the new world is not Canada but the USA. She is frequently referred to in connection with popular culture. Her navel is 'like a slot for a dime ... The first female for a long time, the first not on TV from the south' (26). The failure to hold onto her, to prevent her from becoming a female 'on TV from the south', is testament to the cultural power of the USA. The narrator's cultural references tend to be European.

We found a wooden ship on our lost satellite, stuck in ice, perhaps beached deliberately centuries before, lost men, food still on their table. Did the bears pick them off one by one, eating the years? ...

I walk her to the wooden ship, as if we are courting, to show her the frozen Norwegian rat lying on ballast stones, stones and rats been there so long a time, born in Europe, Eurocentric rats, going nowhere now.

Have you been here almost as long? She wonders (29-30).

This is clearly a reference to the Franklin expedition<sup>15</sup>, a perennial Canadian narrative of failure and hostile nature; what is notable is the four mentions of time: ‘centuries’, ‘eating the years’, ‘so long a time’, and the girl’s question, which goes unanswered. This theme is present, not only in Jarman but in Munro, where, although every document is dated, the distance between an event and the account of it contributes to the undermining of certainty. Time also figures as ambiguity in Jarman. The girl’s question ‘Have you been here almost as long?’ both voices ignorance of Canadian history and a connection with the British past which is still present.

The narrator does become friends with the girl, seeming to be closer to her than the others. ‘I read to her. These are prickly hair curlers. These are pink pedal pushers. That’s green grass. That’s the way a rich woman sits in an Adirondack chair.’ (32) These are the ‘old British picture books’, which have ‘come to hand’ in typical bricolage fashion. The list of artefacts, none of them useful or present in their situation, includes two which are notably US American. ‘Pedal pushers’ originated in mid-twentieth-century America, and the Adirondack chair originated in New York State; the Canadian equivalent is often known as the Muskoka chair. The first time he reads, the list is different, but equally odd.

*These are farmkids chasing a greased pig.  
This is a bi-plane.  
This is a black bathing-suit, a red guitar.  
This diamond ring (29 italicised in original).*

Here we can see his memories of home; even though he has said he is reading from British picture books and periodicals, they could equally well be Canadian memories. And perhaps the diamond ring suggests he is falling in love with her. There is a third list, not introduced, which comes just after his remembering ‘the fields clad in yellow grain’.

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<sup>15</sup> An alternative reading of ‘My White Planet’ might centre entirely round (yet) another re-visioning of the Franklin ‘legend’; the comparisons are obvious, but that is not my purpose here.

*These are bottles of stout.*  
*These are shopping malls.*  
*These are car dealers.*  
*Freeways and doom palms (34).*

This is life at home. It could be Britain, America or Canada. Later he tells us:

Our talks continue. She sits beside me, her body so warm.  
*These are lawyers.*  
*These are debutantes.*  
*These are power lines.*  
*This is a sizzling steak (38).*

The development between the third and fourth list of phrases seems to be from ordinary everyday things to signifiers of power, possibly American again. The apparently random sentences themselves signify the ‘abundance of names inherited from Britain and the United States’ (Kroetsch 1989, 50).

The attempt at allowing versions of narrative might explain the extreme intertextuality of Canadian culture. Where the impulse in the US is usually to define oneself as American, the Canadian, like a work of postmodern architecture, is always quoting his many sources (1989, 27).

Jarman’s text, as does Munro’s, quotes its many sources; in Jarman’s ‘British picture books and periodicals’, and in Munro’s autobiographical historical papers. As Adam Carter says ‘Canadians have no single, definable national identity, except, perhaps, insofar as Canadians’ peculiar awareness of multiplicity and difference might itself be said to constitute an identity’ (2003, 6). Carter is referring to postmodern texts, and his assertion is true of Jarman, while Munro’s text still searches for one true and stable origin, while pointing out the difficulty of discovering it. However, as Dobozy points out, in his use of bricolage, Jarman ‘implicates the subject’ (2007, 325) in the redeployed articulation of influential, invasive, cultural naming. In contrast, Munro’s striving for a unique Canadian narrative allows her texts to excavate from historiographic metafiction a resistance to the old meta-narratives.

The narrator says ‘The world seems ridiculous to me’ (39), but the girl ‘falls in love’ with what she sees on the television. She is being lured back to

‘civilisation’ by images of consumerism and materialism, in much the same way that First Nations and aboriginal peoples were lured from their lands by material goods, and as the conservative governments of Canada have been lured by the USA.

The narrator mentions the boat which used to appear once a year and ‘She says she's going to leave, go without me. Polar bears are worse than grizzlies, polar bears are meaner, and they like females’ (39). Is she a polar bear? It is not clear whether the line about bears is spoken by the girl or the narrator, but again we recall that Annie says she was wrapped in a bear skin. This is only the second time we’ve had a representation of the girl’s speech. Eventually a boat appears, and for the second time the girl’s speech is given directly.

‘Aren't you climbing aboard?’ she asks me. No.  
‘What's wrong?’ she asks (2008, 41).

Why won’t the narrator go? In Chapter Five of *Survival* on Explorers and Settlers as frequent characters, Atwood says ‘there are two main [patterns of the exploration theme]. i) exploration that doesn’t “find” anything and ii) Doomed exploration; that is, the explorers find death’ (1972, 115). In the previous chapter, Atwood also discusses ‘the life-destroying forces’ of ‘paralyzing guilt, the inability to act, the sexual stasis, the sense of placelessness and exile, the lack of contact with any source of true feeling’ (83). She suggests that, for explorers, ‘the core of the pattern is “failure” rather than “victim”’ (119), and it seems that Jarman’s narrator wills himself to be a victim, or in other words, ‘the inability to act’ means that he fails to survive. Frye’s garrison mentality may also be at play here: where he talks of ‘small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological “frontier”, separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources ... yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting’ (Frye, 1995, 227), this is precisely the situation of Jarman’s ‘explorers’. They are listeners, with nothing to listen to any more that they understand, lost, placeless, exiled.

In ‘A Wilderness Station’, it is the girl who remains, for a while, after she could escape. One could read Annie’s openness to nature as a ‘defence for a garrison culture’; as D G Jones suggests in *Butterfly on Rock*: ‘abandon defence, ... let down the walls and let the wilderness in, even to the wolves’ (1979,

8). She is garrisoned against her will, in the fortress constructed by her husband and brother-in-law. This may also be the defence adopted by the narrator in 'My White Planet', in his choosing to remain in the garrison of the listening station, which is under threat from the polar bears, and the end of which he and the other men seem to accept as inevitable. They remain, rather than returning to 'civilisation'. However, since that civilisation appears to be the USA rather than elsewhere in Canada, they are trapped between the North and the encroachment from the south.

The Arctic is a contentious border region between the USA and Canada. The US has angered the Canadian government by sending nuclear submarines through the Northern Sea Route and icebreakers to clear the passage for their ships, refusing to recognise the passage as within Canadian internal waters. Alaska, as the fiftieth state, gives the USA a base and a reason for assuming the right to patrol the Arctic sea routes. So even in the frozen North, the 'true North, strong and free', as the Canadian National Anthem puts it, Jarman's explorers are in border territory, a disputed, infringed territory.

In Jarman's story, the men (except, in the end, Rasmussen) are white and civil, European, and therefore caught in the settler subjectivity which is a "second world", inducing split anxiety (Lawson 2004, 152ff, also referenced in Coleman, 2007, 35). There is no mention of Arctic indigenous people, the Inuit, but the men's acceptance that the polar bears were there before them and have prior rights to the land (and to their bodies) is also a sign of this anxiety. The desire of the bears, anthropomorphically transfigured, is the desire of the Canadian wilderness for its origins, unsettled by Europeans.

After the girl leaves, the narrator misses her, and considers ending his life, 'but I like it here, these contorted icefields have become my vast home. Home is a strange pliable word, the world a giant laundry line, your mother a giant in blue sky, Adam and Eve now gone from the postwar suburb' (Jarman, 2008, 43). The story ends 'They know us, big carnal carnivores peeking in at our parts. It's love. They spy us in the window and are nostalgic for the happy future when they will have us in their arms' (45). The anthropomorphic identification of the bears, perhaps with the power of the USA, is another instance of the uncanny. This 'perpetual temporal and spatial exile' (Hirsch, 1996, 663) is clear from the semantic confusion of the nostalgia for the future, but this phrase in itself figures

a certain belatedness in the Canadian psyche, as always already in process. It also ties itself to Levi-Strauss's reversal of the diachronic and the synchronic, in that '[the messages or 'signs'] which the 'bricoleur' collects are ... ones which have to some extent been transmitted in advance' (1962, 13).

The erotic gaze is ever-present in Jarman's story, and it is not always the male gaze: the men see the girl through a window in the 'enclosed self-righting lifeboat' (26), 'like a TV and we stared in like the bears stare in at us' (42); she watches television and falls in love with the consumer goods it displays; the bears watch the men. 'They want us, they love us so much, and they do anything they want. We make noise at the front door and the two bears run happily to catch us in their embrace' (44). Every living thing has its eyes on the object of desire. Later they see the woman on television 'on Infotainment Tonight. She is shackled up with one of Jack Nicholson's sons. They walk on the beach and Junior Jack smiles that rakish smile, light at that magic hour the Arriflex cameras love' (42).

Here the link between the men and the bears, between the pure emptiness of life and death in the wilderness and the tacky emptiness of modern civilisation, and American civilisation in particular, are explicitly made. In another story by Jarman, 'Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World' in *New Orleans is Sinking* (1998), the narrator is asked by an American relative: "Do you even know who Janet Jackson is up in Canada?" I don't say how we wish we didn't know', continues the narrator, 'wish Canada wasn't swamped in American dreck' (104). Jarman is a true citizen of the world, well-travelled, but his writing often expresses a familiar Canadian defensiveness or resentment towards the USA, which is also a feature of *Survival*.

It is not only that Jarman is concerned with Canadian national or personal, masculine, identity, but that in saying, as it were, 'Yes, there's a lot of bush, wilderness and empty territory here, and that's Canada's spatial and temporal dimension – so what has it to say to the internet generation?' he is looking outward to the rest of the globe rather than focussing on the investigation of Canada's vast and troubling navel and her margins. He attempts to cut the umbilical cord which joins Canada to her postcolonial past, and to remove the 'late' and insist on Canada's here-ness and be-ness. Where Munro constructs continuity and history in the formation of an independent Canadian nation, Jarman sees the present, and perhaps the future, as already beginning anew.

Where this chapter has focussed on a variety of themes as they appear in two very different texts by two very different authors, Chapter Three examines how the themes work for one writer, whose output, like Munro's, spans the years before and after the publication of *Survival*. In the analysis of Alistair MacLeod's stories, I look in more detail at how the *unheimlich* is a feature of Canadian literature, and, in particular, the experience of 'the reluctant immigrant'.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Making it home: locations of the *unheimlich* in Alistair MacLeod's short fiction.**

#### **Introduction**

The themes which recur in Alistair MacLeod's short fiction include the generational structures, the failed sacrifice made by immigrants from the Scottish diaspora, and settlers and explorers. These appear in three chapters in *Survival*: Chapter Six, 'Family Portrait: Masks of the bear', Chapter Seven, 'Failed Sacrifices: The reluctant immigrant', and Chapter Five, 'Ancestral Totems: Explorers • Settlers'.

After a brief reference to Susanna Moodie, Atwood confines her discussion in Chapter Seven, 'Failed Sacrifices: The reluctant immigrant', to twentieth-century immigrants, and finds examples in stories by Morley Callaghan and Austin Clarke, and novels by John Marlyn, Adele Wiseman and Brian Moore. The constant theme here is failure – the word is repeated throughout the chapter. '[F]or the later immigrants, hostile cities replace hostile forests', Atwood says (1972, 149), and 'he is much more likely to find only failure. The sacrifice [of his past] has been made for nothing: not nothing plus money, just nothing' (150).

Atwood also says 'if [the immigrant] does wipe away his ethnic origin, there is no new "Canadian" identity ready for him to step into: he is confronted only by a nebulosity, a blank; no ready-made ideology is provided for him' (150). As there is none, the immigrant to Canada is not torn between trying to acquire a new national identity, which is 'a nebulosity', and the attempt to retain his culture of origin, but is forced to attempt a reconstruction of his past life in new surroundings, or, in Alistair MacLeod's fiction, his ancestral past. The re-enactment of the familiar in the unfamiliar is what makes the experience of the settler subject *unheimlich*. The stories in this chapter are concerned with diasporic subjects: MacLeod's Scots, who first arrived in Canada after the eighteenth-



century clearances of the Scottish Highlands. Many settled in Nova Scotia, ‘New Scotland’, as did MacLeod’s Scottish ancestors.

MacLeod’s stories also concern the experience of the invader-settler, who is neither indigenous to the new location nor a new immigrant in a host nation. Freud’s *unheimlich*, the Uncanny, is key to the analysis here. The ‘in-between’ nature of the diasporic subject is, of course, widely discussed, and will not be reiterated at length here, except insofar as it affects the experience of specifically Canadian immigrant subjects. In that context, the question which still hangs over the identity of the nation and its citizens adds to the lack of certainty for the new or recently arrived. The lack of home-ness also creates further tensions in European settlers, whose families may have been Canadian for centuries, but have been able to retain a strong emotional and psychical link with the ‘homeland’, as the lack of a firm identity as Canadian does not provide a coherent alternative.

Atwood does not concern herself with Canada as a national entity, except insofar as it is *not* the USA. It is difficult to pin down the beginning of the resentment towards the powerful southern neighbour, although it was certainly a factor by the end of the eighteenth century, after the American Revolution had resulted in the loss of British colonies in what became the United States, and the rise of British control over French territories in Upper Canada. It was a concern for George Grant in 1965, when *Lament for a Nation* was first published. His subtitle, *The defeat of Canadian nationalism* displays a concern with definitions of the national. As he says ‘This lament mourns the end of Canada as a sovereign state’ (2005, 4). He does not define the start of Canada as ‘a sovereign state’, but insists that:

[T]he generation of the 1920s took it for granted that they belonged to a nation. The character of the country was self-evident. To say it was British was not to deny it was North American. To be a Canadian was to be a unique species of North American (5).

‘To be a Canadian’, Grant continues, ‘was to build, along with the French, a more ordered and stable society than the liberal experiment in the United States. ... this hope has been extinguished’ (5).

These anxieties and their political basis are not the chief concern here, but the lack of definition of what Canada *is*, ‘not-the-USA’ appearing as a constant theme, demonstrates the lack of a positive, coherent identification of what constitutes ‘Canadianness’. As Robert Kroetsch puts it:

In Canada we cannot for the world decide when we became a nation or what to call the day or days or, for that matter, years that might have been the originary moments ... We define ourselves, often, as the cliché has it, by explaining to Americans that we aren’t British, to the British that we aren’t Americans (2004, 66).

This lack of certainty is what complicates and partially defines the diasporic identity in Canada. As Stephen Slemon argues ‘the *illusion* of a stable self/other, here/there binary division has never been available to Second-World writers’ (1997, 237 italics in original). This *illusion* of homeliness contributes to the *unheimlich*. What Slemon and Alan Lawson (2004, 151 ff) call the ‘Second World’ is the invader-settler nation, where Europeans have imposed their ‘civilization’ on aboriginal inhabitants, so that the term refers to both French and English Canada, as well as Australia and New Zealand. Lawson talks of the repressed memory of the origins of nation among the settler colonies (2004, 153). As Diana Brydon expresses it, ‘it is the survival of certain ways of seeing and not-seeing from the past into the present’ (2003, 56).

This chapter takes the ideas of Slemon (1997, 228-240) and Alan Lawson (2004, 151-164) on the ‘Second World’, and investigates the stories in the light of the ‘forgetting of the entangled agency of one’s history as a subject with that of the displaced Native/colonial subject’ (Lawson 2004, 151). Lawson’s ‘Second World’ is not that of the Cold War Eastern Bloc nations, but the settler-colonial nations, such as Australia and Canada. Lawson defines it as ‘more or less that part of colonial space occupied by the postimperial, so-called settler colonies’ (2004, 152). ‘The archival narrative ... would be that there has been a strong tradition of resistance to (or, more generally, engagement with) the power of particular imperial discourses since very early in the colonial period’ (2004, 152). MacLeod’s writing engages with the idea of ‘nation’, and traces of resistance can be discovered in the liminality of the spaces in which the characters live and read ‘the English book’ (Bhabha, 2007, 38-43). As Lawson says ‘[Settler cultures] are liminal sites at the point of negotiation between the contending authorities of

Empire and Native' (2004, 155). In MacLeod's stories, it is the absence of the Native which speaks, almost as loudly as the absence of a unitary settler identity, and the reluctance to become absorbed into a settler nation.

### **The generations**

It is not surprising that the first immigrants take some time to feel at home in a new country. However, what Atwood describes in her reading of Canadian literature is a clear distinction between the generations and their assimilation into the nation; she highlights the three-generational structure which she finds in Canadian fiction, suggesting that:

The first generation in the immigrant novel is typically seen as having more charm and wisdom, or vitality, or cultural suavity, than its WASP counterpart; the second generation has more energy – it really fights for success – and the third generation is given a better chance for a full human life (1972, 154).

This generational structure is apparent in the work of Alistair MacLeod. His family have lived in Nova Scotia for over two hundred years, and MacLeod lived on Cape Breton in the summer months, moving to Ontario in the winter<sup>16</sup>. And yet, he still referred to himself as a 'cheap Scotsman' (reading at Toronto Reference Library, July 2010). His published stories are few in number, comprising two collections, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (first published 1976) and *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun* (first published 1986), as well as a novel *No Great Mischiefs* (1999). The stories were published as a complete collection, *Island*, in 2000. This collection includes two 'new' stories, 'Island' (first published 1988), and 'Clearances' (first published 1999)<sup>17</sup>.

Most of the stories are set in Nova Scotia, usually on Cape Breton, and examine the lives of men (mainly) who live by fishing, mining and farming. They speak or sing in Gaelic, particularly at times of stress, recalling their ancestry in the highlands of Scotland. 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood' is unusual in MacLeod's work, in that it is set in Newfoundland, with characters of Irish ancestry. Even more unusual is 'Island', the title-story from the collection, in which the

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<sup>16</sup> MacLeod died in April 2014.

<sup>17</sup> All quotations from the stories in this chapter are from *Island*, (2002) unless otherwise stated.

protagonist is female, and the setting is a small island off the coast of Cape Breton; but here again, the family traces its roots to Scotland.

MacLeod's writing is lyrical, with some of the intonation of the King James Bible, and he can be regarded as a romantic writer. However, he is never sentimental; his men and women are hard-headed, tough, surviving in difficult conditions, both at work and in a bleak, if beautiful, natural world.

The prose is largely paratactic, with long sentences using co-ordinating conjunctions, usually 'and':

And the fish had eaten his testicles and the gulls had pecked out his eyes and the white-green stubble of his whiskers had continued to grow in death, like the grass on graves, upon the purple, bloated mass that was his face ('The Boat' 2002, 25).

When the author gave readings from his work, as at the International Short Story Conference at York University, Toronto in 2010, or the conference in Little Rock, Arkansas in 2012, he spoke like someone retelling an old legend, as if the story had been passed down orally through many generations. The effect was hypnotic and affective.

In discussing whether MacLeod's fiction bears signs of influence from *Survival*, failure, migration, and the relationship with 'mainland' Canada and a Canadian identity need to be considered. 'First-generation' characters in MacLeod identify themselves as Scottish (occasionally Irish, as in 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood'), while the second generation either leave or return home, caught 'in between' the old and the new culture, and the third generation are frequently city-dwellers, who occasionally return home for gatherings of the clan<sup>18</sup>.

The way Atwood's themes function in the stories will become apparent; they connect the diasporic identity with the simpler approach taken by Atwood, who describes the frequency of disaster and failure in pointless sacrifices. In 'Island' Agnes loses her daughter to the city (Toronto), in itself a synecdoche for Canada, and sacrifices herself to four men in an apparent attempt to replace her. The encounter is a failure – she does not become pregnant. The father in 'The

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<sup>18</sup> 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood' is an exception, as the grandson lives with the grandparents in a fishing community by the sea, while it is the son, the second-generation character, who has left. 'Island' is also different, in that it includes a fifth generation, the grandson of the protagonist, whose parents have also featured in the story.

Boat' may drown by accident, (itself one of Atwood's themes; see 1972, 166) or he may sacrifice himself<sup>19</sup> for the son's chance of freedom from tradition and yet the son, the narrator, does not seem to be happy in his 'Canadian' identity.

However, Atwood's distinctions about the generations really only hold true for the second and third. The first, or at least the first in the narrative, are not charming and wise, or vital, or culturally suave, whatever she means here. Vitality, in particular, is lacking; they are more likely to be worn out. They are afraid of, or disgusted by, the future, obstinately attached to their past culture – not really 'suave' at all. They can be wise, in a kind of folk-wisdom way. They can be more or less aware of their non-place in modern Canada (for example, the father in 'The Boat', the grandparents in 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood'), but they often are not. This awareness of their 'non-place', a home which is not a home, contributes to the *unheimlich*.

### **Part 1.**

The first half of this chapter looks at the occurrence of the *unheimlich* in the earlier stories of Alistair MacLeod, drawing a connection between the *unheimlich* home, and the compulsion to repeat the experience of loss in the older generations of MacLeod's families with their memories of legend and history; in the middle, alienated generations; and in the younger characters, who make repeated attempts to leave or to return home, and whose identity is split between the 'here and now' and the 'there and then'. The site of repression in the older generation, which contributes to the *unheimlich* experience, is a refusal to recognise the present location as 'familiar'. The insistent surfacing of the characters' new identity as Canadians, as neo-colonial, disrupts the self-location in a past life and the semi-feudal, Scottish crofter identity which is no longer available.

Claire Omhovère writes of 'roots and routes' in Alistair MacLeod's stories, discussing not only the iterated 'leaving and returning' but the connection with the local place, and how the stories contribute to 'imagined geographies' (2006, 50). She suggests that 'The secret MacLeod's characters share, but will not admit, is constrained within a double bind, staying in Cape Breton being just as

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<sup>19</sup> MacLeod insisted that 'nobody knows!' (conversation with the author, Arkansas, 2012 pers. comm.)

impossible as leaving it' (51). She does not explain why it is a secret, or how this secret functions. The 'connection with the local place' only functions when it can be predicated on isolation, victimhood, and the 'unfamiliar familiar'.

It is this insularity, the space where an imaginary homeland is preserved and always already reconstructed, which is problematic for the diasporic subject. 'Out there', or as the stories frequently describe it, 'the larger world', is almost as mythical a place as the folk memory of the land the characters' ancestors have left behind. It is in the spaces between the present in Canada, the past in the Scottish Highlands, and the unknown future – spaces usually delineated as the different experiences of generations – that displacement and an 'eerily familiar' sensation is *unheimlich*.

The 'sense of liminality, an in-betweenness' (Omhovère, 63) both in time and space, and the iterated leaving and returning, fix the characters in an imaginary location, compelled to repeat the trauma of departure from the familiar, and the equally impossible return to the site of the *unheimlich*, the Cape Breton home. It is worth noting that Cape Breton geographically hangs out into the Atlantic, halfway between Scotland and Vancouver.

In the fracture between older and younger generations, a space opens up between the preservation of past cultural roots, and the route to the present. In that space between grandparents and grandchildren, parents – the middle generation – are alienated. In 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood', the narrator, both a son and a father, describes himself as 'stranded here, alien of my middle generation' (2002, 130). Thus the 'middle generation' is neither in the new nor self-identified with the old. But leaving is not straightforward for the children either. There *are* children who have left, taken 'that other road that leads into the larger world' ('The Road to Rankin's Point' 158), the 'national space', and they seldom return, and seldom appear in the stories. When they do reappear, they are seen by their grandparents as consumer-oriented and shallow, having no roots.

In one of the few examples where the son (and grandson) does leave, in 'The Vastness of the Dark' (first pub. 1971, a year before *Survival*), it is on his eighteenth birthday. 'I think I'll go away today' he says to his parents. 'I think I'll go right now' (2002, 39). 'Perhaps you should go home' his father suggests (41); he is not meaning Scotland, but the grandparents' house. This clearly demonstrates the time and space-relation between the generations of family in

MacLeod's fiction: the grandparents' house being the implied 'home' for the middle generations (in contrast with the younger), which temporarily grounds them in an imagined Scottish homeland, figured by the Gaelic-speaking first generation, while the younger generation attempt to make a home in Canada. 'Don't forget to come back, James', the grandfather says to him, 'it's the only way you'll be content' (44).

Many commentators (Williams, 2001; Nicholson, 2001; Creelman, 2008) have focussed on the use of Gaelic language and Gaelic songs as symptomatic of the willed survival of the pre-diasporic identity in MacLeod's older characters; the reason for its gradual loss among the younger being encroaching modernisation and the internationalisation of industry. In 'The Vastness of the Dark' and in 'The Closing Down of Summer' the local mines have closed, and this loss of the means to make a living provokes renewed journeys, as the clearances sparked the diaspora from the Scottish Highlands two hundred years before. The miners sing Gaelic folk songs as they leave Cape Breton to work in South Africa at the end of the summer, and in 'The Vastness of the Dark' the grandmother 'has always spoken with the Gaelic inflections of her youth' (42). The repudiation of English, the official language of the centre, effects an identity as marginal. In this resistance to the meta-narrative, as Robert Kroetsch (2004) puts it, the older characters become 'archetypal Canadian'. 'In a sense [they become] the archetypal Canadian by refusing to become Canadian' (2004, 67).

In 'Imaginary Homelands' (2007, 428-434) Salman Rushdie discusses the diasporic subject's experience of displacement and in-betweenness. 'It may be that ... exiles or immigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back' he says. 'We will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind' (2007, 428). Rushdie speaks of the migrant's present 'being in a different place from his past, of his being "elsewhere"' (429). The migrant's problem is 'how to build a new, "modern" world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one' (433). 'Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools' (431). Although the migration has taken place two hundred years earlier for MacLeod's subjects, the older generation retains this sense of being 'elsewhere', and this sense of being

haunted by the 'old culture' inhibits the middle and youngest generations, too. John McLeod adds: 'the experience of migrancy make[s] impossible the recovering of the plenitudinous sense of home ... to live in a diasporic location is to live without or beyond old notions of being "at home" or securely "in place". It is to embrace movement, [and] motion...instead of stability' (2010, 244).

This precisely describes the situation of MacLeod's characters; at no point are they fully 'at home', nor are they able to find a satisfactory identity 'away'. Rushdie's 'imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind' intrude into the text and into the formation of a 'new' Canadian identity, preventing a 'plenitudinous sense of home' being fully realised. As Rushdie says 'To forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers would be ... to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile which in South Africa is called the "homeland"' (2007, 433). This 'internal exile' can be not only the 'New Scottish' space of Cape Breton, but also the internal space where individual identity is formed.

Where Rushdie speaks of feeling that 'we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools' (431), Gillian Gane, discussing a story by Rushdie, expresses the diasporic identity as 'not single but resolutely divided' (2001, 48). Thus MacLeod's grandparents 'resolutely' exile themselves in a Gaelic-speaking culturally and historically backward-looking 'homeland', leaving children and grandchildren homeless in a modern and progressing nation. For the alien middle generation, who can neither look back nor quite find themselves in the 'larger world', and for the young whose identification is 'at once plural and partial', both leaving and returning are experiences which recall a long-ago trauma. (The miners in 'The Closing Down of Summer' (MacLeod 2002) are about to leave for South Africa – from where Rushdie draws his definition of 'homeland'). Forcible separation from the mother country and the subsequent alienation in the 'invisible' country which is Canada perpetuates the trauma. The double identity which results is a further manifestation of Freud's *unheimlich*.

Cynthia Sugars (2008) draws on the Freudian Uncanny in discussing 'contingency and origins', in relation to *No Great Mischief*, MacLeod's one novel (first published 1999). 'We are all committed to the uniqueness of our identities ... yet we are equally compelled by a drive toward heredity and genealogy' (2008, 135), she says. She goes on to talk about the instance of uncanniness of 'the



double' when it takes the form of a genetic relation (as occurs in 'The Island', discussed below), but the term could equally be applied to Gane's 'resolutely divided' diasporic subject, or the identity which Rushdie describes as 'both plural and partial'.

Jentsch, from whom Freud begins his enquiry into the Uncanny, described it as rooted in 'intellectual uncertainty ... the better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something *unheimlich*' (Freud 2001, 930). Freud turns to a German dictionary for the definition of *heimlich*, (or homelike, as it is translated by Strachey) giving examples of common usage. One example is 'That which comes from afar assuredly does not live quite *heimelig* (at home) among the people' (932), which surely describes the experience of diaspora.

Freud's thesis in 'The Uncanny' (2001, 929-952) is that '... the *unheimlich* is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (930). It is clear that the 'old and long familiar' can be applied to the imaginary homeland of the Scottish Highlands, and its insistent, if repressed, presence in MacLeod's text. This insistence results from the trauma of the loss of the parental home at the time of the Clearances, when Anglo-Scots landlords evicted their tenants from the land they had farmed for generations. This forced diaspora, many of whose subjects settled in Nova Scotia, is what haunts the present. Freud accepts that the *unheimlich* home is commonly translated as the *haunted* home (945), and the homes in Cape Breton are haunted by homes and a past which is dead, and repressed. When the repressed resurfaces, it is 'nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression' (Freud 2001, 944). For the younger members of the family, this haunting is what attaches them to the 'eerily familiar', and also what causes the repeated attempts to leave.

This haunting surfaces explicitly, for example, in the father's singing to American tourists in 'The Boat'; in 'Vision', the old woman speaks to visitors, who she suspects may be intruders, in Gaelic, repeatedly asking 'Who's there?' (335, 348-9, 360). The question itself points to the connection between the use of Gaelic and the uncertainty of identity. 'The Closing Down of Summer' ends with the miners on their journey into the wider world, to their next job, 'liberating

resources' (MacLeod, 202) in Africa, singing Gaelic choruses. But in what way this haunting presence is *unheimlich* is more implied than spoken – or sung.

It is almost always when the 'larger world' intrudes or threatens to intrude into the private space of the home that Gaelic songs are sung. This intrusion can be equated with what I am loosely terming 'colonisation'. I include the encroachment of USAmerican culture, multi-national business, tourists from the USA and Germany, and even the reappearance of the uncannily unfamiliar younger generation who have lived in the wider world and may be tainted by new values, cultural influences and mores. This is seen, for example, when the grandmother in 'The Road to Rankin's Point' plays folk tunes on the violin when she is expecting the younger members of the family to return 'from their scattered destinations on the roads of the larger world' (166) to try to persuade her to go into care.

Freud goes on to discuss the 'compulsion to repeat' unpleasant experiences, as in the *fort-da* game which he described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1974, 8-10). He concludes that 'whatever reminds us of this inner "compulsion to repeat" is perceived as *unheimlich*' (2001, 943) He insists that in repetition 'the *unheimlich* can make itself felt' ... this factor of involuntary repetition ... surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an *unheimlich* atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable' (942).

Many scholars of MacLeod's work, Omhové (2006) for example, point to the 'compulsion to repeat' the experience of leaving and returning, and the stories almost always recount several instances of homecomings and leavings, and frequently refer to this pattern in the lives of the characters. Departure and return do not in themselves carry *unheimlich* affect, but when combined with the iteration of feelings of loss and the search for a liveable identity, the *unheimlich* makes itself felt. As David Williams suggests, 'it is as if the word *home* is synonymous with the memory of loss' (2001, 56). Since the Scottish families were evicted from the original *heimelig* home, the fear of loss of a settled location attaches to wherever the present families are rooted, which can come to seem always temporary. Dennis Lee comments, in 'Writing in Colonial Space' (2007), "language", "home", "here" have no native charge; they convey only meanings in whose face we have been unable to find ourselves since the eighteenth century'

(349). He says, ‘if you are Canadian, home is a place that is not home to you – it is even less your home than the imperial centre you used to dream about’ (349). In MacLeod, the characters are still ‘dreaming’ this original home. In dreams, the familiar is also the unfamiliar, and thus *unheimlich*.

In ‘The Lost Salt Gift of Blood’, the narrator, returning to his parents-in-law’s home from his life in the United States (the grandparents’ home, in that he also has a son), stands by the water’s edge, and comments that this is ‘perhaps no place for me at all’. (123) He recognizes the coming of twilight – that most *unheimlich* of hours – ‘with surprise and a slight shiver’ (123). When his father-in-law (the grandfather in the story) appears, it is ‘sudden and unexpected’ (124). The narrator describes his son, the grandparents and their home as if he has not seen them before, referring to them as ‘the old man’ and ‘the old woman’, and describing them and their house in detail. ‘There are no voices and no shadows that are real’ he thinks, when he goes up to bed. ‘There are only walls of memory touched restlessly by flickers of imagination’ (138). This recalls Freud’s assertion that ‘an *unheimlich* effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced’ (2001, 946). In the observation of the narrator that ‘no voices and no shadows are real’, the implication is that there are voices and shadows but that they are unreal. The metaphor ‘walls of memory’ means – what? That the walls hold the voices of the dead? Or that the walls are formed from memories, walls which only seem to enclose and could be broken through if the will were there. Taken with the ‘flickers of imagination’, the confusion between what is real and what is imagined is complete. The narrator has earlier identified himself with Heathcliff, hearing the ghost of Cathy crying to be let in – one of the best-known examples of the *unheimlich* in English literature. This is, of course, also a haunting of the text by the literature of ‘the imperial centre’, the lost home. Even as he makes this suggestion, he effaces its ‘reality’ by saying that ‘I hear no voice’ (137). These iterated negative constructions persist in suggesting the opposite of what they say, in ‘doubling’ the impression of what is repressed, of uncanniness. Freud points out that ‘the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix ‘*un*’ is the token of repression’ (2001, 947).

Rather than get into bed, the narrator leaves his room and feels his way in the dark to the room where his son is sleeping. Standing outside the door, he

says 'No one waits on the other side. I stand and bend to hear the sound of my one son's sleeping. He does not beckon any more than the nonexistent voice in the outside wind' (137). This curious passage calls into question the cultural connection between the generations and the reality of the child, the continuance of the life of the family in a liminal location. The uncertainty over whether the child is alive or a haunting, as with Cathy, is definitively *unheimlich*. The child figures both the invisible future and an imagined past.

Washing himself early in the morning while the 'outside light is breaking' (the mirrored double of twilight), '[m]y face looks back from the mirrored cabinet' (139). "I think I will go back today," I say while looking into the mirror at my face and at those in the room behind me' (139). Those others are the grandparents, his mother and father-in-law. Thus, his 'compulsion to repeat' the leaving, which in this case will incur the loss of 'ownership' of his son, is directly connected with his self-identification as a mirrored double, and with the doubling of the grandparents in the room behind him. This doubling, as well as suggesting Rushdie's 'dual identity' is also a feature of Freud's theories on the *unheimlich*. 'For the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denier of the power of death' Freud says. 'But when this [primary narcissism] has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the *unheimlich* harbinger of death' (Freud 2001, 940). Here, the narrator's decision to leave again, or as he phrases it, 'to go back', is connected with his fear of death-like stasis in his family's liminal world.

Freud says:

An uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes (Freud 2001, 946).

Such a symbol is the name 'Springhill', which has become part of the narrator's childhood memory in 'The Vastness of the Dark', when his father went to help rescue survivors of the Springhill mining disaster, and which seemed 'in my fourteenth year, so very far away and more a name than even a place' (MacLeod 2002, 51). He imagines the men 'being carried through the door in the heavy

coffins for the last and final look. Other people's buried fathers are very strange and far away but licorice and movie matinees are very close and real' (52). In explicitly contrasting the death of miners, like his father but not his father, with the real, he allows the name 'Springhill' to become a symbol.

In 'The Vastness of the Dark', when the young man leaves Cape Breton to travel 'out into the world', as it is termed in 'The Road to Rankin's Point' (144, 145), his journey is broken in Springhill. '[The] realization that this is where I have come is more of a shock than I would ever have imagined' the young narrator tells us, 'As if in spite of signposts and geography and knowing it was "there", I have never thought of it as ever being "here"' (2002, 51). This sudden recognition of what had been entirely symbolic becomes a crucial moment for a young man on the cusp of adulthood. His memories resurface and take on new meaning, as he comes to understand more of his heritage, his identity as a member of a particular community. The 'signposts' have pointed him towards family history and the past, albeit a past which is relatively recent. The equivocal deixis in the 'there' and 'here' locates his position in the space between both past and 'there', and present and 'here'. This is one of the few stories where a member of the younger generation may actually succeed in leaving, in becoming autonomous.

The narrator has hoped to go to Vancouver, another name which acts as a symbol. Towards the end of the story, while waiting for a car to stop and pick him up, he realises how inexperienced and unimportant he is.

For I had somehow thought that "going away" was but a physical thing. And that it had only to do with movement and with labels like the silly "Vancouver" that I had glibly rolled off my tongue; or with the crossing of bodies of water or with the boundaries of borders (55-6).

Again, the reality behind the symbol asserts itself, but this time as an absence, a meaningless word. While he is waiting, he thinks about his parents and what he has left behind, and realises that they are like everyone else. However, the misogynist, racist salesman he has been travelling with has taught him something. 'And perhaps this man has left footprints on a soul I did not even know that I possessed' (57), he thinks. Atwood says that Canada is 'the land of death. And in the land of death, simply staying genuinely alive – spiritual survival – is a kind of

triumph' (1972, 154). Atwood's death is often literal but also figures as failure. Canada is "the grey desolation" (quotation from John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death*), and '[t]o enter Canada spiritually is to enter the Death-monster' (154). The narrator in 'The Vastness of the Dark' has entered 'the grey desolation' in entering Canada spiritually.

His mother has assumed that he is going to 'Blind River' when he tells her he is leaving. 'It was as if my mother had not only known that I was to leave but had even planned my route and final destination' (2002, 40). The name 'Blind River' is also significant in that, like his diasporic ancestors who did not know where they were going, he is travelling blind. His final lift is with three miners who are going to Blind River, so his mother's assumption may turn out to be more like a prediction, and he is not free of the anxiety of history after all. It may be that, although he has tried to escape his mining heritage, he will merely have moved from one mining town to another. As Atwood says, immigrants to Canada 'are not travelling *towards* anything' (1972, 151, italics in original). As they travel towards this predestined 'blind' future the 'headlights seek out and follow the beckoning white line which seems to lift us and draw us forward, upward and inward, forever into the vastness of the dark' (58). 'Inward' indicates both a journey into the space of the continent, the centre of Ontario, and also a discovery of what lies at the heart of his own identity. The space through which he is drawn is dark, recalling Conrad's canonical postcolonial text *Heart of Darkness*, but also fears generated by the unknown and the darkness.

### **'Clearances'**

To discover what happens when 'an alien of [the] middle generation' (MacLeod 2002, 130) is confronted with the imagined homeland, another story by MacLeod is worth considering here.

In 'Clearances', the last story in MacLeod's collection, the protagonist takes advantage of his leave from the terrifying trenches of the Second World War to visit the Scottish Highlands, home of his ancestors. He recalls that 'he had prayed in Gaelic ... in the subsequent years he was able to repress the most horrific of the memories' (418). This links the use of Gaelic and the repression of terrifying things. However, Freud goes on to say that 'every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into

anxiety [It] would then constitute the *unheimlich* ... nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (2001, 944). This, he says, is where the *unheimlich* becomes one with the *heimlich*. So it is for the protagonist of 'Clearances', returning to a home which he has never in fact seen, straight from his terrifying experience of war in 'the larger world', and hearing the familiar language of his childhood. On a train from Glasgow into the Highlands 'he was aware of the soft sounds of Gaelic around him. At first he was surprised, hearing the language as what seemed like subliminal whispers' (2002, 418-9) but 'the soft language began to dominate' (419). What is repressed re-surfaces, and to reiterate the quotation from Freud given earlier, it is 'nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression' (Freud 2001, 944). He becomes one with his location, the 'motherland'. However, this transition does not happen easily, all at once. First, he becomes 'aware of his difference and his similarity' (2002, 419); again, this references Freud's *unheimlich*, where the familiar is also the unfamiliar. He 'haltingly' begins a conversation with an old shepherd, who asks him "'You are from Canada? You are from the Clearances?'" (419). He observes that the shepherd 'pronounced the word "Clearances" as if it were a place instead of a matter of historical eviction' (419). For the shepherd, the clearances are symbolic, whereas for the protagonist they are the root of his identity. He sees himself as 'the descendant of victims of history and changing economic times' (420). These victims are those which Atwood insists are common in Canadian literature.

He is asked how he would plant crops among the trees on Cape Breton.

"Oh, the trees had to be cleared first," he explained. "I guess beginning with my great-great-grandfather. They cut the trees and cleared the land of stones."

"After the war will you go back to these cleared lands?" they asked. (420)

He seems entirely unaware of the irony in his use of the word 'cleared' in this context, but it is this 'clearing' which constitutes his repressed identity as Canadian.

In the late afternoons and early evenings he looked across the western ocean, beyond the point of Ardnamurchan, and tried to visualize Cape Breton and his family at their tasks.

“After the clearances,” said his friend the shepherd, “there were not many people left. Most of them were gone to Canada or America or Australia (421).

As MacLeod’s characters frequently stand at the edge of the sea looking east to Scotland, now he returns the gaze, figuring the Janus-like quality of the diasporic subject.

When he returns to Cape Breton at the end of the war ‘he clear[s] yet another field which extend[s] to the ocean’s edge’ (421). The liminal space of the shore from which men yearn for the pre-diasporic homeland is connected to the idea of clearing away, of labour, of making a living. However, this clearing away is never cathartic, but a repression both of the new location and the possibility of recognising a new identity. As is clear from the shepherd’s question, the Highlands are clear of trees. ‘Sometimes in the evenings he would look across the ocean, imagining he could see the point of Ardnamurchan and beyond’ (422); yet again he returns the gaze back to the homeland. In the first occurrence, the text has ‘beyond the point of Ardnamurchan’, in the second ‘the point of Ardnamurchan and beyond’. The inclusion of ‘beyond’ in each, suggests that there is more than mere reality being searched for. In both examples, the attempt to see what is withheld from sight is an exercise of the imagination. What is ‘withheld from sight’ is the site of repression, an unconscious refusal by the subject to identify with either old or new.

Encroaching commercialisation, the departure or death of his children, which ‘had seemed so bizarre and unexpected’ (422), visitors buying up houses, erecting fences which divide the community, the ‘eviction’ of the former owners by economic means, and the death of his wife: these all leave the protagonist isolated in the *unheimlich*.

Some ‘clear-cutters’ arrive, young men who yearn ‘for the spruce trees that had gradually reclaimed the field he had once cleared as a younger man’ (425). He recognises their ambition, but is annoyed by their rapaciousness. One of the young men ‘identified himself through a Gaelic patronymic’ (425), so that naming again connects the past and present, the here and the away. The phrase ‘clear-cutters’ is repeated three times more in the next few lines. They discuss the



creation of a Park by the government which is for leisure and tourism, ‘while the families in its path worried about eviction’ (426). Here the past, figured by the use of Gaelic and the surfacing of ancient fears of being made homeless, haunts the present, symbolised by the clear-cutters, the new industries, and the Canadian state. Thus the past trauma resurfaces in the familiar but unfamiliar home.

When a German couple come, wanting to buy the house and land, the protagonist and his son, who lives nearby, ‘speak uncomfortably in Gaelic’ as if even this refuge is now alien to them. He agrees to the sale, but the Germans do not want the trees, so he is able to sell them.

He looked at the land once cleared by his great-great-grandfather and at the field once cleared by himself. The spruce trees had been there and had been cleared and now they were back again. They went and came something like the tide, he thought ... He looked toward the sea; somewhere out there, miles beyond his vision, he imagined the point of Ardnamurchan and the land which lay beyond. He was at the edge of one continent, he thought, facing the invisible edge of another. He saw himself as a man in a historical documentary (430).

I have quoted this paragraph at length as it draws together the threads of my argument. Here the intrusion of the past into the present, the reiteration of ‘cleared’, the leaving and returning, the imaginary homeland, the looking beyond the real, and the uncertainty about identity come together.

*Heimlich* can also mean its opposite, when it is used in the sense of private, secret, or kept from sight. ‘*Heimlich* ... as withdrawn from knowledge, unconscious...that which is obscure, inaccessible to knowledge’ (Freud, 2001, 934). In connection with this sense it is necessary to consider whether it is the old homelands of the Highlands which are inaccessible, or ‘all the unfulfilled but possible futures’ to quote Freud (941), in ‘the larger world’ of Canadian nationhood. Thus the journey to a full identity as Canadian colonial subject is suppressed, crushed by external circumstances, which, in turn, should be ‘kept from sight’, the unknowable identity of the post-colonial, made-homeless subject of ancestral history.

“Neither of us was born for this,” he thought, and then from a great distance, across the ocean and across the years, he heard the voice of his friend the shepherd’ (430-1). This explicitly *unheimlich* experience foregrounds the location of the once dispossessed diasporic victim with whom he has identified in

the liminal location of Cape Breton. He is now forced to realise his repressed implication in the exploitation of the land, and his dual identity, both as a victim of dispossession and as neo-colonial, a member of the Canadian nation. It is this refusal to recognise the family's implication in colonisation which provides the chief site of repression, contributing to the experience of the *unheimlich* home.

## **Part 2. 'Island'.**

'Island' (first published 1988), the eponymous story from MacLeod's collected short fiction, is a 'later' work, as is 'Clearances' (first published 1999). Both were written after the publication of his previous two collections, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (1976) and *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun* (1986). 'Island' is the penultimate story in the collection, and the most mysterious. Uniquely for MacLeod, the protagonist, through whom the narrative is focalised, is a woman, whose birth, young adulthood, maturity and old age are all encompassed in a long story, more than forty pages. Only 'Vision', from *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*, is longer. The length allows MacLeod to construct a circular narrative which nevertheless does not seem forced or artificial. At the centre, structurally, though not in its importance in the protagonist's history, is a partially obscured event seeming at first to have little connection with the surrounding story, which constitutes a seemingly straightforward narrative of a woman's life.

The *unheimlich* is everywhere evident. The woman, a member of the third generation whose lives and deaths are recorded, and whose name is Agnes, grows up on an island off the coast of Cape Breton, where her parents are keepers of the lighthouse. As a seventeen-year old, she meets a young fisherman with whom she has a brief, clandestine, affair<sup>20</sup>. He asks her to marry him when he is able to return after working in a sawmill 'in the winter woods of Maine' (382). When he returns they become lovers, and he leaves again. This time he does not return, and she hears that he has been killed in an accident in the woods. She gives birth to a sickly daughter, who is left with an aunt on 'the mainland' – 'itself but another large island' (370). After her parents' death, she takes over the care of the light and continues to live, isolated, on the island until she is old, and

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<sup>20</sup> Among the examples Freud gives of *heimlich* is 'Concealed, kept from sight ... secret', as in '*heimlich* meetings and appointments ... *heimlich* love, love-affair, sin' (933).

is taken away 'to live somewhere else' (382, 412). The structurally central event occurs after her parents' deaths, when she is living alone, and a boat carrying four fishermen lands on the shore. It seems that she has sex with all four of them, on the rocks, before they row away. It is not clear quite how this happens, or what consent she has given, but there is little or no evidence that she is forced to take part, or that she is unhappy about it. She expects to be pregnant again, but is not.

In the background of the story is the passage of time on the mainland, the increase in the numbers of motor cars, and the rise of technology; the reader is aware of the twentieth-century advancing. The fifth generation of the story, a grandson, does not appear until the closing pages, and it is he who removes her from the island 'to live somewhere else'. The generational structure and its connection with Atwood's identification of a similar structure are certainly present in 'Island', although not as clear as in the stories by MacLeod discussed so far. The older generations, both grandparents who barely feature in the story and Agnes's parents, live on the threshold of the nation state, although there is a suggestion that they have been placed there rather than voluntarily withheld themselves from integration. Agnes, the third generation, remains isolated until she is an old woman, and does not seem eager to leave for 'the wider world'. However, the young man with whom she has a sexual relationship does leave, and is killed in an accident in the USA, having travelled from the threshold of Canada through the settler colonial nation to the neo-colonial. The daughter Agnes has with him also leaves, first for the immediate threshold of 'the mainland', another, larger, island and later for Toronto. She does not return. The fifth generation, now assimilated, is Agnes's grandson, who succeeds in taking Agnes across the threshold into the national space. Thus, MacLeod complicates the structure described by Atwood, stretching out the development of assimilation and the achievement of a full (Canadian) identity. In 'Island' the focus is on the lack of identity rather than the formation of it.

### **Gaelic and the *unheimlich***

The protagonist of 'Island' is the descendant, as so many of MacLeod's characters are, of Scottish crofters, diasporic subjects as a result of the eighteenth-century Highland Clearances. In this story, as in others, the Gaelic language is used at times of stress. The first use of Gaelic occurs during the description of

‘the late summer rams’ where the fishermen are compared with them by Agnes. The field where they are kept is called ‘*achadh nan caoraich*, the field of the sheep’ (380 italics in original). Gaelic is used again on the same page, when Agnes walks to ‘the back of the island’, to the place where the young man joins her, and where later in the story she will have the sexual encounter with the four fishermen.

There was a small cove there which was known as *bagh na long bhriseadh*, bay of the shipwreck, because there were timbers found there in the long-ago time before the lighthouse was established. She sat on *creig a bhoird*, the table rock, which was called so because of its shape, and looked out across the seeming infinity of the sea. And then he was standing beside her (380).

The next Gaelic phrase is what ‘she thought she heard him say’ when she goes to meet him the second time. ‘As she went by she thought she heard him say *Áite na cruinneachadh*. She quickened her step as she felt her colour rise, hoping or perhaps imagining that he had said “the meeting place” (381-2). The Gaelic phrases are recalled by Agnes after the officials have been to tell her that the lighthouse is to be automated and that her life as the keeper of the light is over. The Law has finally asserted itself over her life, forcing her out of her imaginary space.

She realized with a type of shock that in spite of generations of being “people of the island” they had never really owned it in any legal sense. There was nothing physical of it that was, in strict reality, formally theirs (407).

This recalls the dispossession of the Clearances centuries before, and draws together the repressed in this story with the repressed presence of colonial implication in the other stories. Where the implication of Canadian colonialism is repressed in the earlier stories, in ‘Island’ what is repressed, expressed in the ‘compulsion to repeat’ (see Freud 2001, 942-943), is concealed, not-seen, by the use of Gaelic. At times of stress, as when the officials come to inform Agnes that she is to leave, Gaelic is the repudiation of English, the official language of the centre; refusal preserves the speaker’s identity as marginal, not implicated in the imperial project. The repressed resurfaces when Agnes realizes ‘with a type of shock’ that she is implicated, as she is ‘repeating the phrases of the place-names

[in Gaelic] as if they were children about to be abandoned without knowledge of their names' (407). Like the place, she too is mis-named, and has been abandoned, and her self-identification with the landscape, and her maternal feeling for it, brings her to the realization of her implication in colonialism.

### **The *unheimlich***

Colin Nicholson says that 'Island' 'blurs generic boundaries between realist study in the psychology of loneliness and ghost-story ... Desire and frustrated motherhood combine to shift realism towards fantasy' (Nicholson 2001, 99), and that 'discriminations between what is imagined and what is perceived dissolve' (100). He implies that it is the protagonist's uncertainty, rather than the reader's. He goes on to point out that

[t]he return of the repressed is repeatedly figured as Gaelic phrase and cadence in acts of narration paradoxically concerned to preserve Celtic memory by transposing its signifying systems into English. What then happens is that the lucid constructions of single speaking subjects cannot be reduced to an order of univocal (single-voiced) truth ... [P]recursor forms constantly ghost concretely rendered self-presences whose evanescence is thereby indelibly inscribed (100).

However, as explained earlier in this chapter, it is the present as Canadian settler-citizen which is repressed and contributes to the *unheimlich*, rather than the Gaelic past, which merely signifies the present-day anxieties about origins and their reassertion in the face of the modern world. Nicholson sees the Gaelic as palimpsestic, and asserts the reality of 'self-presences', but it is these very self-presences which are in question in the stories, particularly in 'Island'. But there is a difference in 'Island' in the repression of Canadian identity. In 'Island' Canada figures as the Law, *le nom du père*. It is the Symbolic order, entrance to which is resisted by, or at least latent in, Agnes. Thus she remains afloat in the Imaginary, unsure not only of her own identity, but of the reality of the world about her and of the Other. '[I]n order to rejoin reality (réel), [she] must find the no man's land that provides access to it by effacing the border between them' Lacan says (2006, 389). Gaelic is the no man's land between her ancestral origins as victim of the clearances, and her present liminal state as not-Canadian settler. If she can move through it she will at last enter the Real.

As Agnes recalls her life on the island, she revisits memories of events made uncertain by their very extra-ordinariness. They have become, in effect, the legends of her interior retelling. The beginning of the story takes place in an evening, its temporal place in the history never explained, when she is apparently waiting, as an old woman, by her kitchen window, for something, though we are not told what. At the end of the narrative, she is removed from the island, and the middle sections have been recollected while she waited. The ‘exterior readings’ are made by others, those to whom

[the island] became known generally as MacPhedran’s Island while they themselves became known less as MacPhedrans than as “people of the island.” Being identified as “John the Island,” “James the Island,” “Mary of the Island,” “Theresa of the Island.” As if in giving their name to the island they had received its own lonely designation in return (376).

It is worth noting here that while the men are identified with the island itself, the women belong *to* the island, are *of* it; the men bestow an identity on it, while the women are identified by it, which one might term a ‘double-colonisation’.

Freud says that when imagination and reality cannot be distinguished, an *unheimlich* effect is ‘most easily produced’ (946). In ‘Island’, the truth value of the text is undermined repeatedly. It begins with temporal deixis in ‘All day the rain fell upon the island...’ (369), and it is almost the end of the story before it is clear which day this is. The protagonist seems to be alone, and to be remembering her life. It is a ‘rainy or foggy evening’ (371). Sometimes the rain is visible against the window pane, and at other time it vanishes. ‘At other times it fell straight down, hardly touching the window at all, but still there beyond the glass, like a delicate, beaded curtain at the entrance to another room’ (369). The glass, in itself transparent, but a barrier to the reality of the rain, is covered with a curtain, but one which is fractured, structured from beads, individual elements which conceal ‘another room’ – a space beyond that which is visible.

Further expressions of uncertainty come in the numerous uses of the verb ‘to seem’, and suggestive phrases such as ‘perhaps’, ‘might be’, ‘although’, which question the accuracy of the account. These often appear in the text close to mentions of the lighthouse, or of other lights. It is almost as if the light from the lighthouse illuminates nothing; in fact, soon after it is first mentioned, its purpose is doubted. Its existence is first described when Agnes’s grandmother is

forced by the death of her husband to row across to the mainland with her children, and they use some of the lighthouse lamp oil to light a beacon on the boat so that people will see them. Soon after this, we are told

It was thought that the light [from the lighthouse] would warn sea travellers of the danger of the island or, conversely, that it might represent hope to those already at the sea's mercy and who yearned so much to reach its rocky shore (374-5).

The passage continues 'Before the establishment of the light there had been a number of wrecks which might or might not have been avoided had there been a light' (375). So not only the function but the value of the lighthouse is doubted.

More importantly, it is the double, or mirrored, function of the lighthouse both to lure and to warn, and this symbolism roots Agnes in her search for identity as liminal subject. Agnes's parents, the first present generation in the narrative, are 'keepers of the light'. The story of the grandfather's death, and the Highland clearances being the reason for the family's original arrival in Canada, is told as back story. The light which is kept burning by the family signals both to their own past in Scotland, and their present as diasporic subjects, Janus-like, both looking back towards their previous identities, and beckoning forward to a seemingly unattainable future as Canadian citizens. It is clear that the lighthouse, sexuality and the use of Gaelic are associated in the text. However, although the lighthouse is without doubt a phallic symbol, and connected with Agnes's desire and lack, it also symbolises the Janus existence of the marginalised, and the use of Gaelic makes this liminal existence material and visible.

Born on the island, to parents who are too old to expect to have another child, and born a month earlier than expected, she is taken to the mainland to be christened. The clergyman later records her details wrongly.

[P]erhaps to simplify matters [the clergyman] recorded her birthplace as being the same as that of the other children and of her brothers and sisters, or if he did not intend to simplify perhaps he had merely forgotten. He also had the birth date wrong and it was thought that perhaps he had forgotten to ask the parents or had forgotten what they had told him ... So he seemed to have counted back a number of days before the christening and selected his own date. Her middle name was wrong, too ... he had somehow copied it down as Angus. Again perhaps he had forgotten or was preoccupied, and he was a very old man at the time, as evidenced by his shaky, spidery handwriting (372-3).

Her birth is located on the mainland instead of on the island, her birthday is not recorded accurately, and the priest names her Angus, which is not only the wrong name but the wrong gender. She is thus an anomaly. The only child to have been born on the island, though ‘there had been a number of deaths’ (373), to elderly parents who neither expect to have another child, nor anticipate that she will arrive when she does, and her actual identity concealed in the official textual evidence of her materiality as an individual, her beginnings suggest she could be a mythical child with special powers – of second sight, for example. The mention of her brothers and sisters is the first evidence we have that she has siblings, and only one of them is mentioned again in the story; we do not know what has happened to the others, nor how many there were, though her parents are already grandparents, and she is born only five years after their previous child, who is presumably present while she is growing up, but not evident in the narrative.

There are many gaps left in the family’s story, which may cause the reader some unease. As Freud expands on Jentsch, he continues

[T]he *unheimlich* would always, as it were, be something one does not know one’s way about in. The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something *unheimlich* in regard to the objects and events in it (2001, 931).

In ‘Island’, it is not only Agnes but readers who may find themselves disoriented, in a story in which ‘one does not know one’s way about’, with characters and events alienated from normative material realities, and open to interpretation. Although the text can be read as a straightforward biographical story, the ambivalence makes it *unheimlich*, and gives it aspects of legend.

At seventeen, Agnes meets and falls in love with a young man with red hair, which ‘seemed to flash and reflect in the April sun’ (378). Before they consummate their relationship, the young man asks her to marry him, though ‘in retrospect, she could not remember when he asked her’ (382). The narrative has made a temporal leap, which lasts only this long, into a future which may be the day on which the narrative opens, or some other day later in her life, which is outside the frame of the text. Prolepsis is a common trope in MacLeod’s work, and adds to the ambivalence of the narration. It also adds to the effacement of ‘the



distinction between imagination and reality' (Freud 2001, 946) and to the 'intellectual uncertainty' which is one of the symptoms of the *unheimlich*. Their first conversation on '*creig a bhoird*, the table rock' (2002, 380), ends with the young man promising to come back. 'And then he was gone. As suddenly as he had come. Seeming to vanish behind the table rock and the water's edge' (381).

Thus, the text constantly questions its own certainties, with its motifs of the visible and invisible, the apparent and the 'seeming'. Both Agnes and the unnamed young man carry some aspect of the *unheimlich*, of the immaterial, and it is possible to read their meetings and his very existence as an *unheimlich* dream, or phantasm. 'It was as if he had been invisible to everyone but herself' she recalls, after his death (387). His knowledge of Gaelic places him as another liminal, diasporic, subject and gives him the same un-homed position in the Canadian nation-which-is-not-one. It is his attempt at integration which leads to his death.

The climactic events in Agnes's life are the affair with the young fisherman, his death, and the birth and effective loss of her daughter, who remains on the mainland with an aunt, and later 'vanished into the mystery of Toronto. She did not know of it until weeks later when she came ashore to purchase supplies' (405). She has seen the girl, when the aunt suggests that the teenager might like to go and 'live on the island with her "real mother." The girl laughed and walked into the other room' (405). This recalls the rain-soaked window and the bead curtain which separates the protagonist from 'another room' in the opening paragraph of the story. The daughter is already lost to the mainland, a settler.

The mainland is the place of 'disappearance'. Many times characters try to look across the sea to see what is there. The parents leave the island to live there after the father has fallen and broken his arm, and do not appear again in the narrative, though we are told that both he and, soon after, Agnes's mother, have died. Agnes's daughter lives there after her birth, and from there disappears into Toronto – that great unknown place. The lover, whose very existence is questioned, disappears into 'the woods of Maine'. The four fishermen with whom Agnes shares the encounter on the rocks, she says 'would never be back' (403), as they leave for the mainland. She does see one of them at the store when she is collecting supplies, but it is not clear whether he recognises or remembers her.

And yet, the ‘mainland’ is not itself ‘Canada’, but a liminal place, the threshold of the nation.

The mainland was itself but another large island although most people did not think of it that way. It was, as many said, larger than the province of Prince Edward Island and even some European countries and it had paved roads and cars and now even shopping centres and a fairly large population.

On rainy or foggy evenings such as this, it was always hard to see and to understand the mainland ... At night the individual houses, and the communities they formed, *seemed* to be magnified because of the lights. ... It all *seemed* more glamorous at night, perhaps because of what you could not see (370-1, my italics)

Here the paratactic sentence beginning ‘It was, as many said...’ and its four conjoined phrases and clauses (the verb is elided except in the second): ‘and even some European countries’, ‘and it had paved roads and cars’, ‘and now even shopping centres’, ‘and a fairly large population’, stresses the naive or childlike oral nature of the narrative. Most people, we are told, did not think of the mainland as a large island; presumably the text is referring to those living on it, who think of it as mainland Canada. Or perhaps, this refers only to the family living on the island where the narrative is set, which is the protagonist’s family, herself and her parents. (She has had siblings but they have left home.)

Her relationship with Canada is like that of the protagonist in ‘Clearances’ in that both spend some time gazing across the water, towards it. In ‘Clearances’, he is looking towards it from Scotland, and therefore has no hope of seeing it. In ‘Island’, Agnes can make it out only dimly, either because of the rain dropping a curtain across the window, or because of her failing eyesight, or because it is night. In the night she can see only the lights from cars and houses. This image recalls the lighthouse, which has also a dual purpose, both to guide towards the land and to warn against it. These lights from cars and houses, from ‘civilisation’, are also a signal of ambivalence, both drawing towards and warning away from, the mainland. And yet, the ‘mainland’, even when it can be seen a little more clearly, is not the mainland, but merely an offshoot of it, the Nova Scotia which the protagonist in ‘Clearances’ as in so many of MacLeod’s stories, inhabits. If Nova Scotia, and in particular, Cape Breton, is a liminal place, how

much more liminal is a small island off a larger peninsula, which is almost an island.

The other lights which figure in the story, the lights of cars and from the houses on the mainland, seen from the island at night, emphasise not only the loneliness, isolation, and separateness of island life, as well as the passage of time, but the darkness, which is also often the setting for the narrative. As she grows older, her sight begins to fail, so that it is not just intellectual uncertainty which makes her perceptions unreliable, but a physical inability to perceive things clearly.

### **The lighthouse, the phallus and the *unheimlich***

As phallic symbol, the lighthouse prefigures Agnes's sexual experiences in the text, particularly with the four fishermen. However, its significance holds more meaning than the simply sexual; as the Phallus, it symbolises the Law, *le nom-du-père*, and that Law is situated in Canada, the colonial space. However, the lighthouse is itself located in the same liminal space the characters occupy, on the island, not *in* Canada. Its dual nature, both warning and alluring, also symbolises the family's reluctance to become part of their new location, a nation which should become home but is not home. Agnes appropriates the lighthouse-as-phallus after her parents' death, wearing her father's clothes, replenishing the oil, and rejecting her name, re-assuming her name under the law. She signs official documents with her initials only, as 'A. McPhedran'. As her father's name was Angus she is thus able to take on his role as keeper of the light. She denies her father, who then dies. She takes on herself *le nom du père*, the Law (See Lacan, 2006, 228-230). As punishment, she is castrated, the lighthouse is taken from her.

When Agnes becomes pregnant by the young man, the suspicion of incest is aroused on the mainland, and the family hear that it is assumed that her father must be the father of her child. When she is taken to her aunt's house on the mainland to have the baby, her father, in 'pained embarrassment' implies to her that this is what people are saying. "“Oh,” she said. “I’m sorry”” (388), but she will not say any more than that, therefore allowing the rumours to persist. This is her first encounter with the Symbolic (See Lacan 2006, 230), and she refuses it. Born prematurely, she remains 'pre-mature'.

She also refuses to tell the clergyman when he asks her who the father is, “No,” she said. “I can’t say” (389). This clearly situates her in the Oedipal stage, identifying with the mother, in love with her father. She persists in this rejection of the Symbolic until her mother and father are leaving the island after his accident, and Agnes is left alone, in charge of the lighthouse. Realising she will not see him again, she tells him “It was ... the red-haired man” (395).

Agnes lives quietly enough until she is seventeen, when she meets the young red-haired fisherman ‘[i]n the time before such boats and men became familiar sights and sounds and odours’ (378). Their relationship develops uncertainly; he is staying with other men in the shanties built for the transient fishing fleet. When she first sees the young fisherman, who is never named, ‘she saw the redness of his hair. It seemed to flash and reflect in the April sun like the sudden and different energy of spring’ (378). The flash and reflection also connects his appearance with the lighthouse, and the ‘seemed’ signals the possibility of reading the description as metaphoric.

We are not told why ‘[s]ometimes in the evening she would walk down by the shanties, but not very often’ (379), but we infer that she is attracted to the young man.

[S]he felt uncomfortable walking so close to so many men. Sometimes they nodded and smiled as all of them knew her name and who she was and some of them were her distant relatives. But at other times she felt uneasy ... The remarks seemed mainly for themselves, to demonstrate their wit and masculinity to each other (379).

Sexual awakening and the *unheimlich* are here conjoined. She feels unease on her evening walks, passing by men who knew ‘who she was’ in spite of the ambivalence in the text, and she is very aware of their masculinity, comparing them to ‘the late summer rams ... their pent-up semen ejaculated in sputtering jets’ (380) who are brought to the island to live sexually aroused but isolated from the females so that the lambs will not be conceived at the wrong season.

One evening she walks to the back of the island and ‘looked out across the seeming infinity of the sea. And then he was standing beside her. He made no sound in coming and the dog which had accompanied her gave no signal of his approach’ (380). The young man, thus, also has magical properties, which remove him, as she is removed, from material existence. He seems to be able to

read her mind, and their brief conversation ends when he asks ‘Would you like to live somewhere else?’ “I don’t know,” she said. “Maybe.” “I have to go now,” he said. “I’ll see you later. I’ll come back”” (381).

The phrase ‘live somewhere else’ recurs when her grandson arrives at the end of the story, and tells her twice that he is taking her to ‘live somewhere else’. Just where she is being taken is never named, so it remains ‘another place’ outside reality, something like the Real, a place which is always there but which cannot be described in language. The relationship with the young fisherman develops when ‘she thought she heard him say *Áite na cruinneachadh*. She quickened her step as she felt her colour rise, hoping or perhaps imagining that he had said “the meeting place.”’ (381-2)

She faced out to sea and sat in such a way that she could not see him *not* coming if that was the way it was supposed to be. The dog sat at her feet and neither of them moved when he came to stand beside them (382, italics in original).

The double negative here underlines the uncanniness inherent in the confusion between imagination and reality. He asks her again if she would like to live ‘somewhere else’, and she says ““Oh yes””. ““Oh yes,” she had said. “Oh yes. Oh yes”” (382). This repeated phrase references Molly Bloom’s final soliloquy in *Ulysses*, often used as an example of *jouissance* and female sexuality. For example, in ‘Sorties’ by Hélène Cixous, she says that ‘What is feminine ... affirms: ...and yes I said yes I will Yes, says Molly (in her rapture) ...; I said yes, I will Yes’ (Cixous 1994, 42).

The main difference is that MacLeod gives Agnes the preliminary exclamation, ‘oh’. This becomes a figure in the text, reappearing when her father tells the family of the young man’s death. ““Oh,” was all she could say’ (386). She tightens her grip on the knitting needles she is holding, and wounds herself so that she is bleeding. When her mother asks what happened she translates it as its synonym, nothing. ““Nothing,” she said, rising quickly and going to the door. ““Nothing at all. Yes, I’ll have to be more careful”” (386). Later still, when her grandson says ““I have to go now” ... “but I’ll see you later. I’ll come back””, her answer is ““Oh yes,” she said, “Oh yes, we will”” (410). The yes and the O are conjoined. ‘[N]othing compels us to deposit our lives in these lack-banks’ says

Cixous, speaking of the absent phallus. 'Because we don't desire it. We don't go round and round the supreme hole. We have no *woman's* reason to pay allegiance to the negative' (1994, 41-2, italics in original). Agnes confronts 'the supreme hole' or lack in her desire for the young man, translating that rejection into acceptance when she hears of his death. Her desire becomes an absence, the lack reasserting itself. Whenever the young man appears to her, 'oh' is her first response. She repeats it at the moment of consummation of the relationship, 'digging her fingers into the dampness of his neck' (384), and again when her grandson comes to fetch her. "'Oh," she said, digging her fingernails into the dampness of his neck' (411). When she first begins to tend the light she tries to recall the red-haired man and his proposal 'to share his life in the magical region of "somewhere else"' ... In her persistent refusal to identify him she had pushed him so far back into the recesses of her mind that he seemed even more ghostly than before' (393); in the appearance of his double that the *unheimlich* resurfaces.

In 'Failed Sacrifices: the reluctant immigrant', Atwood suggests that if 'there is no new "Canadian" identity ready for [the immigrant] to step into: he is confronted only by nebulosity, a blank ... The sacrifice has been made for nothing: not nothing plus money, just nothing' (1972, 150). Atwood says that the first generation 'stick with the old values', the second 'wish to abandon them in favour of the new' and the third 'function ... as symbols of integration' (149). In Agnes's case, the nothing includes her lack of fulfilment, the loss of the child, the death of the red-haired man, leaving nothing with which to connect herself to a future, nothing with which to integrate herself. As Kroetsch says 'all is periphery and margin, against the hole in the middle. We are held together by that absence. There is no centre. This disunity is our disunity' (68). Thus, the lack of Canadian identity allows for the connection to be made between the *unheimlich* and the phallus as lack and as the *nom-du-père*.

At the centre of the text, Agnes sacrifices herself to the four fishermen, in the curious scene which seems, at first reading, to be extraneous to the rest of the plot. She appears to be the passive recipient of their 'frenzy', which gives the episode its sacrificial aspect. She remembers 'for the rest of her life' watching the older man removing his clothes and folding them neatly as if 'preparing to lie down with his wife' (402). But if we examine this event more closely, we see that it is a scene symbolic of the experience of the immigrant subject, existing on the

threshold of integration into society, the Law, which, in the lack of coherent Canadian identity, is itself lacking. The four men come from 'the mainland', there is no suggestion that they are also part of the diaspora, but behave as settlers in their ruination of the fish they catch, killing them and throwing them back into the sea in the same way that they discard Agnes. She has had a daughter, but she has disappeared into the 'new' world of Canada, without Agnes's being aware of it, so she cannot function as a 'symbol of integration' for her mother.

The paragraph before that in which Agnes first sees the four men in the boat, concludes 'she was still waiting for something to happen and bring about the change' (397). It is two years after her parents' deaths, and

she was in the lighthouse tower when she saw the boat approaching. She had been restless all day and walked the length and width of the island twice. She had gone to its edge as if testing the boundaries, somewhat as a restless animal might explore the limitations of its cage. (397).

The lighthouse and her restlessness are associated; the ambivalent light which either draws people towards Canada or warns them away also carries phallic symbolism, as might be expected, and as with desire for the phallus, it expresses both a lack and the grounds for identification. She tests the boundaries of her space – a space which is liminal, being on the threshold between Canadian identity, and an identity she cannot remember. She is the explorer who finds nothing (Atwood 1972, 115). She walks 'the length and width of the island', thus forming a cross, consisting of straight lines. She measures her space in this way several times in the story, recalling that 'she had always walked "over" or "across" the island while [the young man] had walked "around," seeming to emerge suddenly and unexpectedly out of the sea by the table rock of their meeting place' (387).

We are reminded that she is not only performing her father's job, but that she is wearing her father's clothes. Restless 'on a hot summer afternoon':

She had walked out into the cold salt water, feeling it move gradually up and through and under the legs of her father's coveralls which had become, for her, a sort of uniform ... She looked downward and saw her coveralled limbs distorted in the green water ... They seemed not to be a part of her but to have become disembodied and convoluted and to be almost floating away from her at a horizontal level. When she closed her

eyes she could feel them intensely but when she looked at them they did not appear the way they felt (397).

As Lacan says in 'The Signification of the Phallus' 'it is in order to be the phallus – that is, the signifier of the Other's desire – that a woman rejects an essential part of femininity, namely all its attributes, in the masquerade' (2006, 583). However, in order to appease the Other, and atone for this appropriation, she has to masquerade as womanliness, as Joan Rivière expressed it (1997, 228-236).

After seeing their boat approaching, Agnes 'walked among the shanties'. 'It was as if she were walking through the masculine remnants of an abandoned and vanished civilization' (2002, 398). However, she does not assume the mask of womanliness immediately, but changes into dry coveralls. She notices the wet ones on the clothesline, 'vertical ... Their dangling legs rasped together with the gentlest of frictions' (398), but climbs back up the lighthouse, from where she can see the men casting for fish, and can also see the shoals at the back of the island.

She hurried down from the lighthouse and shouted and gestured to the men in the boat. They were still far offshore and, perhaps, saw her before they heard her ... As they approached she realized that the movement of her arm, which was intended as a pointing gesture to the back of the island, was also a beckoning gesture, as they might understand it (398-9).

Wearing her father's clothes, she enacts the ambivalent message of the lighthouse itself, both beckoning and warning.

Agnes runs to the house and puts on a summer dress and goes to 'the meeting place' (399) to wait for them. She assumes the place of the Father in wearing her father's clothes and tending the light, but re-assumes the mask of womanliness for her encounter with the four fishermen, for whom she needs to become the site of their desire for the Other. Here 'it is the mask or veil that 'is constitutive of the feminine libidinal structure' (Heath 1986: 52). Veiling recalls the 'delicate, beaded curtain at the entrance to another room' (MacLeod 2002, 369) which prevents Agnes seeing the arrival of her grandson at the prolepsis which forms the beginning of the story. Having rejected the attributes of femininity, she must now re(a)dress herself as signifier. The becoming and the veiling, which both warn and beckon, show Agnes's *unheimlich* self-identification with the lighthouse, signifier of her absent father.



From the rock, she sees the men catching so many fish that they rise ‘to the level of the men’s knees’ (400), as the water has earlier risen to her knees. They see her come down to the water’s edge, and steer the boat towards her. ‘They tossed the painter rope towards her and she caught it with willing hands’ (401), we are told, and it is this willingness which is the indication that she accepts what happens next. The sexual acts are implied rather than described, the next sentence being ‘All afternoon they lay on the table rock’. The only one of the four men to be distinguished in her memory is ‘the oldest man with white hair’ (401). This is clearly a father figure, and she acts out the Oedipal myth in sleeping with him, taking the place of – perhaps desiring to become again – the absent mother.

The parody of the Gospel of John, Chapter 21, is plain. There, Jesus appears on the shore. He sees the fishermen failing to find fish, and tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, where they catch so many fish that the boat is in danger of sinking. With difficulty they steer towards the shore, where Jesus has built a fire and cooks for them. This well-known Bible story is usually connected with the metaphor of the disciples being called to be fishers of men. MacLeod’s Jesus figure is Agnes, and rather than eating the fish, the fishermen consume her, on ‘the table rock’ (401). They are ‘frenzied’, as the fish, and the ‘late summer rams’ were frenzied. When they leave, the men throw their catch, now dead, back into the sea. The appearance of Jesus to the disciples takes place after his death and resurrection, but Agnes, as fully feminine, is still ‘dead’, and this encounter fails to resurrect her.

Jesus is willing to be sacrificed to atone for the sins of men, according to Christian theology. Agnes appears to be willing to have intercourse with the fishermen, but why is less clear. A surface reading might suggest she is lonely, sexually frustrated, and wishes, perhaps, to replace the child she has lost. The scene retains its ambiguities throughout; there is no dialogue, but silence. No struggle, but an apparent tacit agreement that she will accept all four of them. What actually happens, and how, is veiled, *unheimlich*. When they leave, ‘[s]he began to walk up towards the lighthouse. She touched her body. It was sticky with blood and fishspawn and human seed. “It will have to happen this time,” she thought, “because there was so much of it and it went on so long”’ (403). The plenitude, the excess of the act, results in ‘nothing’, however. Her sacrifice of

herself to the four men is ‘a failed sacrifice’, as Atwood suggests is the fate of the immigrant, and no child results from it.

### **Doubling and the *unheimlich***

As the lighthouse itself doubles as both warning and welcome, there are more obvious *unheimlich* instances of doubling towards the end of the story, which is the penultimate scene in the plot, the chronological narrative. The officials have visited her the previous summer to warn her the lighthouse would be automated and she would have to leave. ‘She approached spring with a longing born of confused emotions’ (408), we are told. ‘She who wanted to leave and wanted to return and wanted to stay felt the approaching ache of those who leave the familiar behind’ (408). This sentence indicates a double doubling of her ‘confused emotions’. She cannot return if she does not leave, and if she leaves she cannot also stay. As she ‘leave[s] the familiar behind’, a young man arrives on the island. She watches him from her kitchen window, as she was doing when she first set eyes on the young red-haired man who became the father of her child.

She saw the man bending to loop the boat’s rope to the wharf and as he did so his cap fell off and she saw the redness of his hair. ... She wrapped the damp dish towel round her hand as if it were a bandage and then she as quickly unwrapped it again (408).

This is an exact repetition of her action when she first saw the man when she was young. Then she had seen his boat come into the wharf:

And she wrapped the damp dish towel around her hand as if it were a bandage and then she as quickly unwrapped it again. As he bent to loop the boat’s rope to the wharf, his cap fell off and she saw the redness of his hair (378).

However, this time ‘his accent was slightly unfamiliar. He seemed about twenty years of age and his eyes were very blue’ (408). The second sentence is also repeated from the first scene, although it comes later there. ‘She looked at him as if he were a ghost’ we are told. ““Would you like to live somewhere else?” he asked. “I don’t know,” she said. “Maybe”” (409).

He is repeating the question asked all those years ago by the young man, and her answer is the same. In fact, much of this conversation is identical. So

exact are the similarities, that the reader is forced into uncertainty, a 'leaving the familiar behind', over whether this young man *is* actually a ghost, or a figment of Agnes' imagination, again figuring the experience of the *unheimlich*. "'Where have you been?'" she asks. "'In Toronto,'" he said. "I was born there. They told me on the mainland that you are my grandmother'" (410). At this point, the reader must assume that he is the daughter's son, but at the same time, we mistrust Agnes's report of the conversation. Is she trying to make real an *unheimlich* appearance? And his ancestry is not certain: 'They told me' is not the same as 'You are'.

He promises to return 'in the fall', as the first young man had done. She goes to the window again and sees a man in a boat 'but she could make no clear identification' (410). The passage of time is elided: 'She did not say anything to anyone about the visit'. 'She scanned the faces of her relatives carefully but could find nothing' (410). In a quick reading it is easy to miss these clues to the passage of time; she has clearly been to the mainland and back at least once. The narrative then returns to the beginning, with 'Now as the October rain fell she added another stick to the fire' (411). Her grandson returns, and she greets him down by the shore as if he were her lover.

He took her hands and walked backward while facing her, down to the darkness of the bobbing boat and the rolling sea.

"Come," he said. "Come with me. It is time we went to live somewhere else" (412).

He guides her back through her life, and at the same time onward into assimilation with Canada. 'And when the light revolved, its solitary beam found no McPhedrains on the island or the sea' (412) the story ends. It seems that even the lighthouse, personified, is not certain of its place in the materiality of things.

This *unheimlich* experience, when someone dead apparently returns in the flesh, foreshadows the death of Agnes's identity as a representative of the old culture. As quoted in part one of this chapter, 'the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denier of the power of death'' Freud says. 'But when this [primary narcissism] has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the *unheimlich* harbinger of death' (Freud 2001, 940). So Agnes may

have 'surmounted' her primary narcissism to enter the symbolic order, or she may remain between the two, in an uncertain liminal space of understanding and self-identification, both 'energetic denier' of the death of the Highland culture and the new Law, and at the same time about to become absorbed into the culture of the mainland.

### **Repression of colonialism**

What is repressed in MacLeod's stories, I have suggested, is the recognition of the subject's share in colonial power. Agnes appears to be in a different position, expressing no resentment at the modern world as seen in the car headlights on the mainland. And yet, 'she wanted to leave and wanted to return and wanted to stay' (408) in her liminal position. In her resistance to accepting her place in Canada, which means accepting responsibility for the colonial aspect of the nation's history, she subconsciously acknowledges it. However, after the officials in 'the big boat', on which 'the Canadian flag flew from the mast' (406) have told her that she is no longer required to remain there, 'she walked the length and width of the island. She repeated all the place names, many of them in Gaelic, and marvelled that the places would remain but the names would vanish' (407). She recognizes the transience of her occupation of the place. She repeats 'the phrases of the place-names as if they were those of children about to be abandoned without knowledge of their names. She felt like whispering their names to them so they would not forget' (407).

She realized with a type of shock that in spite of generations of being "people of the island" they had never really owned it in any legal sense. There was nothing physical of it what was, in strict reality, formally theirs (407).

The repressed surfaces again. As the keeper of the light, the end of her time as both warning and welcome is foreshadowed in her giving herself, if only for an afternoon, to the four men from the mainland. After the child fails to materialize, we are told that over the next decade, there are changes made on the mainland. '[T]he lusty rams no longer came to the summer pasturage. The sweeping headlights of cars became a regular feature of her night vision, mirroring the beam from her solitary lighthouse' (405). This mirroring, another instance of

doubling, both lures and warns away from her entrance into the Real. They also foreshadow the arrival of the 'double', but before that she finally recognizes herself. Boat tours circle the island, and 'she later realized, she had passed into folklore. She had, without realizing it, become "the mad woman of the island"' (406). It is by being recognized, apellated, by the Other that Agnes is finally able to cross the threshold into the Law which is Canada. This is not a fixed position for her, however; she is still confused by the identity of the grandson who arrives to remove her.

### **Conclusion**

The question at the heart of this investigation is 'how do Atwood's themes function in contemporary short fiction?' There is clear evidence of immigrant failure in MacLeod's stories. 'The Boat', 'The Vastness of the Dark' and 'The Return' were all published before the release of *Survival*; 'The Boat' is the earliest, first appearing in 1968 in *The Massachusetts Review*; the other two in 1971. Thus these stories pre-date the publication of Atwood's thesis, and *Survival* cannot have influenced them. However, the other stories discussed were first published between 1974 and 1999: 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood' in 1974, 'Island' in 1988, and 'Clearances' in 1999. The earlier stories provide some validation for Atwood's thesis, therefore, in their themes of reluctant immigration, settlement, wilderness, and Nature the Monster.

If the fishermen are read as representative of 'the mainland', and Agnes as a diasporic subject, whose parents (the older generation) never assimilated into Canada, not merely holding to Gaelic and memories of a previous homeland, but literally separated from the new world, and Agnes' daughter (the fourth generation) has achieved 'Canadianness' and been lost to the liminal, we can see that Agnes herself is neither attached to the old nor belongs to the new, but is again that Janus figure, the diasporic subject, both desiring and resisting homogeneity with the new. Agnes is the third generation, who Atwood says 'want, somehow, to *live*, but they have trouble finding a way to do this' (Atwood 1972, 136 italics in original). 'They sometimes feel a double pull', she continues, 'back to the tough values and the land ... or away' (136). This wanting to leave and

wanting to return and wanting to stay is explicit in 'Island', as it is in 'The Lost Salt Gift of Blood'.

The absence of any mention of Canadian identity which is not white-European is an absence, a paralipsis, which speaks. It is Stephen Slemon's '*illusion of a stable self/other, here/there*' (1997, 237 italics in original) in Alan Lawson's *Second World*, which also contributes to the *unheimlich*. Diana Brydon calls it 'the survival of certain ways of seeing and not-seeing from the past into the present' (2003, 56). The absence, 'not-seeing', contributes to a reading of the repressed in MacLeod as not that of the former home and Celtic culture as many commentators suggest, but the colonialism in which the characters are implicated by their presence and activities on Cape Breton. Before Nova Scotia became British, it was inhabited by the Acadians, and before that the Mi'kmaq, who remained alongside the French in reasonable harmony, trading and fighting with them, when necessary. The perfidious British, on displacing the French and the Acadians, signed treaties with the First Nations tribes which turned out not to mean what the elders understood at the time, and led to the Mi'kmaq and the few other Nations being given reserves on which they were to live, and from which children were taken away to residential schools to be assimilated into British culture. There are still reserves in Nova Scotia, and a large and growing population of non-white-Canadians, but they never make an appearance in the Cape Breton of MacLeod's fictional world.

An alternative context in which to place MacLeod's work would be that of 'Settlers and Explorers'. Atwood's chapter is actually called 'Ancestral Totems: Explorers • Settlers'. One might think that 'ancestral totems' are what MacLeod chiefly writes about. The way the themes are discussed by Atwood in 'Ancestral Totems: Explorers and Settlers' is particularly illuminating.

"Ancestral Totems" refers to the function of totem poles – the visible presentation of mythic ancestral figures for the symbolic purposes of unity and identity, with the past and with the social group (1972, 112).

The lighthouse in 'Island' certainly functions as a 'totem pole', an ancestral totem in the sense that it is phallic, and also as it signals as lure of the new and warning away from it, suggesting that the land is dangerous, that those at sea should remain at sea rather than attempt to land in this unidentifiable space. It also

signals the 'identity with the past' of Agnes's grandparents and parents. As Atwood says, there is 'a distinct archaeological motif in Canadian literature' (112), but 'in this country, when you've gone through a thin topsoil of immediate ancestors, what you hit will ... probably be either a Settler or an Explorer' (112-3). Agnes's grandparents were Settlers, although they repressed that identity in remaining on the island.

Atwood says that it is 'wilderness, North, water' which are the romantic locales in Canada, rather than cities or towns, and that this is where the writer sends his (*sic*) 'explorers' (113-4). The romantic hero (Agnes' lover) certainly disappears into the woods, not North, but into the USA, beyond the borders which delimit the Second World MacLeod's characters resist. However, her parents disappear from the narrative to the 'mainland', described as a more urbanised island than the island with the lighthouse. This is also where the four fishermen return after their afternoon on the island. It is made clear, though, that these characters are *not* explorers, but settlers in their response to where they find themselves. Agnes's daughter vanishes into Toronto – the largest city in Canada. Both the young man and the daughter can be seen as explorers, and perhaps it is this recognition in MacLeod's writing that the population of Canada now largely lives and forms its identity in urban locations which modernises Atwood's assertions.

"Exploration" is a recurring motif in Canadian literature, for reasons that I believe are not unconnected with the "Where is here" dilemma; that is, if a writer feels himself living in a place whose shape is unclear to him, "a world but scarcely uttered," to quote A. M. Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," one of his impulses will be to explore it, another will be to name it (Atwood 114-5).

Agnes appears to be unsure of the reality of the island, and 'names' it, in Gaelic, the language of her ancestors. Atwood describes two kinds of explorer themes:

- Exploration that doesn't "find" anything.
- Doomed exploration; that is, the explorers find death (115).

She expands on the first kind in discussing a poem by Frederick George Scott called 'The Unnamed Lake' (1897), where she says 'the attitude of the explorers [is] interesting: they come, they look, they don't do anything or "discover"

anything beyond the lake itself, they go away *in silence*, and their leaving the lake without a name amounts to their refusal to name' (115 italics in original).

When she discusses 'settlers', Atwood says

The wilderness is in Canadian fiction much more likely to come through as a place of exile; there are the settlers, come from the old country with their European artefacts, building their walls within which they hope to recreate that old country (120).

The resonance of both these definitions is clear in reading MacLeod. Although his characters can be read as 'explorers', in that they are searching for an identity, they are also obvious 'settlers' in that they have refused to assimilate into the new location and culture, clearing the trees, building houses and fences, and retaining their language (Gaelic) to invoke connections with their history. However, in 'Island', when Agnes is leaving the liminal home she has grown old in, she 'repeated all the place names, many of them in Gaelic, and marvelled that the places would remain but the names would vanish' (2002, 407). Atwood says 'The poems Canadians tend to make out of "settler" motifs are likely to end ... with the abandonment of the farm with its squares and angles and the takeover of Nature once again' (123).

The 'farm' in 'Island' is set in a wild, rocky place, where the squares and angles are the lighthouse, and the frame of the window through which Agnes waits to be removed. However, when Agnes finally leaves, Nature will surely take over once again, and the lighthouse will be the sole remnant of the family's history as Janus-faced, diasporic subjects.

Nature and the wilderness, in particular the wilderness of the 'North', is the focus of the following chapter. The natural world as it affects the psyche, as well as events, is a constant presence in Canadian writing. The imagery surrounding the North, and winter, is the antagonist in the characters' psychic battle for survival and self-determination, even when their circumstances are comfortably urban. The uncanny, coupled with belatedness, is discussed in connection with a sense of haunting in the literature. Sometimes texts seem haunted by the uncertainty about the nation, at others it is the missing Anishnaabe bands who once populated the plains and forests. Sometimes it is the exile who mourns a lost homeland, and fails to find a secure foothold in a country which



feels tenuous to even the oldest families, such as MacLeod's victims of the Clearances.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Wilderness Haunting: National mythology of wilderness and the North.**

#### **Introduction**

It appears to be impossible to move away from the discussion of what constitutes the ‘Canadian identity’. The battle against the natural world, or, in the twenty-first century, sometimes the battle to save it, whether in the wilderness or in the North, is repeatedly tied to national identity. In newspapers and magazines, the human relationship with wilderness is a perennial theme; see, for example the story from *The Star* quoted below. In literary studies, the North and its elements contribute to the identification of the national literature, and the question of what is ‘Canadian’ about the literature nearly always includes some discussion of the wilderness theme, as in Sherrill Grace’s *The Idea of North*, W. H. New’s *Landsliding*, and *Survival* itself. Some critics begin by condemning identity as an outmoded obsession. ‘The question of “national identity” is an antique one; literary nationalism is something your grandparents did, like macramé’ (Marche, 2015). However, the critics inevitably get drawn back into discussing precisely that which they condemn. For example, a quick search of my university library catalogue gives almost 3,400 articles from a variety of literary, cultural, political and general sources, including sports studies, all with ‘Canadian identity’ in the title. A large number were published in the 1990s and since. The issue is most decidedly not dead. This chapter focusses on wilderness as a marker of national identity in stories by Thomas Wharton, Hiromi Goto, and Joseph Boyden, and in particular, the work of Lisa Moore, the Newfoundland novelist and short fiction author.

In 1977, Cameron and Dixon began their introduction to their ‘Mandatory subversive manifesto; Canadian criticism vs. literary criticism’ by imagining ‘Observers from Mars, or someone equally alien (Americans, say), seeking to comprehend the meaning of “Canadian Literature”’ and finding only theme, ‘and a single theme at that, “survival in a garrison”’ (1). The alien

wonders about the readers: ““Must be a bit boring for them, always reading the same thing. Perhaps it's reassuring. Something to do, no doubt, with ‘national identity’ and ‘Canadian sovereignty’” (1). However, by page four, Cameron and Dixon are discussing ‘formal [critical] values’. ‘To ignore such values and search only for sociological uniqueness in our literature is to deny ourselves a clear perspective on Canada's cultural identity’ (4). This is an early example of the ennui engendered and defeated by the topic of national identity. More recently: ‘A sense of northerness is a major theme in Canadian literature and the arts, but to what degree is it a part of national identity?’ (Rabinovitch, 2011, 20). That word, identity, preceded by ‘national’, or ‘national’ followed by ‘literature’ occurs again and again in the most defiant criticism. It is a theme in *Survival*, where Atwood says ‘every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core’ (1972, 31), which is, in her thesis, survival. The survival of the nation, as well as its identity, is the subject of Chapter Six. However, as W. H. New says, the Canadian identity ‘has so often been accepted as though it were’ inextricably bound up with the ideas of wilderness and of Northerness (1997, 17).

Atwood devotes Chapter Two and Three, much of Chapter Five, Eight and Ten of *Survival* to the relationship of Canadians to ‘everything surrounding you’ (30), and survival, she says, is the over-arching theme, not against attacks from ‘an enemy set over against you’, but from the natural world, whether physically or spiritually. Her chief exception to this rule is survival against the encroachment of the USA into the cultural and financial independence of the nation.

Approximately 75% of Canadians live within one hundred miles of the USA/Canada border (<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com>). The figures are disputed. Some sources suggest as large a percentage as 90% (<https://www.cia.gov>). Of those, most live in cities and towns and have never seen the Arctic, nor been lost in the wilderness. Yet the two loci, North and wilderness, figure powerfully in the Canadian psyche. Some critics accept (see, for example, Angus, 1997, 201) that ‘wilderness’ is still the trope most often used to figure English Canadian identity. That is, wilderness in the sense in which Atwood discusses it, chiefly in Chapter Two of *Survival*, ‘Nature the Monster’, where it figures largely as the battle of Man against Nature. Ian Angus investigates the

domestication of the wilderness in an increasingly industrialized society (1997, 170-204), while Atwood says '[images from Nature] depict a Nature that is often dead and unanswering or actively hostile to man; or seen in its gentler spring and summer aspects, unreal' (49). 'The result of a dead or indifferent Nature is usually a dead man, and certainly a threatened one' (66). Atwood does, indirectly, distinguish north and wilderness, by observing that the two most frequent causes of death are 'drowning and freezing' (1972, 55); in the stories observed here, there is both. Drowning is more likely in the summer, and freezing, associated with the north, in the winter, which Atwood observes is seen in Canada as 'the true and only season' (59). The self-identification with wilderness even among the urban population can be lethal, as this newspaper report illustrates.

'Survivorman fan found dead in Muskoka wilderness'

A Scarborough man who learned about wilderness survival by watching TV has died of hypothermia in the bush north of Huntsville ... "TV abstracts the real ugliness of survival," said Ferri, who runs a school called Survival in the Bush and trained Stroud back in the day. "They make it look like it's a romantic place. Well, it's romantic, as long as you have all your gear and you're camping and enjoying it. In a survival situation, it's a nightmare." (Yang, *The Star* 3/3/2010)

The 'nightmare' of the wilderness is the result of the sense that wilderness is the natural and atavistic home of the Canadian male. Being haunted by a space which is figuratively empty, and ignoring the more adapted inhabitants, such as bears and blackfly, can result in disaster. As Cynthia Sugars comments on Earle Birney's famous quote that Canadians are haunted by 'a lack of ghosts':

[T]here is something very resonant about the idea of a haunting that both is and is not one. ... It also points to the notorious Canadian identity crisis which persists in dogging cultural debate in Canada today. ... it may be true that Canadians have long been searching for a nationally resonant (and resident) phantom who would satisfy two needs: the gratifyingly frisson effect that we demand of a ghost, the sort of thing that makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck; and a link with those things that have become fixed in Canadian iconography, namely images of the wilderness and northern landscape, which in turn give Canadians a vicarious sense of history and belonging. Paradoxically, being haunted may be what makes one feel most at home (Sugars 2005).

Sugars says 'every ghost haunts by virtue of its lack of embodied presence' (2005). This is the 'haunting that both is one and is not one', which has been

discussed in Chapter Three, in relation to incidences of the uncanny in the stories of Alistair MacLeod. This *unheimlich* haunting continues in the stories which have wilderness or the North as topoi. As Canada is haunted by its absent identity as a nation, it is haunted by the myths, fears, and expectations of its imaginary geography. Sugars makes explicit the connection. Wilderness, and nordicity, symbolise the Canadian identity. The lack of national security in its identity, the uncertainty, is also the desire for an identity, based not on history, which is fractured, but on Canada's geography as a northern nation. This is despite the fact that Toronto and Montreal, and even the Newfoundland of Lisa Moore, cannot be described as 'North' in any but the most relative sense.

This is plainly not to suggest that there is no actual wilderness in Canada, nor that the Northern boundaries of the nation do not extend above the Arctic Circle. There are approximately 79 million hectares of protected wilderness as defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and by different provincial bodies (Rutledge and Vold, 1995, 9), and Canadian territory inside the Arctic Circle makes up more than 40% of Canada's landmass (Bonikovsky, 2012). 'Wilderness' is resistant to precise definition, but can be understood as land not in use for domestic or farming purposes, though it may, of course, produce opportunities for hunting for food, especially by First Nations bands, and for recreation. Although Hamelin suggests many different ways to define its southern border (Chartier, 2007), the North might seem to be a geographically determinable area. It is in its symbolic form as it features in the psyche that 'North' will be examined here. Similarly, while wilderness is possibly more readily capable of definition, the concept as it figures in short fiction is at issue.

In Chapter Two, the differentiation between metaphors of the North and the wilderness was not addressed. Where 'A Wilderness Station' is set in wilderness, 'My White Planet' takes place in geographic North. However, it is essential to define how these two topoi figure differently in the Canadian imagination. The images percolate into the writing even of those whose arrival is more recent. Summarising Lefebvre's representational spaces, W. H. New comments that this category 'deals with the symbolic function of spatial allusion, as in the semiotic codes of any culture's art: these ask, for example, not "Where is 'North'?", but "What is *meant* by 'North'?"' (1997, 8). New, however, fails

always to distinguish between North and wilderness, and it is these two different 'semiotic codes' which are the focus of this chapter.

When a distinction is made, there is common agreement among Canadianist critics about what constitutes imaginary 'North'. Sherrill Grace gives many versions of the definition in *Canada and the Idea of North* (2001), all of which contain similar ideas. As she comments 'it is possible to describe the dominant and popular narrative of North as predictable, comparatively stable, easily reproduced, and homogenous' (184). For example 'North is that symbolic place of freedom, of letting go, of spiritual sustenance, and, yes, of death' (156). Again, she speaks of 'the mystical northern vision', and, in reference to the paintings of Lawren Harris, and Voaden's plays from the 1920s and 1930s, 'the notion of North as pure but overwhelmingly white, silent, and spiritual, as *opposed* to material, or bodily, presence' (33). Grace also quotes from composer R Murray Schafer's *On Canadian Music* (1984) 'The North is a place of austerity, of spaciousness and loneliness, the North is pure, the North is temptationless' (Grace, 2001, 63). 'This narrative' Grace concludes, 'represents ... a North empty, silent, mysterious, awe-inspiring, and yet an alienating and crucially "anachronistic space" that is static, "primitive", female, and outside the progressive laws of modernity' (184-5).

This final summary includes the idea of North as feminized, open to, or requiring, penetration by the masculine adventurer. Here Grace's discussion meets *Survival* where Atwood conflates wilderness and North as 'Nature the monster'. Atwood's thesis is that the land is figured as female, a danger to be resisted or violated, and in the North a 'destructive ice virgin' (201). Daniel Chartier says, '[t]his imagined space and some of its characteristics are gendered and reflect a) a binary opposition between stereotyped male and female paradigms, as well as b) basic stereotyped polarizations regarding women' (2008, 29-30).

As seen in Chapter Two, Mark Jarman sets 'My White Planet' in the undisputable North, above the Arctic Circle, and the abandoned men, failed 'explorers', are living in a liminal state, awaiting death. Rasmussen, who suggests that they take turns to have sex with the mysterious *frozen* girl, is shamed into leaving the hut, and dies in the snow. However, this is not merely a story about man (*sic*) confronting his demons, but a more complex piece. Jarman's North is

far from pure or mystical, and not lonely, given there are seven ‘dwarves’ living in huts, confined together by the danger waiting for them if they venture outside. There is little about the ice and snow, or the landscape, in the text, and Nature the monster appears mainly in the form of some rather endearing, if inevitably successfully predatory, polar bears.

The inevitability of death is also a theme in Hiromi Goto’s ‘Camp Americana’ (2004). For the Japanese grandfather death is the unavoidable outcome of the encounter of modern, technological, unprepared man with Nature the Monster in the cold, dark forest, a conflation of the imagery of North and wilderness, as well as a particular cultural import in the shape of the *rokurokubi*, the Japanese mythological monster which replaces the Canadian wendigo in the *unheimlich* encounter in the darkness. In Lisa Moore’s stories, those set in St John’s, the capital city of Newfoundland, the snow and ice feature as setting and context, particularly when the exploration of sexuality is the theme. In ‘Grace’, ‘The Stylist’, and in ‘Natural Parents’, all from Moore’s collection *Open* (2007), women experience sexual awakening or make love against a backdrop of snow and ice. The narrative patterns juxtaposing female desire with imagery of Northern weather suggest ‘an “ecology of the imaginary”’ (Chartier, 2007:44). It could be that either Moore’s female protagonists are ‘writing back’, resisting the representation of the North as female, the site of penetration and conquest, or alternatively, and as this chapter will argue, that they are internalising, or mimicking, masculine representation by *becoming* the northern wilderness (Atwood’s ice virgins) in order to insert themselves and their sexual identity into the Northern and masculine hegemonic structure. As Grace comments, ‘scripts are powerful, deeply engrained in a culture, and difficult to unlearn’ (197). As the North is female and empty, the woman is forced to become the North to arouse masculine desire. The stories of Lisa Moore and Goto’s ‘Camp Americana’ both show the North, or associated northern imagery and the dangers of the wilderness, as female, and analysis of these texts uncovers more than a simple masculine hegemonic relationship with the land, related to the gendered power structures in Canadian fiction explored in Chapter Five.

Wilderness is figured subtly differently from North, though it, too, can provide uncanny encounters with the *unheimlich*. As Atwood says ‘Legends of the Wendigo get connected with [Death by Bushing] – the character sees too much of

the wilderness, and in a sense becomes it, leaving his humanity behind' (1997, 55). Hiromi Goto's 'Camp Americana' falls into this category. Thomas Wharton's 'Wilderness' (2013, online) has more in common with the wilderness which Atwood describes as 'much more likely to come through as a place of exile: there are the settlers, come from the old country with their European artefacts, building their walls within which they hope to re-create that old country' (1997, 121). To use Frye's term, as Atwood does, this is the 'garrison' trope. In Wharton's case, the settling is in the suburban landscape of British Columbia. Stories by First Nations writers, for example, Thomas King's 'A Short History of Indians in Canada' (2005), Joseph Boyden's 'Painted Tongue' (2001), and Lee Maracle's 'Bertha' (1999), feature the city as the effective/affective wilderness, and home as the North or the more literal wilderness of tundra, rural settlement, and the reservation. The desire of the settler for 'civilisation' imposes a wilderness on the First Nations subject, separated from the 'old country' and unable to build their own garrison. I do not suggest that the life of the tribes was innocent or simple, but that their antagonistic encounter with wilderness came with the removal of their self-determination by settlers. W. H. New defines wilderness in relation to terms of law, property, and order.

The images of 'garden' and 'wilderness' ... which recur in writing as well as in pictures of explorers traversing and taming savage lands – are not simple objective references to a neutral empirical reality. They are *tropes* or figurative ways of conveying attitudes and ideas. Such terms describe *territory*, clearly, but they also embody expectations about 'nature', and attitudes which over the course of time have come to express a complex set of relations between fertility (as in the phrase 'Mother Nature') and law (as in the phrase 'Natural Justice') (1997, 26, emphases in original).

For the First Nations, New's law of ownership of territory is the law of the settler, not their own. The *Nom-du-Père* for an indigenous subject is an exclusion from the law, as the Father has become English Canadian, with an attitude to land and ownership which is inconsistent with the indigenous subject's relationship with nature. New goes on to define the wilderness in opposition to the garden, land which could be privately owned. 'Such ownership declared authority; it also expressed a participation in a system of civil order or organization, or a shared notion of 'cultivation'. Hence the (cultivated) *garden* was civil, but the



*wilderness* was ‘untractable’: unruled, hence unruly’ (29). This exposes the settler mentality, quite contrary to the relationship of the original inhabitants with the land.

Ian Angus relates ‘the separation of inner and outer experience’ (1997, 125), to ‘primal memories of autochthony’ (125). ‘In English Canada our primal is the wilderness’ he says (125).

Throughout most of our history and throughout most of our thought, we have been dominated by fear of the wilderness, driving into the technological dynamo without Europe’s restraint. But another possibility lurks behind the trees, scuttles unhampered across the Great Lakes and endless open prairie, is whispered by the Coastal Range: that the wild might be, or become, our own ... There is a deep ambivalence in the English Canadian psyche. Fear of the wilderness, scarcity, leads us to despoil and take without thought of yesterday or tomorrow, but at the same time produces a staggering awe that looks back to the native people and ahead to a civilization that does not imagine itself omnipotent’ (125).

As Angus suggests, the settler is aware of an alternative relationship with land which has obtained before their arrival, and a partial appropriation of autochthony from the many tribes who first inhabited the country. This complicating factor also influences the attitude of the settler to wilderness and the North. It is clear from these extracts that New is giving a more historical and literature-focussed perspective, while Angus is concerned with recent developments in political cultural life. Both viewpoints contextualise a reading of the short fiction texts in this chapter.

Coral Ann Howells asks: ‘What happened to “Wilderness”, the favourite Canadian identity marker for the cultural nationalists? And when did novels with urban settings displace dominant landscape tropes?’ (2012: 21). However, any implication that ‘wilderness’ no longer haunts Canadian literature and the Canadian psyche is questionable, as the first two stories discussed here demonstrate. Both stories could be described as magic-realist, and both depict the natural world in a battle with ‘civilisation’, figured as ipads, CDs, and computer games. Technology and industrialism, in the sense in which Ian Angus uses the term, come into conflict with the natural world, and it is Atwood’s ‘Nature the Monster’ which overcomes. As Angus says ‘industrialism consists in the

assertion of human will against nature understood as a law like mechanism without moral order' (1997, 174).

### **The wilderness**

Thomas Wharton is a writer of novels and short fiction who lives in Edmonton, Alberta. He has written three adult novels, a fantasy trilogy for teenagers and a collection of 'stories about imaginary books' *The Logogryph* (2004), as well as other stories, which can be found on his website.

He is sometimes spoken of as being a regional writer, a prairie writer, (see for example Fiamengo, 2006, 191: 113) but his short stories are less often set in the open than in small towns, and in the foothills of the Rockies. His story, 'Wilderness', exemplifies the lurking danger when Canadians forget their history, their need for the garrison, and take too casually their psychic identity, of which they will be aware if they recall Frye or Atwood. The dismissal of both Frye's bush garden and Atwood's insistence on survival as the key to being Canadian can lead to catastrophe.

In Wharton's very short story 'Wilderness' the encounter between technological man and Nature comes in the form of a Nature 'actively hostile' to the encroachment of 'civilisation' into her space. Land, and a home, which is in the ownership of an English Canadian family, is taken from the family by a wilderness which resists man's (sic) omnipotence. The story gives an example of 'the takeover of Nature once again', to use Atwood's phrase (1972, 123). Here a family wedded to technology, in the form of ipads and computer games, finds their home invaded by plants and trees, and is forced to flee. The story begins when the family is forced to abandon its house by the encroaching bush.

The wild erupted inside their home so quickly that the Sandersons only had time to save themselves and not any of their things. Well, except for Jim, the father. He got out with his ipad under his arm because he'd been facebooking when the invasion began (Wharton, 2013).

The wilderness 'invades' the garrison, and technology cannot save them.

So there they were, castaway on the sidewalk, while everything that a house was meant to keep out rioted inside. They heard crashes and thumps and the shattering of glass as their possessions were shoved and flung around by a mad growth.

The house was eventually designated a wilderness park. The Sandersons were compensated (2013).

The house, like the garrison, should be a stronghold of civilisation, law, and order. However, their ownership of this piece of Canadian land is ‘shoved and flung around’ by ‘a mad growth’; madness is uncivilised, a return to the primitive. It is also dangerous.

Wilderness parks are the subject of debate in contemporary Canada. Much like the National Parks in the UK, there are strict planning laws, and a ban on certain activities. First Nations councils, in particular, find these laws imposed by ‘settler’ Canadians restrictive, and even aggressively opposed to their traditional way of life. Wharton is showing that English Canadians would find the lack of imposed order equally troubling. ‘There were things in the old house that couldn’t be replaced’, the story comments.

The house had become a place civilized people couldn’t stay long. The profusion of stalks and leaves and creepers and roots turned travel beyond the front door into one of those dreams where every movement is an immense labour. The air was too close. The smells too rich and alien. And things could be heard slithering and skittering deeper in the interior (2013).

Connecting with Angus’s primal memories of autochthony, the return to the wild becomes a ‘dream’. Civilised people are unable to stay in it. It is alien. When the mother finds a single fork in a spider web, ‘she carried the fork reverently back to the car. She’d never appreciated the sheer wonder of cutlery before’ (2013). Civilisation has become strange, *unheimlich*. The walls of the garrison have been breached, and the tools of civilised life are no longer taken for granted. The commercial and consumer-driven, wasteful life of modern Canada is highlighted in the contrast with the natural world. ‘They all found keepsakes, toys, impulse purchases that had been boxed up and forgotten long ago’ (2013). The son finds a mix-tape from his ex-girlfriend: ‘the first song, “Born This Way” by Lady Gaga, now sounded like the frantic scratching of tiny claws’. The title of the song is significant, questioning the meaning of being human and disconnected from Nature. After the daughter is bitten by an unidentified animal or insect, the family no longer visit their former home. ‘They settled comfortably into their new split-level, which featured a walk-out basement, a marble kitchen island, and a view

over the local park<sup>21</sup>. They bought new cutlery' (2013). Retreating into another modern, designed and controlled garrison, most of them forget about their defeat by the wilderness. Only the father still occasionally returns, 'and walks up the lawn, kept cut neatly by the parks service' (2013). Outside the house, civilisation still marks the landscape. He rings the bell, but does not enter into the autochthonic dream. 'The door handle is in reach but he is a thousand miles away, an exile' (2013). Nature is present in his psyche, but he can no longer enter it; the Canada of the first settlers has been irretrievably altered by European influence. As Atwood suggests "'settler" motifs are likely to end [with] the takeover of Nature once again. The pattern is struggle without result' (1972, 123). The family home has been abandoned in a failed struggle against Nature.

However, it is worth noting that the house is not allowed to remain entirely outside the law. The wilderness park is ruled by law; prescribed and proscribed activities are laid down by the law; the lawn is still cut. While the son may hear 'the scrabble of tiny claws' these may also figure resistance against the restrictions placed on nature in the wilderness, controlled and supervised by authority.

### **The Northern wilderness**

Authority in Hiromi Goto's story, 'Camp Americana' (2003), is not the European settler Law of territorial ownership which affects the First Nations, but an autocratic, conservative, Japanese, visiting grandfather. His family take him into the wilderness, probably northern British Columbia, which has its own law. The wilderness is not the domesticated wilderness at the end of Thomas Wharton's story, but a forest; whether technically under human management or not, the trees and the dark night are untamed.

Hiromi Goto was born in Japan and emigrated to Canada at the age of three. In 'Camp Americana' (2003), she inserts the visiting Japanese grandfather and his westernised Canadian descendants into a forest in August, but the night is cold, and when he leaves the Winnebago '[s]weet cold night air' greets him (2003,

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<sup>21</sup> There is more work to be done in the future on how Canadian urban dwellers interact with what they see from their windows. It is often the case that the snow, slush and ice are viewed from within the safety of the garrison, and a study could be made of how far this distanced encounter with nature affects the Canadian psychic memory.

124). As in 'Wilderness', computer games belonging to the grandchildren are the metonym for the modern urban world.

Goto frequently combines Japanese and Canadian elements in her 'Japanese Canadian' writing, thus creating an unhyphenated migrant identity. The conservative grandfather, although he lives in a large city in Japan, the most technologically advanced of nations, has not forgotten the spirits of the snow, and when he leaves the family's trailer to urinate in the forest during the night, he encounters a spirit creature, and dies. Goto says she was 'working from' the *rokurokubi*, a type of *yokai* (email 26/02/15 pers comm). The *rokurokubi* is unlike other *yokai* (mythical Japanese monsters), in that '*rokurokubi* and their close relatives *nukekubi* are former humans, transformed by a curse resulting from some evil or misdeed. Perhaps they sinned against the gods or nature, or were unfaithful to their husbands' (Meyer 2013). *Rokurokubi* are always women. In *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (2004), Margaret Atwood describes the Wendigo as

a giant spirit-creature with a heart and sometimes an entire body made of ice, and prodigious strength; and ... it can travel as fast as the wind. In some stories it has feet of fire, in others it makes tracks like giant snowshoes. It has no gender, although an individual Wendigo may once have been a man or a woman. It eats moss and frogs and mushrooms, but more particularly human beings (81).

What makes it more similar to the *rokurokubi* is that humans can become Wendigo if they encounter one. 'You can be changed into a Wendigo by being bitten by one, or by tasting human flesh ... or by being bewitched by a shaman ... The Wendigo has been seen as the personification of winter, or hunger, or spiritual selfishness' (83). It is the 'spiritual selfishness' of the grandfather which transforms not only his wife, but his grandchildren, into *yokai*. Atwood suggests that the meaning of the Wendigo in literature tends to be 'not that monsters are human, but humans themselves are potential monsters' (85)<sup>22</sup>. Humans as potential monsters is also the lesson of the *rokurokubi*. In fact, the Wendigo, in its

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<sup>22</sup> In *Mohawk Nation News* (14/03/2013), the Albertan Tar Sands are described as symptomatic of 'Windigo Psychosis' in 'bankers and their accomplices'; 'The Windigos continue to attack our people and our environment. They relentlessly destroy our vast territories, forests and wetlands. They crave 'bitumen', a tar like substance that is turned into oil through an energy intensive process that causes incredible environmental damage'. ('Windigo' is an alternate spelling to 'Wendigo')

various manifestations, was not born with European settlement, but has its origins in Cree and Ojibway legend, just as the *yokai* are from pre-industrial Japan.

The *rokurokubi* has a long neck, appears at night, eats lamp oil, and its head seems to be able to roam around freely on the end of its neck. During the day, it is indistinguishable from an ordinary woman. Sometimes the sin which has caused the transformation has actually been committed by someone else, a husband or father, for example, but it is the woman who is transformed (Meyer, 2013). There are clear differences between the *rokurokubi* and the Wendigo, in that the Japanese monster causes fear and mischief rather than being utterly deadly, although the shock can be fatal, as in the encounter in 'Camp Americana'.

The story begins with the three generations, grandparents, two grandchildren and the son and his wife, driving in the trailer towards the campsite. Masahiro, the grandfather, complains about the bad 'American' food, and that Americans are careless, in spite of his son reminding him they are in Canada. His refusal to allow his family their identity as Canadian underlines the uncertainty about what constitutes a Canadian. His ideas about the role of the wife in marriage do not extend to allowing her to 'drive this over-sized vehicle' (Goto, 2003, 114). He has already denigrated the 'Canadian stewardesses' on the flight, saying that they are too old (113). Everything about this foreign country strikes him as reprehensible. The way that the grandchildren play with their Gameboy and speak in English in front of him distresses him. When they arrive at the campsite, he does not trust his son to connect the trailer to 'the outlets and drains ... Was his son sure that the toilet water wasn't hooked up to the kitchen hose?' (118). His demand for out-dated gender roles in the family, and for his own authority as the senior male, are out of place in the more liberal culture.

Masahiro's wife suggests that he go for a walk, 'her pale face glowing in the dusk' (119), and this is the first sign of the *unheimlich* event which will overtake him. He insists that the children accompany him 'for their own welfare' (119). The next presentiment of danger comes when 'He is swallowed up by the trees' (119). After telling his granddaughter off for spitting and not doing as she is told, he is left with his grandson. 'Gary stares past Masahiro's head. Masahiro looks over his shoulder, but he cannot see anything except the darkening trees' (120). The forest, and his grandson's behaviour, make him uneasy, and the

combination of alien grandchildren and the trees set up the sense of the *unheimlich* in what happens to him.

Later, after they have gone to bed, and Masahiro is uncomfortably sharing a bed with his wife, which he does not do at home, he listens to her breathing. ‘Mama’s breathing is a cool whistle, like an autumn wind blowing the last leaves off bare-limbed trees. Her white face cold’ (121). These are the first signs of northernness, his wife’s face white and cold, the cool whistle and the bare-limbed trees. The whistle may also recall the Wendigo. As Atwood says ‘Although its voice bellows, it also whistles’ (2004, 81). The text thus insinuates northernness into its narrative, and it is an uncanny northernness, imaginary more than real.

The following section begins with his waking. ‘Tomorrow, Masahiro shudders, how quickly it comes. He is icy to the core and a dull pressure balloons in his bladder’ (Goto 2003, 122). Although it is August, he wakes up cold. However, this is not morning, but still dark, and the uncanny references increase.

He slides his hand along the small shelf next to the bed for his glasses. When he puts them on the *dim night shapes* become less *ominous*. That heap of *monstrous* snoring is the boy’s *foreign* wife. That *otherworldly* grinding is the weakling grandson’s teeth (122, my emphases)

Goto intensifies the arrival of this *unheimlich* experience, and the need to be able to see clearly recalls Freud’s suggestion that blinding is a metaphor. ‘[M]orbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration’ says Freud in ‘The “Uncanny”’ (938). Through his uncanny experience in the half-light, disempowered by the inability to see clearly, the Grandfather allows the Japanese *rokurokubi* of his ancestral imagination to resurface in the Canadian forest. As Ian Angus says, ‘[s]eparation from origin is itself original for New World societies. Our primal experience is wilderness’ (1997, 126). The primal experience undergone by the Grandfather returns him to his origins, albeit not in a New World society, but in an atavistic remembering of an earlier epoch.

Masahiro realises he will have to go out to relieve himself, as he does not wish to use the bathroom next to the bed. Realising one of the children is awake, he demands that they help him.

No one answers.

The air stills. The breathlessness *uncanny*. Like he's in a room filled with *corpses*. Masahiro exhales jaggedly through his nostrils. A rush of *shivery* hair rises, blooms across his back (123, my emphases)

Goto sets up the haunting as in a typical supernatural tale, dropping into the text the signs of the uncanny, and even using the term itself. The room 'filled with corpses' is to Masahiro what Canada, as modern, western world, is to Japan – uncivilised, soulless, and alien.

When he goes out to relieve himself, the 'sweet cold night air' delivers 'an icy kiss' (124). 'The forest night is as cold as winter in Nagoya', which is a large city in Japan, birthplace of Toyota (124). Masahiro is used to cities and technology. It is the wilderness of Canada which specifically makes him uneasy. He regards the children as 'uncivilized' (123). The contrast between Japanese civility and Canadian 'wildness' is disorientating.

However, what Masahiro has forgotten is the traditional Japanese respect for nature, and the 'sensitivity to nature which the modern Japanese may have lost' (Hayashi, 2002, 34). 'The Japanese did not have the concept of nature as a separate term [because] nature and people's lives were unified' (34). Masahiro's relationship with the natural world has shifted to become more 'westernised', seeing nature as the obverse to civilisation, and this is what makes him decide not to use the bathroom beside his bed for his natural functions, but to go out into the forest, and find the outhouse. Unwittingly, of course, he is thus reverting to a more natural life, urinating in the open air, and it is this which allows the return of the repressed, and the spirits of ancient Japanese legend, and allows the uncanny figure of the *rokurokubi* to appear. The *rokurokubi* is his wife, transformed, and in her spirit shape is a reminder to him of his rejection of her as too natural. During the drive, he 'glares at his own wife asleep in the swivel chair next to the door, her mouth foolishly slack' (114). His attitude to women is ultra-conservative: boys should be strong, women should not drive the trailer, wives should cook breakfast for their families. 'A woman must honour her husband and care for him' (117). His wife 'washes the vegetables outside, in a basin', and Masahiro insists she washes them again (118). In the mythology, the appearance of the *rokurokubi* is usually a sign that the man is guilty or ashamed of something,



often unkindness to his wife, and it is she who visits him in the night and terrifies him, although when the *rokurokubi* has returned to its human form, the woman is unaware that she has undergone the transformation.

As Masahiro emerges from the trailer '[t]he warmth is sucked from his lungs, and, unbidden, he thinks of the Woman of the Snow. Her deathly kiss' (124). 'Woman of the Snow' is a phrase normally applied to Yuki Onna, another type of *yokai*, or spirit. She has snow-white skin, and wears a white kimono. Sometimes she leaves no footprints in the snow, which chimes with the famous painting by William Blair Bruce, *The Phantom Hunter* (1888), now named *The Phantom of the Snow*, in which a man dying of cold and exhaustion in a Northern landscape is overtaken by a shadowy figure who 'leaves no footmarks on the snow ... He is also, and decidedly, *not of this world*' (Grace, 2001, 116-7, emphasis in original). Sometimes the Yuki Onna merely appears, often as a beautiful young woman, and fades away again, but in other tales, she is

a terrible *yokai*, that haunts the snowy forests looking to feed. She lives by sucking *seiki*, the vital energy of the human body. She extracts the *seiki* by first freezing her victims to death, then sucking their souls out through their mouths' (Davisson, 2013).

The spirit Masahiro recalls is thus a combination of the Canadian Wendigo and Yuki Onna. At the same time as alienating the urban dweller from Japan in the wilderness of Canada, the text recalls legends from pre-industrial Japan, bringing the Japanese rural psyche to the Northern forest. As Ian Angus says, 'There is also a psychic side to wilderness' (1997, 126). In connection with European settlers, he suggests that 'The absence of belonging, of origin, unleashed a wildness, a madness, an intuition of the arbitrariness of all organisation and goals' (126). This is clearly seen in Wharton's text, but can also be applied to the urban Japanese visitor, in that his desire for order and obedience from those he considers his subordinates is resisted, by his family and by the natural world. Masahiro is forced to recognise a power greater than himself, and in order to make sense of it, he resorts to a psychic reading of his situation, regressing to ancient legends to find meaning.

Imagery of the *unheimlich* saturates the text. In attempting to find the outhouse, Masahiro 'peers about'; the repeated use of this verb suggests a

growing inability to comprehend what he is seeing. Freud describes this sense of spatial confusion: ‘The uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one’s way about in. The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it’ (Freud 2001, 931). Here Masahiro thinks that ‘The conifers are unnaturally tall’ (124). There is ‘an unearthly light’ (124), and ‘a strange greenish glow’ (125). Freud also describes the *unheimlich* as the unfamiliar in the familiar, that which is not plainly seen. He quotes Klinger: ‘At times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is *heimlich* and full of terrors for him’ (934). Freud is showing how the meaning of *heimlich* overlaps with *unheimlich*, when it means secret, ‘that which is concealed and kept out of sight’ (2001, 933). Masahiro’s experience is *heimlich* in just this sense, where the private intersects with the unknown.

The forest consumes him. The darkness enfolds his skinny form and he cannot inhale. Like when breath-sucking night haunts sit upon his chest, Masahiro is paralyzed.

Icy, bony fingers slide across Masahiro’s palm and clamp down, hard, across his hand. The faintest prickle of pointed nails (Goto, 2004, 126)

The resonance of the ‘breath-sucking night’ with Fuseli’s painting ‘The Nightmare’ (1781) is striking, as is ‘the faintest prickle of pointed nails’ with Wharton’s ‘the frantic scratching of tiny claws’; neither image is explained. Masahiro falls over and calls for help. The children come out to him, but in monstrous shape. His granddaughter tells him to ‘shut up’ (127).

Her head. It’s – overlarge. Masahiro blinks and blinks. He cannot focus ... Her eyes glow green. A trick of light or his sight. Her eyes loom larger, closer and she is upon him, her fetid breath in his face, her cold wet nose pressed against his. She licks his cheek. Rasps. Her coarse tongue will tear his skin ... He blinks rapidly. Can almost make out triangular ears, a feline head, on Jennifer’s childish body (127).

The combination of his inability to see clearly as he has lost his glasses in the fall, and the child’s apparent transformation into a cat are the Freudian *unheimlich*. In urban Japan, a cat can be seen as *bakeneko*, or ‘changing cat’, another type of *yokai* (Davisson, 2012). The legend is that some cats can transform themselves

into humans, and turn on their masters. In Masahiro's familiar world, a child, and a female, should be respectful of her elders, and especially the men, and Masahiro's encounter with the liberal western world comes as a shock to him, and the shock to his cultural sensibilities and to his sense of dignity, both as a man and as the senior member of the family, take tangible form in the cold forest. When Jennifer, the granddaughter, is joined by her brother, Gary, Masahiro hopes that at least the boy will respect and help him, but when he looks up at him he looks '[i]nto the muzzle of a fat cat' (127). Both children are revealed to him as *bakeneko*.

Masahiro expresses the modern Japanese relationship with nature, different from the Canadian awareness of the wilderness. 'I never liked the wilds', he says. 'I like wildlife, you understand. Ecosystems. Very important. Balance' (128). Rather than the Canadian understanding of the wilderness as a place where one can expect to struggle against forces which are greater than oneself, the modern Japanese respect for the natural world has developed from animism and 'humans as a part of nature' (Hayashi, 34), to a separation from nature. '[T]he contemporary view of nature is based both on superiority over nature and dependence on nature' (Hayashi, 37). The 'balance' which Masahiro desires implies an orderly distance between nature and civilisation, not unlike the management of the wilderness in Wharton's story. In modern Canada, as in Japan, there is a growing green movement, and an awareness of the need to protect the natural world, but that awareness, social and political, does not negate the residual uneasy awareness of an 'out there', which is inevitably inimical to the complacent life.

As he begins to realise what a great deal he owes her, his wife, who he has been denigrating for her snoring and taking up space in the unfamiliar narrowness of the bunk bed, now appears as the *rokurokubi*. 'Her face. It bobs mere inches from his ... Has she been a monster all along? Starts twining her serpentine neck around his frozen body' (139). In addition to the presence of his cat-like grandchildren, he is taken over by the conviction that he is being drained of life by the *yokai*.

His wife's neck winds round and round. Her skin is cold. Stink of wet iron. Bumpy and rough like the skin of a giant Gila monster, her neck

scrapes against his hands, his arms, slowly rising towards his face. Coil after coil. Squeezing tight his heart. The cold. So cold (130).

The story ends: 'The sun is bright, a loud invitation. He rises towards its call. Really, he thinks, his entire life. He hadn't known any of them at all' (133).

It is not made explicit exactly what kills him, but the family suggest a stroke or a heart attack. It may be the cold. The *rokurokubi* is not usually fatal but acts as a nightmare form of guilty conscience. Masahiro's unwillingness to recognise Canada (as distinct from the USA) or to come to terms with living a natural and more liberal life, leads to his death. Having left the garrison of the urban life he understands, he fails to control his family and his environment, and a combination of old and new world ghosts overcome him.

'Camp Americana' juxtaposes Japanese myth against Atwood's Nature the Monster and the Ice Virgin to form a narrative which crosses boundaries between the psyche and the will, seeing, as the diasporic subject must, his roots in both former and present location. The lesson for Canadians and Japanese alike is that if man sets himself against nature, he will be defeated.

These are contemporary short stories in which Nature features as an implacable enemy, or an indifferent danger, but there are also, increasingly, stories in which the wilderness is urban jungle, alienating its inhabitants from themselves and from each other. For example, in Joseph Boyden's 'Painted Tongue' (2001), it is the metropolitan centre which is unfamiliar and in which the battle for survival usually takes place. In settler stories with rural settings, Nature usually means weather and its effects: floods, blizzards and high winds. In a nation where, for example, the average maximum temperature in Toronto varies between -10°C in January and 27°C in July (Trail Canada, 2011), it is hardly surprising that the weather becomes a theme in Canadian writing. Atwood herself mentions this in her Introduction to the 2004 edition of *Survival*.

The persistent cultural obsession of Canadian literature, said *Survival* in 1972, was survival. In actual life ... this concern was often enough a factor of the weather, as when the ice storm cuts off the electrical power (2004, 8).

In Atwood's 2014 linked collection *Stone Mattress*, the first story, 'Alphinland', is set during just such an incident. The story begins:

The freezing rain sifts down, handfuls of shining rice thrown by some unseen celebrant. Wherever it hits, it crystallizes into a granulated coating of ice. Under the streetlights it looks so beautiful: like fairy silver, thinks Constance (Atwood, 2014, 1).

The story is about a writer of fantasy books whose husband has died. In the course of the narrative, she remembers an earlier lover, who she now keeps virtually in an oak cask in her online fantasy world, along with the woman with whom he was unfaithful, who is ‘immobilized by runic spells inside a stone beehive’ (25). She dreams ‘The trail of ashes leads through the woods, glimmering in the moonlight, the starlight. ... She comes out from under the trees: she’s on an icy street. It’s the street where she lives’ (30).

The trees and the cold night feature again, combined with the psychic dream-state, and throughout the story, although she knows her husband is dead, she hears his voice. Her dream, and the recognition that she is home, on familiar ground, is yet another manifestation of the *unheimlich*. The cold and the wilderness provide the site for her imagined life and her memories, just as in Goto’s ‘Camp Americana’ they do for the grandfather, but being Canadian and in her own city, she accepts the difficulties in her relationship with the natural elements.

### **The North**

Daniel Chartier speaks of ‘the imaginary of North’ forging ‘a rich, complex, network of symbolic meanings’ (2007, 35). ‘The “North”’, he says, ‘poses the problem of the relationship between geographic realities and the world of the imagination, since those who have written and read about it in Europe and America, have, for the most part, never been there’ (2007, 35). In expanding Louis Edmond Hamelin’s ideas about nordicity (*nordicité*), which centred on the geography, both physical and human, of the region, Chartier investigates the symbolic meaning of the North in Québécois literature, and ‘the links between a territory and the imaginary and among different cultural works’ (36). ‘[Hamelin] proposed a “geographic nordicity” through identification with ten real spaces, including ... Canada, Alaska and Greenland as well as all places that experience winter-like conditions’ (38). Hamelin, says Chartier, defines

“nordicity” (in English) as referring to “the state, degree, awareness and representation of cold territoriality in the northern hemisphere.” The comprehensive nature of the term is what makes it new: it encompasses the “state of North” in all its complexity: As Hamelin says, “comprehensive nordicity refers to systems of thought, knowledge, vocabularies, intercultural know-how, arts and humanities sensibilities, expressions of opinion, application in territorial, political and economic fields; in short, nordicity denotes the state of a northern country.” (Chartier, 2007, 39-40).

Hamelin’s ideas have been expanded to include other neologisms, such as ‘winterity’ (*hivernité*). Nordicity is variable; it takes account of human activity, industrialisation and infrastructure, as well as winter conditions, the extent of snowfall and ice cover. Thus an industrial town might be ‘Northern’ geographically, but have a lesser place in the index of nordicity, while an area of wilderness further south might register higher.

On winterity, Chartier explains that:

[W]hen Hamelin defines all possible manifestations of winterity, the list includes many elements reflecting narratives and discursive forms. We can group these elements into a paradigm of “literary winterity,” add to the list from our perspective, and enrich it with the historic and discursive layers of the texts we study (2007, 44).

Chartier lists some of the elements of this ‘literary winterity’.

Elements such as icebergs, polar bears, the cold, the northern lights, the absence of reference points, desolation, solitude, remote places, nomadic way of life, refuge and the cabin, the predominance of the colours blue and white, the snow, and the absence of trees ... can all be used to create a Nordic setting (45).

It is these elements which point to Atwood’s theme of Nature and wilderness, many of which can be found in the stories discussed below. We have already met polar bears in the Jarman story, where they are *Survival*’s typical British animals, which are anthropomorphised and endearing, although ultimately the cause of the characters’ deaths. The predominance of blue and white features is the stories of Lisa Moore, and the snow is a perennial element in the texts. Chartier goes on to explain the extension of the natural elements into the metaphoric realm of nordicity, connected with the psyche.

Simple elements—such as ice and snow—in the representation of “North,” defined as discourse, go beyond the semantic layer they seem to cover. The universality of “North” ... leads us to question the relationship between not only geography and discourse, but also the real and the imaginary—a relationship in which the demands of the real are not excluded, but in which discourse is constructed like a changing whole that can be grasped only in its constant movement in the narrations, images and forms that underlie it (47).

This relationship between the real and the imaginary in the discourse of winterity, and in the narrations and images in Lisa Moore’s stories, ties Chartier’s work to the symbolism in Canadian identity. As Chartier himself writes, ‘[f]or English-speaking Canada, the North has become symbolic’ (2006, 34). As Atwood suggests, spring and summer seasons are *unheimlich*, haunted by winter, by snow and ice, as is found particularly in the work of Lisa Moore.

### **Symbolic North: Lisa Moore**

This section takes the opportunity to examine narrative structure in the short story, a discussion which is continued in Chapter Five. There are, of course, modernist and postmodernist novels which challenge the reader with changing narrative perspectives, interiority, and first or second person narration, but this artifice is more frequently used in short fiction, where the very structure is a part of the essential affect of the piece. While a novel is not asking to be read at a sitting, William Boyd says, a ‘well-written short story is not suited to the sound bite culture: it’s too dense; its effects are too complex for easy digestion’ (2004). As Charles E May reminds us, ‘the short story’s shortness has traditionally been closely related to a sense of loneliness and alienation’ (2002, 117). He is summarising the main argument of Frank O’Connor’s seminal study of the short story, *The Lonely Voice* (2004), in which the most frequently quoted passage is ‘Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society’ (2004, 18). Lee Maracle’s Bertha in the eponymous story is just such a figure (Maracle, 1999), as is Painted Tongue in the story by Joseph Boyden discussed below, and both of them are First Nations subjects in an urban, industrialised world. However, for Settler Canadians facing ‘a dead or indifferent Nature’ in a vast part of a vast continent, where most of ‘society’, however that is defined, is near the Southern border, or across it, in the USA, the ‘fringes’ extend

from Toronto to the silent emptiness of the Arctic. It is part of Atwood's argument that a 'sense of alienation' is common in Canadian literature. Characters suffer 'an almost intolerable anxiety', she says (1972, 33). 'The result of a dead or indifferent Nature is an isolated or "alienated" man (1972, 54).

The investigation of the short stories focuses on narration; it is connected to theme as in 'The Stylist' by Lisa Moore (2007), the interiority of the *you* narration is focussed on imaginary North as a marker for Canadian and gender identity. Here, unusually in Moore's work, the protagonist's interior life reveals her to be a type of ice maiden as victim (cf Atwood 1972, 199). In Diane Schoemperlen's case, discussed in Chapter Five, the narration reveals an Atwoodian 'hag', although the protagonist there could be a 'Wise Old Woman' (1972, 199), depending on the reader's gender.

The stories of Lisa Moore develop the theme of the North. In her work, the weather, snow, ice, and wind, provide a context for life, and particularly sexual life, in Newfoundland. Although St. John's, the capital, is a three-hour flight north-east from Toronto, it is, in European terms, on the same latitude as Toulouse in the South of France. However, being out in the Atlantic, like MacLeod's Nova Scotia though further north, but also detached from the mainland of Canada, it is possible to see icebergs floating offshore in July. The Labrador ocean current brings icy water down from the Arctic and around the coast of the province. While in Toronto the weather is hot and humid in the summer, in St John's average temperatures are ten degrees cooler in summer, and a couple of degrees milder in winter than Toronto's averages. Heavy snowfall can occur at any time between November and March. Its position, therefore, grants it the conditions for winterity and nordicity, although it is not seen as Northern in Canada.

Chartier admits that although most writing on the North is by men, 'some women have also contributed' (2008, 42). Their contributions have added 'to the complexity and figures that underlie it' (43), although he goes no further with this idea, and it is this complexity, and an extension of the way women's writing interacts with images of nordicity and winterity, rather than actual North, which is addressed in the analysis of the stories by Lisa Moore.

It is often observed of Moore's fiction that it is cinematic, and 'is full of visual detail, abrupt cuts, and startling juxtapositions' (Warder, 2006, 162). As



Herb Wyile comments in an interview with the author, ‘how collage-like it is. I realize that that is a fairly rudimentary term, but what I mean is that your narratives evolve almost spatially, as opposed to linearly or chronologically’ (2008,117).

This may recall Jarman’s use of bricolage, of apparently randomly associated images and anachronistic intertextual references, but where Jarman’s stories may seem to be constructed from whatever is to hand, Moore’s images are focussed on, and weave together, four main areas of human location and experience: light, colour, snow and ice, and female sexuality. The locus is usually St. John’s, a port and tourist venue, a cosmopolitan city of 200,000 inhabitants. Where Jarman’s references come from pop music and popular culture, Moore’s are sensory. In some of her stories, like ‘Mouths, Open’ and ‘The Way the Light Is’ (both in *Open*, 2002), characters venture south, to Spain or Cuba, and it is there that they meet with danger, in the heat. They are at home in the north, they identify themselves against the psychic North, while not being geographically northern. North is the symbolic Other.

As Wyile says, Moore’s narratives are spatial rather than linear or chronological. While Chartier describes icebergs, ice, and frost as gendered male in literature, snow is ‘completely feminized in texts, fitting a stereotyped paradigm of passivity in which the woman protects, covers, soothes, conceals and caresses’ (2008, 39). Both ice and snow feature in Moore’s writing, but while ice is associated with the male characters, the snow is the site of the seduction of the male by the female, although not always by design. As Chartier says: ‘The relationship with the land, however implacable, is one of dangerous seduction: as Rouquette says, “*la terre du Nord, mangeuse d’hommes, attire comme une maitresse*” [the Northern landscape, a maneater, lures like a mistress] (42, trans. Elaine Kennedy).

In ‘Granular’, a story from Moore’s first collection, *Degrees of Nakedness* (1995), the female narrator relates a sexual encounter with her husband in which he penetrates her with a cucumber from the fridge, ‘shocking cold’ (1995, 101). In the later collection, *Open* (2007), it is the women who bring the cold and ice into their sexual relations, either literally, as in ‘Natural Parents’, or in subconsciously juxtaposed images, as in ‘The Stylist’ (2007). ‘This is what you see outside the window: hideous icicles, a row of fangs. You dream you kiss

your [diving] coach' (138). Here the 'hideous fangs' are clearly associated with the kiss which the coach later gives the young girl, a masculine threat, which may indicate an early association of ice, winterity, with sex, or may cause the later appropriation of winterity as a way of dealing with desire.

As the North is seen as a feminine space, masculinised by the penetration of the male seeker for self and spiritual wholeness, but who frequently dies in the attempt, the question remains of how women view the North. Sherrill Grace addresses the question by examining the role of women in novels by Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, Aritha Van Herk, and Elizabeth Hay. In particular, Van Herk's *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* (1986) gives a woman's perspective, and ends with the protagonist following the road North, where 'she has disappeared into conjecture and speculation' (Grace, 2001, 199). The ending, though not the character, is similar to that of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (2015), in which the protagonist swims out to sea; a feminine element absorbing her into its eternal living nature. Van Herk's less passive protagonist drives into the North, penetrating and appropriating it in a further act of defiance in a masculine world.

This is one option for the female encounter with the North. An alternative is Atwood's short story 'The Age of Lead' (*Wilderness Tips* 1992), also mentioned by Grace, in which the female protagonist watches the exhumation of John Torrington, one of the crew of Franklin's expedition on television. The story is one of Atwood's earliest examinations of ecological issues and the threat to Nature from consumerism. Atwood's protagonist in 'The Age of Lead' goes into 'her kitchen – all-white, done over the year before last, the outmoded butcher-block counters from the seventies torn out and carted away'(161). Man-made materials have replaced the natural wooden surfaces. It also recalls Wharton's family in their new house, 'their new split-level, which featured a walk-out basement, a marble kitchen island' (Wharton, 2013).

The strategy in Lisa Moore's writing is different again. Although Newfoundland is not the 'frozen North' of the Arctic Circle, and not regarded in Canada as the north, it is the recurring imagery of nordicity and winterity which form the basis for a reading of the encounter. Moore's protagonists do not easily fit Atwood's stereotypes of Ice Maiden, Earth Mother or Hag, or Diana-Maiden or Hecate-Crone (Atwood uses various terms at different times in *Survival*),

which may be because Atwood was mainly discussing writing by male authors. In relation to Nature and women, Atwood says ‘Sometimes the Canadian Nature-goddess is rock, sometimes ice’ (201). She posits that ‘the full shape of the Nature-Woman metaphor in Canadian literature’ may concern ‘the attempts of the buried Venuses and Dianas to get out, to free themselves’ (210). Moore’s female characters often fit these buried roles, the form of the narration exposing their inner lives.

In a postscript to ‘Nature the Monster’ (Chapter Two), Atwood writes of snow ‘as a death or termination image’ (65), and comments on three poems by P. K. Page: ‘the snow takes friendly forms at first but turns during the poem into a metaphor for alienation, terror, manifestation of the inhuman void, and death’ (65). It is true that in Goto’s writing this metaphor is worked out, although the agent is a cold night forest rather than actual snow, as it is with the narrative of the Franklin expedition which is a theme in Atwood’s own ‘Age of Lead’. In Atwood’s more recent ‘Alphinland’, although the snow is a threat, it is conquered by the woman sufficiently to allow her to feed herself, and to escape into her memories of her love affair and into her own constructed fairy world. Moore recognises the dangers of snow more as inconveniences, and the sound of the snow ploughs clearing it away from the streets of the city form an aural backdrop to the stories.

Instead, Moore’s female characters use the imagery of snow and ice as erotic prompts. Rather than being Other, ice is internalised (literally, in the case of the cold cucumber), and the Woman-as-Nature (Northern), takes the engrained, hard to unlearn script and replays it, in a re-appropriation of the role of Woman-as-North, or rather, of North-as-predatory-female.

Van Herk and Hay ‘write and rewrite Woman’ says Grace (2001, 205).

They too desire true North, but to find it they must first find themselves and acknowledge their prior inscription by *men* as synonymous with North. This identification means that it is almost inevitable that writing about the North will mean writing the self ... desire for North is a desire for home, for that place where they can feel at home, secure, legitimized, and where their voices will be heard – where they can rest (205, emphasis in original).

This connection of the id with the Canadian psychic identification with the figure of the North, also connects Woman with desire. If Nature is seen as the mother, and, more particularly, the space for masculine play, then, according to Lacan (1999, 4), it might seem to follow that Woman should desire both man and Nature. The desire of the other/Other – what we imagine the Other desires – in Moore is the desire both of the male and the North. Where snow and ice are seen as a threat to the self – they, like the Wendigo, may desire to consume the body – they must thereby desire the self.

Moore's protagonists, while in the present of the narrative, fear that they are about to lose this security, and are often remembering previous sexual acts, or sexual desires. Sometimes, as in 'The Stylist', it is a memory from adolescence. 'The Stylist' (2007: 137-151) uses the 'narrative *you*' (as David Herman, 2004, expresses it) throughout. In his chapter on 'Contextual Anchoring', Herman explains that 'interpreters rely on analogous, model-based representations of the world(s) in which they are trying to make sense of a given narrative' (331). Themes are patterns which provide analogies and models for the interpreter. Herman describes 'double deixis' as that form of the *you* address which combines two or more of the following possible deictics: address to the protagonist, to the reader, to a narratee, or a generalised *you*, which he terms 'the "pseudo-deictic" *you*' (340). He lists 'proverbs, maxims, recipes, VCR instructions, song lyrics' among other sites of the pseudo-deictic *you* (340-1). This list will prove useful in the following chapter, where two stories are discussed which both feature this form of *you*. As Herman says, a text may include more than one of the five possible functional types of textual *you* (338), and it is not always easy to ascertain which is in play. It is worth noting that Atwood also uses *you* to address the reader in *Survival*: '[b]ut when you are here and don't know where you are because you've misplaced your landmarks or bearings, then you need not be an exile or a madman: you are simply lost' (1972, 18). At other times, *you* refers to the writer: '[p]art of where you are is where you've been. If you aren't too sure where you are, or if you're sure but don't like it, there's a tendency, both in psychotherapy and in literature, to retrace your history to see how you got there' (1972, 112). As is clear from the latter quotation, *you* can be ambiguous, and slide in the course of a sentence from one context of interpretation to another. As Herman says:

[I]n second-person fictions ... the deictic force of textual *you* sometimes helps decenter (*sic*) ... the modal structure of the narrative universes built up by those fictions ... In some cases at least, narrative *you* produces an ontological hesitation between what is actual and what is virtual within the story-world (Herman 2004, 337-8).

The connection between Herman's 'ontological hesitation' and Atwood's uncertainty about 'where you are' is implicit. Decentering the epistemic modality of the universe is one way of expressing alienation from a stable identity.

In order to discuss the various types of narrative *you*, Herman analyses a novel by Edna O'Brien, *A Pagan Place* (1970), which he says has the thematic focus of 'a narrator-protagonist in search of an identity for herself' (341). This is often true of the stories of Lisa Moore, which also focus on the search for personal identity, in a Newfoundland setting. Herman goes on to discuss the ways O'Brien's narrator-protagonist appears to be addressing herself. Herman describes how *you* can identify the protagonist 'in the act of self-address', alternatively named an 'autotelic' form of second-person narration, or 'internally focalized narrative discourse' (343). This, he suggests, has the chief function of establishing 'cohesion among the various narrative units uttered, lived, and interpreted ... by the fictional protagonist herself' (356). He also suggests that this form of narration does not encourage readers 'to depersonalize this *you* [in *A Pagan Place*] who, caught in the interstices between childhood and adulthood, is herself searching for an identity – familial, social, and sexual' (355). The protagonist of 'The Stylist' remembers the liminal state between childhood and adulthood.

However, he also allows for double deixis, 'a hybridized combination of the other functional subtypes...[which] draws attention to and so de-automatizes processes of contextual anchoring' (342), in that the reader who shares with the protagonist some of the same life experiences, (and he mentions the 'footprint of sexuality [which may be] inscribed upon [her mind]' (344)), may find herself 'within the discourse' (344) or identifying with the protagonist or the addressee, whereas other readers may understand the *you* as referring to either the protagonist herself, or to a fictional addressee.

Herman quotes from Brian Richardson's article, 'The Poetics and Politics of Second Person Narrative' (1991), and his section on second person

narration is an extension of Richardson's analysis. Richardson's is less of a linguistic analysis but more semantic and ontological, and the examples he studies include O'Brien's *A Pagan Place*. Richardson suggests that the use of the second person 'offers new possibilities of mimesis, particularly for revealing a mind in flux' (1991, 327), and, summarising his analysis of the use of this form in the O'Brien novel he concludes 'it is admirably suited to express the unstable nature and intersubjective constitution of the self' (327). The second person works to suggest 'a psychomania between self and soul, a dialogue between id and superego' (314).

The protagonist of 'The Stylist' recalls a time when she was in that transient situation, aged twelve, having just developed breasts, so that she was on the threshold of maturity. In the narrative present, she has another changing identity, no longer a wife, but a deserted wife. Herman refers to Bühler's term 'deixis am Phantasma', in which 'the speaker conjures up a past version of himself and talks to and about it as if it were present in his immediate deictic field' (354), and Moore's protagonist is expressing the psychomania of a fractured subjectivity by addressing her former selves. These ideas inform a reading of Moore's 'The Stylist' so that the function of the imagery of the North in conjunction with *female* subjectivity can be examined. (They also inform analysis of one of the texts in Chapter Five).

'The Stylist' opens with a contextual setting easily recognisable to most women readers.

The stylist stands behind you and leans in. She scrunches your hair in her fists, testing bounce. She lifts it to the side like wings, tugging her fingers through the snags.  
She says, What's the idea here?  
The idea is I want to look good.  
You want a change, she says. Your husband left you. Your husband left you. Your husband left you.  
Uncross your legs, she says (137).

The last line is significant in the schema of the story; not only can it be read as a sexual request, but it also looks forward to the 'story', which is about a woman who has always been defensive and curled in on herself, and must now 'learn how to become vulnerable again' (145). After this opening, the particular context

of the fictional world of the *you* becomes more apparent, and the reader is no longer implicated, unless, of course, they have very similar experiences.

The chronology makes the first of its switches here. In broad terms, the protagonist's memory goes back to when she was twelve, and training for diving competitions at her local pool. From there, the narrative recalls the birth of her children, achronological and undateable, scenes from her marriage, her husband's desertion, turns back to while she was practising law and pregnant, and then returns to the present. Just before the end of the story, the protagonist recalls the scene when her diving coach was driving her home and stopped the car and kissed her. This scene may in fact be a dream. It is possible to read it as virtual or fictional reality. In between these scenes, there are brief returns to the present in the salon, and a brief recollection of her time at law school.

The structure of the narrative thus makes the act of reading challenging, as the text must be decoded to work out when the events in the story happened, and in what order they actually occurred. This difficulty makes it clear that the *you* is a form of self-address, a contemplation of how the narrator/protagonist has arrived at this point in her life, having streaks put in her hair by the stylist, at the suggestion of her mother. In the interview with Herb Wyile (2008), Moore says

I'm interested in time, and what time is, and how it's elastic, and why sometimes we experience a winter in the snap of a finger and sometimes it feels like twenty years, and how that connects with emotions. I'm interested in memory and I'm interested in the fact that there are things that we remember with our senses, and other things, important things, that we have no recollection of. I'm interested in how, if I pick up a coffee in a café, a whole year or two of flashes of imagery might go through my head and be completely forgotten by the time I put the cup down again (2008, 116).

Moore's attempt to present the whole of a character's past experience at once, in the way that any human identity is constructed from past experience, still presents a challenge to the reader, who has not been present at the events recalled. It is true that at the end of Moore's stories, the reader is left with an understanding of the protagonist's life, and can see it as an ongoing process of development through time and experience. 'Literature is a doubling back, it is reflection; as such, it kind of stops time', says Moore, and quotes from the novel she is working on: 'The present always has the past dissolving in it. That's the enigma of the present.'

The past has already infiltrated it' (120-21). As Daniel Chartier says of one of the elements of winterity in the story, 'Ice is associated with temporality. It "freezes time"' (2008, 37). It represents the present, but the past is visible through it.

Throughout the story, colour and light play their part; Moore's palette is carefully chosen. She initially studied the visual arts at college in Nova Scotia, and Creative Writing afterwards in Newfoundland, and says that the way light falls on things has always interested her. There are frequently mirrors in her stories, reflecting both light and the self. In 'The Stylist', the protagonist is seated in front of the *you* in the mirror of the salon, and watches the stylist working. As she considers her new identity as ex-wife, she studies her reflection in a re-enactment of the Mirror stage.

The first colours appear in the text when she recalls her diving lessons. 'Your bathing suit, the frosty green of the old Ford. The green of leaves covered with short silver hair, lucent grapes' (137). The green and silver recur at other places in the text; they are the colours of holly and mistletoe, winter colours, as emphasised by the adjective 'frosty'. Like any painter, Moore understands the drama of contrast, and on the next page there is 'ketchup screaming on the white plate' (138).

Later, as in 'the sky is a ravenous mink', 'the chrome gym', 'a white towel' (138), all the colours are grey or white, the colours of snow and ice. There are splashes of red and black, but otherwise 'Everything is white' (144). The colours add to the sense that it is always winter when the key events occur, such as the first kiss, and the scene in the present when she is attempting to comprehend how her life has unspooled. In these winters, *you* grows up. As Moore says in the Wylie interview:

[E]verybody experiences the world through the senses, and our emotions are really tied to the senses, so that when we experience a flash of emotion, it is because of the sounds and smells and colours and textures around us, and it's often not a conscious putting together of the information before us and coming to a conclusion that, say, we feel sad now. Rather, it's a sensory experience of the world (114).

After recalling the birth of her first child, Anna thinks about her unnamed husband, and sets him in the North.



Your husband wanted golfing and hockey, a new tent, to celebrate his Native heritage (hitherto unmentioned during seven years of marriage), to become a theologian, to hunt seals. (There's a white mask the Inuit hunter holds to his face while approaching the seal basking at the edge of an ice flow. Everything is white, the hunter's white furs, the ice, the air. When he lifts the white mask he's obliterated. Your husband, the empty landscape, your husband, the empty landscape.) You prefer oblique dreams but you are too tired to manufacture the oblique (144).

The penultimate sentence appears to be almost metatextual, foregrounding the explicit image of the North. Anna situates her husband firmly as part of the Northern landscape, the snow and ice, and then renders him uncannily invisible. In a sense, she sees him as Grey Owl, the English Archie Belaney who took on the persona of an Ojibway. There is no suggestion elsewhere in the text that the husband has any Native heritage. Atwood discusses in *Strange Things* the phenomenon of 'the desire among non-Natives to turn themselves into Natives; a desire that becomes entwined with a version of wilderness itself, not as demonic ice-goddess who will claim you for her own, but as the repository of salvation and new life' (2004, 43). From Anna's perspective, her husband is an 'empty landscape', absorbed by the North, and only appearing briefly when he lowers the mask. If she is identifying with the North, she may also be able to hold him, to enclose him, to absorb him.

In the dream in which *you* kisses her coach, one of her teeth falls out into his hand. 'Now you must go through life like this. Icicles crash from the eaves' (139). The conjunction of an awareness of an adult identity and the icicles comes together at this moment of adolescent fantasy, with the ice again functioning as the conjunction of past and present. The final section of the story takes *you* back to a night at the pool, when a storm means everyone has left and her mother has not arrived to pick her up. Her coach drives her home, stopping to kiss her. 'He kisses and kisses. You have never. Nothing will ever be as wonderful as this. You give yourself over/over/over' (151). Although Moore uses many verbless phrases, the unfinished sentence 'You have never' (one of four in the text), and the fractured syntax suggests the battle between pre-mirror stage and (becoming) self.

'Natural Parents', also from *Open*, is a longer, more complex story. The narration is third person until almost halfway through, where it changes to first. Again, the chronology is non-linear, and although in more conventional first and

third person, it is not always clear who is the implied narrator and when. The colour scheme is mostly red and orange, fire and electric lights, and the Northern imagery is in the elements observed.

We learn that a couple are on their way to a dinner party, but 'he's already abandoned her' (70) and they have two children. Their story is revealed slowly, and has to be gathered a clue at a time by the attentive reader. Though it begins from the perspective of Anna, the wife, on the fourth page it switches to being focalised through Lyle, the husband. In between, there is an intervening recollected scene, beginning in Anna's consciousness, of the couple trying to soothe their baby, Pete, who has woken during a winter night, '[t]he window opaque with frost' (72).

When Lyle's focalisation begins, it is during this scene, and he has just looked in on his older daughter 'sleeping with her arm thrown over the dog, whose back legs were hanging open, his penis distended and raw looking, the balls shiny with short silvery hair, pink skin showing beneath' (72). Shortly after, the text takes the narrative from the winter evening and the dog's sexuality, to his sleeping daughter's parted mouth, to his memories of a summer afternoon with Alex, the daughter, and the evening, during which a boy had called for her. In the first scene in the car, Anna has observed the snow on the angel statue in the graveyard they have passed; now Lyle remembers 'the smell of wild roses' (73). As Chartier suggests,

Concealing the unsightliness of the world, snow especially the first snow, fills man with wonder; it takes him back to his childhood (making him feeling nostalgic about his origins) when he was close to the mother who enabled him to dream (Chartier 2008, 40)

Although Lyle is not returning to childhood here, he is certainly returning to a warmer, more feminine, time in the summer, when he was reading Heidegger in the garden; however, he also recalls that he had 'been like someone copying pans of ice ... A fat squall of grace had raced across the ice to engulf him' (74). The North is in his psyche as well as Anna's, and as the snow takes him back to a simpler time, he imagines the effort of reading Heidegger, the battle with the complexities of philosophy, as an encounter with ice. Of course, Heidegger's best known work is *Being and Time*. Interrupted by his daughter, '[t]he field of loose

ice sank away, nothing remaining but a phrase, *the abandonment of being*, which might have been Sanskrit' (75, emphasis in original). The imagery of winterity here illustrates an intellectual battle, as well as a psychic one.

The italicised phrase draws attention to the connection between North and 'being'. When the ice sinks away, being is lost, as if it is only through symbolic winterity that Lyle can exist. The relationship of ice and time is reasserted. Anna recalls him from his memories, to the winter night where he is supposed to be fetching a bottle for the baby.

Lyle's perspective continues. 'He was a man dreaming he was a butterfly dreaming he was a man. The winter night asserted itself. Snow pinging the glass' (75). Now he remembers when he was eighteen and slept with a girl named Rachel. The occasion he recalls also takes place against a backdrop of winter weather. 'The wind was blowing her across a skim of ice and she was squealing and she slid into his arms' (76). They go to her parents' house for an evening of pot-smoking and lovemaking. He describes her 'breasts like saucers of snowflakes' (77).

It is Rachel who takes control, both of their sexual encounter and the ice, when she goes to the kitchen for a drink of water, and fills a glass with crushed ice from the machine in the fridge door. 'Rachel spilled the ice over his chest, it felt like flankers spat from a fire' (78). So although she has employed ice in her love-making, to the male it feels like fire. 'Her mouth was cold like an igloo' he recalls. 'The street had turned an uncanny white' (79), he notices. It is as if, to him, the ice is alien, and that Rachel is the North. Thus, he reasserts his relationship to the North, as a masculine space of struggle and adventure, while Rachel, who is only seventeen, it may be noticed, attempts to become the site of adventure, to become the dangerous maneater mentioned by Chartier.

She gets a cookie from a tin which has 'the Norman Rockwell of a little girl with a pink bow in her hair and her drawers lowered for a spanking ... Ravenous, Rachel said, her mouth filled with cookie. A paranoia shot through him' (79), and he dresses as fast as he can and escapes. Whether this sudden panic is because of the illustration, with its paedophilic undertones, or because her ravenous devouring of the cookie subconsciously makes him fear being trapped forever by the ice maiden, or being eaten by a wendigo, is not explicit.

The next time he speaks to her it is when she summons him to meet her, as she is pregnant.

‘The city sifted through the fist of a snowstorm. Ribbed icicles dripped and shot sparkles. The snow was pink or buttery, blue in the scoops and caves. Shimmery veils flew in twisting sheets off the roofs and the lips of drifts’ (82), he observes as he walks to the university for the meeting. ‘[I]f this woman wanted to exert her will over him...’ he thinks, and she is cast as the aggressor. The description of the snow and the icicles combine the masculine, active, ‘fist’ and ‘shot’ as well as softer, more feminine imagery, of pink, and ‘shimmery veils’.

Soon after the scene of their meeting, the narrative shifts into the first person, and remains there until the end of the story. ‘One day last March I went up to Lyle’s study on the third floor’ (85) it begins, not making it clear at first who is speaking, or which ‘last March’ this is. It is Anna, we realise, and she has gone to tell him she is expecting another child. The narrative cuts to the couple’s arrival at the dinner party to which they were driving at the beginning. Anna leaves early with the baby, who is crying, and on the way home she relates how she got pregnant. The couple have been on holiday in France, and at another dinner party they meet Bernard, a chef. When there is a thunderstorm and everyone else is outside collecting the laundry, Anna stands by the window watching. ‘We are eating ice cream from the carton’ Anna tells us (91). Bernard is standing behind her, and she tells us ‘He’s a chef during the winter season. I didn’t decide. At no point did I make a decision’ (91). Bernard pulls down her underwear and has sex with her. Although they are in France and this is a summer storm, with rain, thunder, lightning and mud rather than snow and ice, the ice (cream) and the winter season are selected in what Anna comments on. Yet again, though set far from the north, the sex act is connected with the weather.

The final story in the collection is a long short story, at over sixty pages. ‘Grace’ again concerns a married woman, Eleanor, wondering about her life and marriage, and the narration is more conventional third person, focalised through her. The frame of the story is another party, a wedding reception, at which she drinks too much and flirts with other men. She believes that her husband is falling in love with another woman, who is also at the party. One of the differences between this story and the previous two discussed is that the party is set in the summer in St John’s, but ‘too cold to be outside’ (153), and some scenes take

place abroad, in Nepal and India. The chief contrast in imagery in 'Grace' is that of summer and winter, and winterity figures less in the story than in the others. However, when it does, it is always crucial.

A conversation which runs through the evening is about a 'white weasel or mink' (161) which had, while Eleanor was at university, invaded Eleanor's mother's living room and trapped her. Weasels living in cold climates turn white in the winter, and the white fur is another indicator of winterity. While talking to the man she finds the most attractive, Glenn, Eleanor looks across the garden. 'Below Constance's bedroom window, the sunroom window. She sees a white streak that might be Philip's shirt. Weasels don't come in white, Glenn says. The one in my mother's house was white' (178). The connection between her husband, Philip, the weasel and the winter is implicit.

Although the palette of colours Moore calls on for this story is varied, there is a noticeable amount of white, including white bedsheets, white napkins, and a wedding veil. The conjunction of sex and winter is picked up, not only in the white at the wedding, but in Eleanor's recollections of her younger self. Her first kiss, for example, when she was thirteen, and letting her horse out of the barn, its 'back legs step-stepping in the deep snow' (193). Friends of her mother's have brought their sixteen-year-old son to visit, and 'he was drinking a cup of tea ... standing in snow up to his knees, she had loved the horse, had spent winter evenings in the mare's stall...' (193). The syntax, the skipping from boy to horse, as if she has merely glanced at him and looked away, shy, coupled with the snow, should warn us now that sex is in her mind. She recalls how she cared for the horse, feeding it apples, 'the water bucket with a skim of ice, the blue salt lick...' (193). This sentence, noun phrases linked with commas, is three quarters of a page long. It is also in parentheses; these are not closed until halfway down the following page, after the kiss.

Danny Martin came up to her and kissed her lips, he took his time, she could feel the mare's breath on her wrist, he was holding the cup and he tasted of milky tea out there in the snowbank on a spring day, the snow creeping back off the pavement, the asphalt shiny, the horse.  
For weeks after, months, she imagined the kiss while falling asleep, and when her father sat her down on the plaid sofa and took her two hands in his, cradled them between his, explaining they would have to sell the horse, his heart nearly broken, she could hardly remember why she had ever wanted one (194).

This is where the parentheses close. The episode and its aftermath show a young girl's transference of interest from her horse to the possibilities of adult life. It is enclosed, not only in parentheses, but within a recollection of reading pornography, in the shape of a Harold Robbins novel which her now dead father used to read before he went to bed, and which she is forbidden to look at. She relates what she found in it after the passage about the kiss and the horse.

Harold Robbins described being overcome. Sexually overcome. Losing control. To think that such a thing could happen to adults. Those who made the world stable ... She understood why she hadn't been allowed to read the Harold Robbins. Her parents hadn't wanted her to know, and knowing, she could feel herself crossing over, becoming adult (194).

In the context of the story, in which the grace of the title is not a character, but a quality Eleanor wishes to acquire, the two episodes, one wrapped in the other, foreshadow the quest she is now on. Fearing that she is losing the husband she loves, she is trying to find a way of 'behaving with grace' (153). She suspects a change coming in her life, akin to that related in the memories of her discovery of sexuality.

Those memories are followed by the image of toothpicks, belonging to the married lover her mother takes after her father's early death. They have 'Playboy bunnies at the tip, in silhouette, jutting breasts and ponytails, the tiny cheeks of their bums perched on the picks' (195). *Before* her father has died, the man and his wife visit her family, and 'Mrs Ryan sent her to the house for ice' (195). From this one line, the reader understands that it is summer. Raspberry canes are mentioned, and swimming off the wharf. This is actually the beginning of the story of reading the Harold Robbins. 'She opened the freezer and took out the metal tray of ice. In the living room she lay (*sic*) the tray on the TV and picked up a Harold Robbins novel from the shelf' (196). After checking to see that her family are still engaged outside, recalling other incidents in the day, and briefly returning to the present, the narrative returns to the scene. 'The Harold Robbins novel: Eleanor on the cusp of puberty, small breasts, ears pierced with two ice cubes freezing the lobes' (196-7). The proximity of ice and Eleanor's thirteen-year-old body again foreshadows sexual experience.

The scene she reads is that of a man with a gun threatening to shoot a woman, who disarms him by removing her clothes. Thus the young Eleanor

learns the association between ice and sex and how to absorb the power of masculine desire.

Although the present-day narrative takes place in the summer, and some of the flashbacks on a foreign trip to hot southern countries she has taken at some point with a friend, Sadie, it comes as no surprise that she almost certainly loses her virginity in the winter. Eleanor is writing a screenplay, based on her relationship with her father. ‘Sandra, the lead, is drunk in the penultimate scene. She has made up her mind to lose her virginity. The town is buried in snowdrifts; it’s a white film. White’ (166).

When she recalls her first night with the man she is now married to, she remembers first how they watched *The Last Tango in Paris* in a bar ‘on a snowy screen’ (174). She has already told us that he had a three-year-old daughter, and about ‘A snowy afternoon at four o’clock; walking past the war memorial with his three-year-old child on her shoulders ... They were a family overnight, some sort of family ... Slush seeping into her boots ... The who-she-was disappearing fast, gobbled by the who-she-is’ (172). A little later in the narrative, she returns to her relationship with her husband, and a time when they were living in Toronto. ‘The sidewalk where they lived covered with blossoms. All part of their love-making, and Leonard Cohen singing about Joan of Arc. *Make your body cold, I’m going to give you mine to hold*’ (179, emphasis in original). Eleanor has become a cold body, the North which her husband desires.

This transformation can have its drawbacks, however. Almost at the end of the story, and in her drunken state at the reception, having accosted the girl she fears her husband may leave her for, she thinks

She will do it then, if she’s forced, finish this girl off, although already a new clarity has befallen her. The girl has nothing to do with it. Where, she wonders sadly, is Philip [her husband]. Who is he? How can she remind him who he is? (212)

Having successfully acquired the status of masculine site for adventure, she now realises that she has obliterated Philip, in much the same way as Lyle is obliterated by the North in ‘Natural Parents’.

### **First Nations in the wilderness**

As explained in the introduction, including discussion of First Nations texts in this thesis is problematic, as Atwood had few accessible to her when she was writing *Survival* in Toronto in 1972, and even if she had, the relationship of First Peoples with the land and with the concept of Canada as a nation is very different from that of the settlers and migrant populations.

This is not to assume or insist that every First Nations writer is necessarily always writing about the experience of First Nations Canadians. There is now a sizeable number of literary productions by writers with an indigenous heritage; many of them are poets, and many are novelists. My research suggests that there are fewer short fiction writers from the indigenous population, though why that might be would have to be the subject of a separate study.

For the purposes of looking briefly at how the idea of wilderness features in the writing from aboriginal communities, I turn to ‘Painted Tongue’ by Joseph Boyden, from his literary debut collection, *Born with a Tooth* (2001). Since then he has published three novels: the renowned *Three Day Road* (2005), *Through Black Spruce* (2008), which won the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and *The Orenda* (2013), shortlisted for two important prizes and winner of Canada Reads in 2014.

Boyden is from North York, Toronto, of Scottish, Irish and Anishinaabe<sup>23</sup> descent. His novels and short stories feature Anishinaabe characters, often living on reserves in Northern Ontario, or who have moved south to Toronto. *Born with a Tooth* is divided into four sections, named after the points of the compass. ‘East’, subtitled ‘Labour’ includes three stories set on the reservation. ‘South’, subtitled ‘Ruin’ has three stories set in Toronto and on the reservation, but these latter include interactions with the city: a daughter who returns from Toronto, a girl who leaves, and a young man who is taken away by police. ‘West: Running’ includes a story about children trying to escape from an ‘Indian School’, where they are mistreated by nuns. ‘North’ is subtitled ‘Home’, and shows the Anishinaabe defending their way of life, albeit on the reservation.

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<sup>23</sup> Anishinaabe is a name taken by several tribes, including Ojibway, Algonquin, Ottawa, and some Cree and Métis, who share a culture and language, and originate from around the Great Lakes in Canada and the northern USA.



'Painted Tongue' ('South') concerns an Ojibway who has come to Toronto from his reservation in Northern Ontario. Like many aboriginal people in formerly colonised countries, he is an alcoholic. A displaced person, he struggles to find a home in the urban world. He has his routes around the city, places he can talk to other Anishinaabe, places he can get food, places he can beg for money to buy drink, and a large circular building site, round which he frequently walks, commenting to himself on the workmen's skills and the ever-rising construction.

In his daily rambling he maps the city. Hugh Brody's classic text, *Maps and Dreams* (1981), follows a band of Indians as they move on and off the reserve in Northern British Columbia, on hunting, trapping and food-gathering expeditions. The maps in the text show the circles which their routes take, differing according to the purpose of the trip. The routes which Painted Tongue takes around the city superimpose an Ojibway map; circles drawn on a city of straight lines. The circular construction fascinates him because it is round, although later in the story he sees it as a giant turtle, and recalls his mother telling him how the earth came to be, when

a giant turtle rose up out of the water. Eventually, rocks and trees and animals and finally *Nmishoomsag*, the Grandfathers, sprouted from the turtle's back. Painted Tongue remembered the look in his mother's eyes, her stare out towards Christian Island (Boyden 2001, 79).

Painted Tongue has come to the city with a friend from the reserve, Kyle, who is now a painter:

an artist who could afford anything he wanted now and who lived in a loft in the warehouse district with pretty white women and pine furniture and a kitchen made of steel. Kyle wore suit jackets with his jeans, his hair combed back and neat in a ponytail held by a silver Haida thunderbird. He'd first made it big with a series of portraits of Painted Tongue: Painted Tongue standing in a field with his bow raised to the sun, Painted Tongue leaping from a tall building and transforming into an eagle (65-6).

The relationship between the two men and the different ways they have survived away from the land shows that there is more than one possibility for displaced Ojibway, but neither of them is healthy. Kyle has made money by producing

stereotyped images of his friend, though Painted Tongue has not shared the profits. But Painted Tongue believes that

Kyle always knew what was going on. He always had the right answers. Even though he walked a different circle than Kyle did, they'd both had the vision of the turtle. Kyle's was in paint and Painted Tongue's was in concrete (79).

Oddly, perhaps, this metaphor suggests that Painted Tongue's vision is more lasting, but Kyle, the Ojibway who has 'sold out' to the urban settlers, presents only a surface reality of his vision. Kyle's paintings are a representation of First Nations life, rather than the truth, the material reality, solid like Painted Tongue's concrete.

The wilderness of the city, as Painted Tongue experiences it, delivers traumatic experiences. First, when he finds the stadium, the circular construction he has been fascinated by and walked round so many times is more or less complete, and his route round the site has been blocked by a fence. Second, when he is sitting 'by a small grove of trees and a pond in High Park' (74), and witnesses the murder of a gay man by a gang, and is too scared to intervene. Finally, when he needs a drink, gets thrown out of a bar for stealing someone else's, and is attacked by 'a group of boys in baseball caps' (84). They begin by insulting him, and then form a circle round him.

Painted Tongue began to pace slowly around the inside of the circle. He felt a warrior's control suddenly, all eyes upon him, watching closely his every move ... The boys widened the ring. Painted Tongue concentrated on his own feet moving. He picked up the pace. He could hear the pound of the drum in his head. The boys began clapping in time. Check it out, one said. He's on the warpath (86).

In his drunkenness he reverts to what he knows, and begins to dance. 'He was happy. He was a warrior. He moved faster, bent far forward, lifting his knees high. He closed his eyes and danced the circle. It was effortless, like a strong wind picking him up and carrying him' (86). One of the boys eventually trips him up. 'He really was flying into the air now, off the stadium roof, off the turtle's back' (87).

The tragedy of Painted Tongue's attempt to live in the urban wilderness is a tragedy which occurs every day in Canada. The reserves provided for First

Nations peoples allow only a small portion of the land and freedoms which they had before the advent of European settlers, and wilderness parks, like the one mentioned by Thomas Wharton, further erode the Anishinaabe's hunting grounds and ability to move camp. In a Europeanised world, trying to live in that world sometimes seems like a necessary move, but it often ends in disaster and homelessness. Painted Tongue has shared lodgings with Kyle when they first came to Toronto:

Kyle moved in with a pretty gallery woman, and Painted Tongue, after some decision-making, left walls and a roof on the first warm spring day two years ago to live more simply. He enjoyed living like the grandfathers, his days spent searching out food and drink, protecting himself from enemies and sitting quietly, listening to his few friends talk to him on park benches, or lying in the grass still left between the concrete buildings' (73).

He attempts to live in the city in the way Anishinaabe have lived for centuries, but as with the man from Muskoka, who decided to go off into the wilderness and died there, the urban wilderness which Painted Tongue tries to live in proves fatal.

### **Conclusion**

The main theme of *Survival* is 'survival'. Much of Atwood's text focuses on man's relationship with wilderness in one form or another. Settlers 'draw straight lines' and form garrisons unsuccessfully to try to keep it out, as in Munro's 'A Wilderness Station' and in Wharton's 'Wilderness'. Explorers wander through the world without seeing it for what it is, though they attempt to name what they see, but leave again when Nature refuses to conform to their expectations. The battle against Nature is doomed to fail, as in Jarman's 'My White Planet' and 'Clearances' by Alistair MacLeod. Nature may feature as Woman, as in Matt Cohen's stories (see Chapter Five), or as a monstrous enemy, as it appears in 'Camp Americana'.

Some of these stories take place in geographic North, such as 'My White Planet', and others in imagined North, like those by Lisa Moore, where 'Nature-as-Woman' becomes North to enact the other's desire. Wilderness can be experienced in the middle of cities, as in 'Alphinland' and 'Painted Tongue', and figures in the displacement of those trying to inhabit the modern urban world, as

well as in an untamed landscape. Whatever the setting, the literature struggles with the complexity of trying to impose 'civilisation' on a recalcitrant continent, and with the constantly evolving concept of a cohesive national identity.

The stories of Lisa Moore focus on female characters and their relationships with husbands, parents, lovers, and children. In Chapter Five, I focus on male characters, and in particular, how they are portrayed as 'victims' in the Atwoodian sense, not in their struggle in natural or man-made wilderness, but in a domestic setting.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Timber!!! Logging the Canadian male, and his women (and vice versa)**

#### **Introduction – gender and *Survival***

This chapter extends the metaphors in ‘Ancestral Totems: Explorers • Settlers’ (Atwood 1972), in which Atwood explains the ‘archaeological motif’<sup>24</sup>, and that what is uncovered when Canadians look into their ancestry is nearly always an Explorer or a Settler. The overall picture of Settlers, according to Atwood, is of futility; ‘nothing has been accomplished except a lot of wasted suffering ... the pattern is struggle without result’ (123). In this chapter, I use these metaphors to create a typology of men, as found in the literature, as either Explorers who find nothing, or Settlers, who struggle without result. Although I touch briefly on stories by Lynn Coady, and Patricia Young, the work of Matt Cohen, D. W. Wilson, and Leon Rooke provides a useful view of how texts by male authors portray the masculine. The main focus of the chapter is a comparison of ‘Liking Men’ by Atwood herself, with ‘On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men’, by Diane Schoemperlen, which reveals the contrasting attitude of female-authored texts to the male body, and, in Schoemperlen, a glimpse of carnival.

The chapter on settlers and explorers provides a useful metaphor for the Canadian male. Atwood says:

A Settler is a man who attempts to clear a place for himself out of the land. An Explorer is a man who travels through the land for the first time, without settling in it. He may be looking for something specific – India, the Northwest Passage, a goldmine – in which case his exploration resembles a quest; or he may just be mapping out new territory, seeing what is there. At any rate, he is venturing into the unknown (1972, 113).

Further, there are two types of Explorer: one that doesn’t find anything, ‘they go away in silence’ (115), and one that is doomed, finding only death (115). Settlers try to impose order on chaotic Nature; they frequently fail, often dying in the struggle. In some cases, ‘the settlers succeed in their plan, build their straight-line

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<sup>24</sup> discussed above in Chapter Two

constructions, but kill something vital in the process; it is often Nature in the form of a woman' (123).

Atwood herself extends the discussion of ancestral explorers to approach 'another kind of journey into the unknown: the journey into the unknown regions of the self, the unconscious, and the confrontation with whatever dangers and splendours lurk there' (1972, 113). The men described in the texts analysed in this chapter can be categorised figuratively as either Explorers or Settlers. Most of them are explorers, and Atwood may have found the same: she devotes more space to explorers than to Settlers in *Survival*. In the first section of her short prose piece, 'Alien Territory' (1993), Atwood describes the birth of a man, who 'at the first opportunity ... climbs out the window and joins a gang of other explorers, each one of them an exile, an immigrant, like himself. Together they set out on their solitary journeys' (76-7).

I focus here chiefly on texts by women, thus redressing the balance in *Survival*. I also include stories by three male writers, but rather than examining the typology of female characters, I reveal the self-image of the Canadian masculine as seen by male narrators, and the construction of masculine archetypes. The narrating female character also reveals herself as she allows access to her perspective, so the female archetypes also appear, insofar as they still exist. This reading does not find wide differences between the way male and female writers depict their male characters, nor between contemporary texts and those discussed by Atwood, except that there are fewer clear Ice Virgins and Hecates.

In Chapter Ten of *Survival*, 'Ice Women and Earth Mothers', Atwood discusses two main types of women, Ice Virgins, who she also terms Diana-Maidens, and Hecate-Crones. 'There is a noticeable absence of Venuses', she comments (1972, 199), by which she means young, fertile, women with normal healthy lives, both mental and physical. 'Venus traditionally provides two things: sexual love and babies' (206). Babies, Atwood says, come 'out of thin air, with little to explain their genesis' (207). Atwood asks 'why no Canadian writer has seen fit – or found it imaginable – to produce a Venus in Canada' (199-200). This chapter suggests an answer to that question. Women, 'leading normal married lives, having children who are not dead' (209), do not appear to exist in the Canadian creative imagination, and 'most of the strong and vividly portrayed

female characters ... are old women' (199). In reading the literature 'you would have to believe that most of the women in the country with any real presence at all are over fifty, and a tough, sterile, suppressed and granite-jawed lot they are' (199). However, *Survival's* female archetypes are not classed by age: a crone can be young, and an ice-maiden can be old. Atwood uses the terms figuratively, as I use them here. Moreover, Hecates may make the perfect partners for Explorers, capable of leading them through the wilderness, while Ice Maidens suffer at the hands of Settlers. The argument of this chapter, however, is that the prevalence of these two types of women is due to the nature of the men they attempt to live with.

One of the most striking features of *Survival* to a modern reader is its use of the male pronoun to include persons of either gender. For a twenty-first-century reader, used to neutral terms, this gives the impression that there are very few women, either writers or female characters, in the text, which seems surprising, given Atwood's reputation as a feminist<sup>25</sup>. The male pronoun occurs frequently; for example in Chapter Nine, 'The Paralyzed Artist': 'Let us [suppose] that the artist in question is not completely self-enclosed, but sees himself as a man with a vision communicable in words or images which he wishes to make accessible to others' (Atwood 1972, 181). A quotation from a poem by P.K. Page, three sentences about *The Hidden Mountain* by Gabrielle Roy, and a final page on Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* is all there is on women-authored texts in the chapter. However, Atwood does point out that Del Jordan, Munro's protagonist, 'does not die and she does not regard herself as maimed or invisible. She is a functioning artist, and she is plausible' (1972, 193). Atwood here appends a plug for the strength and resourcefulness of a female character as a finale to a chapter colonised by men, and strong women are certainly a theme in contemporary short fiction.

Thematically, the women have a chapter of *Survival* to themselves, in the sense that it discusses how women are seen in the literature, but men have the rest of the book. It may not be so surprising, given that one of the main themes is the relationship of Canadians to the wilderness, to survival, and to production ('The Paralyzed Artist'), and that it was written at the beginning of the 'second

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<sup>25</sup> It is a label which she distrusts; as she said, for example, 'Who is the "we" that we are talking about [in feminism]? ... feminism is a big term' (Akbar, 2009), or 'I never say I'm an "ist" of any kind unless I know how the other person is defining it' (*Goodreads*, 2016)

wave' of feminism. In fact, taken chapter by chapter, the proportion of women writers to men varies from none at all to 50%, in the chapter on 'Ice Women vs. Earth Mothers'. In all, there are forty texts by women discussed as opposed to one hundred and twenty male-authored texts. One third in total<sup>26</sup>.

Atwood's text cannot be criticised on these grounds. It is beyond the scope of this study to ascertain how many Canadian female-authored texts had been published and available for inclusion but omitted. Atwood was, of course, not attempting to form a balanced view, but was trying to persuade the Canadian public that such a thing as a Canadian literature worth reading existed, so it may not be surprising that she largely includes the applauded and the well-known. In this thesis, my intention is to look beyond the already-known outside Canada to demonstrate the breadth and width of current practice.

As stated in the Introduction, *Survival's* female archetypes are less in evidence today, at least in part because of the rise of feminism and the resulting awareness of women as speaking (and writing) subjects. Feminist studies of the representation of women and women's lives in the 1970s have largely been overtaken more recently by a current focus on examining masculinities, lesbian, gay and trans-gender constructions and the interaction of gender and race. Since the 1980s there have been studies of the female gaze (Gamman and Marshment, 1988, Bihlmeyer 2003) but there appears to have been little work done on how women writers construct their male characters. Jane Miller's *Women Writing About Men* (1986) might be expected to include this, but the emphasis is on what kind of relationships the women characters have with the male characters, fathers, sons, and husbands, in the texts. Thus the chapter 'Heroes' (134-162) begins 'Men in novels become something as well as husbands, while women become something by becoming wives'. The chapter goes on to focus on the kind of men women writers select for their heroines to love, and the kind they marry. Miller

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<sup>26</sup> There may now be more published work by women than there was in 1972, or it may be that it is more widely read, but it is under-represented in Atwood's text. It is not possible to gather precise data. In the thirty-five years prior to 1972, the Governor-General's Award for fiction in English was given to a female-authored book ten times; in thirty-five years since 1972, women won it eleven times, but this is comparable with other literary prizes open to both genders, where women are under-represented. It was won by a female writer three times in the five years 2007-2012. In the fifteen years up to 2012 of the Danuta Gleed award for short story collections, a female writer has won six times (Bornath, 2016).



draws a distinction between men's heroes and women's heroes; the former are those who are strong and capable in the world, and the latter tend to be those who pay attention and show affection and respect for the women they are attached to. They could almost be equated to Atwood's Settlers and Explorers, except that, as Atwood points out, Explorers do *not* pay attention, and Settlers may be strong and capable, but can also be brutal and destructive. However, Miller's chief focus is on the heroines and their options and choices for husbands, rather than examining the way women writers depict men.

### **Male and female created he them...**

In understanding the antagonisms inherent in the difference between Woman's relationship *with* Man and Man's relationship *to* Woman, Luce Irigaray's pieces on love and philosophy (see *Key Writings* 2004) are helpful. In 'You who will never be mine', Irigaray considers the process of recognition.

You will never be entirely visible to me, but, thanks to that, I respect you as different from me. What I do not see of you draws me towards you provided you hold your own, and provided your energy allows me to keep and raise my energy with you (2004, 9).

As Irigaray suggests, here and elsewhere the relationship depends on a contract, in which each responds to the other's performance of their part in that contract, and each sees the other as Other. The key word is 'visible', and the problem faced by female characters in these stories is that the male characters do not 'see' them, being lost in their doomed explorations. In 'The Wedding Between the Body and Language' Irigaray identifies how Man relates 'between the one and the many, between the I-masculine subject and others: people, society, understood as *them* not *you*' (Irigaray, 2004, 13), whereas Woman privileges 'the relationship between subjects, the relationship with the other gender, the relationship between two' (13).

The relations between genders in the stories examined below show the result of a contract which is not upheld by the Man, and the despair of Woman in her attempt to enter a relationship between two. The two are autonomous, different, and self-contained, as Irigaray insists, but there must be energy in the relationship. When the masculine subject is passive, the energy of the female has

no way to express itself other than in frustration and resentment. This may be the reason for women appearing as Hecates most often. The Ice Maidens are far less common, but when the men are totally disengaged, they can appear; a woman may find it difficult to become Woman if Man is absent in their relationship.

In turning the gaze back onto the man, the first half of this chapter considers one of Atwood's very short pieces, 'Liking Men', from *Murder in the Dark* (1994), which begins tenderly, but the tenderness is driven out by the surfacing of repressed fears of the Settler male. This chapter also examines in detail how the male body is depicted in 'On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men' by Diane Schoemperlen (2001), a descriptive piece which only gradually reveals itself as story, drawing a picture of the male which goes further than bodily features. Here the man is an Explorer who fails to uphold the social contract, producing resentment in the speaker.

More briefly, I also look at Lynn Coady's 'Run Every Day' from *Play the Monster Blind* (2000), Patricia Young's 'Dumb Fish' from *Airstream* (2006), and 'An Unrehearsed Desire' from Lauren B. Davis's eponymous collection (2008). Other examples of female-authored stories which repay close reading include Atwood's 'Making a Man' also from *Murder in the Dark* (1994), 'Men at Sea' from *Good Bones* (Atwood, 1993), and Susan Swan's 'The Man Doll', from *Stupid Boys are Good to Relax With* (1996), all of which suggest interesting comparisons, all showing a wry awareness of masculine shortcomings, and at the same time, an awareness of the vulnerability of the body, both male and female. The title of Swan's collection gives an idea of the attitude which some Canadian female-authored texts have towards men. How these texts depict the male contributes to the function of the speaking woman, as Hecate or Ice Maiden. The chapter ends with three stories by male authors, Matt Cohen, Leon Rooke, and D. W. Wilson, to assess the male character as written by men, in their encounters with the feminine.

### **Men by women**

Gender, it is widely accepted, is socially constructed, and as a western nation, Canada has the same hegemonic stereotype of powerful, dominant, masculinity as other western nations. The common perception of stereotypical Canadian masculinity is of a lumberjack, or a hunter, a masculine man alone in the bush or

in the North, facing danger. Typical images include the red-jacketed RCMP, who 'always get their man', and the hockey player, rough and tough, a 'man's man'. The Canadian man can clear the land, build a homestead, protect his wife and children from bears, is upright, strong, and resilient. The reality as seen both by women and by the men themselves, in *Survival*, and in the men constructed in the following stories, is unsurprisingly very different. Although the representation of men by women frequently places Woman in a position of power over Man, who is lost, there is a sub-text, of a resistance to patriarchy which may in the end be futile.

In the stories by Atwood and Schoemperlen, the man is either a figure to be desired but also feared, or someone to be both derided and loved. The social contract between the sexes has been that Man leads and Woman follows. Man protects and acts, while Woman serves and waits. But when Man appears weak and passive, not 'holding his own', as Irigaray demands, not in fact the capable, powerful figure women are taught to expect, as in all the stories below except 'Liking Men', the resentment at the role imposed on women is doubled. If Man is not acting according to his role in the contract, Woman cannot *react*. The frustration with the situation is evident in the stories by Schoemperlen and Davis; in Atwood's story, the paradox is more simply played out. Both texts demonstrate how far from Irigaray's ideals both genders are.

### **Some women's men (and women).**

A quick glance through a number of collections by Canadian women authors published since the start of the twenty-first century finds similar male archetypes. Lynn Coady's female characters are necessarily strong, as husbands and lovers are often absent. The men are marginal to the narrative of 'Run Every Day' (2001). The father is dead, an ex-boyfriend an absent, drifting, outsider, and the narrator's present partner has not come with her to her mother's. The flashbacks to the narrator's childhood recall a twelve-year-old boy who is threatening and dangerous, but '[h]e was kind of like a god, but a bad god ... the only god I could compare him to at the time was Jesus' (189). The girl's confusion between the threatening male and the safe male is another illustration of the paradoxical relationship between genders.

Coady's older women, like the mother in 'Run Every Day' are Hecates. 'My mother threatened to kill herself one time' the female narrator says. 'She threatened to set the house on fire and jump in the strait' (191). 'I used to imagine my mother giving [Gerald] the evil eye and scuttling away, cackling to herself like some medieval crone', says the narrator (201). Older women who are manipulative, sinister, and trapped are Hecate, and Atwood shows some sympathy for younger women who are becoming crones. She suggests that the characters try to evade 'the takeover by the Hecate stereotype' and fail (1972, 210). The mother in 'Run Every Day' is selling the family home. '[S]he has started talking about the house like it is her own personal nemesis, like it's out to get her. Like the house harangues her to clean it day in and day out' (190). She is another woman in rebellion against domesticity, and in the absence of the male, is able to reassert her independence.

Darlene's unnamed father, in Patricia Young's 'Dumb Fish' (2006), is also absent, fighting a wildfire. He is a partial Settler. The family live in a converted barn in a forest in British Columbia. The father's job is to 'hack hiking trails through a provincial park' (15). However, it is the mother who persuades the father to cut the trees down round the house as she is afraid of them blowing down, and the father who is reluctant to do it. The farmer who built the barn, who is 'a pioneer farmer who abandoned the homestead because of the rock and poor soil' (20), is an example of a literal settler, who failed, as they ultimately do. According to the previously cited quotation from *Survival*, texts with Settler motifs 'are likely to end ... with the abandonment of the farm' (1972, 123). In Young's story, though the father returns, it is the mother who leaves, in her cowboy boots. Her flight, and her appropriation of masculine footwear is her response to a man who refuses to fulfil his Settler role.

The eponymous story in Lauren B. Davis's *An Unrehearsed Desire* (2008), concerns a woman in her fifties who has been married for twenty-six years to a man who now bores and repulses her. '[H]is kisses were too wet, his hands too tentative and his genitals so remarkably unremarkable' (166). She feels trapped in marriage to a man she says is 'a good man, a good father, a good husband' (165). 'She has never found Arnie beautiful, never thrilled to the sight of his flesh, never wanted to run her tongue along any part of his anatomy, and over the years this ambivalence has deepened to loathing' (165). The lack of

connection between them stems from ‘his bookishness ... She overlooked his narrow shoulders in favour of his keen mind’ (165). Now he is a middle-aged businessman, she yearns for a Settler, and remembers a ‘bad boy’ from her teenage years, and wishes she had been ‘a bad girl’ (167). The paradox is that were she to have been ‘bad’, she would suffer for it, as Lynn Coady’s narrator suffers, for her teenage relationship with Gerald, the bad boy, which her Hecate-mother refuses to forgive or forget. But staying with an Explorer brings its own suffering, in ennui and disgust.

In a shop selling sex toys, she steals a pair of nipple clamps. However, she is caught, and the staff call her husband to take her home. She thinks he is angry with her, but when they get home he turns from being ineffectual and limp to commanding and ‘cruelly elegant’ (179). He orders her to remove her blouse, and in seeing him afresh as a powerful and demanding instead of weak and dependant, she rediscovers her interest in him. The Explorer has become Settler, and she is at last able to play her role in the relationship her conditioning has promised her.

In her chapter on immigrant fiction, Margaret Atwood discusses a novel which features ‘the sexual problems of a woman who enjoys being hit with a belt’ (1972, 158), but ‘she has a rough time scaring up anything [in Canada] that even *looks* like a decent sadist’ (158, emphasis in original). Her Canadian husband is ‘pale grey’, and all the men are ‘soft as Pla-Doh’. Atwood comments ‘If Canada, land of victims, fails to provide the right kind of suffering, *even for a masochist*, things are tough indeed’ (159, emphases in original). Davis’s heroine is in a similar position; an example of a woman knowing what she wants and only at the end of her story being able to find it, by uncovering the Settler in her Explorer. ‘An Unrehearsed Desire’ gives a common view of Canadian men in fiction, and the frustration of the women, whether the stories are written by women or men.

All but one of the texts which are analysed here show Man as Explorer; the exception is Atwood’s ‘Liking Men’ from *Murder in the Dark* (1994). Comparison of Atwood’s very short piece, ‘Liking Men’, with Diane Schoemperlen’s ‘On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men’ (1998) reveals the two different perspectives on masculinity, and two different but related responses to it. Atwood’s male is a Settler, and potentially violent, and Schoemperlen’s an Explorer, disengaged and passive. Thus, the man in Atwood’s piece is performing

masculinity, but in an extreme form, whereas the male in 'On Looking Further' is not. Either stance makes the performance of femininity a problem.

Atwood describes an earlier version of 'Liking Men' ('How to Like Men', unpublished) as 'a short prose poem' (Atwood 1982, 373), although in her study of the short pieces, Sharon Wilson suggests there is no definitive distinction between prose poems and flash, or short short, fiction (Wilson, 2004, 20-1). 'Liking Men' begins with the narrator telling us:

It's time to like men again. Where shall we begin?  
I have a personal preference for the backs of necks, because of the word nape, so lightly furred; which is different from the word scruff. But for most of us, especially the beginners, it's best to start with the feet and work up (1994, 91).

As in 'On Looking Further' the narrator's eye scans the body, although after briefly beginning with the neck, as we shall find that Schoemperlen's also does, Atwood's starts from the feet, intending to work upwards. Schoemperlen's examination covers the entire body, both front and back, where Atwood's gets no further than the neck and feet. Both narrators begin with a part of the male body they see as vulnerable. As Reingard M. Nischik says, 'an ironic reversal takes place, with woman portrayed as reifying man, [and] an undercurrent of irony is present from the outset' (Nischik, 2004, 12). The ironic reversal is present in both stories. After her brief consideration of the nape of the neck, Atwood's narrator avoids the head, and looks for some other part of man with which the woman can feel an affinity. 'Then there's the navel, birth dimple, where we fell from the stem, something we have in common; you could look at it and say, He is also mortal' (1994, 91). The fall from the stem is biblical, the Edenic fall, the stem of Jesse. For the female commentator, the navel is a direct connection with the mother, with the maternal, and the connection between them is implicit in 'He is *also* mortal', as is the female observer. The observation is the first expression in the text of the possibility of death. However, the modal in 'you *could* look at it' suggests that it is only one way of thinking, which might suggest that the narrator is comforting herself by imagining a man who is not all-powerful. 'But it may be too close for comfort to those belts and zippers which cause you such distress, and comfort is what you want' (91) she adds. The awareness of her own vulnerability is repressed quickly. 'He's a carnivore, and you're a vegetarian.

That's what you have to get over' (91). In order to rediscover equilibrium, the narrator continues:

The feet then. I give you the feet, pinkly toed and innocuous. Unfortunately you think of socks, lying on the floor, waiting to be picked up and washed. Quickly add shoes. Better? The socks are now contained, and presumably clean (Atwood, 1994, 91-2).

This compares with Schoemperlen's comments on the grotesquery of men's feet, which conclude with 'Men with ugly feet should spend a lot on socks and shoes which they should remove only in the dark' (Schoemperlen, 1998, 163), but where Schoemperlen's narrator demands that the man should deal with his own socks, the observer in 'Liking Men' accepts her domestic role. Schoemperlen's text rejects intimacy with the man's feet, but Atwood's shows more tenderness:

You think of kissing those feet, slowly, after a good scrubbing of course; the feet expand their toes, squirm with pleasure. You like to give pleasure. You run your tongue along the sole and the feet moan (Atwood, 1998, 92).

This is where the two texts definitively part company, as the Atwood story, first published in 1983, in the heady days of the women's movement, then lingers on footwear. There are several different kinds listed: golf shoes, white sneakers, workboots, rubber boots, along with the attractive qualities that men wearing them might have. For example, the rubber boots are worn by a man 'wading out to the barn in the rain in order to save the baby calf. Power, quiet and sane. Knowing what to do, doing it well. Sexy' (1994, 92-3). Thus far, the response of the female narrator to the male is socially conventional, submissive, admiring, and affectionate.

The 'prose-poem' continues 'But rubber boots aren't the only kind. You don't want to go on but you can't stop yourself' (93). As Nischik points out, this last phrase marks the turning point in the story (2004, 12). The relation to the male is resituated as oppositional rather than protective, and any hint of rebellion has disappeared. The feminine role returns, and the images of boots have increasingly violent imagery associated with them. From riding boots to cowboy boots with spurs, to jackboots.

Jackboots, so highly shined you can see your own face in the right one, as the left one raises itself and the heel comes down on your nose ... Power is the power to smash, two hold your legs, two your arms, the fifth shoves a pointed instrument into you' (93).

Unlike in the Schoemperlen story, where a violent undercurrent runs from the female narrator to the male subject, the violence here is enacted by men on women. After this section, the narrator tries to 'retain the image of the man you love and also like' (94), but finds it difficult; the images of rape, killing, of women, children and men, linger. She tries to recall the feet, which, naked, can be appealing:

There is his foot, sticking out from under the sheet, asleep, naked as the day he was born. The day he was born. Maybe that's what you have to go back to, in order to trace him here, the journey he took, step by step. In order to begin. Again and again (94).

In taking the man back to a perinatal time, woman is reimagined as benefactor, bestower of life, rather than victim. 'Liking Men' reasserts the superior strength of the male, while beginning and ending with the memory of the man as baby, dependent on and connected to the mother, in the same way that Schoemperlen later tries to connect male and female when discussing the navel, 'the birth dimple'. However, 'Liking Men' ultimately sites the female body as potential victim, whereas the carnivalesque of 'On Looking Further' gives power to the woman's gaze. Both texts connect narrator, reader and subject, but there is little of the carnival in 'Liking Men', and Atwood's male body is resituated in the patriarchy, unknowable, hard, and oppositional.

Both Atwood's and Schoemperlen's texts implicate the reader in their use of *you* narration, assuming that women have a shared perspective. Atwood uses the first person plural in the first line of the text. 'It's time to like men again. Where shall we begin?' (1994, 91). 'But for most of us' comes three lines later. After that 'we' are addressed as 'you', so that we read the text as if it is specifically addressed to a group of – possibly *all* - women. This makes Atwood's piece less ambiguous than Schoemperlen's, although the reader may not have the common experiences which Herman suggests are necessary to make us 'storyworld participants' (Herman 2004, 338). There may not be a 'man you love' (Atwood, 1994, 94), and so the *you* in 'Liking Men' may fall 'somewhere on the



continuum which stretches between reference to storyworld participants and address to readers' (Herman 2004, 338), and is thus not very different from the *you* in 'On Looking Further'. However, not every female reader may access the repressed fear as Atwood's narrator does, although the text serves as a reminder of masculine hegemonic society, and the vulnerability of woman in a world of Settlers. Neither *you* works quite like that in Lisa Moore's 'The Stylist', where the narrative is more clearly an interior monologue.

### **'On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men'**

Diane Schoemperlen is a novelist and short fiction writer, who lives in Kingston, Ontario. Her work has won many prizes, including a 1998 Governor General's Award for her second collection of short stories, *Forms of Devotion*. 'On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men' is from that collection.

Analysis of 'On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men' (1998) (hereinafter referred to as 'On Looking Further') reveals not one woman's protest, but the implication of all women's publicly secret, privately acknowledged, subversive view of Canadian men. The liminal co-existences of women, the short form, and Canada itself, allow a carnivalesque dimension to the text, in the subliminal desire of the narrator both to cherish and to destroy the male form, which in itself references the common representation of women as either objects of prey or as possessions requiring protection. The female narrator returns the gaze onto the male body, in a writing back which nevertheless reveals more than scopophilia in its act of looking, connecting the body to the persona of the male under the gaze in a way which is rarely the case when men describe women.

It is a commonplace that male writers use the bodies of women as 'love interest', or as objectified bodies, and this chapter will not go over the arguments for that. Neither will it recap in detail Laura Mulvey's essay, 'Visual Narrative and the Pleasure of Cinema', as that too is well known. In brief, Mulvey says that the male is positioned as the viewer, the woman as object, and that even when the viewer is actually a woman she is forced to view as if she were male. This may not be the case when the male reader confronts a text which gives the female

perspective on his own gender.<sup>27</sup> Mulvey discusses the erotic pleasure to be derived from viewing the human form, suggesting that it is voyeuristic, echoing the child's experience during the mirror stage, and the formation of the ideal ego through a misrecognition of the superior form of the reflected body (Mulvey, 2009, 17-18). '[T]he position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer', she says (Mulvey, 2009, 17). Thus, as Irigaray describes the relationship with the Other as unknowable, 'never entirely visible' (2004, 9), Mulvey shows the attempt to become one with the Other. As it is essential to Irigaray that male and female should recognise the Otherness of their partners, Mulvey's projected desire can only happen when this recognition is absent, as it is with the Explorer male. Further, Mulvey notes how the 'visual presence [of woman] tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation' (2009, 19-20).

Schoemperlen's story provides a response to the question of what happens when it is the male body which is laid bare, exposed to the female gaze. Does the female gaze replicate that which it has learnt from reading male texts, or even female-authored texts, conditioned by reading so many descriptions of the female body written by men? The storyness<sup>28</sup> of the text is crucial here, as it uses the mapping of the male body to structure the narrative; the real story lies underneath the simple description. The title suggests that there is more to the text than a diagrammatic description of male biology. 'Looking further into' may be what this writer does which male writers seldom do, inquire further than the outer appearance. Where the male viewer reifies the female body, the female viewer of the male desires more than just the flesh; she desires to be connected at a deeper

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<sup>27</sup> In an experiment with my MA Writing group, I asked them to read the story and comment. There were five students, three women and two men. All the women, both young and old, recognised the description and liked the story; the man in his twenties was non-committal, saying only 'it's all right', but the middle-aged man, not insensitive, a poet, complained that it 'was only doing to the man what had been done to women, simply copying men's writing, and it goes on too long.' He was offended by it. He noticed the changes of register, which he found difficult, and said it 'was merely getting back at men' and in a childish way. In other words, it didn't work for him at all, but was perhaps functioning exactly as carnival should function. This has also been the reaction when I've used the story with undergraduates, with the female students finding it funny and tender, and the male students finding it offensive and threatening.

<sup>28</sup> See Lohafer (2003); Hernáez Lerena (2012); Patea (2012); Levasseur, and Rabalais, (2001) for use of this common term in short story study.

level. This need is also a resistance to the utilitarian objectification of the feminine.

Known, and sometimes criticised<sup>29</sup>, for her formal experiments, in *Forms of Devotion* Schoemperlen uses 'found' engravings around which to construct her texts. Those from this story are included below, and the abjection of the male in the illustrations lies in the stripping bare of the body, seen from both front and back. The illustrations, from the early eighteenth century anatomist Albinus's *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani* (pub. 1747 Leyden), serve as a *memento mori*, but of the male body, rather than the female, as in 'Liking Men'.

'On Looking Further' describes what a male body should have and what it should not. For example, 'In a good neck the Adam's apple is evident but not pointy' (158); 'a chest without nipples would be like a face without eyes' (159); 'the stomach ... should not hang over the belt' (159); 'men with ugly feet should not expect you to rub, kiss, or lick them' (163); 'men with no bums have trouble keeping their pants up' (166); 'some men do not think with their brains' (169). The implication, ironic in its insistence, is that in 'real life', men do expect their feet to be caressed, or that they do have physical shortcomings of which they are unaware. It is the inclusion of both ideal bodies and, by omission, what one might term 'real' bodies which gives the text its parodic tone. From these examples, it is clear that not all the jokes are original, and this can be seen as a fault in the narrative. However, these are women's jokes, contributing to the 'writing back' evident in the story; they reference other women's voices through time, adding to the dialogic property in the text. The switches which occur between the modal and imperative forms and the parodic jokes are switches between different linguistic levels, and the split between the metaphoric and metonymic codes reveal the character of both speaker and the object of the utterance.

'On Looking Further' includes many negative constructions, and the modal 'should', implied if not actually present. The modals – should, may, can – contribute to the construction of an uncertain reality, and when in addition they are part of negative constructions – men should not – the uncertainty is redoubled,

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<sup>29</sup> For criticism, see, for example, the review of *Forms of Devotion* in *Canadian Literature* (Wilkshire, 2002) ; for a critical appraisal see Andrzejczak, (2005) 'Dividing life into manageable parts: the fiction of Diane Schoemperlen' in *Place and Memory in Canada: Global Perspectives* (2005) Ed(s). Paluszkiwicz-Misiaczek, Reczynska and Spiewak. Krakow: Polska Akademia Umiejtnosci. 21-30.

suggesting a certain scepticism about the male character. This scepticism is part of the construction of doubt about the formation of identity, for both men and women, in a space in which 'one does not know where one is'. The Canadian identity, in fact. It also contributes to the development of third dimensional characters, both the viewer and the object being viewed, and the thematic characteristic of the Explorer which Atwood describes in *Survival*. It also suggests the caution inherent in any act of resistance against authority.

The low culture jokes of women against masculine hegemony include ironic comments on the genitals. Schoemperlen's narrator tells us:

The average length of an erect penis is six inches. No man likes to be thought of as average. It is better not to mention that the penis of the African elephant weighs sixty pounds and measures six feet in length when erect (160).

The narrator continues 'Apparently it is not the size that counts anyway'. The lack of a comma after the adverbial gives the comment its wry, rebellious tone. This low humour, laden with ironic implication, universal among communities of women, is the carnivalisation of discourse in a reversal of the primacy of the phallus, the law of the father.

The female protagonist is a pragmatist, who is aware that few men's bodies, or personalities, match the ideal. There are many instances of what Jonathan Culler calls 'verbal irony', as opposed to dramatic irony (Culler 1992, 154). An ironic text is one in which the reader understands the world is not as it should be. Men should be handsome, healthy, young, 'ideal'; they should not be creaking at the joints, overweight, sprout hair in unattractive places, suffer from ulcers. The reader's knowledge of the world allows the understanding that what men should not be is exactly what they are: the negatives cancel the expectation of the positive.

It is these contrasts between the ideal, as in 'Ideally a man should have all his fingers still attached', and the reality, 'however, a man who is missing a finger or two will have at least one interesting story to tell' (Schoemperlen, 161), which give the story its movement, and lay bare the character of the Canadian male. The unflinching female gaze not only sees but accepts that bodies are rarely perfect, but that life experience is something to value rather than reject. The

narrative does not suggest that it is men's bodies only which are generally imperfect.

The truth is many men look better with their clothes on. This is not a gender-specific trait. It is also true of many women, the difference being that the women usually realize this while the men usually don't (166).

What Schoemperlen does not say is that women's awareness of their own bodily shortcomings is the result of their societal role, in which reification of female body parts is the norm. A simple reversal of the gaze is not what Schoemperlen is doing here. Yet the constant counterpointing of what the male body 'should' be and what it often is can be seen as a way of 'cutting down to size' or castration.

The *you* narration, from the second paragraph on, conflates direct address to the reader with internally focalized discourse: to recall Herman's term, double-deixis. 'Begin with the neck ... [s]ometimes you can see the blood pulsing in these veins ... [d]o not assume that a man's heart is essentially the same as a woman's' (Schoemperlen, 2001, 158-9). This form of address, part instruction, part warning, centres the narrating voice in the *sjuzet*, as well as drawing the narratee, the female reader, into complicity. Combined with the use of modals and negative constructions – '[the neck] should not be scarred from frequent shaving mishaps' 158) – suggesting 'uncertainty in the speaker' (Bal 2009, 52), the reader is encouraged to perceive the narrator as not merely an objective observer, but active participant. The changing attitudes to, or perspective on, the object of both desire and resentment, is also where the storyness resides. In fact, the modals do suggest 'uncertainty' in the addressee, but express life-experience in the protagonist, so that we are able to see not just a gendered narrator, but a woman who has intimately known more than one man, and recognises the difference between the ideal and the actual. The ironic voice contributes to the impression that the object under the speaker's gaze is one particular man, rather than men in general, although this remains uncertain. The comments construct an image of a man gone to seed, not beautiful or idealised, but the negative verb forms make the image appear as the negative of the photograph. The positive implication remains shadowy, suggesting that the ideal man cannot exist.

Chapter Four referred to David Herman's work on *you* narration, and how the reader with the same life experiences in her past may find herself 'within

the discourse' (2004, 344), and he mentions the 'footprint of sexuality [which may be] inscribed upon it' (344). In addressing the audience directly, 'On Looking Further' insists on the complicity of the reader in the narration, their identification with the experiences and opinions expressed in the text. Unlike the *you* in Moore's 'The Stylist', in which the protagonist is 'in search of an identity for herself' (Herman, 2004, 341), Schoemperlen's *you* is 'address that exceeds the frame (or ontological threshold) of a fiction to reach the audience, thus constituting "vertical" address' (Herman, 2004, 341), and it is the object of the gaze whose identity is uncertain. When the male is the object of the gaze, the female's awareness of lack and disconnection undermines the masquerade of womanliness, and with the male as Explorer, the masquerade of masculinity is absent.

Where Moore's protagonist appears to be addressing herself, Schoemperlen's also addresses an invisible accomplice. Her story, like Moore's, does not remain in a single, 'apostrophic term of address' to the self or to the reader, but slides at times into a 'pseudo-deictic *you*' (344), which Herman explains as 'impersonal or generalized *you*' (2004, 340). The combination of these terms of address, not easily distinguished in each utterance, reveal the male as under the aggressive gaze of a Hecate, and of a subversive community of women.

The inclusion of the female reader is present in the mentions of mundane household tasks, such as the male shoulders being essential for 'lifting heavy things like pianos, refrigerators, and the weight of the world' (Schoemperlen 1998, 158). The last task, the lifting of 'the weight of the world' is a parodic comment on masculine self-importance. The narration is individual, characterized by a droll wit and ironic extraneous comment and the direct address to the reader foregrounds this. There is only one speaking character, but the *you* narration which draws the female reader into complicity transforms the single voice into the heteroglossic, community voice of women.

Bodily features and functions which are normally taboo are foregrounded. In order to remove authority from the powerful, satire highlights physical characteristics and undermines any idea that those in authority are in some way superior human beings. 'Feel cheered by the way the penis bursts free with such springy enthusiasm from its cage of clothing' (160) typifies the

grotesque body breaking out of societal control, the human as animal. The feet are the focus of detailed abuse, sometimes being ‘hideously decorated with bunions, calluses and corns’ (163). ‘The nose should not be so large as to have you recommending the name of a good plastic surgeon’ (167). ‘It should not be red and bulbous, covered with blackheads, or grossly misshapen from having been broken seventeen times. A nose with some or all of these qualities is a *parody* of a nose and cannot be taken seriously’ (167 my emphasis). Parody, as Schoemperlen uses it here, sums up the attitude of ‘writing back’ to the male, a revolt against the prevailing hegemonic order.

In ‘On Looking Further’, the humiliation and comic uncrowning is carnivalesque, and therefore temporary, and the story ends with the reinstatement of authority in its traditional role.

You may find that it is the arms that you most often long for ... reaching out to you, wrapping around you, holding you tight (161).

The sudden sight of the downy nape of a male neck bent over a book in a yellow circle of lamplight will set off a spasm of love in your sentimental throat, your startled heart (164-5).

The tenderness, the emotional affect, is clear. As in ‘Liking Men’ the nape of the neck is picked out as one of the vulnerable spots on the male body: it initiates love.

More than purely physical characteristics, ‘On Looking Further’ also addresses the relationship between the female and the castrated, ineffective, male as Explorer. The heart is treated as romantic metaphor: ‘Some men have stones where their hearts should be. Others have holes’ (159). From the mainly scientific, objective description of the size and weight of the brain, the text moves into its final, lyrical section, which begins ‘Brain waves ... are like the wind’ (169). The conclusion suggests that the ‘brain waves’, invisible though they are, are what creates affect in the female observer, or lover, and that whatever the outer appearance of the body, or the parodic view of the male, it is something intangible which connects one woman to one man, and allows the male his place in the social structure.

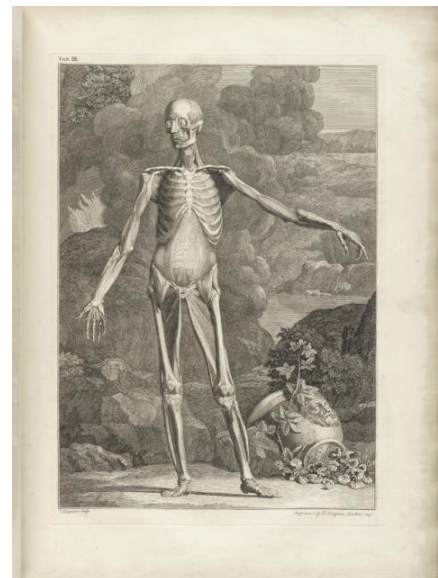
## **The illustrations**

‘The grotesque body’ says Bakhtin, ‘is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, is never completed (1984, 317). The illustrations show the reverse of this: the body in the act of un-becoming, of reversal and abjection, in another instance of carnival, the stripping of male power.

In ‘On Looking Further’, four illustrations accompany the text. The first comes before the text of the story, below the Roman numeral which indicates section one, and shows a male body which is flayed to display the muscle groups, standing in a classical landscape, with a stone tablet recording Albinus’ name and the inscription ‘Tabulae Anatomicae Musculorum hominis’; the final image is the same pose against another outdoor, mythic scene, but this time the muscles too are gone, and the bones and sinews only remain. On the ground is a spilled funerary urn, a visual reference to mortality.



1st illustration



Fourth illustration

The second body is again set against a slightly altered scene, and this is the skeleton alone, although it appears in the text during the description of the muscles. The third is set in the middle of the loving depiction of the nape of the male neck by lamplight, and shows the reverse view of the muscled body, posed in the same way, and flayed.





2nd illustration



3rd illustration

The body is stripped bare for our inspection during the course of the narrative and partially restored. There is no gradual stripping of flesh, but a complete ‘death’ of the body early on, a body which is then re clothed in muscle, and partly uncovered again to end with sinew on display. The illustrations also encourage the reader to notice the images of violence in the text.

Running through the text, and occurring with increasing frequency, is an undercurrent of resentment which could lead to murder. Not every reader notices, but it is partly what gives the story its storyness. It begins on the first page, during the discussion of the neck.

It should not be scarred with frequent shaving mishaps. The large veins in the side of the neck are visible, but should not bulge except under conditions of extreme stress. Sometimes you can see the blood pulsing in these veins. This should fill you with tenderness, not nausea, repulsion, or murderous intent. Bear in mind that one of these veins is the jugular (158).

The placing of ‘shaving of mishaps’ along with ‘murderous intent’ and a reminder that ‘one of these veins is the jugular’ sets up a thread through the story, in the repressed desire to violate the male. On mentioning the breadth and weight of the skin – ‘the skin of an average man covers an area of twenty square feet and weighs about ten pounds’ (165) – the narrator goes on:

In order to verify this information, the skin would have to be removed entirely and measured accordingly. This is not advisable for amateurs as the procedure is messy and the chances of being able to put it all back on again are slim’ (165).

Other mentions of violence or death include ‘Some men’s eyes shoot off sparks. Calm yourself with the knowledge that after death all eyes change color [*sic*], usually becoming a dull greenish-brown’ (167). ‘In cases of death by strangulation, the hyoid [bone] is usually fractured or crushed and so its condition often provides useful evidence in homicide investigations’ (168). ‘Because the brain has no nerve endings, it can be burned, frozen, hit, or sliced without feeling a thing’ (169). ‘The brain continues to send out signals for up to thirty-seven hours after death’ (169). Taken together with the illustrations, these comments insinuate an eschatological theme into the narrative.

It may be that male readers subconsciously perceive a misandry in this undercurrent. However, ‘On Looking Further’ reverses the brutal male Settler character, and suggests that women can also be brutal. The story is not fixed on this course, and as with Atwood’s ‘Liking Men’, it concludes more romantically, albeit with the violence now suggested as a form of self-punishment, the repression once more of the desire to escape imposed authority:

Brain waves, posthumous or otherwise, are like the wind; you cannot actually see them, you can only see their effects. Imagine a warm breeze wafting through a fragrant field of wildflowers, gently lifting your hair off the back of your neck. Then imagine a tornado scooping up the contents of your heart, ripping it to shreds, flinging the pieces away in all directions at once.

Brain waves are a form of electricity. Imagine a cozy room at dusk, pools of yellow lamplight, the sound of soft music floating on the air. Then imagine sticking your finger in the light socket (169-70).

This is how the story ends. The connection the narrator feels with the essence of the man she is describing is not based, after all, on physical appearance, but on some ineffable affect. Romantic love regains its conventional place in the narrative, although the violence implicit in the image of ‘sticking your finger in the light socket’ adds another dimension to the normal literary expression of romantic love. Coming so soon after the chocolate box image of the ‘fragrant field of wildflowers’, it undercuts, to an extent, any hint of sentimentality. What is more, the repetition of the image of a man in ‘pools of lamplight’ from earlier in the story, suggests, perhaps, that the narrator has one particular male in mind. Schoemperlen’s text is carnival, and it is disruptive, but in the end succumbs to

the law, and to the hegemonic ideal of relations between genders; the Hecate becomes masochistic Venus in an enactment of Irigaray's contract.

Canada, Atwood writes, is 'an unknown territory for the people who live in it ... I'm talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head' (1972, 18). The male body (but not the mind) is also an unknown territory in *Survival*, except as the victim of Nature or accident, and Schoemperlen sets out to explore it, mapping it in the way that Atwood explores Canadian literature. The male body in 'On Looking Further' is both vulnerable and repugnant, and, like the literature, it comes to have a particular character of its own. The reader of *Survival* may assume that Atwood is describing Canada and its literature as it is, until she is left with questions – the book concludes 'Have we survived? If so, what happens *after* survival?' (1972, 246 italics in original). In similar fashion, 'On Looking Further' and 'Liking Men' appear to map men in general, but pose the same questions: 'Can women survive? If so, must it be always as adjunct to male power?' As Atwood famously says:

"Why do men feel threatened by women?" I asked a male friend of mine ... "They're afraid women will laugh at them," he said. Then I asked some women students ... "Why do women feel threatened by men?" "They're afraid of being killed," they said (1982, 413).

Schoemperlen's piece is mockery of the male, both his body and his pretensions, while an *unheimlich* undercurrent of potential violence towards him runs through it. Atwood's illustrates the fear of being injured or killed by men. Despite the *unheimlich* (in the sense of secret, repressed) desire to violate, 'On Looking Further' ultimately affirms the necessary attraction of woman to man, love and desire. This re-affirmation is the repression of socially unacceptable desires, which in themselves are sparked by the refusal of the male to enact his hegemonic role.

### **Men (and women) by men.**

Most of the husbands and fathers in these stories are Explorers. They draw no straight lines, they see nothing, they do not speak, they may find only death. They are the subject of investigation. In 'Liking Men', Atwood's male is the Settler, opposing a feminine Nature, cutting it down, destroying. Stories by men can also be found, perhaps even more easily, which also fit the patterns. The last section of

this chapter examines texts by three male writers, and concentrates mainly on how the men function thematically.

Matt Cohen (1942-1999) was an Ontario writer whose story 'Columbus and the Fat Lady' (1972) is mentioned by Atwood in Chapter Five of *Survival*. He also published fourteen novels and some poetry. His writing often features the lives and loves of the Jewish population in Toronto, and an awareness of both recent and more ancient history of persecution, although the story discussed below is not one of these.

'Getting Lucky' (2001) is the title story of his eleventh, posthumously published, collection. The male protagonist, Michael (a name Cohen often uses for his protagonists), meets a woman in a tavern. He has chosen to sit opposite her, even though he is the passive partner in what follows. He is a typical Explorer, in a landscape he cannot read. The woman, Karen, can read him, however. 'She leaned across the table and squinted at his face as though it were a book in small print' (1). As she questions and flirts with him, he doesn't answer. 'Michael looked down at his hands. He knew he was someone who kept to himself, but he couldn't have offered a list of what he was keeping' (1). His lack of certainty is a sure Explorer trait.

He is distracted by her eye teeth, and 'he was wondering if she was some kind of vampire' (2).

That the way her eyes sparked reminded him of his father's dogs when they caught the scent of something they knew they could kill? That he wished he could untie his tongue, look into her face, tell her stories about herself that would put her in his power the way she had suddenly taken control of him, trapped and wrapped him in her charm so completely that he was just like a boy on a toboggan, speeding down an icy hill wanting to go faster and faster until he crashed (2).

There are shades of other themes here: Goto's spirit, Wendigo/Yokai; wilderness and North in the hunting and the icy hill; the woman becomes the North as female, Nature the monster, dangerous and alluring. The man is helpless and silenced, not finding the words to express himself. Michael could even be the man under the gaze of Schoemperlen's protagonist.

It is not yet explained how they get to her apartment, but the implication is that she takes him home. There he finds another man watching television 'with

a long storky neck ... the man was slowly swaying back and forth' (2), curiously reminiscent of the *rokurokubi* again, but male. He is watching a hockey game with the sound turned off. 'Maybe it was the reflection of the ice, but the man's skin seemed absolutely white, almost transparent' (2). This man, Bob, is literally a 'Paralyzed Artist' (Atwood, 1972, 177ff), who is in a wheelchair and writes bad songs. He is an ex-partner of Karen's and still shares the apartment, singing songs to her to try and win her back.

Michael tells us that Karen 'was wearing a white short-sleeved shirt and slacks ... She'd separated him off from the group without him resisting, then said he could drive her home' (2-3). Quite explicitly, she is here connected with the supernatural, a huntress, a wolf in winter fur. He thinks she looks like a man, and this reversal of gender stereotypes is typical of Canadian fiction, where the women tend to be stronger, and the men, unless they are 'Settlers', are weaker. Just as Schoemperlen reverses the gaze, and the man is positioned as passive object, Cohen's protagonist is feminized, silenced and vulnerable.

There are further wintry images. Michael recalls his previous girlfriend taking him to 'a group she'd found at the Cosmic Therapy Centre' (4). He is unable to concentrate, until 'what came into his head was a picture of an ice cream cone' (4). As in Moore's stories, the ice cream is recalled when he is wondering 'if they would be instructed to have group sex' (4). Michael recalls other sexual encounters. 'Since Lee-Anne has left he'd gotten lucky a couple of times ... but in the end he hadn't felt so lucky after all' (5). One woman had physically grabbed him, and he allows her to make love to him, even though he doesn't want to, as 'he didn't want to hurt her feelings' (5). This passive, pliant masculinity frequently features in Cohen's stories, and it is also to be found in other writers. This is male as Explorer; a bemused wanderer, at the mercy of the (female) elements.

Michael spends the night with Karen, and in the morning lies in bed beside her while Bob, the paralyzed artist she lives with, comes into the room, sings her a song, and has a long conversation with her. Michael takes no part in the conversation, and is ignored. The story ends with Michael deciding he is in love with the rich man's wife he is working for, but that she and Bob, Karen's now ex-partner, would be perfect together. He proposes instead to Karen, giving her a gold ring.

‘He could feel the ring rimming his ear as he unbuttoned her jeans and his tongue that could never find the words to speak continued on its journey’ (26). His inarticulateness and lack of will is combined in the image of the journey; the exploration of the reified female body which will end with him finding nothing. As Atwood says of Cohen’s ‘Columbus and the Fat Lady’, also by Cohen, ‘he has discovered nothing and understands nothing except that it has all somehow gone hideously wrong’ (1972, 118), and Michael’s feeling, though not articulated, is exactly that.

D. W. Wilson’s collection *Once you Break a Knuckle* (2011), includes ‘The Dead Roads’, which won the 2011 BBC Short Story Award. Wilson is a graduate of UEA, and lives in the UK, although he grew up in British Columbia. Another of his stories, ‘Mountain Under Sea’, not in the collection, won the 2015 CBC Short Story Prize.

The stories in *Once you Break a Knuckle* are focussed on male experience, and the men here are Settlers, rather than Explorers. As Atwood suggests, they act, often violently; they drive trucks, work with their hands, usually in building trades, and fight. Fathers beat sons, men fight over women. Their trade is building houses – a typical Settler trait. However, in true Canadian fashion, the women are also strong. They too drive trucks, build houses, and are not defeated by the Settlers who, in Atwood’s theory, destroy their families in the same way that they despoil the landscape. The ability of the women to transcend the Venus and avoid the Hecate is evidence that Atwood was writing *Survival* before second-wave feminism had allowed women to have their own voice, their own will.

Wilderness also features as adversary in Wilson. Atwood says that both Settlers and Explorers ‘involve a primal encounter with the land’, and in Wilson’s stories there are many such encounters. ‘A Settler is a man who attempts to clear a place for himself out of the land. An Explorer is a man who travels through the land for the first time, without settling in it ... he is venturing into the unknown’ (1972, 113). Cohen’s protagonist is never at home, metaphorically; Wilson’s men are literally travelling, but they are at least attempting to ‘clear a place’ for themselves.

The families Wilson creates – and as with Munro’s *The View from Castle Rock* (2007), the stories are linked in that the same families appear in

several different stories, narrated from different perspectives – consist of fathers and sons, first and foremost, and of wives, who are not as vocal. The younger generation of women, sisters and girlfriends who work alongside the men, respond to teasing or challenge physically as well as vocally.

What stands out in Wilson's stories is his ability to make even the toughest men sympathetic. He does this by writing from their perspective, or from the perspective of those who love them, as with Will Crease and his father, John. They are the focus of the first and last of the stories in the collection, and appear incidentally in others. John is in the RCMP, and volunteers for peacekeeping duty in the former Yugoslavia, where he is shot in the chest. He is rough in handling his son, ruthless with offenders, but the unspoken tenderness between them, and his concern for the local people can be 'glimpsed out of the corner of the eye, in passing', as V. S. Pritchett describes the form of the short story (quoted by Carver, 2005). Mitch Cooper is another recurring character, a factory worker when adult. The stories are not chronological in sequence, but take place sometimes during the characters' teenage years, and at other times when they are adult. It may require a re-reading of the collection, but with hindsight the patterns of their lives become clear. Some have done well: Paul, an apprentice in the building trade in the first story, is Mitch's brother and a successful contractor in a later one. Will, the son of the policeman, intends to leave the valley and goes to university, but returns later to follow in his father's footsteps. One childhood friend of Will's later has a breakdown and 'goes bush', hiding in the forest. These life trajectories are not explicit on first reading, and the impression from the collection is of a small area of BC and its inhabitants, whose lives touch one another in ways which are only seen clearly when the collection is considered as a whole.

The male characters are all Settlers, tough, drinking, unfaithful often. However, the women are frequently as tough as the men, and their names reflect their strength. Ash, Andie, Vic, Tracey, Alex, Kelly, and Ricki: all of them could also be men's names.

In 'The Mathematics of Friedrich Gauss' (2011), for example, the narrator is an unnamed teacher of mathematics, whose wife, also unnamed, has gone travelling, possibly taking his son with her. She 'built the fence ... She wore a muscle shirt with sweat-stained ribs and jeans faded in great smiles at the thighs' (28). Her 'toolbox yawns atop our picnic table, red and blastworn like a fire

hydrant' (28). The narrator has been left behind with his marking, unable to keep up with the life his wife leads. In this family, it is the woman who fills the stereotypical male role, while the man is teaching a subject which can be associated, disparagingly, with being irrelevant, effete, apart from normal life experience.

In many of the stories, the women have left the men behind. It is not explained just what happened to Will's mother, but as a young man he lives alone with his RCMP father. ('The Elasticity of Bone', 'Reception'). Winch, in 'Valley Echo', is the son of another millworker, Conner. His mother, Ricki, becomes a drug addict after leaving the home, occasionally returning to rob them, so that he grows up with his father and grandfather, neither of them tender. The father, Biff, and an unnamed forty-four year old son in 'Big Bitchin' Cow' have both been married, but are now without partners. 'The boy's wife was a Calgary cowgirl he met during his first year of electrical school, with dishwasher-blond hair and a black cowboy hat she'd only wear when driving her car' (96). Biff remembers his own ex-wife as 'a tough woman ... a denim wearer, coat and all, and the kind of girl who looked good in a ballcap ... She always had a smudge of dirt or sawdust or oil on her cheek, sure as makeup. She was damn near as strong as him, and if he'd ever had to fight her he wouldn't have wagered either way' (98).

I have said the men are Settlers; in the same way as the men in Hemingway's stories, they can also be seen as Explorers in their own lives. They are in jobs they did not choose; they drift from place to place; like MacLeod's characters, they try to leave the area but return, defeated. They look back on lives which they see as failures. Their families are broken, their work is hard and not what they aspired to as young men. They struggle to articulate their desires. Ray in 'The Persistence' is taken to bed by a much younger woman who he has been working with, and is unable to perform, conscious of 'his old body', 'his pasty gut, his mangled hands on her stomach – how could she be genuinely interested in him?' (42). 'A real man would save face, blame the booze, answer with bravado and nonchalance – but Ray had long since moved beyond that. You get less and less invincible, he figured. Or you give up trying' (49). In the end, he is a pathetic figure, having moved away then returned to beg for work, lost his wife to a younger man, attempted to see himself as able and virile still, although he knows he is too broken by life to succeed. Like John Crease and Biff, he is



outwardly tough, but inwardly aware that he has not become the man he believes is the ideal: masculine, hard, capable. Wilson exposes the tragedy of a lack of understanding, in men who see other men as strong and successful, not realising that the others feel as afraid and confused as they do themselves. Wilson goes tenderly to the heart of the Settler, with whom Atwood has little sympathy.

Leon Rooke was born in North Carolina, USA. He moved to Canada in 1969 and became a Canadian citizen at the age of thirty-seven. He may be the least ‘Canadian’ of the writers discussed here, although many of his quirky, surreal stories have a humorous, self-deprecating quality more often associated with Canadians than with USAmericans. Rooke lives in Toronto, and is a prolific writer of short fiction, novels and plays, and some poetry. He has won many awards, including the Governor-General’s Award (1983) for his novel *Shakespeare’s Dog*. He has published fourteen collections of stories, seven novels, two plays, and a book of poems.

His stories have elements of magic realism, and many are comic. The story analysed here, ‘Want to Play House?’ is from *Who do you Love?* (1992). Kent Thompson, in ‘The Performing Artist’ (2004), compares Rooke with Flannery O’Connor, as they ‘share ... a common background and similar concerns’ but ‘she has had the more powerful literary establishment asserting and demonstrating her virtues. She is accorded the American reputation. But Rooke at his best is her equal’ (60). Thompson asserts that ‘Want to Play House?’ is the best story in the collection (2004, 59-60).

The story is narrated in the second person, but this time we understand that it is an unseen character in the story who is being addressed, although the *you* also functions as double-deixis, where it can also be the reader who is addressed. The narrator is female, and is addressing someone ‘in muddy boots’ (59), probably male, although the boots may be imaginary. The story begins:

Here. Come here. Yes. Now this is what you do. You see where I have marked with my stick that line in the dirt?

That is the back door. You come in the door and I am standing in the kitchen. That’s right, this is the kitchen, see my pots and pans? See my table?

All right, don’t sulk. Look, I will draw the table in the dirt with this stick. See? That is the table. It is polished nice and clean, and it has our plates on it, and our silverware, and this nice stew I have made (59).

Although the voice seems adult in the sentence construction and confidence, the reader can assume this is a child's game. Clearly the kitchen and its contents are imaginary. The narrator issues increasingly specific orders to *you*, drawing more of the room and its furniture to help the addressee. 'Very well, I will draw the sink and the windows. There. See them? Take your hands out of your pockets and pay attention' (59).

The command to 'take your hands out of your pockets' is one of several which could be a child mimicking an adult in the family; there are other common phrases which the reader can recognise from their own experience. 'It's seen better days' (59), 'Because I said so' (60), but gradually the narration becomes less stereotypical of child's play, and more knowing. 'I have lost my spunk. Bills, bills, bills, and I never get any help' (60); 'You like watching me secretly like that, because of how pretty I am and how much you love me' (60).

This is much better and totally realistic. Don't you see? Because if I am dead you can start over and get yourself a new wife who will look so pretty you can't keep your hands off her. Yes, you are the Daddy. I told you, you are the Daddy. You are the Daddy and my husband. Yes, both, you can be both. Just do what I say, that's all you have to do, is do what I say. Can't you see how it is done? (60).

At this point, the narrative has begun to slide away from the real world, and can no longer be read as a children's game between two children in a fictional context of their own devising. The story becomes metatextual, a paradigm for a relationship. 'Can't you see how it's done?' points the reader to this parallel narrative, directing us to both how a marital relationship breaks down, and how a text constructs a fictional world. The reader is instructed to 'do what I say', to follow the text, to complete the world of the text, and to recognise it in their own experience. *You* has become 'I', the reader, not pulled into the world of the story, but into recognition of the artificial construction both of writing and of social relationships. As Michèle Kaltemback says, of another Rooke story, 'Rooke's narration ... is aimed at us; it drags us into the story, assigning each a part to play. Yet, that part too turns out pretty soon to hold no security at all as we lose our bearings among the shifting identities of the "You" and "I" in the narrator-narratee relationship' (2004, 126). She also comments that 'fantasy and childhood innocence' are well-trodden ground in Rooke's work. 'The secure

structure of the tale' she reports, 'soon seems to collapse and we find ourselves on the other side of the border, inside the text' (127). Kent Thompson (2004) reads the narrator and narratee as a little girl and her younger brother throughout, and does not examine the shift from a 'real' fictional world of a dirt yard where two children are playing to a more sinister, adult, world of experienced desperation.

'Forget the sink. I tell you I am at the table. Yes, weeping. I can weep really convincingly. Truly I can, so your heart would break. Now you are there, and you see me weeping. What do you do?' (61) The interrogatives throughout the text persistently call on the reader to engage with the fantasised situation, as increasingly we are interpellated as 'storyworld participants'.

By the end of the story, *you* has the stick, and the narrator challenges him to beat her.

Have you been drinking? I bet you have been drinking. I bet you have been spending all our money down at your tavern, your beer hole, and now I and the children will have to starve.

Go on, start beating. You can't hurt me. A little nothing like you couldn't hurt anyone ... You are Quitsville, do you know that? You are some little rodent thing in the road I would run over. Smash you flat, you lift a hand to me.

...

And then I run, you see, and you chase me. You are in a rage, shouting you will kill me. Shouting for years you have been wishing me dead.

...

What do you mean you can't do it without real furniture? (62).

If these are children, and they are re-enacting scenes they have witnessed between their parents, it's a traumatic scene. The text pushes it still further.

Oh, wait. I have another idea. You see here where I've drawn in the sink, the counter? And up there, the windows? Now here on this counter is this knife. Mama's butcherknife. Mine, I mean, I'm the Mama. It's under those leaves down in the dirt, where the pretend-counter is. And while you're chasing me you pick up the knife and when you catch me you stab me a thousand times (62).

In this extract, the speaker implies that she is actually a child, pretending to be her mother. The knife may be a real knife, under the leaves, but how did it get there? She appears only to have just imagined, or remembered, this scene, and yet the

knife must have been placed there earlier. If it is an imaginary knife, it could be on the imagined counter. The story ends:

You see me weeping.

You see the knife. Already you have spotted the knife. Good. It will be so much fun.

Come on, then. Ready, set, go! (63)

The story and its conclusion recalls Atwood's 'Liking Men', in that it starts with play, possibly going to be sexual (as Thompson suggests is implied by the title), but ends in the female character seeing the male as violent and sadistic. If we read this story back into 'Liking Men', we can see that in both cases, it is the female who *constructs* the male as violent, who is in control of the script, even though the imagined scene places men in the position of power over the women's bodies and lives. In 'Want to Play House?' the male character appears to have little say in the way the plot turns out, but is urged on to ever-increasingly violent action by the female, a typical Hecate. She is also the illustration of Irigaray's provisional contract, the woman trapped in a role which refuses her autonomy, but demands her subservience to a man who does not respond to her advances. Her response, in these stories, is either flight into self-realisation, as in Coady and Young, or resentful attack, as in Schoemperlen and Rooke. The exception is in Davis's story, where the male becomes Settler, in order to fulfil his part in the contract. In Rooke, the man is the victim, an Explorer cast as reluctant Settler.

### **Conclusion**

In all these stories, the women are stronger; even the speaker in 'Liking Men' finally submitting to the law, is questioning the desirability of following the domestic path, and is aware of the community of women who may join her in protest. Traces of Atwood's Hecate and Ice Maiden can still be found, but it is the Canadian masculine who remains, usually as Explorer, occasionally as Settler. In his explorations, his relationships with women are left unfulfilled and unfulfilling, the female remaining unseen, unnamed, and therefore not Othered, which leaves her embittered, invisible, and alone.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

The question which this thesis set out to answer is whether the themes which Margaret Atwood identified in Canadian literature in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian literature* in 1972 can still be seen in contemporary short fiction. Effectively, this constitutes at least two areas of investigation. Firstly, whether *Survival* was as inaccurate, partial, simplistic, and irrelevant as some critics claim; whether Atwood may have been more perceptive than she was given credit for; whether there is a thematic thread inherent in Canadian literature which cannot help but be manifest. Secondly, whether the themes are not only visible in novels and poetry, which are the main areas of academic study, or whether short fiction also exhibits the possible influence of *Survival*.

The importance of this investigation is threefold. It lies partly in the foregrounding of a neglected form, or genre, of fiction, which in Canada has a particularly strong and growing tradition. As Reingard Nischik suggests, ‘the short story is today considered to be a particularly vital genre, if not the flagship genre of Canadian literature’ (2007, 1). Moreover, the thesis was begun in the fortieth anniversary year of the original publication of *Survival*, and with the consequent re-issue of the text, a revisiting of its value seems a worthwhile project. Most important, although not explicit in *Survival* but revealed in the thesis, is the discovery of the continuing survival of an overarching theme: Canadian national identity.

The problems with research have been chiefly of a material nature, in that many of the texts are only available in Canada. Some are already out of print as short story collections, unless they are by Alice Munro, are usually given an even smaller print run than the novel. There are also such a large number of new collections published each year that the careful selection of texts, and the need for a cut-off point after which no more could be considered, became essential. However, the necessity of focussing on a selected number of texts also helped the focus of the argument, and allowed the space for detailed analysis, where the

danger of trying to include the most recent could have resulted in a mere annotated bibliography.

The reasons for the form's popularity among writers in Canada cannot be definitively stated, although there are theories which suggest possible roots for it in the USA, and these can be adapted to the Canadian experience. Joseph Urgo (1998), for example, suggests that in the USA, it is the collision of capitalism and nationalism which has resulted in the proliferation of journals, magazines, and newspapers which carried articles, news, and short stories across the nation. Urgo's chief argument is that in the formation of a country with the landmass of USAmerica, it is necessary to take steps to unify each region in a single identity. With the advent of the railroads, transport of news from financial and government centres in the East to the mining towns of the West coast, and vice versa, became viable, and magazines carrying not merely news, but fiction, helped people from different occupations to understand the nation-building motives and different experiences of both national government and labourers. Although the historical development of Canada as a single nation is very different, and as some would say, yet to be completed, Urgo's argument is capable of adaptation to Canadian circumstances.

Secondly, Canadian literature in general repays attention, and yet, even in its country of production, it is often overlooked or disregarded. In Canada, this happens despite Atwood's insistence that audiences who questioned its existence, or its worth when compared with literature from Britain or the USA, were mistaken, and suffering from 'the Colonial Mentality' (2004, 5). Outside Canada, the country as a whole is too often ignored, or thought of as devoid of interest. In spite of its size, both geographical and financial, it is noticeable that it is rarely mentioned in British newspapers or television news programmes, two recent exceptions being the reporting of the terrorist attack on the Parliament building in Ottawa in 2014, and in May 2016, occasional items on the wildfire which necessitated the evacuation of an entire city. When severe ice storms or wildfires in North America have been reported in Britain, as they were in 2014, there was no mention of their effects on Canada, as if the weather stopped at the 49th parallel, although Canadian homes and lives were equally affected. It is not surprising in this context that the literature from this uninteresting and internationally irrelevant country is unknown outside the country. Few British

people could name more than two Canadian writers, Atwood and Munro, even though they may have read *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje, *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel, *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry, *The Stone Diaries* by Carol Shields, the *Jalna* series by Mazo de la Roche, or, as children, L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. These books are all novels, seldom recognised by the public outside Canada as being Canadian; if the dominant form of the novel (and all those listed above have also been made into popular films as well), is not recognised as Canadian, the less popular short fiction of Canadian writers other than Alice Munro is therefore correspondingly neglected. Yet there is a wealth of excellent literature by Canadian writers, novels, poetry, plays, and short fiction, and this thesis hopes to contribute to its wider recognition.

Of even more importance to the value of the thesis is the re-evaluation of Atwood's text, and the consideration of its lasting influence on the national literature, and also on Canada's identity as a nation, both internally and in the world. The themes in *Survival* are repeatedly connected by Atwood to the identity of the nation and the national character. In chronological terms, her thesis begins with discussion of Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, widely taught in schools while being in only the loosest sense Canadian. Among the founders of Canadian literature, these British women's published experiences informed, and continue to inform, the view of Canada as a wild country, untamed and possibly untameable. Their struggle to describe what they found in the nineteenth-century has influenced the development of the national literature and the national psyche to this day. Atwood points to their position in the canon as symptomatic of what Bloom calls (but Atwood does not) 'the anxiety of influence', in which the culture of a former colony remains affected by the lasting status given to the culture of the colonial masters, and interacts with it for many generations afterwards.

Atwood adds to the British influence that from the USA, which is also both political and cultural. The anxiety about being gradually subsumed into the United States, sometimes referred to as neo-imperialist, is a constant thread through *Survival*, and traces can be found in some of the short stories which there

has been no space to include, but which should be the subject of future study<sup>30</sup>. A glimpse of the relationship is found in Alistair MacLeod's 'Island', where the father of Agnes's child disappears to the United States and dies there. It is common in the literature for characters to disappear into the North or the wilderness, and the USA is equated with these psychic locations where the body and spirit are both overcome.

The contention here is that partly because of this double-headed anxiety, the necessity of trying to find a way to differentiate the nation from both past and future powerful masters, results in an emphasis on Canadian identity, which is at the same time, uncertain. The 'negative' identification of that which is Canadian, as neither-British-nor-American, lends an ambiguity to the literature, in ways which have been explained in the preceding chapters.

This argument is not without its detractors. 'National identity' is *passé*, say the critics; Canadians stopped worrying about it after the upsurge in nationalism in the 1960s and 70s. Nevertheless, as explained in the Introduction, the phrase recurs in contemporary journal articles, newspapers, and Canadian university module descriptors. It is clearly still an anxiety, albeit repressed in public discourse when the audience is outside Canada. The desire to present a confident face to the world was apparent in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's uncomfortable response to a question on BBC's *Newsnight*, also discussed in the Introduction.

A second controversial proposal which is central to the thesis is the desirability of taking Atwood's *Thematic Guide* seriously, and of continuing to discuss it. Despite its uneven reception in 1972, it was used in schools and colleges as a guide to the study of the literature for many years, although it is not possible to ascertain exactly how long. Nowadays, it appears on many reading lists, as a secondary text among many others, and it has taken its place alongside Frye's work in the canon of critical work, although its value is disputed, even derided, by current academics. Margery Fee, Professor at the University of British Columbia, referred in a private conversation to *Survival* and Frye's 'Conclusion

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<sup>30</sup> These might include 'Plane People' by Rick Moody (2002), 'Miles City, Montana' by Alice Munro (1998), Thomas King's 'Borders' (1993), and Atwood's online story, written with Naomi Alderman 'The Happy Zombie Sunrise Home' (2014-5). An argument could also be made on some of the characters' disappearances in the work of Alistair Macleod. (see Chapter Three above)



to a Literary History of Canada’, as ‘the parents of Canadian literature’ (2013, pers. comm.). If Canada is now at the stage in its development where it rebels against its parents, that may be a sign of maturing, but a maturing which is an ongoing project, rather than a completed process. The survival of Canada as an independent nation is potentially of huge importance to the balance of world power and stability.

Margaret Atwood has commented that ‘I wouldn’t write *Survival* today, because I wouldn’t need to’ (2004, 11). ‘The erstwhile molehill of Canlit has grown to a mountain’ she continues, and in a version of the ‘Introduction’ published in *Macleans* in 1999, she said ‘In fact, so vogueish is Canadian writing – or writing in English, at least – that it’s become almost embarrassing’ (1999 online). In 2004, she also suggested that were she to write *Survival* today she might add ‘a chapter on Canadian war novels, one on Canadian humour, one on genre writing such as the crime novel’ (2004, 11). These additions were mentioned by Atwood in 1973, in her reply to the scathing review by Robin Mathews. She says, ‘I’ve decided to try to write sections for inclusion in a second edition ... on a few other areas – Humour, War, Magic, Struggle (if I can find enough material), and something about the shape of critical theories, which was to have been in *Survival* but which got too abstruse’ (1982, 131). The additions were never made. Most recently, in the Kreisel lecture which Atwood delivered in April 2016 in Edmonton, which she titled ‘The Burgess Shale: The Canadian writing landscape of the 1960s’, she commented that ‘Canadian literature formed in the 1960s’, and, in a radio interview with Paul Kennedy (‘What did we think we were doing?’ 2016) that grants, reading series, literary festivals and book tours began in the 1960s (2016)<sup>31</sup>.

Whatever the merits or otherwise of Atwood’s text, the evidence is clear; themes which Atwood discusses in *Survival* are still appearing in the literature today. A question which it is impossible to answer in a study of this kind is whether these continuing appearances are because the themes are inherent in the state of ‘being Canadian’, in which case Atwood was correct in her diagnosis, or whether it is learned behaviour, either through having been taught about literature through the prism of *Survival*, or having absorbed the key findings in the same

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<sup>31</sup> The full lecture is available to view at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM85Q28OSuc>

way that British subjects may absorb Shakespeare, without the necessity of actually reading or seeing the plays. Barbara Godard comments on Northrop Frye's *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957):

The "archetypes" or recurring images and symbols that connect one text with another are ritual patterns ... Their recurrence is based not in historical fact, but in human desire, representing the deepest wishes and anxieties of humanity ... The modes and myths of literature are transhistorical, collapsing history to sameness, or cyclical repetitions of the same themes (Godard, 1987, 30).

Godard goes on to quote Barry Cameron: 'the narrative structures or informing myths ... also construct human imagination and memory, thus [are] constitutive not only of literature, but of society and the human mind as well' (30). In that case, Atwood's accuracy is irrelevant; the themes have been ingested into the national consciousness of Canadians, including writers, and writing as a Canadian is the inescapable cultural and social context of writing in Canada. Whatever the cause, the same themes continue to surface in the contemporary short story.

### **Empirical findings**

On discovering *Survival*, after many years of exploring Canadian short fiction, I was struck immediately by the similarities between Atwood's themes and elements in the stories I had been reading. In order to test the thesis, it became necessary to draw on a variety of sources, not only a wide range of short fictions, published during the forty years 1972-2012, but including Canadian history, Canadian cultural criticism and literary criticism. A decision was made to use secondary sources from or about Canada wherever possible, rather than spreading the net too widely, to ensure the specificity of the arguments to the Canadian context. However, some more widely known frameworks also presented themselves, such as Freud's theory of the *unheimlich*, and a little of Bakhtin's work on carnival.

The *unheimlich* provides a methodology for articulating the hauntedness of Canadian literature, for example, in the stories of Alistair MacLeod. The unknowable nature of national identity can also be seen as a form of *unheimlich* experience, in that it is both familiar to Canadian readers, but undefinable in the Canadian psyche. The survival of *Survival* can also be read as an *unheimlich*

presence in Canadian texts, where themes which might be thought to be dead are reinvigorated.

Carnival reflects the interiority of the relationship of the less powerful with the powerful, as seen in stories by women, specifically here in 'On Looking Further into the Bodies of Men' by Diane Schoemperlen. But the relationship of Canada to the United States is often expressed in carnivalesque terms, as can be seen in Justin Trudeau's comment that the USA is welcome to become another province of Canada. The awareness of a lack of world status can be paralleled in gender relations, with female characters defending themselves against either attack or indifference on the part of men by becoming Ice Maiden or Hecate. In the same way, male characters are aware of their powerlessness in the face of Nature the Monster, which they figure as woman, and either fight it, or greet it with passive acceptance, neither of which response is conducive to building a good relationship with women. In turn, completing the vicious circle, women take on the responsibility for running the household, building or repairing the garrison, and thus fulfil the expectations of men that they must either fight or allow them to get on with it. In the stories of Lisa Moore, the women have chosen to associate themselves with ice, with nordicity, in an attempt to provoke a response from disengaged men.

### **Theoretical implications**

Existing studies of Canadian short fiction are few, and tend not to look at the form, but analyse the texts in the same way as they might were they novels. Nischik begins her Preface by noting the 'relative dearth of criticism on this particular body of texts on the Canadian side of the 49th Parallel' (2007, ix). Her bibliography 'may be broken down into the categories of historical, generic or subgeneric, literary-sociological, narratological, regional, and didactic approaches. The historical approaches are most numerous' (2007, 2). If the list reminds the reader of Polonius on the players' repertoire, that serves to indicate the scattered approach of the critics of short stories to date. This thesis fails to alter that; when a series of disparate texts have no common style, author, date, or setting, a variety of methodologies and frameworks are required. This is both a frustration and a joyous challenge when working in the field of short story criticism. Studies of Canadian short fiction such as Nischik's are rare, and her anthology is composed

of articles by different scholars on individual stories, which are generally the better known, by well-known writers. As most of the stories represented here have deliberately been selected from less well-known writers, there is little extant academic criticism of either the chosen stories or their authors. The list of 'Further Reading on the Canadian Short Story' to which Nischik refers is less than two pages long. It follows that the analyses here are based on other sources, from a range of contexts. Both the sources and the analyses in the thesis are drawn from a similar catalogue of approaches to the list suggested by Nischik, with the chief exception being the regional, Canadian literary regionalism being too large a sub-topic to be comfortably explored. In the use of Freud, this thesis adds the psychological to Nischik's catalogue.

These broader approaches, including Freud, Bakhtin, references to Lacan, and discourse analysis, allow the study of a wide range of modes of text, from the realism of D. W. Wilson's work, to the surrealism of Leon Rooke. Linda Hutcheon's examination of Canadian postmodernism, in which she proposes the term 'historiographic metafiction' connects subtly but productively with Atwood's theme of the archaeology of origins<sup>32</sup>, and the incidence of historiographic metafiction is significant in the stories analysed here. As Nischik notes, historical approaches to criticism of the short story in Canada are most numerous (2007, 2), and that fact supports the observations of both Hutcheon and Atwood.

Where 'The Afterlife of Survival' differs from other critical works, it is in the application of a forty-year old thematic guide to contemporary literature, a practice which most Canadian academics find perplexing. The main reason for their puzzlement is the lack of respect shown nowadays to Atwood's text; a further suspicion results from a similarly world-weary attitude to thematic criticism in general. Countless thematic studies of the literature have followed Frye and Atwood, Moss, and Jones, which may be because in a country so unsure of its meaning, a list of key elements is reassuring, if ultimately unproductive. In avoiding the surface reading of texts which can result from a focus on theme, a combination of aesthetics, stylistics, and semantics gives depth and resonance to the uncovering of the themes, and the lasting existence of the same tropes in the

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<sup>32</sup> Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) could help explain the survival of themes and thematic criticism in Canada.

literature must suggest something essential in the experience of being Canadian, even in the twenty-first century. My thesis is not that *Survival* itself has necessarily had far-reaching influence, although that may well be the case, but that when Atwood constructed her argument, albeit drawing on a narrow range of canonical texts supplemented with some newer work published by Anansi, she may have been more accurate in her evaluation of Canadian obsessions than she has been given credit for.

In 1986, a Symposium was held at the University of Ottawa, titled 'Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature'. Papers from the symposium were published under the same name in a collection edited by John Moss (1987). In his introduction to the book, Moss allows that 'most Canadian criticism in the last decade or so has continued to serve the perceived social imperatives of a nation in perpetual adolescence' (1987, 3). The symposium was a gathering of writers and critics who discussed the development and the potential future of critical theory in its application to Canadian literature. As Moss tells us:

Bakhtin leaps from the sidelines to centre stage, as Derrida clammers out of the orchestra pit and into the prompter's box, and Lacan swings from the flies, as Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Barthes, and a throng of others rhubarb their way through the text (1987, 2).

'A few mavericks', Moss says, 'have been thinking about literature and ... deconstructing the box in which we have tried to contain our culture; not peering over the garrison walls but walking right through them' (3). The first piece in the collection is extracted from a conversation between two such mavericks, the writers and academics Robert Kroetsch and George Bowering. In a long, and often light-hearted, discussion about the influence of theory in writing, both welcome the 'discovery of theory' (Kroetsch, 1987, 18), saying that they read it and use it when writing fiction or poetry. On the other hand, an unnamed participant in the symposium says that 'as an academic rather than as a writer, the basic impulse is to dissect the material, look for the unity of the tradition, look for the images' (23). Kroetsch comments that more theory would help unblock a writer, who has 'come to the end of what they've picked up unconsciously, and they don't know how to break through to a new plateau' (24). This thesis is not denying the more recent existence of French and American theory in Canadian

criticism, merely suggesting that ‘what [writers] have picked up unconsciously’ may well be the thematic criticism of *Survival*.

The second piece in the collection is a paper by Barbara Godard, in which she traces the development of theory in Canada. She begins in 1974, by referring to the first conference of the Association for Canadian and Québec Literatures. It was at that conference that Frank Davey delivered ‘Surviving the Paraphrase’ which Godard says was ‘singled out as the rallying point in the critical debate’ (1987, 27-8). In the paper, Davey denounced the current fashion for thematic criticism, but Godard proceeds to highlight several paradoxes in his argument, pointing out that Davey argues for archetypal criticism to be applied to Canadian literature as an alternative to thematics. ‘The resulting split between semantic and syntactic levels continues to characterize the Canadian critical scene’ Godard admits (29).

Atwood’s main themes include the typology of character, by gender, and in analysing contemporary stories these themes, or as they could be termed, archetypes, most often reveal themselves in the narrating voice rather than in action. Discourse analysis, or a form of close reading, is the method chosen to tease out the thematic characteristics of the speaker. I have taken advantage of ‘the split between semantic and syntactic levels’ in analysing the survival of *Survival*.

### **Implications for future practice**

The more that sustained bodies of critical work are produced on the short form, from Canada in particular, the more seriously short stories will be taken, both by the general reader, and crucially, in the academy. In connecting contemporary writing with its historical context, this thesis attempts to position the focus on short fiction in the centre of the study of Canadian literature, and to demonstrate that careful reading of short fictions can be as complex and revealing as the study of the recognised canon. In teaching the short story as literature, the university is helping to provide the readers of the future. The suspicion which the study of the form generates among academics in more conventionally respected fields appears to be based on the belief that if a text is short, there must therefore be little content, no effort required to study it, and little to be learnt from analysis. I refer these doubters to Shakespeare’s sonnets.

However, the main argument in this thesis is around the survival of *Survival's* themes in the present day. This is important as it concerns Canada's view of itself as a nation, and complicates the common view from outside Canada that the literature of the former colony is a pale shadow of British literature, contaminated, or perhaps enriched, by the literature of USAmerica. The thesis shows that not to be the case, but that in its very obsessions with its own history, with the ongoing project that is the national identity, Canada has a literature which is most particularly its own, with its own concerns, its own voice, its own solutions. Similar studies might perhaps be undertaken of the literature of other former colonies, and of those countries which are today undergoing a process of upheaval and destruction which will leave them too in the situation of needing to (re)construct their own identity, based on their own histories, anew.

### **Recommendation for future research**

There are many omissions, some for reasons of space, some to avoid blurring or distorting the focus. Mentioned in the Introduction are the Francophone literature of Québec, and the under-represented work of First Nations writers. Others have already produced valuable studies of these two areas<sup>33</sup>, and my own plans for future research include the study of individual writers, as so many of those represented briefly here have had little or no academic study undertaken on their work. These include Leon Rooke, whose prolific production of postmodern and surreal stories and novels and plays is known and admired inside Canada and unheard of beyond its borders, and Lisa Moore, whose novels and stories of life in Newfoundland connect gender and place with nordicity.

There have been edited collections of Canadian Jewish stories, among them Miriam Waddington's *Canadian Jewish Short Stories* (1990), and Norman Ravvin's *Not Quite Mainstream* (2002). *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish-Canadian Literature* by Michael Greenstein (1989) is a collection of articles covering poetry and novels, and including analysis of two of Matt Cohen's stories, as well as some by Henry Kreisel, Jack Ludwig, and Naim Kattan. With the largest Jewish community in North America outside New York,

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Siemerling (1996), Bölling (2008), Carrière and Khordoc (2008). Rosenstreich (2000); Christie (2009), King, Calver and Hoy (1987), Hoy (2001), Mandel and Taras (1987), Moses and Goldie (1998), Van Styvendale (2013).

Toronto has produced many collections of short fiction by Jewish writers, and Montreal is similarly blessed. A study of Canadian Jewish short fiction would update Greenstein's work, and provide an interesting comparison with the work on other Canadian diasporic communities, and follow Chapter two where I analyse the work of a descendant of diaspora still looking back as well as forwards, Alistair MacLeod.

The thesis has also been unable to cover the writing of more recent immigrants, such as those from the Caribbean and India. Clearly, the relationship of a contemporary black immigrant to modern, urban, Canada is unlikely to fit well into the 'European settler' narrative which is the chief focus of Atwood's text. In her chapter on 'Failed Sacrifices', about immigrant writing, Atwood includes some Jewish writing, and a collection of short stories by Austin Clarke, about the experience of Caribbean immigrants, but my chapter on the failed sacrifice is on MacLeod. Although there are plenty of contemporary short fictions by these more recent 'new Canadians', Cyril Dabydeen, Olive Senior, Neil Bissoondath, and Dionne Brand among those just from the Caribbean, a discussion of their work could have skewed the thesis away from its chief question in possibly fatal ways. I have been able to include a story by one Japanese Canadian writer, Hiromi Goto, in the chapter on wilderness, but other work by Canadian writers with non-European roots will need to be the subject of future work, although others are engaged on it already. Postcolonial studies (in the widest sense), such as that by Martin Genetsch (2007) on multiculturalism, often critique Canadian Caribbean writing, and, as I have said, I wanted to foreground less widely known work.

This has meant that the thesis is focussed largely on stories by settlers with a Christian European heritage, who, in the current climate, are less investigated, academically, while probably being most read, although the numbers remain small. In a short study such as this, the attempt to include a wider range could only result in fewer conclusions being drawn. I acknowledge the omissions, and look forward to doing further work in the neglected areas.

The tight focus has, however, led to definite conclusions. The chief discovery is that, like *Survival* itself, Canadian national identity is the subject of both bored dismissal and a perennial fascination in the literature and in academia. The period since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement



(NAFTA) in 1994 continues to be crucial for Canada's autonomous place in the world, and relations with the United States and within North America more widely. It affects not only Canada's position, but the power wielded by the USA, and at the time of writing, when TTIP (The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) is being negotiated between the USA and the European Union, lessons could be learnt from the experience of our Commonwealth neighbour across the Atlantic.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis has demonstrated that the themes in Margaret Atwood's *Thematic Guide*, while being dismissed as irrelevant and partial, have still their echoes in contemporary literature, specifically short fiction. The themes haunt the texts like *unheimlich* spectres, revealing the suppressed anxieties of a nation which is not one, the blank space which remains to be filled, and the possibly hopeless quest for a certain home.

Word count: 81,427 words.

## APPENDIX

### *SURVIVAL: A THEMATIC GUIDE TO CANADIAN LITERATURE (1972)*

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