

“I am not I”: Late Modernism and Metafiction in Canadian Prose

by

Vanessa Lent

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Dated: May 17, 2012

External Examiner: _____

Research Supervisor: _____

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that a number of works of Canadian fiction usually designated as modernist fit more properly into the category of “late modernism”: a category that has only recently begun to emerge as a bridge between post-war modernism and emergent postmodernism. These works are aligned by their use of abstract, absurdist, or surrealist narrative structures and consequently by their refusal to adhere to conventional strictures of social realism. Because of this refusal, literary critics have identified the late-modernist emphasis on narrative form as necessarily ahistorical or apolitical. Conversely, I argue, these works are socially and politically engaged with the historical contexts and material conditions of their inception, composition, and consequent reception.

I argue herein that the works of Sheila Watson, Elizabeth Smart, Malcolm Lowry, and John Glassco tend towards non-representational narrative forms, and in doing so, they engage in modes of cultural critique. These critiques are focused by a negotiation of what has been multiply identified as a “contradiction” in modernist art: while on the one hand the texts break with traditional forms of social-realist narrative out of a need to find new forms of expression in an effort to rebel against conservative, bourgeois sensibilities, on the other hand they are always produced from within the self-same socio-political economy that they critique. Whether this position is identified as a “modernist double bind” (following Willmott) or a “central paradox” of modernism (following Eysteinson), I have argued that each author negotiates these internal contradictions through the integration of autobiographical material into their writing. In reading these works as part of a unified late-modernist narrative tradition, this dissertation aims to destabilize critical and popular understandings of mid-century Canadian prose and argue for an alternate reading of artistic interpretation of the twentieth-century Canadian condition. Such a reading challenges current canon formation because it destabilizes traditional critical accounts of these texts as instances of eccentric expression or singular moments of genius. Instead, we are asked to consider seriously the tendency for play with subjectivity and autobiographical material as an interpretive strategy to express the mid-century, post-war condition.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Is it true, then, that we are a people without a literature?
—Massey Report (222)

My dissertation argues that the works of Sheila Watson, Elizabeth Smart, Malcolm Lowry, and John Glassco form a coherent pattern in mid-twentieth-century Canadian prose that challenges current configurations and theorizations about modernist literature. I contend that the use of non-realist narrative forms and integration of metafictional material result in works that critique the conservative social-cultural milieu of Canada and inaugurate a sophisticated play with narrative subjectivity that continues to reverberate as a dominant narrative mode in Canadian literature. My argument depends upon the confluence of three shifts within modernism and the interpretative repercussions of each. First, it considers the movement of high modernism into late modernism. In the last fifteen years scholars have argued for the establishment of late modernism as a bridge between post-war modernism and emergent postmodernism. The late modernist moment responds to shifting attitudes toward the avant-garde inaugurated between the wars and continuing past World War II. The avant-garde's abstract, absurdist, or surrealist narrative aesthetics were associated with counter-cultural social rebellion. Further, these aesthetics, because of their non-adherence to narrative strictures of realism, were criticized as dehumanizing and were consequently considered ahistorical or apolitical. This study contends, conversely, that the works studied herein are socially and politically engaged with the historical contexts and material conditions of their inception, composition, and consequent reception. Such engagement and critique manifests both *covertly* in the authors' choice to work with non-realist aesthetics within a milieu that was highly resistant to them as well as *overtly* in vocalized critiques that have been overlooked for a number of reasons that I will investigate.

This leads to the second shift within modernism: the intersection of fiction and metafiction in modernist literature. Recent modernist scholarship has called for a broadening of the field to allow for a multiplicity of modernisms to co-exist¹. One such call is for a reinvestigation of the relationship between fiction and life-writing.² This call coincides with a broader tendency in theorizations of life-writing to accommodate the nuanced relationship between the two modes.³ This study interrogates the tendency to play with the content and form of metafiction and life-writing in late-modernist Canadian fiction. Authors of late-modernist fiction destabilize the realism of their texts through the use of abstract narrative techniques. Although the extent to which such integration leads to metafictional play varies from text to text, ultimately each text ends up meditating self-consciously on the role of the artist-figure in post-war Canada. Further, the use of metafiction in these texts deflects from possible charges of being ahistorical or apolitical – the presence of a self-conscious subjectivity anchors the works to a specific socio-cultural paradigm.

The third shift is nested within a specifically Canadian context: the change in popular attitudes to art as represented by the findings of the Massey Commission (1949-51) and its published *Report* (1951). The *Massey Report* documents a mid-century anxiety about Canadian culture's inability to stand alongside the cultural production of other first-world nations. The

¹ For examples of such calls see Peter Nicholl's *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (135), James Elkins' Afterword in *Art and Globalization* (278), and Dean Irvine's *The Canadian Modernists Meet* (5).

² Max Saunders' *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2010) argues that "modern writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found new ways to combine life-writing with fiction" and that the study of such combinations has thus far been undertheorized (4; 12).

³ Marie-Laure Ryan uses the term "panfictionalism" to argue for the inseparability of fictional and nonfictional narratives. All utterances, she argues, whether posturing as truth or fiction, are essentially fictional and therefore "the categorical difference between real and imagined events is overwhelmed by the artificiality of narrative representation" (39).

subsequent establishment of the Canada Council in 1957 to foster established and emergent artists also required a re-narrativization of Canadian cultural production that emphasized the writers of the past in order to provide a chronology of a Canadian artistic voice for the present and future. Consequently, this period inaugurates what I identify as a search for Canada's "lost modernist origins"; that is, a reevaluation of works that align with the avant-garde aesthetics of Anglo-American and continental high-modernist cultural production. The extent to which each author engages with or resists this reformulation varies. In Canadian literary criticism, the result of this reformulation has been a tendency to read these texts as isolated moments of modernist production, rather than understanding them as part of a tradition or continuum. That is, the texts studied herein are traditionally read as singular productions of modernist genius that serve as precursors to late-twentieth-century trends in Canadian literature. This study argues, conversely, that they be read as expressions of socially- and culturally-engaged late modernism that critique their contemporary socio-cultural moment. Such critiques – while expressed through non-realist narrative techniques – are grounded through an integration of fictional and metafictional elements.

I. Late modernism

Tyrus Miller's *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (1999) brings together the work of a number of primarily postmodern critics to construct a justification for the category of "late modernism" as a necessary bridge between the two major movements of the twentieth century. His argument boils down to one of necessity: how does one account for the great number of works that contain elements characteristic to both modernism and postmodernism? Miller turns to Fredric Jameson's call for a category that accounts for the "transition" between "the last survivals of a properly modernist view of art

and the world after the great political and economic break of the Depression” and the “new conception of social realism” that develops simultaneously (*Postmodernism* 305). This negotiation of the “properly modernist” and “new [...] social realism” is precisely the dance in which the authors I discuss participate.

In Canada “properly modernist” literature never had a chance to flourish to the extent that it did in Europe or the United States. Canadian prose remained for the most part faithful to traditionally realist narrative style. Therefore, Canadian literary modernism was coming into its own as the rest of the Anglo-American scene was moving into the “second stage” of modernism, one deeply shocked by the atrocities of war – not to mention suspicious of the intimacy between high modernism’s affected style and what Benjamin called the “aestheticization of politics that fascism pursues” (242) – resulting in an emergent interest in realism’s ability to bear witness to such atrocities. While interwar and post-World War II Canadian poets could get away with the adoption of modernist styles because of poetry’s inherent affinity with symbolism, abstraction, and fragmentation, they too shifted toward documentary, journalistic, narrative, and confessional modes. Modernist Canadian prose, on the other hand, did not fully develop an experimental high-modernist stage and, instead, slid comfortably into the social-realist mode. Writers such as Morley Callaghan and Hugh MacLennan led the way for Canadian writers to craft realist fiction that integrated the psychological anxieties of the interwar and postwar periods and addressed issues of nationalism, economic crisis, global conflict, sexualities, gender politics, and social and political protest. What of their contemporaries, though, who chose to express themselves through aesthetics more closely aligned with high modernism? Miller’s study deals with a number of these writers – such as Wyndham Lewis, Djuana Barnes, Samuel Beckett, and Mina Loy – and argues that their works negotiate a balance of experimental form (and by

this I mean movements such as surrealism, symbolism, futurism, decadence, absurdism, etc.) and a complex engagement with the same socio-political and historical issues as those writers who chose to do so in a social-realist mode. Miller notes that these authors, like many of those included in this study, were “not particularly successful in either critical or commercial terms” (13), which has contributed to their subsequent marginalization in modernist studies. His project, like my own, is one of recovery and recontextualization of a cohesive body of literature that promises to add much to our understanding of literature in the twentieth century. It is my hope that my study will likewise produce an alternative reading of modernist prose in Canada.⁴

Alan Wilde is another critic who identifies a need for late modernism as a “third term” that “interposes a space of transition, a necessary bridge between [the] more spacious and self-conscious experimental movements” of modernism and postmodernism (11). Specifically, Wilde characterizes the difference between modernism and late modernism as resting on a shift from a “richly inclusive and interconnected fictional world” in modernism as needed in order to counteract the “chaos and impoverishment of modern life” (11). Like Miller and Wilde, Brian McHale calls for late modernism as a category that considers modernism as essentially epistemological and postmodernism as ontological. Where modernism endeavours to represent the world in a way that accounts for its discontinuities,

⁴ Since the publication of Wilde’s work on late modernism there have been a number of works that have added to the field. These works, like my own, primarily focus on specific authors or regions and include Conor Carville’s “Autonomy and the Everyday: Beckett, Late Modernism and Post-War Visual Art” (2011), Sarah Ann Wells’ “Late Modernism, Pulp History: Jorge Luis Borges’ *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935)” (2011), Robert Genter’s *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (2010), David James’ “Localizing Late Modernism: Interwar Regionalism and the Genesis of the ‘Micro Novel’” (2009), and Marina Mackay’s “‘Doing Business with Totalitaria’: British Late Modernism and the Politics of Reputation” (2006). In addition, Cheryl Hindrichs’ “Late Modernism, 1928–1945: Criticism and Theory” (2011) provides a useful historicization of the theorization of late modernism as a critical category.

traumas, and contradictions, postmodernism instead “invents possible worlds”. He sees late modernism fitting into this model in works that “unsettl[e] the opposition” between these two modes (5-6).

Astradur Eysteinnsson’s pivotal *The Concept of Modernism* (1990) picks up on one of modernism’s inherent contradictions, which he identifies as the “central paradox” of modernist studies. On the one hand, modernism is a massive cultural force that rebelled against the conventions of Victorianism to break new ground on a number of fronts and, on the other hand, modernism is an elitist project that attempts to de-historicize itself, choosing instead isolation from history. Eysteinnsson asks, “how the concept of autonomy [...] can possibly coexist with [...] the view of modernism as a historically explosive paradigm” (16)? In other words, how can something be both ahistorical and culturally significant? Separating modernism into these two categories, he argues, does it a disservice. Eysteinnsson switches focus from what he sees as modernism’s paradox to explore Matei Calinescu’s similarly troubling “two modernities” wherein “modernism is judged in the light of its opposition to the ‘progress’ of social modernity” (qtd. in Eysteinnsson 37). That is, modernism, though concerned with the new, is nevertheless implicated in tradition because of its need to invoke past models before it can break them apart. In setting itself up in opposition to the “capitalist-bourgeois ideology” of such historical positioning, its opposition to the capitalist-bourgeois subject (which inherently carries with it associations with social change through capitalist means) aligns modernism – within an “ideological space of social harmony” – with aversion to change. Many critics who face the dilemma of acknowledging Eysteinnsson’s “central paradox” do so by separating social and aesthetic modernism. I agree, however, with Eysteinnsson (and others) in suspecting that such a break is a false one: the social and

aesthetic need to be addressed together because the form is so intrinsically tied to its response to social conditions.

Two major theorists of modernism who work through these same issues are Theodor Adorno and Fredric Jameson. Whereas in his earlier works Jameson is primarily a critic of postmodernism his works of late have shifted to modernism. As such, Jameson's reading of modernism as a movement has itself shifted through his career. In his earlier works Jameson identifies postmodernism's inception with "the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s" that marked, in his estimation, an end to the division that high modernism kept in place between high and popular culture ("Postmodernism" 188-89). Adorno similarly charts a rift between high art, which he sees as oppositional and critical of commodification, and consumer culture, which he sees as uncritical because of its embeddedness within capitalism. That is, if the art of the "culture industry" affirms the world from which it comes, high art attempts to negate it. Instead of expressing the world's "utopian potential" in high art's critiques, it simply expresses the world as it is, validating it (*Negative* 218). Adorno gestures here towards modernist art as non-representative and mass culture as representative, realist, and mimetic—a formulation that has been critiqued for being too simplistic and elitist. Jameson notes in his earlier theorizations that Adorno unrealistically suggests that modernist art is autonomous from a commodity culture. Jameson, conversely, argues that all art (modernist or otherwise) is a part of its social milieu and thereby is always embedded in an economy. Jameson critiques Adorno's placement of modernist art alongside classical works without an equal placement alongside contemporaneous works of mass culture. Instead, Jameson orients an analysis of modern art alongside consumer culture because they are from the same "capitalist mode of production" (Hardt and Weeks 12). While I agree with Jameson's troubling of Adorno in his early theorizations, his formulation is equally reductive.

Jameson goes on to argue in his earlier works that all art is mediated by its own historical specificity and that specificity is intrinsically tied to commodity culture. He asserts that art then conforms to that commodification in a way that disallows a critique of its own culture. While I follow Jameson's logic that art is implicated within commodity culture, the suggestion that such implication disallows critique is troubling. That is, Jameson sees such conformity change art in a way that removes the critical function that Adorno figures as a strength in art—and in the modern art he praises in particular—and instead views these changes as directly expressing complicity within its capitalist economy. We can see this critique, for example, in Jameson's essay "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (1979) in which he frames Adorno's reading of repetition as a figure that directly reflects mass and consumer culture (as in factory assembly lines) in a way that does not address repetition's presence as a dominant quality of modernist art. Jameson, in contrast, sees the use of repetition as a structural and thematic element in modernist art symptomatic of a situation where "[m]odernisms have been forced, in spite of themselves, and in the very flesh and bones of their form, to respond to the objective reality of repetition itself" (131). That is, modernism tries to counterbalance the threat of commodification by integrating repetition as a dominant structural element. It is at this impasse between Adorno's belief in modern art's successful integration of its socio-historical moment's contradictions into its very form and Jameson's assertion that such integration simply re-affirms the artwork's ingrained participation in a capitalistic economy that my dissertation situates itself. I argue that the works studied herein address the difficulties of critiquing one's socio-historical moment without re-affirming one's own embeddedness within it through a formal blurring of the subjective and objective.

Where Adorno argues most persuasively for modernism's potential for cultural criticism is in his theorization of a work of art's "truth-content." He sees modern art as autonomous from society: "insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks," he writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, "it is their functionlessness" (227). This category of "functionlessness" seems at first to play directly into the major criticisms of high modernism. Adorno's "functionlessness," however, is both strategic and engaged. For Adorno, a successful work of art is one whose "truth-content" is able to both challenge the status quo and suggest alternative configurations – which is where he sees modern art's utopian idealism of which Jameson is so critical. In order to achieve this "truth-content," the work of art must be able to negotiate its own internal contradictions that arise from the work's simultaneous autonomy from and origin within its particular socio-cultural milieu. A successful work of art for Adorno is one that formulates strategies to overcome this contradiction and, in so doing, is then capable of highlighting its embedded, invisible socio-cultural contradictions. For Adorno, a "good" work of art need not be explicitly political or search for social consciousness because its "truth-content" does this through narrative form. My dissertation finds the same strategy at work in late-modernist authors. Structurally, their tendency towards non-representational form and use of metafiction enacts a "working out" of their internal contradictions that come from being both *of* (that is, created and therefore implicated within) and *apart from* (that is, critical of and searching for alternatives to) their social milieu. Where high modernism overwhelmingly prioritized the subjective perspective expressed through literary techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, fragmentation, and repetition, late modernist authors adopt this focus on subjectivity and adapt it to between-the-war concerns with dehumanization by investing their narratives with personal perspectives in a manner that foreshadows the tendency toward metafiction in

postmodernism. Late modernists keep the non-representational forms of high modernism but invest their works with their own subjectivity in an attempt to overcome fears of dehumanization. What could be any more human, really, than Glassco's loneliness about being left behind and left out, Watson's search for community, Smart's broken heart, or Lowry's crippling self-doubt and self-medication?

Jameson's later works on modernism – and in particular late modernism – begin with his seminal work *A Singular Modernity* (2002). Therein he argues that the “ideology of modernism” solidified into our current understanding in the mid-century late modernist moment. *A Singular Modernity*, then, historicizes modernism's historicization and in so doing Jameson's theorization of modernism aligns more closely with that of Adorno. Jameson's discomfort with modernism's complicity had more to do with the ways in which modernism had been theorized by critics; the modernist works themselves do not necessarily hold up to these theorizations. Jameson identifies the American New Critics as leading the charge towards this solidification and argues that pre-mid-century, there was no singular ideological formation of modernism. Instead, such ideologies were broken into multiple theorizations identified either broadly by national or historical strictures or more specifically by artistic collectives or individual theorizations. The work of the New Critics imposed a unified theorization of modernism and posited a similarly unified ideology of modernism. Ironically, the contemporary call for a breakdown into multiple modernisms by critics such as Peter Nicholl rejects such unity and recreates a pre-mid-century formation that allows for the co-existence of a number of modernist ideologies. Jameson's understanding of this narrativization into a singular modernity is a direct response to a post-war transition into complete modernization from the incomplete modernization of the early twentieth century. Not yet entirely transitioned *into* this complete modernization (and therefore into

postmodernity), late modernist critics' theorization of high modernism works through a tenuous in-betweenness by separating themselves from the early decades of the twentieth century by essentializing and commodifying what they saw as a cultural and artistic moment that still sought André Malraux's notion of the "Absolute" (159). A second irony, then, that in their rejection of what they identified as high modernism's search for wholeness ended up articulated in an ideology that itself was dependent on an "Absolute" truth.

Aesthetically, Jameson divests late modernism from the Poundian maxim to "make it new." By the 1950s and 60s, he notes, modernism "seemed to touch a kind of limit and to have exhausted all available and conceivable novelties" (152). Jameson challenges the "ideology of modernism," as constructed by late-modernist critics, that identifies innovation as a quality of modernism *unique from* previous artistic movements. With a nod to Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Jameson argues that instead of "the alleged telos of modernist innovation (and the fetishization of the New)" we view modernist experimentation as part of a process of innovation that begins much earlier and results in each "subsequent generation" left dissatisfied with "feels the unsatisfactory inherited linguistic schema of subjectivity to be an artificial convention" (157). This trajectory of innovation, Jameson argues, ends with the moderns and it is only within this late-modernist / postwar moment that the end can be eulogized by the celebration or "fetishization" of newness by the critics.

If Jameson's understanding of the ideology of modernism rests in a late modernist narrativization that originates with the New Critics, then where do the late modernist artists fall within his theorization? *A Singular Modernity* never clearly places the late modernist artist within this framework outside of a purely historical positioning within a postwar/cold war moment. The text suggests, however, that these late-modernist artists are performing a

similar recapitulation of high modernism. Certainly Sheila Watson's mid-century theoretical work on Wyndham Lewis and integration of German expressionist aesthetics into her creative work speak to such renarrativization. Indeed, the following chapter will read Watson's seminal work *The Double Hook* as an allegory of modernism. Elizabeth Smart's two major texts are phenomenologically aware of their historical and cultural moments and turn to literary techniques innovated by the Romantics and reframed within modernism to provide biting critique of the mid-century condition. Malcolm Lowry's works use an autobiographical subjectivity to reflect (sometimes obsessively) on the political and personal battles of the first half of the twentieth century. John Glassco's most recognizable text returns to the apex of high modernism and, like Lowry, intertwines the personal with the historical to critique and reframe modernism. What distinguishes late modernism from its earlier iteration, then, is its desire to return to the site of origin and begin the process of continual return that has characterized the movements of artistic practice to the present day.

The late modernist narrative strategies that operate in Glassco, Watson, Smart, and Lowry form part of a larger shift in the field of literary production. In particular, Frederic Jameson focuses on the role of literary criticism within late modernism in *A Singular Modernity* (2002). Therein he argues that the "ideology of modernism" solidified into our current understanding in the mid-century late modernist moment. Jameson identifies the American New Critics as leading the charge towards this solidification and argues that pre-mid-century, there was no singular ideological formation of modernism. Instead, such ideologies were broken into multiple theorizations identified either broadly by national or historical strictures or more specifically by artistic collectives or individual theorizations. The work of the New Critics imposed a unified theorization of modernism and posited a similarly unified ideology of modernism. Ironically, the contemporary call for a breakdown

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II. Canadian Context

In her article “Canadian Letters, Dead Referents: Reconsidering the Critical Construction of *The Double Hook*” Donna Palmateer Pennee asks “what it might mean for Canadian literature

to be part of ‘the modernist tradition’—as prescribed by T.S. Eliot’s high anglomodernism—in a site in Canadian literary history other than the cosmopolitan-nationalist debate in poetry” (234-35). My dissertation takes up this question by interrogating Canadian modernism from a new perspective—a perspective that adds to the discussion of the cosmopolitan-nationalist debate that overwhelmingly has come to define our understanding of Canadian modernism by moving beyond the limits such a discussion naturally embodies. The particular “site in Canadian literary history” that I will interrogate is one that has been excluded from this debate because of the ways in which the debate necessitated a politicized language to develop around conceptions of art and nationality in Canada. The fusion of poetry and political engagement after the Great War and into the mid-twentieth century shaped the way our literature was read, consumed, and produced. But I think it is critical that, when reading back into the literature of this period, we make the distinction between *poetry* and *poetics* because far too often we have categorized this literature on the basis of where, politically, the authors stand in relation to certain aesthetic movements without also interrogating the aesthetics themselves. That is, there has been a worrisome tendency to make broad assumptions about literary *form* based on the author’s allegiance to certain political ideologies and therefore not read into the more detailed ramifications of the formal aspects of their writings.

Indeed, Palmateer Pennee continues that the cosmopolitan-nationalist debate in *poetry* “needs to be reconsidered for the ways in which a materialist-critical practice disappeared” (235). I propose that such a disappearance can be very fruitfully discussed by studying a similar disappearance—that of a unified discussion of how Canadian prose fits into “the modernist tradition”: A tradition that responds to the high anglomodernism of Eliot, Pound, Joyce; a tradition that develops its own particular style that parallels, but differs

from, the post-war modernist literature in America. My dissertation will track what I see as a complex yet unified aesthetics of Canadian modernist prose between 1930 and 1960 that I call “late modernism” not as much because of particular dates in time (which can be rather restrictive and non-representative of the complexities of literary influence and production) but rather because of a particular *chronology*: this is a modernism that responds directly to the historical, cultural, and artistic developments originating in the European and English fin-de-siècle movements and into the productive between-the-wars period. More specifically, it is also a modernism that, while highly influenced by high anglomodernism, is also responding to artistic movements, schools, and innovations from the continent in a way that anglomodernism, by virtue of its need to assert its own sense of itself, did not have the opportunity to avail itself of. I suggest that Canadian modernist prose is unique from that produced in England and America by virtue of Canada’s ties to Europe. Canadian literature of the twentieth century is in dire need of reevaluation and I will perform such a reevaluation by discussing modernism in a way that separates the overarching concept of “modernism” as a solely angloamerican modernism and instead fracture this concept in a way that aligns angloamerican modernism alongside other manifestations of modernism such as Italian Futurism, French Surrealism, and German Expressionism. Such a differentiation is necessary to adequately examine the ways in which all of these movements reverberate throughout our prose works. So, when Donna Palmateer Pennee asks “what it might mean for Canadian literature to be part of ‘the modernist tradition’” I intend to include “T.S. Eliot’s high anglomodernism” alongside other manifestations of this tradition in order to produce an accurate and revolutionary way of reading Canadian modernist prose.

Obviously, there are a number of narrative threads my project must first follow to lay the groundwork for a study of particular authors and works. My dissertation will

historicize two of these narratives: 1) The history of Canadian modernist literature as it has defined itself, as it has been anthologized, and how it has been interpreted (and recently re-interpreted) critically. Of note, I will chart how Canadian modernism came to be defined by the literary activity of our socialist poets, thereby creating a situation where Canadian modernism became synonymous with a social-critical perspective that ended up creating a literary lacuna into which an alarming amount of the literary output of the time fell into. I want to stress that just because this literature does not participate in the well-documented discussions of artistic and social engagement usually associated with our modernist poets does not mean that it is any less politically or socially engaged. Rather, I suggest that by taking up the “materialist-critical practice” Palmateer Pennee notes has disappeared we can read these works as very sophisticatedly engaging with their political, social, and cultural milieus. 2) The ways in which modernism has been defined and, of particular importance for my argument, how recent critical investigations have rejected the monolithic category of modernism in favour of seeing how multiple manifestations of modernisms have dialogically influenced one another throughout the early-to-mid twentieth century. It is this dialogical pattern that I see Canadian modernist prose emulating, thereby making it difficult, up until now, discuss in a unified way without also undertaking the difficult task of historicizing these dialogical exchanges. In this section I will clarify my use of the term “late modernism” as a category that I find most useful in the discussion of Canadian prose between 1930 and 1960. With these two narratives firmly established, my dissertation will then turn to particular authors and works that I see as unifying into a distinctly Canadian manifestation of modernism—one that, though separate from the ways in which Canadian modernism has up until now been defined, still very much speaks to that “cosmopolitan-nationalist debate” and adds to our understanding of our literature of the early-to-mid twentieth century and,

further, helps us to understand the overwhelming international successes of post 1960s Canadian literature.

Mr. Canadian Postmodernism himself Robert Kroetsch famously remarked the American literary journal *Boundary 2* in 1974 that “Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern.” This statement has been copied and pasted into countless arguments for, against, and indifferent to the topic of modernist Canadian literature and I would like here to take it up as a fitting introduction to the storied and always-changing analysis of modernism in Canada. I will begin by pointing out what was to me a surprising discovery when I read past Kroetsch’s famous assertion:

Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern. Morley Callahan went to Paris and met the modern writers; he, for Canada, experienced the real and symbolic encounter; he, heroically and successfully, resisted. The country that invented Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye did so by not ever being Modern. (1)

That Kroetsch invokes the figure of Morley Callahan to stand heroically as a defender against the modernist threat, and further uses Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye as figures whose names alone stand for what seems to be everything that is anti-modern clearly indicates the extent to which modernism was treated as a suspect, corrupting, and (particularly in the Canadian context) feminine and decadent. Canadian literature, virile, masculine, and comfortable in its New Critical and post structural innovations, was seen in the 60s and 70s as finally coming into its own as capable of producing an international powerhouse of critics and writers. This wave of nationalism, spurred on in great part by governmental injections of grants into the arts coinciding with the 1967 Centennial and

resultant trumpeting calls for clear articulations of “Canadianness” did a great deal of damage to literature written in the early-to-mid twentieth century that did not fit into these new definitions. The modernist Canadian prose writers who resisted the impulse towards formal abstraction characteristic of Anglo highmodernism in favour of a social-realist style that looked more like Dickens than Joyce—writers like Morley Callahan and Hugh McLennan—stayed in print and on reading lists in high schools and fledgling Canadian literature undergraduate courses. The prose writers whose work *did* take on aesthetics of high modernists but whose sweeping visions spoke of landscapes that broke past boundaries of nationhood into either an international landscape (as we see in Malcolm Lowry, for example) or an oddly-non-national one (as Sheila Watson’s seminal modernist novel *The Double Hook* has often been characterized) that moved beyond the limits of the high modernists were narrativised as individual works of genius instead of as part of a particularly Canadian modernist tradition or school and precursors to the comfortable and superior postmodernism Canadians were so skillfully producing.

In poetry, the modernist writers who continued to be anthologized and taught were the self-same writers and their followers who edited the anthologies and designed the new Canadian literature courses. The resultant image of modernist literature in Canada, then, was, up until the late 80s brought about reevaluations of this literature, a very specific and very skewed one. The dominant narratives can be reduced to a parallel and infamous anecdote about Morley Callahan: his punching out Ernest Hemingway in a boxing ring in Paris—heroically resisting even the masculinist decadence of a giant of modernism. This story, however, is retold in John Glassco’s *Memoirs of Montparnasse* in passing, a description that characterizes Callahan as a dull, albeit productive, writer of little imagination or charm. Glassco’s book, published in 1970 partly as a reaction to Glassco’s memoir of his time

among the “Lost Generation” in Paris, provides an alternative view of the Canadian encounters, “real and symbolic” with the hub of modernism and stands as a testament to the writers who chose *not* to resist its influence. Glassco’s oeuvre (discussed in chapter one of my dissertation) demonstrates a sophisticated interaction with modernist aesthetics—particularly his indebtedness to the late-nineteenth-century decadents in France. Glassco is one example of the many Canadian writers whose experiments with modernist literature reveal a great deal about the Canadian experience, even though what it may reveal does not align with the cleanly deconstructed hetero-masculinist lines drawn in the sand between “Canadian” and “not Canadian.” Therefore, let us go back and examine the writers and works that were produced, read, and discussed throughout the first half of the twentieth-century while simultaneously examining how critics have, since the late 1980s, reevaluated and renarrativized modernism and its place in Canadian literature.

Turning back to Kroetsch’s quip, it is interesting to me that he invokes Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan as figures that stand out as representative of a postmodernism in a way that *needs no further elaboration* is fascinating to me. I argue, as others have before me, that both of these critics can be read as embodying a transition between modernist and postmodernist modes of thought. Steeped as they both are in the criticism and philosophies that come directly from the high modernists, their critical work is deeply entrenched in a modernist way of looking at the world. Their influence has established itself firmly within postmodernist circles, however, I read them as exemplary figures of late modernism, and their work stands testament to the modes of thought that coincide with my authors and serves to bolster the period of late modernism, as I am reading it, as a valid literary category in Canadian literature.

Between the end of World War II and the Canadian Centennial Canada experienced a surge of nationalism born from a newfound sense of international respect (Berland 16). With this boost in national pride came a sense of anxiety that Canadian creative and intellectual life did not align in quantity or quality with other nations. This, combined with extreme anxiety over the continuing influence of American culture, resulted in the appointment of The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences by an Order in Council in 1949. Chaired by Vincent Massey, then chancellor of the University of Toronto, the Massey Commission lasted from 1949 to 1951 and issued what would become known as the *Massey Report* in 1951. The *Report* confirmed that artists in Canada were struggling. It cited “vast distances, a scattered population, [and] Canada’s youth as a nation” as some of the factors that contributed to this struggle (Kallmann, n. pag.). Recommending a system of national patronage of the arts, the *Report* led to the 1957 establishment of The Canada Council, an agency that administered public funding to the arts. The establishment of state funding was a political decision that furthered Canada from American cultural policy and more closely aligned the nation with English and European models.

The *Report’s* findings on the state of literary culture reveals much about the sense of anxiety over the lack of a national literature – a sense that extended to French Canadian letters as well. For example, the study cites E.A. McCourt’s report in which he reveals “[t]he unpalatable truth [...] that today in Canada there exists no body of creative writing which reflects adequately, or with more than limited insight, the nature of the Canadian people and the historic forces which have made them what they are” (222). That is, not only does McCourt stress that there is no strong national literature, he believes there is not even anything close to “adequate” in the country. The lack of a national literature is repeatedly

cited in the *Report* as reflecting negatively on Canada in an international field. René Garneau, for example, asserts that “literature cannot be considered as the genuine voice of a nation until this literature is accepted as a credible witness by other nations” and that it is “[o]nly therefore when literature is related to man’s universal experience [...] can it properly be called national” (223). A national literature, then, must both portray “the nature of the Canadian people and the historic forces which have made them what they are” and express something about “man’s universal experience” – a reiteration, as Dean Irvine points out, of the native-cosmopolitan debate that has been so formidable in theorizations of Canadian modernist literature in the 1940s (Irvine, *Editing* 222). The *Report* stresses that Canada’s newfound economic and political “maturity” has not been followed by an “intellectual maturity” and that “as a cultured nation exploring the human mind and soul she ranks low” on an international stage (224).

Jody Berland identifies a fascinating paradox within this mid-century nationalist push: while Canada was seeking to solidify a nationalist voice through the arts in a way that followed a European model, Europeans were distancing themselves from such fervent nationalism following the war. While Canadians “had no national tradition weighing on them like the nightmare of the living,” “the war created a very different response in Europe, where there was a widespread retreat from nationalist politics and a move towards articulating new ideas of the social” (16-17). Berland characterizes the Massey *Report*’s “distaste for mass culture” and “concern for the viability of a more elevated Canadian culture” as qualities now recognized as troubling for what they implicitly leave out. The “paradox of nationalist modernism” that Berland identifies for Canadian art is a complex one: if modernism is universally understood to represent a rejection of tradition, and if Canada was, postwar, generally concerned with the establishment of tradition, where does that leave us? She notes:

In its proponents' haste to define and police aesthetic standards and practices (imported, if necessary, from Europe or New York), the art world betrayed the emergent practices that might have led to local and indigenous 'changes of purpose.' What might such changes be, and how might they have differently constituted the country's artists, citizens, and cultural consumers? Where are the artistic responses that were not taken up? (24).

I suggest that the works addressed herein take up Berland's challenge to identify what an alternative expression of postwar modernism in Canada looks like. Although I argue that these writers use the imported Anglo-American and Continental "aesthetic standards and practices" of high modernism, they do so in a way that expresses an "emergent practice" that would eventually be integrated into the Canadian literary tradition. The use of and play with metafiction within prose is a way through which these writers negotiate the multiple paradoxes of modernism. By integrating subjective material into fiction that uses a certain set of aesthetic codes associated with modernism, these authors at once validate the Canadian voice within the movement and push the boundaries of modernist practice by challenging the subjective/objective divide that is integral to artistic production and criticism of modernism.

Literary criticism in Canada dismissed Canadian modernist prose for decades as offering neither anything of lasting value to the nation nor belonging in any significant way to the chronology of Canadian literary development. W.J. Keith in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (1983), for example, remarks that fiction written between 1940 and 1960 "shows few signs of forming a coherent literary pattern." He sees "no sense of a national movement, of predominant themes and approaches, of an accepted novelistic technique, or even of a concerted attempt to express Canadian or mid-twentieth-century consciousness"

(573). Reiterating this common belief is Robert Kroetsch's infamous quip in 1974 that "Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern" (1). George Woodcock's *Introduction to Canadian Literature* (1993) argues that modernists prioritize "aesthetic values" over political, moral, or social affiliations; he catalogues these values as follows: "their close concern for the texture of prose; [...] their quasi-Imagist awareness of the revealing detail; in their interest [...] in verbal experimentation and their desire to 'make it new'" and most of all, "their freedom of commitment to extraliterary bonds and preconceptions, their clear-eyed openness to experience" (101). Woodcock sees a schism, therefore, between works that attempt aesthetic innovation and experimentation, which relegate themselves to an ahistorical or even anti-social perspective, and works that stay in the realist mode, which tie them intimately to issues of nationality and identity in Canada. Such a division is characteristic of how many critics of modernism, whether Canadian, American, British, or continental react when they come across what Eysteinnsson calls "a central paradox of modernist studies" (16).

Colin Hill's dissertation "The Modern-Realist Movement in English-Canadian Fiction, 1919-1950" identifies the category of "modern-realist" fiction as a way of explaining the tendency for Canadian prose of the period to correlate certain narrative techniques dominant within Anglo-American modernism with formal elements typically identified with realism. He identifies a lack of criticism of prose at this time and further argues that what criticism *does* exist either critiques the prose for replicating "foreign literary modes and methods" or shunning these "foreign" elements entirely (1). According to Hill, the most "serious" work written during these years is modern realist. He identifies a number of novels, including Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, as exemplary of "accomplished and distinguished modern novels" that do not fit in his category (3). Further, he singles out

Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* and Sheila Watson's *Deep Hollow Creek* and *The Double Hook* as some of the "few indisputably modernist novels produced in Canada" (14). While I find useful Hill's identification of the subtleties that lay within the fiction of the time, I disagree that works such as these "seem few and far between in Canadian fiction, and do seem to appear sporadically and independently, with little connection to a larger national or international movement" (15). Rather, I contend, though not part of a movement united by the direct meeting of authorial minds as we see in the poetic communities of the time, the authors studied herein are indeed connected by a shared response to both particular national and international moments—moments instead of movements.

Glenn Willmott's *Unreal Country: Modernity in the Canadian Novel in English* (2002) argues that, because of the youth of the nation, Canadian urban centres did not develop an "artistic elite" and that, consequently, popular literary genres became the "most appropriate media of new, collective and artistic self-reflection" (8). He identifies the two dominant types of writing in Canadian literature as realism and romance and that, unlike the "break" that occurred in Anglo-American modernism – where these modes gave over to a new ones – the "break" that occurred in Canadian literature did so *within* each mode, and that the aesthetic experimentation typical of Anglo-American modernism was achieved within these modes in a way that is "self-fractured, radically incomplete, and experimental in the best modernist tradition" (6). From this perspective, Willmott sees the same aesthetic innovations that occurred in Anglo-American modernism also occurring in Canada, but within the modes of realist and romantic literature. Further, he suggests that the same "radical approach to form" is present in the "disfigurement of existing forms" as in the Anglo-American formation of modernism as a new mode (8). Within this figuration, Canadian modernist literature

“create[s],” rather than addresses, the “reader of a modernist text” (8). Therefore, the types of aesthetic innovations happening in Canadian literature are, for Willmott, just as radical as those occurring elsewhere, and through the modes of realism and romance, train Canadian readers to read in modernist ways. The works that Willmott analyzes are embedded within either the tradition of realism or romance and each is written in the early to mid-twentieth century. In many ways, my study picks up where Willmott’s leaves off: the works studied here represent a photographic negative of those in *Unreal Country*. These kinds of works prioritize Willmott’s third type of narrative mode, modernism, which for him “lies obscured behind these inverted shells of romance and realism” (5). Instead of lying obscured behind these modes, however, these works assert modernism as their primary mode – one that does not completely abandon the narrative conventions of realism or romance, but one that is self-assured enough to speak to an audience without the need to train them in reading strategies. If by mid-century such an audience has already been “trained” to read modernism through the other two modes, the question must be asked why these works were overwhelmingly (with the exception of *The Double Hook* and *Under the Volcano*) not appreciated or widely read as popular fiction in their own time. Although readers had become acclimatized by mid-century to the inclusion of modernist narrative and stylistic elements in predominantly realist prose, they never accepted Canadian fiction that that worked with avant-garde aesthetics. These works were being written: some are works by authors whom Willmott does not discuss and some are lesser-known works by authors he does examine, and some are works that he locates within realist and romantic modes but fall more fittingly, I argue, within a late-modernist mode.

Willmott identifies the Massey Commission as an event that “prepared the way for high-cultural and counter-cultural movements” (8). I suggest that this mid-century shift was

not one that “prepared the way” for artists or movements but for an accepting audience. It led, for example, to McClelland and Stewart’s inclusion of *The Double Hook* in the New Canadian Library and its canonization as part of the movement toward the institutionalization of the burgeoning field of Canadian literature.⁵ It led to the country’s adoption of Malcolm Lowry as a Canadian literary figure from the late 1950s onward, an embrace that came after the publication of *Under the Volcano* (1947), which, at first, received very little critical acclaim in Canada, much to Lowry’s chagrin. Finally, it led to the belated cult following for Smart’s *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945) (which was reissued as a paperback in the mid-1960s) as well as to the late-twentieth century adoption of John Glassco’s *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970) as an embodiment of the early modernist Canadian experience in 1920s Paris. The public and critical reception history of these texts highlight, as this dissertation will further investigate, the desire to recapture a lost modernist youth in Canadian literature. Wrapped up in the nationalist project of postwar and post-Massey Commission Canada is a reimagining of Canadian literature’s involvement within modernism as a transnational phenomenon. These works by Watson, Lowry, Smart, and Glassco were written in a late-modernist moment in which Canada responded to transnational modernisms and consequently expressed their mid-century, post-war concerns in a non-realist, aesthetically experimental mode that integrates autobiographical or metafictional subjectivity. However, it was not until after the Massey *Report* that modernism was formally recognized as the dominant mode of Canadian literature. The belatedness of this recognition is what led to these late-modernist works being studied as individual expressions of literary achievement and not as part of a broader movement.

⁵ Although published by McClelland and Stewart in 1959, *The Double Hook* was not included as part of the NCL until 1964.

Any argument that interrogates the turn toward metafiction or autobiography in late-modernist prose at mid-century must also account for developments within these fields of in Canadian literary criticism. In her introduction to *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions* (2005), Julie Rak provides an extensive historicization of the ways in which metafiction, autobiography, and biography have been theorized in Canadian criticism and surveys recent developments in the field of auto/biography—a category she mobilizes to contain “autobiography, biography, life writings, and other terms that have been coined to describe the representation of identity in non-fiction” (1). While her identification of the “non-fictional” may seem to exclude the writers that I have selected for study, there is a notable slipperiness in both Canadian and international auto/biography between fiction and non-fiction that goes beyond the examination of non-fictional prose as literature. In the Canadian context, Rak notes three main trends: the first is feminist autobiography, the second “a cluster of studies on canonized texts by literary authors” that focus primarily on Michael Ondaatje, Gabrielle Roy, John Glassco, and Susanna Moodie; and, last, “a much wider approach” that tackles texts that fall under a variety of categories of criticism “such as diaspora studies, postcolonial criticism, queer theory and criticism, or studies which highlight issues concerning people of colour” (7-8). Rak’s second category most directly applies to my study, particularly insofar as the way in which Canadian writers since the 1960s came to be associated with the concept of “biotext.” George Bowering invented this term “as a way of privileging literary form as the place where the writer of a specific poem or fiction finds him- or herself” (Saul 4). Joanne Saul’s *Writing the Roaming Subject: The Biotext in Canadian Literature* (2006) adopts Bowering’s category to account for texts that collapse the traditional generic divisions among fiction, poetry, and autobiography. For my purposes, the category of biotext is useful because it allows me to trace a trajectory that redefines the work of authors included

in this study in a tradition that has emerged as predominant in the study of contemporary Canadian literature. I suggest that the playfulness and self-awareness of these later postmodern writers can be found within the works that I gather under the category of late modernism. Although other early to mid-century Canadian writers such as Hugh MacLennan were writing texts that integrated their life's experiences in fictional works, I argue that Watson, Smart, and Lowry, and Glassco were doing so with a sophisticated self-awareness that anticipates the experiments of later writers.

Ultimately, the most productive way for this study to address the metafictional tendency in these works of fiction is by leaning away from biotext and auto/biography and towards their ultimate placement in a late-modernist mode. I do so, in part, by aligning my own study with David Williams's theorization of the *Künstlerroman* or artist-novel in modernist and postmodernist Canadian fiction in *Confessional Fictions: A Portrait of the Artist in the Canadian Novel* (1991). While Williams uses James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) as a seminal work in the genre, he insists that the artist-novel does not begin with the modernists but goes much farther back, singling out George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1885) as a key precursor written in the fin de siècle decadent mode. Moore's *Confessions*, it should be noted, was repeatedly cited by John Glassco as the inspiration for his *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. Indeed, it is the confluence of aestheticism and decadence that Williams (building on Brian Trehearne's 1989 study *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists*) deems a necessary precursor to any literary community that develops into modernism. While Trehearne, speaking specifically to poetics in Canada, argues that "in a country where no significant Aesthetic period had existed, one had to be created before Modernism could occur" (*Aestheticism* 314), Williams argues that the same could be said of Canadian novels. This is a bold statement, yet Williams provides only the example of Frederick Philip Grove

to support it. I strengthen his assertion, and by extension Trehearne's claim, then, with the addition of authors included in the present study as examples of those who created their own aestheticism in order to bring about their own modernisms. This is the case in the *Künstlerroman* precisely because the genre is keenly interested in the relationship among art, artifice, and aesthetics and the lived world; or, to put it another way, the connection between art and reality is at the core of the genre. As Williams notes, "[a]rt thus turns into the one and only reality as transient (and mundane) 'experience' is transmuted into the everliving portrait of the artist" (6). Ultimately, for Williams, what is at stake in the *Künstlerroman* is this interdependency between art and life. "The moral test of the author's aesthetic philosophy," he tells us, "ends in an admission of art's dependence on life; neither art nor the artist can ever be truly autonomous" (17). This belief in such an autonomy is, for Williams, "[t]he greatest single limitation of modernist aesthetics" (31). Each of the authors studied herein struggles within their fictions with an artist-figure narrator and narrative perspective in order to interrogate the interdependence, whether damning or emancipatory or somewhere in between, of life and art.

III. Late Modernism in Canada

This study takes up the multiple calls for reevaluations of modernism that have hailed from the so-called "new modernist studies" of the past fifteen years. I argue that the Canadian canon has been shaped through an assumption that the primary manifestation of early to mid-century Canadian prose has been social realist. Conversely, a more expansive definition of modernism informed by the field of new modernist studies broadens our considerations of material available to be designated as modernist. This includes material considered marginal to what Jameson calls the "properly modernist"—that is, material typically read as

postmodernist or proto-postmodernist, or material only loosely defined as Canadian because of the internationality of the author or the content. New modernist studies that has flourished since the late 1990s has seen an expansion of scholarly definitions of modernism in what Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz identify as “temporal, spatial, and vertical” dimensions. *Temporal* expands the historical period of modernism from the traditional 1890-1950 interval in a manner that reflects expansion in other fields (Mao and Walkowitz use the examples of “the long eighteenth century” and “the age of empire” [737]). *Spatial* expands the location of modernism far beyond the Anglo-American axis and in so doing reads modernism through theories of transnationalism and globalization. And *vertical* refers to the expansion of modernist literatures to include media accessed by a variety of audiences (newspapers, little magazines, films, pulp novels, etc.), or, in other words, material consumed by low- middle- and high-brow audiences. Each of these three expansions – temporal, spatial, and vertical – are reflected in my study.

A temporal expansion of Canadian modernism beyond the early to mid-century period accommodates the development of modernism outside of a specifically Anglo-American context. Susan Stanford Friedman argues that previous delineations of periodization “cut off the agencies of writers, artists, philosophers, and other cultural producers in the emergent postcolonial world just as their new modernities are being formed” (427). While Friedman is specifically addressing Caribbean, African, and Indian authors, I argue that Canada’s position as an emergent postcolonial nation necessitates a similar expansion of traditional temporal demarcations. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s *Geomodernisms* (2005) similarly calls for “break[ing] open” the category of modernism in order to foster “a locational approach to modernisms’ engagement with cultural and political discourses of global modernity” (3). Such an approach reveals “both unsuspected

‘modernist’ experiments in ‘marginal’ texts and unsuspected correlations between those texts and others that appear either more conventional or more postmodern” (3). My dissertation accomplishes both of these tasks by demonstrating modernist engagement in “marginal” and non-canonical texts *and* teasing out the modernist tendencies of texts considered postmodern. I aim to broaden, challenge, and complicate current popular and critical beliefs about modernist Canadian prose.

Each author in this study struggles with the embedded contradiction in modernist art between a desire to represent reality through the use of abstract, non-representational aesthetics (thereby breaking with tradition, creating new forms, and rebelling against conservative, bourgeois values), while also writing and publishing from within a nation formed through a political economy of capitalism (where the works of art are all already embedded and implicated in the same economy against which they purport to rebel). As I have noted, this contradiction is variously identified as a “modernist double bind” (Willmott), as “two modernities” (Calinescu), or a “central paradox” of modernism (Eysteinson). While not explicitly political, each of the texts examined herein manages a critique of its socio-political-cultural milieu by virtue of its negotiation of its own internal, structural contradictions that come about through the dialectics between form and content. It is the text’s working through of this dialectic that allows for what Adorno calls “truth-content”: a document of how things are and an impression of how things could be better. These works never fall into the utopianism that Jameson warns about due, in part, to the ways in which they evade the dangers of an elitist essentialism by integrating the personal perspective through an infusion of metafictional subjectivity. This turn is the result, I argue, of a late-modernist reaction against the charges of depersonalization that come primarily out of fears originating out of the rise of fascism and the avant-garde, non-representational

aesthetics associated with it. This integration of the author's lived experience results in a persistent meditation on the act of writing and the position of the writer within his or her cultural context. This particular mode of metafiction bridges a modernist adoption of the Romantic artist or genius figure found in works such as James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and a postmodernist iteration in which the identities of the narrator and author are so intertwined that the lines between them turn arbitrary. It is this embedded authorial subjectivity, I argue, that allows these works to successfully negotiate their own internal contradictions and, through this, produce significant critiques of the twentieth-century Canadian milieu. The chapters that follow trace a pattern of such subjectivity in late modernist works of Canadian prose.

While Sheila Watson's published oeuvre is made up of only two short novels and five short stories, the density and scope of these works has produced over a hundred articles that, over the past fifty years, have yet to exhaust the interpretive possibilities. My chapter uses Watson's PhD dissertation on Wyndham Lewis as the backbone of my analysis. I argue that Watson's intimate familiarity with German aesthetic theories of art, as they are filtered through her readings of Lewis's adoption of these theories, allows her to formulate an intricate analytic philosophy of art's relationship to its socio-cultural milieu. This philosophy, as understood through theorizations on the relationship between artistic form and content articulated in Alois Riegl's concept of *Kunstwollen*, or "the will to form," Konrad Fiedler's theorization of "form-language," and Lewis's understanding of "significant form," is evident in the evolution of her aesthetics from the 1930s to the 1960s. I read her early novel *Deep Hollow Creek* as explicitly concerned with the act of writing. While the main character obsesses over her ability to artistically capture the place of Deep Hollow Creek from the position of an outsider, the text performs a metafictional critique of such an artist-figure.

Though Watson composed *Deep Hollow Creek* in the 1930s it was not published until 1992. Instead, it was her pivotal work *The Double Hook* (1959) that is considered by many as “the first truly Modern Canadian novel” (Davey, “Sheila Watson” 822). I read *The Double Hook* as both an allegory of modernism’s journey through the twentieth century and a commentary on the place of the artist within a Canadian mid-century society. Both of these novels draw their material from Watson’s experiences as a teacher in the Cariboo region of British Columbia. Each novel provides a distinct configuration of autobiography and fiction: where one work is a metafictional critique of a writer struggling to accurately represent place and the other is an allegorical re-telling of a search for a morally responsible aesthetic voice. This shift, I argue, demonstrates a sophisticated negotiation of form and content that allows Watson to address her socio-cultural milieu. This chapter ends with an interrogation of the ways in which Watson in general and *The Double Hook* in particular have been singled out as standing for a Canadian expression of modernism that rarely aligns her within a cohesive modernist tradition within Canada and instead aligns her with a transnational modernism. I argue that she is an early example of Canada’s anxieties about a failure to recognize avant-garde, non-realist works as part of the Canadian canon. Further, the late publication of her early novel *Deep Hollow Creek* falls into the continual desire to recapture a “lost modernist origins” in Canadian literary reconstructions of the past in a way that evades criticism of an earlier disavowal of avant-garde aesthetics.

Like Sheila Watson, Elizabeth Smart is known primarily for a single text: *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945). While the novel drew little critical praise or attention from Canadian critics when first published, the text slowly garnered popular and critical attention and is now considered part of the Canadian literary canon, albeit as a singular work rather than part of a tradition of Canadian modernism. Smart’s non-realist

aesthetics are informed by French surrealism and the high modernists' adaptation of a Blakean romanticism that results in a rich intertextual execution of metaphoric and allegorical prose. My chapter reads this novel alongside her companion text *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals* (written between the end of World War II and its publication in 1978) and argues, counter to the literary-critical consensus, that Smart's text undertakes an unequivocal and biting critique of conservative Canadian literary values and social mores. In particular, *By Grand Central Station* addresses the different ways in which America and Canada responded to the horrors of World War II and the *Assumption* addresses the materiality of motherhood and the role of the working writer in post-war England. Both texts draw explicitly from Smart's personal life and, as a result, many critics have focused on her generic interplay with prose poetry, autobiography, and the novel-journal. Instead of reading Smart as an enigmatic and singular figure in Canadian literature who writes in between genres, I suggest that her late-modernist integration of avant-garde, non-realist aesthetics in the historical context of a transnational, mid-century culture results in works that offer a unique perspective on the mid-century Canadian scene that has heretofore been ignored or misread. This chapter ends with an examination of Smart's belated acceptance into the Canadian literary canon that coincides with the 1980 publication of the first Canadian edition *By Grand Central Station*. Smart actively participated in this reclamation and was heartened to receive the belated attention. The chapter ends by arguing that the recovery of Smart in the latter half of the twentieth century can be read as part of a nationalist project of retroactively acknowledging avant-garde work that had neither popular nor scholarly audiences in its day.

Malcolm Lowry, although not Canadian by birth, has long been claimed – although not unproblematically – as part of the Canadian literary canon. Born, raised, and educated in England, Lowry spent time at sea and travelled the world as a young. Although his time in

Mexico inspired what is not only his most memorable work but one of the best-known works of late modernism in *Under the Volcano*, it is the time spent living just outside of Vancouver that Canadian critics and readers cite as the basis for claiming him as a Canadian writer. My final chapter will first trace a line through Lowry's narratives that aligns him within a late-modernist use of autobiography as a structuring principle. Because any study of Lowry's complete oeuvre would overwhelm a project of this length, I have selected, for this chapter, a number of works that I consider the most representative of his meditation on autobiography and the role of the author. This will occur in three sections. The first section reads Lowry's early novel *Ultramarine* (1933) and novella *Lunar Caustic* (written in the 1930s and published in 1968)⁶ as initiating experiments with the integration of autobiographical material into fiction. These two early works demonstrate Lowry's struggles with a separation between autobiography and fiction by presenting main characters whose constant struggles for autonomy and self-knowledge lead them to unsuccessful and doomed fates. The second section reads Lowry's negotiation of the success and significance of *Under the Volcano* through *Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid* (1968), where his main character is posited as the author of the earlier work, and "Through the Panama" (1961), which pulls even further back when his main character is posited as the metafictional author of *Dark as the Grave*. This "boxes within boxes" construction allows Lowry to meditate extensively on the role of the author and the extent to which he holds himself responsible for providing personal experience for the material of his fiction. The third section takes a closer look at Lowry's short story "The Forest Path to the Spring" (1961) and argues that the constant struggle for autonomy by his artist characters has been resolved through the main character's

⁶ Though many of Lowry's works were published posthumously, he worked on the narratives for years (sometimes decades) and the evolution of his manuscript drafts is in itself a topic of much academic work. The Lowry chapter will offer a more detailed list of composition dates.

ultimate acceptance of his lack of control. This chapter concludes with an examination of the ways in which Lowry has been received in Canada throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. I argue that while the later popularity of Glassco, Watson, and Smart stems from a desire to reclaim a late modernist youth, Lowry stands in as an adopted modernist son. As such, his integration of avant-garde narrative form and socio-cultural commentary both stands in for a late-modernist ideal of such a mode and allows Canadian literature to claim, at least in part, a major modernist artist whose metafiction heralds the Canadian literary experimentation after 1960 found in novelists such as Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, and Robert Kroetsch.

My chapter on John Glassco reads his mid-century literary production of erotic fiction and translations in order to tease out his complex negotiation of authorial identity. His frequent use of pseudonyms in his erotic and fetish work moves from playful to strategic, and his choice of material to translate—from Aubrey Beardsley’s unfinished *Under the Hill*, to Saint Denys Garneau’s experimental French Canadian modernist poems and journals, to his invented translation of pornographer Hideki Okada’s *The Temple of Pederasty*—demonstrates a complicated shift in authorial identity as eroticist, translator, poet, and literary critic. This is further complicated with the 1970 publication of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*—a work that purports to have been primarily written in 1933 about his experiences in 1928 as an expatriate artist at the tail end of the “lost generation” in Paris but which was revealed after his death to have been written primarily in the late 1960s. It has since been discovered that Glassco not only invented events and meetings with prominent literary and artistic figures, but he also inserted his own writings (sometimes literary criticism that had been previously published in magazines) into their mouths. A comparison with the draft manuscript also reveals that Glassco effaced much of the material that would have revealed

his homosexual experiences during this time – a disappearance that critics have argued says as much about the nation’s attitudes toward queerness as to Glassco’s own comfort with his own sexuality. The majority of scholarship centres on the tensions between gender and genre in his work. While acknowledging this invaluable work, my chapter focuses more specifically on the ways in which these texts are indebted to both a pre-twentieth century continental modernism and to high modernism’s responses to English romanticism. This chapter reads Glassco’s retrospective critique of modernism, his integration of (auto)biographical material, and his play with authorial identity under the rubric of late modernism. Further, I argue that through a negotiation of form and content – a working through of the text’s internal contradictions – Glassco’s works perform both implicit and explicit critiques of twentieth-century Canadian society, particularly attitudes towards art and gender. This chapter ends with a reading of the ways in which Glassco has been characterized within Canadian letters since mid-century. I argue that his shrewd publication of *Memoirs of Montparnasse* at a time of Canadian nationalism resulted in a feverish embrace of Glassco as a figure of Canada’s “lost modernist origins” that allowing him to gain the public and critical acceptance he coveted his entire writing career.

My conclusion considers whether works that have traditionally been identified as early manifestations of postmodernism in Canada can be read as embodying characteristics of late modernism. Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers* (1966), for example, has often been hailed as the first work of postmodernism in Canadian literature. This categorization can be challenged when it is read alongside the works examined in my dissertation. These concluding remarks round out my study of late modernism by performing a reevaluation of early works of postmodernism in Canadian literature.

CHAPTER TWO
SHEILA WATSON'S ALLEGORIES OF MODERNISM

The artist, [Wyndham] Lewis thought, must constantly strive 'to ENRICH abstraction till it is almost plain life, or rather to get deeply immersed in material life to experience the shaping power amongst its vibrations, and to accentuate and perpetuate these'

—Sheila Watson, *Wyndham Lewis and Expressionism* (31-32)

Sheila Watson's significance to Canadian literature and literary modernism in Canada has been discussed at length by some of the country's most lucid and astute critics. While there are reams of criticism already dedicated to her, most of it concerns her best-known novel *The Double Hook* (1959) and much less is dedicated to the earlier-written but later-published *Deep Hollow Creek* (1992) or to her short fiction. Still fewer critical works address Watson's theoretical writings: although the majority of these focus on the same handful of interviews and short statements of intent, they overwhelmingly agree about the importance of her PhD thesis, "Wyndham Lewis and Expressionism." Angela Bowering notes, for example, that Watson's "reading of Lewis's art provides [her] readers with the instruction that is needed for reading her own" (3). Of Watson's many critics, however, only Sherrill Grace spends any substantial time examining the thesis. Even then, Grace's analysis offers only an *initial* connection between Watson's understanding of Lewis and expressionism and Watson's writing. With this in mind, this chapter will take Watson's critical voice as a starting point in an examination of her fiction. While *The Double Hook* has an important role in this chapter, *Deep Hollow Creek* will be studied alongside it in order to broaden our understanding of

Watson's modernist inheritances, her innovations, as well as her relationship with and influence on an emergent postmodernism in Canadian literature produced after 1959.

The overarching goal of this chapter is to set up a reading of Watson that contextualizes her work within a field of her own writing: reading Watson *through* Watson. It aims for a comprehensive movement into her oeuvre in a way that has not yet been attempted. Writing of Watson's dissertation, Grace notes that "unlike most other Lewis scholars, [she] sees his total *oeuvre* as a consistent system, instead of incoherent, conflicting fragments, that reveals itself most closely when Lewis is viewed within the context of Expressionism" (*Regression* 188). It is possible to construct a "consistent system" by examining Watson's oeuvre and that such a system is capable of uniting differing elements of Watson's writings – writings that at times seem conflicting. By shifting focus away from her individual works *as such* and towards an understanding of her body of work, this study moves away from reading Watson as a singular genius and towards reading her as an artist working within a literary community. This theorization will demonstrate that Watson's understanding of Anglo-American and continental modernisms, and German expressionism in particular, combined with her engagement with McLuhan's cultural theories, positions her as a writer uniquely poised between modernist and postmodernist sensibilities. Where she is modernist in terms of her use of myth, her conservatism, her concern with ethics, and her use of repetition, fragmentation, and cyclicity, her writings also embody a postmodernist acceptance of simultaneity as offering possibilities for the denial of easy closure. In other words, Watson is a prime example of late modernism in Canada. Her particular blending of formal aesthetics and narrative play suggests that her concerns move far beyond pure aesthetics and demonstrates an intricate engagement with her own historical paradigm.

Watson's oeuvre, when read chronologically, shifts from a hesitant engagement with modernist aesthetics to a confident mastery of them. Primarily, when reading her two novels, this manifests in a shift in narratological style. While *Deep Hollow Creek* has a hierarchically organized perspective of narrator and primary focalizer (in this case, Stella, a thinly veiled biographical sketch of Watson herself), *The Double Hook* embeds the narrator within a carnivalesque shifting of focalizers. This chapter argues that Watson's understanding of art's relationship to its socio-cultural milieu is demonstrated by her application of German aesthetic philosophies in her dissertation on Lewis.

Watson's two novels focus on a small community of people in the British Columbian interior – an area where Watson spent two years working as a schoolteacher. The earlier text is more dependent on traditional techniques of realism and thereby undertakes a careful, painful metafictional struggle with the ethics of portraying a particular place – and only eventually solving this problem by having the main character, who has herself struggled as an author throughout, to realize her own fictionality. The later novel abandons traditional narrative realism and in so doing “kills the schoolteacher” (Flahiff 56). That is, Watson eliminates the need for the intrusive, almost ethnographic outsider narrative perspective that she thought hampered her first novel. This is not to say, however, that *The Double Hook* abandons the autobiographical. Rather, by virtue of its innovative narrative construction, Watson creates in her character James a doubled foil: his journey can be read both as an allegory of modernism's relationship between aesthetics and social responsibility and also as a representation of her own journey as a writer that moves from the aesthetics of high to late modernism. Both of these journeys are constructed through James's Bergsonian trajectory of coming into free will.

This chapter ends with an interrogation of the ways that Watson and *The Double Hook* have been singled out as standing for a Canadian expression of modernism that aligns with transnational modernism. She is an early example of Canada's anxieties about a failure to recognize avant-garde, non-realist works as part of the Canadian canon. Further, the 1992 publication of her novel from the 1930s exemplifies the enduring desire to recapture a "lost modernist origins" within the Canadian literary scene.

I. Critical work

Watson completed a BA in English at the University of British Columbia in 1931, an Academic Teaching Certificate in 1932, and an MA in 1933. She did not return to higher education until 1957, when she began her doctorate at the University of Toronto and worked with Marshall McLuhan on her dissertation until its completion in 1965. The structure of the thesis is clearly influenced by McLuhan's interest in montage, fragmentation, and narrative "mosaic" construction. These formal elements in her critical writing can be read against the formal experimentation present in all of her fiction. A reading of Watson's dissertation illuminates the interests at the centre of her creative writing: Lewis's place as an early innovator in Anglo-American modernism, his participation in Vorticism, his blending of fiction, theory, and visual art, and the Germanic roots of his own theorizations are critical influences on Watson's understanding of the relationship between art and life. I turn to her dissertation because the seriousness with which Watson treats the relationship between art and the lived world, and her belief that it is the responsibility of the artist to honour both of those elements. This, I contend, informs all of her writing, and demands a rereading of her

small but complex oeuvre through such a lens—an exercise that has yet to be conducted and which I will undertake in this chapter.⁷

Very little critical work has been done on the thesis; at most, it is mentioned in passing. The exception to this, as mentioned above, is Grace’s chapter “Sheila Watson and the ‘Double Hook’ of Expressive Abstraction” from her 1989 book *Regression and Apocalypse: Studies in North American Literary Expressionism*. The thesis is of particular use to Grace’s reading of *The Double Hook* because it demonstrates Watson’s familiarity with the history of Expressionism’s development into “a seminal modernist aesthetic and style” (*Regression* 188). In particular it is how Watson traces Expressionism’s “transform[ation] from an active, creative, revolutionary impulse into a new dogmatism pronounced (and criticized) by a chorus of ‘official’ voices and vested interests” (189). Such a transformation within the specific field of German Expressionism is likewise present in Anglo-American high modernism. Where at first we see a “revolutionary impulse” in the application of non-realist aesthetics to express or represent the particularities of living in a rapidly changing moment of modernity, once those aesthetic principles became solidified into practice they themselves stand in as representative not only of a particular way of viewing the world but also an overtly politicized one (albeit one sometimes criticized for its *lack* of political commitment). Watson’s familiarity with this shift positions her ideally as a critic of modernism within Canadian literature. Because Canada had no artistic “revolutionary” moment of its own to create a shift into non-realist aesthetics, such aesthetics never solidified into practice. As a result, there was no “central paradox” of modernism to contend with (Eysteinson 16). *The Double Hook* embeds and interiorizes both the shift into such aesthetics and the negotiation of the paradox within a specifically Canadian context.

⁷ A reading of Watson’s short fiction demonstrates that such concerns run throughout her creative works. For the sake of brevity such analyses have been omitted from this chapter.

McLuhan's influence upon Watson's thesis is visible to anyone familiar with his style: each of the two parts is separated into sections. Part One, "The Visual Revolution: Inner Necessity and Significant Form" into sixteen and Part Two, "Icon Recognition: Configurations in the Flux" into twenty-two. Each section begins with a title, set in capital letters, describing the thesis of the following text. The titles, referred to by Watson and McLuhan as "headlines," (Flahiff n. pag.) reverberate with McLuhan's interest in textual play and his theorizations of mass media in *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) and later in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). At times, Watson's headlines extend into passages over one hundred words long. The structure of each section parallels Lewis's vortex: the headline a concentration of the energy of each section which then whorls into an elaboration of the thesis. These sections are spaced closely together at the beginning of the book, with only a handful of pages in between each, and offer concentrated analyses of Lewis's critical and artistic origins. The first reads, "BY ALL HIS NATURAL INSTINCTS, LEWIS SAID, HE WAS A MAN OF THE *TABULA RASA* IN BOTH ART AND POLITICS" (3). Watson builds her study of the man from the position of paradox: writing onto the blank slate. As the book progresses the sections increase in length and grow more complex. This structure allows Watson's argument to develop in complexity while gradually gathering a myriad of threads from the history of aesthetic theory in general to Lewis's influence from the Germans more particularly.

I will limit my study of the thesis to the moments when I see Watson's reading of Lewis as offering a way to read her own philosophy of art. One of these moments occurs in part three of the first section, which explores Lewis's knowledge of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century German aesthetic theory. Watson spends considerable time analyzing Lewis's reading of Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1907). This meditation,

which Grace also focuses on, is the key to the thesis as a whole. Watson's own aesthetic theories and practice can be read as responses to Worringer. *Abstraction and Empathy*, Worringer's doctoral thesis, was of great influence to modernist artists such as Lewis, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky and theorists such as T.E. Hulme and Joseph Frank. Worringer argues that all art falls into one of two main categories: "abstraction" or "empathy." His argument stems from Alois Riegl's concept of *Kunstwollen* ("will to form"), which dictates that the evolution of aesthetics in art does not necessitate a trajectory towards technical skill that results in a more exact realism or naturalism. Rather, the "will to form" of certain cultures and periods through history tends not towards mimetic reproduction of reality but rather toward what Worringer identifies as "abstraction" or non-realist aesthetics. He identifies this type of art as manifesting primarily in times of social and cultural upheaval. The opposite of abstraction is, for Worringer, "empathy," occurring during periods of cultural tranquility, where the desire of the artist is to accurately represent the natural world. Thus he suggests that a traditional aesthetic discourse which views Greek art as "classical" and Egyptian as "primitive" imposes a value judgment that is dependent on the work of art's affinity with mimetic representation. Worringer's system (through Riegl) classifies Greek art as "empathetic" and Egyptian art as "abstract" – eliminating the need for a hierarchical alignment of technical skill with the value of the *Kunstwollen*. Watson describes Lewis's influence from Worringer as coming directly from his affinity with Hulme. She goes to great ends to prove this connection, concluding that there was no doubt that Lewis "was critically aware of the formalist movement on the continent and of the works of the German artists who were creating a new style in an atmosphere in which a re-examination of ways of seeing had become a problem of intense concern" (*Wyndham Lewis* 17). This point demonstrates that Watson herself is "critically aware" of this formalist movement and her interest in it

shows itself repeatedly through her critical work. F.T. Flahiff's biography shows us that Watson, while writing her fiction prior to working on this thesis, was a voracious reader of continental aesthetic theory. The continued emphasis on German philosophies of narrative form in her critical work signals the value of reading of her fiction through such theories. Watson's reading of Lewis's particular version of Expressionism, I argue, reflects her own notion of Expressionism. At times her descriptions of his work could easily be transposed onto her own works. Take, for example, a description of *The Enemy of the Stars*, which she distinguishes from "some early Expressionist drama": "The action is catastrophic. The masks are rigid. The bodies are epileptic machines. The dialogue is not always distributed, but hands between the protagonist and the super like words in search of their utterer" (20). This description could be transposed onto a reading of *The Double Hook*, which demonstrates a shared set of aesthetic and narrative elements between the two writers.

Another key concept that Watson emphasizes in her thesis is "significant form." She notes that although typically attributed to Clive Bell, it was Konrad Fiedler who most fully realized the concept. Artistic expression comes from "the sensory-intellectual nature of man" and each different art form "has its own form-language"; that is, each art form "expresses only itself and the value of its work cannot depend upon what an extra-artistic interest reads into it" (41). The result of such impenetrability is that form and content are indistinguishable. Watson interrogates the ways in which the modernist artists (painters in particular) experimented with this form/content relationship: "Together with the emphasis on the absolute power of the image, its independence as expressive gesture, and its freedom from obligation to be other than itself, went a desire to free the image from association with a 'subject'" (44). She then goes on to describe the desire, in this period, for one art form to aspire to the condition or "significant form" of another. She notes Walter Pater's assertion

that “[a]ll art constantly aspires toward the condition of music” and Friedrich Schelling’s infamous description of architecture as “music in space” (41). It is Watson’s interrogation of writing’s tendency towards the “significant form” of painting, however, that holds the key to her use of the phrase as it relates to modernist writing in general and Lewis in particular. Explaining Lewis’s distancing of himself from the Impressionists, Watson notes that he was seeking something “more fluent,” which he found in an exhibition of German woodcuts: “It was not the illusion of acceleration or dynamic fragmentation that interested Lewis. In the woodcuts he saw ‘the black nervous fluid of existence; flowing into hard shapes in ‘a white luminous body’” (49). The key to Lewis, Watson goes on to note, is not that he desires a confluence of the written word with plastic form, but of the imagination with the object. To apply the concept of “significant form,” then, Watson expands Fielder’s argument that each art form has its own “form language” outside of the limitations of artistic genre to the world at large. She concludes that what Lewis ultimately wanted was “a new visual language which could compete with the ‘form language’ of the machine” (50). This broadening of “significant form” serves as a perfect example of how Lewis saw the world; that is, as not simply the *subject* (read content) of artistic expression but the *vessel* (read form). This description of Lewis’s artistic trajectory again closely echoes Watson’s aesthetic. Her obsession with “the expressive form of the object” develops throughout her oeuvre (49). Unlike Lewis, however, her attention does not lead her to mechanization of the inanimate world, but mechanization of the animate. Lewis’s figures become machine-men whose bodies are the vessels into which his abstract characters are formed. Watson achieves a similar effect by focusing on the natural mechanization of the human body. She aligns the human body within the biological and animal world and uses it as a vessel that shapes the movements of her characters. Therefore, a study of Watson’s work shifts from inner,

psychological struggles, to struggles as articulated by the human or animal body. I suggest we take Stella's "body" speech in *Deep Hollow Creek* and attribute it to her aesthetics in the same way that Joyce scholars use Stephen Daedalus' meditation on the epiphany to stand as a statement of intent for all his prose that follows. Stella here contemplates the failure of the mind and success of the body:

The mind has failed, failed with first-class honours, with second, failed in the departments of pure and applied science *cum laude*. I believe in the body, the creator of other bodies, and in the body's body conceived by the body, born of the body, and suffering under the body—the body crucified, the body dead, the body buried—the body rising in the grass and blossoming in the hedgerow. No ghost. No church. No communion except the communion of the body to protect the body against the body. The only ritual, the ritual of the horse, the mat, the vaulting pole. (Watson, *Deep* 58)

Stella praises the body and releases it from its ties to both the intellectual or rational mind and to its entanglements in religion and faith. Instead the body becomes only indebted and tied to the body both biologically (the literal and physical body) and as a concept ("the body's body conceived by the body"). The body here forms its own language and its only rituals are tied to feats of athletic prowess ("the horse, the mat, the vaulting pole").

A third critical moment in Watson's thesis that reflects upon her own writings is the opposition she sets up between Roger Fry's and Lewis's conceptions of artistic vision. For Fry, an eminent artist and critic who was part of the Bloomsbury group, the artist has a choice to either "*think* form like the early artists of the European race or merely *see* it like the Bushmen" (Fry, "Artist's" 54). Fry's seminal essay "The Artist's Vision" outlines four ways of seeing: 1) practical vision: biological function of seeing, 2) curiosity vision: seeing the

world as a child would, with “some passion,” 3) aesthetic vision: the vision of one who “indulge[s]” in “contemplat[ing] a work of art,” and 4) creative vision: an artist’s way of seeing the natural world wherein his “vision becomes distorted by the emphasis of the rhythm which has been set up within him” (54). For Fry the artist *deforms* the natural world through his own creative vision. Fry’s definition of “creative vision” results in a process he calls “significant deformity”; these artists find joy in the world of everyday objects because their particular *way of seeing* transforms this world. Fry prioritizes this way of seeing over the “aesthetic vision,” which is “indulgent” because it allows the viewer to passively absorb. For Fry, what gives each artist a particular way of seeing, of distorting, is something quite spiritual. The often-quoted statement that comes out of “The Artistic Vision” is that, for one who sees with “creative vision,” “the greatest object of art becomes of no more significance than any casual piece of matter; a man’s head is no more and no less important than a pumpkin” (51-52). Dehumanization such as this informs much of the backlash against high modernism. Watson’s own concerns with such claims place her solidly within the philosophies of late modernism.

Lewis, as Watson notes, is skeptical of Fry’s theories and refers to him as a critic and “dilettante” and to “The Artistic Vision” as “a very naughty piece of fun for the scholarly and fastidious art-critic” (68). What Lewis objects to most vehemently in Fry is his interpretation of Fielder’s *earlier* argument that form and content are indistinguishable. In *The Caliph’s Design* Lewis takes issue with the “pure visual” of Fry’s interchangeable pumpkin/head formula, claiming that Fry’s misreading of Fielder leaves out the significance that outside factors may have in shaping any work of art. He notes, as an example of such a misreading, that an interpretation of Cézanne’s “The Card Players” as “emotionally moved only by the form and colour, omits a great subconscious travail of the emotion which

fashioned along with the pure painter's sense" (qtd. in Watson, *Wyndham* 70). Watson aligns Lewis's understanding of the form/content divide with theorist Erwin Panofsky who, like Lewis, looks skeptically at "pseudo-impressionistic theory" that claims that form and colour are meant to be read as only concerned with form and colour. Panofsky defines content as "the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion—qualified by one personality and condensed in one work" (71). It is *this* definition of content that spoke to Lewis and is also significant to Watson's reading of Lewis. Content must, consciously or subconsciously, reflect the conditions of its production, regardless of the level of visual or narrative abstraction of the form. To read the abstract or "non-representational" as apolitical or ahistorical is, as Lewis and Watson emphasize, a misreading that strips the work of art of its full meaning.

Such concerns, for Lewis, are consistent through his artistic career. As a young man he announces in *Blast 2* (1915) that there is a tendency amongst his friends on the "Camden side of London" to use the word *realist* to mean "a man who scientifically registers the objects met in his everyday life" when, in Lewis's view, the term they should be using is *naturalist*. He describes a painter capturing a scene in Blackpool with the flatness and exactness of a camera: "the crudity of Time added to the spatial poorness of the Camera." He then outlines Futurism as an example of a movement that *does* capture realism in painting. Because Futurists "reject" both imitation and "the static 'Moment of Time,'" their work tends toward simultaneity – a way of seeing that Lewis considers as accurately *realist* in comparison with human vision. In Vorticism, simultaneity is a "reformed and imaginatively coordinated impression" wherein "the direct and hot impressions of life are mated with Abstraction" (Lewis qtd. in Watson, *Wyndham* 87). The *problem* of realism *within* modernism is repeatedly hashed out in the criticism of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Lewis's

distinction between the terms *naturalism* and *realism* is key to my understanding of how realism works in modernist literature, and in Canadian modernism in particular. Within such an understanding *naturalism* comes to stand for works that recreate with the fidelity of a photograph – specific point of view, clear sense of form, scene, character, adherence to linearity. *Realism*, conversely, comes to stand for work that recreates with the untrustworthy instrument of the human eye, the human sense, the human psyche – shifting or uncertainty of focalizers, fragmented, blurry, or contradictory sense of form, simultaneity of narratives or images (where myth and other intertextualities interweave), and non-linearity prevail.

Wyndham Lewis and Expressionism was not Watson's final word on Lewis. Between 1963 and 1974 Watson wrote six articles on Lewis that were then collected in a 1974 edition of *Open Letter* dedicated solely to her uncollected works. Reading these six articles together allows a pattern to emerge: certain moments from Lewis's oeuvre are repeated three, four, or sometimes five times. This emphasis, I argue, sheds light on moments in her thesis that may not immediately stand out as significant but, through this later repetition, are illuminated. These key passages point to problems of narrative that say something particular about Watson's own writings and her philosophy of art.

These articles highlight Lewis's repeated warnings that the way to deal with the skepticism he saw coming out of the war was with laughter. Not a "Bergsonian" laughter, "but something primitive, hard, and unchangeable" (Watson, "Canada" 94). Henri Bergson describes laughter as an automatic process that typifies his view of man as programmable ("something mechanical in something living"). He describes laughter as purely cerebral and tied to its function as "social gesture" (Bergson, *Laughter* 87-88). Lewis's laughter, conversely, falls back to a state before the social, to an animalistic response such as "the bark of delight of a gregarious animal at the proximity of its kind" (95). Watson picks up on the function of

laughter repeatedly in her work on Lewis, turning to his following passage from 1937's *Blasting and Bombardiering* five times:

I would not have you think that I am shut out from the sense of what is called by the Japanese “the Ah-ness of things”; the melancholy inherent in the animal life. But there is a Ho-ho-ness too. And against the background of their sempiternal Ah-ness it is possible, strictly in the foreground to proceed with a protracted comedy, which glitters against the darkness. (8)

In this passage Lewis identifies the animal condition of eternal “Ah-ness” as having an emotional counterpoint in “Ho-ho-ness”: an equally animal response that rebels against the ominous darkness. Both Lewis and Watson repeatedly focus on the connection between the animal nature of laughter: “There is nothing that is animal,” asserts Lewis, “that is not absurd” (qtd. in Watson, “Myth” 125). Lewis suggests that such laughter is a way to negotiate the horrors of war which, he suggests, typically cause people to step back, retreat to a scientific objectivity that is then mirrored in the adoption of the machine as dictating form (such as we see in the Futurists) and vision (such as we see in abstraction that does not envelop the human, that abstracts with only a mechanical eye – i.e., irresponsible abstraction). Where he once praised the Futurists, Lewis became suspicious of their techniques and, after World War I, claimed that abstraction is only socially responsible when it also includes a gesture back to the human, a movement that, for him, meant allowing the “Ah-ness” or “Ho-ho-ness” of *things* to infiltrate art.

What is the significance of this connection between Lewis's wariness about skepticism – one tied to a belief in scientific objectivity and the mechanization of vision – and his understanding of the types and functions of realism in art? For Lewis, any artist who uses techniques of abstraction is socially responsible to also include a gesture back to the

human. For him, this means a glance to the animalistic, pre-social state of mankind. Watson, I argue, was drawn to Lewis precisely because her works also combine non-realist aesthetics with the animalistic or pre-social. In *Deep Hollow Creek* this manifests in Stella's focus on the body and her slow movement away from social constructs and towards communion with nature. In *The Double Hook* it is the uncanny weaving of the human, animal, and spiritual that allows for a work that is at once abstract/non-realist and almost painfully human. Returning to the realism versus naturalism debate, which dates to his work prior to the war, we see Lewis praising the Futurists for their ability to go beyond the limits of a "naturalist" vision that seems to only imitate, that seeks as an aesthetic goal to reproduce the flatness of a camera's perspective. He admired the Futurists for being able to move outside an isolated moment in time to capture a dynamic fusion of time and space. He associates this with the Vorticists, who sought "the direct and hot impressions of life are mated with Abstraction" (qtd. in Watson, *Wyndham Lewis* 87). During the war, however, Lewis grew wary of "dogmatic abstraction, and of the dangers inherent in the expressionist doctrine which he had already explored" (Watson, "Canada" 82). Such dangers, he felt, as many late modernists felt between the wars, had to do with such a mechanized vision that curtailed the human perspective. Lewis often emphasized that scientific progress caused problems of vision because visual technologies, whether scientific (such as the microscope) or aesthetic (such as photography), caused a separation of the senses, and particularly of *vision* from the other senses. This switch in perspective is fascinating when read in conjunction with a review of his painting *A Canadian Gunpit* (1918) in the *New York Times Magazine*. The painting is said to "[mark] a return to something akin to realism, though by no means a complete surrender" (84) – a shift that epitomizes late modernism.

It is this same approach to “realism” in art that I see working throughout Watson’s creative work. Stylistically, her prose never falls into the obscure or the nonsensical; her narratives are never abstracted in a way that disentangles them from the recognizable. Like Lewis she is in favour of “complex structures” over “isolated elements,” and “inclusive” consciousness over “exclusive” (Watson, “A Question” 46-47). Like Lewis, she is drawn to an understanding of narrative that comes through Hulme and Worringer, to a philosophy that prioritizes the ties between the imagination and the object and to a sophisticated understanding of how form and content are indistinguishable from each other, where “the plastic” is never “impoverished for the idea” (Watson, “A Question” 47). Finally, Lewis’s fears that modern technology was creating a separation of vision from the other senses and a separation of perspective (narrative, artistic, human) from the primal or instinctive or animal, are fears that also reverberate through Watson’s works. Whereas Lewis eventually manages this conflation of machine-man-animal in the creation of his archetypal figures that choose to be either machine-man or animal-man, Watson’s characters are, I argue, more successful in their ability to embody both the archetypal and the human. That is, Lewis’s characters, much like the human figures he paints and draws throughout his post-World War I career, remain dynamic in form; they remain fixed in their archetypality, they seem resistant to or unable to change. Watson’s characters, however tied to mythic or literary archetypes, maintain a closer allegiance to the human than Lewis’s. Watson’s fidelity to the human in her fiction is most closely felt in works that are written from an autobiographical perspective. Watson’s writings that draw from her experiences are concerned with the moral, ethical, and social responsibility the author has to writing of a particular *place*. She shares Lewis’s fears of dehumanization in abstract aesthetics and compensates by integrating elements of both the “Ah-ness” and “Ho-ho-ness” of the animalistic or pre-social life.

II. *Deep Hollow Creek*

Watson's anxieties about *Deep Hollow Creek* are, as Fred Flahiff argues in *Always Someone to Kill the Doves* (2005), tied up with her concerns about the integration of fiction and autobiographical material. Though Watson kept diaries throughout her two-year stay in Dog Creek she did no creative writing while there. Rather, she "only felt and looked. [She] had nothing to say" (Flahiff 39). While in *The Double Hook* a parrot and a bartender named Paddy are the only material drawn from Watson's experiences of the town, *Deep Hollow Creek* contains many elements drawn from her life. These include Watson's choice to live by herself in a log cabin instead of the family she initially boarded with; her being gifted "the heart of a slaughtered steer"; the presence of a visiting friend who ends up both bartering for a "moose-hide jacket" and riding "at the head of a Native funeral procession"; and, perhaps most strikingly, a Labrador named Juno to whom Watson offered a match after she lit a cigarette – an event that led to Watson's departure from Dog Creek just as it leads to Stella's departure in *Deep Hollow Creek* (Flahiff 40).

It was not only autobiographical details of the novel that bothered Watson, but also references to contemporary events. These include a reference to the reading of the Riot Act in Vancouver during The Relief Camp Workers' Union strike in April 1935 and a dog named "Selassie" that references Mussolini's 1935 attack on Abyssinia that defeated the army of Haile Selassie (47). Despite these references, Watson asserted that the novel was not "a documentary" but "a book, a text, which emerges from the conditions of the times" (qtd. in Flahiff 47). As Watson often noted, in writing *The Double Hook* she sought to "kill the schoolteacher" – to eradicate the narrative perspective of the naïve young outsider who observes and passes judgment on a small, isolated, and conflicted community. After trying unsuccessfully to find a publisher for *Deep Hollow Creek*, Watson dropped the manuscript to

concentrate on short fiction and, eventually, the manuscript that would become *The Double Hook*, not returning to the earlier novel until late in life. Flahiff writes that Watson's attitude to the earlier novel softened as the years went on, noting that it contained "some good things" and eventually showing it to Sherrill Grace, Shirley Newman, and himself in the late 1980s (307). She was still trepidatious about the work but Flahiff insisted that she not destroy the typescript, which the two then edited and sent to McClelland and Stewart. Watson remained anxious about the book's publication, worrying that some might think that she was, late in life, "emptying out drawers in search of something publishable" (Flahiff 309).

While we read *Deep Hollow Creek* as a product of the 1930s, it is important to also read the novel as heavily influenced by editorial decisions made in the 1990s. Flahiff discusses Watson's insistence, for example, that the original spacing of the text be maintained. While McClelland and Stewart wanted the spacing regularized, she insisted on their importance of the spacing's "temporal," and "visual significance." This spacing was, she wrote, originally "intended to indicate a juxtaposition of space and time – montage in the problematic sense endlessly explored by Sergei Eisenstein and others in the late twenties and early thirties" (qtd. in Flahiff 310). The editorial decision to remain faithful to the aesthetic influences of the original manuscript speaks to Watson's early and longstanding engagement with continental philosophies of artistic production. As such, *Deep Hollow Creek* can, in effect, be read as a text that bookmarks her entire oeuvre. In what follows I read *Deep Hollow Creek* as a meditation on the ethical dilemma of writing about a specific place. I see the novel as structured by Stella's struggles to attain narrative control over her surroundings. Stella is not able to fully realize her authorial power and slowly comes to realize her own subordinate position as a character – a character, even, who inhabits a failed novel.

Critical response to the novel has been favourable, although there has been significantly less work published on the text than on *The Double Hook*. Both Glenn Willmott and Marlene Goldman have produced readings of this earlier novel that address the complexity of Watson's modernist narrative experimentations. Willmott reads *Deep Hollow Creek* as "on first approach less modernistic" than *The Double Hook*: "for here physical reduction at once presents itself so literally and so subtly, under the cover of realism, as to obscure its labyrinthine symbolic organization of the novel" ("Nature" 32). That is, while *The Double Hook*, by virtue of its structural elements, clearly falls into a modernist or avant-garde categorization, *Deep Hollow Creek* postures as a realist *künstlerroman* with avant-garde tendencies, much like Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952). However, Willmott clarifies that this is no simple *künstlerroman* when he identifies the "base sign of value, the original ideologeme of this text" as not a development of an artistic sensibility but, more elementally, "precisely a mere physical *being* indicated by nakedness [...] which finds its figuration in nature, the body, and particularly the native conditionality of place" (32). He sees Stella's physical body as this "original ideologeme" that marks the architecture of the novel. Stella's speech about the body (quoted above) is often read as metonymic of the novel as a whole. While Willmott notes that to read Stella's declaration apart from the text would suggest a "postmodern investment in 'the body' as a utopian site of values and desires" that exist separately from "dominant social ideologies" such as church and state, when read within the novel it stands as Stella's rejection of her inherited frames of reference. Instead, Stella orients herself to "some bare order in existence represented by the 'body'" (33). The body is here not a symbol of postmodernist reduction of identity down to the lowest common denominator of the individual, rather, Watson "invests the 'body' with values and logic resistant to the deconstructive order of a postmodernist aesthetic" by creating a body

that requires humility in the face of its ultimate failure, a quality Willmott identifies as “rather modernist” (33). Reading Stella’s investment in the body as a site of alternative allegiance that eventually leads her to an understanding of her body, and herself, as failed, also aligns with a reading of James Potter in *The Double Hook* as a modernist figure who must reconcile himself with a position of humility.

In this formulation, Stella’s rejection of her learned “dominant social ideologies” and investment in the body demonstrates a shift into a new, yet still highly constructed, regulated, and controlled system of values. Instead of rejecting such order and hierarchy, Stella’s shift in allegiance is a typically modernist one that rejects traditional fin-de-siècle values in favour of a system built on a mythology of the body – an order built on “Nature.” Willmott argues that this investment in “Nature” speaks to Stella’s struggles to reconcile her relationship to place, particularly in reference to the First Nations peoples. Willmott then reads Stella’s offering of the match at the end of the novel as representative of the body’s failure. Here, “[e]ven at the animal minimum,” the body requires contact beyond itself, requires “speech,” and “to listen and be listened to” (38). This “failure” in Stella and the independent body is, I argue, also a “failure” of Watson’s attempt at creating a narrator who does not speak through her own “dominant social ideologies” – who does not occupy her learned, inherited social positioning and therefore cannot speak of place without also failing to speak of it satisfyingly. Stella’s modernist failure is also Watson’s modernist failure. Further, I argue that such failure has been theorized as an essential characteristic of modernism.

Marlene Goldman’s article “Ethics, Spectres, and Formalism in Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook*” foregrounds Watson’s early concerns with the dangers of a narrative perspective that colonizes the local or Native elements within a specific landscape. Even

though this is the self-same concern that led Watson to abandon the text for over half a century, Goldman notes that “rather than stake a claim based on her ability to access the other, the narrator quietly insists on the Native people’s legitimate ownership of the land and its secrets, elements of cultural value” (197). Goldman here differentiates between the narrator’s and Stella’s differing narrative perspectives. While Stella spends the novel searching for a connection with “the other” (whether Native or not) in order to *write* “the other,” the narrator has no such desire. Here we encounter a tension within criticism that reflects tension in the text itself: while Stella spends the novel searching for a way to express artistically the community in her writing, she eventually comes to understand herself as a written subject. Although criticism of the text tends to conflate Stella’s narrative perspective with that of the narrator, I argue that this power struggle encompasses the major struggle of the novel.

Goldman uses an example from the end of the novel to demonstrate *Deep Hollow Creek*’s movement “beyond ‘recognition’” that runs through the text. Stella’s insistence on “respect and an awareness of difference” between herself and the First Nations people of the region extends “to what Bhabha terms ‘a poetics of identification,’ with the latter’s production of a spectral third” by the end of the novel (197). In a scene where Stella travels to a nearby reserve to inquire about hiring one of the women to help her with household chores after a fall from her horse leaves her injured, Stella encounters difficulty when trying to communicate. This “uncertainty about how to converse with the marginalized other is followed by an uncanny glimpse of a spectral coyote” (Goldman 198). Because this coyote is “both a real coyote and the Trickster god of the Shuswap, the text underscores the tricky and doubled poetics of identification – a process that entails what Bhabha terms the ambivalent splitting of the minoritarian subject” (198). That is, Goldman reads Watson’s text

as successfully encoding the troubling and contradictory encounter between the self and the “marginalized other” and, in so doing, sets the stage for *The Double Hook*’s ambiguity. Rather than read *Deep Hollow Creek* as a text that exploits a particular place by virtue of an alien and naïve narrator/narrative positioning, Goldman reads it as already encoding these concerns within – if not the structural level of language and diction – the characterization of Stella and her encounters with the First Nations people. Further, I argue that the tense relationship between Stella and the narrator enforces a troubling of her alien and privileged position as an observer/artist figure. Such a concern reflects Watson’s burgeoning late-modernist melding of high-modernist aesthetics and a commentary on the ethics of the treatment of First Nations peoples in Canada.

As *Deep Hollow Creek* begins, Stella arrives from the city to a small community in the Cariboo region to teach at a one-room schoolhouse. At the outset, Stella boards at the house of Bill and Rose Flower; as the narrative progresses we are introduced to the other members of the community and Stella quickly perceives the social hierarchies at work. Stella’s use of literary metaphors to describe her surroundings begins on the first page of the novel when she searches her memory for the ideal metaphor with which to describe life: “She could summon to witness Taylor’s rose, Browne’s flame, and Harvey’s microcosmic sun, the palpitating radiance of the life-streak seen with the naked eye in the egg of a barnyard fowl” (1). While these references at first all seem to suggest literary origins, only Taylor can be described as a poet.⁸ This first encounter with Stella’s internal narration demonstrates her self-construction as an archetypal modernist writer. Here she references three historical

⁸ Edward Taylor, a devotional poet, wrote of the rose as a metaphor for life in “The Reflexion.” Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), about whom Virginia Woolf wrote essays, was a man who combined meditations on medicine, religion and science, and who described life as “pure flame.” William Harvey (1578-1657) was a physician who mainly wrote of blood circulation and who used the sun as a rhetorical device to explain his theories.

figures by condensing their philosophies into imagistic figures of nature. This Lewisian technique of allusive obscurity and imagistic language repeats throughout Stella's internal narration and demonstrates her struggles with expression as she struggles with her writing the longer she remains in the valley.

Rose Flower's relationship with the landscape is a key contrapuntal emphasis in the first half of the novel. Watson sets up a contrast between the flatness and eerie emptiness of the land outside of the stopping house and scattered dwellings. Rose is repeatedly represented as having no interest in visiting any of the structures except for her own. The stopping house is described as the "centre" – a place where people "came from choice or necessity. Here came the proud and the meek. Here came everyone except Rose" (11). Directly before this passage, however, we are given a description of the valley, not clearly identified with either the narrator or Stella, in geological terms:

Round the valley the hills crowded. Rà'tlem the Shuswaps had called their village there; they were the people of the deep hollow. [...] In the valley all things moved to a point. The road ran into the creek both ways to the stopping house – though, if one stood on the hill where the water broke in the spring, one could see the road winding like a thread the whole length of the valley. No one stood on the hill. In the valley one spoke of the road running up or down, into or out of the centre. (10)

Here, then, we are offered a different perspective on the concept of the "centre" of life in the valley. From within the valley the centre falls, as is later described, at the stopping house, where "all things move towards a point," streaming down the hill (thus running "into the road" and to the stopping house on both sides, like a funnel). If one were to see the valley from the "hill," however, the perspective would shift and one would see that the stream in

fact runs *along* the valley (and not, as it seems, *into* it), thereby shifting what one would consider the “centre.” This is significant in our discussion of Rose because, although “[no] one stood on the hill,” the narrative repeatedly associates Rose with this perspective. After these two passages locate the centres of this community, Rose notes, “[i]f you go to the top [...] you can look down away from it – down to the river, across the great folds and twists on the other side” (11). Willmott also notes this contradiction, stating that the “no one” identified in the passage above “forgets to include Rose, the outsider of the community, who knows and speaks to Stella of the view from the hill. Nor does it include the Indians, who live in the hills ‘crowded’ round this ‘centre’” (“Nature” 35). Why would Watson juxtapose these contradictions of centres and perspectives? I suggest she does so precisely to highlight the problems inherent in the writing of perspective. Stella frequently fumbles with the mechanics of writing, first making awkward and inappropriate references to a wide array of canonical works in conjunction with her observations about the community and then self-consciously struggling with her inadequacies in her attempts to capture the landscape in prose. Passages such as the one above challenge traditional conceptions of writing in “naturalist” terms and instead offer an example of “realist” writing: such writing allows multiple perspectives to coexist, allows the centre to be both in a point in the valley and throughout the valley, and allows Rose to both be on the hill and for nobody to be on the hill (a foreshadow, perhaps, of Mrs. Potter’s haunting presence in *The Double Hook*).

A key moment that demonstrates Stella’s efforts to “author” the community occurs halfway through the novel at the performance of a school play. The children perform a version of Act IV, Scene 1 from *Macbeth* that has been rewritten by Stella to accommodate local mythology and landscape. Immediately before this section, Stella remarks to herself that “[h]ere in the cleft of the valley [...] it is difficult to distinguish between comedy and

tragedy” (35), setting the stage for this scene-within-a-novel. The next paragraph names off the play-goers that reads as a *dramatis personae*: first “[t]o the school party came Rose, orange tam-o’-shanter defiant”; next “came Mamie, carefully through the dust of the road”; “came Bella [...] came Myrtle Farish [...] came Dick Mockett” (35-36). After the audience of characters assembles, the play then begins; its presentation is interspersed with description of the audience, ostensibly presenting the reader with two “plays”: the one the children perform and the one the adults act out. The play begins:

Thrice the brindled cat has mew’d;
Thrice and once the porky whin’d
Coyote cries, ’Tis time, ’tis time. (36)

Stella’s *Macbeth* keeps the original “brindled cat” but replaces “hedge pig” with “porky” and “harpier,” the third witch of the scene, with Coyote. This scene continues similarly, the next significant detour from the original comes in the change of the iconic lines: “By the pricking of my thumbs, / Something wicked this way comes” with “By the rattling of his spurs / Something wicked this way stirs” (*Macbeth* IV.i. 44-45; *Deep* 37).

Stella’s rewritten *Macbeth* reads like an Eliotic version of modernism, with the original lines made contemporary, each text seamlessly entwined with the other. Her project falls on deaf ears with Mamie, whose dialogue interrupts the play when she notes that her son Christopher “could have done the real thing,” but the limitations of the other students, particularly Rose’s son George, have restricted the range of the production. Mamie reads Stella’s adaptation of the play as a lesser, watered-down version of the original, made “easier” through its localization. Watson aligns Mamie with a Canadian middlebrow readership in the novel; she belongs to book clubs and displays her “reader’s library” as a sign of her status within the community. With Mamie’s misreading, Watson critiques the

ways in which a Canadian adoption of high-modernist aesthetics (here represented by the Eliotic adaptation of *Macbeth*) that simply replace details of content with local material insufficiently engages with the energy and impetus *behind* such formal innovations. That is, Watson is critiquing a certain type of Canadian modernism that ended up, through such a lack of engagement, alienating a middlebrow Canadian readership. What she is here calling for is a tradition that integrates high modernist aesthetics within a Canadian context. With *Deep Hollow Creek*, Watson is struggling with an appropriate method and mode for such an endeavour; Stella's struggles and failures as a writer reflect Watson's own difficulties.

As a writer, Stella struggles to negotiate a place for herself within a multi-voiced community. In her efforts to do so she first separates herself from the Flower household by purchasing a horse and securing her own cabin in which to live. She is frustrated early, however, when she realizes that although she can buy a horse she still needs someone to shoe it for her:

A man is not an island unto himself, she thought, There was a time when all the body's members... Poetry could rise to eloquence. One could fob off a fact with a line. The right eye scanned the testimony of the left and in the margin the hand wrote lyrical self-pity. (50)

The poetic excerpts at the beginning of the passage both allude to the necessity of connection, of interaction, and the impossibility of individuality or separation. "No man is an Island, entire of itself," writes John Donne in Meditation XVII:

every man
is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as

well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine
owne were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind. (1-7)

Donne here intertwines the notion of humanity with nationhood and empire, where the loss of one man diminishes the individual because of the interconnectedness of all "Mankind" as well as the loss of a piece of land diminishes a geo-political body through its loss. Equally political are the lines that Stella quotes from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*: "There was a time when all the body's members / Rebell'd against the belly," Menenius Agripa counsels the rebelling commoners, who angrily blame Coriolanus for the food shortage they are experiencing (I.i. 89). Agripa recites a parable of the body's members rebelling against the belly because it seems to do nothing but sit "like a gulf" in the middle of the body while the rest toil. The belly replies that although it appears to reap all the benefit of food, it is the "storehouse" of the body and delivers sustenance to the rest of the body. The plebeians are thus calmed but later in the play are goaded into rebelling again, causing Coriolanus to bitterly condemn the democratic "popular rule." Such a concentration on the singular versus the communal again relates back to Watson's concerns with a singular narrative perspective versus one that breaks down hierarchies of power by expanding over a number of perspectives. The short passage quoted above highlights Stella's need to rely on intertextual reference to work through this artistic impasse. Stella's difficulty in writing about her community painfully reflects her inability to connect to place and her resultant isolation from community.

Stella's efforts towards self reliance and artistic productivity are foiled in the character of Miriam Fairclough, a friend from Vancouver who returns with her after the Christmas break "for social insurance" (61). Miriam stands in as the figure of the

ethnographer – a collector of artifacts and narratives who epitomizes the modernist primitivist who searches for authenticity within non-European cultures. Miriam describes her desire to “really live – close to something – the real sort of thing one reads about” and her subsequent time spent in the valley mirrors this contradictory urge to live something that is both real and located in a shared imaginary experience of the real. At first their living arrangement is ideal, with Stella off teaching during the days and Miriam cooking and keeping house. Miriam proposes the possibility of using her “real” experiences as the basis for a novel – a pronouncement that clearly makes Stella nervous. “I have an idea,” Miriam suggests, “that if I really wanted to I could collect enough material here for a book. It’s lying around everywhere.” Stella makes light of the suggestion, calling Miriam “The Arnold Bennett of the creek in the deep hollow,” while simultaneously “put[ting] her pencils in her pocket” (63). With this pocketing, Stella hides her own artistic impulses and discourages Miriam’s efforts. Further, her dismissive alignment of Miriam with Arnold Bennett – a writer known for his portrayals of ordinary people and considered a throwback to Victorian modes of writing by contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf – signals her own artistic anxieties.

Miriam’s presence quickly overtakes Stella’s life. She “seem[s] to fill the cabin” and her “papers [are] scattered on the table,” physically taking over both Stella’s space in the cabin and her presence in the valley. Stella goes only from schoolhouse to home while Miriam travels through the valley to buy supplies, pick up mail, and visit with Mamie. Miriam spends her evenings reading one page from *Moby Dick*, knitting, and writing “endless letters.” Stella projects that Miriam is probably “outlining the day’s incidents with the flat precision of a pen tracing the contours of a microscopic section” (68). Again, she expresses anxiety over Miriam’s ability as a writer to capture the “real” life of the valley. Her description of Miriam’s writing aligns with Lewis’s earlier description of the “Left bank”

painters in Blackpool who achieve something close to photogenic naturalism without capturing anything truly “realist.”

Directly after her predictions of flat, microscopic precision, Miriam announces that she has written for “things from the coast” that she can trade with the Indians. This identifies her as both a writer and a collector, an agent of the system of commodities so often alluded to throughout the text. Aside from her creative aspirations, Miriam’s relationship with the Indians agitates Stella. Soon after her arrival, Miriam “stopped once at the reserve to look them over” (64). The wording suggests Miriam’s objectification of the Indians, yet she returns to the reserve shortly thereafter to trade “a yellow silk petticoat and a red knitted suit for a moose-hide jacket” (64). Again, there is something about Miriam’s encounters with the Indians that bothers Stella. Her observations about Miriam’s writing reflect her heightening resentment of her friend’s presence. Stella describes Miriam’s “recording [...] facts” while also “seem[ing] outside the life which stirred in the deep valley.” Here Watson again seems to be critiquing a type of modernism that collects and aestheticizes non-western cultural production without considering the ethics of such an act. Modernist primitivism resulted in potentially damaging essentializations or “otherings” of non-western cultures for the purposes of accessing a pre-social humanity. Although Stella is wary of such essentializations, she falls into a similar trap. She is resistant to trading western goods for Native artifacts or service. She idealizes the Natives in a way that aligns with false ideals of a “pure” or “untouched” primitivism. I argue that Stella’s difficulties reconciling her relationship with the First Nations people of the valley epitomizes Watson’s struggles with ethical representation of non-western culture. The tension between the writerly strategies of Stella and Miriam expresses a narrative dilemma that ended up silencing *Deep Hollow Creek* for over fifty years.

Watson further emphasizes Miriam's relationship with the Indians as, much like her other "collecting" of experience in the valley, something performative and proprietary. "Things always seem to happen to me," Miriam announces that "[n]o one here could ever have seen anything like it" when she returns from accidentally leading a funeral procession of Indians (69). Nothing that Miriam says demonstrates any acknowledgement of the levity of the funeral. Stella responds to her story of the procession that winter is especially hard on the Indians: "The winter catches them [...] as the sharp stake catches the deer when it jumps the crossing at the creek" (69). While she acknowledges the reality of their hardships Stella frames the Natives' struggles poetically in a manner equally problematic as Miriam's.

This tension between Stella and Miriam's authorial styles is broken with the departure of Miriam just as spring arrives in the valley. Stella toasts both events with a celebratory glass of wine at the top of the hill – rising, like Rose, to a position of authorial observation. As the novel draws to a close, Stella has become even further isolated from her community. She spends her evenings in the cabin reading and occasionally reading aloud to her nervous Labrador Juno: "She was completely aware of Juno's brute indifference but she liked to hear the sound of a voice" (86). The dog's presence allows Stella a freedom to have companionship with *her own voice*, as if finally allowing her the time and space to become intimate with language outside of the confines of the written page. What is spoken is here contrasted with what is unspoken: "The logic of discourse she reserved for silent meditation," the narrator tells us (86). Watson sets up a contrast between words as the form, the plastic, the "outside" of language and thought as the content, the idea, or the "inside" of it. This construction sets up the body as the element that keeps words and thoughts both separate and connected. Yet, what follows complicates this initial construction: "If I hadn't come here, she said, I doubt whether I should ever have seen through the shroud of printer's

ink, through to the embalmed essence. The word is a flame burning in a dark glass” (86-87). The first thing to note is that Stella says this aloud, even though the narrator has just indicated that such thoughts were relegated to silent contemplation. Of further note is Watson’s complication of the earlier construction of language by the introduction of the written word. Here, we have the written word as a “shroud” covering the “essence” that has been embalmed in its death. Stella, if we assume that it is she who continues speaking, brings the darkness back from the dead with her image of the word as a burning flame obfuscated by a dark glass. We are here reminded of an often-quoted passage from the Bible: “For now we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor 13:12). A reference to this Biblical passage is significant for a number of reasons.⁹ First, it is primarily a meditation of the meaning of *agape* – “selfless love” – a love free of jealousy, envy, and pride, a love greater than either faith or hope. Second, the passage in question is preceded by another well-known Biblical passage:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Cor 13:11-13:12)

With this context we see that the “glass” in question here is not Stella’s wine glass but a mirror. Watson signals that Stella has not yet developed into a fully realized narrator/author. Her earlier celebration at Miriam’s departure indicates that she still exhibits jealousy and has not come to fully realize the incompleteness of her vision – both artistic and biological. This is emphasized further if we read a few verses ahead a few verses in Corinthians: “Love never

⁹ The lines preceding the ones examined herein, for example, concern (as does the Donne) the ways in which separate members of a larger whole relate to one another: “For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body – though many – are one body, so too is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:12-12:13).

faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor 13:8-13:9). Vision (prophesy) will always be fragmentary, obscured, and dictated by perspective. Stella, twined as she is with the horse and the dog, has not yet put away her childish things; she may have physically “climbed the hill” but she cannot yet decipher what is in front of her because she is still seeing “through the glass, darkly.” Her meditations on language speak of the “shroud” of the written word without the self-knowledge needed to see, not through the typically misunderstood “glass,” but through the *mirror*. Stella is mirrored in the “brute indifference” of her dog. Indeed, Watson suggests that Stella’s “true” mirror is in fact her own narrator. The subtle breakdown between narrator and subject in this passage suggests that Stella must reconcile herself as subject, as storied, as trapped in the “shroud” of printer’s ink as she often seems “trapped” by her reliance on quotations from and reference to works from the English canon.

This is supported when, shortly thereafter, Stella rides Button towards the Farishes in something resembling “a pilgrimage” to bring Juno to birth her puppies. The narrator tells us that Stella “often talked to animals now,” aligning speech with “other primitive and essential desires” (87). There is an acceptance or maturation in Stella, for she realizes that “if the word had become for her the shroud, the thought had become the vital essence which could find realization only in the word” (87). That is, she comes to realize the necessary balance between form and content – she comes to a Lewisian understanding that the plastic cannot be impoverished for the idea. That she is accompanying Juno for a birth is of significance in this series of passages so concerned with birthing and childhood. It here brings her to a realization that she had not yet “produced a single thing. I have grown by a force set in motion by an urge extrinsic to myself. I have grown like a plant and leafed after

my kind – but here is the end. I live [...] like a stone” (87). In comparison with Juno’s life-giving body, she sees sterility and an end in herself. The image is a plant that lives like a stone – petrified, held in stasis. Stella, as we near the end of the novel, is coming to terms with her own fictionality. She cannot write or create because she is written. She here realizes that any growth she has experiences is due to a force “extrinsic to [her]self” – and this force is not some external *social* element, but an external authorial control. Stella’s acceptance of these extrinsic forces coincides with her retreat from language. Stella’s silence at the end of the novel mimics Watson’s silencing of the novel for fifty years. Although she initially tried to publish it she later prioritized her other writings and searched for a less autobiographical mode of expression that would allow her to “kill the schoolteacher.”

Dean Irvine argues that Watson’s fiction takes “a decisively critical stance that foregrounds the failures of expressionism” and that such a stance aligns with her reading of Lewis’s “problems of Expressionism” (*Wyndham* 265, qtd. in Irvine 1). Both artists’ critiques, he further argues, focus on Spengler’s misinterpretations of Kandinsky’s “inner necessity” and Fielder’s “form language” which “explicitly and ironically denies the expressionist artist’s will to transcend the historical forces of modernity through the creation of abstract art forms” (Irvine 2). That is, in Spengler’s formulation, the expressionist artist cannot free herself from her historical moment of modernity and therefore her abstract creations are always the product of an expressionist zeitgeist. Both Watson and Lewis challenge this by investing in their fictions critiques of Expressionist artist figures. I suggest we follow Irvine when he identifies Stella as a “metasatiric picture of a Lewisian artist figure” (2). Stella’s obsessional attempts to describe her environment breakdown throughout the novel and are only able, in the end, to refract endlessly and uselessly between her character and the narrator of the novel. In the years between the novel’s composition and eventual publication

Watson returned often to her frustrations with the dynamic of Stella and the narrator. Irvine notes that these “public statements all call attention to the expulsion or symbolic death of this authorial-narratorial voice or figure.” And indeed, Irvine confirms that such dissatisfaction is present in the text itself. Watson’s “autocritical readings of *Deep Hollow Creek* are carried out in the novel itself, an indication of how it could be read as a narrative about the expulsion or symbolic death of this voice or figure” (4). While Irvine’s reading of Stella primarily identifies her as a figure of satire, I suggest we complicate this reading by returning to the autobiographical presence of Watson in the novel. The satire is not just of the modernist or Expressionist artist but more explicitly of *herself* as the failed modernist artist and Stella’s failure predicts the novel’s fifty-year “failure” until it is finally published in 1992. Such belatedness, further, reframes Watson as a figure of Canada’s “lost modernist origins.” Where she is typically read as a preeminent figure of modernism, I suggest we read this belatedness as an early silencing that comes out of Watson’s own struggles with the failure of Expressionism. Stella’s struggles to separate herself from her historical moment of modernity parallels Watson’s early struggles for the same.

III. *The Double Hook*

The Double Hook is regarded by many as the first high-modernist novel in Canada, and is undoubtedly one of the most often taught. As previously discussed, Watson went into *The Double Hook* with a very specific desire to excise the cloying narrative perspective she struggled with throughout *Deep Hollow Creek*. While *The Double Hook* went through a number of drafts, the biggest change was “the removal of most details of personal and family history, of national or racial origin, and of references to the more institutionalized world of civilization” (Morriss, “Short” 2). The first draft provides information that some scholars

have integrated into their arguments about the novel. Of particular interest is that “Kip and Angel are ‘pure-blooded’ Indians, but William and James (and presumably Greta) are ‘a mixed lot.’” Also of note is that “Felix is descended from ‘the Spaniards and Frenchmen who had come carrying boxes and taking bales of kin pressed flat for the trade’” (Morriss, “Short” 4). This removal of national and racial identifiers parallels John Glassco’s excising of queerness from *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. Unlike Glassco’s changes, which take out autobiographical elements from a text marked by the genre of “memoir” through virtue of its title, Watson’s removals are from a work of fiction based on lived experiences but identified as “total fiction.” The stripping of personal detail from her text falls within her desire to eliminate markers that could potentially lead to cliché or to judgments on the action from the narrative perspective. By leaving these details vague while still including references to European and Native culture and cultural artifacts, Watson de-historicizes the narrative in a manner that comes dangerously close to the critiques of modernism’s tendencies toward dehumanization through abstraction. She avoids this by infusing her narrative with characters who – though de-historicized – retain enough of their humanity to remain relatable. Margaret Morriss addresses this de-historicization when she aligns Watson’s style with Joseph Frank’s theorizations of modernist texts: “Watson’s novel demonstrates what Joseph Frank describes as the essence of modernism in fiction: ‘historical depth’ has vanished, replaced by a ‘spatial fusion’ of past and present ‘for which historical time does not exist’” (qtd. in Morriss, “Short” 2). What this spatialization removes in terms of historical depth it makes up for in terms of the connections it draws between the characters.

Marlene Goldman argues that “the structures of European modernism” in *The Double Hook* disrupt communication and disallow a stable representation of the other:

If, as Benedict Anderson asserts, collusion exists between the realist novel and the nation as imagined possibility, then, as Jody Mason argues, the questioning of realist impulses can serve as an admission that the nation is no longer knowable—that the subjects the nation excluded in its making would now assert themselves and the nation will no longer be recognizable. (203)

This turn to ethical criticism allows Goldman to read *The Double Hook*'s "European modernism" as enacting a critique of the nation by denying access to the "Other" of Nativeness in the text. *Deep Hollow Creek*, which integrates certain aesthetic tools of modernism, nevertheless remains too deeply aligned with the realist novel to allow for such a critique without leaving its main focalizer crippled and ultimately too self-aware to function as a character.

Goldman asks whether the great number of Canadian artists working in the realist mode aligned themselves with Georg Lukács's theorization that "objective realism" allowed for a representation of "the wholeness of human experience" that had disappeared under capitalism, while modernism, through its non-representational aesthetics, "emphasiz[ed] capitalism's fragmenting and contradictory effects on experience" (203). Goldman counters this by aligning Watson with theorists and writers from the Frankfurt School – again locating Watson's influences within German (not Anglo-American) aesthetic modernism (203). Further, she argues that Watson's allegiance with this school distances her from the postmodernism so often associated with her novel.

Although we have come to the same conclusion through different critical lenses, I stress the importance of reading Watson's allegiance with European, and particularly German, modes of conceptualizing the relationship between aesthetics and political/social engagement. Goldman reads Watson's text as critical of the historical and contemporary

treatment of Canada's First Nation's peoples by the nation state. She argues that what has often been identified as the modernist difficulty or ambiguity in her text is instead Watson's realization "that the other does not always want to be, nor can be, accessed according to the terms explicitly or implicitly outlined by the dominant group" (206). As in her earlier novel, *The Double Hook* frames a concern with the ethics of representation. Here Watson negotiates this concern by embedding ambiguity in the text – a strategy that allows her to address her social-cultural critique in a way that avoids belittling either the narrator or characters.

Sherrill Grace also argues for Watson's interest in ethics and representation. She notes that, for Watson, "art is ritual," and as such has a responsibility towards playing "an intimate and vital function within a community." The artist's function is to mediate as a "priest or shaman" mediates between religion and the community. The art that generates such a mediation cannot be naturalistic because "it expresses something recognizable that is felt and shared by artist and reader" and therefore must be able to contain the paradoxes of such a dual representation (193). "Furthermore," Grace continues, "Watson's narratives are all highly objective. However much they spring from personal experience, there is no sense of an autobiographical self in the text and, emphatically in *The Double Hook*, little sense of a central perceiving and narrating 'I'" (194). I agree with Grace's initial reading of *The Double Hook* as necessarily avoiding naturalism in order to mediate between reader and artist in a fashion that communicates the ineffability of the human condition.¹⁰ I disagree, however, that there is "no sense of an autobiographical self in the text." While this autobiographical self is not present in a naturalist or realist voice, it is nonetheless present within both the fractured and multiple perspective voices and within the overarching narrative "I" that, though distant, nevertheless maintains control through the text.

¹⁰ This abstraction aligns with Eysteinnsson's "central paradox" of modernism as discussed in the introduction.

An interview with Sheila Watson demonstrates the complexities of her integration of autobiographical material into her novel when she notes: “[w]hen I began the work which became *The Double Hook* I knew I had to create a total fiction out of an experience which was concrete – which defied the clichés imposed on it. I wanted to get rid of the reportage, the condescension of omniscience” (“Interview” 352-53). Watson acknowledges that the “total fiction” of the novel is nevertheless constructed from her experiences of place. What she wants to eliminate from this autobiographical self is “reportage”; she wants to remove her eyewitness account of a particular time and place that would transform her voice into something akin to ethnography. Further, an elimination of the “condescension of omniscience” reflects the problematics of a narrative perspective written from someone outside of a community – the self-same problematics that Stella wrestles with throughout *Deep Hollow Creek*.

Watson highlights her concerns with narration is through the trajectory of her characters. In particular, I will focus on the transformation we see in James Potter. *The Double Hook* has variously been called a narrative of redemption, of morality, of renewal, and of community. These labels are most often placed upon the narrative of James, who kills his mother, whips his sister and Lenchen (pregnant with his child), beats and blinds Kip, and abandons his community and family. He stops in the small town of Nineveh to buy supplies and catch a train heading east. In Nineveh his money is stolen and he then returns to his home to the news of his sister’s suicide and the birth of his child. James’s particular narrative arc is one not normally associated with a returning hero, or the man redeemed, yet the novel, despite this, constructs him as so. How does *The Double Hook* accomplish this?

Scholars who read James’s journey as one of redemption typically frame James as a Christ-like figure or a modernist fisher-king who rids the community of the old and dying

and brings in new life and vitality.¹¹ A second trend in scholarship, however, is to read James much more negatively because he suffers very little for his crimes of matricide and assault. Thus his acceptance back into the community is understood as problematically emblematic of modernism's prioritization of aesthetics – where the mythic and cyclical journey balances the narrative structure of the work – over ethics. A handful of critics provide alternative readings to these two trends; such readings speak to the much more complex nature of James's journey.

Oliver Lovesey, for example, reads James's journey as an allegory of colonialism in North America. Specifically, this journey allegorizes the concept of the "anti-conquest," a narrative wherein the "European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (51). Lovesey sees James's movement through the "settlements" on the way to Nineveh – the Indian reserve, the "fenced-off land," and the Chinese gardeners – as making "an allegorical transit through the history of colonial settlement" (55). Further, he reads James's return to his community and the lack of punishment for his actions as "implicitly reject[ing] a historical consciousness" and actualizing a "move outside history" (56). While Lovesey's argument seems to align his reading of James's journey with scholarship that sees him remain unpunished, it troubles such a reading by suggesting that Watson purposefully invests James's character with ambiguity so that his journey can work symbolically through the history of colonialism. James's problematic attempt to move "outside history" likewise represents a problematic rejection or erasure of Canada's colonial past and present.

Grace, conversely, reads James's journey as an archetypal narrative of the "expressionist rebel." There is an "abrupt awakening from a previously insensate, repressed

¹¹ See, for example, Margot Northey's compelling argument in her article "Symbolic Grotesque: *The Double Hook*."

condition, followed by violent acts of rebellion against social constraints in an effort to express the subjective individual will, and then *Aufbruch*—the breaking free, departure, and search for rebirth” (195). Punishment for such a character “is irrelevant because the purpose of the text is general redemption, not individual indictment [...] expressive abstraction, not realism” (197). Grace’s reading undeniably categorizes James’s journey as aligned with scholarship that reads him as unpunished for his crimes but because her reading is contextualized by the total oeuvre of Watson’s work, and particularly by her interest in German expressionism, she reads the ethical ramifications of his singular trajectory as non-consequential to the trajectory of the novel as a whole.

“What I’m Going To Do” is a short statement by Watson that was published at the end of *Open Letter*’s special issue dedicated to her writing. Originally intended to accompany a public reading of *The Double Hook* at Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton in 1973, the work is notable for being the first time Watson talked about the novel in a public setting. Watson recalls that she first conceived of the novel while walking down Bloor Street in Toronto, where she was at the time writing her dissertation. “It was in answer to a challenge,” she notes, “that you could not write about particular places in Canada: that what you’d end up with was a regional novel of some kind. It was at the time, I suppose, when people were thinking that if you wrote a novel it had to be, in some mysterious way, international” (182). Her critics often take this quotation as a proof of Watson’s anti-regional stance and commitment to universality. Further, the quotation is used to justify reading Watson’s *particularity*, her separateness from the Canadian modernist scene and placement, instead, into a cosmopolitan or international modernism. These critics, however, do not take into account the nuanced difference between Watson’s use of the terms “particular place” and “regional.” The problem lies in Watson’s use of “regional” and “international” and the

strictures each term had, at the time, carried. That is, that a novel could be *either* regional or international—but not both. Indeed, later in the same paragraph Watson asks “how are you international if you’re not international? if [sic] you’re very provincial, very local, and very much a part of your own milieu” (182). She wanted to translate her experience of the Cariboo as a real place, a particular milieu. She explains that her drive was to express “in these images” something particular about human nature: “about how people are driven, how if they have no art [...] no tradition, [...] no ritual, they are driven in one of two ways, either towards violence or towards insensibility” (183). Overall, she explains, the novel was driven by an exploration of the place of the work of art in the world. The people she describes above “have no mediating rituals which manifest themselves in what I suppose we call art forms,” or, what we have are “men without art.” We return again, then, to the ever-present Wyndham Lewis who describes *Men without Art* as a defence of satire, and from which Watson quotes the following passage in “Unnaccommodated Man,” which appears earlier in *Open Letter*:

The artistic impulse is a more primitive one than the ethical; so much is this the case – so little is it a mere dialect of the rational language in which our laws are formulated, but, on the contrary, an entirely independent tongue – that it is necessary for the artist to change his skin almost in passing from one department to the other. (105)

This contrast between the primitive and ethical man is foregrounded by Watson and serves as a key interpretive tool for *The Double Hook*. By emphasizing her exploration of the “men without art” in *The Double Hook*, “What I’m Going To Do” signals that Watson’s reading and understanding of a literary criticism is based upon a particular trajectory that runs from Worringer through Lewis *and yet*, or in spite of, this “internationalism,” still says something

crucial about Canada because her “milieu” happens to be at a specific juncture of space/place and Bergson’s *durée*. Therefore, *The Double Hook* escapes what *Deep Hollow Creek* never managed to work itself out of: it never “had to be about what I would call something *else*” (182). Watson’s novel is concerned with “figures in a ground, from which they could not be separated” – the figures cannot be separated from the ground because their presence makes it so, their interactions with one another and “the things about them” form the fabric of existence because the particularity of all these people and things intermingling *means* something. Unlike Stella, who fails as an author because of her dependence on outside texts as interpretive tools of her experience (thereby “othering” herself from the landscape), the “author” of *The Double Hook* succeeds by unapologetically surrendering to place as a nexus of people and things in a way that uses mythic forms without giving into their predominance over local story and myth.

Of the nexus of people in *The Double Hook* James Potter is the most prominently featured. James’s journey figures doubly in the novel: first it stands in as an allegory of modernism. James’s murder of his mother symbolically stands for modernism’s violent rejection of a feminized Victorianism that nevertheless remains a haunting presence. James’s blinding of Kip – the “seer” of the text and his rival for Lenchen’s love – symbolically stands for a rejection of a mysticism/occult spirituality associated with the early modernism of Yeats. James’s abandonment of his family and community for the town of Nineveh represents a modernist move away from isolated pockets of self-identification towards a cosmopolitanism and universality that he so desires. His failures within Nineveh, where he is conned out of his money and left abandoned outside of a brothel, and his uncanny laughter at the absurdity of his position, represent a late-modernist rejection of the depersonalization of such movements and a Lewisian acceptance of the contradictions of modern life. James’s

humbled-yet-enlightened movement back towards his home and the disappearance of his mother's ghost demonstrate a full movement into late modernism, where the ghosts of Victorianism have been replaced by the haunting inheritances of the violence past. James's desire, upon his return, to rebuild his home as a one-level house (where there are no stairs) represents not an erasure or an eliding of history but instead a breakdown of hierarchies in favour of an open field, where everything is visible and therefore made accountable.

Within this movement from early to late modernism, Coyote's calls work as contrapuntal representations of the excitement, allure, and danger inherent in modernism's energy. Coyote's voice is both the triumph and the violence of modernism's break with tradition – of James's violent push of his mother down the stairs. That is, in Watson's novel James's violence is representative of the danger and allure of the modernist impulse towards individualization *and* the conditions of modernity that resulted in the global violence of the wars of the early to mid twentieth century. Such a construction also echoes Heinrich's assertion that has come to be so closely associated with the novel: "when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear" (48). Coyote's refrains remind James, the community, and the reader that such violence must be accompanied by an acceptance of the consequences (found in James's return to the community to accept his role as a member of something larger than himself – rejecting his individualism for his part in a communal whole). And though James's journey is arguably the dominant one of the text, the novel is constructed by a polyphony of voices and narrative arcs. That Watson embeds what I see as an allegory of modernism within an interwoven web of voices and journeys speaks to the impossibility of an allegory of one, singular modernism and instead constructs this allegory in a way that requires it to be attendant to a multiplicity of narratives. What follows is a more in-depth reading of James's journey that expands upon

this allegory of modernism to a much more focused reading of the journey as emblematic of a Bergsonian construction of the modern individual's coming into free will. Such a trajectory further demonstrates Watson's use of the philosophies of German aesthetics in order to construct a movement through such an allegory.

Watson's novel follows the lives of a small group of people in a loose community in the British Columbia interior. The text begins with what is usually called a *dramatis personae*: a list of the characters and their connections to one another, all living "[i]n the folds of the hills / under Coyote's eye" (3). All living, that is, "until one morning in July." What follows is initiated by a push: James pushes his mother, Mrs. Potter, down the stairs, seemingly killing her. This all occurs as James' sister Greta stands at the stove, "[t]urning hotcakes" (4). The push is identified as acted by James's "will," "hand," and "words": "This is my day. You'll not fish today." And so ends the first section of the novel. The second section begins with the contradictory statement, "[s]till the old lady fished." In the narrative that follows, we encounter many of the other inhabitants of the valley observing the "old lady" fishing. First Ara, the wife of James and Greta's brother William, sees Mrs. Potter and resents the old woman's silence towards her. As she watches, Ara perceptively "[feels] death leaking through from the centre of the earth" (5). Ara then looks over to Felix Prosper's house and her glance ends the third section, with the fourth beginning with Felix's spying of the old woman. Felix, who once lived with his wife Angel and their children, now lives only with his dogs and his fiddle, a solitary existence reminiscent of Stella's in the last portion of *Deep Hollow Creek*. Felix's fiddle playing seems to call into being the first passages attributed to Coyote when his hounds hear Coyote's song "fretting the gap between the red boulders":

In my mouth is the east wind,

Those who cling to the rocks I will

bring down

I will set my paw on the eagle's nest. (9)

His hounds then return, “yellow forms in the yellow sunlight. Creeping round the barn. Flattening themselves to rest.” The figure of Felix feeding scraps and bones to his dogs (separated into hounds and one terrier) also echoes the apocalyptic man/nature figure in Watson's short story “And the Four Animals,” thereby connecting him with her most abstract work of prose.

The old lady is spied again at the beginning of the fifth section by “the Widow's boy,” Heinrich (10). The Widow, we later learn, came from away, and her husband's death left her to raise her children Heinrich and Lenchen. Lenchen yearns to leave the valley and we also soon learn that she carries James's baby. The fallout surrounding her condition forms the crux of the novel's crisis. This section establishes the Widow's association with blindness, she “[keeps] her eyelids folded over her eyes” and Heinrich thinks to himself that “[a] person can't keep her eyes glazed over like a dead bird's forever” (11). In section six Heinrich leaves the house and encounters Kip, who has a message for Lenchen from James. Just as the Widow is associated with blindness, so Kip is linked to sight and is often referred to in the novel as a servant of Coyote. His role as a messenger, however, stays unfulfilled, suggesting that where he succeeds in vision he fails in language.

Section ten returns to James and transitions from Lenchen's thoughts to vision, although here it is a lack of vision: “If Lenchen had been looking down from the hill just then, she would have seen James saddling his horse” (16). The rhythm of these first sections emphasizes a circularity and connectivity between the people in the valley. It also provides the reader with a strategy for reading and interpreting the text. Watson's circling among a large cast of focalizers, six in the first sixteen pages (seven if we count the narrator who

controls the first two sections), and the manner in which the characters trace one another's movements, where one focalizer will focus him/herself on narrating another character, suggests perspectival simultaneity and narrative destabilization. Similar to her later short fiction, Watson does not put quotation marks around speech, allowing for a shift from speech to thought. Much like Stella's shift from internalized to externalized thought in *Deep Hollow Creek*, the characters in *The Double Hook* often speak their thoughts aloud – projecting them into the surrounding world. The fluidity of the world that Watson has set up is reminiscent of Bergson's concept of *durée*: here we have a solid, immovable landscape, yet time seems protean, subjective, and constructed through the observations and thoughts of the characters. Time seems to be both simultaneous and, as in *durée*, causality (where any action is determined by the existence of a previous one) is not clearly demarcated. That is, while Kant insists that free will is constructed separate from time and space, and therefore a matter of *faith*, Bergson insists that free will is “freed” from its association with faith because of a misidentification of time as *inherently* tied to space. Instead, he argues, time is fluid, both multiple and unified—qualities that are, I argue, built directly into Watson's narrative structure. Given that the main thrust of the narrative focuses on notions of accountability and morality, it follows that Watson's novel is essentially concerned with teasing out the consequences of a Bergsonian construction of the world.

Before delving into an analysis of Watson's adoption of Bergson's theories we must address the Wyndham Lewis's critique of the theorist. In *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* Mary Ann Gillies argues that though Lewis is known for his critiques of Bergson in *Time and Western Man*, he was at one point enamoured of his philosophies. The tenants behind Vorticism are deeply indebted to Bergson and his theories of *durée* (51). Gillies reads Lewis's later critique of Bergson as a way through which he separates himself from both his earlier

writings and from modernism as a movement. For Lewis, Bergson's influence is so prevalent for modernist artists that it comes to represent all he wishes to move away from; Bergson's ideas "become both the yardstick by which he measures what art should not be and, because they underlie Lewis's own theories, they subvert them" (52). Watson's adoption of Bergson is untroubled by an association of the theorist with her chronology as a writer and, further, can be read as a similar challenge or subversion of Lewis's later writings.

Although Watson's awareness of Bergson predates the book, it was Gilles Deleuze's *Bergsonism* (1966) that reintroduced Bergson to a larger philosophical and literary audience. Deleuze cited Bergson's concept of multiplicity as a crucial contribution to epistemological and phenomenological philosophy. By "multiplicity," Deleuze refers to a particular twentieth-century understanding of the term that combines the theories of Bergsonism with phenomenology (115). The difference between the two schools of thought is subtle but significant: where in phenomenology the world – as composed of multiple phenomena – is made comprehensible through a unified consciousness, in Bergson's theory consciousness itself is composed of a multiplicity of *données* (a term which is often translated as 'data'). In *Time and Free Will* Bergson criticizes Kant's construction of free will because he assigns it a place outside of time and space. Bergson sees this melding of time and space as a false unification that prescribes that human action is tied to "causality." Instead, Bergson suggests the separation of time and space and in their separation he aligns *les données* of consciousness with time, or *durée* (duration). Causality, then, is eliminated within this construction because in *durée*, events are not juxtaposed and therefore do not suggest a natural progression that would make one dependent on the other. This reordering of events allows for multiplicity. How does multiplicity affect free will? It has to do with his description of the functions of feelings as attached to morality within his philosophy. For example, Bergson describes

sympathy as a “moral feeling” (18). Sympathy begins when one puts oneself in another’s “shoes,” we then feel their pain, and this pain leads us to a feeling of horror. At this point we help the other person out of a fear that, if we do not, something similar will happen to us when we need help. Bergson describes this as a “need” to help because of fear as “inferior pity.”¹² “True pity,” in contrast, results not from fear of pain but a desire for it. Bergson continues that “[t]he essence of pity is thus a need for self-abasement, an aspiration downward.” This desire for pain then transforms into a sense of superiority. The next step is a removal of oneself from “certain sensuous goods” because of a superiority *to* and detachment *from* them. The final feeling in this trajectory, due to removal from the world of things, is humility. Bergson calls this process of feeling “a qualitative progress”: horror to fear, fear to sympathy, and sympathy to humility. The importance here for Bergson is that none of these feelings qualify as “greater to” or “less than” any other. Instead, the feelings suffuse each other, become inseparable. Bergson calls the last feeling in any qualitative progress *mobility*, and it is here that his definition of free will manifests, for he associates mobility with freedom and both with *durée*. *The Double Hook* constructs a world in which each character is placed somewhere in the “progress” of sympathy. James is the most obvious, for his role is to lead us most clearly from beginning to end, from horror to humility; however, I suggest that each character is placed somewhere along the trajectory and his or her struggle in the novel is to move to the next stage without becoming stagnant. Coyote’s role in the novel is to help push the characters along their paths.

For the first four of five chapters of the novel James is caught in the stage that leads from horror to fear: the downward movement (Bergson’s “aspiration downward”) of his mother down the stairs begins this trajectory quite literally. His actions that follow all

¹² There are various manifestations of “inferior pity” in *Deep Hollow Creek*, particularly in the characters of Miriam and Stella.

manifest his attempts to attain sympathy. First, however, he must move through horror. Seeing Greta's life leads him to horror, manifested as fear, which causes him to lash out and beat her. Likewise, Lenchen reminds him of his past actions and her situation also causes him to lash out from fear. James does not come to any sense of sympathy, false or not, in these sections. Rather, it is in Nineveh that the shift happens for him – therein he experiences a transition from fear to sympathy. The transition, however, is not an easy one, and includes three instances of “inferior pity” or “false” sympathy.¹³

The first thing he sees on his way out of town is the Indian reservation and a collection of pathetic reserve dogs. He then passes a group of men working in the tomato fields with the round hats, an image that suggests impoverished migrant, possibly Chinese, workers. Crossing the bridge into town his horse is afraid and the water is both moving and standing still (embodying, perhaps Bergson's *durée* as something that is both multiple and unified). It is here he sees the “dark figure” of his mother fishing. These three visions (reserve, migrants, mother) begin his movement into sympathy. Instead of accepting them, however, he closes his eyes and rides into the town. Once there, James goes to the bank and withdraws all of his money. He then goes to the general store, run by Pockett (a variation on *Deep Hollow Creek's* Mockett, perhaps) and buys a wallet, a few pairs of socks, a small canvas bag, and some plaid shirts. He leaves the store and, looking down at the river, wonders to himself what he expected to happen when he “defied” his mother. To this Coyote answers:

To gather briars and thorns,
said Coyote.

¹³ Although James's journey forms the cornerstone of this novel, his is surely not the only journey we encounter. Indeed, Kip, Felix, and the Widow each go through similar trials on their way to humility.

To go down into the holes of the rock
and into the caves of the earth.

In my fear is peace. (89)

The “peace” that Coyote suggests to James is the humility he will reach at the end of his “qualitative progress.” James defied his mother with the multiple push (will, hands, words) – a push downward that began his horror. Instead of accepting his actions and Coyote’s promised peace, James goes to the hotel, meeting with Traff, a man who had been poking fun of him earlier in the store, but who now suggests a drink. They go to the hotel bar where they meet Shepherd, Bascomb, Paddy the bartender, and the indelible parrot. As they talk of his mother’s passing, James gets drunk and Traff takes the lead in taking care of him.

Watson here provides an example of “inferior” or false pity to use as a foil against James’s eventual progress. When he leaves the bar, James settles on a hotel room for the night, and while at the front desk takes “inferior” pity on the parrot, leaving him a bit of money for beer. “It’s little enough he must have to live for,” James says, “[o]ne parrot in this whole bloody universe of men.” Paddy responds that “[m]en don’t often have their own way. It’s not many have the rights of a dumb beast and a speaking man at the same time” (94). Traff ends up betraying James, obtaining for him a bottle of hard liquor and taking him out to Felicia’s, a local flophouse located down in the flats with the “halfbreeds” and “Chinamen.” Everything in this “Nighttown” is either doubled or uncanny: in “the lamplight and shadow” James cannot “see whether [Felicia] was young or old” (95); the prostitutes lay on the bed, “their arms linked, their feet shuffling together on the floor” (96). This uncanniness is hinted at earlier in Paddy’s description of the parrot as combining the qualities of both man and

animal.¹⁴ It is here that James encounters his last instance of “inferior” pity. After sitting in the house for a while he leaves, placing ten dollars on the bed, and sits by the river, where, “[f]or the first time in his life he felt quite alone” (98). Lilly, one of the girls from the house, comes down to talk to him. When he asks her why she has come she says that it is because he did not take advantage of them and because he is nothing like Traff. He tells her to go away while “his arm brings her closer,” and then she leaves. He then realizes that while in the consoling embrace she has stolen his wallet. He watches from the window as she and Traff count his money, burn his new wallet, and laugh. James laughs as well. He looks from “[t]he life which Traff and Lilly led behind Felicia’s dull glass” to the lights of the town, “where the parrot who lived between two worlds was probably asleep now, stupid with beer and age” (100). James stands, still “among the clumps of stiff sage which shoved through the seams and pockets of the earth,” rooted in place in a manner of acceptance, of “pure sympathy.” This sojourn in town makes up an entire chapter, marking the only time in the novel that a character receives such unshifting focus. As he returns home his narrative of return is embedded again in the movements of the other people of his community.

James does not appear again until the eighth section of chapter five, returning to the exact moment we left him. This is oddly jarring because of the extensive movement of the other characters back in the valley. James here realizes that Lilly and Traff had “freed [him] from freedom” and his thoughts turn directly to Lenchen and their unborn child as he has his Joycean epiphany when he sees “clearly for a moment his simple hope” (111). James is

¹⁴ There is much similarity to Joyce’s “Nighttown,” which appears in Episode 15, “Circe” of *Ulysses*: its placement in the red light district; Bloom’s drunken hallucinations of family members; Bloom’s feeding of a dog at the beginning of the episode (much like James’s feeding of the parrot); the transformation of Bloom, within one of his hallucinations, into a woman, which mirrors James’s realization that he is attracted to Traff because of his physical similarity to Lenchen; Bloom’s confiscation of Stephen’s money; Stephen’s hallucination where his mother’s corpse appears to him and he considers his role in her death; and finally, Bloom’s hallucination of Rudy, his dead son.

“freed” into a Bergsonian manifestation of free will. He has forcefully yet successfully been divested from “certain sensuous goods” and at once feels superior to them (just as he feels superior to Traff, Lilly, Felicia, and the parrot) and he leaves the town without returning to the hotel to gather his other purchases. This superiority does not come from feeling *better than* these things but comes from his feeling *divested from* them. This sympathy leads him to humility, to the acceptance of his actions and his responsibilities, and this humility carries him through the remainder of the novel. As he rides from the town towards his home, Coyote tests his transformation. James crosses the bridge and “in the shadow of the girders,” where he had previously seen his mother’s form, “fear unwound itself again like the line from his mother’s reel” (112). Coyote then calls to him:

Where is your hope?
Better go down to the bars of the pit
Better rest in the dust
Justice is swifter than water. (112)

Instead of faltering, James crosses without closing his eyes. He allows the horse to carry him on, signaling that he has now accepted the fear as something necessary in his transformative process. After this change James is portrayed as actively *sensing* the world around him. He now “feels” and “hears” and as he crosses a creek he sees no shape of his mother in the “opaque and formless” water. He now closes his eyes, not to block out what is there but to imagine what is missing, to meditate on his mother’s death and his part in it.

We encounter James again a few sections later in the novel. It is now daybreak and he contemplates, as Heinrich and others had previously contemplated, the glory of the light. He first thinks of it as it defines the landscape around him: it “defined the world, [...] picked out the shattered rock the bleached and pitted bone” (117). He then thinks of how it would

define what he had just left behind: “It would edge the empty bottle on Felicia’s table. [...] It would lie congealed in the unwashed plates. It would polish the yellow of Traff’s head and count the streaked tears under Lilly’s eyes.” Finally, he thinks of how it will define his home: “It would shine in his own empty mangers. On Kip’s face. On Greta’s bleak reproach. On the loose stones William had piled on his mother’s grave.” What he *expects* to see is not what he *will* see, but this dramatic irony does not last long as James senses that light is “call[ing] on him to look. To say what he had done. Yet he could see, he told himself, only as far as his eyes looked. Only as far as the land lay flat before him” (117). He realizes here that his vision is limited by his location; his distance from home limits what he can do. He decides that he cannot let his memory of what he has done out of his heart or let it fester in his mind. He will, instead, simply go on living and silently accept the hatred and punishment he expects to receive. While James’s locking up of memory may be read negatively, it is constructed positively when read in conjunction with the Widow’s paralyzing attachment to memory. The novel suggests that an unhealthy attachment to trauma has the potential to paralyze one along the “qualitative progress” from horror to humility, freezing one in fear.

The Double Hook ends with James’s arrival at his mother’s house, only to find it burned to the ground. This sight makes him close his eyes once more, and in the landscape in his mind the remains of the house are gone, leaving “only the seared and smouldering earth, the bare hot cinder of a still unpeopled world” (122). He thinks gratefully on “the destruction of what his heart had wished destroyed,” and “into the first pasture of things” he imagines building a new home “further down the creek, [...] all on one floor” (122). The removal of stairs eliminates the separation, the downward and upward struggles of power, the hierarchy, and instead places everything along the flat ground. Heinrich and William are there and tell him of Greta’s death and Lenchen’s disappearance. They leave for William and

Ara's and end up at Felix Prosper's, where everyone is gathered, including Lenchen and James's newborn son. His entrance to the house is described not by the narrator but by Lenchen: "The door's opening, she said. I see James in his plaid shirt. He's lifting the baby in his two hands" (125). The novel ends with Ara, who cannot look at James, an avoidance that suggests redemption and forgiveness will be slow-coming for him, and she hears Coyote cry:

I have set his feet on soft ground;
I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders
of the world. (125)

These last lines are often understood to refer to the child and his promise of renewal to the community. When read alongside the Widow and Angel's conversation of the baby's back, I suggest that Coyote's lines refer to James. "Dear God," the Widow says, "what a straight back he has" (124). "He'll need it," Angel answers her, "to carry round what the world will load on his shoulders." The "soft ground" of these last lines, I argue, is baby Felix's back: it is upon the foundation of his "sloping shoulders" that James will now find footing and root his newfound humility.

Although the entirety of Sheila Watson's published works is not sprawling, the depth and complexity of this work sustains even my brief survey and suggests that much more scholarly work needs to be done, especially on her critical work, her early novel *Deep Hollow Creek*, and her short fiction. In my analysis of *The Double Hook* and *Deep Hollow Creek*, I have argued for a reading of Watson's oeuvre as part of a consistent system. This system works through the creation of a narrative perspective that allows for an ethical treatment of a particular time and place. A concern with such ethics manifests itself in Watson's excision of autobiographical experiences from these works that, paradoxically, solves her dilemma about

how to write about a specific time and place by emptying her work of specific details. Such an emptying allows her to instead insert her characters into archetypal narratives that act out allegories drawn from continental philosophy and aesthetics. Watson's narrative system can be read as a "working out" of the texts' internal contradiction that comes from being both *of* and *apart from* their social milieu. As discussed in the introduction, the late-modernist tendency to use non-representational forms while infusing the work with a particular manifestation of subjectivity is one way through which these authors worked through fears of dehumanization. In the narrative trajectories of Stella and James we see Watson working through these late-modernist concerns within the specific milieu of Canadian art.

The enthusiastic and continual lauding of *The Double Hook* in Canadian letters is another demonstration of a desire to embrace Canada's "lost modernist origins." In Watson's case, it is her successful conflation of the aesthetics of high modernism in a local setting and her often-repeated assertion that the work is assuredly *not* regional or local that helped pave the way for *The Double Hook's* untroubled integration into the Canadian canon as a singular work of modernist genius. The work has frequently been aligned with a Canadian modernist cosmopolitanism, and such a category has worked against reading the text as part of a larger body of work. Canadians could proudly hold up *The Double Hook* as an example of a modernist novel. In many ways, however, I suspect that the success of *The Double Hook* has led to its alienation from both Watson's other writings and from other works of Canadian modernist prose.

On October 24th and 25th 2009, St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto hosted "Celebrating Sheila: Reflections on the legacy of Sheila Watson on the occasion of her 100th birthday," an event that drew writers such as Michael Ondaatje, Elizabeth Hay, Jane Urquhart, George Bowering, and Daphne Marlatt as well as leading scholars in the field

of Canadian modernism from around the country. The event celebrated Watson's place in Canadian letters, in the canon, and in the literary-cultural imagination of the nation. In a recent article about Watson's centenary, Nick Mount states that what once kept *The Double Hook* distanced from a populist place in the canon – the arch-modernist style that is at once abstract, alienated, and yet tied into the concrete world of razor-sharp images – is now the same thing that has cemented the novel's place on Canadian literature syllabi and thereby in the canon. "Sheila Watson is my way of teaching modernism," he notes, commenting that her novel confidently stands beside "Beckett and T.S. Eliot" in any discussion of modernist literature. What worries, however, is that the novel is rarely identified as standing confidently beside any other Canadian novel and, perhaps more worrisome, her other writings are likewise rarely placed within a Canadian tradition. I contend that Watson's desire to distance *The Double Hook* from her personal experiences in the Cariboo region (thereby leading her to desire not to write of that specific time and place) has led to a mis-reading of her aesthetic intentions. Instead of reading *The Double Hook* as an isolated incident of genius in Canadian letters – of relegating Watson to a pedestal from which she is difficult to read critically – a much more constructive task is to read Watson within her own context (the entirety of her oeuvre) as well as broader traditions of late modernist prose in Canada and beyond. Such a movement enriches any reading of Watson by acknowledging the sophistication of her engagement with and criticism of mid-century Canadian arts and culture.

CHAPTER THREE
“ONLY THE VERB WORKS”: LANGUAGE AS ARTILLERY IN ELIZABETH SMART’S LYRICAL
MODERNISM

Fact and emotional truth [...] are quite different. Something might be factually untrue but might be emotionally true. Therefore it is fiction and it is made with what we hope is art. If you have an emotion and you have no craft, then you will not have art. You have to have the craft first.

—Elizabeth Smart “Fact and Emotional Truth” (191)

The transition from Sheila Watson to Elizabeth Smart reveals a number of significant similarities: both authors make use of mythic and biblical elements in their novels; both favour condensed, cyclic forms and craft short, tight narratives; and both play with the tension between biography and fiction. These similarities are counterbalanced by just as many significant differences: where Watson’s use of the mythic and the biblical is conservative, Smart’s is licentious, almost shameless; where Watson’s writing takes on an exacting, externalized imagism, Smart’s is characterized by an overabundant, fiery, and internalized lyricism; and where Watson struggled to extract the autobiographical from her stories, to “kill the schoolteacher,” Smart boldly interweaves the autobiographical into her narratives. Both authors struggled to find a balance between writing, family, and work, and both were in relationships with poetic powerhouses whose literary outputs often took priority and precedence over their own. Finally, though both authors left a relatively modest number of published works, the influence of these works resounds to this day.

Sheila Watson’s childhood memories of the asylum her father ran played an important role in the formation of her own mythic codes – we see this place rewritten

intertwined with Sophocles' mythic archetypes throughout her short fiction. Similarly, Elizabeth Smart's childhood experiences remained with her throughout her life and formed the core of her philosophies about the relationship between life and art. Smart's affinity for the natural world is a key element in her work and was cemented by vast amounts of time exploring and daydreaming in the woods surrounding her family's cottage "The Barge" in Quebec's Gatineau Hills on Lake Kingsmere. Smart "wandered ecstatically" through this landscape and it is described in many of the stories of her *Juvenilia* as a place imbued with mystery and mystic creatures; the lyricism found in her later novels finds its root in her first creative exploits (Smart, *Necessary* 29). J.M. Barrie played an early influence, and Smart "absorbed his satiric style" in these early writings (Sullivan, *By Heart* 33). This satire equally finds its way into her later works but is rarely discussed by her critics. It is this blending of lyricism and satire that I see forming the essence of Smart's style. While many of her critics and reviewers interpret Smart's use of erotic language and serious contemplation of love as melodramatic, I suggest that her wry humour and deft satirical eye shift her narrative into cultural commentary. It is her ability to combine these two elements that distinguishes her work as a unique rendering of late modernism. That is, her ability to infuse cultural and artistic critique into a narrative that melds metaphor and mythology demonstrates what I see as the defining quality of late modernism: a non-realist narrative form that embeds a reflection on its own historical moment within the text.

Since the publication of *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* in 1945, there has been a wealth of scholarly articles published on her works. I will focus my reading on criticism that falls into four main categories: modernism, war, exile, and metafiction. The section on modernism will interrogate how critics have variously defined Smart's participation in the modernist movement and modernist aesthetics. I will demonstrate

Smart's familiarity and dialogue with a variety of modernisms, both aesthetic and political. This will lead to a theorization of Smart's treatment of war in her novels. I read Smart's modernism as highly invested in and politicized by the realities of war and its consequences.

Smart, born and raised in Ottawa, moved from California to New York and finally to England during World War II. Her geographical movements are echoed by the movements of her narrators in *By Grand Central Station* and *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*. Smart's self-exile from Canada during and after these years leads to my third concentration: Smart's treatment of exile in her novels. Much has been made of Smart's use of Psalm 137, a lament of the exiled Israelites for their homeland, as a structuring device in *By Grand Central Station*. I will examine such critical readings alongside my own interpretation and extend this reading to the treatment of exile in her second novel. The fourth and final subject of this chapter is Smart's use of metafiction and autobiography in her works. The relationship between Smart's journals and novels has been the subject of many critical essays. These essays pay particular attention to the fluidity of style between the two genres. My chapter will end by enfolding the three previous concentrations into a meditation on Smart's play with metafiction – a play that, not inconsequentially, each of the authors included in this study negotiates.

Smart's texts embody late modernism in their twinning of narrative experimentation and socio-political-cultural engagement. Contrary to those practitioners of high modernism who are chastised for their anti-humanism, Smart has suffered the opposite: instead, she is often criticized for an over-abundance of feeling, an effusiveness that earns her the same labels of ahistorical and apolitical that Glassco's kindred decadent texts attain. What does it mean that the divergent narrative stylistics (minimalist, symbolist on the one hand and effusive, decadent on the other) result in a similar charge? Both work outside the boundaries

of traditionally accepted realism. Glassco and Smart are damned by their use of a type of lyrical romanticism drawn from an early or pre-modernist era. That is, they are disregarded because such a style predates the robust modernism of a contemporary mid-century Canada. Instead of aligning with a new Canadian voice that moves beyond the experiments of high modernism, their writings hearken back to the occultism and mysticism of Yeatsian early modernism and pre-modernist transcendentalism. Such stylistics were associated with writings of the Confederation poets who were critiqued by the mid-century vanguard of Canadian modernism for embodying an overwrought, clunky, and clichéd nationalism. This mid-century hesitancy to look backwards to early and foundational narrative styles resulted in an inability to see the new ways in which these writers were drawing upon early- and pre-modernist stylistics in order to engage with and critique their sociopolitical milieu. One way that both of these authors did so, I argue, is through a skillful play with the autobiographical and metafictional self in fiction.

As noted in my introduction, I locate the writings studied here as operating in a space between Adorno's assertion that high modernism's non-realist stylistics negate the world and offers instead "utopian potential" and Jameson's assertion that all art is part of its social milieu, embedded in its own economics, and therefore cannot offer a critique of its own social location. I argue that works of art negotiate critiques from inside this embeddedness. The authors studied here do so by integrating metafictional voice into their narratives. While all the authors do so to differing extents, each is almost obsessively concerned with the intersection between fiction and metafiction. Elizabeth Smart's concern with the interplay of fiction and autobiography is the most pronounced of all the authors. *By Grand Central Station* and *The Assumption*, while presented as novels, do not attempt to hide that they are drawn directly from Smart's life. They are so closely aligned with her life that

they are often read as novel-journals. To read them as uncomplicated metafiction, however, is to disregard the deliberateness of Smart's craft. This chapter will challenge the familiar categorization of Smart as an enigmatic figure within Canadian letters whose works are uncategorizable because they exist between genres. Instead, I argue that her use of non-realist aesthetics that borrow from both romanticism (in her style) and high modernism (in her narrative structure and form), in combination with a self-conscious, subjective voice, offers a biting critique of her social milieu. Through this combination her narratives work through their "internal contradictions."

I. Criticism

The belatedness of Smart's arrival on the Canadian scene has led to a number of misreadings of her works. It not only led to readings that identified her texts as arcane in their non-adherence to the popular social realism of the time, but also to readings that were always already informed by her biography. This belatedness effectively allowed her authorial identity to eclipse the texts themselves and in so doing the extent of Smart's avant-garde narrative aesthetics and socio-cultural critique have been lost. David Lobdell writes that when *By Grand Central Station* finally made a substantial mark in the Canadian literary scene in the 1960s it belonged to "the so-called 'avant-garde' movement," which he identifies as "already a little stale and outmoded in Europe and England." He claims it "had barely made a dent on Canadian letters. For readers weaned on the works of Hugh MacLennan and Gabrielle Roy, *By Grand Central Station* [...] must have seemed outrageously arcane and obscure" (5). Barbara Godard claims that experimental Canadian novels such as Smart's "were innovative in a period when social realism held sway, and symbolist novels of an early phase of Modernism were just struggling to appear; a period when the prime critical value was

objectivity” (“Transgressions” 122). In a later article Godard makes the bold claim that the erasure of women writers from the Canadian canon was one of the impetuses behind modernist literature’s neglect (“Ex-centriques” 64). Brian Oliver, writing about Smart’s reception in the 1970s, makes the claim that Canadian literature, “[f]or the most part,” was “still in the realism phase of creative prose, behind the times as usual. (*The Diviners*, for example, is more typically Canadian than, say, *Beautiful Losers*, in style as well as subject)” (3). This brief list of critical statements about Smart’s place in mid-century Canadian prose demonstrates the difficulties she faced as a writer invested in a style that operated outside of social realism. These reactions to her predicament are echoed by Smart, who felt she “had no place at the literary table” in Canada. Scholars and other writers, she claims, “would speak to me one on one, but I had no place at the table” (qtd in. Sullivan, *By Heart* ix).

Although not recognized in its time for such innovations, *By Grand Central Station* is described by many critics as challenging the dominant traditions of realism through the technique of collage. Anne Quéma, for example, sees Smart as challenging the codes of the realist novel’s construction of plot and language. Specifically, she asserts that Smart captures “the effects of the sublime” by “creat[ing] a new temporal paradigm” (285). This new paradigm is achieved through a narrative structure that “borrows from the Surrealist reinterpretation of collage to effect a rapprochement of incongruous elements” (286). Smart’s use of a complex juxtaposition of narrative elements echoes the Surrealist desire to “unsettle and transform the meaning conventionally associated with the object” manipulated through collage. Quéma argues that Smart’s appropriation of *The Song of Songs*, for example, disrupts traditional readings of the text by recontextualizing it within an erotic narrative in order to reinscribe the original text as a work of erotic prose. Godard, in her article

“Transgressions,” also points to Smart’s use of *The Song of Songs*. Her description of this appropriation is useful here to contextualize Quéma’s use of the text:

By returning *The Song of Songs* to its original meaning as an erotic love poem, she is deliberately subverting the conventional Christian interpretation wherein the beloved is allegorically transformed into the church and the lover becomes Christ. Such a pairing of concrete and abstract terms is a fundamental and disruptive feature of Smart’s poetry. Here style mirrors thought. Love’s infinite power is her subject: sexual passion is divine and creative. (Godard 127)

Quéma identifies Smart’s adoption of collage as a “modernist experimentalism” that prioritizes “linguistic texture” over the traditional linearity of the realist novel. “In this respect,” she writes, “her text shares with modernist works such as *Ulysses* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) the project of a reconfiguration of time in terms of duration that derives from linguistic experimentation” (285). Quéma’s configuration is striking insofar as it demonstrates that Smart’s writing is striving to reach the same effect as Watson’s. Her reading places both writers as simultaneously yet separately desiring a spatialized text that achieves duration or *durée* through abandonment of a traditional linear structure.

Gina Oxbrow’s article “*By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*: Suffering as a Poetic Exercise” identifies Smart as “the first writer to break with the English-Canadian tradition of realism” and also places her as a precursor to the “re-emergence of self-conscious stylistic innovation in the arts which reached its zenith during the 1950s and 1960s and which was to culminate in the post-modernist movement” (288). Such a placement, I argue, suggests a late modernist classification. Like Quéma, Oxbrow emphasizes the use of collage as a structuring element. “At times the prose is realist [...] and typically narrative,”

she concedes, “but more frequently it resembles a collage of fractured sentiments, poetic utterances juxtaposed with documentary fragments.” By the end of the novel the narrative “even transcends to a stream of consciousness, almost bursting with unbalanced, uninhibited ramblings and varying reflections” (300). Smart’s collage of the realist and documentary with the surreal and poetic allows her to skillfully balance narratives that can support intimate, personal meditations on love, both erotic and familial, and expansive socio-political critiques. Moreover, these meditations need not be examined as parallel or simultaneous foci but instead as deeply intertwined and mutually dependent.

Although most critical praise lauds Smart’s narrative style for its challenging the realist novel, Quéma reads Smart as also challenging certain tenets of modernism. In her article “Elizabeth Smart and Cecil Buller: Engendering Experimental Modernism,” Quéma proposes that *By Grand Central Station* be read as an articulation of late modernism when she identifies it as appearing “at the tail end of international modernism” (275). Quéma adopts Bonnie Kime Scott’s typology of modernists and counter-modernists developed in *The Gender of Modernism* (1990). Scott reads modernism as an intricate collaborative dialogue between modernist artists. Quéma in turn reads Smart as enacting a series of “dialogical relations and counter-relations” that allow her “not only to endorse modernist practices but also to challenge the dominant discourse of modernism.” It is this ability to both participate and critique the “dominant discourse” that allows for a nuanced reading of Smart’s engagement with modernism. Further, it demonstrates her engagement with her social milieu. Quéma goes on to position Smart as specifically critiquing “the prevailing poetics of intertextuality and impersonality, or what in 1919 T.S. Eliot referred to as the relation between tradition and the individual talent.” Quéma argues that Smart’s prioritization of the female body allows for “a rhetoric of pathos or affect” that challenges a poetics of

impersonality (276). That is, she reads Smart's use of intertextual references to canonical works in the English canon, and to the Bible in particular, as a "gendered reappropriation" of works "traditionally associated with patriarchy" (277).

Overwhelmingly Smart's novels are examined for their treatment of the romantic in ways that have led to the erasure of the political from discussions of her work. There are, however, a number of exceptions to this trend. Heather Walton's article "Extreme Faith in the Work of Elizabeth Smart and Luce Irigaray," for example, argues that *By Grand Central Station* does not "[construct] a romantic retreat" from the war but is instead a "a radical response" to it. Walton's exploration of this response is oddly torn. On the one hand, she compares Smart's use of "the trope of the desiring and fertile female body" placed in "powerful opposition to the disembodied ethical and spiritual systems" as exemplifications of Luce Irigaray's, Hélène Cixous's, and Julia Kristeva's writings on the woman writer's use of the female body as a location of resistance against the hegemonic and phallogocentric writing tradition (40). On the other hand, however, she calls Smart's narrative choices "perverse" and identifies an emotion of "offence" when she "read[s] her work" (40, 47). Walton locates this "perversion" in Smart's decision "to expend her creative energies on the emotional and the particular, the ahistorical and the apolitical" (40). I disagree with Walton's assumption that a text cannot be both personal and political. Conversely, I argue that Smart's choice to write about the personal at a time when such choices were critiqued (as Smart's narrator is critiqued by her family and friends in Ottawa) is a defiantly political statement, one that historicizes her personal response to what she saw as a hypocritical Canadian attitude towards the war.

Similarly, I disagree with how Alice Van Wart, in her article "*By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept: The Novel as Poem*," describes the world of the novel as clearly

delineated into inside and outside worlds. Van Wart notes that Smart “creates a world that transcends the concrete ordinary world as it moves outward to encompass all love and all lovers’ hope and despair.” Smart’s “lyrical process,” she continues, “transcends the temporal and the spatial, and in doing so she extends the dimensions of lyrical poetry to the novel” (1). I suggest that the novel does not “transcend” the ordinary world but instead maneuvers gradually further and further into it by shifting from a romanticized idyll tied to the lyrical mode to a more realist novel. Van Wart further describes time and place as “important only in relation to the narrator’s feelings.” She elaborates that placing the novel during World War II “is important only because, ironically, the narrator feels her love is more powerful than the power of war” (2). Similarly, she reads the specific settings in the novel as places that “superficially link the narrative, but only as backdrops for the emotional drama unfolding in the heart of the narrator” (2). I also disagree with Van Wart’s de-historicizing and dis-placing of the novel in order to prioritize the erotic and romantic narrative is troubling. Smart is highly conscious of the political significance of the war and of her play with geography, place, and exile and therefore suggest that we read Smart’s novels as enacting a complex satire of her own journals – a satire that at once legitimizes her source narrative (i.e., her own writing) and is acutely aware of the problematics of her social self-positioning as an upper-class Canadian citizen throwing out social conventions in the pursuit of self-fulfillment and self-expression.

Nancy E. Wright reads into the complexities of Smart’s negotiations of war in her article “The Proper Lady and the Second World War in Elizabeth Smart’s Narratives.” Wright argues that both of Smart’s novels “justify an understanding of war ‘as a gendering activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all members of a society, whether or not they are combatants’” (1). Specifically, she sees Smart’s representations of traditional

constructions of the feminine in wartime Canada, England, and America as embodying stasis; such a construction is fixed within the domestic sphere, “absent from the scene of battle except as a photograph, an image that mirrors male desires for security, domestic comfort, and honour” (1). The gendering of wartime tends to “overfeminize” women; typically they are portrayed in terms of their procreative roles, and in this way Wright reads Smart as complicit in her representation of gender. Where Smart strays from tradition, Wright argues, is in her narrators’ mobility. That is, in wartime narratives the male combatant is oftentimes characterized as a heroic traveller on an adventure or quest. Smart’s narrators (like Smart herself) resist the overfeminized woman-in-stasis archetype through continual movement in *By Grand Central Station* and postwar remembrances of the dangerous cross-Atlantic journey with a child in *The Assumption*. In particular, it is the latter novel’s figuring of the narrator as a fertile mother brazenly traversing the oceanic battlefield that boldly challenges wartime gender roles. Wright sees the narrator’s reflection upon her self-exile from Canada as a response to the idyllic hopes of what travel would bring for the narrator of the earlier novel. “Exile,” Wright notes, is for the narrator of *The Assumption*, “an experience that revises her former ideas of travel as a means to gain mobility and freedom from the legal and moral constraints limiting a young woman’s life and voice” (4). Smart’s older narrator looks back on her dangerous wartime crossing as a moment when her younger self-narration broke down and the realities of war and life sunk in: “A wartime death on a sunken ship would have conformed with a paradigm of a completed heroic journey and life. Once in England, the narrator confronts her mistaken, romantic ideas about the location” (5). Smart’s texts challenge the wartime and postwar gender expectations of the woman writer and conclude that a deliberate choice to write outside of prescribed norms (that is, the choice to write experimental fiction) is one that leads to exile. For Smart’s main characters

such exile is a literal self-exile from homeland and also a figurative exile from the “literary table.” Denise Adele Heaps’ “The Inscription of ‘Feminine *Jouissance*’ in Elizabeth Smart’s *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*” places such risks within the context of feminist writing and reads the novel as “an experimental application” of Cixous’s writings about feminine *jouissance* (1). Heaps first praises the text for its innovative breaking down of gender binaries, calling the “I” narrator and her lover hermaphroditic and bisexual. Cixous offers both categories as alternatives to reading a text’s femininity; for Cixous, a “female” writer need not be female. Shakespeare, for example, is an author she places in the female category. Heaps then problematizes this empowerment by asking if the narrator’s acceptance and proclamation of her sexual desire does so at the expense of another woman’s (the lover’s wife); further, she asks whether the novel can be read as both feminine and feminist. Heaps argues that the following description of Cixous’s theories come very close to what Smart is doing:

She encourages women to write because the scene of writing is a “somewhere else” (72), a potentially subversive and rebellious site that is not obliged to reproduce the system (72), a space where one may valorize the feminine or deconstruct the hierarchical binary oppositions that have structured symbolic systems in general, a place where one may upset the harmony of a phallographic binary system of thought that always subjugates the feminine yin (darkness) to the masculine yang (light). (2)

What intrigues is the possibility that writing from this “somewhere else” aligns with notions of exile. How can such an alignment be read considering Smart’s self-exile to England and self-exile from traditional gender roles? Can we read Smart’s and her narrators’ self-exile as empowering positions of writing that are celebrated in *By Grand Central Station* only to later

be problematized in *The Assumption*? Can self-exile here be read as a rebellion or protest against the literary scene in Canada? What are the implications of such a protest that unites the author and narrators in tangible ways? How, ultimately, do we read the metafictional in Smart?

Indeed, the autobiographical is inescapable in Smart's texts. However, to read her works as uncomplicatedly integrating autobiographical material is to misread Smart's deliberate blurring of autobiography and fiction for the purposes of her craft. In "'OO – I have been well loved': Elizabeth Smart and the Three Musketeers" Elizabeth Podnieks argues that *By Grand Central Station* has too often been read as simply autobiographical: "Smart herself corroborates this in an interview with Rosemary Sullivan in 1979, when she states that the male figure in the book is not Barker per se; rather, 'he is faceless; the he is a love object'" (50). Podnieks agrees with Alice Van Wart's insistence that there has been too much focus on the "biographical implications" of the novel: "Quite simply, it is the book she had been preparing for ten years to write" (50). Robert McGill also tackles the issue of biography and narrative in "'A Necessary Collaboration': Biographical Desire and Elizabeth Smart" wherein he reads the paratexts of the book as informing most readers' desire for reading it biographically. He uses Gérard Genette's definition of paratext as including "interviews, cover blurbs, and prefaces" and introduces "reviews, critical biographies, and author profiles [to] also fulfill this paratextual function" (68). His article argues that *By Grand Central Station* is a "book that anticipates its own public life" (69). That is, the novel "is a text that is preoccupied by the same notions of desire and abandonment that characterize the book's reception" (70). He goes on to define the novel as "a metafictional allegory of reading" because it prophesizes its own reception, where "Smart's abandoned narrator is a stand-in for the reader: like the novel's audience, she enters a relationship that is intimate,

adulterous, and eventually estranged” (70). He concludes that “Smart and her book together provided critics with a myth of lost youth, and the story of the Canadian recognition of *By Grand Central Station* was as much about the belated act of discovery itself as about the virtues of the book” (74-75). McGill’s innovative reading inspires two lines of questioning: first, I wonder what possible implications of such a “myth of lost youth” may be for an author whose *Juvenilia* is so readily available? An author whose awareness of authorial positioning and reader reception was built into her works from the time she learned to write? Secondly, I suggest we take McGill’s interpretation further by reading critical responses to Smart, alongside similar responses to Glassco, Watson and Lowry, as responding not only to the belated response to these authors and their lost youth but in fact as belated responses to modernism and our loss of a collective Canadian modernist origins.

II. *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*

Unlike many works of Canadian modernism, which were in the public eye when first published only to fade into obscurity, Smart’s *By Grand Central Station* garnered little critical or popular attention when it was first published and gradually rose in popularity, achieving what some have called a “cult status.” The novel has not only risen in popularity over the years for general reading audiences, it has also drawn attention from scholars around the world. Studies of modernist prose in Canada, however, often leave out Smart’s novel in their discussions. As already noted, *By Grand Central Station* is often read as highly autobiographical: a young woman falls in love and begins an affair with an older, married man and moves to New York to have his child. Similarly, Smart’s affair with the poet George Barker resulted in her move to England where she raised their four children. *By Grand Central Station* uses Psalm 137 – a lament for homeland by the Israelites expelled from

Jerusalem – as a structuring device that frames the narrative’s meditation on exile. While there have been a handful of studies of the trope of exile in this text, they all focus on the narrative of the love story (Fröjdendahl; McMullen; Oxbrow). The novel takes place in North America over the backdrop of World War II and chronicles a love triangle between three characters, all unnamed: our narrator, her married lover, and his wife. The slim volume is divided into ten parts and chronicles the narrator’s longing for her lover as he and his wife stay with her on the Californian coast, the eventual seduction and consummation of this love within this lush landscape, her incarceration at the Arizona border for crimes of morality, her return to her family and homeland in Ottawa, followed by their troubled visits and her repeated abandonment (physical and emotional) of both herself and the child who has resulted from the affair. The narrative style is dense, lyrical, and rife with metaphor, most strikingly tied to images of rivers (both of water and of blood) and is peppered with allusions to biblical and literary texts.

While the majority of her critics either choose not to address the war in their discussions of the text or argue that Smart’s romantic narrative overshadows or de-historicizes/de-politicizes the war, I believe that Smart’s text does not abandon the historical and the political. It is only as the novel progresses that the ahistorical transitions into the historical, the apolitical into the political. Smart places the historical and political in direct juxtaposition with mythological and spiritual tropes in a manner not unlike the high modernists. That is, while modernist authors often fragment linear narrative trajectories in favour of a more spatialized form that places disparate historical and mythical figures and moments alongside one another, this does not *dismiss* history but rather emphasizes the patterns inherent in it. In particular, I read *By Grand Central Station* as meditating on mid-century fears of dehumanization brought on by war.

This fear is exemplified in the following passage from Part Two of the novel. In this section the lover and his wife have arrived to stay with our narrator in California while she types his latest novel. The narrator and the lover have begun to meet secretly in the night, and this passage begins with the speaker barricaded in her room, surrounded physically by the grotesque lushness of the surrounding environment and psychologically by the war that rages half a globe away. I quote it here at length in order to demonstrate the narrative shifts in this dense passage:

I have locked my door, but terror is ambushed outside. The eucalyptus batters the window, and I hear all smitten Europe wailing from the stream below. Malevolent ghosts appear at the black panes, unabashed by the pale crosses of the frame, for now Jesus Christ walks the waters of another planet, bleeding only history from his old wounds.

All cries are lost in the confusion of the storm. The coughing of sheep in the lost hills of Dorset, of gassed soldiers, of a two-year child with croup, roll into one avalanche of calamity, which sounds in the rushing of the stream, and which sounds even underneath the insensitive stomp that can break the whore's heart.

America, with Californian claws, clutches the Pacific, and now she masses her voices for frantic appeal. They roar like Niagara. They shake the synthetic hills. The sand of catastrophe is loosed and every breast is marked with doom.

But the cheating cicada arrives to lie All's Well in God's ear, which measures time so generously, and the woodlice are rocking their babies under

the log. Anxiety lies still, while his eye makes its vast convolutions on remote and other worlds. (32-33)

The ghosts that appear are threefold: first, the “wailing” in Europe; second, the local ghosts that wander after throwing themselves from the cliffs as our narrator has often contemplated; and third, the ghost of the spurned wife of her lover who the narrator often pathologizes as angelic. These ghosts need not mind the symbolism of the white cross as they gaze in at her because, as we learn, Jesus has since left Earth, and is figured as an extraterrestrial who bleeds not the blood of those in the world, but instead bleeds history. The second paragraph returns to those wailing in Europe. The physical storm outside her window has now metamorphosed into the storm of war. Sheep, soldiers, and children cough in a polyphony that rolls from a calamity of snow to a rush again of water, returning us to the foregrounded scene. The paragraph ends with a return to the topic of sexuality that is never far away in this novel. Here, the sound of those suffering in Europe is so pervasive it trumps even the prostitute’s lament at her own mistreatment at the hands of callous men. The third paragraph specifically focuses on the conundrum of the American response to the horrors of war. It emphasizes that the noise has become so pervasive it must be acknowledged and the response is roared back in return. The “synthetic hills” of California heed this cacophony and the last sentence takes a page from Yeats after Jesus’s interstellar abandonment leaves room for some “rough beast, its hour come round at last / Slouch[ing] towards Bethlehem to be born” (“The Second Coming” 21-22). Additionally, the “Breasts [...] marked with doom” echo the last stanzas of Psalm 137 (which we will shortly turn to) in which the Babylonian mothers are warned of the impending murder of their children. Motherhood is echoed once more in the fourth paragraph, where instead of the figure of the Madonna and child or the Babylonian mothers we turn away from humanity to

the natural world where woodlice “[rock] their babies under the log.” By this point, the only positive available image of motherhood must be found hiding in the verdant undergrowth of the woods outside. The paragraph ends with anxiety personified, and his Emersonian wandering eye is turned away from not only humanity but also Earth, again abandoning it for other worlds, perhaps not yet past saving.

Such a passage demonstrates that to read *By Grand Central Station* only as a self-centred meditation on love does a disservice to the complexity of Smart’s engagement with her social milieu. By expanding traditional readings of her text to include not only the narrative of the love triangle, much can be added to the study of this text.

Smart’s use of Psalm 137, for example, is traditionally read as a metaphorical device that links her forbidden and exiled love with the laments of the Israelites exiled from Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Alice Van Wart notes that the narrator is “exiled through love in an alien and material world, and further exiled from love itself when her lover abandons her in New York in order to return, out of pity, to his wife.” Contrasting this exile with that of the Israelites in Psalm 137 “associat[es] this love with the Biblical love” and in so doing “it encompasses a tradition, an idealized literary past” (3). While this reading certainly holds water, I think we can *also* read Smart’s allusion to Psalm 137 as a direct commentary on Europe’s “wandering five million” that she repeatedly addresses in her text. Smart’s mode of social, political, and historical commentary may be illuminated by a reading of the Psalm itself:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we
remembered Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they
that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I
prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. (*King James Version*, Psalm 137. 1-6)

The first six lines of Psalm 137 link the acts of remembering and lamenting homeland with a demanded vocalization of this lament by the Babylonian captors. This demand resulted in the Israelites self-silencing in the hanging of the harps. The next three lines, however, link forgetting and an inability to honour homeland with a silencing of both writing and speech. There is an odd double silencing here, one self-imposed and one threatened:

Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who
said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that
rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.
Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.
(7-9)

These lines, directed towards God, ask for a remembrance on his part of the destruction of Jerusalem – a destruction that has left the Israelites both homeless and silenced. Finally, lines twenty through twenty-four warn the Babylonian mothers of the coming punishment and, most sinister, the alleged joy taken by he (assumedly the God referenced above) who administers the punishment. When read, as most critics do, in conjunction with the love triangle in *By Grand Central Station*, obvious connections appear: the novel's title hints at a bringing into modernity of the traditional narrative of exile, where, instead of being exiled

from a physical place, there is instead an exile from love. There is also the thread of doubled victimhood: in the Psalm there is the original exile of the Jewish people and the subsequent genocide of a generation of children, while in the love story there is figure of the lover's wife as victim as well as the abandonment of our narrator and her child.

As the novel progresses, these meditations on war, suffering, and exile are further explored. In particular, the novel constructs a complex relationship between the world of love and the outside world. The most idyllic moment of love occurs in Part Three of the novel. Separated from the lover's wife, the narrator and her lover traverse through California. Their love, to the narrator, is so strong that the outside world cannot disrupt it; further, it is so expansive that it can contain the entire world. The narrator rhapsodies: "we can include the world in our love, and no irritations can disrupt it, not even envy" (41). In this state the narrator thinks her love is untouchable, and her pronouncement that "there is no reality but love" is later echoed by the narrator's attempts to envelop the outside world into this love-reality (41). At the sight of "waifs and strays" at a railway station she declares: "There are not too many bereaved or wounded but I can comfort them, and those 5,000,000 who never stop dragging their feet and bundles and babies with bloated bellies across Europe, are not too many or too benighted for me to say, Here's a world of hope" (43). This is the first of many occurrences where the narrator vehemently pronounces that the strength of her love can cure the world's ills. This is also the first specific reference to the wandering five million of Europe. While in Part Two the narrator alludes to ghosts "wailing" alongside imaginative manifestations of her own guilt and longing, they are there internalized and used metaphorically to express the extent of her anguish. This return in Part Three to the five million appears alongside "waifs and stray" cats at a railway station. They are still treated as abstractions that work to mirror the state of her love. It is not until later in the text – after

she and her lover have been separated (first forcibly by law and later by his choice) – that her “bloated belly,” due to both hunger and the child she carries, will free the “wandering Europeans” from metaphor (111).

Parts Five and Six not only meditate on our narrator’s loneliness in Canada but also present a fascinating portrait of war-time Canada, particularly as it compares with the America she is forced to leave. En route she is melancholic yet looks forward to a community where she can at least expect understanding and politeness: “After the greed already hardening part of the American face into stone,” Smart writes in Part Five, “I fancy I see kindness and gentleness looking out at me from train windows” (56). She returns to the idyllic here, but instead of an idyll of love held in the rapturous present it is a romanticized idyll of history: “I sense the reminiscences of the early pioneer’s passion, and the determination of early statesmen who were mild but individual, and who allude to Shakespeare while discussing politics under the elms” (57). As opposed to America, where “the blood of early settlers, split in feud and heroism,” Canada has “not yet been bottled by a coca-cola firm and sold as ten-cent tradition” (57). By invoking the violence of the American civil war and blurring Canada’s historical inheritance, she de-historicizes her homeland and makes it a *tabula rasa* to which she returns. Indeed, Part Five ends with a description of Canada as a place of “waiting, unself-conscious as the unborn’s, for future history to be performed upon it” (57). Not only is her homeland de-historicized but in fact constructed as *prior to* history, waiting, as it were, like a child *in utero*.

Part Six, conversely, presents a less-than-idyllic homeland where the narrator complains of the stinginess and inflexibility of those who speak of duty and morals instead of love. It is the hypocrisy of those who continually chide her for *only* speaking of her love, for not doing her part for the Canadian cause while, meanwhile, “11 000 faces identical with

Christ's are growing thinner in the federal prison" (62). Of this she asks, "[who] dares breathe pleasure when war is the word but not yet the actuality? Here the gossip of war covers over the goal which might in small degrees even be present now." In contrast to what she sees as a country in denial of the actualities and horrors of war, she notes that in "London they know this better, and strangers kiss in underground shelters or find jokes in bombed effigies. Be at hypocrisy's funeral, O my dear country, and pay the usual hypocritical tear" (64). Her argument, articulated throughout the text, is that ignoring the individual human stories and concentrating solely on the mass horrors ends up desensitizing and overwhelming to a point at which the human is no longer recognizable as such. By the end of Part Six the anti-idyll of home is completed as Smart re-historicizes Canada as a place capable of allowing suffering. Not only are those imprisoned denied basic human rights, but, as we shall see, she invokes Canada's violent colonial past.

As she is briefly reunited with her lover in Ottawa at the end of Part Six, the narrator returns to a language of love. Her characterization of this love, however, is no longer one that is strong enough to separate from reality or absorb the entirety of that reality. Rather, she laments: "tonight we will put the whole untidy world into a nest, and it will hang swinging comfortably as if it were as far away and as glossed over by history as the Red Indians' right to be free" (66). In this passage the world is put aside, outside of love, forgotten, but only for a while. Now her characterization of the world is one that acknowledges the dangers of "glossing over history," as she did in the first half of the novel. Such a glossing, she warns, results in the violation of an entire people – the "Red Indians" of her homeland.

The final chapters of the novel take place in New York, in a tiny hotel room shared, first, by the narrator and her lover, and then only her as she waits for her lover to return to

her from his wife. In these final sections the reality of the war is barefaced and omnipresent. Part Eight begins with the death of the lover's brother, mother, and grandmother in a London Underground during a bombing raid. At this point our narrator still holds on to the belief that love "is stronger than death": "Babylon and Sodom and the Roman Empire fell, but the winter blizzard cuts as cruelly as ever and love still uproots the heart better than an imagined landmine" (79). The narrator reaches back beyond human history to geological history and back again in a curious section that documents her rapidly dissolving hope for a resolution to her love triangle. The passage turns to the extinction of the dinosaurs who "trailed across the desert to their end" – an image that invokes, once again, the exiled Israelites wandering through the desert of Psalm 137. The narrator apocalyptically warns that another extinction may occur here: but is she speaking of their love or more literally of humanity? Smart's use of metaphor is vague here as the worlds of love and reality become more intimately enmeshed. "So perhaps there will be no revolving back at all," she ponders, here using, if indeed we are to read this conceit as one chronicling human history, a movement similar to Yeats's "gyres": a characterization of the progress of history as cyclical. Instead, she warns that there may only be "archives full of archetypes." Much as the soil stands as an archive of the dinosaur's existence, in this case she likens archetypes to "composite photographs of movie heroines" (83): image-collages that create romanticized and idealized portraiture not dissimilar from those the narrator herself created in the first half of the text. She then emphasizes the continuity of nature that, with or without them (lovers or mankind), will continue. She ends this passage by describing herself as dissolved into an elemental existence that will allow her to live within nature until the "extinguishment" of time. She dissolves into chemicals she had "held together" through the

years, disappearing like a composite photograph would disappear into chemicals, returning to a white sheet, unwritten on (84).

Part Ten begins with the titular: “By grand Central Station I sat down and wept.” While our narrator weeps for her love, for herself, for her child, for her destitution and abandonment, she emotionally aligns herself with Psalm 137’s exiled Israelites who silence themselves and worry about losing the ability to express a longing for their lost homeland. It is amongst this faceless and amorphous crowd (made so by the tears that blur her vision and make “Lexington Avenue [dissolve] in [her] tears” [104]) that she historically aligns those original Israelites with the voices wailing from across Europe and the answering cries from America, ostensibly uniting different pockets of humanity in a unified lament of loss. Instead reading such connections as ahistorical, I argue that these juxtapositions foreground the problems of historical silencing and the need for instead a voicing of lament, whether it is for a lost homeland, a lost love, or a lost child. Just as the Israelites of Psalm 137 silenced themselves when their captors demanded songs of their homeland, our narrator falls into silence when being questioned by the police in Arizona and likewise censors herself in Ottawa from speaking too often and too vehemently about her separation from her lover. By the end of the novel the narrator manifests the dangers of such censorship as she “writhe[s] in desperation” at her silence loneliness and, simultaneously, “shriek[s] beneath [her lovers’] window” to let her presence be known (107). In the last pages of the novel she is once again with her lover. Their reunion, however, is anything but ideal. He is plagued by nightmares: “He cries out in his sleep. He sees the huge bird of catastrophe fly by. Both its wings are lined with the daily paper. Five million other voices are shrieking too. How shall I be heard?” (111). The end of the novel is filled with shrieks, her own, her lover’s, and those of the five million in Europe. That both lovers join in this cacophony suggests that their love

is now wholly part of the world, neither a container and balm for it nor able to set the world aside in a bird's nest to rock while they ignore it. Instead Smart has fully immersed them in this world. It is at this point of cross-cultural and cross-historical identification that Smart leaves her narrator, to return years later in *The Assumption* as the world settles into the realities of post-war life.

III. *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals*

Published in 1978, thirty-three years after her first novel, *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals* chronicles the continued self-exile of a Canadian woman in England following the horrors of World War II. *The Assumption's* publication coincided with Smart's discovery by popular and academic readerships. This popularity was one that moved beyond her strong, select readers in England to include Canada, the United States, as well as a global audience. Her works have, since the mid 1960s, been consistently popular; as of 2011 there have been with twenty-eight editions of *By Grand Central Station* published in nine languages. Between the late 60s and early 1980s there has been a skyrocketing interest in her works. *By Grand Central Station* saw a 1966 British reissue by Panther Books, the first American edition by the Popular Library in 1975, another 1977 British reissue to coincide with the publication of her poetry collection *A Bonus* by Polytantric Press, and, finally, the first Canadian edition of any of her works with Deneau's 1981 hardcover edition. This cultural moment is significant for Smart's readership because it includes a wealth of interest and production by a large number of feminist writers and scholars and a post-Massey *Report* moment of Canadian nationalism that actively encouraged the cementing of a narrative trajectory that demonstrated a rich history in our national literature. These two factors did much to reenergize interest in not only Smart's novel, but also her own highly romanticized story: the young Canadian darling

who eschewed her status as a member of the Ottawa elite in favour of a life of creative and material struggle all in the name of love.

Although the majority of reactions to *The Assumption* were favourable, there were a handful of negative reviews. “Auberon Waugh,” Rosemary Sullivan notes, “brought out a review simultaneously in *The Evening Standard* and *The Statesman* entitled: ‘Heroine in a Terrible Mess!’” (*By Heart* 337). Regardless, Smart was appreciative of all the attention and sought to take advantage of it. The publication of *The Assumption* also coincided with Smart’s entry into a mass-media driven world of popular culture. She travelled to Canada on book tours and took up a position as a writer in residence at the University of Alberta in the 1982-83 academic year. This was followed by a year in Toronto funded by a Canada Council grant, for which she was recommended by Michael Ondaatje and Alice Munro (*By Heart* 363).

The Assumption does more than serve as a summary of post-war life in England. It also provides a reevaluation of *By Grand Central Station*: Smart offers a critique of the ways in which the earlier novel had been interpreted and suggests new ways through which to approach it. The structure of *The Assumption* mimics that of Smart’s earlier novel: it is similarly separated into parts that chronicle a distinct moment in her narrator’s emotional and creative life. Unlike *By Grand Central Station*, each chapter or “part” in the later novel has a title and several of the parts are further broken into sections which are subtitled. The result is a novel that is more fragmented, yet more controlled and more self-aware. I contend that *The Assumption* abandons the lyrical fluidity of *By Grand Central Station* in order to create a distinctly un-journal-like prose. Although the voice of the confessional “I” remains, this voice is more purposefully controlled and directed. This increased self-awareness extends past the narrative form to also include the subject matter addressed in the text. In particular,

there is a meta-fictional concentration on the practice of writing and the place of art within this post-war landscape.

Unlike criticism of *By Grand Central Station*, critical responses to *The Assumption* more frequently frame the novel as responsive to Smart's particular socio-cultural milieu. Cy-Thea Sand, in her article "The Novels of Elizabeth Smart," argues that in Smart's second novel the "heroine is transformed from Nature's daughter into a creator of culture, an actor rather than one acted upon" (11). This agency is evident in the shift from implicit critique of hypocrisy to pointed, witty caricatures of those who exhibit those self-same qualities. Whereas in *By Grand Central Station* the narrator "has no control over her feelings" and is "continually acted upon," In *The Assumption* "the narrator-heroine has joined the community of women that Adrienne Rich calls those 'who age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world'" (12-13). Nancy Wright sees *The Assumption* as both "a means of representing the dislocation of literary and social conventions during and after the war" and also "a result of the historical and material conditions of the production of her narrative" (Wright 8). Jean Mallinson argues that the "substance" of *The Assumption* demands that it be read as "a continuation of and a commentary on the earlier work." The formal aspects – "discontinuous vignettes as a variety of modes, lyrical, anecdotal and reflective, with an oblique relation to narrative – indicate that the earlier book established for Smart the frame within which she chooses to work" (1).

The Assumption's engagement with autobiographical material, and critics' responses to such engagement, also becomes more richly developed in this period. In the introduction to *By Heart*, Rosemary Sullivan notes that Smart was an artist who "refused to make a distinction between her life and her work" (xi). Robert McGill notes that in the 1970s attention to *By Grand Central Station's* "autobiographical aspects had caused [Smart] to

emphasize its non-referentiality instead” (72). Further, he notes that “feminist reviewers of *By Grand Central Station* in the 1970s generally downplayed the book’s autobiographical aspects and celebrated it instead from a formalist perspective” (77).

Where the earlier novel followed the narrative of love, *The Assumption* addresses “love of various kinds” (110): love of mother for child that is rarely expressed beyond a primal need to clothe, feed, and shelter; a love of family, particularly of her father, whose death is chronicled with tenderness and wariness; love for friends, acquaintances, fellow-Londoners in the bar, the “rogues and rascals” she identifies as her true compatriots; a love of the physical objects and environment that surrounds her, whether that is a more traditional exultation of trees, birds and flowers, or whether she speaks of the less easily romanticized buildings, pavement stones, and dress shops of the London streets; and, finally, a love of self, and in particular a love for self-as-writer. This self-love does not allow her to exist alongside those who, unlike her fellow “rogues and rascals,” choose to not engage in the messiness of music and sex and life. Late in the book, as she struggles to find space in her life for writing, she confesses that these loves were inserted “just to entertain, [...] [because she] knew you’d be bored and thirsty without a drink, a tale, a diversion on this bald monotonous route” (110). She admits that she should have inserted more love in the text, one that admittedly is tied down tightly to the realities of post-war life. “But *could* I?” she asks, “I doubt it. Love is not the point. Love is beside the point” (110). If love is beside the point – located adjacent to but running parallel, never touching – was love beside the point in the earlier novel? Were both implicated in love but pointedly about something else? *The Assumption* implies the point as being one of creative self-expression, a voice crying out to be heard in a metafictional mode of late modernist prose.

The Assumption begins not where *By Grand Central Station* leaves off but after the end of *The Waste Land*: a post-war landscape where the threatened city is simply “boring”: instead of apocalypse we have ennui and routine. We join our narrator “[w]andering in the wastes of Kensington” where the “neat ruins of the war lie like a boring scar, whose history is all of the repetitive future, and all that memory can retain” (9). The use of simile here does not allow for clear metaphors. Language, this opening suggests, has become as tenuous and wild as the “derelict paper bags” blowing haphazard through the streets. Time is wrested from linearity and tied, instead, into repetitive cycles yet also held in stasis where history is “all that memory can retain.” Throughout this section the narrator speaks of and to the collective “we,” observing that, although England is on the winning side of the war, “we are not massed for victory” (10). Instead, she calls out the hypocrisy of war propaganda and the ease with which the citizens fell into its lull when she invokes: “O Führer of self-love and self-hate, whose false moustaches fooled us into thinking he was not us: where is your twin enemy with the terrible banner of peace?” (10) Smart boldly deconstructs the caricatures of war to reveal the realities of day-to-day life. She deconstructs even this invocation, which “sounds too highfalutin for the times – out of place” (10). The elevated poetic invocations that run through *By Grand Central Station* no longer apply and the narrator is no longer a self-mythologized lover but instead “just a woman in a fish queue, with her bit of wrapping paper, waiting for her turn” (10). This section continues in this self-focused manner; the narrator, pointing out a hole in her stocking, laments that even “[v]anity has become a burden, and I think desire has failed too” (11). The chapter ends with the narrator lamenting for all the exhausted women who, “hourly, yes, at every timeless hour, redundant and obsolete, the witches increate in Kensington, as one more woman becomes too weary to go on” (11). Here the desiring and sexualized women whose stories were fought for so

vehemently in *By Grand Central Station* are now in danger of metamorphosing into oddly out of place and time witches. Time is again paradoxically both timeless and plodding on “hourly.”

The Assumption, as evidenced by the title, loses none of Smart’s interest in using Biblical material as structuring elements in her work. In “Part Three: Working,” for example, the narrator goes into a rhapsody comparing the battles of love with religious parable. This section poignantly addresses the ways in which the narrator of *By Grand Central Station* characterized war, particularly in the first two thirds of the novel. “Is it possible,” she begins, “in the midst of the battle to view the war with a larger perspective?” (22) She claims to have lain “like Lazarus waiting for Jesus to come and tell me to get up.” Yet she is unsure whether he will come or not and concludes that, regardless, “there has been no resurrection” (23). In the Bible, the name Lazarus occurs twice: first in the Gospel of Luke 16:19–31 where he is a beggar who lies outside the gates of a rich man who ignores his poverty. When both men die Lazarus goes to heaven, not on account of his poverty but because of the grace with which he accepted it. The second, better-known reference is to Lazarus of Bethany from the Gospel of John who is raised from the dead by Jesus as an example of his miraculous power. The narrator points out that she is not hung out on a cross but instead is waiting “at a desk in an office, making out shopping lists” (23). Both incarnations of Lazarus wait, like the narrator. But will she accept her poverty with grace similar to that of poor Lazarus? Or does she hope to instead be Lazarus of Bethany, risen from the dead by wild miraculous act? This act of waiting for a resurrection that has not come parallels the narrator’s frustrations with her writing career. *The Assumption* focuses on the things that have prevented the narrator from achieving her artistic goals (children, poverty, and the constant need to work that both

of those entail). The disappointing impossibility of a miracle that would resurrect her writing career is balanced, throughout the text, by a belief in the miraculous.

The problematic connection between the language and ideals of love are addressed in “Part Five: The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals.” This section was originally written as a separate piece and published independently. It begins in May with the narrator frustrated by spring because all of its signs, “the lilacs and the field of buttercups and the birds’ eggs,” seem only to her like an “inventory” or “catalogue of the world, without passion or caprice” (33). The topic of age and fading youth take over the narrator’s musings in the first few pages of the section. She identifies herself as 31½, too old for “a floppy beribboned hat”; the precociousness of her childhood has disappeared and she “cannot bear the lilac tree now” (34). The connection with nature that she harboured and cherished as a child has seemingly left her behind. This focus on nature quickly turns to a more scientific contemplation. After she birthed her first child, she “felt time and space come whorling back into the empty space where it had lain. And Einsteinian demons come rushing to attack me with the terrible nature of the naked truth” (34). The use of the word “whorling” suggests an almost Vorticist figuration of her uterus: after the child in funnels the reality of her situation. No longer can the romanticized story be upheld; instead, “Einsteinian demons” – strange confluences of theoretical physics and mythology – lay bare the undeniable reality of her life. She offers some examples of other women who strategize differently to deal with the world. We are offered two choices: women who go out and sing at the pub despite their desperate situations and “women decorators” who construct barriers out of pillows and toile and “Elizabeth Arden foundations” order to “veil” themselves from the world (35). She sees her potential future in both of these women and once again is faced with the eventual “return to the moment of aloneness to be BORNE” (37).

Instead of facing and bearing this truth, our narrator travels to France. This self-exile in the form of a short vacation offers the possibility of meeting “a man with an expensive shirt and Tweed on his moustache [who] will see in [her] an acquisition for his yacht” (39). However, she soon discovers this hope for the normalcy of the “Elizabeth Arden” crowd cannot ever satisfy her and that she will always be drawn back to the misfits of the world. While at the villa surrounded by a paradisaal landscape she finds herself living with cheap, unimaginative Brits with whom she is careful not to share her erotic enthusiasms for nature. She finds them obsessed with money; even while she sleeps she can “hear them adding and subtracting and dividing, with an edge in their voices, growing shriller, panicking” (39). This is exacerbated by the life and excitement that the narrator knows is going on around her. She can hear music from across the bay, and she wants to go down the road to find “rioting, swooning, abundant” scenes instead of playing cards in the villa. After many days of the same the narrator fully drops her self-denying pretense that she could possibly bear a life of comfortable boredom and bemoans that she cannot engage with her own type of people: “The faces of the rogues and rascals hung mocking and aphrodisiac over Antibes” (41).

Her exile from this exile is confirmed when the group decides to go into town on the last night of their holiday. They make a game of deciding what to do with this last evening, each writing a desired activity on a slip of paper to be drawn from a hat. Each selection is expected (“Go to a nightclub,” “Go to the casino”), but when the last piece of paper is drawn the group goes silent and the evening is shut down. We find out that “[t]he rude word” for which “[o]nly the verb works” must be *fuck* and was undeniably written by our narrator out of frustration. At this point she accepts her life for what it is: “The price of life is pain, since the price of comfort is death and damnation” (43). As Nancy Wright notes, the “requirement, to relinquish language and to limit her own speech, proves too much for the

narrator” at this moment and she comes to accept that “her own appreciation of her linguistic act of defiance that exceeds the social code of propriety established to limit her language and sexuality” (6). Yet she consoles herself with the fact that she is welcomed among “the rogues and rascals” who “raise their stolen hats,” “buy [her] a bitter with borrowed cash,” “spend their Authors’ Society grants in a single evening,” and “are received into heaven” (44). This last statement returns to Smart’s earlier reference to Lazarus and the possibility that she is playing around with both biblical figures of Lazarus; here, it is the poor Lazarus who accepts his fate as a poor beggar is assumed into heaven while the rich man who passes him by and selfishly does not share his wealth is denied entrance.

The Assumption continues to meditate on the act of writing in a section entitled “Trying to write, trying to survive.” It begins with a breakthrough that, although “a bit bogged down,” is nevertheless encouraging for our narrator. She returns cyclically in this section to the topic of *success* and how one can qualify it. She worries if she will have enough paper, and enough “nappies” – the combination of motherhood and writing here aligned in a co-conspiratorial fashion. She then begins to directly address the reader of the novel. She notes that her readers “need a drama [...], a climax, not to say an orgasm, to make an experience – a rising to a height, and a subsiding” (99). She anticipates her critics when she admits that the novel should contain more characters than herself, that “[t]hey are usually called for” in a story. “But,” our narrator concedes, “there’s only me. Large as life” (100).

Smart’s literary allusions then turn to North American settlement narratives written by women, most notably Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie. “What about those clearings in the woods, and the wiped-out pioneers, and the lonely women agonizing?” she asks. And although she mentions “no names,” the ghosts of these women “hit you hard as you come bursting out of the dark secretive woods into this little bright patch of total

failure” (101). In the figures of Parr Traill and Moodie we find kindred spirits of women labouring to support families and maintain writing careers. Like these early writers Smart also has an intimate connection with gardens. Stemming from her love of nature fostered as a child, Smart’s home in North Suffolk was surrounded by a garden that she tended attentively. Her writings on gardening were published posthumously in 1989 in *Elizabeth’s Garden: Elizabeth Smart on the Art of Gardening*. Undoubtedly, then, Smart’s interest in planting and gardens likewise adds to her connection to Moodie and Parr Traill and leads her to conclude: “So girls, I recommend a study of manure, and the great rising and falling and fertilizing principles, which are not sad, however many sentimentalists weep to see fair daffodils haste away” (101). For her, then, despite what she labels as failure, the *success* of these women must come from a complete melding of the natural and the creative. This last comment serves as a “dig” to those poets who use the natural world as a place of metaphor without knowing anything of its true essence, something, as Rosemary Sullivan points out, with which Smart always had an affinity. In addition, the narrator here seems again to be offering instruction to the earlier narrator of *By Grand Central Station* who metaphorized nature obsessively throughout the text, yet never seemed to reach a consensus that would allow the needs of the body (nature) and the needs of the mind (art) to coexist.

And yet such a caution offered to the earlier narrator is balanced by an apologia when the narrator compares the human desire for successful creative expression with the plant’s desire to grow: “The greed of plants to succeed doesn’t seem at all disgusting. They don’t need praise or encouragement or stimulation [...]. The message, for them IS them” (102). What was often figured as selfishness or greed in her earlier narrator is here figured as an instinctual response in nature. The older narrator knows this option is unavailable to her and instead turns to the model of Beckett, and specifically to the theatre of the absurd and

its transformative possibilities to turn tragedy (what she calls her “scream[ing] for distraction”) into comedy. The success of the absurd comes from the fact that “[o]nce you start speaking, of course, the agony lessens – memory of it is near, but relief makes laughter” (102). This section ends with an extended scene of the narrator’s evening with friends at a local pub – her nod to the combination of tragedy and comedy in the scenes from real life. Take for example Zena, who visits the pub for the first time since giving birth three weeks previously to her fourth child: “She is pale, puffy, flabby, but eager to begin again” (104). Zena finds camaraderie in the pub where “nobody pities her and roughly she does what she should against great odds” (105). Nancy Wright argues that, for Smart, women like Zena “offer the narrator a model of the production of satisfying narratives that express their experiences” (7). She takes these women as an example to model her work on.

The novel ends with a return to the unseen yet written word *fuck* in “The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals.” Here our narrator tells us: “Be. Do. See. (Only the verb works)” (109). She wonders about the state of her work, again anxious about its form: “What’s it about? What’s it all for? No story, no characters, no memory of people, places, things” (109). In these last few pages, she breaks apart her intentions, not only for this work but, arguably, for all of her works. She admits to dwelling on love “of various kinds,” but this she tells the reader was simply “to entertain you.” In the end, she insists, love “was beside the point.” Even though her works are often read as meditations on love, if one reads carefully, she cautions, moving beyond the salacious rewards the reader with a richer text: a text that enfolds such meditations within a post-war socio-cultural milieu that frowns upon non-sanctioned forms of writing by women. She then ponders what would have happened if she had abandoned her children for her art and what she could have done differently to make their lives better. After this moment of self-critique a voice pipes in: “Miss Smart, you

are not the first woman to have had four children” (111). The text ends with a jubilant return to the verb that works: “I picked these roses because they looked so disgusting, just waiting there for the bees to come and fuck them”: a combination of the unstoppable instincts of nature twinned with the traditional symbol of love and passion (111).

In *By Heart* Rosemary Sullivan writes that *The Assumption* was, for Smart, about “[t]he irony of being cornered *into* salvation” (332). The mode of social-satire that Smart honed in her juvenilia is transformed in *By Grand Central Station* as a social critique of the hypocrisy of wartime attitudes towards sexual morality at a time when moral abuses of much grander and severe nature were being committed in the name of imperialism and nationalism. *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals* similarly criticizes attitudes towards morality. Unlike the London of *By Grand Central Station*, where the horrors of war stripped its citizens of their caution and allowed them to kiss in the underground, the narrator here finds that Londoners recoil in horror from “the verb that works.” Those who do not shrink from their natures, those rogues and rascals that the narrator gathers around her, are those who, like Lazarus who accepts his poverty, are assumed into heaven.

The place of Elizabeth Smart’s writings within Canadian letters has always been overshadowed by her life story. While this is due in large part to the metafictional nature of her writings, she is most often portrayed in a stylized and mythologized manner that tends to overlook her literary achievements. Michael Brian Oliver’s 1978 essay “Elizabeth Smart: Recognition” contributes a unique perspective because it is one of the few critical works that was written as her renaissance was happening. He calls her “a found literary treasure” who “has been living in virtual seclusion.” He warns that all this new attention mischaracterizes her as “a Romantic Lady Recluse with hints of Tragedy in her past” and notes that “[i]nstead of ignoring her, readers are now recognizing her for the wrong reason, paying too much

attention to her life and not enough attention to her art” (1). Oliver then draws a fascinating connection between the types of attention that have been given to Smart and her contemporary Malcolm Lowry:

[E]ven though Elizabeth Smart was born and grew up in Canada and finished writing her book on the coast of British Columbia just a few miles from where Malcolm Lowry was simultaneously finishing *Under the Volcano*. (No, they never met.) It is deplorable that Canadian readers have so long paid tribute to Lowry, the exile among us, yet so long been ignorant of Elizabeth Smart who chose, for reasons at least partly cultural, to exile herself to Britain and has stayed there for more than thirty years especially when we realize that her literary accomplishment is even more unusual than Lowry’s. (1)

Although Canadian recognition of Smart has increased significantly since 1978, Oliver deftly points out the enthusiastic embracing of Lowry as a figure of Canadian letters while the acceptance of Smart was slow to come and, according to her, and despite being from a well-known Canadian family, was made to feel that she had “no place at the table” of Canadian literature. The belated integration of Smart into the Canadian canon resulted in her being paralleled with late-twentieth century feminist writings and the then-burgeoning hybrid journal-novel texts being produced by Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, and Fred Wah. Critics searching for precedence in Canadian letters found in Smart a literary foremother whose work traced a continuity of a Canadian voice. I do not mean to discount such arguments here, but it worth noting that by aligning Smart with late-twentieth century writers disassociates her work from its own milieu. Robert McGill argues that Smart and *By Grand Central Station* “provided critics with a myth of lost youth” – of, more particularly, a lost Canadian modernist origins (74). The dangers of such belated acceptance without an

accompanying examination of why the work did not receive such acceptance in its time lies in an erasure of the text from context. Smart's works were threatening in her own time, I argue, precisely *because* of their politics, because of their unfavourable characterization of wartime Canada and the realities of post-war life for artists, particularly women artists. The fact that there is so little commentary on Smart's treatment of the war, and so much on the genre-categories of her stylistics, leads me to argue that it is only through re-contextualizing her as a modernist writer, and a late-modernist in particular, that we will come to appreciate the complex ways in which Smart's lyricism and modes of social and political critique work together intimately in her narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR
“AUTHORING THEIR DOOM”: DISSOCIATION AND NARRATION IN MALCOLM LOWRY’S
FICTION

The minute an artist begins to try and shape his material – the more especially if that material is his own life – some sort of magic lever is thrown into gear, setting some celestial machinery in motion producing events or coincidences that show him that this shaping of his is absurd, that nothing is static or can be pinned down, that everything is evolving or developing into other meanings.

—Malcolm Lowry “Ghostkeeper” (223-24)

Malcolm Lowry’s writings are frequently hailed as exemplars of modernism; his novel *Under the Volcano* (1947) is widely considered one of the best novels of the twentieth century.¹⁵ Lowry’s personal struggles with alcohol and depression are as well known as his acclaimed novel. In fact, the semblance between Lowry and Geoffrey Firmin – *Under the Volcano*’s doomed hero – has bolstered the notoriety of both novel and artist. I argue that the tension between fiction and metafiction in Lowry’s works further complicates the various autobiographical positions already encountered in this study. Lowry presents us not only with multiple doppelgängers of Lowry-as-writer but also has these doppelgängers end up as writers within each other’s novels in contortions that predate the metafictional self-creation so predominant in postmodern fiction. As Cynthia Sugars notes, “Lowry is generally spoken of as a late modernist or proto-postmodern writer, though in the discourse surrounding discussions of his prose he appears as something of a hybrid of the two” (146 n2). Lowry’s metafictional play with the figure of the writer and his adoption and continual return to the encyclopedic novel place him at a crossroads between a modernist concern with cultural referentiality and a postmodernist obsession with self-referentiality.

¹⁵ *Under the Volcano* was listed as number eleven on the “Modern Library’s 100 Best Novels” in 1998 and number ninety-nine on *Le Monde*’s multi-lingual “100 Books of the Century” in 1999.

Sherrill Grace offers a comprehensive overview of Lowry's opus "The Voyage That Never Ends": an interconnected narrative arc that consists of five novels, one novella, and one collection of short stories. Lowry never considered any of his works as finished but rather as continually moving towards completion and, once he conceived of it, towards a complete integration into the "The Voyage." Lowry wanted "The Voyage" to offer a "new form," and in so doing, as he writes in a 1953 letter to his editor Albert Erskine, "a new approach to reality itself" (*Selected Letters* 330; Grace, *Voyage* 1). What is at stake for Lowry in this "new approach to reality" is his ability to adequately represent what he perceives as the continual movement and progression that shapes and defines existence. Grace notes that for Lowry "the universe was in a constant process of change akin to the Nietzschean state of becoming that underlies romanticism and expressionism" (2)¹⁶. Lowry ascribed to the philosophy of an ever-changing world in his fiction and in the world at large. For him, these two worlds are one and the same – a belief that leads any discussion of the autobiographical nature of his fiction into complex territory. Lowry believed that "a man's moral duty is to live in harmony with this universal motion through constant psychic growth" and his writing demonstrates this because "his creative method [...] is congruent with these beliefs and artistic goals" (3). I argue that Lowry's commitment to the constantly created and renewed world leads his works to move beyond a traditional realism to one that grapples to understand the psychological effects of living in the world.

Many of Lowry's critics have commented on the autobiographical content of his work. Judith Adamson, for example, notes that "[t]he weakness and the strength of Lowry's work lie in the fact that he could create only himself" (32). Grace notes that Lowry's

¹⁶ She also identifies Henri Bergson and José Ortega y Gasset as likely influences on this philosophy of reality. This possible interest in Bergson is notable for the potential connections with Watson's engagement with Bergsonian thought in her thesis on Wyndham Lewis and in her creative writing.

“profoundly autobiographical and subjective” writings “during the late modernist period” occurred at a time “when such writing was frowned upon.” In the three decades that she has dedicated to the study of Lowry, however, Grace has seen a change and an “increased critical appreciation for the *art* of autobiography” that has resulted in a better understanding of Lowry and his works (“Introduction” 17). Three critics who explore Lowry’s autobiographical tendencies at length are David Falk in “Lowry and the Aesthetics of Salvation,” Sue Vice in “The *Volcano* of a Postmodern Lowry,” and Patrick A. McCarthy in “Totality and Fragmentation in Lowry and Joyce.” Falk argues that Lowry’s later works all address his frustration that the successful publication of *Under the Volcano* failed “to secure him a permanent sense of self-mastery and salvation” (53). He goes on to argue that “[e]very artist-figure in the late works [...] confronts the possibility that in ordering his autobiographical material for artistic ends, he has seriously distorted the reality he set out to tame” (54). Falk’s argument is bolstered by Lowry’s own commentary on the autobiographical process when he notes that “[t]he minute an artist begins to try to shape his [autobiographical material] some sort of magic lever is thrown” and demonstrates “that this shaping of his is absurd, that nothing is static or can be pinned down, that everything is evolving” (Lowry, “Ghostkeeper” 223; Falk 56). The impossibility of ever capturing on the static page the continually evolving nature of life drives his works, and in particular his later works, and leads to the similarly constantly evolving encyclopedic opus “The Voyage that Never Ends.”

Vice argues that Lowry’s autobiographical impulse clearly aligns him within a postmodern paradigm. “[W]hile modernism suspended the referent in favour of the word,” she notes, “postmodernism problematizes the very activity of reference” (126). That is, she suggests that postmodernism disturbs the assumption of a connection between word and

world. To this end she uses the example of Sigbjørn Wilderness who, in *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*, is convinced of his own reality as a character in a novel-in-progress. “[T]he more he insists on his inability to write,” Vice notes, “the more written he becomes. This is, in a sense, the structural expression of autobiography; all ephemeral personal activity is transformed into the permanence of art” (126). Vice suggests that the further into autobiography Lowry’s writings get, the less able his artist-figures are to write as they calcify into figures representing Lowry. The more successful Lowry is as a writer, the more threatened his artist-figures are by a *lack* of agency.

McCarthy places Lowry’s negotiation of his art and his life within the Romantic tradition. In this formulation the artist “achieves the coherence and stability that elude us in everyday life.” That is, the writer achieves an ideal balance within fiction not capable in the real world. “[W]ith Lowry,” McCarthy continues, “the distinction between the literal and the figurative was always tenuous, and his identification of his life with his writing became stronger throughout his career” (181). Lowry found the ideal world of fiction so alluring that he invested his fiction with his own life in order to recreate that often-sought-for balance. Further, McCarthy argues that Lowry’s “association of self and work” not only reverberated throughout his fiction, but also in “his representations of writing by his autobiographical characters, particularly Geoffrey Firmin and Sigbjørn Wilderness” (183). Lowry’s artist-figures strive for the self-same balance in *their* writings that Lowry strives for in his.

What I see operating throughout Lowry’s works is a gradual change in the power relations amongst his characters, narrators, and his own self-figuration as an author. The major difference in the trajectory has to do, ultimately, with agency. While in *Ultramarine* Dana Hilliot seems at first to fit fairly comfortably into the conventions of a realist novel, upon closer examination we can see his attempts to wrest control over his narration, first

with his hijacking of the perspective in the third pivotal chapter of the novel; then with his lengthy parenthetical stream-of-consciousness interjections into the action in the second, fourth, and fifth chapters; and finally, with his emergence in the sixth and last chapter as a character fully able to slip into stream-of-consciousness in a way that figures him as self-narrated, even if this self-narration rings as falsely confident. *Lunar Caustic*'s Bill Plantagenet begins and ends the novella in a blind-drunk loss of control, and while his lack of agency is here figured as wholly self-inflicted, the time he spends sober in the hospital provides clarity of vision that comes directly from his artistic sensibilities. Specifically, this is achieved through his abilities as a jazz pianist to observe the simultaneous and multiform workings of the world around him. These moments overwhelm him and, when faced with the world outside of the safe containment of the ward, he descends once more into state of submissiveness, a place where he needs not author his own narrative. *Under the Volcano* has four major focalizers, and although Geoffrey Firmin is the primary one, the way his story is framed in the first chapter by the remembrances of his filmmaker friend Laruelle challenges our reading of Firmin as anything but an always already-authored character. Geoffrey is a character who struggles with the same demons of control and agency that Plantagenet does in *Lunar Caustic* and that Sigbjørn Wilderness will later struggle with in the works that follow. His already-authoredness is further compounded when, in the novels *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* and *La Mordida* and the short story "Through the Panama," the main character is Sigbjørn Wilderness, the author of a novel entitled *Valley of the Shadow of Death* that exactly mirrors *Under the Volcano*. That Sigbjørn constantly references the work and the character of the Consul is complicated enough, that he himself feels he is being controlled by an authoring daemon transforms these novels and short story into works primarily concerned with agency, authorship, and the always-shifting power relations among

character, author, and text. Finally, it is in the short story “The Forest Path to the Spring,” the last story in Lowry’s posthumous collection *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, that presents an artist-figure who resolves his anxieties about agency by coming to terms with his own failings, personal history, and fate. Gone are the hyper-metafictional references rife throughout Lowry’s other works. Instead, Sam gains control of his life in a way that does not conflate lived life with written. The trajectory from characters who struggle for control over their lives, sanity, consciousness, and very existence to a character who has fully realized control over his life through an acceptance of that which is uncontrollable exemplifies Lowry’s mastery over his ability to balance modernism’s “internal contradiction.” As previously noted, this “internal contradiction” identifies the inseparability between modernism as objectified/commodified and as personal/objective. Just as Glassco, Smart, and Watson each achieve their “truth-content” by challenging and responding to their social milieus, Lowry does the same with a particular focus on capturing the inner workings of the mind of modern man. For Adorno, a work’s “truth-content” encapsulates its ability to challenge the status quo and suggest alternative configurations. I argue that, for Lowry, the macrocosmic and sweeping concerns with existence are at the same time highly personal and objective concerns. His works are already explicitly political. The tension in Lowry lies in the *implied* political present in his characters’ struggles to comprehend and exist ethically in a post-war world.

I. Ultramarine and Lunar Caustic

Malcolm Lowry’s first novel *Ultramarine* (1933) was put together from notes taken in 1927 when he sailed on a tramp steamer from Liverpool down through the Suez Canal, on to Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and up past Vladivostok, Russia. Upon returning he

attended St. Catharine's College, Cambridge in 1929 and there began shaping his notes into a series of short stories, which he published and later worked into the novel. It was published by Jonathan Cape only after the first manuscript was accepted, subsequently stolen from a car, and then rewritten (the history and extent of these rewrites has remained a contested story). As part of Lowry's unending project of revision, changes were made to the novel for a new edition published in 1962. These changes re-aligned the novel within the narrative trajectory of "The Voyage That Never Ends" and as such it is this later version that is addressed herein.

As an early iteration of Lowry's focused play between autobiography and fiction, the novel's main character Dana Hilliot boards a tramp steamer leaving Liverpool for Japan. While certain elements in the novel echo modernist experiments with consciousness and perspective through a Joycean interplay of fragmented interior and exterior dialogue, the novel is in many ways a traditional coming-of-age story in which Hilliot must face his flaws in order to grow from a boy to a man and gain the respect of his working-class shipmates. His main obstacle is Andy the cook who, despite his lowly occupation and weakness of chin, stands as an epitome of masculinity. Andy is infuriated by Dana's incompetence and has no qualms in letting the boy know his opinion. All the while Dana desperately holds onto the thought that being accepted by Andy would lead to "the acceptance of the crew," which would "further justify himself to Janet," the fiancée he has left behind in England (20).

The foreground of the action takes place as the steamer nears and then docks in Tsjang-Tsjang. As they approach the harbour Dana's separation from the men is evident. The first night Dana does not join the other sailors in town, citing fidelity to his fiancée. The teasing of his shipmates the next day, however, adds to his own questioning of his manhood and results in his adventures in the city on his second night, complete with visits to a variety

of bars, a movie theatre, a museum, a whorehouse, and a dancehall/brothel before he is found passed out on the wrong ship the next morning. Before he enters the town he receives a long-desired letter from Janet (her lack of communication is one of his major justifications for entering the town to lose his virginity). During this night he manages to lose her letter before he gets a chance to read it. The second day sees him fed up with Andy's teasing and he finally stands up to the older man as he unleashes an astounding series of insults about his lack of a chin ('You weak-chinned son of a Singapore sea lion! you cringing cowardly bloody skulker!' [152]) only to learn that Andy lost his chin in the war. Dana is overcome with remorse and the two men make up. As they prepare to depart from port, they discover that they will be transporting a variety of animals, including an elephant, as they head westward.¹⁷ The accumulation of events over this forty-eight hour period has transformed Dana's perception of himself as well as his shipmates' perception of him. In the end he is accepted and, better still, asked in the final moments to join the firemen who stoke the flames to run the ship. These men represent for Dana the pinnacle of masculinity and, although all foreign and of the lowest class, and "despite their work [...] seemed to get more fun out of life than the seamen, and seemed somehow to be better, in some queer way to be nearer God" (23).

Chapters two, four, and five are written in a unique narrative style; the third-person foreground that describes the tedious minutiae of life of the ship is frequently interrupted by lengthy parenthetical ruminations from Dana. The sections in parentheses are in third person but read more like Dana's self-narration than the omniscient third-person narrator of the sections without parentheses. In one section a number of seamen in the mess hall tease Dana as he serves them. A tension in the power dynamics is obvious to the reader but not as obvious to Dana, whose ego and identity are at this point still very much caught up in being

¹⁷ The animal-laden ship recurs throughout Lowry's work.

accepted as one of them. Although they chide him for not going gallivanting ashore, at the same time they prod for details about his “Jane.” One man tells him, “you’ve got the position, like. We all know that you got eddication and we ain’t” (63). They also wonder why, if he is avoiding women and drugs in port for Janet’s sake, he also does not stop drinking. This dialogue is then followed by another lengthy parenthetical section that begins thus:

(“—a selection of the real language of men—” ‘—the language of these men—’ ‘—I propose to myself to imitate and as far as possible to adopt the very language of these men—’ ‘—but between the language of prose and that of metrical composition there neither is not can be any essential difference’
Lingua communis. (66)

Dana here quotes and paraphrases William Wordsworth’s “Preface to Lyrical Ballads” (1801). There Wordsworth argues for a poetics that “choose[s] incidents and situations from common life” and “describe[s]” such incidents “in a selection of language really used by men.” He goes on to require that there be “no essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition” and that the form-language must align with the content-language within a poem. As such, he concludes that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” By citing Wordsworth’s major arguments, Dana both aligns himself with his shipmates by acknowledging the value of their speech and distances himself from them by demonstrating his knowledge of poetic principles which would require a certain level of “eddication.” Further, it draws attention to the authorial struggle with melding form and content. Such an emphasis can be read as Dana’s struggle to capture the men’s speech in prose, Lowry’s struggle to capture stream-of-consciousness within prose, or, more complexly, a combination of the two as exemplified by the blending of third-person narration and Dana’s stream-of-consciousness.

Once ashore, Dana meets a German sailor, Hans Popplereuter,¹⁸ with whom he can speak German. Their conversation leads naturally into the topic of authorship, and here we see Lowry's first powerful commentary about the role of the writer. Speaking of the war, Hans suggests that "[p]erhaps you will write a book of your experiences," to which Dana responds:

That is certainly a point. But the desire to write is a disease like any other disease; and what one writes, if one is to be any good, must be rooted firmly in some sort of autochthony. And there I abdicate. I can no more create than fly. What I could achieve should be that usual self-conscious first novel, to be reviewed in the mortuary of *The Times Literary Supplement*, a "crude and unpleasant work," something of that nature, of which the principal character would be no more and no less, whether in liquor or in love, than the abominable author himself. (96)

Dana here defines writing as something autochthonic: it originates at the source, a decree that follows Lowry's conception of literature throughout his works. In addition, Dana's fears of creating "that usual self-conscious first novel" ironically and playfully gestures to the awareness with which Lowry's first novel is laden with self-referentiality.

The subject of language occurs once more in the last chapter of the novel as Dana and the other men chat – his speech now included amongst theirs. One sailor says to Dana: "[o]f course, Hilliot, you've got eddication and I ain't. I want to tell you that I'm just a plain British working man." The sailor then goes on a lengthy speech about his love for Bernard Shaw because the author uses plain speech to accurately portray the average working-class

¹⁸ Lowry's use of the name could refer to Walther Poppelreuter (1886-1939), a German neurologist who worked with brain-injured soldiers in World War I. Poppelreuter joined the Nazi Party in 1931 and in 1932 delivered a lecture entitled "Political Psychology as Applied Psychology" based – with Adolph Hitler's encouragement and blessing – on *Mein Kampf*.

man: “[h]e speaks right out, that fellow, wot he thinks. [...] I don’t mean from a literature point of view, I mean from a reading point of view” (178). This marks a clear separation between academic and working-class readers: “You see, he’s always got a message for the proletariat.” He finishes his Shavian commentary by praising Shaw for “all his *satire*” (179).

After a lengthy section of this dialogue, a parenthetical section begins with a letter from Hans, who is forwarding him the lost letter from Janet. She begins by praising the manliness of the directness of his speech before they parted: “I loved our talk last Sunday evening just before you went home, because you were so manly, and you put things so simply and without making excuse for them, and I understood and felt proud of you” (183). I argue that, ultimately, *Ultramarine* is a book about language, and the need for simplicity and directness. It chronicles the difficulty of stepping outside the authorial set of conventions and expectations – the hang-ups that result in a work where the form and content do not coalesce. In a sense, then, Dana’s inability to “create” anything that is *not* autochthonic, instead of viewed as negative, is figured as positive. This is complicated, however, when one moves beyond autobiography to fiction. Where Dana fails is in his misreading of the type of writing valued by his shipmates. Where Shaw appealed to them because he combined social commentary with humour – resulting in social satire that spoke to the abuse of the working classes in a way that effected change in the attitudes of individuals regardless of class – Dana instead turns or “authors” himself into an imitation of a working-class character.

Dana then writes to Janet and tells her of his fondness and, surprisingly, his pity for Andy: “I have identification with Andy: I am Andy. I regard it all now with sanity and detachment. But I have outgrown Andy. Mentally, I have surrounded Andy’s position, instead of being baffled and hurt by it” (185). With this identification Dana finds that he must take “the component parts” of Andy’s character, specifically his manly qualities, and

integrate them into his own character. He “must no longer confuse moral courage with physical courage” (186) and “shall be more interested in biceps than forceps.” He finishes with a reference to literature as corrupting and feminizing: “As for my books, I shall throw them overboard and buy new ones. [...] My writing? You or any woman can do that for me. I don’t know a damn thing yet” (186). While Dana achieves a certain sense of self through *Ultramarine*, the novel does not, as Grace notes “end on this pinnacle of insight. [...] Dana Hilliot, prefiguring the restless voyaging of subsequent Lowry heroes, realizes that he has ‘surrounded Andy’s position’ and must move on” (Grace, *Voyage* 29). Such an assumption of enveloping and surrounding Andy as Dana enters the ship’s boiler room to labour with the lowest rung of sailors in the ship demonstrates Lowry’s attempts at social-satire; here he critiques the complete autochthonic envelopment that effaces Dana. The potential dangers of such misreadings are further explored in Lowry’s next major work.

Lowry began *Lunar Caustic* in 1934 when he was living in New York. While there he was incarcerated in Bellevue Hospital on a “voluntary” and “deliberate pilgrimage” to gather material (Knickerbocker 291). Lowry worked on the story for twenty-two years and at the time of his death left two complete manuscripts and an in-progress third draft. A version entitled “The Last Address” was to appear in *Story* magazine but Lowry recalled it. In 1956 a French translation appeared in the notable French leftist literary magazine *Esprit*. As Grace notes, the novella was to play a major role in “The Voyage that Never Ends” and “charts a further withdrawal from reality after the temporary respite and balance established at the end of *Ultramarine*” (*Voyage* 29). There are a number of thematic connections with the end of the previous story, including the presence of docks, ships, and a lone man wandering. He is drunk, a whiskey bottle in his pocket as he “glid[es] over the cobbles lightly as a ship leaving

harbour” and wanders from one tavern to another (295).¹⁹ Although Dana’s alcohol consumption is criticized (in the end even by himself) in *Ultramarine*, *Lunar Caustic* features alcohol much more deliberately – leading to its predominance in the novels that follow. From inside a pub the yet-unnamed protagonist “is aware of the hospital” that “tower[s] up above the river.” Beside him in the bar he sees an old woman “whose black veil only partly conceals her ravaged face.” She is mailing a letter, “trying repeatedly and failing, but posting it finally, with shaking hands that are not like hands at all.” Our narrator experiences a moment of panic when it “strikes him” that the letter is for him. Like Dana’s identification with and subsequent “envelopment” of Andy, here Lowry’s main character experiences difficulty making a clear separation between himself he world around him. After leaving the bar he first visits a church and ends up, finally, at the hospital, which he had been circling the entire time.

What follows is the story of Bill Plantagenet, a jazz pianist who has been admitted to the Observation Ward of the Psychiatric Hospital located high up above the East River in New York. Bill first wakes from his drunken stupor certain that he is on a ship, basing his certainty on the noises around him. We find out that he used to lead a jazz band, “Bill Plantagenet and his Seven Hot Cantabs,” but he “couldn’t seem to hold the boys together at all.” Bill’s delirium continues until he wakes fully to find an old man, Kalowsky, and a little boy, Garry, sitting over him. Mr. Kalowsky identifies himself as “the Wandering Jew”; he was born in Lithuania and moved from there to Königsberg and onto Berlin where he worked as a silversmith until he hiked to Paris. He describes the Germans going to war in

¹⁹ There are many similarities between Bill and Dana Hilliot as well as between Bill and Lowry himself. For example, when the doctor asks him where he got his muscles Bill answers that it was through “weight-lifting. And I once took a freighter to the Orient, came back full of lions, one day I’d like to tell you about the lions. After that I read Melville instead. Four years ago I held the Cambridge record for the two-arm press” (303).

1870. Kalowsky here stands as a reminder of the ebb-and-flow progression of history that Lowry so often emphasizes. Garry is incarcerated for slitting the throat of a little girl, although he claims that it was “only a little scratch.” He promises to tell Bill stories to cure him. “Do you know,” he begins, “it’s a funny thing, it’s like a miracle, but wherever I am if I’m up in the air, or under the sea, or in the mountains, anywhere – I can tell a story” (300). Garry is figured as a mad young storyteller with an apparently inexhaustible ability to create stories out of his immediate surroundings.

Early in his stay Bill encounters the first of several moments of simultaneity that form the backbone of the novella. While sitting in the main room he looks through the barred windows to another wing of the hospital where he sees “four operations being performed simultaneously.” To Bill “it seemed as though the front of that part of the hospital had suddenly become *open*, revealing, as in the cabin plans of the ‘Cunard’ or in charts of the human anatomy itself, the activities behind the wraith of iron or brick or shin” (307). In this passage, the hospital is also a boat and a human body. This tripled-identification and quadruple operation, “suddenly, like the looming swift white hand of a traffic policeman, reeled towards him” and he feels as if “all these dressings and redressings [...] were at the same time being placed [...] on a laceration of his own mind” (308). The body-identification now transforms into his *own* body and he next wonders if he has died and the doctors are working on his corpse. Once again, Bill struggles with separating his sense of self from what he observes of the world around him.

The second moment of simultaneity occurs during a thunderstorm while Bill plays piano in the main room. During this lengthy scene the interplay between the songs that Bill plays on the piano, the songs sung by Battle (one of the “Negro” inmates who was at one time a stoker on a ship), and Garry’s interjected stories and songs builds a narrative wherein

Lowry constructs a critique of racism and the inheritance of slavery in the United States. Before delving into this scene it is important to note that the previous moment of performance occurred when the doctor brought in a Punch and Judy puppet show wherein Punch is an American airman who crashes in Ethiopia and Judy is an Ethiopian “with a brass ring in her nose” (315). As the show goes on Bill feels as if “he had made a sort of descent into the maelstrom” and when the show ends the audience “break[s] up, each man into his inner Africa” (316-17). This scene makes reference to Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and in so doing aligns Lowry’s novella with a literary tradition that draws attention to the violent inheritance of colonialism present in 1930s America.

As the second scene of simultaneity begins Bill plays “*Sweet and Low*” on the piano in the main room. The song was originally a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson that was set to music in 1863 by Sir Joseph Barnby. In the poem a woman sings to the “[w]ind of the western sea” to blow her husband safely home. Though the lyrics of the poem are not articulated in the narrative, this reference inaugurates a multifaceted series of references to sailing and the sea. Bill finds himself “absurdly disappointed by the indifference of his audience” and begins playing “*These Foolish Things*” while his hands tremble and Battle plays whist with two “negro sailors” nearby (318). Battle begins to “half [sing]” a melody that does not align with what Bill is playing: “Something in the rhythm of his blood, it seemed, did not like Bill’s music; not because it was alien music, it was precisely because it sounded too cognate that he would not conform to it” (319). Bill feels that Battle is jealous of his music and when Bill changes the tune again to “*Milneburg Joys*.” Battle then begins to sing “Shine and the Great Titanic,” a song that progressively builds “into something with a strange encompassing rhythm to which the feet and hands of the other Negro card-players

responded as with a soft beating of Haitian tambours” (320). Shine is an “epic figure” in African American folklore who serves as a trickster. In the Titanic story, Shine is a stoker who notices the ship is taking on water. The captain ignores his warnings and when the passengers attempt to get his help “Shine answers the pleas for help with his bawdy rhymes and emerges, in most versions of the toast, as the ship’s only survivor” (Roberts 45). Battle’s articulation of a folkloric trickster who outwits his white oppressors is met with a rebuttal when Garry sings “I saw a Ship a Sailing.” Garry’s song is a nursery rhyme that at first seems non-sensical and non-threatening. It begins, “I saw a ship a-sailing, / A-sailing on the sea; / And oh, it was all laden / With pretty things for thee!” The third verse, however, takes an ominous turn: “The four and twenty sailors, / That stood between the decks, / Were four and twenty white mice, / With chains about their necks.” The image of these “white mice” between the decks suggests the transportation of African slaves during the transatlantic slave trade. Indeed, at the point where Garry sings of the “[w]hite mice [standing] between the decks,” this syncopated performance builds to a head as all the stories and songs work together to provide a biting criticism on slavery, jazz, and appropriation of black culture.

After he learns that he must leave the hospital because he is British, Bill joins the other patients and sits with Kalowsky and Garry to watch “an ol barge” and a sidewheeler steamer pass below (340). As the sidewheeler comes closer the thunder “starts again” and the “Negro sailors” rush to window and climb the bars that cover them while the patients continue to “roar” and Bill thinks back to his old ship that had once carried a cargo of wild animals as it sailed back from the far East. When the ship encountered a hurricane “the jaguars moaned in terror like frightened children” and all the while Bill “had thought, ‘Let us be free to suffer like animals.’ And that cry was perhaps more human than the one he now heard” (341). Lowry here makes a significant connection between the “Negro sailors” in the

moment, the trapped and frightened African jaguars of his past, and the chained mice of Garry's nursery rhyme: all three images are juxtaposed to create, once more, a commentary on the use of ships to transport slaves to the new world from Africa.

This triptych of images returns in the final section of the novella which finds Bill once again outside the City Hospital. The first thing he does is stop into a corner store to buy some stamps with images of tigers, elephants, duck-billed platypus and "a Negro climb[ing] a tree" (344). He then buys oranges and sends the stamps and oranges to Kalowsky and Garry all the while "keeping an eye out for Melville's house." He sees a sign for "*Whale steaks 5¢*" and goes into a sailors' tavern, orders a whisky, and sits in a corner. He goes into a washroom to finish his drink and notices "an obscene sketch of a girl chalked on the wall." This reminds him of Gary's horrific crime and, infuriated, he throws his bottle at the drawing; "it seemed to him that he had flung the bottle against all the indecency, the cruelty, the hideousness, the filth and injustice in the world" (346). The novel ends as Bill wonders if "[t]hat terrible old woman he had seen posting the letter was [...] with him in the bottom of some mine." He returns to his corner seat in the bar but he feels someone is watching him so he moves, "drink in hand, to the very obscurest corner of the bar, where, curled up like an embryo, he could not be seen at all" (346).

The ending of *Lunar Caustic* differs starkly from the end of *Ultramarine*. Instead of finding community and brotherhood, Bill retreats as far as he can into isolation, withdrawing until he cannot "be seen." Although the earlier novel ends on an optimistic note, Dana's optimism be read critically. His journey takes him to a point where he rejects his writing in favour of his body; he trades his selfhood for a false association with the labouring classes. Instead of rising to the challenge of becoming a Shaw who is able to portray the lives and conditions of the working class to an audience, he instead absorbs himself into a community

seen by the sailors he admires as even lower than their lot: the animalistic Norwegian stokers who have so little voice throughout the novel. In *Lunar Caustic* Bill encounters resistance from another group of stokers epitomized by the figure of Battle. As Bill plays what are in many instances famous jazz songs that have been appropriated by white artists, Battle meets his challenge and the scene ends with Bill's retreat from the piano, his hands shaking as Battle takes over. This exchange is emblematic of Dana's misreading of his ability to transform his identity to the working classes; he can no more do so than Bill can keep his role as a musician playing adopted working class black songs.

Lowry's early works demonstrate a struggle with the ethics and problematics of writing that maintains an autonomy of voice without a surplus of reference to and reverence of his literary forbearers. In terms of autobiography, Lowry here goes beyond merely using his own experiences as fodder for his stories: he actively sought out these specific experiences in order to create these stories. Dana's and Bill's continuous self-questioning of their autonomy or "realness" also metafictionally stands out as Lowry's continual hailing of the "writteness" of the text and presence of his controlling hand.

II. *Under the Volcano*, *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* and "Through the Panama"

These two novels and one short story encompass the strongest and most representative work of Lowry's middle period, one that begins with *Under the Volcano* (1947). This was followed by years of writing out of which he spent the majority of his time unpacking and processing what was then becoming recognized as a masterpiece. The Sigbjørn Wilderness series is comprised of two novels and three short stories. Beginning with *Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid* (published after his death in 1968), Sigbjørn is introduced as he

travels to Mexico with his second wife to finish revisions on his novel *Valley of the Shadow of Death* (itself a shadow of Lowry's *Under the Volcano*). The next novel, *La Mordida*, was not published until a scholarly edition in 1996 that prioritizes a preservation of the manuscript variants over narrative cohesiveness. *La Mordida* picks up almost exactly where the earlier novel leaves us. Sigbjørn and Primrose are still in Mexico and spend the majority of the time fighting with immigration officials to allow them to leave the country. The themes it explores are similar to those in *Dark as the Grave*, and it is with this in mind – combined with the fragmentary nature of the manuscript – that I consider an examination of *Dark as the Grave* sufficient to work through all that *La Mordida* also contains. In addition to “Through the Panama,” Lowry's short fiction includes two additional Sigbjørn stories: “Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession” picks up Sigbjørn in Rome on a Guggenheim Fellowship and “Gin and Goldenrod” finds Sigbjørn and Primrose in their beloved home of Eridanus, on the British Columbia coast. These two other stories, however, do not meditate on the act and process of writing with the same attention as “Through the Panama,” nor do they directly reference Sigbjørn's authorship of *Valley of the Shadow of Death*. *Under the Volcano*, *Dark as the Grave*, and the short story “Through the Panama” tease out the tension between the act of living and the act of being written. Each text's main focalizer tests the boundaries of his agency and resists his “writtenness” and affinity with Lowry.

Under the Volcano chronicles the last day of Geoffrey Firmin's life as it unfolds in Mexico on the Day of the Dead in 1938. There are four focalizers in the book: Geoffrey Firmin, a former Consul who has been living alone in Quauhnhuac (Cuernavaca) since his wife's departure; Jacques Laruelle, a film producer who has known Geoffrey since childhood; Yvonne, Geoffrey's estranged wife who was a child actor in western films; and

Hugh, Geoffrey's half brother who was once a guitar prodigy, a sailor, and a journalist.

Laruelle's narration only occurs once, in the first chapter, and is also the only chapter that does not occur on the fated day but instead on the Day of the Dead the following year.

The narrative of the Day of the Dead in 1938 begins as Yvonne returns to Quauhnahuac to find Geoffrey in order to convince him to leave Mexico with her. To her surprise Geoffrey's brother Hugh is visiting as he decides whether he should board a ship carrying supplies for the Nationalists in their struggle against the Mexican-supported Republicans in Spain. After a failed attempt at love-making and a morning of half-hidden drinking Geoffrey sleeps as Hugh and Yvonne go for a walk and later for a horse ride where they encounter an Indian riding a horse marked with the number seven. Hugh and Yvonne return and they all decide to take in some bull throwing in the nearby town of Tomalín. On their way to the bus station they first meet the mailman who delivers a postcard to Geoffrey from Yvonne that has been lost in the mail for a year and then run into M. Laruelle who invites them up for a drink. After a short visit with Laruelle they take in some of the Carnival before boarding the bus to Tomalín. On the way they spot a body at the side of the road and stop to help; the man, an Indian, has suffered a head injury and there is much speculation whether he has been robbed or whether he was thrown from his horse, which is loosely tethered nearby and marked by the number seven. The bus driver demands that they all leave at the arrival of the local police or "vigilantes," as Geoffrey identifies them (258). The bull throwing is a dull affair until Hugh recklessly jumps into the ring to replace an injured bull rider to the audience and Yvonne's delight and Geoffrey's annoyance. After the bullfight Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne make their way to the *Salón Ofélia*, a tavern and restaurant that also boasts a waterfall and swimming reservoir where Hugh and Yvonne bathe while Geoffrey drinks mescal. They then order dinner and while they wait for it to arrive Geoffrey

repeatedly retreats to a stone washroom to drink more mescal. He argues with Hugh and Yvonne and then leaves, heading up the forest path to the Farolito, a rough and dangerous tavern in Parián. In the penultimate chapter Yvonne and Hugh search for him as a rare summer storm approaches. On the path to the Farolito Yvonne is suddenly run down and killed by a panicked horse marked with the number seven. In the last chapter – which occurs simultaneously with the chapter before – Geoffrey has found the Farolito and continues to drink heavily. Outside the bar is a military police office and he notices a horse tethered outside marked with the number seven. Recognizing the horse from earlier he is convinced of his earlier-suspected belief that the corrupt police, infiltrated by fascist elements, have robbed and killed the Indian. Infuriated by the injustice and yet nearly incoherently drunk, Geoffrey is accosted in the tavern by the police, who begin to suspect him to be a spy – a suspicion not helped by his lack of official papers. Geoffrey breaks free of the bar and runs out to the yard where he frees the horse only to then be shot to death by the police. The spooked horse tears off into the forest and Geoffrey's body is thrown down into the barranca, a ravine that runs the length of the whole area.

Under the Volcano is comprised of a system of thematic and symbolic components that result in a highly structured novel. Of importance to my reading of Lowry as a late modernist are three key elements: Geoffrey-as-artist, Geoffrey's violent experiences in World War I, and the figure of Canada as idyllic refuge. All three of these elements work together to construct Geoffrey as an artist whose ability to create is destroyed by the violence of war that has cleaved the connection between the aesthetic and ethical – the fictional and lived worlds. For Geoffrey (and for Lowry) it is in the violence and beauty of nature, found in the idyll of British Columbia, that such a balance is found. Geoffrey's death is the sacrifice that must be paid so that the artist figures who come after him can find this place of refuge.

Under the Volcano draws a complex connection between the reverberations of World War I, in which Geoffrey served, the rise of fascism between the wars, and the struggle of the individual for selfhood. This selfhood is intricately tied up with issues of autobiography and self-expression and reaches beyond Geoffrey to encompass also Yvonne, Hugh, and Laruelle. Each are failed-artist figures: Geoffrey, with his unfinished writings on the occult, his unfinished poem found by Yvonne and Hugh on the back of a menu, and his inability to write back to Yvonne save for the letter that Laruelle finds (unsent) in the book of Shakespeare plays; Hugh with his abandoned career as a guitarist and half-hearted, self-hating commitment to journalism; and Yvonne with her unsuccessful attempt to return to film after she abandoned it at a young age. There is also the ambiguously successful artist figure of filmmaker Laruelle who, in the first chapter of the novel, is about to return to France to make films as World War II breaks out. I read *Under the Volcano's* engagement with war as framed through the characterization of these failed artist figures. Their inability to express themselves is symptomatic of the tension in modernism between artistic expression of the subjective, personal voice of the individual artist and expression that speaks directly to the atrocities of its time by accurately representing such atrocities. While Laruelle, Yvonne, and Hugh wrestle with such challenges within a realist frame of the novel, Geoffrey both wrestles with expression and *is himself* a self-consciously written metaphor for Lowry's self-same struggle. In the analysis of *Under the Volcano* that follows I argue that Lowry constructs Geoffrey Firmin as a doomed modernist artist whose death on the cusp of World War II epitomizes the death of high modernism, ushering in a new type of modernist (anti)hero who is a self-aware and metafictional construction that allows for both narrative experimentation and social critique from a grounding in personal, autobiographical experience.

Laruelle describes his first encounter with Geoffrey in 1911 when “the family of the famous English poet, Abraham Taskerson, had come, bringing with them the strange little Anglo-Indian orphan, a broody creature” who wrote poetry to whom Jacques “had felt oddly attracted” (17). The first tangible description of Geoffrey, then, is as a sensitive and lonely young artist, reaching maturity at the same time as the modernist movement began to solidify. Laruelle explains that during World War I Geoffrey had served on the *S.S. Samaritan*, a seemingly “unarmed merchantman” who found herself accosted by a German submarine but who, when the submarine approached, “suddenly changed her temper” and turned into “a dragon belching fire” to incapacitate the U-boat and capture the crew (33). For his part in this capture Geoffrey had received a “British Distinguished Service Order or Cross.” However, by the time the *Samaritan* reached port none of the prisoners remained on the ship, they had “been kidnapped by the *Samaritan*’s stokers and burned alive in the furnaces.” For this (though Laruelle has no doubt that Geoffrey had no capability of ordering any such action), he had been court-martialed and acquitted (34). Laruelle marvels that Geoffrey never shied away from discussing the incident; rather, he was capable of being “enormously funny about it,” saying that “[p]eople simply did not go round [...] putting Germans in furnaces” (35). Laruelle emphasizes that Geoffrey had insisted that the stokers had never received any of the blame. Of note here is a re-encounter the stokers or “firemen” that have appeared in *Ultramarine* as the noble proletariat and the “Negroes” in *Lunar Caustic*, mad and haunted by their collective history of slavery.

Grace’s 2009 essay “Remembering Tomorrow: Lowry, War, and *Under the Volcano*” proposes a new way into the novel that prioritizes the act of remembering, and remembering war in particular, as shaping the “most important aspects of the narrative system” of a novel. Her argument highlights the importance of the wars of the twentieth century as they occur in

the memories and stories of all four main characters. Particularly striking is Grace's use of Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life" as a condition of being that reduces a person "to mere physical existence, stripped of all aspects of identity and value as a socio-political being and a citizen of a state with rights and subject-hood, and placed outside the law" (207). Agamben most notably discusses this condition in reference to the state to which Jewish people were reduced during the Holocaust. Grace takes up the concept in reference to Geoffrey's experience on the *S.S. Samaritan* and argues that the guilt from this incident follows Geoffrey for the rest of his life and contributes to the series of events that led him to his death at the end of the novel. She proposes that in the end Geoffrey lets himself transform into "bare life" – dispossessed of all markers of his identity, and therefore allows him to be murdered and thrown into a ditch on suspicion of being a spy.

In the first pages of the novel Laruelle thinks back to the events a year earlier and connects their import with the escalation to war that has occurred in the time since. "What had happened just a year ago to-day seemed already to belong to a different age," he remarks, "[t]hough tragedy was in the process of becoming unreal and meaningless it seemed one was still permitted to remember the days when an individual life held some value" (5). Laruelle thinks back to World War I, when he was fighting under his commanding officer poet Guillaume Apollinaire – a luminary in the Paris Montparnasse scene who had coined the word surrealism (33). Laruelle is here connected with an aesthetic movement that was often critiqued for its radical break with traditional, realist forms and its association with Trotskyism, communism, and anarchism. Even a year previously "Laruelle, at forty-two, had still then not quite given up hope of changing [the world] through the great films he proposed somehow to make"; a year later, however, at the time of his narration, "these dreams seemed absurd and presumptuous" (9). Laruelle's change in attitude not only reflects

the sobering effects of World War II but also suggests that the return to war has tempered his artistic fervour in a way that even his personal, front-line experiences in World War I did not produce. David Falk, in “The Descent Into Hell Of Jacques Laruelle: Chapter One of *Under The Volcano*,” writes that like Geoffrey, who “no longer believed in a vision of salvation, Laruelle has lost faith in his art” (74). There is a popular reading of Laruelle as the suggested “auteur” of the rest of the narrative that argues the continuation of an underscore that runs from the first chapter (marking the end of Laruelle’s narration) to the beginning of the second chapter (marking the beginning Yvonne’s narration) and that may be read as the unraveling of a film reel (see Acklerley and Clipper 15; Kilgallin *Lowry* 131-47). This interpretation is tempting because it suggests the narrative contains yet another layer of authorship. In addition, it allows a reader to approach the novel as a late-modernist cinematic response to World War II – one that blends surrealist technique and social commentary through the autobiographical lens of a character who is, in many ways, a doppelgänger for Geoffrey.

Grace argues that “the historical and political” levels of the novel “require the characters to represent ideological positions as well as concepts such as freedom and necessity” and as such “*Under the Volcano* comprises a political fable” (*Voyage* 37). In his introduction to the first French edition of *Under the Volcano*, later translated and published in *Canadian Literature* as “Preface to a Novel,” Lowry emphasizes the extent to which the novel functions politically. He draws an alignment, for example, between the scenes in the first and last chapters as people gather to take “refuge during an unseasonal storm, while elsewhere, all over the world, people are crawling into the air-raid shelters” (26). He further notes that the novel’s “subject is also the fall of man, his remorse, his incessant struggle towards the light under the weight of the past, which is his destiny” (28). Finally, Lowry concludes that

“[o]n one level, the drunkenness of the Consul may be regarded as symbolizing the universal drunkenness of war. [...] [T]he destiny of my hero can be considered in its relationship to the destiny of humanity” (28). The role that Geoffrey plays is therefore an *explicitly* political one. However, this synecdochal positioning does not flatten or dehumanize his character: rather, it is the extent to which Lowry presents Geoffrey’s subjectivity that allows his character to contain both the universal/symbolic and the personal/subjective. That is, Lowry invests his character with qualities that accommodate modernism’s “internal contradiction.”

As if to emphasize the importance of the figure of the failed modernist artist in the face of war, Hugh serves as a narrative echo of Geoffrey. The age difference between the two men cements the difference in reaction between the pre- and post-World War I artists. We first encounter Hugh as he struggles to decide whether he should board a ship bound for Spain to fight against the fascists. He and Geoffrey argue over the issue of Spain, with Geoffrey proclaiming, “there was far too much sentiment about this whole business of going to die for the Loyalists. In fact, he said he thought it would be much better if the fascists just won and got it over with” (106). Hugh reveals that he has already been in Spain twice, has friends who have died for the cause, and is contemplating sailing on the *S.S. Noemijolea*, which, though posing as a merchant vessel “with antimony and coffee,” will end up “twenty miles south of Barcelona, [where] she will discharge her cargo of T.N.T. for the hard-pressed Loyalist armies and probably be blown to smithereens” (107-8). The similarity between this voyage and the one that Geoffrey took in World War I, when his ship posed as a merchant vessel to disguise its darker purpose, suggests a return or cycling of history. Like Geoffrey, Hugh links man’s individual struggle with that of all mankind. “Good God,” he thinks, “if our civilization were to sober up a couple of days it’d die of remorse on the third” (122).

Just as Geoffrey is associated with writing, so Hugh plays the part of the artist through his background as a musician. His reminiscences in chapter six, when read against Lowry's oeuvre, are significant insofar as they serve as a re-narrativization and reframing of both *Ultramarine* and *Lunar Caustic*. The chapter goes so far as to place Hugh as a crewman on Dana's ship *Oedipus Tyrannus* for a month and later describes him paying a visit to his friend Bill Plantagenet (172, 184). The chapter focuses on Hugh's decision to go to Spain, which hinges on his need to "atone for [his] past" (160). As a youth he excelled at the guitar, so, interested in taking advantage of his position as a prodigy, he made a deal with the "Jewish firm of Lazarus Bolowski and Sons" to publish two of his original compositions (163). He was, at the time, experiencing success in "the tin-pan alley of England" and was not unlike "another frustrated artist, Adolph Hitler" (163). He gave Bolowski the songs along with a premium paid by his aunt and then went off to sea and returned expecting fame, but instead discovered that Bolowski published the minimum required copies of the songs did little to nothing to promote them. His frustrations developed into anti-Semitism and Hugh took revenge by seducing Bolowski's wife only to then have Bolowski sue him for plagiarism. To Hugh's horror, he discovered that he had indeed inadvertently copied "two obscure American numbers" (180). Too young for "first wave" modernism, Hugh's youthful genius is taken advantage of by the economics of art and then revealed to be imitative and fraudulent. His attempts to gain the experiences of the earlier modernists lead only to failure and an abandonment of art for something more tangible. He then turned to journalism because of its combination of "honesty and art." After years as a journalist, however, he proclaims it equal to "intellectual male prostitution of speech and writing" (105). Hugh is figured as the late-modernist writer searching for a mode of expression that melds "honesty and art" and attempts so through repeated turns to action (such as his impulsive need for

action epitomized by his participation in the bull throwing in Tomalín). We learn through Laruelle's narration that Hugh does eventually go on the ship to Vera Cruz: "For Hugh, at twenty-nine, still dreamed, even then, of changing the world [...] through his actions" (9). Also of significance to a reading of Lowry's interrogation of the modernist artist is Hugh's purchase of a guitar in chapter eleven, suggesting that he is ready to try, again, to assert his artistic vision.

Geoffrey's position as a failed artist is associated through the novel with the image of Canada as a refuge, a place of potential creativity and personal peace. The alignment of artistic productivity with this "northern idyll" further complicates Lowry's autobiographical investment in *Under the Volcano* as it was in Canada that he finally finished the manuscript. The reader first encounters Geoffrey's writing when Laruelle finds an unsent letter composed by Geoffrey to Yvonne. The letter was written in the Farolito in Paríán – the self-same bar where he was shot. Geoffrey writes that he sees himself and Yvonne "living in some northern country, of mountains and hills and blue water; our house is built on an inlet and [...] beyond and under the hills on the other side of the inlet, what looks like an oil refinery, only softened and rendered beautiful by distance" (38). In a novel where Geoffrey is so often figured as a frustrated or failed writer, his description of this place of marital happiness and communion with the natural landscape (a description that continues for several more paragraphs) is also noteworthy because is a description of the place from which Sigbjørn Wilderness is supposed to have written and edited a great deal of his imaginary parallel novel *Valley of the Shadow of Death*. This place, here figured as an imagined idyll, is also, when read in relation to the life and oeuvre of Lowry, a real and more fully developed landscape through which he places not only the Wildernesses but also two other of his married couples, Ethan and Jacqueline Llewelyn from *October Ferry to Gabriola* and Sam and

his wife from “Forest Path to the Spring.” That it is at this moment of writing that Geoffrey is able to fully formulate this vision highlights his connectedness with Lowry’s other protagonists.

Yvonne’s narration in chapter nine offers a very detailed description of her dreamed place in Canada. As in “The Forest Path to the Spring,” there “was the narrow path that wound down through the forest from the shore” (279). She wishes that she and Geoffrey could be alone “so she could tell him of” her dream (280). As previously noted, however, in the letter that Laruelle finds Geoffrey has *already* had the exact same dream vision. This invests the book with a non-realist loophole – a loophole of narrative impossibility built through a breakdown of linearity within which Lowry sets a substantial bulk of his writing to follow *Under the Volcano*. It is significant also because it is in this setting that both the characters envision Geoffrey returning to his writing. There is something crucial to the *impossibility* that the Consul’s description of his and Yvonne’s northern retreat should match both the reality of Lowry’s home in British Columbia and the dream that Yvonne herself tells to Hugh and Geoffrey. This richly detailed landscape is both the frustrating denial of the realistic whole of the novel and also the trapdoor through which we are allowed to crawl from the heartbreak of the story’s conclusion. The vision in the Consul’s letter could have been taken directly from *Dark as the Grave*, *La Mordida*, *October Ferry*, or the short stories in *O Hear Us O Lord*. Eridanus is the link between almost all the works that follow *Under the Volcano*.

To further elaborate the autobiographical investment in the text, there are moments when Geoffrey seems aware of his existence as a fictional character. Such realizations will affect Lowry’s later characters much more frequently and explicitly; however, it is important to trace such origins to Lowry’s major novel. Early in chapter three, the first chapter where

Geoffrey serves as focalizer, he contemplates his seeming disintegration: “Sometimes I am possessed by a most powerful feeling, a despairing bewildered jealousy which, when deepened by drink, turns into a desire to destroy myself by my own imagination” (41-42). Such a reference can be read as reflecting the thoughts of a self-sabotaging man. However, when read alongside other moments of self-awareness, I argue it be read as a conflation between the voice of author and character. Take for example Geoffrey’s ruminations on his situation when he finds himself drunk in his own bathroom. He ambiguously references the fates of both Yvonne and Hugh as well as the fates of the people of 1938 who are as yet unaware of the wartime violence to come in the next year:

Yet who would ever have believed that some obscure man, sitting at the centre of the world in a bathroom, say, thinking solitary miserable thoughts, was authoring their doom, that, even while he was thinking, it was as if behind the scenes certain strings were pulled, and whole continents burst into flame, and calamity moved nearer. (152-53)

A Yeatsian pronouncement on the state of the world expresses Geoffrey’s feelings of guilt about his actions in World War I and gestures towards what will, in Lowry’s next major work, become Sigbjørn Wilderness’s conflation of the figures of author and God. This melding of a concern for his personal selfhood and fate perfectly encapsulates a reading *Under the Volcano* as “political fable” and further emphasizes that Geoffrey’s destiny “be considered in its relationship to the destiny of humanity” (Lowry, “Introduction” 14).

Just as Laruelle’s narration in the first chapter introduces the reader to the system of signs and figures that will form the novel, Geoffrey’s narration in the final chapter echoes these figures once more. Occurring simultaneously with the chapter before, Geoffrey finds himself in the Farolito drinking heavily. He is surprised when a packet of letters from

Yvonne that he had previously lost is returned to him. He retreats into one of the many inner rooms, which “were framed in dull glass, like cashiers’ offices in a bank,” and “was not really surprised” to find the same old woman playing dominoes who was with him in the Bella Vista at the beginning of the novel (358). Geoffrey begins to feel “dissociated from himself [...] almost as if he were yet another kind of drunkard, in different circumstances, in another country, to whom something quite different was happening” (358) – a nod, once again, to an awareness of his own writtleness. As he disassembles, so too the words in the letters are “blurring and dissembling” (359).

At the moment of this disintegration, however, Geoffrey experiences clarity and purpose. While in the bar he spots the horse marked with the number seven tied to a tree and concludes that the Unión Militar are responsible for the Indian’s death: “He felt suddenly sure of this. As if out of some correspondence between the subnormal world itself and the abnormally suspicious delirious one within him the truth had sprung – sprung like a shadow however” (369). He is approached by armed men from the military police as well as “a tall slim man in well-cut American tweeds with a hard somber face and long beautiful hands” (371). This man seems familiar and he realizes that he “might have been the image of himself when, lean, bronzed, serious, beardless, and at the crossroads of his career, he had assembled the Vice Consulship in Granada” (374). He meets a second doppelgänger at the bar, a man who “looked like a poet, some friend of his college days” to whom Geoffrey offers a drink, “which this young man not only refused, in Spanish, but rose to refuse, making a gesture with his hand of pushing the Consul away” (375). A few older people in the tavern attempt to escort him away from their places because they recognize that he is in danger. He is unable to rise to go with them and realizes that the woman who has tried to help him is the same old woman playing dominoes whose appearance has bookended his

day. The police accuse him of being American, Jewish, and a spy (an “espider”). He leaves the bar, approaches the horse and is shot as he releases it. As he dies, he feels himself falling “through the blazing of ten million burning bodies” (391) – marking a final connection between Geoffrey and the atrocities of war to come. He is not only mistaken for a Jew, but his descent passes through these “ten million burning bodies” as he is thrown in the ditch. Geoffrey’s drunken demands for justice for justice in the death of the Indian and the accountability of this dedication redeem the Consul for his earlier inability to stop the execution of the German sailors. Geoffrey’s fall is the fall of the world into chaos, repeated reference to trains transporting the dead body throughout the novel then become metonymic of the trains in Europe transporting the Jews to internment camps.

Tied to this fall into the world of chaos is a memory of the tapestry entitled “Los Borrachones” that he had observed earlier in the day in Laruelle’s house. Describing it as “a prohibitionist poster” he interprets it as depicting drunkards falling into hell “shrieking among falling bottles and emblems of broken hopes” while “up, up, flying palely, selflessly into the light toward heaven [...] shot the sober” (208). Such polar movements – down into a cavernous hell and up into the heavens – predict Yvonne and Geoffrey’s final moments. In the tavern he sees this tapestry “again in his mind’s eye.” This time, however, he interprets it differently: while the people rising up to heaven “appear[ed] to grow more free, more separate, their distinctive noble faces more distinctive, more noble,” the people descending into hell “becom[e] more like each other, more joined together, more as one fiend, the further down they hurled into the darkness” (376). Geoffrey comes to realize that with Yvonne he had striven to be one of the sober individuals and when doing so “the ‘features’ of life seemed to grow more clear, more animated” and when he had given up, “the further down he sank, the more those features had tended to dissemble, to cloy and clutter, to

become finally little better than ghastly caricatures of this dissimulating inner and outer self, or of his struggle.” Despite this, he had “desired” this communion, even if it meant a dissembling of vision. For Grace this remembrance is Geoffrey’s realization of “his damnation”: “ Like the drunkards in the painting, his identity is dispersed, lost, indistinct. For Geoffrey, what might be called pathological space, that rudimentary and essential ability to distinguish self from not-self, does not exist” (*Voyage* 54). This inability stands as yet another example in Lowry’s oeuvre of a character who is unable to separate himself from the surrounding world. This is emphasized by the fact that at this moment of realization Geoffrey is surrounded by his doppelgängers, “these phantoms of himself, the policemen, Fructuoso Sanabria, the other man who looked like a poet, the luminous skeletons” (377). Grace argues that Geoffrey here comes to realize that if he had “continued to struggle,” he would have been able to “break out of the circle of self, he could have become free, separate and distinct” (54). If he had done so there would be “no devolving through failing unreal voices and forms of dissolution that became more and more like one voice to a death more dead than death itself, but an infinite widening, an infinite evolving and extension of boundaries, in which the spirit was an entity, perfect and whole” (377). The struggle for agency and independence is one that Lowry’s main characters continue to move towards, never realizing success until the work intended as the last piece of “The Voyage that Never Ends”: the short story “The Forest Path to the Spring.”

From the darkness of the ditch where Geoffrey’s body lies, *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* begins from a completely opposite vantage point: thousands of miles above the earth in a plane. Sigbjørn’s story is again one that parallels Lowry’s own experiences. Lowry made a return trip to Mexico with his second wife Marjorie to visit the cities where he had

lived and on which he based *Under the Volcano*, only to have the manuscript which he had worked on for ten years rejected and to find out that his dear friend (upon whom he based the character of Dr. Vigil) had been murdered since he was last there. Sigbjørn as a protagonist and as a writer is, much more than the Consul himself, aware of his own fictiveness, of his “being written.” In many ways we can read *Dark as the Grave* as Lowry’s attempt to separate himself from *Under the Volcano* by inventing another layer of authorship. That is, in *Volcano* we have Geoffrey, the omniscient narrator, the frame narration provided by M. Laruelle and in *Dark as the Grave* we have in addition to the author (Wilderness), a second omniscient narrator, and, seemingly, and finally, Lowry. But even such a configuration is too simple, for while Lowry’s early works of fiction demonstrate his initial experiments with narrative play, and these middle works see him create his masterpiece and then immediately begin to distance himself from it in order to write something new, what comes after in his later novellas and short stories are further articulations, manifestations, and interactions between the characters he has already created.

While in Mexico City Sigbjørn and Primrose sit in a café and talk of losing the original manuscript of *In Ballast to the White Sea* (a version of *Ultramarine*) in a fire. Sigbjørn tells Primrose not to blame herself: “it was fate, or whatever. And besides, *this is the book.*” In the conversation that follows Sigbjørn seems to be speaking of *Dark as the Grave* itself. Primrose is understandably confused throughout the conversation. “This is what book?” she asks him. “The real book,” he answers, “Now, it’s as if everything we do is part of it. I can’t write it, of course. [...] And if I did, it would probably be unreadable. But this is it” (85). To her further confusion he describes the figure who seems to be authoring them and pondering whether the mistakes they have made in their lives are perhaps “the parts he crosses out the next morning when he sets up his precious desk again strung between two

stars. If he ever sleeps. Or eats. Myself, I think he just drinks” (86). His description of this authority oscillates between an author figure and a God-like one – a figure who desires good for them whether they want to behave correctly or not. The ultimate tension, in this passage, is between control and free will. Sigbjørn explains that the author’s “notions of art, while sometimes perhaps not unlike ours, are simply wider.” As characters they are destined to “become filled up with self-reliance of the wrong kind and that in turn fills him with despair, because in fact we’re utterly dependent upon him and have to ask his help at every turn instead of our own” (86). Primrose asks him if he is talking about God and Sigbjørn replies that he “hadn’t intended to,” but instead was speaking of his “idea that [his] daemon was trying his hand at writing a book himself, rather than making [him] do it” (86).

Sigbjørn’s sense of his “writteness” occurs consistently throughout the novel. On a bus to Cuernavaca he is hit with a sense that his observing of the world around him mimics the act of reading a book: “a book that, paradoxically, had not yet been wholly written, and probably never would be, but that was, in some transcendental manner, *being* written as they went along” (102). In chapter six, after he and Primrose have been in Cuernavaca for a month, Sigbjørn wakes in his bed with a paralyzing hangover, unable to move but slowly putting together the last month’s events: “How could he have sunk like this, have become his own ‘character,’ nay, far worse. [...] And the guilt also in this other sinister form; this feeling he is being watched” (119).

This interpenetration of character and author is further complicated for Sigbjørn when, after the rejection of his manuscript and a failed suicide attempt, he and Primrose take the bus to Oaxaca to see Fernando. When they reach the city they discover he has been murdered much in the same way that Sigbjørn’s (and Lowry’s) Consul was murdered. Stunned by this knowledge they visit the ruined city of Milta. This city is, quite suitably, a city

of mourning, and during this visit Sigbjørn reminisces about the filmic adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher," which turned the tragedy of Poe's original story into a hopeful romance by making the entombed woman Usher's wife instead of his sister, who is then rescued in plenty of time and they are both saved in the end. Sigbjørn asks:

Were we not empowered as the director of that film at least to turn the apparent disaster of our lives into triumph? Suddenly it occurred to him that this was what he was doing in Mexico: was it not for him too a sort of withdrawal into the tomb? Was he the director of this film of his life? Was God? Was the devil? He was an actor in it, but if God were the director that was no reason why he should not constantly appeal to Him to change the ending. (249)

Lowry offers both Sigbjørn and the readers a possible solution to the problems of agency and will in the narration/creation of a story. Here Lowry creates hope at the end of his novel just as the director of *Usher* does in the film. This section also includes commentary on Sigbjørn's writing: "Wilderness, while imitating the tricks of Joyce, Sterne, the surrealists, the thought-streamers, give us the mind and heart of Sir Philip Gibbs" (249). Gibbs was novelist and journalist firmly set within the realist tradition who was known for his opposition to censorship of journalists writing from the Front during World War I. The separation between *style* ("imitating the tricks" of "the thought-streamers") and the realist, documentary *effect* ("the mind and heart") provides a late-modernist synthesis of abstract style and social commentary. That Sigbjørn comes to this realization at one of the most optimistic moments in Lowry's oeuvre demonstrates that Lowry is here championing or striving towards a novelistic technique that captures the subjective inner reality or consciousness within a wider socio-cultural context.

“Through the Panama” chronicles Sigbjørn and Primrose’s journey to Europe that takes them through the Panama Canal. Grace describes the story as “constantly echoing *Under the Volcano*,” and notes that the narrative “depicts a multi-faceted hell consisting of the southward journey to the infernal region of Mexico and the static containment of the ship in the locks” (*Voyage* 105). More crucially to the argument at hand is the breakdown that occurs between Sigbjørn and his character Martin Trumbaugh, the protagonist of *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*, the novel he is currently writing about his trip to Mexico with Primrose. Further, he also begins to plot the ways in which this novel will be placed within his over-arching sequence *The Voyage that Never Ends*. We learn that his novel “is about a character who becomes enmeshed in the plot of the novel he has written, as I did in Mexico. But now I am becoming enmeshed in the plot of a novel I have scarcely begun” (27). “Through the Panama,” then, presents us with yet another level of authorial layering. Not only has Sigbjørn now become the author of the novel he first appeared in, he is authoring that same novel and has replaced himself with Martin Trumbaugh.

Sections of Sigbjørn’s novel are interspersed with marginal notes imitating Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and a history of the Panama Canal. Wilderness also intersperses, both within these marginal notations and within the text proper, passages about and narrated from the perspective of Martin Trumbaugh. Sigbjørn becomes “disassociated” when thinking about his character: “I am not I. I am Martin Trumbaugh. But I am not Martin Trumbaugh or perhaps Firmin either, I am a voice, yet with physical feelings, I enter what can only be described – I won’t describe it” (37). Further and further integration of and confusion between the characters occurs. For example, an entry dated “Nov. 20 – or 21” switches between Martin and Sigbjørn’s perspectives:

Was it, Sigbjørn thought, that he did not wish to survive?

At the moment, it seems, I have no ambition...

Sigbjørn Wilderness (pity my name is such a good one because I can't use it) could only pray for a miracle, that miraculously some love of life would come back.

It has: apparently this retracing of a course was part of the main ordeal; and even at this moment Martin knew it to be no dream, but some strange symbolism of the future. (40)

We can read this cycling between Sigbjørn and Martin as occurring either wholly within Sigbjørn's mind or more metafictionally located on the page, at the level of narration as composed by Lowry. Sigbjørn's statement "I am not I" further develops the series of characters who are incapable of distinguishing themselves as individuals. Here the autonomy of not only Sigbjørn but also Lowry is purposefully confused, melded, and transformed.

As Sigbjørn falls into an anxious depression and into the mind of Martin, he also falls into the English canon, quoting authors or inventing lyrics in the style of certain authors and raising the question as to whether it is authentic or not. "I know you think Tennyson wrote that, but I did," he writes after quoting a segment of a poem that had previously been written by Lowry – again destabilizing the identity of each narrative voice. Portions of two short French sections "*Alarme*" and "*Abandon*," signed "Samuel Taylor Coleridge," and a short poem "*Safety*," signed "Wilderness Carlos Wilderness" are otherwise found in a letter Lowry wrote to John Davenport on November 1947 from the SS Brest on a trip down to Mexico with his second wife Margerie (Lowry, *Sursum* 112).

When the marginal text switches into a history of the Panama Canal, the narrative slips into a lengthy aside that ends with Sigbjørn's assertion that the Canal is a work of "a child's genius" or "a novel": "just such a novel as I, Sigbjørn Wilderness, if I may say so,

might have written myself – indeed without knowing it am perhaps in the course of writing, with both ends different in character, governed under different laws, yet part of the same community” (60-61). This meditation runs into a comparison of the authority of the lock-keeper in the canal system and an author of a story. The gates move with ease at

the touch of that man sitting up in the control tower high above the topmost lock who, by the way, is myself, and who would feel perfectly comfortable if only he did not know that there was yet another man above him in *his* invisible control tower, who also has a model of the canal locks before him, carefully built. (61)

This intricate layering of lock-keepers and authors encapsulates, at the end of this story, the tenuous relationship that Lowry constructs when he distances himself from Geoffrey by first creating Sigbjørn as the author figure and further when Sigbjørn creates Martin as *his* author figure. Grace sees the story as “a delightful parody of Lowry’s own problems, as a writer and as a man, in which he maintains a keen sense of the ridiculousness of the situation” (*Voyage* 106). Ultimately it is Sigbjørn who is the author and the written, and, on top of that, is the author who is paranoid of being authored. He is, in “Through the Panama,” the author who cannot separate himself from his own creation, achieving a sort of permeability between Lowry and Trumbaugh.

III. “The Forest Path to the Spring”

“The Forest Path to the Spring,” located at the end of Lowry’s posthumous short-story collection *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven thy Dwelling Place*, marks the end of a cycle of ebbs and flows in a way that, as Grace describes, “repeats and resolves the conflict in *Hear Us O Lord*.” The collection was still in manuscript form at the time of Lowry’s death. The “Publisher’s

Note” states that “Lowry had conceived of [the collection] as a unit, and had arranged the tales and short novels of which it consists in a kind of curve, so that each story had bearing upon those on either side of it” (n.pag.). Lowry described the work as so complete that it qualified as a “short novel” – the only one “of its type that brings the kind of majesty usually reserved for tragedy [...] to bear on human integration” (*Selected Letters* 266).

In “The Forest Path to the Spring” Sam recalls the years he has spent in Eridanus with his wife and the trials and successes experienced there. He is a former jazz musician (linking him, through this occupation, to Bill Plantagenet and Hugh Firmin) who has retired to a cabin on an inlet that overlooks an oil refinery. When he and his wife first arrive they rent a small cabin and after a while have saved up enough to buy one of their own. Their life in the first cabin is simple and structured by routine. Every evening Sam walks the forest path to the spring in order to fetch a container of water that will last them until the next evening. It is his mental and spiritual state on these walks that overwhelmingly structures the conflict in the story. While at first the walk is a joy, he comes to find it arduous and eventually thinks of it with dread. One evening he encounters a mountain lion and confronts it by speaking calmly – so calmly, in fact, that the measure in his voice seems to startle the lion who then falls from his branch and slinks off embarrassed. Sam recalls:

Finally I heard myself saying something like this to the mountain lion, something extraordinary and absurd, commanding yet calm, my voice as unreal to myself as if I'd just picked myself up from a lonely road after falling off a motorcycle and in shock were adjuring the wilderness itself to aid, a fact one half recalls under chloroform afterwards. ‘Brother, it’s true. I like you in a way, but just the same, between you and me, get going!’ Something like that. (265)

Grace argues that “[o]n the level of psychological quest, the narrator must come to accept the past” and that it is “only by transforming the past, or by confronting it without fear, as he confronts the cougar on the path, is the Lowry voyager able to create himself in the present and believe in the future” (114). It is through his voice that, even though he is in a psychological state of crisis and, on account of the danger in front of him, a very tangible state of panic, he is still capable of finding an authoritative means to control the situation.

After this event his mood on his nightly walk continues to be one of sadness, but his *perspective* has changed to one that is dream-like and is capable of rising above (quite literally, as he imagines himself looking down on himself) and shortly the walks begin to *seem* shorter and shorter, to the point at which he has trouble remembering them at all. Sam shifts from high elation and enjoyment in-the-moment, to sadness and despairing in-the-moment, to boldly gaining control of his fate, to ascension to an authorial perspective, to an almost withdrawal from the environment – a complete removal from experiencing anything in-the-moment – to the eventual return to the original state of elation where he is able to observe and marvel at the world around him is a trajectory that replicates, in simplest and most beautiful form, the struggles of authority, autonomy, and agency that all of Lowry’s protagonists have experienced. This shifting perspective, further, is connected to his role as an artist, for as Sam recalls his dream-like state of observance: “I was aware that some horrendous extremity of self-observation was going to be necessary to fulfill my project” (268).

The short story then describes Sam’s project at length. His fellow-musicians visit the couple’s home occasionally and bring him a cottage piano. At first Sam reintegrates himself into the musician’s life by coming up with inventive titles for his friends’ songs that had “grown out of improvisation.” From this initial act of naming Sam begins to meditate in

earnest on the connection between music and life, life and art. He recalls that on one evening's walk he "suddenly thought of a break by Bix in Frankie Trumbauer's record of 'Singing the Blues' that had always seemed to me to express a moment of the most pure spontaneous happiness." Sam's reference to "Singing the Blues" further connects him with *Lunar Caustic's* Bill Plantagenet who played the same song during his polyphonic performance. Here the song results in a revelatory moment for Sam who wonders if it is possible to "translate this kind of happiness into one's life?" He realizes the near impossibility of translating something that happened spontaneously in a single moment to a "permanent" moment, but, nevertheless, he marvels at the song's ability to "[suggest] at least the existence of such happiness, that was like what is really meant by freedom, which was like the spring, which was like our love, which was like the desire to be truly good" (257). Sam's realization may be read as Lowry's artistic statement on the methods of capturing the continual movement of life within a Joycean "epiphany" or even a Bergsonian evocation of *durée*. Stylistically, Sam accepts the impossibility of attempting the mimetic translation of this moment; instead, a work need only *suggest* the possibility of such happiness to produce the feeling. Sam here successfully translates an artistic moment into his life and this realization of how to harness art's transformative power results for him in a "freedom." Further, because of Lowry's concern with the moral state of mankind, this moment of artistic revelation is also connected to a "desire to be truly good."

Turning to his project, Sam mentions that he had become "haunted" by the notion of writing a symphony that "would incorporate among other things, for the first time in serious music (or so I thought), the true feelings and rhythm of jazz." From this idea he meditates on the connection between music and words, and whether there is a hierarchical relationship between the two. He asserts that he does not consider music superior to words;

rather, at times, he “even thought poetry could go further, or at least as far, in its own medium” (269). This is countered once again by yet another reconsideration of voice and language:

But there is a sense in which everybody on this earth is a writer, the sense in which Ortega [...] means it. Ortega has it that a man’s life is like a fiction that he makes up as he goes along. He becomes an engineer and converts it into a reality – becomes an engineer for the sake of doing that. (271)

Sam here translates Ortega y Gasset’s concept of freedom as originating from within an individual’s acceptance of his fate, thereby requiring him to “author” his life from within this acceptance. Ortega y Gasset writes that “we accept fate and within it we choose one destiny.” This is key to an understanding of the progression of artist-figures through Lowry’s oeuvre: if Sam, as Lowry’s only successful artist-figure, is one who has accepted his fate – that is, accepted his status as a written character – he achieves through this acceptance both artistic freedom and spiritual happiness. Through his use of the figure of the engineer, Sam’s realization connects with Sigbjørn’s adaptation of William Ernest Henley’s poem “Invictus” in “Through the Panama”: “I am the chief steward of my fate, I am the fireman of my soul” (38).

Like the fates of so many of Lowry’s characters the symphony that Sam works tirelessly on is eventually destroyed when their second cabin burns to the ground. Sam notes that he could never “recapture [his] symphony” and is “still struggling with words as well as music” and therefore decides to write an opera instead. The opera, titled *The Forest Path to the Spring*, is “built, like our new house, on the charred foundations and fragments of the old work and our old life” (274). Here, for the final time in Lowry’s oeuvre, the reader is faced with a moment of the autobiographical. Lowry’s oeuvre has been constructed through a

working out of his life; therefore, it is fitting, as Grace suggests, that “The Forest Path to the Spring” also contains the patterns, symbols, and themes of all of his works. Lowry’s past is here both real and contained within his art.

The story ends with a meditation on the trajectory of Sam’s development that functions, as Grace argues, as “the coda to “The Voyage that Never Ends”” (113). Sam notes that he “had become tyrannized by the past, and that it was [his] duty to transcend it in the present.” This transcendence, he believes, must not dismiss the past. In fact, his “new vocation was involved with using that past,” and integrating the past with the present. To do this, Sam adds, “it was necessary to face that past as far as possible without fear. Ah, yes, and it was that, that I had begun to do here. And if I had not done so, how could we have been happy, as we now were happy?” (282-83). To achieve this happiness, this extended moment, he suggests one must raise a calm voice, assert agency over what one may encounter along the path, in order to move above oneself in a way that allows for a complete negotiation of the past. This, ultimately, is what allows the artist to create a work that is able to say something about reality: “it was as if we were clothed in the kind of reality which before we saw only at a distance. [...] [I]t was as if we lived in a medium to which that in which our old lives moved, happy though they were, was like simply the bald verbal inspiration to the music we had achieved” (284). In this formulation their old lives, though happy, were akin to “bald verbal inspiration” because they had yet to accept their fates and the “medium” in which they lived. Sam cautions that he is speaking of their “lives only” and that his “compositions have always fallen far short of the great.” Instead, the importance for him is the realization of the ideal from which he strives to create. Although his creations “will never perhaps be anything more than second-rate,” it seems as if “there was room for them in the world, and I – and we – had happiness in their execution” (284). Although the inclusive

“we” on the level of the story refers to Sam and his unnamed wife, I suggest here a reading that expands the “we” to Lowry’s other artist-figures and, further to Lowry himself.

At the conclusion of “The Forest Path to the Spring,” Sam’s wife calls him out of bed to watch rain fall on the inlet. They watch the “perfect expanding circles of light [...] becom[e] expanding rings growing fainter and fainter, while as the rain fell into the phosphorescent water each raindrop expanded into a ripple that was translated into light” (286). This moment provides us with a final image of the interconnectedness of life that Lowry has constructed throughout “The Voyage that Never Ends.” Such connections at times confuse and confound his characters, causing them to lose their sense of the boundary between self and world in a way that threatens their sense of selfhood. Elsewhere, such dissolutions of boundaries are figured as positive, allowing for the creation of communion and empathy between individuals. Further, Sam’s realization that the rain “itself was water from the sea, [...] raised to heaven by the sun” epitomizes Lowry’s belief in the ebb and flow of life. Just as Geoffrey descends into the barranca Yvonne is raised up into the stars. We are here instructed not to read such movements as judgments on their characters but as different stages along the same cycle.

This chapter has traced the trajectory of Lowry’s artist-figures through his opus “The Voyage that Never Ends” and argued for a reading of their negotiations of the divide between world and art as reflecting Lowry’s own struggles. In the earlier works, his characters either deceive themselves that the way to self-knowledge is through a simple transposition or absorption into the other that results in an eschewing of artistic practice for a complete engagement with the physical, lived world (as we see with Dana Hilliot); or completely dissolve in the face of the incongruities of personal and historical narratives that

reflect a disharmony or inability to “hold the boys together” (as we see with Bill Plantagenet). His middle work is epitomized by a masterpiece in which multiple focalizers struggle for selfhood and artistic integrity. Their failures to successfully create art that is able to contain or reflect their struggles or the struggles of the world around them are resolved, finally, with Geoffrey’s acceptance that he is not an isolated genius but part of a whole. That his only successful moment of writing comes chronologically after his death (in the letter that Laruelle finds) while paradoxically appearing in the novel before his story begins (as it is placed in the first chapter) emphasizes the importance of the cyclical journey for Lowry. Lowry’s later works feature artist-figures who themselves wrestle with their own doomed written-selves and, as such, also suspect and fight against notions of themselves as controlled or written by some higher authority. It is only when Lowry’s final artist-character faces his fears, accepts his history, *and* accepts his fate, the fate of “his medium,” that he comes to a peace with both his art and his life. Such peace allows him to accept also that his works of art do not need to stand in as mimetic recreations of moments of pure happiness, but instead need only suggest that such happiness and freedom is possible to create in their audiences such self-same feelings.

Lowry locates this successful artist-figure on the British Columbia coast, where he lived and worked for fifteen years. George Woodcock notes that Lowry did not write about Canada “as a transient outsider.” Rather, he writes about it as a man who “lived himself into the environment that centred upon his fragile home where the Pacific tides lapped and sucked under the floorboards” (“Under Seymour” 9). Despite his inarguable internationality, Lowry’s works are often read as part of the Canadian canon by Canadian critics. The question is not whether Lowry should be considered a Canadian writer, but rather what lies behind his growing importance to Canadian literature. As I have already

noted in his discussion of Elizabeth Smart, Robert McGill argues that “Smart and her book together provided critics with a myth of lost youth, and the story of the Canadian recognition of *By Grand Central Station* was as much about the belated act of discovery itself as about the virtues of the book” (74-75). If we read the belated Canadian responses to Smart and Glassco as conflating the stories of these authors’ lost youths with lost origins of Canadian modernism, then Lowry serves a similar function by way of his critical reception in Canada. Although the initial responses to *Under the Volcano* were less than favourable (when they occurred at all), his presence on the west coast and influence on writers and scholars alike has strengthened through the late twentieth century to the present day. That the desire to claim Lowry as our own has increased at the same time that his notoriety as a tortured figure of modernist genius has increased internationally leads me to argue that our critics have come to embrace Lowry as a figure of Canadian modernism because he, like Smart, Glassco, and Watson, represents one facet of a myth of lost modernist origins. Lowry has become the adopted Canadian modernist son.

To further complicate matters, I ask whether we can read this adoption of Lowry in connection with what I see as the inherently late-modernist qualities of his work. Are there aspects of his writing – or even his self-characterization as an artist – that were missing from Canadian literature at mid-century? Among these features of his writing are his liminal positioning by critics as an author who works in both modernist and postmodernist modes; his obsession with the problems of plagiarism and the position of the plagiarist; his refusal to adhere to traditional notions of genre; and, finally, his play with the lines between autobiography, fiction, and metafiction: a playfulness that of all the authors included in this study comes closest to a postmodernist embrace of metafiction.

CHAPTER FIVE
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AN INSPIRED LIAR: JOHN GLASSCO'S AUTHORIAL
VENTRILOQUISMS

This young man is no longer myself: I hardly recognize him, even from his photographs and handwriting, and in my memory he is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel I have read.

—John Glassco, “Prefatory Note” to *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (n.pag.)

John Glassco is a writer who negotiates a complex set of authorial identities as a poet, translator, eroticist, and memoirist. This chapter traces his self-fashionings in order to argue for a reading of Glassco as a competent self-mythologizer and a preeminent figure among Canada's lost modernist origins. His erotic and fetish fiction was first published under a myriad of pseudonyms and occasionally republished later in his career under his own name. The works that Glassco translated and edited earned him his highest praise: his completion of Aubrey Beardsley's *Under the Hill* (1959); his translation of important Québécois texts such as Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau's *Journal* (1962), *The Complete Poems of Saint Denys Garneau* (1975), and Monique Bosco's *Lot's Wife. La Femme du Loth* (1975); and, finally, his editorship of, introduction to, and translation of seventy-two poems in *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation* (1970). Taken together, these works place him in a middle ground among the figures of writer, critic, and literary historian: a position that allows Glassco to maneuver among authorial roles and challenge literary convention. *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970), the well-received memoir of his time as an expatriate writer and bon vivant in 1920s Paris, marks what is perhaps his most complicated relationship with his own authorship. When the memoirs were first published, Glassco claimed that the majority of the writing had been composed during a hospital convalescence in 1932. Subsequent examinations of his archival material, however, have revealed that a number of his recollections were falsified or greatly exaggerated, his timelines expanded and contracted, and whole conversations

between himself and notable literary figures had previously appeared (sometimes verbatim) in articles he published through the 1950s and 1960s. I see Glassco's movement through erotic fiction, translation, and memoir as reflective of and responsive to the anxieties of authorship that he struggled with his entire career. Part of that anxiety stems from the resistance in Canadian letters to work that did not fit within the standards of an official national literature. As such, Glassco's departure from Montreal for Paris in his youth says as much about the possibilities of that literary community as his lack of acceptance in Canada.

An exchange that typifies this lack of acceptance comes from an aesthetic debate between Glassco and John Sutherland, editor of *Northern Review*, in late December 1950 and into 1951. In the mid-1940s Glassco had successfully published his "Frogmore" series of erotic translations in the Sutherland-edited magazine *First Statement*. When Sutherland rejected the short story "The Pigtail Man" for publication in *Northern Review* six years later, Glassco wrote to Sutherland in an effort to persuade him otherwise. "The story is an attempt at *entertainment* pure and simple," he explains, "in a genre that goes, in intention at least, beyond Kafka's loose, personal symbolism, and that might be called 'literary abstractionism'" (original emphasis). He then separates his version of abstractionism from a "simon-pure" form "where the techniques of abstraction are applied *back* to the representation of the classic objects of still life [...] and which is designed, as [the painter Braque] says, merely to 'please,' to 'entertain'" (Glassco "Letter"). Sutherland responds in a letter to Glassco by disagreeing with his "conception of the short story as art." Instead, Sutherland claims that Glassco is "depriv[ing]" himself of an audience by his "insisting" on "the importance of a technical tour de force" in the work. Sutherland claims that Glassco "wish[es] to encourage the critical at the expense of the creative faculty" before divulging his frustrations with the current trend in art to prioritize such a balance between critical and creative faculties. "It is a

kind of disease,” he writes, “to think that technique, and technical analysis, are of primary concern in a finished work of art, and not just the means to an end.” He ends by claiming that during his tenure as editor for *First Statement* he “do[es] not remember publishing one story or poem in that magazine which could be labeled ‘abstract’ or ‘non-representational’ in the sense in which you are using the terms” (Sutherland “Letter”).

Apparent from this exchange are the differing conceptions of abstraction and the role of narratives as art rather than entertainment. Sutherland’s position assumes that the critical and the creative are mutually exclusive. Further, Sutherland’s distancing of his editorial sensibilities from non-representational aesthetics – especially his claim to have never published any “abstract work,” which is categorically untrue – speaks to the extent of the separation between an aesthetics of abstraction and an aesthetics of realism in mid-century Canadian literature. The exchange indicates Glassco’s defense of his desires to mix sophisticated, sometimes obscure, narrative elements with genres of popular fiction – a desire that he continually expressed throughout his career in journals, letters, and articles. This exchange also marks a turning point in Glassco’s career in that it occurs on the cusp on his emerging success as a writer. It was at the outset of the 1950s that his frustrations with the publishing world led him to seek out new forums. These experiments made many of his works unpublishable in more conventional venues, and were especially confusing to Canadian critics and readers, which resulted in Glassco’s turn to highly unconventional modes of getting his writing published.

Glassco’s writing does not serve as a bridge between modernism and postmodernism to the same extent as other authors discussed in later chapters. Instead, here I read Glassco *himself* as the bridge. That is, Glassco deliberately represents himself as the figuration and embodiment of lost modernist origins. While other authors struggle to control the ways they

were framed in Canadian literature, Glassco actively takes control of his. His continual play with authorial identity radically shifts between the 1920s and the 1980s, and his use of pseudonyms, his invention of texts, his choices of translations, and his semi-fictionalized *Memoirs* demonstrate an evolving complexity of authorial play. In particular, I read Glassco's translation of the *Journal* of Saint-Denys Garneau – a project that occurred at a particular moment of personal and artistic crisis – as inaugurating his understanding of the post-1960s caché of the figure of the lost modernist origins of Canadian letters. This, in turn, resulted in his refashioned biography as a young artist at the very hub of high-modernist artistic production.

I. Erotic Fiction

John Glassco's erotic works – while often featuring sado-masochistic relationships that recreate the abusive one he claimed to have with his father (Busby 22-23) – do not delve into the explicitly autobiographical. Instead, they work through the same issues of control and agency addressed in the works of Watson, Smart, and Lowry through the power dynamics inherent in both sado-masochism and the triangulated desire of a love triangle. A majority of Glassco's erotic fictions were published pseudonymously; his first public foray under his own name came in 1959 with his completion of Aubrey Beardsley's *Under the Hill* (1907) – a text already firmly established as a classic example of nineteenth-century literary decadence. *Under the Hill* was non-threatening to Glassco's contemporary audience because its subject matter reflected the morals and aesthetic ideals of what was considered a corrupted, effete, and already-dead culture. Further, Glassco's choice to work with *Under the Hill* had much to do with Beardsley's particular manifestation of modernist *pastiche* in his erotic drawings and texts. That is, Beardsley's works themselves use older or “othered” forms and styles in order

to present highly sexualized subject matter in a way that was acceptable to a literate bourgeois audience. Beardsley's drawings use a combination of "foreign" form and mythic, classical, or folkloric figures to lessen the threat of his eroticism. Glassco, I argue, adopts and adapts Beardsley's technique of *pastiche* in his erotic works in order to turn to certain types of literary style to critique his own cultural milieu.

Leon Edel identifies Glassco's completed version of *Under the Hill* (1959) as a form of *pastiche* in his article "John Glassco and His Erotic Muse."²⁰ There he stresses the need to look "below the surface of frolic" of the text to Glassco's "identification and empathy with [Beardsley's] ability to laugh and mock and invent." In short, Edel asks the reader to look beyond the salacious form to the social and aesthetic satire at work in the text. In *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* (2000), Allison Pearse identifies Beardsley's pornographic pastiche as one that "function[s] both as an appropriation of and a commentary upon the pornographic image and ideal" (98). She further argues for a theorization of Beardsley as highly attuned to the cultural norms and the limits of aesthetic experimentation within the sphere of "high art." Take, for example, Beardsley's depiction of sado-masochistic flagellation. Pearse argues that Beardsley subverts the trope in his drawings by placing a man as subservient to a dominant woman. By reversing the traditional Victorian configuration of woman-as-subservient in pornographic photographs and postcards, Beardsley "uses the pornographic to unsettle the culturally staid" (112). Further, Beardsley's sado-masochistic figures are always classical or aristocratic in nature. Pearse argues that because nineteenth-century "literature of flagellation" was associated with aristocracy on

²⁰ Edel is here using the term *pastiche* to mean a work "created in the style of someone or something else; a work that humorously exaggerates or parodies a particular style" and not Fredric Jameson's identification of (specifically postmodern) pastiche as "speech in a dead language" that is "without laughter" and simply "blank parody" ("Pastiche"; Jameson "Postmodernism" 114).

account of a “common experience of education at public school,” his depictions then eliminate “the picture’s threat to bourgeois hegemony by identifying the aristocratic male as the willingly powerless” (110). Beardsley carves out a space between pornography and high art where his drawings can circulate. From this understanding of Beardsley’s pornographic pastiche, then, I read Glassco’s “identification and empathy” with a method that goes beyond simple imitation of pornography to offer a commentary on and critique of mid-century Canadian attitudes toward the pornographic.

Glassco’s choice of *Under the Hill* as a public foray into the pornographic demonstrates his understanding of the conservative attitudes towards sexuality in Canada as mitigated by the reverberations of high-art legitimacy that Beardsley continued to foster. As noted in the introduction, Canada was in the midst of a nationally sanctioned push towards artistic and cultural legitimacy that favoured a European model of high art. As an early proponent of modernist aesthetics, Aubrey Beardsley is best known for his drawings influenced by minimalist Japanese style and “neo-medievalism.” Known as much for his “dandyish” public persona as for his art, he is often associated with aestheticism and decadence (and consequently homosexuality). After his successes with drawings Beardsley took up writing, and worked on an adaptation of the *Tannhäuserlied*²¹ he entitled *Under the Hill*. Attracted to this “story of sex, sin, and forgiveness,” Beardsley found that the more he worked on the prose “the more pornographic it became,” and eventually only fragmentary

²¹ Tannhäuser was a poet and courtier whose poetry, and specifically his *Bußlied* (Poem on Atonement), led to the legend that became known through ballads. Therein he is a knight who stumbles across Venusberg, the home of Venus. He stays and worships her for a year before returning to Rome to ask Pope Urban IV to absolve him of his sins. Urban refuses him, and announces that such forgiveness would be as unlikely as for his staff to bloom with flowers. Three days after Tannhäuser leaves Rome Urban’s staff blooms. A search for the knight turns up nothing as he has disappeared back to Venusberg. (“Tannhäuser, Der”)

sections were published in the *Savoy*. Glassco's completion of Beardsley's *Under the Hill* in 1959 came at a time of revival for the artist whose persona and style became part of the fabric of 1960s pop culture as evidenced in "posters and advertisements, [...] T-shirts and record sleeves" (Crawford n.pag.). Glassco's decision to complete the work, then, took advantage of Beardsley's caché as both an early-modernist celebrity and an innovator of graphic art. In addition, Glassco's association with an artist who himself was adept at manipulating his own literary celebrity by playing with gender reverberates with Glassco's obsession with attaining legitimacy and the negotiation of his public and private struggles with his sexuality identity.

Edel notes that Glassco's work with *Under the Hill* appears as though he "were remembering his own spirit when he was writing the *Memoirs of Montparnasse*" – an ironic statement seeing as (unbeknownst to Edel) Glassco had yet to write much of the memoir. This ironic reading of Glassco is telling of the extent to which we can now read the depth of his use of satire in the manipulation of his authorial identity. Edel gives as an example *The Temple of Pederasty* (1970), a translation of Japanese poet Ihara Saikaku's (1642-93) erotic book about the sexual and sado-masochistic relationships between Samurai men and boys. It is commonly believed that Glassco invented a vast majority of the text – an invention that goes so far as his creation of a fictional translator, Dr. Hideki Okada (Sutherland, *John Glassco* 53). This authorial posturing in *The Temple* is furthered in Glassco's article "The Art of Pornography" (1969) in which he claims that the art of homosexual pornography in seventeenth-century Japan "reached its point of perfection in the *collages* superimposed on the work of the great novelist Ihara Saikaku" (107, ital. in original). In other words, Glassco here claims that Japanese homosexual pornography reached its pinnacle with his own invented translation of Saikaku's work. Further, the preface to *The Temple* ends with a

warning that “the authorship of these interpolations is extremely doubtful.” (qtd. in Edel, “John Glassco” 114). This further destabilizes the notion of authorial control and emphasizes Glassco’s repeated gestures towards the text’s instability.

In “The Art of Pornography” Glassco makes a case for reading pornography as “a form of literary art” (101). For Glassco, pornography is defined by its “*deliberate attempt, by all the resources of the written word, to stimulate the sexual appetite*” (101, ital. in original). If it begins to stray “into politics, philosophy, satire or blasphemy,” it is no longer pornography. Glassco follows Montaigne’s “useful” (yet admittedly elitist and flawed) model that separates the “common” or “public” taste from pornography-as-art: “*that kind of aphrodisiac writing which, no matter to what sexual disposition or vagary it is addressed, neither bores or repels a literate reader of dissimilar sexual orientation*” (101, ital. in original). Cleverly, Glassco sets the stage for his reading public by claiming that a cultured, literate reader would have the good taste to react positively towards any work of pornography-as-art regardless of the sexual material found therein. To react with offense would suggest the reader’s boorishness or commonality.

Patricia Whitney’s 1997 article “‘Raptures and Roses of Vice’: Reading John Glassco and his Pornography through a Biocritical Lens” delves into the detailed nature of the abuse he received at the hands of his father (as confirmed and documented by Whitney in consultation with the first wife of Glassco’s brother David) and reads Glassco’s erotic and pornographic works based on these experiences. She argues that “Glassco spent his life naming his situation in an effort to master his pain and achieve peace” (1). Whitney’s biographical reading offers illuminating insight into Glassco’s major pornographic works, but the study remains a psychological profile and does not offer much in terms of literary analysis, concluding that “Glassco seems never to have understood the conflicted position of the adult survivor of sadistic sexual abuse” (10). Whether Glassco ever came to such an

understanding or not, he did have a dogged obsession with the workings of power and the play between control and lack of control. Such an understanding reveals itself in his authorial play and self-fashioning.

A close reading of Glassco's 1972 rubber fetish novel *Fetish Girl* demonstrates how he uses the subject matter of a sado-masochistic love triangle to explore issues of authorial and artistic control. While the majority of the novel is taken over by the main character's clichéd, overwrought diction that relentlessly quotes, misquotes, and alludes to classical works of western literature, the narrative shifts dramatically into a powerful rendition of lyrical stream-of-consciousness when she is forced to face her own reflection. Glassco's novel moves from a distractingly false and alienating narrative voice that can only express itself through quotation to – if not a passage poetic and evocative in its own right – then at least a successful imitation of high-modernist narrative style. This shift, I argue, embodies Glassco's frustrations with his inability to make a living writing in a style or genre and still be taken seriously by his peers.

An excerpt from *Fetish Girl* was published in the first issue of *Northern Journey* in 1971 and the entire work was published in 1972, both under the pseudonym Sylvia Bayer. A brief, first-person biography of Bayer appears on a perforated removable page at the back of *Northern Journey*. It reads: "I have been writing since I was about eight; but my poetry was all birds and flowers, and my stories all waltzes, heartbreak and moonlight." Further, Bayer indicates that she began writing "this kind of thing six years ago and my first book, *Eros, My Angel* (Gargoyle, 1965) has just enough success to keep me at it. [...] My favourite poet is Margaret Atwood, and I still hope to meet her some day" (qtd. in Sutherland, *John Glassco* 73). This biography is not the only extratextual information about Sylvia Bayer. Also present in the issue is a feature called "Collect Canadian Writers Cards!!" that contains a number of

Canadian authors such as Al Purdy, Earle Birney, and John Glassco, as well as Sylvia Bayer, whose photograph is of Elma, John Glassco's wife who was at the time hospitalized and dying of tuberculosis and anorexia nervosa (Whitney, "Raptures" 13). These two pseudonymous elements betray the extent to which Glassco manipulates authorial identity. The "character" of Sylvia Bayer (who dedicates her novel to John Glassco) points to the very real emergence of a new generation of Canadian women writers in the early 1970s. That Glassco would use the image of his dying wife in the context of these series of semi-farcical promotional cards demonstrates a profound investment in the identity of Sylvia Bayer that goes far beyond a playful manipulation to something much more personal.

Fetish Girl highlights and frames Glassco's anxieties about writing pseudonymously in the genre of fetish fiction. The novel tells the story of Ursula Ware, a beautiful, young, single, and self-sufficient interior decorator with a penchant for rubber who meets and falls for two men who share her fetish: Adrian, the controlling and powerful older man who has an unfortunately small penis and his lover Tony, a young, blonde Adonis with a penis that more than compensates for Adrian's. A love triangle develops when Tony falls in love with Ursula, throwing Adrian into a jealous rage. Ursula falls for both men: Adrian for his powerful presence and Tony for his sweet demeanor. By the end of the novel the three come to an agreement to enter into a marriage of sorts. The narrative perspective of the novel is controlled by Ursula's saucy, campy voice; she maintains so much control that the third person-omniscient narrator rarely has a chance to intervene. Ursula repeatedly references literary figures, mentioning, for instance, Electra, Ezra Pound, Freud, Alexandre Dumas, and Sir Galahad in just one short chapter. An example of such allusiveness occurs when the three lovers are picnicking by a lake and Ursula thinks to herself:

Oh how I love the country, the real country, somewhere I can walk barefoot
in the grass—yes, and take off my clothes and put my arms around trees and
sit on big soft warm humps of moss. A violet on a mossy stone, that’s what I
want to be. Just an old-fashioned girl out of Wordsworth. (29-30)

This section references William Wordsworth’s “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways,” a poem about a woman named Lucy for “whom there were none to praise / And very few to love” and who is therefore “[h]alf hidden from they eye” despite her beauty (lines 3-4, 6). At the poem’s completion we learn of Lucy’s death and, though unknown to most of the world, the speaker exclaims: “The difference is to me!” (12). The emphasis on Ursula’s rareness, specifically the rarity of finding a woman (or man) who shares a particular fetish is repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel. That Glassco infuses this text with examples from classical and canonical literatures demonstrates that his intent – to return to his theorization of pornography-as-art – is to titillate audiences beyond only those with rubber fetishes.

The novel is written in this narrative style until the penultimate chapter. Before entering into her ménage à trois marriage, Ursula decides to “clear [her] sensual decks” by having an affair with a woman named Inez. In this chapter the narrative style shifts: instead of clichéd, campy narration punctuated by colloquial exclamations, the diction simplifies and adopts a fluid lyricism. Ursula is strapped to a chair and her head is encased in a rubber hood. Inez controls Ursula’s breathing as she stimulates her sexually, throwing Ursula into a state of ecstasy.²² Near the end of the chapter Inez strips Ursula of her blindfold and she faces a mirror. In this state Ursula disassociates, not recognizing that the girl in her reflection is also herself: “She’s suffering, she can’t move or breathe. [...] Ha, ha, she can’t breathe! And I’m watching her, the black woman and I are both watching her. Shall we kill her?”

²² Ursula here is literally in “[t]he state of being ‘beside oneself’” as she faces her reflection in the mirror (“Ecstasy”).

(100). Ursula then loses consciousness and wakes to find herself freed from her constraints. Ursula's lyrical stream-of-consciousness narration is unlike any other section of the novel, and significantly, unlike any other of the erotic scenes in the novel. Ursula thinks: "My pussy is calling, whining. *Prmmkgnaiow!* A love vernal contralto: *wiabow, wah, wooh, preeenwwwow*. Come to me clippyclaws, fuzzyfur, pinkyomtongue in the end-of-April night. Fnihlingraushen. Sweet airs, blow soft: mount, lark, aloft" (101). This section recreates a Joycean use of onomatopoeia and portmanteau. Further, it references Thomas Heywood's "Love's Good Morrow," a love poem that praises the coming of the day as offering renewed hope and love. This combination of the modernist and romantic continues throughout the chapter. At Inez's touch Ursula praises her "[l]ong feathery strokes of silken black fingertips. Whorls, touches as of a camelhair brush, petal-soft arabesques damascening my tender sides, touches as of underwater ferns over my trembling sides. O so sweet, O so soft is she" (102). Here Ursula's ecstasy references Ben Jonson's poem "Have you seen but a white lily grow"²³ which praises the untouched, unsullied white lily before it has been soiled by the hands of men. This session with Inez provides allows Ursula to remove the stain of her previous actions before entering into her marriage.

At the chapter's end, when her time with Inez is over, Ursula's voice shifts once more into her familiar style as the novel ends with Adrian, Tony, and Ursula living in post-honeymoon happiness. In a novel in which the triangle is an overarching figure, it is significant that Ursula escapes from her stylized self-narration and cheeky references to literature and finally achieves her own narrative style when faced with her second self, her

²³ What does one make of Glassco's use of these two poems, both commonly set to music, and composed by early modern playwrights? I suggest that because Jonson and Heywood are both known primarily as authors of domestic dramas – where the subjects of marriage, virginity, and fidelity form the plot, that Glassco here is satirically winking at his audience that the conclusion of this unusual narrative turns into a traditional narrative of the "marriage plot."

doppelgänger, in her time with Inez. That is, as she faces her own reflection and separates herself from the woman she sees in the mirror, Ursula's inner monologue ceases to reference other literary styles and instead becomes its own style. Because of Glassco's awareness that his novel is so firmly placed within a limiting genre (that of the rubber fetish), he sees himself as similarly "strapped down," hindered, controlled, and yet he chooses to give in to such strictures. The triangulated figure of Glassco, his pseudonymous identity, and the overwhelmingly present narrative voice of Ursula is mirrored by the continually shifting power relations among Ursula, Tony, and Adrian.

The figure of the fatal woman is also present throughout Glassco's collection of three novellas in *The Fatal Woman* (1974). In the preface Glassco claims that the novellas were influenced by his readings of "Huysmans, Pater, Villiers, Barbey d'Aurévilly and other of the so-called Decadents" who inspired him "to write books utterly divorced from reality, stories where nothing happened" (ii). The first story composed was "The Fulfilled Destiny of Electra," "modeled after Greek tragedy." Glassco notes that his efforts to write a "motionless tale" was thwarted by action, or "movement." "The Black Helmet" was next, modeled after the Endymion myth but, as with the first story, he found it contained too much "movement" and after many rewritings he gave the story up. Finally, in 1964, Glassco wrote "Lust in Action," which he describes as his most successful of the three tales in terms of addressing the topic of "the fatal woman." This third story turns to social critique to interpret the story of Inger and Artemis in a futuristic tale of surveillance and control. As with most of his introductions, Glassco's apology turns to meditations on his role as a writer and an emphasis of how much of his texts are confessional or autobiographical. He turns to Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*, explaining that he has chosen "the way of Axel" by limiting his writings to his own psychological obsessions. Wilson's 1931 work of literary criticism

examines the rise of symbolist literature between 1870 and 1930. He argues that the works of W.B. Yeats, Paul Valery, T.S. Eliot, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein be read as part of “a self-conscious and very important literary movement”(1). In particular, Wilson’s work picks up on the importance of the integration of autobiographical material in the works of these writers. Glassco’s alignment of his erotic writings with Wilson’s seminal work of criticism not only justifies the integration of his own autobiographical experiences within these texts but also retroactively places these novellas within a modernist context. Glassco explains that such autobiographical obsessions reflect “the writer’s own limitations [and] lack of psychological insight that makes him incapable of creating any character that is not some aspect of himself” (iii). The preface finishes by emphasizing that this decadent self-obsessiveness results in an author who “stands outside of history, economics, literary fashions and all the dreary hurly-burly of the facts of life: his realm is that of pure illusion” (iv). Glassco firmly places his writings as self-focused and located in fantasy. Although his preface repeatedly emphasizes how such an entrapment of fetish and sexual obsession limits his writing, at the same time his distance from the claims of social-realist text allow him a number of freedoms as well. By concentrating on the psychology of the individual, particularly if that individual is self-confessed to be the author, Glassco skillfully silences his potential critics of his excessiveness by providing himself with both a literary precursor in the Decadents, solid structuring and symbolic material with his use of Greek myths, and a critically viable subject matter in sexual psychology.

As Glassco notes in his introduction, the three novellas that compose *The Fatal Woman* are unified by their use of the iconic figure of “the fatal woman.” Although when read independently the stories share many other qualities, they also trace a number of fascinating threads when read as one, single narrative. The first I will address is the relation

of sexual licentiousness or “perversion” with architecture and landscape. In the first two novellas the male protagonists are associated with ownership and solitariness within an isolated but vast property. This property, however, passes into a state of development and progress when the protagonists surrender sexually to the power of the fatal woman. These male figures are associated with decadence, decay, and an older, timeless state of being. The fatal woman is associated with an uncertain future, which then manifests itself in the dystopian (or utopian, depending on your point-of-view) female-controlled futuristic setting of the third novella. I argue that Glassco – much in the same way as he uses the pastiche of the “author portrait” of Sylvia Bayer as a critique of new forms of feminist writing, offers a critique of his writing as outdated, decaying, in the face of new, virile feminine voices.

Phillip is the focus of “The Black Helmet,” a young man recently returned to his family estate after a series of failed business ventures. He languishes around his home writing of literature and both lamenting and honouring the time in his life spent with his childhood governess Miss Marwood. That we may read this story as a continuation of Glassco’s many-versioned erotic novel of the same name is undeniable. Adrienne and her brother Lavigne enter the narrative intent on taking advantage of Philip and his “perverse” auto-eroticism (7). Adrienne poses as a housekeeper and comes to take the place of Miss Marwood – eventually taking control of both Philip and his estate, which he signs over to her.

From the outset of the novella we learn of Phillip’s love for the decaying property he inherited from his great-grandfather which he once considered “ugly” when it was new: “blazing with paint and gilding and varnished wrought-iron! I’m afraid great-grandfather meant this house to serve as a landmark, a kind of habitable shrine” (8). This “monument” is compared to others built across the country by the patriarch: the “unspeakable mausoleum, modeled after the Parthenon, which he built for us all in Montreal” to “that early skyscraper,

shaped like a portable gallon can” to “the blocks of rat-ridden tenements, the cantons of ruinously mortgaged farms, the abandoned railway-lines leading nowhere” (8). Phillip concludes this desolate listing of the failed empire by associating the grotesque or ruined buildings and landscapes with himself: “So perhaps it’s only fitting,” he suggests, “that I, his only descendent, the last of the lot, should be left with nothing but this big ruin which no one wants” (8).

At the end of the tale Phillip has completely submitted himself to Adrienne and no longer feels fear or self-condemnation. He has also become completely enveloped by the estate and notes that the world outside of its limits is “a sham”: “an evilly enchanted country of vague indices, remote and fearful affinities, nightmares of horror and ennui, endless progressions through the myriad forms of suffering to the single form of death” (59-60). In the concluding lines of the novella Phillip describes the development and change on the estate. As he walks through the woods he observes a fence with “high steel posts, the strong close mesh of barb and knotted links” constructed, according to Adrienne, “[t]o keep the world away from us.” As they watch “the small dark men at their work” Phillip knows that

[s]oon there will be only the world of shifting snow, a land quiet and rigid under its dazzling shroud [...] a whole secret universe quietly throbbing like that other perpetually vernal heart we shall bring to birth and keep buried here, along with everything that I love and can at last share in freedom and ease. (60-61)

Where once there was decay, stasis, and impotence there is development, change, and fertility. The land is described as “shrouded” by the snow which, when moved by wind, changes the landscape of the vista. The snow is Adrienne’s hood and the wind her whip. Her influence brings about a sinister change. Glassco’s use of the word “vernal,” associated

as it is with spring, suggests that life and growth will be buried or shrouded from view, controlled by the domineering snow.

Glassco's second novella, "The Fulfilled Destiny of Electra," similarly begins in a secluded landscape. Once again the seasons play a significant role – particularly Charles' relationship with the sun. The first movement of the story, encapsulating chapters one to three, begins in late summer, it is dusk and Charles and Sophie are out swimming in the lake. Charles is described as "veiled" but the nature of his covering is never described. The two watch the sunset and then he uncovers his face and they take the boat out into the lake. This first movement is ruled by sexual tension: we learn of the unusual living situation and the love triangle that exists between our three characters. Sophie is attracted to her mother's lover, Charles, and she deliberately misbehaves in order to receive beatings from her mother, which she knows give Charles sexual pleasure to hear. We also learn that after each beating Charles and Inger make love while Sophie listens in and masturbates. At the end of the movement a pivotal scene occurs when Inger, watching from above, witnesses Charles violently kiss Sophie out in the woods.

Charles' earlier veiling is paralleled when he identifies the sun as his tyrant: "If ever I could love the sun, he told himself, it would be now, when it is a struggling and almost vanquished force. But soon, in a few months, it will again become the tyrant, a light on everything I fear and dare not face" (89). Here, the sun reveals the truth and Charles prefers to live in a world that is veiled or cold. Sophie rebels against her authority figures by submitting to be courted by Vernal Topp. Vernal and Charles engage in conversation about his property. Topp thinks it should be developed into cottages and a camp for "the common man," noting that "[t]he rich men have had their day. It's the poor folks that will call the tune from now on. The poor folks with the fine big families, them who're living in cabins

and trying to raise their kids right” (92). This statement associates Charles’ riches with the decadence of perversion and Topp’s poverty with a bland morality of the status quo.

Like Topp, Sophie and her mother are aligned with the “poor folks” and this association distresses Inger. The mother implores that Sophie submit to Charles and offer him her virginity for “what are [they] but two common women?” (96). Sophie submits and is ceremoniously “given” to Charles by her mother but he cannot climax with her and calls Inger back into his bed, forcing Sophie, who is ashamed and confused, to watch. His inability to climax is figured as a failure on her part but as the novella draws to a close we see that it is he who is figured as sterile. The day after he beds Sophie Charles is paralyzed by the March sun streaming through his window: “Oh the sun, the sun, he thought: my enemy always” (101). Sophie then leaves the home and goes to Topp who quickly turns violent with her. Charles then barges in and attacks the man. He receives a summons for his attack of Topp and when he does not respond the police come to the house to arrest him. He opens fire and they shoot back, killing him, only to later find out that he had shot blank cartridges at them. Just as he is unable to climax with Sophie we here see that his violence is a sterile one and this sterility leads to the eventual passing of land from him to the common man.

Though associated with sterility, Charles’ death is figured as a death of beauty. Sophie and Inger survey the land they inherited and that they will soon sell to Mr. Topp. Sophie is glad that it will be developed and ruined so no one else will experience the beauty of it. They are now rich and will travel the world: “yes, it is all before us. We are two women going for a walk, with a secret between them, something never to be mentioned and which, by dint of silence, will soon be forgotten” (113). Property, at the end of this novella, is delineated in opposition to its figuration at the end of “The Black Helmet”: whereas in the first novella it is fenced off and made private for the practice of the sexually perverse, in

“The Fulfilled Destiny of Electra” it will be made public and sold to the “common man,” and rid of its perversions. This cleansing of the land sets the stage for the final novella of the series: “Lust in Action.”

For this third novella Glassco changes the style dramatically and gives us a campy pastiche that envisions the world as controlled by a “gynocracy,” where only one child in 10 000 is male, the women have come to view the male body and male sexuality as abhorrent and unnatural; even the mere suggestion of male genitalia is horrific. The twentieth century is referred to as “The Dark Ages,” a time before “artificial birth and the determination of gender” (128). When a boy was accidentally born he was allowed to “run free in the Half World as an example, a warning, an illustration of the dangers of hetero” (129). The main character, Martha Coxweiler, is a warden of a prison of forty-four boys who faces a crisis in the prison in the form of the illegal creation and distribution of a number of “obscene papers” (hand drawings of their own nakedness) (118). Chief suspects in this matter are Arthur Dumont and Thurlow Smart, two “troublemakers” who are in consideration for getting “the knife”: an operation deemed necessary for those boys who are beyond reform. The two boys use the papers to attempt an escape and threaten the guards with exposure to the lewd documents as well as their penises, which have been freed of their “rings” and are therefore highly threatening. Their attempted escape is foiled by the brave and heroic guards, the boys taken off to get knifed in “the long room” of the institution, and a heartwarming love blooms between guard Helen Nightingale and Marian Hope, Chief of the State Corrective Squad. The text ends with control firmly reestablished in the hands of the “fatal women” who destroy the men biologically before birth, and physically and socially in life. The vast estates of Phillip and Charles have now completely been deterritorialized into the hands of the women and the role of the mediating man, played by Lavigne in an active sense

in “The Black Helmet” and Topp in a more passive role in “The Fulfilled Destiny of Electra.” In a manner similar to what we will see in *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, Glassco uses the figure of a seductive and dangerous “fatal woman” to metaphorize his authorial anxieties. He associates himself with a decadent and dying tradition that is controlled and destroyed by a powerful female collaboration. Although not as explicitly worked through as in *Memoirs*, Glassco’s note in the introduction that “the writer’s own limitations [and] lack of psychological insight [...] makes him incapable of creating any character that is not some aspect of himself” (iii) demands we read these tales as working beyond the surface of eroticism to an embedded critique of his cultural milieu.

Glassco’s adaptation of modernist *pastiche* allows him to transplant the aesthetics and artistic posturing of the nineteenth-century decadents, the mythology of Japanese Samurai, or the style and diction of dime-store pulp fiction into his own manifestations of erotic or pornographic texts. His works, through such transplantations, become less threatening to a bourgeois audience. His various appropriations and authorial identities further distance him from the works yet the textual clues he leaves in his introductions, dedications, and critical works constantly refers back to him. I argue that this adoption of the modernist technique of *pastiche* allows him to express (though such expressions are at times cautious or conflicted) the difficulties of being queer in mid-century Canada. Glassco uses his erotic writings to explore his interests with control and agency in a way that predicts his authorial maneuverings in *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. In particular, I read Glassco’s understanding and adoption of Aubrey Beardsley’s method of *pastiche* to strategically deflect criticism that may befall his works. Far from Jameson’s identification of postmodern *pastiche* as dead, silent, or useless, Glassco’s *pastiche* carefully selects material, tropes, and styles to reflect and critique

his contemporary socio-cultural milieu. His “quotation” of these genres and styles both disarms the subject matter’s threat to a bourgeois audience and highlights the conservatism and limitations of that audience.

II. Translation

It was at a low point in Glassco’s life in 1957 that F.R. Scott suggested the journal of Saint-Denys Garneau, originally published in 1954 by Beauchemin, as an ideal object of translation. Glassco’s numerous literary rejections, the failing health of his longtime partner Graeme Taylor, and his own advancing age led to this period of dejection and depression. Patricia Whitney’s doctoral thesis describes the *Journal* project as one that reinvigorated Glassco’s spirits as well as his creative drive: “It is doubtless true,” she writes, “that the translation, at this particular time, was crucial to Glassco’s regaining his creative energy” (“Darkness” 332). The *Tamarack Review* published early excerpts of the translations in 1958, which encouraged Glassco’s work from the outset. When he reached out for a publisher in 1959, however, he encountered resistance. “[W]e can’t believe that it would commend itself to many readers,” writes Macmillan’s Kildare Dobbs. “This is not a question of our being afraid of anything literary or *avant-garde*. We fear that Garneau’s *mal de siècle* [sic] has occurred in the wrong *siècle*” (qtd. in Godbout, “Glassco” 41-42). The charge of being out-of-sync with the contemporary moment echoes critiques frequently attributed to Glassco himself. Frank Davey, for example, writes in *From There to Here* that “[a]ll of John Glassco’s works have been eccentric achievements, more attached to the values and fashions of the past than to those of post-war Canada” (122). Oddly, a similar sentiment appears in Gilles Marcotte’s introduction to the *Journal*, in italics no less, that “[w]e are no longer living in the day and age of *Saint-Denys-Garneau*” (10). Marcotte distances the effusive religious crisis expressed

throughout the *Journal* from “the present generation” of poets who have “weapons against it” that Garneau did not (10). That Marcotte felt a need to make this pronouncement says much of the tense socio-cultural moment of the late 1950s as the nation transitioned out of the nationalist cultural moment of the Massey Commission and edged towards centennial celebrations of the 1960s. It also strengthens the worries of the acceptance of a work from a repeatedly assigned “modernist” writer whose work does not align with a modernism of detachment but instead one of a wild, mythic, Yeatsian religious fervor. These early reactions and framings of Garneau say much about Glassco’s attraction to the poet. Indeed, as Glassco remarked in an interview with *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, he felt a shared “spiritual and poetic experience, that of a French Jansenist Catholic and of an English Pelagian [sic] Protestant. [...] For me it was a shock of self recognition at the deepest level” (qtd. in Whitney, “Right Time” 213). This religious connection, however, is only the first of many parallels between the two writers.

The early rejections of the manuscript were righted by Scott who convinced McClelland and Stewart to publish the *Journal*, noting in a letter to Glassco that they would “help to civilize this country despite all the barriers raised by the Establishment” (qtd. in Godbout, “Glassco” 42). In order to negotiate the subtleties of translation, Glassco enlisted the help of Jean Le Moyne, himself a noted writer and old friend of Garneau’s. The two men worked together through the summer and fall of 1960, and the combination of Le Moyne’s dexterity with Quebecois language and idioms and his memories of Garneau resulted in a thorough translation that had been “meticulously examin[ed] [...] word by word, phrase by phrase” (Whitney, “Right” 211). Concurrent with this collaborative work, Glassco found himself in and out of the hospital for treatment of his tuberculosis – a constant crisis in his health that undoubtedly reverberated with Garneau’s own anxieties about his weak heart in

the *Journal*, a problem that had been identified when he was a child and which led to this eventual death by heart attack while swimming in a lake on his family's estate. Despite his failing health, however, Glassco completed the translation and McClelland and Stewart published *The Journal of Saint-Denys-Garneau* in 1962 to favourable reviews.

Patricia Whitney notes the similarities between the two writers: their upper-class Québécois families (one French, one English), their private-school educations, their early artistic leanings, their youthful beauty, and, as previously noted, their shared experiences of illness at a young age. Unlike other critics, however, Whitney picks up on their early modernist avant-garde influences. For Garneau it was at

the exhibition of Modernist painters [...] shown at the Scott Gallery in Montreal. [...] The Scott exhibition, the first major exhibition of French Modernists in Montreal, transfixed Garneau. For the two months that the paintings were on display, Garneau visited the gallery daily, drinking in the Picassos, the Matisses [...] It was after the exposure to modernism in painting that his own verse initiated poetic modernism in French Canada.
(213-14)

Whitney identifies Paris as Glassco's similar "moment" of modernist inspiration. That both men experienced first-hand encounters with the elite of French modernism is significant. More significant, I argue, is the way that each author integrates these influences into his works. That is, while Garneau interprets and absorbs the techniques and moods of these modernists into his writing and painting, Glassco's method is a more shrewd imitation of style, or even imitation of fashion, in a manner that aligns with the writerly project that is much more interactive, much more self-aware. I argue that while these two writers share much in common, their artistic expression and experience of modernism differs in a way that

aligns Garneau with early modernism and Glassco with late modernism. It is Glassco's self-conscious manipulation, self-aware fashioning, and intertextual gesturing that place him further along the continuum towards a postmodern expression of pastiche.

George Woodcock notes that Gérard Genette's category of "palimpsest" best describes Glassco's work. He states that Glassco's method "takes an existing text, removes part of it and rewrites new material which blends plausibly into the original, to produce a work in its own right" (145). Many other critics have picked up on Woodcock's use of the palimpsest as a useful way of identifying Glassco's literary method. One such critic is Patricia Godbout who, in "Pseudonyms, traductionnymes, et pseudo-traductions," argues that traditional categories of translation identify a work as "good" if it follows the "l'illusion de la transparence" ("illusion of transparency")²⁴ if it does not seem to be a translation (94). In such a model the translator should be invisible and the author in control of the work. However, a perfect replica of the original, Godbout argues, is impossible, partly because language itself is imperfect. Further, she notes that any invisibility on the part of the translator "masque la réalité de l'acte de traduction" ("masks the materiality of the act of translation") (94). She aligns her own theorization of translation with Stéphane Mallarmé's pronouncement that poetry stems from language's imperfections and that the act of translation "crée un espace d'écriture propice aux jeux de rôles et aux redefinitions d'identités" ("creates a space where writing tends towards playfulness in the redefinition of authorial identity") (95). Such playfulness, Godbout notes, is found throughout Glassco's writings, whether translations or not. Specifically in terms of authorial identity, she astutely points out that while Glassco's erotic works, with the exception of *Creatures of the Chase*, are published under pseudonyms, in his non-erotic works Glassco "choisit alors de le faire à

²⁴ All translations of Godbout's article are my own.

visage découvert, sans recourir à un traductionyme” (“chooses to allow his face to be seen without resorting to a pseudonym”) (99). Unlike the palimpsestic rewritings found in Glassco’s erotic works, Godbout argues, Glassco’s non-erotic rewritings are executed in a way that allows them to be discovered as translations. Godbout asks whether Glassco’s unobfuscated identity as a translator has more to do with wanting it made clear to a broad literary audience just who was doing the rewriting, whose skill was being woven in with the original text. That is, Godbout sees Glassco’s translations and his assertion that they are “faithful but not literal” as a refusal of the transparency and authority of the original author: they are “bad” translations in the traditional sense but “good” writing.

Like Godbout, I find Woodcock’s palimpsestic category for Glassco convincing and, it should be noted, one in which Glassco freely admitted participating. In his introduction to the *Complete Poems of Saint-Denys-Garneau*, he notes: “In translating the poems I have followed a course that was bound to result in the intrusion of my own personality. [...] [T]ranslation is a search for an equivalent, not for a substitute. These renderings are faithful but not literal” (17). Similarly, in his article “The Opaque Medium: Remarks on the Translation of Poetry with a Special Reference to French-Canadian Verse,” Glassco cites seventeenth-century English writer Sir John Denham, who notes that a successful translation is not possible “[u]nless a new, or an original spirit is infused by the translator himself” (27). Glassco’s ideal translation, then, is by nature a collaborative one in which the translator does not disappear behind the original author but adds something of himself to the work. With both the figure of the palimpsest and the collaborative creation of a new text in mind, the question remains about how Glassco’s translations of Saint-Denys Garneau should be read. While there is undoubtedly much scholarly work that can be done with such an examination, it is one for a much more gifted linguist. I instead turn to an inquiry that inverts the question: in what ways

did the act of translation of Saint-Denys-Garneau's *Journal* and poetry rewrite the palimpsest of Glassco? That is, how did Glassco's own writing change after this undertaking? I suggest Garneau provided a model for Glassco's self-figuring as a modernist artist and paved the way for his experimentation with authorial identity in *Memoirs of Montparnasse*.

Both Garneau and Glassco suffered youthful anxieties about their works. The difference is that while Garneau recoiled when he achieved critical success with the publication of his only collection of poetry and subsequently retreated from public life, Glassco never attained the critical success he so desired in his youth. It was only with the luxury of time that he figured out how to take advantage of his anxieties in order to finally gain the acceptance for his own writings (rather than the translations) that he so desired.

While Sheila Watson, Elizabeth Smart, and Malcolm Lowry have come to be mythologized as figures of a lost Canadian modernist origins, I suggest that Glassco has similarly come to represent such a figure but, unlike the others, he had a very active hand in his mythologization as such. While I read his *Memoirs* as a carefully constructed project of self-mythologization, I also read his adoption of Saint-Denys Garneau as both participating in the mythologization of one of Canada's best-known lost modernist youths and as forming the model for his own writings. For example, consider the following from Garneau's *Journal*:

This moment I have the notion of an autobiographical novel whose hero discovers his falsity and his nothingness and goes to his death in a brothel, thinking to find there a real contact with life, an ultimate and true consciousness of his existence, but finding nothing there, only the same vain despairing labour of impotence, the bitter insufficiency. (59)

Such a description could easily be transposed onto *Memoirs*, which suggests further that the figure of the palimpsest be extended past Glassco's rewriting over texts to a rewriting over

his own life, his experiences as a youth in Paris as enhanced by the genuine experiences and feelings of Garneau. The narrative voice in *Memoirs* can be read as a Garneau's "new or [...] original spirit [...] infused" into Glassco's life.

I suggest that Glassco's adoption of Saint-Denys Garneau as a model for his memoirs performs a reversal of the palimpsestic mode of appropriation found throughout Glassco's oeuvre. That is, Glassco works from the affinities between himself and Garneau and builds upon the commercial and popular success of Garneau's national and regional mythologization as a tragic modernist artist figure to position himself similarly. Because of the success of numerous memoirs of the Lost Generation in general and in response to his characterization as a flippant, gay, and boorish youth in Morley Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris* in particular, Glassco, in a reverse palimpsestic model, takes his own material, removes part of it, and takes an existing "text" so that it "blends plausibly into the original, to produce a work in its own right" (Woodcock 145).

III. *Memoirs of Montparnasse*

Memoirs of Montparnasse documents the belated arrival of a Canadian modernist origins in the Paris of the "roaring twenties" – a scene that drastically shifts in the short time that Glassco's protagonist experiences his sojourn. Escaping the mundane bourgeois world of Montreal represented by McGill University, his job at Sun Life, and most poignantly by his conservative father, our hero makes the necessary leap into a cosmopolitan literary and artistic community – a community where literary celebrity is possible. But on arrival in Paris Glassco finds himself late to the game. He "meets" some literary heroes, some who fare better than others in person (and others still who speak what are Glassco's own, sometimes previously published, words). His adventures take the shape of a parabola, ending in poverty,

sickness, and disillusion in a Paris now mostly vacated by the artistic community so vibrant in the first two-thirds of the narrative. My critical analysis of the text keeps in mind Glassco's narrative positioning: he is writing in 1964, but posturing as a young man writing from a hospital in 1932 about events in the late 1928. Moreover, he is writing about a period of transnational prosperity and return to life after World War I from the perspective of a bleak Depression-era Canada that he finds even more mundane than the one he originally left behind. This 1930s perspective (which features Glassco's disgust at the rise in socialism and the labouring classes) from a protagonist who narrates his physical demise foreshadows the destruction of Paris during World War I as well as the dismantling of the artistic community that he witnessed. This section interrogates Glassco's *actual* authorial position within the 1960s. How do we account for his temporal imposture of his experiences between the wars? How do the observances of our protagonist from the late 1920s and early 1930s change when one considers the social and political contexts that Glassco retrospectively constructs from his position in the 1960s?

The "Prefatory Note," dated October 1969, states that the first three chapters were written in Paris in 1928 while chapter four and on were composed in 1932 in Montreal's Royal Victoria Hospital. The hospital stay is to treat his tuberculosis, a direct result of his dalliances in Paris. This framing of his narrative continues throughout the text and he frequently interjects from his 1932 "present." Often such moments begin with a lament that he has put himself in such a position but end with an assertion of the joys that his adventures brought him. Particularly, the lamentations and jublations of these interjections address his love affair with one woman in particular, Mrs. Quayle, a paradigmatic femme fatale. The work ends abruptly after chapter twenty-six, which places Glassco in a moment of triumph after leaving Paris for Spain with Mrs. Quayle. Instead of a conclusion to this

story, there is a “Postscript” dated 1967 that explains how Glassco had abandoned this manuscript when the date of his impending operation changed. Instead of finishing the manuscript from this later date, he briefly sketches out the events that he had planned to include in the last two chapters, including the onset of the illness that would land him in the Royal Victoria Hospital. Glassco’s “Prefatory Note” claims that after his operation he “turned away from [his] youth altogether” and did not look at the text for thirty-five years. He claims that when he took up the text again he made few changes to the original except for “the occasional improvement of a phrase” and “the excision of some particularly fatuous paragraphs” in the first chapter. This “Prefatory Note” ends with a question: “And after all, why change any of this? This young man is not myself: I hardly recognize him, even from his photographs and handwriting, and in my memory he is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel I have read” (xxi). Glassco’s seeming dissociation from the “character” of himself in the novel offers his readers, from the outset, a destabilization of the autobiographical narrative that follows in a way that prioritizes the metafictional voice.

The amount of scholarship on *Memoirs* dwarfs all that has been produced on Glassco’s other texts combined. The critical narrative is most easily assessed when separated into two parts: scholarship produced prior and subsequent to the text’s “outing.” For over ten years, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* garnered praise and a spattering of scholarly attention. The praise congratulates Glassco’s raw, natural, and uninhibited prose of his youth. In particular, critics praised Glassco for restraining from “the temptation to rewrite or edit the memoirs” (French 16). The result of such restraint is a text that, compared with other memoirs of 1920s Paris, reads “fresher and truer to the moment than the others” (Cowley 27). Such initial reactions are obviously ironic when put in the context of scholarship that follows Glassco’s death in 1981. After Glassco’s donation of a phenomenal amount of archival

material to both the McLennan Library at McGill University and Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa, scholars began to take notice of this wealth of unpublished material, diaries, and correspondence; this attention led to murmurings of discrepancies in *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. Of the wealth of evidence that proves the later date of composition, one of the most definitive is a document entitled “Note for *Memoirs of Montparnasse*” attached to one of the manuscripts. I quote it here at length to illuminate the shift in intent:

This book is the result of an attempt, made in the winter of 1964-65, to put into some coherent and consecutive form the mass of notes, reminiscences and jottings produced during the six months I spent in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, over thirty years before. [...] The attempt to make a proper book of these fragments, so many years later, appears to me to have been a total failure: the gaiety and élan which were sought after turned into a tedious flippancy, the satire into cheap and often vulgar malice, the humour into flatness, the hero into an unconvincing liar and an intolerable coxcomb.

Knowlton, November 17n 2 a.m., 1965 (qtd. in Kokotailo 28)

This excerpt demonstrates that, at the time of writing, Glassco’s initial plan was to present the text as written in the 1960s. When and why he decided to push the date of composition back over thirty years is debatable. Perhaps it was on account of what he here identifies as a “failure”; that is, by locating the text’s composition at a point where he can claim a certain amount of artistic naïveté rather than positioning himself as a seasoned writer, he anticipates and fends off the possible criticisms.

Following these revelations, the scholarship on *Memoirs* interrogates questions of authenticity and demonstrates that the lines between truth and fiction had always, if problematically, been blurred. At first, scholars scrambled to dissect the text into events that

had occurred and events that had not. Philip Kokotailo calls the work “literary subterfuge” (9); Stephen Scobie calls it an autobiography of “the history of the author’s personality” and not a memoir of historical events; Fraser Sutherland calls it “a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of education” (Abrams 15; Sutherland 20); and Leon Edel, in his introduction to the text, identifies it as an “autobiographical picaresque” (xi). This scattered and schizophrenic list of identifications speaks to the complexity of the novel’s play with genre. Most scholarship that belongs to this second, post-outing group focuses attention on this generic play. Within this scholarship, however, there has been little effort to use the author’s other writings to come up with a strategy to bridge the younger Glassco who acts in *Memoirs* with the older Glassco who is composing them. I propose to address this by reading *Memoirs of Montparnasse* through the erotic fiction and translations written throughout his career. Such a reading proves especially productive in locating the dual figures of the young naïf and the femme fatale, both of whom are symptomatic of Glassco’s lifelong work under a decadent rubric.

Memoirs of Montparnasse is most often studied for its play between fiction and autobiography or for its equally shifting play with Glassco’s queer or homosexual experiences excised from the text (as evidenced by the manuscripts in his archives). While these discussions add much to the theorization of genre and gender in twentieth-century Canadian literature, I am interested in shifting the focus away from the specifics of which sections of *Memoirs of Montparnasse* are based on factual occurrences, which combine elements of Glassco’s lived experiences with falsified ones, and which are almost wholly fictional.

Early reviews in 1970 by Louis Dudek in the *Montreal Gazette* and Jack Kapica in the *McGill Daily Supplement* are the first to question the veracity of Glassco’s memoirs, the latter writing that the work “hovers between a true fictional novel and genuine memoirs” that “seems as if it were written yesterday.” In 1981, before the manuscripts were available, John

Lauber offers the first critical investigation of the factual and fictional aspects of the text, based on the revisions between his first chapter in *This Quarter* (1929) and the finished product, which concludes that that *Memoirs* is “the product of conscious art” (67). In 1983, Thomas Tausky takes a close look at material in Glassco’s archives (manuscript, letters, and journal) and closely examines the self-conscious commentary on writing in *Memoirs* itself in order to argue for the work’s complexity and its layered and “artful concealment of identity” (25). Also in 1983 Stephen Scobie, in his article “The Mirror on the Brothel Wall: John Glassco, *Memoirs of Montparnasse*,” goes into great detail in examining Glassco’s archival material and conducts a careful analysis of how this material informs the multifaceted ways that autobiography and memoir have variously been defined. He concludes that Glassco’s construction of the people, both literary celebrity and not, allows him an “embodiment of his own alterity within the text” (13). That is, Scobie identifies “the ultimate paradigm of autobiographical writing: the ‘I’ who acts doubling itself as the ‘[s]he’ who is acted upon, and tripling itself as the actor/writer/reader,” creating a “split consciousness” (14). Philip Kokotailo’s book-length study *John Glassco’s Richer World: Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1988) identifies Glassco as working in a mode of “literary subterfuge” (Kokotailo 9) and aligns his project with that of the nineteenth-century aesthetes and “literary dandies” who, like him, had an “allegiance to artifice” (118). In “Notes Towards a Sometime and Probably History of John Glassco” (1988), Michael Gnarowski sees Glassco’s “deception” stemming from a lack of confidence in his own literary reputation. The article builds on Tausky’s earlier work with the Glassco archives to carefully tease out fiction from fact. This scholarly interrogation also informs Gnarowski’s 1996 edition of *Memoirs*. Timothy Dow Adams argues in another 1988 article that Glassco’s play between genres can be seen as an early incarnation of postmodern writing (16). He asks, how can we “distinguish between metafiction and fraud,

between docudrama and hoax, between a dishonest distortion, an authorial misrepresentation, and a lie?” (18). Adams concludes that we can keep the generic distinction of “memoir” if we agree that the subject of the work is not Glassco but “the particular section of Paris known as Montparnasse, as it was experienced in the 1920s by an expatriate Canadian” (20). That is, Adams suggests that this particular incarnation of Montparnasse, as it is formed particularly by time and perspective, is both the author and subject of the work.

In “Queering Modernism: A Canadian in Paris” (1996), Richard Dellamora marks Glassco’s text as containing “both disavowed and acknowledged” queerness (1). He identifies Glassco’s project as one that explicitly responds to the way in which he and Graeme Taylor were figured in Morley Callaghan’s memoir *That Summer in Paris* (1963) as both homosexual and “socially and culturally marginal” (2). Dellamora identifies Glassco’s response to the “masculinist modernism” of Canadian writers whose works fit within a “realist and assertively Canadian” aesthetic (3). This reading claims that Glassco’s response to a masculinist mode offers “alternative histories of modernism – and alternative possibilities in the continuing struggle to constitute the terrain of Canadian identities” (2). These alternatives are achieved, Dellamora argues, by Glassco’s adoption of “camp modernism” over the two other predominant kinds that occur in *Memoirs*: the first associated with “French surrealism and portions of [...] *Finnegan’s* [sic] *Wake*” and the second Hemingway’s and Callaghan’s “masculinist modernism” (6). This allegiance to camp, which “is characterized by emotional excess, anticlimax, parody, and pastiche” allows Glassco to “pursue truth through artifice even though artifice negates truth” (8; 14). Andrew Lesk (2001), in contrast, frames Glassco’s elimination of the homosexual material from manuscript to finished work as an editorial act done out of necessity in light of the negativity towards homosexuality that he would have experienced based on the differing homophobic

reactions to Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) and Scott Symons's *Combat Journal for Place d'Armes* (1967). While acknowledging the merits of Dellamora's argument, Lesk questions his use of the term "queer" in connection to *Memoirs* because he sees Glassco's project as one that effaces his homosexuality in favor of creating a text that will be accepted by the Canadian literary community as well as the general reading public. He concludes that this effacement relegates the book to "a literary confession that seeks not to illuminate a life but to affirm an author's aspirations to reputation" (182).

Brian Trehearne's chapter "John Glassco's Post-Decadent Verse" in *Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists: Aspects of Poetic Influence* (1989) focuses on Glassco's poetics through reference to his prose and argues against an easy alignment of *Memoirs* with literature of the Decadents because, although his subject matter fits, his narrative style does not. "In its ironies," he writes, "its multiple levels of narration, and its taunted, refractive prose style, *Memoirs* is masterfully modern" (189). Trehearne advocates for critical engagement of Glassco that does not separate the motivations behind and aesthetics of his poetics and prose, and comes up with the term "post-Decadent" for his poetry, a poetics that combines Aestheticism (as an influence on the Decadents) and Modernism. Trehearne sees Glassco as "accept[ing] of the principals of the Decadents" and acting as "adaptor and qualifier of its conventions" while also realizing that such principals "no longer serve the modern world" (227). Trehearne asserts that qualifying Glassco's verse as "post-Decadent" allows for a more unified alignment with his prose works, including *Memoirs*, which now becomes framed by this Decadent-Modernist construction "a prose record of Glassco's intense, hedonistic, ecstatic past, a record of the spirit rather than the letter" (229). Trehearne's chapter concludes by aligning *Memoirs* within Glassco's oeuvre as a phase "of a single scale of personal development, from hedonism to decay" in which the fascination with his lost youth

is relayed retrospectively through nostalgia (229). While Trehearne's theorization spends so much time defining the term "post-Decadent" that it does not adequately account for his modernism, particularly the aesthetics of his modernist style, his chapter nevertheless provides an invaluable working out of Glassco's relationship with modernism.

Memoirs begins with a seventeen-year-old Glassco dropping out of McGill University to pursue an education of experience, claiming that school could teach him nothing. After first moving in with his friend Graeme Taylor and taking a job with the Sun Life Insurance Company of Canada, both boys decide to take a free ride on a freighter to Paris. It is from Paris that Glassco first writes of what will be the underlining drive to the whole adventure: "What do I mean to do with my youth, my life? Why, I'm going to enjoy myself" (3). This pledge to uphold the goal of hedonism, and the consequences of such a goal, echoes throughout the narrative. After claiming that books could no longer teach him anything, Glassco aims to follow his practice of surrealist poetry, though once in Paris he quickly abandons that and immediately gets to work on his memoirs (4). For a seventeen-year old to switch to such a genre, especially at the outset of his voyage, hints at the parodic narrative positioning at work. And yet, Glassco *did* publish an early version of his first chapters in as "Extract from an Autobiography" in Ethel Moorhead's *This Quarter* in 1929. Though, as many scholars have pointed out, "not a single sentence in the two is identical" (Dudek, "Decadent" 40). Many times in the text Glassco complains of not being able to work on his memoirs because he is still "too close" to the events he is trying to compose, which suggests that the claimed composition in his hospital bed four years later allowed for this necessary distance and justifies the earlier failure to write. Every time this failure is mentioned in the text Glassco brings it back to his desire to enjoy life in the moment. Hedonism and an appreciation of the decadent things in life are set in direct opposition to the act of writing.

Writing, in the text, only successfully occurs from a point of stasis and contemplation. In effect, the act of writing is presented as an act of penance for the “sin” of falling in love with a fatal woman.

The first chapter introduces a writer and a text against which we read *Memoirs of Montparnasse* as a foil. While on the boat from the Port of Saint John to England, Glassco suggests to Graeme for their brief time in London a visit to George Moore, who, at the time was his “literary god.” Moore’s 1886 memoir *Confessions of a Young Man* chronicles his youthful experience in Paris during the 1870s and 80s amongst the Impressionists. Glassco praises Moore’s memoir for “[t]he sweep of his memories, the magic of his style, the bland persistent assertion of himself, the dazzling effect by which in a single phrase he gives an almost physical impression” (9). This visit is successful and while there the three men discuss both Moore himself and the work of a fellow Irishman, James Joyce. Of *Confessions of a Young Man* Graeme states that it is “a book that will never date, it’s a kind of statement of youth for all time, a youth in which we all partake somehow. Only people who are never young could find it dated” (10). Of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Moore says that he “couldn’t quite get through it. Rather dull in the middle[.] [...] And a little too earnest and iconoclastic for my taste. Too satirical” (10). By retrospectively aligning his writing with an author associated with Decadence and aestheticism and, further, epitomizing a timelessness and *not* with Joyce’s particular style of modernist narrative, Glassco suggests that his aim is to create an equally “timeless” text that, instead of engaging with modernism as a style, embodies the *essence* of youth. This sets up Glassco as one who has the ability to act as a critic of modernism by virtue of his “timelessness.” The rest of the text, indeed, provides a bevy of critiques of writers, artists, and editors associated with high modernism. Glassco’s self-exclusion from the high modernists is thus achieved by positioning himself as an observer who chooses to

live a hedonistic life rather than actively participate in the expatriate modernist literary culture.

For example, shortly after landing in Paris Glassco takes it upon himself to study, in detail, surrealist style, which he identifies as “an endless number of out-of-the-way objects [...] placed in apposition to adjectives and verbs to which they had no relation but that of surprise” (23). He briskly identifies the style as incompatible with his own and he decides to instead take up prose. Graeme and Glassco then take all “the first lines of surrealist poems” and turn them into a Shakespearean sonnet, throwing around titles such as “The Ideas of March,” “Little by Little,” and “The Great Bed of Ware” before settling on “Nobody’s Fool” – a title that nearly demands that reader approach Glassco’s use of art as one that is playful, malleable, and a little suspect. We are also left with an invisible work of surrealist art. When, only a few pages later, the young Glassco meets Narwhale (a false name given to the already-pseudonymous Man Ray – originally Emmanuel Radnitzky, a well known photographer), we get a sense of how to read such a work when the artist describes his own work of surrealism: an “imaginary portrait of the Marquis de Sade,” who, according to Narwhale, never had a portrait made. “I’m going to represent him,” Narwhale describes, as “big and fat, as indeed he became towards the end of his days in the Charenton lunatic asylum, and make the face all out of blocks of prison stone” (29). Keeping in mind that Narwhale is a photographer and *not* a painter, this portrait plays with all of the qualities of surrealism that Glassco had already ascertained. Giving the impression of being able to almost immediately absorb, translate, and dismiss the style of an entire mode, Glassco appears to the reader here as capable of rising above the limitations of the mode to a position from which to act as a critic. These imaginary works of art also inherently draw the reader’s attention to the play and slipperiness of Glassco’s manipulation of art.

A second key memoirist who works as a foil for Glassco's writings is Robert McAlmon, an American writer, prominent supporter of the literary arts, and well-known character in the French Quarter. His 1938 memoir *Being Geniuses Together* chronicles his Paris days and, like Glassco's text, omits his homosexuality. Significantly, McAlmon also omits both Glassco and Graeme from the memoir, a slight that undoubtedly coloured Glassco's characterization of the older man. Shortly after meeting McAlmon, the three men voyage to Luxembourg in order to have their passports stamped on the way back in (allowing them to then procure identity cards that would allow them to live lawfully in Paris). It is on this trip that Glassco begins to lament his inability to write, especially in comparison to both Graeme and McAlmon. If he could quell his desire to write, Glassco claims, he might be able to be happy: "What, after all, was the use of tormenting oneself by putting words on paper, endlessly arranging and rearranging them, and then having at last accepted their inherent failure to say more than one quarter of what they were meant to" (56). Here he associates happiness not with being able to write but with being able to escape writing. Earlier in the text, Glassco had noted that he was unable to participate in the "adult conversation" of the lesbian crowd because he lacked "the experience of either poverty, thwarted ambition, or unrequited love" (34). The same could be extended to his inability to write. Each of these characteristics he lacks, however, he will possess by the end of the work, which enables him to write the memoirs in retrospect.

Robert McAlmon encourages Glassco to abandon surrealist poetry to continue working on the memoirs: "It's genuine, it's a human document," McAlmon insists, once again emphasizing the qualities of fidelity and legitimacy typically associated with the genre (60). McAlmon's support goes beyond encouragement as he promises to send the first chapter to Ethel Moorhead at *This Quarter* because "she gets a kick out of the antics of

children” and promises to publish it in its entirety if he finishes it (60). This promise is interrupted by an interjection from Glassco-the-narrator in 1932: “*As it turned out I never got past the first page of the fourth chapter because I became so deeply involved in living that I had no time to write. Only now, when I have the leisure, the brightness of my memories, and the unutterable boredom of hospital life to drive me back to writing, have I resumed this chronicle of my dead youth!*” (60; italics in original). The younger Glassco’s choice of experience-over-art at the time causes him much anxiety, yet the older Glassco’s literary productivity justifies this choice. This older Glassco dismisses McAlmon’s productivity when he notes that “[t]he book Bob was writing or revising was, I think, called *Being Geniuses Together*, which I did not read until about six months later, when I found it exactly like all his others” (65). The flippancy of this dismissal masks the extent to which Glassco was hurt by his omission from McAlmon’s memoir, a slight that was righted when he and Graeme were later added by Kay Boyle who revised the text years after its first publication. *Being Geniuses Together*, then, stands as an early template for non-fiction memoirs of the lost generation. Glassco’s initial absence from the text further emphasizes his position as a figure of “lost modernist origins”; lost, even, from the memoirs of the Lost Generation. *Memoirs* gives Glassco a chance to reframe his relationship with McAlmon in a way that renarrativizes his young self as one who chose living life over literary productivity and who maintained a wary and critical literary sensibility.

This is exemplified when Glassco again critiques McAlmon’s writing. This time it is his fiction that he considers unimaginative and too close to memoir. McAlmon’s “obviously literal transcripts of things set down simply because they had happened and were vividly recollected” in fiction bores the young man who laments that

[t]here was neither invention nor subterfuge; when the recollections stopped, so did the story, and one had the impression of a shutter being pulled down

over the writer's memory as if in an act of self-defense against a dénouement either unformulated or too painful to remember. The only unifying feature [that the novels] possessed was a central figure who was manifestly Bob himself. (66)

What Glassco pulls off in his memoir is the opposite of McAlmon's fiction: where one would expect literal transcriptions of things that had happened, we instead encounter invention and subterfuge. Here, he suggests that McAlmon's failure of imagination belies the genre of fiction. Further, Glassco hints that his own work possesses no such failure and again gestures toward the fictionalization at the heart of this memoir through reference to another author's work.

A third memoirist who appears as a foil to Glassco is Frank Harris, a writer who most notably published a four-volume memoir *My Life and Loves* (1922-27), which "created a sensation for its sexually explicit passages couched in a boastful style. Now seen to be completely unreliable, it offers interesting insights into the Victorian literary scene in London" (*Memoirs* 213). Glassco's praise of Harris's literary sabotage reads as praise for himself: "to me the prospect of seeing the most celebrated English scoundrel of the last fifty years was exciting. I had read nothing of his except a few short stories and the first four volumes of *My Life and Loves*" (101). Glassco's comment is tongue-in-cheek seeing as "all" that he has read of Harris is in fact everything he had up until then produced. Glassco describes the memoir as "the best mixture of adventure, documentation and sheer nastiness ever written. It was as vivid as a newsreel, as informative as a police report. [...] [A]s if one were walking through [the books] oneself in the company of a superb raconteur and inspired liar" (101). Not only does the description of the text mirror Glassco's own, but even the physical description of Harris mirrors the ways in which the older, 1970s Glassco presented

himself publicly. He is at first shocked because “he didn’t look like Frank Harris at all” (102) – that is, Harris’s youthful vitality has disappeared with the years and only remains relevant within his memoirs. Harris’s “costume,” however, “a black, high-lapelled Edwardian jacket, light waistcoat, enormous striped cravat” allows him to retain the posture of this youth and, not coincidentally, is reminiscent of how Glassco himself is described by interviewers from this period as dressing anachronistically. Finally, Harris’s description of the troubles with the police he’s been having with *My Life and Loves* because of the scandals surrounding sexuality contained therein reverberates back to Glassco’s 1970s text and his excision of the overt homosexuality found in the drafts.

Glassco’s own status as a writer features prominently in the last third of the book as McAlmon’s departure necessitates a turn to writing as a means of survival – a turn, I argue, that mirrors his post-Paris difficulties in securing the critical praise he sought and his need to filter his artistic vision through his works of erotic fiction and translation. In his months of self-sufficiency, Glassco shifts from being hired as a typist for a novelist, to a pseudonymous pornographer, to a typist for a Decadent memoirist, to a masked model for pornographic photographs, and finally to a prostitute. This evolution is characterized in the text as a downward spiral that reaches its nadir with Graeme’s departure back to Canada due to his father’s ill health and Glassco’s love affair with Mrs. Quayle. Quayle is a typical Glassco femme fatale figure and his protagonist’s affair with her results in a double destruction: first of his literary production which she burns in a fire and second of his health, which leads him to the hospital where our narrator sits and writes and laments his lost youth. This downward progression of Glassco’s fortunes in the text is directly related to his position as a writer, indicating that we can read *Memoirs of Montparnasse* as a memoir not only of Glassco’s time spent abroad as a youth but also of his entire career as a writer.

An example of the text's reframing of Glassco's literary career occurs when he claims to have written his "first published book *Contes en Crinoline*," an erotic work for which no copy has ever been found. This imaginary text metonymically stands in for his erotic writings:

This work was a sequence of historical sketches with a unifying transvestite motif, in which a young man was reincarnated in different varieties of female dress. It was written in French, and all the details of farthingales, plackets, shifts, conical hats and corsets were taken from an illustrated history of costume I had picked up on the quays. The *Contes* were brought out by Elias Gaucher, a fly-by-night publisher on the rue des Sains-Pères, to whom I had been introduced by a surrealist poet. (139)

That he claims to publish this work through a surrealist connection speaks to the extent to which Glassco considered erotic writings works of art. However, because the publisher insists the text be published under pseudonym, we also encounter the impossibility of actually recognizing Glassco's erotic writings as art, especially in a mid-century Canadian context. Finally, when the publisher's cheque bounces and he and Graeme must spend days tracking him down, Glassco speaks to the difficulties that lie in writing within a tradition that, though long-established, lacks the credibility and reliability of more traditional early to mid-century literary modes such as realism or romance. Glassco's perseverance and posturing likewise speak to his dedication and self-preservation through writing and belief in his own work.

A further example of Glassco's narrativization of his literary career is evidenced in Mrs. Quayle's recreation of "the fatal woman." During their first sexual encounter Glassco notes: "[s]he had changed to a knee-length dressing-gown of black suede; her legs and feet

were bare. I tried to take her in my arms. ‘No,’ she said. ‘Never kiss me. Go into the bedroom’” (149). Such a description could be plucked from *Fetish Girl* or *Harriet Marwood*; however, instead of coming to represent a certain phase in his literary career, I instead read his troubling relationship with Mrs. Quayle as representative of his relationship with the literary community, and in particular with a Canadian literary scene. As he remembers his first childhood love, he notes that he loved her because she kicked his legs under the table. He loves Mrs. Quayle, he concludes, for the same reason: “But still it doesn’t make sense. In the first place, she isn’t my type at all. Or isn’t that the very reason? Don’t I love her because she is incapable of loving me?” (150-51)

I argue that Glassco’s relationship with Mrs. Quayle encapsulates his continual desire for and anxiety over his acceptance as a legitimate writer, and Canadian writer in particular, as a masochistic and oftentimes damaging relationship. After Glassco contracts tuberculosis and he is confined to two months of enforced rest, he and Mrs. Quayle reunite. He admits to knowing this was the wrong decision in the moment and his older self admits: “*Today, here in the hospital, I know it was a wrong step. I ought to have stayed on with my loneliness and my Vichy, and spent a night of defection in the rue Broca. If I had, I mightn’t be here now. But I like to think I went because it was my destiny: this spares me a useless remorse*” (158; italics in original). Again we have a doubled figure: that of the regretful but not repentant man who chose experience over literary productivity and of the aged writer who chose to work outside the traditionally acceptable and profitable mode of social realism in favour of decadence and eroticism. Through recapitulating and reframing these choices Glassco transforms *both* the youthful lover and the aged writer as tragic heroes, and from this transformation a doubled emergence of a figure of Canada’s lost modernist youth and a savvy, tricky author capable of imaginative and playful narrative manipulations that weave truth with fiction.

Glassco's downward spiral at the end of the novel is echoed by his observances of Paris's declining artistic community. The Americans are leaving Paris and, upon McAlmon's brief return, the two men throw a final lavish party. At this party Glassco talks to Narwhale about book endings. Narwhale states that his ideal book does end at all: "I suggest there might be some merit in a book that was either left unfinished or ended, say, by repeating the sense of its beginning. I mean a kind of discontinuous or possibly circular, rather than a linear, structure" (193). Such a pronouncement is yet another example of Glassco's ventriloquizations: here, Glassco predicts and justifies the abrupt ending that is soon to come. Further, it suggests that the authorial imposture contained therein is not a trick or a deceit, rather it is an example of a circular and discontinuous structure.

The next chapter, which is also the last, leaves off at the moment of Glassco's planned departure to Spain with Mrs. Quayle. This final chapter begins in the 1932 "present" and Glassco admits that he has both learned much and not learned anything at all: "I suppose I have learned nothing and forgotten nothing and will return to habits of dissipation with the same appetite—but on the other hand I have promised myself to do so with a little more caution" (197). Again, this hospitalized narrative perspective paradoxically balances lament for his actions with a complete lack of regret. He first warns his reader that "[e]verything a man writes about himself is instructive" (198), and then ends with a comparison of his youthful adventures (and, additionally, I argue, his writing career between the 1920s and 1970s) to the hero of his 1959 adaptation of Beardsley's *Under the Hill*: "I felt at times like Tannhäuser in the Venusberg, except that I had no desire to return to the upper world: I had no Elisabeth to woo or knell me back to the light of common sense, and the allegory of the dead olive staff never occurred to me" (199). Again, Glassco's reference to a work that would stand to define his mid-century literary production and inaugurate his

eventual acceptance as a Canadian literary talent seems coincidental if read as a commentary from 1932 and strategic when read from the 1960s.

The *Memoirs* leaves us in suspense, and in a short postscript we learn that it ended before he could write the Spain section when the operation was pushed forward by a week. We learn that in Spain Mrs. Quayle took another lover and then Glassco came down with tuberculosis, the cause of the illness that put him in the hospital from which he purportedly writes. This postscript allows the text to remain both unfinished and cyclical, complete, with the tale of his dalliances leading to the narrative perspective from which he writes.

This chapter has argued that Glassco's palimpsestic play with texts, combined with a complex metatextual play throughout his works aligns him, of all the late-modernist writers included in this study, closest to a postmodern positioning in that he balances precariously on the line between covert and overt play with authorial identity. What makes Glassco unique amongst other late-modernist writers is the extent to which he is able to take control of his public persona in the 1960s and 1970s and both help to foster the figure of "lost modernist origins" through his editorial and scholarly projects and simultaneously refashion himself into that self-same figure. I read this sophisticated self-fashioning in the later phase of his literary career as one directly informed by decades of strategic negotiations with authorial identity through ventriloquism, subterfuge, or palimpsestic "collaboration" with other writers' whose texts and authorial identities allowed Glassco a place to experiment with avant-garde aesthetics or taboo subject matters that he was unable to express under his own name. This inability, I argue, stems from mid-twentieth-century Canada's inability to recognize such writings as "Canadian." This fissure is not dissimilar to similar binaries found throughout scholarship on modernism and, because of the belated arrival of a critical mass

of modernist writing in Canada, it is not surprising that the literature produced between the 1930s and 1970s should follow a similar pattern, particularly considering the extent to which Canada's literature and criticism are so interdependent.

I agree with Patricia Whitney when she marks Glassco's engagement with the *Journal* of Saint-Denys Garneau as reinvigorating and redirecting his "creative energy"; however, I argue that part of this reinvigoration comes from his recognition of the powerful possibilities that lay within a mythologized figure of a "lost modernist origins." Alongside memoirs published by his contemporaries on the "lost generation," Glassco's return to his own aborted project from the invented perspective of his youth allowed for a sophisticated play with his self-mythologization. As a result, he appears as an overlooked Canadian artist whose youthful choice of a life lived according to principles of the aesthetes and decadents in favour of a life of dedicated service to the mode of the social-realist novel have resulted in a tragic yet romantic figure who did not fit the mold of virile, masculine, porridge-plain prose from which Canadians were actively looking to distance themselves. The *Massey Report* and its recommendations that led to the creation of the Canada Council meant that Canadian artists in particular were invested in not only fostering a unique, sovereign artistic community in the present, but also in finding foremothers and fathers whose writings demonstrated that such a spirit already thrived within the nation's borders. Glassco astutely made himself, through some deliberate buffing and a few clever tricks, into exactly the type of artist for which this new generation of writers was looking. Because this self-fashioning occurs contemporaneous with this new generation, however, Glassco finds much in common with the melding of fact and fiction, the genre-bending, and the playful interrogation of authorial identity found in the celebrated new writers of the late 1960s through the 1980s such as Leonard Cohen, Michael Ondaatje, and bpNichol. This is not to

discount the tradition of a trickster-like figure of authorial subterfuge found throughout the history of Canadian letters from Confederation onwards; rather, it is the *celebration* of such figures that inaugurates in the latter twentieth century that Glassco, in *Memoirs of Montparnasse* in particular, anticipates and inaugurates.

CHAPTER SIX:
CONCLUSION: CANADIAN MODERNISM'S *BEAUTIFUL LOSERS*

My dissertation has argued that the works of Sheila Watson, Elizabeth Smart, Malcolm Lowry, and John Glassco tend towards non-representational narrative forms, and in doing so, they engage in modes of cultural critique. These critiques are focused by a negotiation of what has been multiply identified as a “contradiction” in modernist art: while on the one hand the texts break with traditional forms of social-realist narrative out of a need to find new forms of expression in an effort to rebel against conservative, bourgeois sensibilities, on the other hand they are always produced from within the self-same socio-political economy that they critique. Whether this position is identified as a “modernist double bind” (following Willmott) or a “central paradox” of modernism (following Eysteinnsson), I have argued that each author negotiates these internal contradictions through the integration of autobiographical material into their writing. In reading these works as part of a unified late-modernist narrative tradition, this dissertation has aimed to destabilize critical and popular understandings of mid-century Canadian prose and argue for an alternate reading of artistic interpretation of the twentieth-century Canadian condition. Such a reading challenges current canon formation because it destabilizes traditional critical accounts of these texts as instances of eccentric expression or singular moments of genius. Instead, we are asked to consider seriously the tendency for play with subjectivity and autobiographical material as an interpretive strategy to express the mid-century, post-war condition.

To a large extent each text included in this study provides a commentary on the place of the artist within a post-war, post-holocaust, and postcolonial world. These authors search for a mode of expression that allows for beauty in a world reeling from atrocity. Their works trouble the belief that such a task is possible and yet each arrives at a point of tortured beauty. It is through, in part, the figure of the failed or failing artist that they accomplish this

task. By embedding artistic failure as a trope, these texts address the tenuousness of artistic expression in a post-war world and begin working through strategies of representation that will eventually lead to the use of metafiction, parody, pastiche, and irony characteristic of postmodernist style.

The combination of non-realist aesthetics and social critique allows these authors to push at the boundaries of expression in order to challenge the limits of what literature, and Canadian literature in particular, can express about the mid-century Canadian condition. In challenging narrative expectations each author opens up space for Canadian writing to achieve an intricate narrative framework that can sustain contradiction, play with perspective and narrative authority, and breakdown linearity – all qualities that were to come to the forefront of Canadian literature in the 1970s and beyond. I argue that these late-modernist texts be read as part of a continuity in Canadian prose narrative throughout the twentieth century. Instead of viewing Canadian literature as something that “evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern” (to reiterate Robert Kroetsch’s challenge), I contend that these texts demonstrate the richness of Canadian narrative expression and suggest the necessity for a further plumbing of mid-century prose for works that complicate our understanding of the Canadian modernist vision.

By re-orienting these works under the rubric of late modernism we can better understand the evolution in Canadian prose throughout the twentieth century. Reading *The Double Hook* as late modernist, for example, reconciles the conflicting identification of the text as both proto-postmodernist and the first truly modernist text in Canadian literature. We can trace a continuity that does not demarcate literature into temporal packages but instead allows for a fluctuating, malleable space. In her 1980 study on metafiction, *Narcissistic Narrative*, Linda Hutcheon warns that reading postmodernism as “a temporal, historical

designation” is “much too inclusive.” Instead, she insists that the term “must denote a technically definable literary entity. The ‘post’ of ‘post-modernist’ would therefore suggest not ‘after,’ so much as an extension of modernism and a reaction to it” (2). Similarly, I stress that although the qualifier “late” in “late modernist” suggests a temporal category, I have used it to identify a “technically definable literary entity,” which it not to suggest “after” but instead to argue for a reading of modernism as an extended artistic reaction to the rapid technological, social, and cultural changes that constantly cycled through the twentieth century. Late modernism represents a phase along such a continuum but not one that is restricted by strict temporal absolutes.

Each of the authors studied here turns to his or her personal narrative as a lens through which to interpret his or her socio-political milieu in a poetic or non-realist prose form. What is compelling about this marriage is the extent to which it becomes a literary trend in later Canadian works such as Robert Kroetsch’s *Seed Catalogue* (1977), Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* (1982), Daphne Marlatt’s *Salvage* (1991) and *Ghost Works* (1993), and Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill* (1996). Aside from the explicitly autobiographical, Canadian literature has also used the trope of autobiography/biography/metafiction in order to create narratives that challenge our assumptions about authorial control and identity such as Margaret Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems* (1973), Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), and Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red* (1998), to name only some of the most prominent. Reading the works of Watson, Smart, Lowry, and Glassco as independent or eccentric instances of literary production outside of a pattern in Canadian literature misrepresents this fusion of poetic-prose and metafiction as a form that developed a unique manifestation in Canada and developed as an integral literary form expressly *because* of how it speaks to the

Canadian condition. I argue that one of the reasons Canadian literature was so successful in a post-1967 context is because the narrative uncertainty, troubling of authority, and refusal to adhere to realist absolutes that are typically aligned with postmodernist and postcolonial narrative style are also qualities that reflect a particularly Canadian cultural imaginary. By reading Canadian fiction prior to 1967 we can see the development of these trends as they solidify into discernible characteristics of Canadian literature.

Late Modernist Losers

Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) provides an example of such continuity. The novel is traditionally read as a proto-postmodernist Canadian text and yet it picks up a number of the qualities of late modernism that I have identified. Cohen's text exemplifies the extension of late-modernist narrative practice into a form more solidly definable as postmodern. The metafiction and negotiation of authorial control we see at work in late modernism has been even further internalized within the text's fictional narrative. Moreover, instead of implied critique, Cohen's text confidently provides an *overt* socio-political critique that is nevertheless couched within a non-realist, experimental narrative aesthetic. A brief reading of the novel demonstrates a through-line of aesthetic, thematic, and artistic concerns from the works discussed previously to Cohen's novel.

Beautiful Losers has caused controversy since its publication in 1966. It has remained canonical despite its narrative difficulty and overt sexuality. It is an explicitly political novel insofar as it dramatizes the political upheaval of the mid-60s Canada as the Quebec sovereignty movement was at a high.²⁵ Published three years before the "summer of love,"

²⁵ At the time of publication the FLQ was in the midst of its major activity that operated between 1963-1970 and resulted in the deaths of participants, civilians, and public figures.

one year before the Canadian Centennial, and four years before the October Crisis, Cohen's novel picks up the dominant political and cultural tensions of its milieu and incorporates them into a meditation on the individuation of the self for the twentieth-century citizen of the world. The novel responds to the violent history of colonialism in Canada in its construction of a system of powerful hierarchies. Canada's First Nations are conquered and controlled by the French, the French are conquered and controlled by the English, and the English are conquered and controlled by the Americans. The surreal scenes that employ filmic form and use the mechanizations of modern technology allow for meditations on Canada's colonial violence in a non-realist space that does not demand concrete answers or conclusions.

The prose is difficult, the linearity disruptive, the narrative authority split between three focalizers of questionable reliability, it satirizes the Quebec separatist movement, turns Hitler into an Argentinean waiter peddling soap made from victims of the holocaust, and obsessively explores sex in visceral and riotous scenes. Despite all this, *Beautiful Losers* is regarded as a Canadian success, although one accepted cautiously. While it was chosen as one of the five books competing in CBC Canada Reads competition in 2005, for example, it was eliminated immediately for its narrative difficulty and sexually explicit material. That is, it is regarded well enough to belong in the popular imagination but not considered essential (or even recommended) reading. As is the case with many of the works studied herein, *Beautiful Losers* seems to foretell its own reception by embedding the trope of failure into its very construction. Identified by critic Robert Fulford as "the most revolting book ever written in Canada," and "verbal masturbation," Cohen's championing of the figure of the "beautiful losers" such as the A_____, a tribe "characterized by incessant defeat," legitimizes his work in advance of the inevitable negative reactions it will garner (qtd. in Nadel, n. pag.).

There is more, however, to this championing of failure than a simple posturing of “defence-as-offence.” Rather, I read Cohen’s strategy as one that offers failure as a suggested national stance. Kit Dobson argues that *Beautiful Losers* is not interested in “mounting an international defense of Canada” by portraying “the nation in self-consciously problematic, yet still determined ways.” Instead, the novel “seems most interested in the defeat of categories, in the fractures within Canada [...], in the explosion of myths” (2). Dobson sees an implicit “self-awareness and self-critique” in literature of the 1960s and 1970s resulting from the nationalist push in Canada in the build up to the 1967 centennial celebrations. The multiple failures in *Beautiful Losers* are a way through which Cohen can meditate on historical inheritance, nation, and narration in a way that avoids the inevitable traps of national myths and metanarratives. The novel’s failure to offer a cohesive linear progression or closure suggests that such narrative qualities are luxuries not available within the contemporary world and therefore the failure to attain them should be embraced as an interpretive strategy.

As in many of the texts included in my study, Cohen’s narrative construction allows for a complex meditation on the reverberations of war. *Beautiful Losers* addresses the nationalist push in both Canada and Quebec with the violence of the National Socialism of Hitler’s Germany. In the second section of the novel, F. admits to a historical apathy during the Second World War. Though he “knew what they were doing to the Gypsies, [he] had a whiff of Zyklon B,” he “was very, very tired.” F. further describes this wartime exhaustion: “A huge jukebox played a sleepy tune. The tune was a couple of thousand years old and we danced to it with our eyes closed. The tune was called History and we loved it, Nazis, Jews, everybody” (163). Although F. knew about the Gypsy children who were used as test subjects for the Zyklon B gas that would be used as a mass-murder device in internment camps by Nazis, there was no choice but to continue dancing along to the “sleepy tune” of

history. F troublingly stresses that everyone caught up in the dance was enthralled by it equally “because we made it up, because [...] we knew that whatever happened to use was the most important thing that ever happened in the world” (163). The somnambulist inaction that F. describes here suggests a loss of agency on the part of individuals caught in a historical moment. F.’s fervent need to “fix” those around him (Edith and the narrator in particular) is paralleled by his desire for Québec sovereignty to break the cycle of cultural dominance. That is, F.’s historical retrospective of North America understands the First Nations to be culturally dominated by the French, the French culturally dominated by the English, and English Canadians in turn dominated by the Americans. A free Québec would “hammer a beautiful colored bruise on the whole American monolith” and cause “the State to doubt itself seriously” (186–87). A state of doubt, or a loss would, for F., break the history of violent cultural effacements and disable the citizens from their nightmarish dance.

Yet another important tie between *Beautiful Losers* and the works of Watson, Smart, Lowry, and Glassco is that Cohen’s text troubles authorship and the power of authorial control. Further, Cohen connects the motivations behind the creative impulse with the progression of historical events. Playing off the trope of cultural absorption and appropriation, the “I” narrator notes that “new systems are forced on the world by men who simply cannot bear the pain of living with what is. Creators care nothing for their systems except that they be unique. If Hitler had been born in Nazi Germany he wouldn’t have been content to enjoy the atmosphere” (55). Cohen here identifies an artistic impulse with the need to constantly invent new narratives – a critical gesture, I argue, aimed at Ezra Pound’s high modernist credo to “make it new.”²⁶ This need to constantly improve and “fix” things

²⁶ Pound’s turn to fascism in the 1920s, his association with Mussolini, and his anti-Semitism, when combined with his importance as an innovator of high modernist aesthetic style, make

is associated in *Beautiful Losers* with both Hitler and F. I suggest that Cohen figures both as epitomes of the modernist subject.

F. repeatedly asks the narrator to “go beyond [his] style” (151). Instead of reading this instruction as a further development, or improvement upon, or “fixing” of his own, I suggest that F. is instructing the narrator to transform himself from a writer of historical narrative into a *written* text. “I believed that I had conceived the vastest dream of my generation,” F. writes, “I wanted to be a magician. That was my idea of glory. Here is a plea based on my whole experience: do not be a magician, be magic” (164). F. pleads for the “I” narrator not to be the one who performs the “tricks,” but instead to become to trick itself. In the third and final section of the novel we witness a figure who is seemingly an amalgamation of both the “I” narrator and F. eventually dissolve into a projection of a Ray Charles movie in the night sky above Montreal—transforming, finally, into a text that brings joy and entertainment, not to mention relief, to the people of the city. One voice instructs that they “[j]ust sit back and enjoy it,” while another one responds, “Thank God it’s only a movie” (242). . . Instead of investing his novel with autobiographical material, Cohen has here embedded in his novel a figure who “authors,” controls, and instructs our narrator, who then, in turn, transforms into text.²⁷ Cohen’s play with authorship in *Beautiful Losers* contains echoes of the struggles for autonomy and free will examined earlier. Again, I stress that these

him a pivotal figure in Cohen’s meditation on the conflation of artistic and nationalistic impulses in the twentieth century.

²⁷ It is tempting to read Cohen’s meditations on writings and writing alongside Barthes’s theories of readerly and writerly texts published in *S/Z* (1970). Barthes distinguishes the form of the classical novel from forms distinctive to the twentieth century (such as the *Nouveau Roman*) that challenge realist conventions. In contrast to a “readerly text” – a text that falls into a given culture’s given literary conventions and therefore a “product” for which the reader is a consumer – in a “writerly text” readers take an active role and “produce meaning” instead of consuming it (4).

struggles reflect the mid-century subject's ability to reconcile his or her place within a post-war and postcolonial world—an attempt at reconciliation that stems from a desire to wake from the sleepy waltz of history, a desire to critique from self-conscious embeddedness within the system/text.

The “beautiful losers” that Cohen champions in his novel deserve to be read alongside Lowry’s compatriots gathering together as they tumble into hell, Smart’s rogues and rascals as they tell stories and beg one another for one more drink, Watson’s flawed-and-forgiven valley-dwellers, and Glassco’s doomed reconstruction of the lost generation. These communities are made up of the damned, the sinners, and the downtrodden and yet there is solace and even joy in their very coming together. I suggest we read the late modernist texts herein as a collection of “beautiful losers” whose self-consciously demonstrated failures provide a biting criticism on the mid-century Canadian condition.

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