THE ENCYCLOPEDIC IMAGINATION IN THE CANADIAN ARTIST FIGURE

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Canada

For my family and for Mark

O God, Your Morning Is Perfect. People Are Alive in Your World. I Can Hear The Little Children In The Elevator. The Airplane Is Flying Through The Original Blue Air. Mouths Are Eating Breakfast. The Radio Is Filled With Electricity. The Trees Are Excellent. You Are Listening To The Voices Of The Faithless Who Tarry On The Bridge of Spikes. I Have Let Your Spirit Into The Kitchen. The Westclock Is Also Your Idea. The Government Is Meek. The Dead Do Not Have To Wait. You Comprehend Why Someone Must Drink Blood. O God, This Is Your Morning. There Is Music Even From A Human Thigh-Bone Trumpet. The Ice-Box Will Be Forgiven. I Cannot Think Of Anything Which Is Not Yours. The Hospitals Have Drawers Of Cancer Which They Do Not Own. The Mesozoic Waters Abounded With Marine Reptiles Which Seemed Eternal. You Know The Details Of The Kangaroo. Place Ville-Marie Grows And Falls Like A Flower In Your Binoculars. There Are Old Eggs In The Gobi Desert. Nausea Is An Earthquake In Your Eye. Even The World Has A Body. We Are Watched Forever. In The Midst Of Molecular Violence The Yellow Table Clings To Its Shape. I Am Surrounded by Members Of Your Court. I Am Frightened That My Prayer Will Fall Into My Mind. Somewhere This Morning Agony Is Explained. The Newspaper Says That A Human Embryo Was Found Wrapped In A Newspaper And That A Doctor Is Suspected. I Am Trying To Know You In The Kitchen Where I Sit. I Fear My Small Heart. I Cannot Understand Why My Arm Is Not A Lilac Tree. I Am Frightened Because Death Is Your Idea. Now I Do Not Think It Behooves Me To Describe Your World. The Bathroom Door Is Opening By Itself. And I Am Shivering With So Much Fear. O God, I Believe Your Morning Is Perfect. Nothing Will Happen Incomplete. O God, I Am Alone In The Desire Of My Education But A Greater Desire Must Be Lodged With You. I Am A Creature In Your Morning Writing A Lot Of Words Beginning With Capitals. Seven-Thirty In The Ruin Of My Prayer. I Sit Still In Your Morning While Cars Drive Away. O God, If There Are Fiery Journeys Be With Edith As She Climbs. Be With F. If He Has Earned Himself Agony. Be With Catherine Who Is Dead Three Hundred Years. Be With Us In Our Ignorance and Our Wretched Doctrines. We Are All Of Us Tormented With Your Glory. You Have Caused Us To Live On The Crust Of A Star. F. Suffered Horribly In His Last Days. Catherine Was Mangled Every Hour In Mysterious Machinery. Edith Cried In Pain. Be With Us This Morning Of Your Time. Be With Us At Eight O'Clock Now. Be With Me As I Lose The Crumbs Of Grace. Be With Me As The Kitchen Comes Back. Please Be With Me Especially While I Poke Around The Radio For Religious Music. Be With Me In The Phases Of My Work Because My Brain Feels Like It Has Been Whipped And I Yearn To Make A Small Perfect Thing Which Will Live In Your Morning Like Curious Static Through A President's Elegy. Or A Nude Hunchback Acquiring A Tan On The Crowded Oily Beach.

(Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers* 57-58)

But to accumulate lines, is not that a pleasure?

(Louis Dudek, *Continuation I*, 1)

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ABSTRACT

The "encyclopedic imagination" describes an artist's conviction that a work of art must be expansive and inclusive to a point of total embodiment. The artist (or dramatized artist figure) implies that the work of art must give a total account not only of the subjective life of the artist but of the reality to which the representing self responds. The focus of this study is not on any work's encyclopedic *achievement* (for the artist's inclusive ideal always remains well outside the actual capacity of the work), but on the relationship of the ideal of aesthetic all-inclusiveness to a problematic ideal of encompassing selfhood for the representing personality.

Following an introduction that establishes modern and postmodern conceptions of the notion of aesthetic totality, this dissertation describes, in six Canadian works, the (untenable) radicalization of the self through the "encyclopedic" ideal. Chapter one considers Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) and notes that the protagonist's drive towards total representation is costly to his sense of authentic temporality. Chapter two identifies "total embodiment" as the governing poetic principle of P.K. Page's *The Hidden Room* (poems *c.*1942-1997), and suggests the relation of this ideal to Page's apparent creative crisis. Chapter three examines the ethics of all-inclusive representation in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) and argues that the novel's vision of the world incorporated into a single body is a reflection of both the totalitarian politic of One Man and of apocalyptic-beatific "total identity." Chapter four looks at Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988) in terms of the trope of the "perverse museum" in Atwood's *oeuvre*. The novel's treatment of representation as *exhibition* figures identity as a matter of insatiable demonstration. Chapter five considers the "life-long" poems of

Louis Dudek (*Continuation c.*1971-2001) and bpNichol (*The Martyrology* 1967-1988) as particularly marked cases of works that must continue until they have enfolded a coherent world-view into an all-encompassing subjectivity.

Each chapter stresses the counterintuitive quality of the "encyclopedic" ideal and demonstrates that a total yet coherent representation of the world seems inversely proportional to a coherent yet total representation of the self.

RÉSUMÉ

L' « imagination encyclopédique » décrit la conviction voulant qu'une oeuvre d'art puisse inclure le monde et le moi jusqu'à la représentation totale. L'artiste (ou l'artiste personnage) insinue que l'art doit être un récit complet de la vie subjective ainsi que de la réalité à laquelle cette subjectivité réagit. La présente ne vise pas le succès encyclopédique d'oeuvres données (puisque l'idéal encyclopédique demeure en dehors de la capacité actuelle de l'oeuvre) mais plutôt la problématique que pose l'idéal d'une représentation globale, nottament du moi, pour la personne représentante.

Suite à une introduction qui pose les bases modernes et postmodernes de la totalité esthétique, l'auteur trace au travers de six oeuvres canadiennes l'intenable radicalisation du moi occasionnée par l'idéal encyclopédique. Le premier chapitre examine *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) d'Ernest Buckler et constate que le désir du protagoniste de tout représenter lui en coûte sa propre constitution dans le présent. Le second chapitre reconnaît en l'« incarnation totale » le principe esthétique dominant du *Hidden Room* (poèmes, *c*.1942-1997) de P.K. Page et propose une relation entre cet idéal et la « crise de vers » de l'écrivain. Le troisième chapitre considère l'éthique de la représentation globale dans *Beautiful Losers* (1966) de Leonard Cohen et argumente que la vision du monde du roman, incorporée dans un seul corps, reflète à la fois la notion de l'homme totalitaire et une « identité globale » apocalypto-béatifique. Le quatrième chapitre se penche sur *Cat's Eye* (1988) et sur le trope du « musée pervers » dans l'oeuvre de Margaret Atwood. Le roman établit une relation entre représentation et exposition, faisant ainsi de l'identité une question de démonstration insatiable. Le cinquième chapitre interprète les poèmes « de toute une vie » de Louis Dudek

(*Continuation c.*1971-2001) et de bpNichol (*The Martyrology* 1967-1988) comme des ouvrages devant s'accroître jusqu'à envelopper une vision du monde cohésive dans une subjectivité globalisante.

Chaque chapitre souligne le manque de sens pratique de l'idéal encyclopédique et démontre qu'une représentation cohérente mais globale du monde est en fait inversement proportionnelle à une représentation complète mais cohérente du moi.

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INTRODUCTION:

The Encyclopedic Imagination in the Canadian Artist Figure

I could realize the whole content of everything there is [...].
(Ernest Buckler, *The Mountain and the Valley* 285)

Great desire to write it all.
(P.K. Page, "The First Part," *The Hidden Room* I.216)

Are you disarmed and empty, an instrument of Grace? Can you stop talking?
(Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers* 163)

It's the weight, the accumulation of all these objects.
(Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* 53)

Actually everything is everywhere.
(Louis Dudek, "Continuation III," *The Caged Tiger* 58)

I am afraid of writing something that does not end.
(bpNichol, *Martyrology 3*)

Above are six testaments to the dizzying, compulsive and burdensome artistic drive toward an all-inclusive representation. The works from which these lines are taken reveal artistic imaginations that are incremental, obsessed with inexpressible degrees of observational and subjective quality, and insatiably concerned with the final "wholeness" of the representation. In such works the artist must immerse him- or herself in details; the work must leave nothing out. The call of the world's particulars reveals, in turn, the artist's desire to master a sense of his or her *own* individuality and uniqueness. As such, the accumulative aesthetic that this dissertation will describe in six twentieth-century Canadian authors foregrounds the unrelenting project of writing oneself into being. The artist imagines the work's capacity to enclose the world *utterly* and implies that if such a project could be realized it would also mean the completion—even the perfection—of the representing self. In each author I shall discuss, the notion of an all-inclusive text

extends the possibility of "absolute autobiography" to the artist (Page, "The First Part," *HR* I.216).[1] Such a work would define the artist's subjectivity so inclusively that he or she would be liberated from the hitherto obvious tension between self and world. The artist envisions a total representation as the avenue to becoming *ens causa sui*, to being absolutely comfortable in an imagined total self-sufficiency. The project of saying everything that is sayable and thus disposing oneself to silence is, in Leonard Cohen's words, the "complete gift" that brings one to "Grace" (*Beautiful Losers* 128, 163). The "encyclopedic imagination," then, is a special brand of artistic idealism that reveals itself in the artist's unselective attention to *everything*. But the desire to see with unmistaking clarity and to account for everything exactly sets the artist (or dramatized artist figure) such a mandate of objective precision and inclusiveness that it becomes impossible to negotiate between "the splendid waste of life" and the "sublime economy of art" (Arata 218).

It is immediately obvious that, in projecting impossible standards of closure and limitation for both the work and the self, the imagination that is impelled towards endless demonstration will fail in its "awful challenge" of a complete response to the world (Buckler 227). While it may be true that the "encyclopedic" artist is positively (if obsessively) motivated toward a vision of the work's and the self's perfection, the contrary motivation (not towards perfection, but away from imperfection) is even more forceful. The "encyclopedic imagination" typically generates the crippling belief that wherever this ideal but unrealizable project *fails*, the self stands unauthenticated: "it was as if in neglecting to perceive *every*thing exactly, he had been guilty of making the object, as well as himself, incomplete" (Buckler 227, original emphasis). The artist's

damaging intuition that the work is never finished until it is somehow absolute will struggle to find any remotely adequate formal expression. There is, of course, no example of the perfect, all-inclusive work to be found anywhere in the pages of this study. This is, instead, an examination of the "encyclopedic" *intention*, the vexation at the core of the artistic disposition that motivates the writer toward this particularly impossible standard of artistic encompassment and toward an often helpless accretion of literary material. The artwork that demonstrates an "encyclopedic imagination" is not "encyclopedic" simply because it is descriptively and materially exhaustive (as is, for example, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*), or because it extravagantly manages to imply a sprawling *total* history in an almost mythic structure (as does Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*), or even because its primary method is the catalogue (as in the poetry of Christopher Dewdney or Tim Lilburn). The defining feature of the "encyclopedic imagination" is a self-conscious perfectionism informing the representation, and the suggestion of the artist's own expectation of artistic failure if the work should leave anything out. Through the lens of mid- to late twentieth-century Canadian literature, this dissertation examines the artistic reasoning that produces a theory of endless representation: "to know what the knowers share, / In all times and places, / a way with particulars, a passion for perfection" (Dudek, *Continuation II*, 20). This study examines its central problem through six representative works of Canadian literature: Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952); P.K. Page's *The Hidden Room* (poems *c.*1942-1997); Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966); Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988); and finally, in a chapter that specifically considers the life-

long poem as a special case of literary "encyclopedism," bpNichol's nine-volume *Martyrology* (1967-1988) and Louis Dudek's *Continuation* series (*c.*1971-2000).

Each of these works contributes something quite different to my characterization of the "encyclopedic imagination" and its contest against what novelist Thomas Mann once called "the fever of matter" (275). The differences between these works, as we will see, are as profound as the similarity that binds them. But in all of these works, the "encyclopedic imagination" stems from yet ironically sustains an unstable conception of the self: a self that identifies everywhere; a self that wants to include everything (thereby threatening its very definition as a "self"). In Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, the protagonist is so eager to create himself as the knowing personality that understands "what everything was like" (254), that he sacrifices his own personal and artistic integrity to the instantaneously beheld totality of the aesthetic vision. His epiphany, a spatially inclusive vision, is only achieved by virtue of the willing dissolution of the ordinary processes of his personality. In the work of P.K. Page, we will see the poet's deep skepticism about the *falsely* encompassing nature of subjectivity. Over the course of her career, the poet must temper her tormented suspicion that the world is only ever revealed in solipsism, in order to find the "total self," instead, a legitimate avenue to a poetic "all" ("Cry Ararat," *HR* II.185; "The Hidden Room," *HR* I.11). Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* demonstrates that the artist may assume an extreme power in formulating the inclusive vision. In this power, the artist assumes both the function of the saint (as the suffering avatar of the single, universal body) and the totalitarian (who, in the "formal elegance" and startling unworldliness of fascism [Kermode, qtd. in Eysteinsson 15], similarly attempts an entire, idealist recreation of the world). Atwood's novel assumes a

more worldly and social direction in implying that social anxiety as well as existential distress fosters the artist's vigilance, circumspection, and dedication to particulars. Atwood figures the artist as a collector whose encyclopedic drive is determined by a need to establish a sense of individuality amidst influences that constantly insist on her insufficiency and incompleteness. (Here we might note that while "encyclopedism" is a feature of the artist's perceived total power in Cohen, it is a feature of the artist's perceived total powerlessness in Atwood—at least initially.) The life-long poems of Nichol and Dudek help us see another vital opposition between the authors at hand, which is that whereas Buckler demonstrates the way a *spatially* inclusive vision may pose an insurmountable challenge to the artist's sense of self, so too may the *temporally* inclusive vision. Nichol and Dudek show us that an entire dedication to the "continuity" of one's thought in poems that articulate "the essential thought-process, like the time process, always going on in us" (Dudek, "Questions" 12) ends up testifying to the self's infinite fracture and to the idea that "nothing is more different from the self than the self" (Gide, qtd. in Sypher 64).

Despite their crucial differences and the various facets of the artistic personality that they help to illuminate, these works share the extremism of their twin drives to represent—absolutely—the world and the self. The underlying connection between the "total work" and the (problematic) total identity of the artist is the main critical issue of this dissertation. The imagined complete representation is played out within postures of extreme egotism or extreme self-sacrifice and stylistically within an aesthetic of impersonality or a (fully indulged) subjectivism. And present in all of these postures is the threat that a very inclusive work may not just extend but may utterly diffuse the

representing personality. The encyclopedic work reveals that a self that does not select and discriminate between the world's details also cannot truly value any of them, and that, in failing to discriminate and value, the self cannot lay claim to its own integrity. In other words, the artist's thirsty attention to the myriad aspects of his or her unique existence actually disperses his or her individuality. In so doing, this overweening attention undermines the *source* of poetic value—the subject—and even compromises a sense of the object's own nature. In the words of Charles Altieri, "the pretense of knowing something in all its details yields a sense of the ungraspablity of its essence" ("What Differences" 124).

As these artists in various ways discover, a world-inventory may amount to a renunciation of the world, and likewise, an intense pursuit of the self's nature may amount to a flight from the self. R.P. Blackmur illuminates the problem when he points to the counterintuitive quality of exhaustive representation: "a chaotic poetics [which an unselective poetics must be] does not express the biographical requirement for a self put in order" (271).[2] The self has a requirement for limitation that is alien to the inexhaustible, "encyclopedic" project. Thus the everywhere implicit identification of the work that *refuses* limitation with the self that *requires* it is a primary source of the tension and anxiety that is pervasive in all of these works. A total yet coherent representation of the self seems inversely proportional, in these works, to a coherent yet total representation of the world. A sensed tenuousness in the self gives spurs to the artist's encyclopedic and totalizing desires and almost helpless accumulations. The accretion of detail is intended, ironically, as a stabilizing and substantiating project, but produces opposite effects.

Of course the world is revealed in and through the self. But there is a vital difference between the self's *naturally* encompassing quality, and the *disciplined* project of seeking to bring everything into the realm of the artistic consciousness. William Gass remarks that "[t]he self is a crocodile named Midas, and whatever it touches is instantly eaten; whatever it does is as much itself as its leathery skin; whatever it dreams is crocodilian" (193). Naturally, the self casts its own quality on everything; this is an inescapable feature of our daily lives. But the *radicalization* of the personality through artistic discipline is something else, and can actually bear out (more or less subtly) the predatory implication of Gass's conceit. Robert Pack writes that art may "indulg[e] the fantasy of existing beyond limits" in persuading the artist of his or her own boundless creativity (6); this observation must be all the more true of an artwork that in some way or other "can't stop" (Dudek, "from *Atlantis*," *Infinite Worlds* 191). Such a work not only *reflects* the natural voraciousness of the self, but also *creates* the self in an image of problematic "omnipotence" and even "immortality" (Pack 6) while projecting a contrary fear of powerlessness and death. But, certainly, the usefulness of an examination of the "encyclopedic imagination" is that each work in its own way offers a profound and often moving study of the finite principles it may appear to reject: temporal existence and mortality, limited perspective, sociality and the (happy) natural restrictions of the self. In the words of bpNichol, "Getting control of the 'I' in your writing is to realize that you *can't* devour the world" ("Syntax" 294, emphasis added).

It should be clear by now that the term "encyclopedic" in this context is a convenient metaphor for an inclusive representation, but does not imply that these six versions of "encyclopedic" representation are factual and enumerative in the *style* of an

encyclopedia. Certainly the inclination of these artists towards taxonomic or catalogic description is richly evident, usually as part of the work's larger demonstration (and critique) of art's compass. For example, Atwood's Elaine Risley arrives at her vocation in part through an interest in the minutiae of biological differentiation; Dudek's *oeuvre*, as well, includes various catalogues, including an encyclopedic catalogue of species-nomenclature; Brian Bartlett points to the "taxonomic agony" impelling P.K. Page's "naturalist" poem, "Only Child" (104). Cohen's novel refers briefly to an encyclopedia-like document entitled *L'Exposition du Système du Monde* (89), a seventeenth-century treatise being authored in the lifetime of Catherine Tekakwitha, the Iroquois Virgin whose life *Beautiful Losers* fictionally recounts. Here, the (Enlightenment) ideal of total, rational world-explanation ironically reflects the novel's own project, which is itself "encyclopedic," but in a fuller range of ways, and certainly in a way that enfolds the problem of subjectivity, the informing issue of this dissertation.

As a related matter of terminology, "encyclopedic" form (not intention) is probably best known as a recurring term in Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism.* Frye traces "encyclopedic" representation through the ages and holds it in contrast, for the most part, with what he calls "episodic" representation (55). The "encyclopedic" form (derived from epic) is always continuous or cyclical, and aware of the "extended patterns" of myth, legend and archetype. The poet deploying the "encyclopedic" form is a "social spokesman" (54) and may be received as an ecstatic or sacral figure. The "encyclopedic" work itself has the authority of a "total body tending to incorporate itself within a single [...] form"; the poet is almost transparently its instrument (55). On the other hand, an "episodic" form (derived from lyric) describes a discontinuous individual

utterance.[3] The "episodic" poet speaks as an individual rather than as a social prolocutor; his theme tends to be a study of the "boundary of consciousness" (56), or the distinction between the life of dreams and invention and the life of experience and memory. His articulation may be quite extensive but still "fragmentary" or "discontinuous," whereas the "encyclopedic" poet's is patterned and cyclical. I did not decide on my central term "encyclopedic" with reference to *The Anatomy of Criticism*, and my own survey of the "encyclopedic" intention seems to encompass qualities of *both* these categories of Frye's freely and without any concern for their distinction. Some works of my study, more to the point of Frye's "episodic" designation than his "encyclopedic" one, are obviously works of the private mind, and they explore the power of the individual consciousness to be inclusive. But Frye himself notes (of his pan-literary perspective) that in the twentieth-century the distinction between his categories is exceedingly weak, since a private epiphany can reveal "the vast panorama unrolled by history" as in Joyce or Proust (61), and a work can be *simultaneously* "encyclopedic" and "discontinuous" as in T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* or Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (61).

The flexibility of the term "artist figure" rather than "artist" in the title of this thesis permits a study of the inclusive drive as a quality of the artist protagonist or speaking persona as well as an authorial quality. One of this dissertation's most frequently recurring problems is whether there can be an absolving irony an author may adopt towards an artist protagonist who demonstrates an "encyclopedic imagination." This question prompts a variety of answers over the coming chapters. (I will suggest, for example, that Atwood's attitude towards her narrator Elaine, a compulsive collector, is a matter of *diminishing* irony, whereas Buckler's attitude towards his protagonist David

and his "encyclopedic" obsessions is a matter of *increasing* irony.) There is no case in which the "encyclopedic" compulsion is *fully* ascribed to the persona or character; the author is always in some way complicit. The involvement of the author in the protagonist or persona's "encyclopedic" bent arises naturally from that part of my definition of "encyclopedism" that insists that the all-inclusive ideal must be an *invested* ideal. The author in each case has had to lend a high degree of credence to the artist figure's supposition that not only is "encyclopedic" representation a necessary and worthy ideal for art, but that there is a palpable cost to the representing self if it is not met. In establishing this aspect of the "encyclopedic imagination" with the necessary intensity even in an artist character, the author will certainly create some implication of his or her own collusion. Discerning the extent and nature of this involvement is always one of the most rigorous challenges of the analysis of these texts, particularly when the author has faithfully rendered the protagonist's "encyclopedic" style.

One added complexity in discussing "encyclopedic" authorship is the risk of unfairly assigning the same creative psychology to the author that he or she has been at pains to establish in the character. For example, Ernest Buckler creates a very intimate and detailed (and generally unflattering!) portrait of his protagonist David Canaan, and suggests that David's "encyclopedic" artistry has a complex but appreciable psychological explanation. If I suggest that Buckler's "encyclopedic" *style* is indistinguishable from David's, am I suggesting that a similar psychology has given rise to it? I have tried to treat the artist protagonist's "encyclopedism" as a study in creative psychology while discussing the author's apparent "encyclopedism" as an expression of manifest aesthetic convictions. Such convictions might be, for example, Dudek's

declared belief that poetry "attempts the total integration of modern man" ("Introduction to a Course in Modern Poetry" 153), or Cohen's implied belief that the creative act is inherently a sacral discipline inclining itself to a discovery of the absolute. The most difficult acts of discernment between author and persona occur in my treatment of Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (because of the novel's status as an "autobiographical illusion" [Cooke 164]) and my treatment of P.K. Page. Page's repeated dramatization of the self's inability to assume any but an absolute self-definition (in extremes of impersonality, self-loss, dehumanization, and solipsism) seems to be reflected in her own "guilt[ily]" inclusive poetic ("Photos of a Salt Mine," *HR* I.46). This poetic guilt leads, I argue, to a *genuine* creative crisis and poetic silence, at which point the poet must reconceive her idea of poetic "inclusiveness." In this case, then, the point of implying Page's own share in the "encyclopedism" of her personae is certainly not to pathologize the poet's own imagination and sense of self, but to suggest sources for her apparent aesthetic self-castigation.

Because the "encyclopedic imagination" is, in this study, primarily a feature of the creative personality rather than a direct matter of form, it has been possible to look at "encyclopedism" in both novelists and poets. I have looked at each work in terms of its own particular composition and aesthetic without attempting an extended comparison of novelistic "encyclopedism" with poetic "encyclopedism." But obviously there are different expressions of this creative bent available to writers in different genres. For example, I have explained David Canaan's "encyclopedism" as emanating, in part, from his refusal to accept the natural organization of his experience in time; this is a feature all the more visible against the backdrop of the novelistic *medium* of time. I have argued

that Page's "encyclopedism" is visible even despite her adherence to various principles of poetic constraint and closure. In Page's case, the doctrinaire tenets of modernist objectivity have called ironic attention to her more *subjective* requirement for endless demonstration. The expression of Cohen's "encyclopedism" has relied heavily on the poetics of fiction. His manipulation of plot and character to the very limit of credibility has helped to communicate his extremist vision, and his exploration of authorial omniscience illustrates his "encyclopedist" avowal of creative omnipotence. In the case of Dudek and Nichol, the lyric possibilities of the long poem genre help to suggest each poet's insurmountable alienation from himself, and generate his "encyclopedic" attempt to redress that schism. In sum, my use of the "encyclopedic imagination" as a term relating primarily to persona (not form) has given me a basis for bringing poets and novelists into the same study. But certainly, the formal capacity of the work to express the "encyclopedic" imagination is different depending on its genre, and will be reflected as such in each analysis.

The artist's intention to "embod[y] all" in a work of art (Page, "The Hidden Room," *HR* I.11) and then to find a vision of self-perfection in this complete work gives rise to a spate of fruitful aesthetic and even ethical problems. There is no comparable extended study, in the field of Canadian literature, of this particularly exaggerated artistic bent (in fact, at the risk of broad generalization, I would venture to say that literary critics in this field do not often posit Canadian artists as "extremists"). There are many fine and relevant studies of fraught aesthetic closure in these individual works (as we will see in the coming chapters), but my articulation of the problem of the all-inclusive aesthetic intention as a *sustained* concern in Canadian literature is quite new. Sometimes a related

genre study will relevantly foreground the way a particular type of representation fuels a potentially endless search for self and mitigates the self's mandate to "totalize" itself. For example, various studies of the Canadian *Bildungsroman* (such as Glenn Willmott's recent *Unreal Country: Modernity in the Canadian Novel in English* [2002]), the autobiographical fiction and the long poem have been useful. The "Long-Liners" conference of 1981 (as completely documented in *Open Letter*) provides many useful insights on the relationship between a work's continuation and the representing persona's elusive desire for full self-possession. This issue of *Open Letter*, alongside ensuing studies like Barbour's *Lyric/Anti-Lyric*, Kamboureli's *On The Edge of Genre*, and the collection *Bolder Flights: Essays on the Long Poem*, edited by Frank M. Tierney and Angela Robinson, provocatively illustrate the self's constant "dislocation" (Kamboureli 170); its conception of itself (following Charles Olson) as a "field" of information and influence (Davey,"Countertextuality" 35); its effort to grasp itself as a conceptual unity; and its use of the artwork as a "system" by which it becomes sure of its own authority (Kramer 101ff).

Brian Trehearne's *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition* has been an invaluable study on which I have drawn repeatedly, particularly in my chapters on Page and Dudek. Trehearne describes a generational search for formal poetic coherence and articulates its link to the "psychic wholeness" of the speaking persona (70). Within a detailed exploration of Montreal's literary "little mag" culture, Trehearne investigates the various ways in which his group of focal poets inherited, responded to and reconceived doctrinaire modernism and its orthodoxies. In particular, he illustrates the diverse efforts of these poets to rediscover lyric principles against the dictates of high modernist

impersonality. My own study has taken a more exaggerated stance, perhaps, in emphasizing not the search for "*integritas*" as such, but the *insatiable* search for an order for the work and the self. And while Trehearne has been "happy [...] to avoid" the "moral and ethical resonances" of the term *integrity* (favouring *integritas*, from the aesthetic theory of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, via Aquinas) (69), I am happy to exploit such resonances as matters of sustained concern. The representational power the artist assumes in envisioning the "encyclopedic" poem is all the more pronounced for the scope of the intention and is sometimes a matter of ethical ambivalence for the representing self.

On the issue of the lineage I have suggested in this study, I would like to note that where others have brought any of these writers into a relationship, it has tended to be as satellites to a figure I have *not* addressed at any length: A.M. Klein. Klein's elegiac 1948 poem "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" has impressed itself deeply on the Canadian literary and critical consciousness and has given eloquent expression to the poet's solitary labour of recreating a whole world in poetry. This is a vocation that, in Klein's handling, invites introversion, social censure, obscurity and suffering. The poet's identity as the "*n*th Adam taking a green inventory" (103) places him between the poles of "mystic[ism]" and "mad[ness]" (102). Here, we have a poignant expression of the artist as an inventory-taker, unable finally to distinguish between himself and his surroundings, between the "map" of the world and the "chart" of his own body (103). Brian Trehearne aligns Klein, Page, Buckler and Dudek in *The Montreal Forties*. D.G. Jones, in two essays, treats Buckler and Page together, and in both instances, also alludes to Klein.[4] Atwood revisits the trope of poet as landscape in her own poem "This Is A Photograph of

Me" and alludes to Klein's poem repeatedly in both her 1972 critical assessment of Canadian literary thematics, *Survival*, and also in her vocational meditation, *Negotiating With the Dead* (2002). Atwood proposes a small genealogy of inventory-taking artists in *Survival*, linking Klein to Buckler and to Alice Munro;[5] I will return to Atwood's awareness of this literary inheritance in chapter four. Cohen figures *himself* as the successor to Klein's struggle in a speech entitled "Loneliness and History," which I will address in chapter three. I will also suggest Nichol's echo of Klein in the image of the "dead" poet buried in the landscape of the page ("the i dies finally / merges with the land's scape" [*Martyrology 4*]). Because I have wanted to move outside a *generational* coterie of "encyclopedic" artists in order to take into account both modern and postmodern concerns, this study has displaced Klein in favour of P.K. Page as the representative of late modernist poetry. (Page is, as well, someone uniquely able to demonstrate the release of the artist from the "encyclopedic" compulsion.) I have chosen to voice my first thoughts on "encyclopedism" through a study of Buckler, whose protagonist displays the "encyclopedic imagination" in so extreme and prototypical a fashion, and with such a well-developed psychology to explain it. But asides in a number of chapters will (albeit inadequately) note Klein's underlying influence on these writers and their articulations of this provocative problem.

My dissertation on the "encyclopedic" intention aims to fill a descriptive gap between criticism that develops the idea of the twentieth-century crisis of subjectivity (and the resulting particularity of the world), and criticism that responds to works of genuinely encyclopedic literary *achievement* (such as those of Joyce, Proust, Pound, Olson, Pynchon and others). I believe that the "encyclopedic imagination" in my usage is

the middle term that needs articulation in general and application to the field of Canadian literature in particular. Every good modernist period survey—Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism*, Schwartz's *The Matrix of Modernism*, Eysteinsson's *The Concept of Modernism*, Frank's *The Widening Gyre,* Ross's *The Failure of Modernism*, Glicksberg's *Modern Literary Perspectivism* and so forth—offers a complex analysis of the individual's various strategies of finding a principle of subjective and textual coherence in response to a resistant world. But this basic modernist drive is heightened to a conviction of the perfectibility of the representation and the perfectibility of the self in the works of this study: "I could realize the whole content of everything there is" (Buckler 285). The implication that the work *fails* and the self is condemned to nonentity if the "encyclopedic imagination" leaves anything out reveals a self-conscious radicalism that seems to be a special case of modernist fervour and its "blessed rage to order" (Stevens 98). The imagination I am describing stops well short of the actually encyclopedic achievement of Joyce's "chaffering allincluding most farraginous chronicle," *Ulysses* (Joyce, qtd. in Eysteinsson 112) or Pound's "poem including history," *The Cantos* (Nadel 221), yet it is more obsessed with perfection. There is a slight mismatch between my survey and the criticism that has arisen to describe those works that truly *are* cultural inventories realized within the experience of a focal personality. Works like Joyce's and Pound's seem to achieve the ends of both the classical humanist education, which is to understand as entirely as possible the "formation of man as man," and of the modern encyclopedic drive towards "the mastery of nature and the development of material civilization" (Hadot 46).[6] Criticism interested in exploring the encyclopedic knowledge of these works must inevitably give itself over to the elucidation of each work's range of

reference. This study's emphasis, on the other hand, is on explaining each artist's understanding of the limits of selfhood, with the critical task of cultural exegesis greatly diminished.

A critical work interested in creative selves whose artistry both expands and threatens the personal "boundary" is Charles Altieri's *Enlarging the Temple*. Altieri discusses American postmodern poetry of the 1960s and its effort to "enlarge" the subjectivity (past the apparent limitations of the confessional stance) in order to expand the scope of the poem. In his discussion of Creeley in particular, Altieri relevantly emphasizes the poet's occasionally *pathological* bent towards "total self-definition" (*Enlarging* 183), and reveals many features of thought that my "encyclopedists" share:

> Creeley usually wants the impossible union of feeling the self within the world and of having some insight into a stable identity that persists in these experiences. He is not content to take as his principle of plenitude the continuity and harmony of natural processes, but he wants that principle to be connected somehow with a sense of his own personal needs and desires. He thus must try to take up a position at once within the flux of experience and outside reflecting upon its relationship to his own personality [...] Creeley cannot find for the subjective self the kind of plenitude others experience in seeing their particular experiences of intense presence as illuminations of a deeper, abiding order. Because his intense experiences may be self-generated, each of them offers moments of vitality that are only evanescent and that threaten upon dissolving to leave only greater needs and a more nagging sense of how divided a self he is in is ordinary life. Full identity seems to disappear the moment one reaches for it. (*Enlarging* 173)

Many elements of this description will be repeated with reference to my six authors in the coming pages: a self driven to be both inside and outside an experience at the same time in order to apprehend it fully; a compulsion to seek for the artistic self and the representation insatiable levels of "plenitude" and of "order"; a torment born of the fact that others may be *naturally* satisfied with the repleteness of their world without being driven to recreate it in representation; a "full" self that disperses in the effort to articulate itself wholly. Altieri's work connects Robert Bly, Robert Lowell, Charles Olson, Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, W.S. Merwin, and Denise Levertov as compeers in "the discipline of attending carefully to the mind's concrete place in immediate existential contexts" (*Enlargement* 22). My own study attempts to suggests a similar personal "enlargement" in Canadian authors, and embraces poets and novelists without the same sharp effort to distinguish the postmodernist from the modernist cast of this imagination.[7]

In the coming chapters, we will see that, despite certain differences in the modern and postmodern handling of the "encyclopedic imagination" in the works of this study, many of the same issues and paradoxes are sustained. The "encyclopedic imagination" complicates, in itself, one basic distinction between modern and postmodern representation that has given rise to so many others. This core distinction is that the modernist aspires to the creation of an aesthetic totality through a centred, organizing consciousness whereas the postmodernist opens the work out infinitely to relativity and "performance" as befitting the "modalities" of thought and sensibility (Bertens 18, 22). Thus, the modernist is revolutionary and Utopian whereas the postmodernist enjoins an unauthoritative and multifaceted "acceptance of the world" (Bertens 13). The modern

project is "glorious and admirable" while the postmodern project is "cogent and pertinent" (Jameson 80). A twentieth-century literature is realized within an "actively struggling modernism" or, alternatively, a "passively bewildered postmodernism" (Alan Wilde, qtd. in Herman 59). There is an inherent moralizing in many such remarks, applauding either the modernist's principled inclination towards order, or the postmodernist's resistance to the *imposition* of order. Emmanuel Levinas makes this difference into the basis for a phenomenological ethics, suggesting a distinction not necessarily between the "modern" and "postmodern" mind, but on a related note, between the "totalizing" and the "infinitizing" consciousness:

> The basic difference is between a mode of thought which tries to gather all things around the mind, or self, of the thinker, and an externally oriented mode which attempts to penetrate into what is radically other than the mind that is thinking it [...] The former seek for power and control; the latter for a higher quality of life. (16-18)

The totalizer tries to assimilate the world to the self, whereas (and preferably, in Levinas' ethics) the infinitizer opens the self out to everything which is *not* it, and allows him- or herself to be tutored and led by the infinite alterity of others and of things. The infinitizer responds with self-abandonment to the *face* of everything, because the face is the indication of the mystery of "otherness" and it generates the desire to sympathize with the "other" through representation.

But if there is one thing that the trope of "the encyclopedic imagination" will demonstrate, it is that there can be very little distinction between a "totalizing" and an "infinitizing" imagination when the totality the artist envisions for art is actually

absolute. Indeed, the "encyclopedic imagination" shows the easy interpenetrability of many of the above binaries. In Buckler's novel, for example, the protagonist is noticeably *obsessed* with faces, which, far from indicating his Levinasian willingness to apprehend the mystery of the way others' natures are different from his own (and ensuring his "higher quality of life"), instead reveals a deliberately *superficial* perception that maintains the standards and priorities of the self. (The face of the other also becomes a barrier that feeds his sense of perpetual exclusion from the life that surrounds him). And Leonard Cohen's work shows, for example, that "passive bewilder[ment]" is not necessarily a democratic and relativist stance but may be a covert form of authority. In Cohen's work most explicitly, and in the other works generally, binaries such as all of those quoted in the preceding paragraph may *easily* be twin aspects of the same personality, particularly when the imagination is engaged in a project that is absolute and finite in intention but potentially infinite in execution.

One foundation for the similarity of the modern and postmodern complexion of the "encyclopedic imagination" in the works we are about to examine is that these movements share the inheritance of the "romantic agony," which develops alongside twentieth-century concerns to become a self-conscious agony of inclusion. Sanford Schwartz praises critics who are able to see continuities between romanticism and twentieth-century writing (*Matrix* 72). Joseph Conte cites Coleridgean organicism (which touts the propriety of "form as proceeding" rather than "form as superimposed") as a precedent for modern and especially postmodern accumulative and serial forms (33). More to the point, romanticism gives us a source for the conviction that "the representer must want and be able to represent everything" (Novalis, qtd. in Helfer 79). The "extent

and fervour of [the Romantic age's] response to the claims of daily life" (Trilling 89) suggests not only the desire to bring everything into the scope of the representation, but also the desire to make this inclusiveness into an expression of personal (and "daily") authenticity. Wordsworth's (modest!) intention to discourse on "Man, Nature, and Human Life" in his *Prelude*, for example, is an obviously encyclopedic intention that he pursues instead through an extended *self*-portrait. The encompassing romantic self and the inclination to let the world be known within the phenomenon of individuality are surely antecedents for the representational paradoxes that this study will unfold. The modern and postmodern "encyclopedic imaginations" further the assumption that when man knows himself in his uniqueness, the world pours in and through him.

So, too, is "encyclopedism" informed by the romantic self's sickness, terror and melancholy, and by the moments when the self feels itself withdraw before the terrible vision of a world revealed in its entirety and beyond representation. The sublime and revelatory moment of the romantic soul's apprehension of the world's totality—when "life seems suddenly to reveal itself in all its mystery and terror" (Josipovici 2)—is a moment in which the self must confront its own obliteration. We will see, particularly in Cohen and Atwood, that terror is still an indispensable element in the perception of totality, and that sublimity informs the equally modern and postmodern fascination with the *limit* where the representable cedes to the unrepresentable. One legacy of romanticism to the modern "encyclopedic imagination" is the somewhat pathological bent that Alice Kuzniar describes. Kuzniar articulates the anxiety that may be provoked by an unfulfilled drive towards totality, its cost to the self: "An absolute drive toward completion and perfection becomes a sickness, as soon as it destructively turns itself

against the incomplete and the imperfect" (83). Josipovici, too, observes that modernism profoundly inherits the romantic "melancholy" and self-recrimination born of the failure to represent everything: "the attempt to express *everything*, the totality of experience, unfettered by the rules and limitations of conventions and consciousness, leads to self-destruction" (7, original emphasis).

The inherently romantic quality of the "encyclopedic imagination" is one powerful source of commonality in the works of mid-to-late twentieth century literature that contribute to this study. And indeed, several of my texts at hand are really situated *in between* a definitive modernism and a definitive postmodernism.[8] The "encyclopedic imagination," I believe, reveals the deep continuity of modernist and postmodernist literature, though I do not mean to suggest that the works are then deprived of modernist and postmodernist features. Though it is my general argument that "encyclopedism" minimizes the distinction between modern and postmodern "inclusion" (the basis for our most familiar discriminations between the movements), certain characteristics remain unique to each. The modernist work "strains for all-inclusiveness" (Glicksberg 9) in certain ways that are unique to it: the prizing of an impersonality which displaces the "integral subjectivity" (Levenson 118), a stress on the epiphanic or visionary capacity of the artist which dictates a certain breadth of apprehension; an insatiable "epistemophilia" that particularly informs modernist realism; and a sense of infinite self-alienation that engenders a drawn-out seeking of identity. As well, a practiced obscurity in modernist art introduces an element of tension into an artist's general aim to comprehend and incorporate the world, and forces the work to suggest, at the same time, that the "negation of synthesis is a compositional principle" (Adorno, qtd. in Eysteinsson 210). One more

feature informing modernist inclusion is the modernist work's aspiration to be timeless or ahistorical. The effort of modernist art to liberate itself from time and all of time's contingencies has implications for "encyclopedism." Astradur Eysteinsson, commenting on James Joyce's young artist Stephen Dedalus, remarks that modernism, in line with Stephen's own aesthetic, "is striving to escape from the nightmare of history, trying to rule out the dimension of time" (13). (This liberation from time informs Buckler's and Page's work particularly, and we will also encounter a version of history as a nightmarish simultaneity in Cohen.) The denial of time also lends itself to a foregrounding of the role of the eye, with its special capacity for breaking the fluidity of action in order to "carve out of space and fix in time the most inimitable of pictures" (Gage 14). The tendency of modernism to be expansively "scopic" often ironically *denies* the traditional function of the eye in art, namely to declare itself as the locus of desire (Jay 178, 180). The modernist eye, and particularly the "encyclopedist" eye, often multiplies (and thus conceals) the desires of the representing self through its effort to see *everything* at once.

This emphasis on simultaneity also makes each moment thick with significance, thrusting the artist into the role of the (typically modernist) "visionary." The sacralized function necessarily forces him or her to meet and perhaps transcend the boundaries of self towards an impersonal omniscience that displaces the "integral subjectivity" (Levenson 118). For William Thickstun, "[v]ision dwells on the borders of life and death; like tragic action, it requires that a fully achieved identity give itself up to the rhythm of a power beyond the self, beyond, in Keats's words, 'any irritable reaching after fact and reason'" (135). The artist becomes more-than-herself in a moment which is more-than-itself, represented in a work of art which must, for some critics, even be more

than a work of art. For Frederic Jameson, the modernist work conceives of its own significance in sacral terms that are apparently alien to a postmodern way of thinking:

> [O]ne of the fundamental features of modernism with which it is hard for us to come to terms in a postmodern age is very precisely its trans- or even anti-aesthetic vocation—the will of the great modernist works to be something more than mere art and to transcend a merely decorative and culinary aesthetic, to reach the sphere of what is variously identified as the prophetic or the metaphysical, the visionary or the cosmic, that realm in which aesthetics and ethics, politics and philosophy, religion and pedagogy, all fold together into some supreme vocation.[9]
>
> (80)

This outgrowth of the work towards "prophetic or [...] metaphysical" visionary proportions is revealed in several of these "encyclopedic" works, as representations that *cannot* be satisfied with the ordinary function and limits of art.

Postmodernism disposes itself more liberally towards formal openness and the phenomenon of "form gulping after formlessness" (Conte 30). Critical thinking on postmodernism, endlessly embroiled in the question of how—and whether—postmodernism is "emergent from modernism" (Schwartz, "Postmodernity" 12), holds that the postmodern work is relatively less constrained by an obligation to conceptual wholeness; rather, postmodernism asserts a functional heterogeneity that does not bind itself to a promise of closure. Jean-Francois Lyotard's critical call to arms—"let us wage war on totality"—credits postmodernism's playfulness, indeterminacy, and valuing of small, local "recits" over grand narratives; these are various reactions against the imposition of form on a presumably formless world (Calinescu 19, 5). We find, too, a

cross-disciplinary fascination with chaos and uncertainty (Hayles 11), and a contemporary artistic disposition towards "information" that threatens "a sort of victory of life over art" (Eco 3). Postmodernism "celebrates its own fragmentary nature and the aleatory process of composition that prevents its noise from being reconciled in the discovery of autonomous coherence" (House, "Encyclopedia"). Does the postmodern aesthetic, then, set up artistic conditions under which the "encyclopedist's" gathering impulse can flourish unproblematically? Does postmodernism's inclination towards open-endedness mean that the tension and trouble is gone from the accumulative drive?

bpNichol envisions that "'the self [may open] as wide as possible while struggling for precision through a meditational process of accumulation'" (Nichol, qtd. in Thesen 19). There is an intriguing contradiction inherent in Nichol's ideal: the self is open "as wide as possible" and yet its crucial *movement* is a "struggl[e] for precision." This sentiment suggests that the "wide" self (the suggestion of which is reminiscent of others in this survey, such as Page's "absolute autobiography" [*HR* I.216] or "total I" [*HR* II.182]) *aspires* to form, not formlessness, through its qualifying accumulation. Nichol's telling *emotional* orientation (evident in the engaged term "struggle" and the necessarily personal "meditation") is towards precision and closure, towards the self's unalterable aim of clarifying itself. Meanwhile, Nichol keeps the poem open and asserts its unfinishability by undermining the positivism of representation. He *teases* us with the idea that the poem's "accumulation" is definite, delimiting:

> the precision of openness
>
> is not a vagueness
>
> it is an accumulation

cumulous (*Martyrology 4*)

Nichol presents his postmodern "accumulation" as affirmative and precise—"not a vagueness"—only then to offer "cumulous" as a tongue-in-cheek synonym for "accumulation," thereby returning us to the idea of nebulosity, and to the "cumulus" cloud image which dominates the work's accompanying line drawings. If the poem is to be a struggle for precision, then, it is a struggle that will constantly renew itself by injecting reminders that the essential ambiguity of being cannot be displaced by any effort at self-definition. Though the work is free from its *formal* obligation to autonomous coherence, it is counterintuitive to imagine that the creative imagination can readily free itself from giving form or seeking its own precise meaning when the "complete" work is identifiable with the "complete" self.

Recalling Conte's characterization of the postmodern work as "form gulping after formlessness," we might note that the description typically underemphasizes the role of the artist as maker, as if it were simply inherent in form itself to devolve. Moving radically away from the modernist cult of the artist and his or her aspiration to master a world that resists representation, the postmodern artist abandons him- or herself to the "limitless set of relations in the world" (Conte 15). The modernist seems to suggest that immediate experience is *only* available if the intervening fact of representation can somehow be overcome. But the postmodern imagination suggests that immediate experience is *persistently* available if the artist allows both the self and the work to be unquestioning vessels of it (this is the premise of Dudek's *Continuation*, but perhaps disingenuously so, as I will suggest). As Wallace Stevens once wrote in a letter, "Sometimes I believe most in the imagination for a very long time and then, without

reasoning about it, turn to reality and believe in that alone. But both of these things project themselves endlessly, and I want them to do just that" (Frye *Spiritus* 177). *Things project themselves endlessly* and the artist simply approves. When the postmodern artist does not set about constructing the work of art as a rich field of interference between inner and outer reality, he or she claims to have no specific formal impulse; the artist suggests that form almost creates itself. These characterizations, participating in the model of the postmodern work's impetus towards entropy, imply that the artist is *led by* the natural tendency of all things towards randomness.

But I rather think that postmodernist expressions of the "encyclopedic imagination" have something in common with modernist expressions of it, which is that the encyclopedic drive *produces* an unmanageable enlargement of the self that the artist will find basically untenable and counterintuitive. The drive to include everything seems to support modernist impersonality just as it seems to necessitate and support postmodernist "dissolution of ego boundaries" (Graff, qtd. in Bertens 38). But the "encyclopedic" artist's loss of identity generally becomes, at some point, a matter of self-consciousness, in which the artist intuitively feels the encroachment of absurdity threatening the project. I would like to return us to the underlying idea that a dedication to the world's particulars reveals the artist's own search for subjective particularity and uniqueness—but this time with an assertion borrowed from Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "[b]ecause we are unique in the world, we are condemned to meaning" (qtd. in Glicksberg 21). The "encyclopedic imagination" produces a representation that, in one way or another, *cannot stop* any more than the self can "stop" or fully realize its own nature, its own existential limits. And yet, just as the self unremittingly searches for

evidence of its own finitude (with respect to the other, with respect to the prospect of death, and so forth), so too does the "encyclopedic imagination" implicitly *seek* a point where the work will be total, final, and finished. Though the work may certainly depart from a mood in which accumulation is "a pleasure" (as in the opening epigraph to the entire dissertation, from Dudek's *Continuation I*), it cannot ultimately delight in the infinite generation of text as a rich semantic field that proceeds without end. Just as this dissertation's other epigraph (from Cohen) illustrates the unleashed consciousness as almost a divine madness, it remains also the most abject expression of loneliness in the world. It articulates the danger of an existence that is moving beyond any principle. The six focal texts of this study have endeavoured to make themselves so identical to consciousness that—profoundly—they share consciousness's own drive towards the "ends" of itself: its ideal life, its irrevocable limits.

Chapter one of this dissertation performs a reading of Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) as a first articulation of the "encyclopedic imagination" in the Canadian artist figure. The chapter aims to move away from idealized interpretations of the novel, particularly those that suggest that the work's artist figure and protagonist, David Canaan, surmounts the limitations of his jealousy and self-centredness to achieve a visionary transcendence at the moment of his death. The chapter looks at several of the work's major episodes, and notes the way in which eleven-year-old David's first, incomplete climb up the novel's titular mountain establishes his pattern of deliberately deferring all his most vital and anticipated experiences. Buckler's protagonist adopts a strategy of overwhelming himself with frenzied visual perception *in the moment* in order to grant himself the conceptual space he requires to envision events

in their best form, and, more importantly, to create himself in his own ideal aspect. Through a voracious attentiveness, David either concentrates sharply on things outside himself or abandons himself utterly to the "swarm" of the external world in order to control his sense of time, and ultimately to convince himself that none of his actions are irrevocable. Thus, the *deliberately* burgeoning and unintegrable vision comes to express the compromise of David's own personal integrity. The young man's "encyclopedic imagination" helps to foster a self that will *never* experience itself as "whole" and self-possessed, largely because it has given up the exigency of constituting itself properly in time. David's mounting personal incoherence is the effect of an increasingly momentous contest between his thirst for the *instantaneous* aesthetic experience, and his "natural" obligation to experience his authentic temporality. David's desperation to hold onto his world in all its minutiae is a damaging and alienating personal strategy. It helps him circumvent his "real" temporality and saves him the pain of directly confronting the death and loss that are everywhere in the novel; instead it falsely reassures him of the plenitude—indeed the *limitlessness*—of his experience. Buckler's novel emphatically shows us the danger of a self that avoids its own limits. The chapter attempts to establish the complex of philosophical concerns and modernist aesthetics that informs Buckler's insightful characterization of David Canaan, and it weighs Buckler's own complicity in David's "encyclopedism" by drawing on archival materials relevant to the novel's composition and revision.

Chapter two considers a work in which the artist seems highly identifiable with some of her "encyclopedic" personae, and seems, as well, to share some portion of their crisis of subjectivity. The chapter gives a reading of P.K. Page's poetry from her 1997

collected works, *The Hidden Room.* Among other things, the chapter tries to make sense of Page's twelve-year poetic silence as a *dispositional* extremity occasioned by her "encyclopedic imagination." The idea that Page's early poetry accretes images with a wild energy is widely acknowledged. The poet herself remarks, retrospectively, that "[in looking back] I could see very clearly how pelted with images I was when I was young. And then [...] I reached the point where I realized how little control I had over those images [...]" (qtd. in Bashford and Ruzesky 119). Page's early accumulative style has invited praise for its vigor and originality and, on some occasions, blame for the pressure it puts on the coherence of her poetry. Indeed, certain critics have responded to Page's use of "too many images" much as the Emperor responds to Mozart's music in Peter Shaeffer's *Amadeus*, by deploring its use of "too many notes" (29). But the standard for declaring that the work is *overtaxed* has often been an aesthetic standard that prescriptively touts a notion of poetic unity. The real determinant of whether Page's accumulative technique is *excessive* (thus, obsessive or "encyclopedic") is revealed *subjectively* in the poetic persona and the way in which the style of the representation excites a worry in the persona on the issue of personal coherence. On some occasions, the work achieves its inclusiveness only through a distortion of the self, so that even while Page's accumulative style is brilliant and engaging, it generates troubling visions of the voracious and even dehumanized self. This chapter tries to suggest a plausible course for the development of Page's "encyclopedic imagination" up to its point of self-consciousness. The chapter then meditates on the "turn" in Page's career, where she manages to forward a *new* model of poetic all-inclusiveness which does not produce the same subjective anxiety.

Chapter three, on Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966), is the focal point of the dissertation's *ethical* consideration of the "encyclopedic imagination." The chapter explores the relationship between extremes of experience, extremes of (encyclopedic) representation, and the "totalitarian spirit" particularly as Hannah Arendt defines it in "The Ideology of Terror." Cohen offers his reader various personae who are in the process of disciplining themselves into perfection, as his characters pursue what each determines to be the worthy extreme of human experience. Catherine Tekakwitha, the seventeenth-century Iroquois Virgin (and the inspirational center of the novel) attempts to impress herself with a divine terror through a saintly mortification of the flesh. In an effort to identify with *everything*—mortal and divine—Tekakwitha beatifically annihilates herself, a project of self-completion reflected variously in the lives and works of the novel's other characters. The historian who documents her plight (conventionally named "I" for his first-person narration) retreats into his sprawling document and ascetically binds himself to a world in which he cannot live. "I"'s friend and lover, "F," attempts to discipline himself (and "I") into an all-engulfing joy through a doctrine of total and unimpeded personal freedom. Both "I" and "F" narrate encyclopedically in a manner that complements their "unlimited" style of being, namely "I"'s self-effacing personality, and "F"'s infinitely self-enlarging one. But Cohen's characters are problematic channels of the "universal body." The novel presents the development of any radical personal style as an implicitly dangerous project of homogenizing the world by turning it toward the self (and especially at the expense of ignoring the suffering of the other). The disciplined effort to make *oneself* into a conduit for the universal order, whether by the eradication of the self or by its radical fulfillment, is ethically ambiguous.

Hannah Arendt's work on the totalitarian spirit helps us move past the commonplace that a (modernist) compulsion towards order and authority is the route *par excellence* to a fascist aesthetic. Arendt's work shows that an utter *abdication* of power and authority, and a neglect of the priorities of the self (qualities embodied, for example, in Cohen's saint) are equally part of the ideological "two-sided preparation" of the totalitarian subject (468). *Beautiful Losers* develops an implicit equation between *any* disciplined radicalization of personality, *any* correspondingly unbridled representation, and a totalitarian vision. Chapter three of the dissertation, then, explores Cohen's beautiful hyperboles of style and self as lenses on the ethical implications of "encyclopedic" representation. His novel demonstrates the pure, vertiginous "terror" of the inclusive vision.

Chapter four, an examination of Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988), characterizes the artist figure as a "collector" and suggests that her desire for *self-*possession is expressed in her desire likewise to possess and imaginatively transform the overwhelming material ground of her being. Atwood's Elaine Risley is a painter whose childhood in the northern backwoods has exempted her from the flourishing consumer culture of late 1940s Toronto. When she arrives in the city at the age of eight, her sudden immersion in a world abounding in *material* invigorates a particularly acutely self-conscious relationship to the object world, and excites an attitude that is implicitly artistic in its deference to the integrity of objects. Elaine's unrelieved object-fixations (illustrating her "encyclopedic imagination") are socially cued by her childhood persecution by three playmates and formally cued by her painter's eye. Atwood's novel is a provocative study in the social nature of objects and the power of objects to

demonstrate an identity, even while they threaten to overwhelm the subject. The chapter is interested in the poetics of collection and exhibition in *Cat's Eye* and, in particular, the way in which Elaine's curiously objective self-portraiture complements Atwood's own desire to offer her readers a materially inclusive period portrait of Toronto in a quasi-autobiographical fiction. The novel is a kind of personal exhibition and contains an abundance of literal and figurative museums. At the heart of this chapter is a meditation on the recurring trope of the "perverse museum" in Atwood's writing. The perversity of the museum concretely reveals the conflictual relationship between absolute world-portraiture and absolute self-portraiture that is so central to my discussion of the "encyclopedic imagination." Drawing on theory that suggests that the collecting compulsion implicitly expresses the personal desire for individuation, the chapter tries to determine what possibilities exist for poetic closure and the identity of the collector in the face of the novel's "perverse" and museum-like inclusiveness.

Chapter five offers readings of the life-long poems of Louis Dudek and bpNichol, works that *would not have stopped* except for the death of the poet. Dudek's *Continuation* books and bpNichol's nine-volume *Martyrology* are artistically refined records of each poet's thought, works that dispose themselves openly to any valence of poetic meditation. Each poet insists that no aesthetic principle of closure can exist for the work and concedes only to the simple, irrevocable end that his own death imposes. This chapter attempts to define a core irony of the life-long poem. I note that although the poet tries to circumvent aesthetic closure by deciding instead on biographical closure, the very inscription of the poet's death into the poem's design inevitably *turns* his natural death into the work's chief literary trope. As such, the poet's death becomes something

other than the single principle of absolute finitude that guarantees the "continual" structure of the poem while the poet lives. Instead, the poem figures forth the death of the poet repeatedly, constantly. The poet figuratively "dies" to be resurrected many times in poetry. The myriad deaths enacted in the life-long work (and the hapless regeneration of new selves) are an almost obsessive expression of the poet's undeclared desire for poetic closure and subjective finitude. (In mentioning the poet's desire for finitude, I am certainly not pointing to a "death wish" in the poet. I am suggesting that the poem's liberal, open, continual design may, because of its identification with the shape of the poet's life, discomfit his more intuitive urge to feel the conceptual "limits" of selfhood.) The structure of poetic "resurrection" provides the poet with the constant opportunity to meet himself in poetry. The poem unfolds as a courting of self-identity, a common motivation for the "encyclopedic" poem. And the poet's biographical death provides the impetus for the *achievement* of perfect identity and fosters the obsessive structure of the work, as the poet repeatedly loses himself in a world of poetic objects and tries to find himself, finally.

My dissertation spans fifty years of Canadian writing and is nuanced by period shifts, especially from modernism to postmodernism. The trope of the "encyclopedic imagination" proves to be a useful lens through which to view changing attitudes about literary containment and closure. In the earlier works of my survey, it is clear that while the artist wants the work to be ever more inclusive, he or she is bound to a certain formalism. The "encyclopedic" *intention* must be wholly or partially ironized, unmet, or abandoned. The search for an authentic total vision generates paradoxes of representation but must ultimately confront its own failure. But the "encyclopedic" ideal

is no more realizable within a more postmodern orientation, which disposes itself liberally towards formal dissolution and claims no pressure to define a stable aesthetic or personal boundary. I argue that even when the work is free from its obligation to formal coherence, there remains a telling emotional orientation towards finitude that *maintains* certain modernist tensions. In this way, the arguably conservative character of the postmodernism that is expressed in the latter of these focal works is philosophically rich, and, in fact, humane; it shows that the creative imagination cannot after all readily release itself from the form and meaning that are rooted in the finite self.

CHAPTER ONE:

The "Hunger To Be Seen": *The Mountain and the Valley*'s Modernist New Eyes[1]

> It was as if you'd been given eyes for the first time; your first sight was met by the teeming insatiable hunger to be seen, of everything there was.
> (Ernest Buckler, *The Mountain and the Valley* 285)

In the last pages of Ernest Buckler's 1952 novel, *The Mountain and the Valley*, the protagonist is accosted by the spectacle of his entire world made marvelously, instantaneously, explicit. As he draws near to the summit of the mountain he has been attempting to climb since boyhood, David Canaan approaches the omniscient point of view and the panoramic vision "towards which his entire being has been tending" (Bhojwani 108). At thirty, David has exhausted his own life in the valley, and lost the shape and form of his experience. He has cherished every detail of his Annapolis Valley childhood, bringing his unflagging attention to everything: the texture of squaw-blossoms, the interstices of the window screen, the minute expressive shifts on the faces of others. But he has also jealously collected his perceptions in the spirit of an "inviolab[le]" secrecy that has progressively alienated him from his family and dissolved his sense of his own integrity (146). *The Mountain and the Valley* portrays in David an artistic imagination that is obsessed with evoking a vision that is (impossibly) *both* particular and essential, illuminating *everything there was*, and, in the novel's frequent formulation, *how it was with everything*.[2] The epigraph above presents David's vision of a landscape that meets his "first sight" rushingly and overwhelms him with its infinite demand for representation. Of course, it also reveals, with a disingenuous objectivity, the artist's *own* "hunger to be seen," as David senses himself becoming increasingly invisible

against the morass of everything that lies outside him; moments later, he lies dead beneath a heap of snow.[3]

In Buckler's handling of the "hunger to be seen, *of everything*" (285, emphasis added), two connected issues emerge that confirm *The Mountain and the Valley*'s importance in the canon of Canadian modernism, as well as its exemplary status in my examination of the "encyclopedic imagination." First, the novel expresses the struggle of the artist protagonist to rise to a sense of real presence. David Canaan's own bid for visibility against a world that teems with particularity produces a "crisis of the subject" (Eysteinsson 27) in which the protagonist's desperation to assert himself makes him "selfish" (Barbour, "David" 72) without ever being self-possessed. Second, the conflicting demand to be seen that appears to emanate directly from the object-world itself suggests the modernist imperative to "reflect the character of phenomena with fidelity" (Ortega y Gasset 13), though Buckler's David takes this principle to a destructive extreme. Damagingly, Buckler's artist *identifies* the infinite presence of the object-world with an enlarged and ideal self-concept, perhaps because he has always sought in himself a "condition for universality" that mimics modernist impersonality (223). At stake in the "awful challenge" of seeing everything precisely and without omission, then, is nothing less than the broad integrity of the self: "it was as if, in having neglected to perceive *every*thing exactly, he had been guilty of making the object, as well as himself, incomplete" (273, original emphasis). And nothing can accommodate the breadth of this objectively faithful and infinitely self-creating vision except the collapse of time.

If, as Henri Bergson lectured a century ago, "time is what prevents everything from being given all at once" (qtd. in R. Cohen iii–iv), then David's temporal sense is absolutely suppressed in his final impression of the world's total *givenness,* the vision that expressively extends his lifelong patterns of perception. Buckler shows that David's overdetermined seeing is crippling to his sense of self, especially as it bars him from a natural time-conception. Eventually, strenuous perception becomes the very *strategy* by which David denies time. Identity depends upon the sense of temporal persistence, which is each person's intuition that he or she changes but remains identical with past selves. Buckler's novel illustrates, crucially for Canadian modernism, a recurrent and often provocatively absolute contest between space and time, between the instantaneous artistic vision and the temporally-constituted sense of self. Buckler explores, on one hand, the modern novelist's obligation *to look at everything* accurately, and, on the other hand, the personalist impulse to obey the intuitive device of sense-making that Bergson identifies as the blind, subjective feeling of *duration.* Glenn Willmott proposes a similar binary when he suggests that the modernist English-Canadian novel in general and the *Bildungsroman* in particular seeks an expression of "the authority of experience" (29) that inevitably pits the impetus towards abstraction against the urge towards empathy (52).[4] These terms, borrowed from expressionist theorist Wilhelm Worringer, similarly oppose perception and intuition. Worringer suggests that modern art's prizing of perception and *form* redresses a primitive dread of extended space. For Worringer and his followers (notably Joseph Frank), modernist art aspires to "timelessness" in its high evaluation of the "instantaneous aesthetic experience" (Tate viii–ix). A certain strain of Buckler criticism, offering epiphanic and transcendental readings of the novel's close and

avowals of impersonality in the novel's style, supports the idea of the novel's deliberate movement towards timelessness and its pursuit of the instantaneous yet manifold moment of vision.

My own reading of the novel, on the other hand, seeks to restore temporal being and representation as the real issues of *The Mountain and the Valley*. The "encyclopedic imagination"—the desire to represent *everything*—may be David's particular creative gift, his recognition that the world begs infinitely for a responsive imagination to give it shape. But the "encyclopedic imagination," as we will increasingly come to know it, is a destructive obsession, dismantling the self with every detail that the artist is driven to include. David's desperate project of holding on to the delicious minutiae of his experience in its every detail compels him to forget himself in time. Buckler increasingly presents David's ecstasies not as visionary transports but as mere dissimulations of timelessness; in doing so, Buckler offers an implicit criticism of the modernist "new eyes" that help David abstract himself from the world he purports to hold dear.

Buckler insightfully links personal and moral integrity to the integrity of his artist's vision; he shows that the transcendent possibility of the impersonal vision is also, in a very real sense, the moment of the artist's personal and moral collapse. The motor of David Canaan's overactive perception is a fear of change and death; his emphatic seeing reflects his mistaken belief that time can be controlled through *attention* and that he can circumvent loss. It appears that David is trapped by the "cold physics of time" itself, as Bruce Macdonald argues (205), but the greater threat to David's identity is his deliberately protracted (and thus inauthentic) experience of time. Intense visual experience becomes a consolation and eventually a device to David as he loses that

which, to a point, defines and circumscribes his life: his family bonds. Over the years, the family naturally disperses: David's twin sister Anna moves away and marries; his brother Chris falls into the rhythms of valley life; his parents Martha and Joseph die; his grandmother Ellen grows forgetful and remote. In light of his growing isolation, David's deliberate and increasingly self-conscious attempts to make the moment "brim over" with unreflective sensation preserve, artificially, the "texture of youth" (227). David's perceptual thirst is not for long an innocent mode of seeing that embraces "new" experience. It represents, rather, David's insulation of himself against a fear, precociously manifested, of the possible exhaustion of *all* experience. David staves off some future moment of reflection or performance by overwhelming himself with perception. Over the course of the novel his visual experience becomes a perverse strategy of deferring self-realization and keeping his world artificially "new." He consciously pursues a vision of the world's totality, but also unconsciously mitigates it. Buckler offers us an original nuance on modernist impersonality and the practice of "suspending the process of individual reference *temporarily* until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (Frank 13, emphasis added). Damagingly, although Buckler's protagonist seeks a vision of the world that should be *finally* integrable, he does not mind if his vision is *intermittently* inchoate and awash in particulars. In fact, he revels in the "flood" of the immediate present insofar as it helps him avoid the consolidation and thus the limitation of his own identity.

Marta Dvorak's meticulous study of the rhetorical strategy of accumulation in the novel suggests that Buckler's own style conveys an "ontological vehemence" or an insistence on immediacy and "there-ness." Dvorak argues that Buckler's realism is held

in tension with an impersonal idealism by which his character David finally becomes the "clear eye of the world," a sensible seer who overcomes the boundaries of his own personality to fuse his own subjectivity with the world of objects (*Ernest Buckler* 72). But I find that Buckler's strategic presentation of David as the (unselective) "eye of the world," in every case reveals a subjectivity so persistently under-realized that it cannot properly be *overcome*. And wherever Buckler's own style is impressionistic in a way that responds to reality as a "continuous mass of presentation" (Schwartz 32), the reader tangibly feels the lack of equilibrium between the world and the "organizing" consciousness.

The "encyclopedic" quality of the novel's narration extends to both its apparently objective passages and its apparently subjective ones. In a passage that goes so far as to present the day, catalogically, as an "unwithheld entirety" (113), the speaker ("Buckler"? David?) is remote but straining for presence, unidentified and yet obtrusive. Buckler creates a sense, not quite of "there-ness" (as a crux of time, place, and *self*), but of the world's total *appearance*. The passage is self-consciously superficial, dwelling on the "faces" and facets of things, their spatiality, and their formal patterning. The excerpt feels uncomfortably weighty in its detail because the *source* of its encompassing perspective is unclear. The passage is not as evidently subjective as some passages of the novel are; and yet, neither is it as objective as it purports to be when it implicitly identifies the speaker with the omniscient "light" that goes out over everything:

> [...] [T]he albino light, simmering patiently in the aspic air like a sound after the ear for it is gone, lacquered [the squaw weed and the goldenrod] like the shells of the pumpkins piled before the shop. It hung clearly and expandingly between the

> branches of the chestnut tree before the house, bare now as a tree a child draws. The bones of the tree seemed to have a luminosity of their own. It diamonded the bits of glass on the ground, prodigally and sadly, because it would not come again. It furred a strand of the wire fence with light distilled pure and memoryless from the light of summer [...] The pasture decayed gently, lingering after sentience, and lacquered after death with the wistful fall-stain: the burning red of the hardhacks, the blood-red of the wild-rose berries, and the age-brown of the wafered alder leaves. The mud of the mountain road flaked like a pie crust. But wherever a puddle remained in the ruts from last night's rain the yellow light sought it as a mirror. It looked for its own face but made no image but the bright reflection of its own transparency [...]. (112)

This is a perturbed omniscience. The personality of the speaker obtrudes in the passage's verbal coinages ("expandingly," "diamonded," "furred"), suggesting David's synaesthetic and naïve relationship to language, but is concealed again in the sheer quantity of observation and the apparently omniscient perspective. The speaker *aspires* to a visionary omniscience and non-identity in his pursuit of the neutrality, "transparency" and compass of the light's own nature and reach, but neither the speaker's omniscience nor his subjective "*there-ness*" is fully established. Buckler's use of the descriptive terms "aspic," "lacquered," and "diamonded" seems to imitate the hard, clean, impersonal perceptions of modernism. The "luminosity" of the stark bones of the tree may refer to Stephen Dedalus's requirement that the object of (modernist) attention is "luminously apprehended selfbounded and selfcontained against the expanse of space and time which is not it" (Joyce 230). The speaker is too purely an *observer* to really convey such a

sense of immediacy. And yet, the passage never achieves the restraint of high-modernist objectivity, either. The speaker's "eye" never comes to rest on an image in such a way to suggest that, as Pound would have it, "the natural object is always the adequate symbol" (qtd. in Levenson 110). Without a sense of the sufficiency of the percept, the narrator is driven to further and further acts of attention, and this descriptive passage continues at great length. Though the narrator seeks to present himself as "transparent" and "memoryless" and "albino" and "pure" as the scene, the visible non-fulfillment of this intention emphasizes instead the subject's more intuitive struggle to declare itself, just as the fugitive light "look[s] for its own face" (112).

In Buckler's more typical style, the narration seems to express more definitely the private movements of David's *own* consciousness, which likewise appears disconcertingly unlimited. In such instances, the narrative conveys, in almost Pater-esque fashion, David's life of "constant and eager observation" (Pater 249) and boundless free association. Now the narrative is not impersonal but radically *personal*, engulfing everything in a voracious (and thus, nearly formless) subjectivity.[5] Any one of David's experiences will find dozens of analogies in memory, generating *lateral* associations that occur to David—importantly—"like the figures of space" (75). Early in the novel, David has a starring role in a play. He feels a sweeping pleasure in being the one to show his family and neighbours (none of whom share his artistic temperament) his ability to transform everything imaginatively. He describes the encompassing "shine" that goes "out over everything" as he creates himself onstage as the object of everyone's attention (again linking artistic representation to the inclusiveness and transparency of light itself) (75). Buckler portrays the movements of David's mind as "glimpsed" and, very

pointedly, "not time-taking" (75). In spatializing David's memories and moods, Buckler denaturalizes David's thought and reveals the degree of self-abstraction implicit even in what appears to be a deeply interior and personal catalogue of associations:

> A shine [...] went out over everything now.
>
> None of this was consecutive and time-taking like thought. It was glimpsed instantaneously, like the figures of space. And orchestrated in the subliminal key of memory: cold water reaching to the roots of his tongue when thirst in the haymow was like meal in his mouth ... the touch of the crisp dollar bill he had changed his dented pennies for at the bank in town ... the light on the water curling white over the dam when his line first came alive with the dark, secret sweep of the trout ... the cut clover breathing through his open window just before summer sleep ... the sound of his father's sleighbells the night of the day he'd sent for the fountain pen ... the date of the Battle of Flodden looked up tremblingly in the book and found to be exactly the same as the one he'd put down, uncertainly, in the examination ... the doctor coming out of the room and saying [David's sister] Anna would be alright [...]. (75, original ellipsis)

The list of similes purporting to clarify David's current mood is overwhelming and incredible; what emotional experience could be equivalent to *all* of these, and many more? The passage is voiced in a manner closely sympathetic to David's own consciousness (an intermittent technique which, when abandoned, also helps underline Buckler's irony). And yet, this suspension of neutral omniscience in order to bring the reader closer to David's thought does nothing to secure the meaning of this passage, or

limit the scope of its web of references, because David's unselective ego is so encompassing as to eventually forbid his own individuality.

Buckler's novel puts the incoherence of personhood at stake in the incoherence of the encompassing vision and, accordingly, in the accumulative style. In this respect, Buckler seems to exemplify something essential to his generation. Brian Trehearne cites Buckler's artist's determination to "get it all in" (150, 261) as an illustration, in the fictional mode, of the desire for the *integritas*[6] that was the "quest object" for the poets of the Montreal forties (67). The ambivalent status of the poet as an anxious inventory taker or accumulator of images reflects, for Trehearne, the embattled status of the *subject* in the works of the second generation of Canadian poets to respond to high-modernist impersonality (73). The organizing poetic consciousness, emergent but not explicit, is generative because it is not free to assert its own "limits." Modernist principles foster a reluctance to make subjectivity the appreciable standard for the poem's coherence; this produces a tension in the work whereby the subject's inability to come to the fore mitigates both the integrity of the work and the "psychic wholeness" of the poetic persona itself (69). Buckler's novel, too, suggests a relationship between its artist figure's inability to limit his vision and, as we will discover, his inability to operate comfortably within the bounds of a practical subjectivity.

It may be pressing Trehearne's point too far, though, to suggest that Buckler likewise writes accumulatively in response to the pressures of modernist doctrine. *The Mountain and the Valley* was composed in geographical isolation and pursued secondarily to the unremitting demands of Buckler's farm; in fact, Buckler, with self-deprecating humour, describes penning his work on days when the brindle-heifer wasn't

due for "romance" ("My First Novel" 22). Buckler's essay, "My First Novel," makes it clear that he had no desire to participate actively in any literary culture, to write according to any purposive statement, manifesto or aesthetic, or to carve out a place for himself in any tradition, though he names a number of modernist writers whose works permeated his thought at the time: Elizabeth Bowen, E.M. Forster, Henry James, Dylan Thomas, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Marcel Proust (24). *The Mountain and the Valley,* nonetheless, provocatively illuminates and criticizes modernist philosophies of time and space, modernist aesthetics, and modernist experimentation with personality and impersonality.

Buckler's philosophical interest in the boundaries of perception and selfhood complements modernist aesthetic concerns. As an MPhil candidate (in metaphysics), Buckler formally considered the problem of whether there could exist an "all-encompassing absolute self" and concluded (through Hegel and Schelling) that there was a frustrating double bind at the centre of the question. By necessity, the all-encompassing perspective must also comprehend *itself*, meaning that it must be self-conscious to be absolute. But as soon as a perspective is self-conscious, it is *excluded* from the absolute; it is, rather, concerned with discriminating the boundary of the self and distinguishing it from the not-self. Buckler remarks on this paradox in his notes: "the self-conscious being is, of necessity limited, and [...] the absolute being because unlimited, may not be personal" ("Progress of Idealism").[7] This tension, finding expression in Buckler's novel, helps to produce modernist values in *The Mountain and the Valley* that may not explicitly be modernist *commitments*.

Laurie Ricou shares my interest both in what he calls the "aesthetic of getting-it-all-in" and in David's conscious manipulation of the stretch of time in order to do so (685), but ultimately characterizes the novel's modernism differently. In Ricou's view, David figuratively remains a child for all his thirty years, and retains the sense of wonder that gives a childlike coherence to his world. Naive apprehension, like David's, is a type of impersonal (unselective) encompassment, which, by Ricou's analysis, positively complements Buckler's. For Ricou, the "draftsmanlike precision" and "cinematic magic" of Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending A Staircase* (1912), a painting that crosses David Canaan's mind in the epilogue, models Buckler's own style, with its "multiple overlapping images at once static and spatial yet containing the movement of time" (695). This analogy suggests Buckler's allegiance to an impersonal high modernism: precision, stasis, image, and the abstraction and containment of time. Ricou's reading suggests that Buckler's novel treats spatiality in a way that is faithful to theorists in the tradition of Worringer and Frank, in whose view "static images simultaneously apprehended" offer a "liberation from time" (Hollington 431). But my reading asserts that David's propensity for "stretching" time illustrates not the preservation of his sense of wonder but the wilful delay of his self-realization. The value that Buckler wishes to promote is not "liberation from time" but rather the *significant experience* of time.

Buckler's mountain itself is a figure for "natural" time-conception, where the movement toward and away from the peak represents the structure of anticipation, experience, and remembrance. David's efforts to climb the mountain frame the novel and twice raise the definitive issue of whether "natural" experience—experience in time—is available to David. At the outset, eleven-year-old David awakens to the

possibility of climbing the south mountain to a fishing camp with his father and brother. Buckler's third-person narrator exclaims, in David's idiom, "This was the very day!" (13). Despite conveying the sense that this day will deliver something David has long hoped for, the scene is marked everywhere with indications of his contradictory wish to *defer* the entire experience. Walking along the log road, he discovers that the anticipation of climbing the mountain is actually preferable to the climb itself; he elects to stop and *look* at the mountain in the distance: "Let's wait," thinks David, "I can be near the mountain and save it at the same time" (22). A problem of personal commitment, which will become a problem of artistic commitment, is taking root. David's desire to be near, and yet to save, the mountain, expresses his desire to be near, but ultimately *not to have*, his dynamic experience, his "very day." His visual perception preserves rather than delivers the sought-after experience, and he seizes upon the damaging idea that experience does not have to be unique and irrecoverable: "He thought, we could do this every day! We will! We'll come back here and eat every day!" (23). His original sense of the import of his "very day" dissolves, as does his general impetus towards personal progress in time. Buckler, through Aristotle, once described the shape of a cone as a symbol for "the vital principle of all action" ("Aristotle's Psychology" 7). The peak signifies self-sophistication, representing that toward which one strives. The base represents unrefined soul and matter, and movement towards it suggests the energy of avoidance. One can easily see the shape of the Aristotelian cone reflected in the form of Buckler's mountain. David's arrested progress towards his self-sophistication and his tendency to balk before "the vital principle" turn the novel's major episodes into a catalogue of abortive experience and persistent self-loss. David cannot complete his first

climb up the mountain at any rate because of an external circumstance: the drowning deaths of two village men in the pond at the fishing camp. David, Joseph and Chris are compelled to turn around and accompany the surviving men back to Entremont. The deaths of Spurge Gorman and Pete Delahunt (to which Joseph and the men respond "like chastened children" [35]) fittingly expose the illusion of temporal control that David is newly embracing. Though David believes that he can defer and "save" his experience by stopping to survey and represent it to himself, the cruel, sudden deaths of the village men—especially of Pete Delahunt who had fought unscathed at Ypres and Verdun—are a reminder of the inescapable mortality and finitude David is beginning to deny.

Near the end of the novel, in a contrasting episode, David's twin sister climbs the same mountain in adulthood with her husband Toby, in the full knowledge that their return to the valley will mean Toby's departure for war (now the Second World War). Anna asserts a view, similar to David's and likewise hyperbolically asserted, that she is coming not only to "the peak of the day" but also to "the peak of her whole life" (263). But she is willing, unlike David, to climb right to the top, and to *feel* the moment of arrival: "It lasted, and she couldn't speak [...] It lasted for one long minute" (263). As Anna descends, "the time began to go. This would be the last day; and the day before the going is shadowed with the going, so that there is no free time left" (263). Anna's experience of *duration*—the palpable change in her consciousness as she anticipates, experiences, and mourns the "peak of the day"—gives the interval its form. The curtailment of her sense of freedom on the way down is the cost of the genuine emotion she experiences. David, in generating the idea over the course of his lifetime that "nothing behind you is sealed, you can live it again. You can begin again..." (283,

original ellipsis) preserves his ostensible freedom. But in doing so, he cuts himself off from the possibility of authentic emotion and leaves his true freedom unrealized.

A lifelong immersion in visual experience insulates David, or so he believes, against time. As an adolescent, he tends a graveyard with his family and shudders at the sight of the tombstones of young family members. He wonders how death could have overtaken them, and significantly observes that "They couldn't have been *watching*" (86, original italics). Under the implicit belief that time can be suspended and death deferred through attention, David becomes a consummate observer. Bergson claims that determined visual attention (unnaturally) maintains the present tense and that dropping the gaze relegates each percept *ipso facto* into the past ("Perception of Change" 173). Of course, Bergson is most strenuous in his belief that our intuition of change and death is fundamental to our sense of vitality. It is one of *The Mountain and the Valley's* cruel ironies that David is vigilant and accumulates perceptions in order to stave off death, but that obsessive attention is itself an anti-vital attitude. In recounting the last day of David's life, Buckler again reminds us of the deadening quality of David's thorough commitment to perceiving *everything*. David, fascinated, is also fixated and perfectly still: "Detail came clearly enough to David's sight; but it was as if another glass, beyond the glass of the window pane, covered everything, made touch between any two things impossible" (8). The objects of his sight are autonomous and individual: apple trees and bushes are "locked and separate," ice is "honeycomb[ed]," even movements themselves are spatialized as "line drawings of movements" (8). In marshalling these particulars, he loses his own impetus to act: "any impulse to movement receded before the compulsion of the emptiness" (8). The perception of objects as bounded and self-contained—

modernist aesthetic perception—deprives David of any motivation. He lifts the objects of his perception out of time, but loses himself in the act, his will paralyzed in the exaggerated drive to see with objective clarity.

Enthusiastic visual perception, sometimes expressed in the novel as a drive to see objectively and sometimes expressed as a desire to see quantitatively, is a strategy by which David avoids "real" temporality. Likewise, he embraces the mediating property of language as it guards him against a too-direct contact with his world. His pleasure in words is a pleasure derived from the power of language to abstract him from experience, rather than from the power of language to represent it. Even as a child, David cannot immerse himself directly in the onslaught of sensory experience that Buckler gives us in eager catalogues. David regulates the time in which he experiences these things through the ritual recitation of lines to the upcoming town play, thus individuating the otherwise "brimming" moments:

> [David thought of his lines when] Joseph thrust his fork slowly into the great cock of hay, lifting the whole thing except for a few scatterings that clung to the ground, above his head: settling it carefully into place on the side of the load and then walking patiently alongside the snail-slow oxen on the sun-parched stubble[....] He thought of them when Chris was dropping seed potatoes, aligning the odd one that tumbled out of place, with his foot; pressing it into the soft brooch-coils of manure automatically. He'd say, 'It'll soon be time for swimmin', Chris'—so that Chris could break away a second from the steadiness of the furrow; so that he could think of his naked body in the water and have somewhere outside the moment to go, too. [...] And to think of them, with Anna,

> was best of all. For Anna was like a second safety: a place he would still have—to go to, if his secret thoughts ever failed. (50)

In reciting the scripted lines while experiencing these things, David uses language not *referentially* to represent his experience, but as a pacing device to lift him out of the moment and to help him *watch* (notably, this passage figures David's sister as a "place"). Language distracts David from each source of his joy, thereby sharpening his perception of it. This sharpened perception, however, awakens in turn his need to preserve and contain such moments, to represent them properly. David's exaggerated self-consciousness perpetuates the need to be inside and outside the moment at once, seeking a way to possess yet also to prolong his experience. Buckler suggests that the words from the play are a *relief* from the intensity of life itself: "The words were a kind of refuge when the moment was bare, stripped right down to time and place" (51). Through attention, David marks (and stretches) moments. But each small act of acute recognition makes him prematurely—and neurotically—self-conscious.

David comes to recognize and fear his rapid exhaustion of "new" experience as the novel delivers two episodes of easy fulfilment: a Christmas which meets and surpasses David's every desire; and later, a precocious sexual encounter. Buckler develops the Christmas scene similarly to the "very day" of the climb, suggesting that each special day of David's life takes on qualities of the original abortive event, the incident repeated with diminishing sincerity: "[T]his was the morning itself," writes Buckler (61), echoing "This was the very day!" (13) but without the same degree of complicity in David's excitement. On Christmas Eve, David dreams about climbing the mountain, and imagines that "all the trees along the road were Christmas trees" (60). The

proliferation of Christmas trees suggests David's hope for the inexhaustibility of Christmas, and recalls his original resolution that the trip to the fishing camp need not be singular ("He thought, we'll do this every day!" [23]). The resurgence of the memory of the climb also reflects the intensity of David's time conception around a special event, and the sensation of coming to the "peak" of an experience through anticipation and then regret: "There were the three days: the day before Christmas, the day of Christmas, and the day after" (54). The episode pervasively expresses David's anxiety about the "spending" of Christmas. The difference between this day and the day of the climb up the mountain is that David must confront a devastating eventuality: the gratification of his desires. Thus Christmas gifts form part of the novel's motifs of givenness and withholding, mystery and unveiling. By "holding back" presents for each of the children, Joseph and Martha delay the moment when, in Buckler's own words, each child's "allotment must be exhausted" (63); the parents unconsciously contribute to their younger son's fear that there are sharp limitations on the experience of the "new." David's misapprehension about "the plain having" (63) reflects his general anxiety about the moment when the novelty of his experience is exhausted and when he has figuratively "run out of gifts." In "[t]he tree, delivered now of its mysteries" (63), Buckler suggests the exhaustion of the archetypal tree of knowledge and implies, with a kind of postlapsarian regret, David's diminishing ability to enter innocently into contact with the mysteries of life.

David's gifts, particularly the kaleidoscope and the skates, suggest his "gifts" of perception. These objects reflect David's potential to conceive of his world in different kinds of unity: one visual and composite, the other transcendent and epiphanic, both

subject to Buckler's implicit criticism. A "mosaic," kaleidoscopic vision contributes, theoretically, to a sense of self-alienation: "In his lectures, Bergson argues that philosophers since Zeno have misconstrued the self because they have confused duration with extension, treating mental states in spatial terms. In their thinking, consciousness becomes a mere mosaic, rather than an interpretative movement" (Ellmann 23). The "stereoscopic immaculacy" of David's perception (Buckler, *Mountain* 96) contributes to a damaging, "mosaic" mode of consciousness. David, in childhood, feels the "repleteness" of the air so palpably that he is convinced that it gives the valley an absolute definition. This "repleteness" produces the valley's (kaleidoscopically) "split surfaces" and "scallops," "pyramids" and "rhomboid shadows":

> The swamps cracked open like a buttermilk pie. Bugs tented in the alders and gauzed their leaves. The cow path to the brook (through the pines dropping their immaculately scalloped cones, the poplars rattling their leaves like silver coins, the red pyramids of bunchberries, the lush green ferns patterned like snow crystals, and the sudden storms of small white butterflies) was firm as stone. (96)

Buckler renders the details of David's vision with a kaleidoscopic sense of colour, geometry and tessellated patterning. But Buckler also sets up these particulars as a distraction and a burden to the reader, particularly in the overloaded parenthesis that makes the reader forget the original subject of the sentence. The detailed vision produces, even for David, an ultimate sense of the *unreality* of the scene. The mountains, to which all of these particulars have been leading, "loo[k] like *pictures* of mountains" (96, original emphasis). After the Christmas scene, Buckler expresses skepticism about this kind of mosaic perception in that David's kaleidoscope has been purchased literally

at the cost of vitality; David knows that his brother Chris has bought him the toy with money he earned by trapping rabbits.

The gift of the skates also suggests a (dubious) movement towards impersonality and self-abstraction. David wants to master the "crossover" (the footwork necessary for a smooth turn), a term that itself implies his urge toward self-transcendence:

> Then, just then—[...] when the dark spruces began to come in closer around the blue meadow ice and the blue ice seemed to stretch farther away toward the other side of the woods, hardening and booming with a far-off sound so it would bruise you if you fell on it and you were alone, but not now, because Anna was there with you, watching—just then, he did it. (66)

Most striking in this passage (besides its obtrusive perceptual and even grammatical strategies of delay) is the pronoun shift at the moment of the "crossover," when the intimate "you" suddenly becomes "he" (66). The unexpected use of the third-person looks forward to the (ironic) impersonality of David's mountaintop omniscience; in fact, David *remembers* the gift of the skates at almost the very moment of his death (294). But irony is richly present in Buckler's depiction of the "crossover," as its validity to David depends on Anna's witnessing of it. Likewise, his final epiphany disintegrates when David adopts an externalized perspective in order to anticipate the praise that Anna will give him. Therefore, the Christmas gifts that describe David's "gifts" of perception also describe two ambivalent forms of self-abstraction that will be more fully developed in the scene of David's death.

The fulfilling Christmas scene, in fact, *predicts* death and loss. David's many small gratifications actually amount to an overarching sense of loss and a consuming fear

that he will never know such happiness again. Though Christmas has been a time of unparalleled family closeness and exquisite domestic joy, the Christmas scene ends with a storm that projects a deep mourning, a radical nothingness:

> A shuddering of the bed awakened David as sleep wore thin with the thinning of the dark. Then he heard the mourning wind. It lashed the house, hard and lost. The house seemed caught inside one great mouth. The wind tried to swallow it, then rushed moaning across the fields like something out of its mind, gathering up the helpless snow, and returning again and again to knock itself out against the windows. (67)

This imagery is shockingly bleak, and uncharacteristically so at this early and often idyllic phase of the novel. And yet, in one way, it is a simple reprisal of the *other* times in which forces of nature (the light, the air) extend over and encompass David's world, as he himself would increasingly like to do in thought and in representation. But here, the wind's "swallowing" of the world is unambiguously mad and futile; it anticipates David's own fruitless "gathering" of particulars and his exclusion—"again and again"—from a sense of the real. The sinister window on which the "gathering" wind batters itself suggests the novel's emphasis on the mediate quality of David's experience, despite the spate of particulars that he perceives so rushingly and apparently so happily. In his portrait of David's Christmas, Buckler creates a crux of fascinating correspondences between David's gratification and his grief; his original awakening to the light of "the very day" and his awakening to the "thinning of the dark"; his desire to perceive his world as endlessly renewable and the promise of a return "again and again" to a sense of nothingness. In Buckler's description of the storm, there is a definite and early

condemnation of the gathering-up of particulars; the same implicit condemnation will apply to David's literary efforts and his death. The night of the storm, moreover, separates Christmas Day from the day of the town play, the first occasion in the novel for David's artistry; the storm casts a particular pall over this performance. The *reason* that the play must be performed at Christmas, moreover, is that the deaths of Spurge Gorman and Pete Delahunt have required a postponement of the play until now, a fact that subtly reinstates death and deferral in these scenes.

In David's first artistic enterprise, the town play, Buckler objectifies time in the rising and falling curtain that separates the scenes. David's own perception of time fragmented into "instants" contributes to a sense of personal fracture. David visualizes the moment in which he will have to bring himself to an audience by concentrating on the curtain that will be lifted to reveal him; as such, the curtain comes to embody the separation and thus the spatialization of moments ("The moment stopped moving. The curtain was pulled back" [71]). When "the relentless minute" arrives, David surprises himself with the joy of making himself into someone else (another wavering instant of self-transcendence):

> Oh, it was perfect now. He was creating something out of nothing. [...] He'd take them with him always, in their watching [...] Oh, this was perfect. There was a bated wonder coming from their faces: to know that this was David, but a David with the shine on him (they'd never suspected!) of understanding and showing them how everything was. (75)

The moment of David's artistic performance has been rendered so significant by his anxiety and anticipation that, when it arrives, it strikes him with a unity-conferring

power. But the aesthetically individuated moment proves to be one of absolute self-division. The "spell" of the play is broken when David breaks from the script to kiss his sweetheart, Effie, and is (lightly, but devastatingly) taunted by a neighbour. David curses ("as if it were another person") the part of himself that imaginatively created the moment as "perfect" (77, 76). According to Bergson, "we are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work" (qtd. in Lacey 83). By this criterion, one would expect David's spontaneous kiss to *be* a "free act" of which his "whole self" has been the author, his scripted character momentarily identical with himself. But his sense of self-betrayal reveals his growing conviction that his spontaneous self is *not* his true self. David will resolve this dichotomy by coming to prefer the less participatory version of himself, the persona who concentrates upon and individuates moments and who stands apart (and outside the moment) to show everyone "how everything was" (75).

Though his portrait of David Canaan emphasizes pathologies of perception and character, Buckler also illustrates that David's attunement to his own life always had the *potential* to unfold into writerly intuition and social concord. The Baptizing Pool—the swimming hole where the boys of Entremont are exuberant and ribald with one another—is where David, far from being excluded, is "in the thick of it" (97). He "seemed forever, by the twist of essentiality he gave to whatever they said or did, to be disclosing and illuminating a part of [his friends' lives that] they'd never recognized before" (98). Not only is David able to show the boys "how it [is]," he is able to do it from a participatory perspective and without contrived time conception strategies.[8] Paul Fussell describes

"boys bathing" as a literary convention, a pastoral set-piece meant to highlight the "vulnerability of the flesh" and the poignancy of "youth unscathed" (301, 306). Buckler's description is nostalgic, even romantic: "Summer impregnated their flesh like the flesh of Early Transparents" (97). Notably, Buckler does not seem to be speaking here with a diction inflected by David's style of thought at all; it is as if David's unexpected "naturalness" suddenly also enables the narrator's full omniscience, a rare feature of the novel.

But such spontaneity readily changes—and David's self-representation becomes strategic and posturing—with the appearance of Effie on the horizon. David's lack of personal integrity is most evident in his treatment of Effie, and the scene of his sexual conquest of her is rife with indications of the collapse and distention of his identity, and the falsification of his experience in time. Their premature loss of virginity—suggesting David's general rapid exhaustion of the "new"—is marked by David's manipulation of events in time. David boasts of his seduction of Effie ahead of the fact, and then feels pressed to render it true, his skewed version of sincerity. All the young boys of Entremont grapple with the unknown nature of sex by abstracting it, carving into trees and rails "rude diamond shapes supposed to represent that part of a girl known to them in imagination only" (97). But David's advance symbolic possession of the sexual act is so far in excess of rude diamond shapes that he scripts the entire event beforehand—his part and Effie's. The incident forms part of a general pattern where advance over-representation purports to give David his experience in its ideal form, but only really mitigates its truth. The terrible script, including such lines as "It's hot isn't it...I'm frozen stiff" (at which point David intends to undress), is hopelessly contrived, meant to protect

David against a too-personal engagement (102, original ellipsis). He cannot bear the idea that Effie's spontaneous responses could throw off his formula, and "wishes he could do it with Effie as if somehow she wasn't there [...]" (102). The extreme impersonality of this act is exacerbated later in the novel when Effie dies of leukemia but David, not knowing the cause, believes he has killed her by taking her into a damp field (even though she has a cold) to impress his friend Toby. He martyrs himself to her memory and quickly inoculates himself against any sincere sadness by over-immersing himself in his guilt and thereby dissolving it (Williams 167). As such, his later mourning takes the form of the seduction itself and, indeed, the form of most of David's experience: over-represented and under-realized.

David's sexual encounter with Effie illustrates David's desire to be *utterly* self-possessed. This is an impetus ultimately linked to his "encylopedic imagination" which aims, as well, at David's self-perfection, his total identification with everything. David at no point allows himself to be disconcerted by Effie's otherness, her femininity. Whereas Chris and his girlfriend Charlotte (in their contrasting first encounter) are "shock[ed]" by the spectacle of one another's bodies (92), Effie's body is familiar—even overfamiliar—to David: "She looked like Anna did, when Anna was a child [....] She looked like a child undressing for bed" (105). David's effort to "swallow" Effie entirely in this act reflects his eventual desire to "swallow" the whole world. Buckler writes, in this typical vocabulary, that David "tried to absorb every bit of [Effie] in a kind of swallowing" (105), a description that comes alarmingly close to Neodoncelle's portrait of the sadist who "wants to do the impossible and make all the subjectivity of his partner pass into her body" so that he can possess her totally (44). But David is not a sadist; he is a boy acting

ahead of his own maturity and aggravating a sense of self that, because it is not coherently possessed, also cannot be given. Buckler makes a constant issue of the personal boundary in this scene, a boundary that is everywhere and nowhere; David is "contracted and scattered" (105) and Effie, true to her name, is self-effacing. In this episode, Buckler develops the way in which David tends to encounter a new experience with a barricade of artifice meant to further the creation of an ideal self—at the expense, here, of the other.

David's vulnerability to the opinions of others (to which Effie is a sacrifice) arises from the coherence of character he perceives in them. Other people, like objective things, "accuse" David with an integrity he feels lacking in himself. David's first *written* self-representation in the novel is a letter to his prospective friend (and future brother-in-law), Toby Richmond. David notices, daunted, that Toby's letter is perfectly contained and defined by the length of the page: "The message ended where the page ended. Not as if it had exhausted itself; but as if, what was the sense of digging out more paper, to prolong it?" (109). This rather bizarre observation of David's reflects his strange and growing jealousy that Toby's self-expression is able to find convenient limits. Buckler (transmitting David's neurosis) remarks obsessively on Toby's impermeable "limit of trespass" (137), his "demarcat[ion]" (245), and his "fulfilled" face beside David's "inconsummate" one (204). It is under the compulsion of Toby's solidity, his capacity for adventure, and his cosmopolitanism that David is driven to dissociate himself from everything that is important to him.

Tragically, David cannot identify with his father's inner "tune" (150); melody to Bergson is the very symbol of inner continuity (*Duration* 44). David strives instead to

identify with Toby, a boy who conspicuously possesses a wristwatch, time abstracted. When the two boys are drifting off to sleep one night, David bolts up in bed and asks Toby if he has remembered to wind his watch. The possible allusion to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*[9] suggests a link between David's desire to possess his *whole* experience and Tristram's attempt to write the Tristrapoedia. Just as Tristram's story—one that aims at total self-possession—is one of deferred engenderment, so David's is also full of paradoxical relationships to time, where he cannot both inhabit and possess his experience. In a more modernist vein than Sterne's, of course, Buckler's novel shows that David entirely loses his sense of coherent personality in the struggle to do both.

David's crises of personal significance, such as a fight with his father, are marked by a Bergsonian rupture of *duration,* an abrupt (and very explicit) conversion of time into space: "[David] felt as if time had turned into space and was crushing against him" (164). David eventually asserts, even against his own inner conviction, that time exists in "rooms" and "wait[s] for you to straighten things out before you moved on" (282). Similarly, when he thinks of having betrayed Effie, he imagines that "by sheer will" he can "reach back through the [...] partition of time" (142) and alter the course of events. His constant reconceptualization of time in order to create himself in his own best light has become an outright denial of his own mortality and the irrevocability of his actions.

The delusion of eternal new beginnings that destroys David's sense of the shape and continuity of his life also affects his literary efforts. His inability to grasp the shape of time unfolding is a general problem of *form* that extends to his writing. David's first attempt at a story (the ill-fated "Thanks For Listening," which bears the same name as a story of Buckler's own) bears out all the problems that cripple the "naturalness" of

David's daily perceptions. The mediate quality of David's knowledge has an unacknowledged impact on the war story he is attempting to write: "He'd never seen a war, but that didn't matter [...]" (254). His idea expands in such a way that sheer detail stands in for the essence of an experience he knows he cannot grasp. The equation Buckler makes between mediate experience and the need for endless substantiation imitates, of course, David's attempts to grasp the meaning of his existence through intense observation. Just as this intensity in David's everyday perception leads to the fragmentation of time into "instants," the lines of the novel come to him in decontextualized pieces, posing a challenge to the novel's form: "A whole line came to him out of nowhere. He didn't know where it would fit, but he wrote it down" (254). And with every piece of apt description, David resolves that "he could do as much for everything in the world" (227), a vision of ultimate authorship that scatters his thinking to "the limit of what can be borne without madness" (227). Despite its pitifully confessional title, "Thanks For Listening" lacks the hallmark of the confession, which is "the integrat[ion] [of] mind on a subject" (Frye, *Anatomy* 208).

When the novelty of David's life in Entremont is inevitably exhausted, he becomes a silent witness to the contrastingly "newslike" and "narrative" changes in the lives of others (193): Anna's invitation to work in Halifax, Toby's enlistment in the war, Chris's coercion by the shrewish Rachel Gorman into a miserable marriage with her daughter Charlotte. "My life brimmed and emptied so soon," David eventually realizes, "and I could never fill it again" (263). This suggestion that David is *working* to "fill" his life with "brimming" moments suggests a disingenuousness of perception and experience. Even when there is nothing new in his environment to see, David continues

to seek out hyperbolically sensate experiences in order to stave off thought (and with it the moment of reflection, performance, form-giving). When his father strikes him in anger, he cherishes the blow as something "more grindingly sweet than anything he had ever known" (159). When a fall from the barn rafters gives him a recurring headache, the injury to his temple becomes a locus for his attention when a mounting self-consciousness makes the world an "unmanageable dream" (195). David's pain keeps the world strange and contingent, not yet absorbed. His pain is intimately important to him: "he personalize[s] it" (189). The moment of pain becomes, to David, a perfect subjectivity, a self-centred moment in which the world is temporarily, and even desirably, unassimilable. Pain serves him in much the same way that overly enthusiastic visual perception does, keeping some instant of cognition or realization at bay.

The barely recounted years of David's young adulthood, years in which David is "exiled from his imagination" (Chapman 197), are a period of tortuous vacillation between pain and habit. (This span of time comprehends the deaths of Martha and Joseph, to which the novel pays significantly little attention and, in this negligence, re-emphasizes David's denial of mortality.) The thorough descent into the repetitive farm-work that turns David into an automaton is not completely prescribed by necessity. It is, in part, a chosen activity of self-recollection where, by doing the same thing every day, he reinforces his tenuous self-concept. But as always, the experience of overfamiliarity or overdetermination is a sort of inoculation against David's ability to discover meaning in his life. Against the dullness of his experience, David finds that only pain-awareness is a "contrasted thing" (221) that revives his ability to focus; indeed only pain gives David the release from time that he has so often contrived for himself in the past.

David's sense that being hurt is "calm, biting, beautiful" (184) reflects the ability of pain to call him to consciousness and *fix* him in time and place. Such a disturbing attachment to painful sensation suggests Hume's observation (paraphased and then quoted by Anthony Kenny) that, "whenever I try consciously to locate myself, I can only do it with perception: heat, cold, light, shade, love, hatred, pain, pleasure; 'I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception'" (16, original emphasis). In other words, David's developing masochism reflects an increasingly desperate desire to locate himself, as if in answer to the novel's fundamental question, posed by old Ellen in the prologue and epilogue: "*David* was here. Where was David?" (12, 295, original emphasis). Because David cannot *intuit* himself, he must *perceive* himself. David does not hasten, similarly, to annul the emotional pain of alienation. After he and Chris have fought, he refuses to reconcile: "Suddenly, hurtingly, he was *glad* he had withheld annulment of this soreness between them" (193). In fact, the painful intractability between himself and his brother spurs David to write.

Kenneth Douglas explains the self-inflicted wound as a symptom of a person's desire for *self-perfection* (a desire which seamlessly extends to David's "encyclopedic imagination" and his desire to represent and thus identify with the entire world). For Douglas, the subject cherishes the obtrusion of whatever object pierces his flesh because of the perverse identification it suggests between the (terminally incomplete) subject and the (complete) object: "Man's basic, self-contradictory aim [....] is to be his own foundation, *ens causa sui*, to reach the satisfying fullness and self-identity of the object, while yet remaining sufficiently distinguished from this self to be conscious of it" (41). Of course, David does not deliberately injure himself, but merely enjoys the sensation of

pain when accidents befall him. But the most compelling connection between the cherished wound and the vision of a "perfected" self is in David's *aesthetic* prizing of injury. David's idealization of pain becomes evident in his conception of what constitutes the *mot juste* in his encapsulation of experience. In the book which David's literary benefactor Dr. Engles sends him in adolescence, the author's vocabulary is painfully sensate, as in phrases like "a shaft of memory stabbed him" or "it was the shocking cry of a child in extreme pain" (189). The words "stabbed," "shocked" and "struck" are, to David, ideal descriptors. His own first sense of writerly satisfaction comes from his invention of the phrase, "his brother's face looked struck" (190).[10] Strickenness and struck faces form a central part of Buckler's idiom as well as David's (193, 205, 210, 215, 228, 234, 254, 256-7, 259, 269, 270, 281). And during David's final ascent of the south mountain, when David's "encyclopedic" vision finally reaches the limit of what David can bear (and he believes that he can represent "everything there is" [296]), he catches himself on a barb, and later bashes his head deliberately against the "hard body" of a "great pine" (291). It is not simply that David needs to stop his rushing thoughts; it is that Buckler seems to want to establish an *association* between the kind of self-perfection David wants to achieve through comprehensive representation on one hand and the "taste of completion" (286) he gets, on the other hand, from pain. His pain is a gateway into the mountain's own "immediate *sharpness*" (280, emphasis added), and makes him receptive to the "*stinging* scream of clarity in the accusation of the unattended" (290, emphasis added).

David's climb up the mountain in the novel's epilogue delivers his self-completion and severs him finally and conclusively from time. Breathlessly, he is

pressed toward the absolute realization of his vocation, his vision, and himself. His ascent of the mountain from base to peak extrapolates him from his life in the valley, towards the omniscient position of being at the summit, and delivers percepts that kaleidoscopically splinter inwardly and outwardly into infinite facets. Every percept branches into an infinity of yet more particular seen and unseen parts: from trees to pine needles to *cells* of pine needles; from snowbank to snowflake to crystals he *doesn't* see. David feels accountable to "the listening presence outside him of every eye, every lash, every smile-wrinkle of every cheek that had ever been" (290); his thoughts "fa[n]" ever outward "into another infinite divisibility" (286). And only a climactic sense of timelessness can accommodate the fullness of his vision: "Time was not a movement now, but a *feature* of the frozen fields" (275, original emphasis). In this spectacularly suspended moment, David's perception rushes with preternatural quickness: "He could think of anything now. Everything seemed to be an aspect of something else. There seemed to be a thread of similarity running through the whole world. A shape could be like a sound; a feeling like a shape; a smell the shadow of a touch" [...] (281). In a rapid interplay of "inner" and "outer" vision, David finds intuition: suddenly, he apprehends the meaning behind things, the feelings behind the faces. For a second, he is caught up in a sweeping feeling of forgiving and being forgiven, and feels the desire to merge with his surroundings. He comprehends his entire life in a catalogue of apparently unconnected memories, now rushing at him as a blinding totality with an "edge of insistence. A sharper, drawing, eating challenge" (285). Buckler's prose achieves the frenetic quickness of a visionary madness as David arrives at the spot where his father was crushed under a tree. David's page-long obsession with "the implication of everything

that bent [the tree] to this spot exactly that way and then" (290) reveals that the absolute plenitude of meaning and total "implication" that has been striking David just now is indistinguishable from the absolute void of meaning represented by the death of his parent, a death David has scarcely acknowledged.

The uncontrollable catalogues of the epilogue culminate in David's "epiphany" which extends David's unreliable sense of comprehending his own life to an equally unreliable sense of comprehending the life of his community. As he approaches the peak of the mountain, David hears the scream of the "infinite permutations of the possible" (291). Unprepared to give in to this fluidity, David brings himself back into focus by grabbing a tree or yelling "stop" and then presses on, taxing his congenitally deficient heart (so that his imminent death is the direct result of his frenzied perception). At the summit, David omnisciently perceives that "[e]verything [is] beneath him now" (292) and finds the "voices and features" of his entire village are bound together in the "stillness" of "one definite instant" (292). In this moment—this aesthetically individuated moment that recalls so many other similarly "definite" ones—David resolves to bind the villagers' lives together in an artwork that will illuminate "their single core of meaning" (292). This admirable vision, merging the particular and the essential, is his would-be epiphany. But David's lack of commitment to this ideal comes through when he imagines phoning Anna to announce that his as yet unwritten book has won a prize. David's self-regard in this moment is predictably objectified in expectation of the praise that others will bestow on him. His binding vision disintegrates under his habitual tendency to step out of the moment and adopt a self-gratifying external survey of it.

David's death in the snow—a "transcendence" for J.M. Kertzer (82), a "godlike vision" for Alan Young (225), a "release into the infinitude of being" for L.M. Doerksen (55)—is also an ambivalent expression of the impersonality and atemporality necessary to his total vision. David has repeatedly had to sacrifice his sense of self in order to "get it all in"; and finally, under the snow, he has become "absolute[ly] white, made of all the other colours but of no colour itself at all" (294). His last "release" expressively extends his lack of commitment, his lack of colour. His vitality has always been sacrificed to his vision. The mountaintop vista, the most comprehensive scope, has likewise cut him off most definitely and most literally from his life. As his infinite vision gives way to self-aggrandizement, David dies in the snow or, figuratively, under a heap of unassimilated particulars (Kertzer 82–83). Here Buckler conclusively challenges, in my view, the portrait of the artist as the "eye of the world," the one who subordinates his personality to the telling (Dvorak *Ernest Buckler* 72). Expressively, David fatally collapses from his constitutional inner weakness in the moment when *everything is given all at once.* In this total vision, which is only achievable with the utter, irrevocable distension of David's sense of time (and, therefore, self), Buckler interrogates the "enlargement of the [modernist] poetic domain" that entails the "[weakening] hold of the organizing consciousness" (Levenson 163).

As David dies in the snow, his grandmother Ellen composes a round rug from bits of the family's old clothing, her craft an alternate mode of authorship. The metaphorical device of the round rug demands that readers see David in light of this second artist figure. Grandmother Ellen is a counterpoint to David in many respects, seeming to have the gift of creating organic unities out of pieces. Nearly blind, she is free from the

material distraction that overwhelms David's sight; her art is a synthetic art. Whereas David operates on a pretext of infinite futurity in which to realize his design, Ellen operates, at least for a time, in the realm of memory—and memory, being selective, automatically imparts form. She is a storyteller and a craftswoman, artisanal traits that Stephen Ross associates with authenticity (59). She composes her rug of inwardly concentric circles, meaning that her task is realizable, teleological. David, as I have argued, actively *denies* the limits of his life and art. The binding together of the rug and the necessity of placing a final, central ring seem, on the surface, to give Ellen's task a certain virtue. An awareness of teleology and finitude defines our subjectivity; a sense of fatality is the very system by which we constitute our vital awareness (Lingis 6). Buckler complicates the significance of Ellen's final ring, however, by colouring it white and thereby juxtaposing it with the snowfall that buries David, suggesting the ultimate blindness they share.

Although critics tend to portray Ellen as a sort of answer to artistic problems that Buckler raises in David, Ellen's art is fraught with an equal and opposite set of ambiguities. By the time Ellen makes the rug from pieces of the family's clothing, her memory is failing. The concept of "family" that the rug is meant to embody is tenuous, as Ellen mistakes the various relationships of those involved. In the end, the competing forms of David's and Ellen's art collectively enact an idea that Buckler quotes twice in his MPhil papers and that evidently arrested him. This idea is Immanuel Kant's notion that "concepts without percepts are empty but percepts without concepts are blind" ("Kant's"; "Relation of Leibniz"). In fact, David is figuratively empty ("my life brimmed and emptied so soon, and I could never fill it again" [269]) and Ellen is literally

blind. The synthesis that Ellen is creating means nothing precise to her; the relationships are askew and so the arrangement of particulars lacks idea. David's absolute idea ("I could realize the whole content of everything there is...") can obviously never be substantiated (290). Out of these two negative expressions—concepts without percepts, percepts without concepts—Buckler himself nonetheless creates a formal and unified piece of work.

The pressing question in Buckler criticism—an important and unresolved one—is whether Buckler writes himself out of the pathologies of perception that are David's. In other words, are David's perceptual faults Buckler's intuitive virtues? It is clear enough that the narrator's voice is often inflected by David's idiom, and yet the ironic distance between the character and the implied author is often quite pronounced. But while David's problem of integrity is a general problem of form-giving, Buckler's own novel is conspicuously structured. It has a narrative frame, it organizes each of its sections around well-marked co-ordinating symbols, and it creates endless structural echoes of the "very day" in the unfolding patterns of David's life, patterns of which he is generally unaware as he incoherently inhabits "this day...this day..." before dying (273, original ellipses). Buckler's irony is often quite pronounced: David is excluded from the absolving knowledge that he has no part in Effie's death by a "big word," just as he has often alienated others with language. (Effie's mother cannot remember the word for what killed Effie: leukemia.) And, elsewhere, the irony is stark as Buckler recounts—catalogically—the scene of David's day-long unconsciousness after a fall from the barn:

> He knew nothing about Chris carrying him to the house [...] or of his father's cold rage when the doctor's horse came in sight, walking. Steve went back later

> to pick up his cap. He slipped the tablecloth from under David, with a sort of apology in him for being exempt from the unseemliness which these actions would hold if one of the family performed them. But David didn't know that. Nor did he see Ellen put her hand not to her head or her heart, when they told her, but to her mouth, as if it were her breath that was threatened. He knew nothing, the next morning, of Anna rushing from Toby's car to Martha's arms [....] He didn't see Anna look at Toby when Toby made reference to the record speed of their trip [....] He knew nothing until the next afternoon. He remembered opening his eyes. They were all standing there, dressed, in his room. He had the instant feeling that he'd overslept, so long that now he'd never catch up with them. (187–88)

The irony here is not only in the unusually conclusive separation of Buckler's consciousness from David's as David lies insensate on the table, but in the highly ordered prose, the formalization of what he *does not* see in the same paratactic style that has been used so often to show us what he *does* see. David is blind to the litany of evidence of his inalienable connection to his loved ones, and Buckler's revelatory catalogue is a bitterly ironic ritual of exclusion. Moreover, David's concern upon waking that he has "overslept" and will never "catch up" reflects David's *first* awakening in the novel (on the "very day"), when he first notices that when he is "alone with his mind's shining population" (that is, when he is asleep and dreaming), others are moving unreachably ahead of him, leaving him behind in time: "'*Please* wait for me, Chris,' David said. He couldn't bear for Chris to get started on the day first" (16).

Finally, it is evident from a look at the revisions Buckler made to his epilogue that the author worked to discredit David's vision somewhat, to render his "translation" less than total. An early draft of *The Mountain and the Valley* describes David's intention to answer the call of everything in the world as if it were actually possible for him to internalize his total experience: "As he thought of telling these things exactly, it was as if all the voices came close about him, but not crowding and sharp now. And he went out into them until there was no inside left and he became the thing he told" ("Revised Epilogue"). But the published novel *qualifies* the same passage to a telling degree: "As he thought of telling these things exactly, all the voices came close about him. They weren't swarming now. He went out into them until there was no inside left. He saw at last how you could *become* the thing you told" (292, original emphasis). Here, David does *not* "become the thing [he] told" but simply *sees* how "you could" do so in theory, so that we are left to evaluate his idea: namely, that he does not have to understand people "one by one" but only as an aggregate with a "single core" of meaning to be found (292). And in the published novel, Buckler further rescinds the possibility of David's "total" translation by remarking, "He didn't consider *how* he would find [this meaningful core]" (293, original emphasis). We rightly remain distrustful of what David "saw."

The problem with overemphasizing an ironic distance between Buckler and David Canaan, however, is that too often critics will invoke the distinction between author and character as part of a defence of Buckler's style. In other words, the charge of overwrittenness that has been levied against the novel since its prepublication phase is excusable insofar as the novel's superfluous description expresses the mentality of a

scattered young boy who, Buckler plainly shows us, does not know any better. It may make more sense to minimize a sense of difference between Buckler and David—a relationship sometimes ironic and often sympathetic—even if it means aligning the novel's style with the authorial and not just the personative voice. It may be that Buckler's style is effusive independently of his characterization of David. For example, in a letter of 14 January 1952, Buckler expresses his happiness about the news of his novel's acceptance for publication:

> The day the news came I was sitting in my room, gazing out over the bleak indrawn winter fields, quite stopped in the writing problem I was trying to work out, and feeling that frightening loneliness you get when you think: Even if I *could* turn out something good, where's the listening—except for that awful almost-taunting listening of the objects in the room when you've struck an impasse like that. Then the news came, and suddenly the whole face of things shifted like the crowd's face at the station shifts when the one you've given up as not having come (you're just turning for home) all at once steps off the train.
>
> ("Letter to William Raney")

This passage contains features of thought that could easily be David's, even at the height of his distraction. The "listening of the objects in [Buckler's] room" echoes "the listening fact of the presence outside him" of all the things David wishes to write about (290). Buckler shares with David a sense of accusation (or at least "taunting") that springs from these objects. Buckler's evocation of one experience entirely in terms of another is David's manner of thinking, and there is even some telling similarity of diction ("faces," "struck"). Buckler's identification with David (and even with his artistic

problems) must not be undermined in an attempt to ascribe the novel's excesses exclusively to its jejune protagonist.

Fictionally, Buckler shows us the productivity of quasi-identification. One night, in the dark, with his eyes free from stimulus and his self-consciousness relaxed, David talks to Toby "*with an interplay of affinity and divergence*" (110, emphasis added), and it is arguably David's most successful self-representation. It seals the friendship between the two boys and, more to the point, it momentarily confirms David's personal "limit" with respect to the other. Perhaps the limited omniscient perspective, with its own gestures of identification and dissociation, allows for the successful expression that is *The Mountain and the Valley.* And perhaps the most absolving mode for Buckler (if we must find one) is not in any of the novel's marked moments of irony, but simply in its retrospective stance, the use of a synthetic time perspective that David could not adopt. The novel asserts the need to feel, palpably, the personal "limit." David denies all shaping forces; he subsumes his own character to his belief that he has a "condition for universality" (223) and he denies the exigency to *act* that the existential limit of his own mortality should have placed on him. He resists forms of realization to circumvent loss; consequently, death overtakes him and satisfaction eludes him. Feeling one's "limit" means performing personality-driven acts of identification *and* dissociation. By and large, David is unilateral in these decisions: he wants to absorb everything or nothing; he wants to include everyone or no one. Perhaps Buckler manages to articulate a productive "limit" for himself as author by investing his novel with the clear pursuit of *essences* that belongs to autobiographical writing but narrating the work in the third person. This way, he can accept his own dividedness as a fact and not feel the need to overcome it—that is,

to be *altogether* personal or impersonal in his perspective. And perhaps this consciously conditional stance enables Buckler to express "how it was" without being caught up too murkily in our greatest experiential paradox: that we experience ourselves at once as knowing subjects and, problematically, as known objects.

In Buckler's second novel, in an assaultingly self-conscious moment, one figure asks another, "How does it feel to be a character?" (*Cruelest Month* 11). Buckler has a clear fascination with the boundary of personality and with the way in which the unity of the person must maintain itself against the vastness of everything that lies outside it. *The Mountain and the Valley* poignantly explores the instability of this self when it is animated by the artistic orientation towards perfection and the desire for an all-inclusive representation. In the end, this orientation may imply inevitable inner division; there is no artist figure, after all, among those who are spontaneous and "natural": not Anna, who is compassionate, Chris, who is intuitive, Toby, who is outgoing, or Joseph, whose inner life is a melody. There is no question that Buckler portrays self-consciousness as a kind of aporia, but he also casts doubt on whether the impasse requires, in a telling word, "surmount[ing]" (189).

CHAPTER TWO:

The Hidden Room and the Embodiment of All: The Poetry of P.K. Page

In 1997, poet P.K. Page published a two-volume comprehensive selection of her life's work entitled *The Hidden Room,* an absorbing retrospect of almost sixty years of her poetry. Its prefatory poem, which shares the collection's title, dramatizes the poet's effort to make the contents and the perimeter of an elusive "hidden room" visible, so that the reader may see that "*it embodies all*" (*HR* I.11, original italics). The poet suggests that she apprehends all things as a unity—as symbolized in the room's capacity for total containment—and yet the poem's entire emphasis is on the room's hiddenness and nagging non-demonstrability. Even while opening this collection with a promise of total disclosure, then, the poet laments her own inability to make *everything* immediately manifest to the reader. And in lending its name to the entire collection, the poem implies that Page, looking back on a long career, conceives of her poetry as itself a "hidden room": a potential container for everything, if only its defining limit could be teased into evidence; an *oeuvre* straining to articulate an "*all.*"

Page's "encyclopedic imagination" is unique among the works of this study because, while her "encyclopedism" is perhaps the most intense and personal, its outward mark is the least explicit. Whereas generally the "encyclopedic imagination" is most obviously revealed in catalogic outpourings and endless objective and subjective recording, Page's poetry (and particularly the poetry of her early career on which I will be concentrating) often demonstrates a high degree of artistic restraint. Her poems are refined and prescient pieces that, though they may be aesthetically *closed*, nonetheless call attention to what theorist Joseph Conte brands "the paradox of *achieved* poetic form"

112, original emphasis). An internal energy—a subjective unrest—implies that the poem's *completion* cannot be equal to the poet's vision of total, poetic inclusion. In the poetry of P.K. Page, we have the singular opportunity to note that an "encyclopedic" sensibility may exist even in a highly formal poet. The exercise of reading Page's poetry is also an exercise in divining the hidden ideal that produces its sustained note of distress. This is an ideal of formal and subjective perfection against which the poet pervasively implies a sense of shortfall, no matter how vital, beautiful and inclusive the poem appears to be.

In the early work of Page's collection, a poem's apparently full closure may be subtly undermined by a proliferating inner complexity, or in Page's rather harshly self-assessing word, an "encumbrance" of the line that implies her inability to "come to rest" in her poetic statement ("After Rain," *HR* II.110). Critics have pointed to Page's dense compounding of one poetic figure with others by describing her style as "accumulative" (Trehearne 61ff) or by suggesting that the ingenuity behind such figuration reflects a personal eccentricity, a "traffick[ing] with strange thoughts" (MacLure 32). The apparent inability of the poet to be satisfied with the (figurative) suggestion of one thing's identity with another prompts her to employ more images in further acts of qualification. And her difficulty in stabilizing one thing's relationship to another ultimately implies the alienation of the poet from the world, and of the world's particulars from one another. Page's sense that there is always something *else* that, if brought into the fold of the representation, would lend it an added fullness, wholeness, or truth of character becomes an anguished, idealist conviction. Page projects a complete standard of poetic inclusion against which she implies the work's (and the representing self's) deficiency. Although

Page's energetic observation and figuration in no way make individual poems *unrealizable*, for these are not visions like Buckler's David Canaan's that will simply never find form, they do suggest a similar perfectionism and ultimately envision a similar point of total inclusion.

The "encyclopedism" I will demonstrate in P.K. Page, then, is not stylistically comparable to the naïve and burgeoning vision of Buckler's David (and, to an extent, of Buckler himself). There is nothing in Page that quite resembles those passages of Buckler's that flaunt their barely choreographed details, or "frond" into such levels of perceptual complexity that they finally render an atomic buzz. Page's style does not echo the tumult of words that opened this study in the epigraph from Leonard Cohen, in which the speaker touches ludicrously on the surreal minutiae of God's "perfect" morning in an obviously unsuccessful bid to bind himself to *anything* outside his own crumbling mind. But P.K. Page's own intense desire for an ultimately vigilant yet introspective "all-ways turning eye" ("Kaleidoscope," *HR* II.162) similarly indicates a desire to *take everything in* and, somehow, to give everything form. This pervasive ideal is largely buried or implicit in her early work, and mainly visible in her repeated suggestions of a dissatisfaction with the work's (and the speaking self's) totality. When, late in her career, she *names* her "great desire to write it all" or describes her intention to "sho[w]" her reader a complete "embodi[ment]," the long implicit and compulsive ideal of aesthetic all-inclusiveness is finally a matter of conscious concern. Ironically, by the time Page makes the "embodi[ment] of all" explicit as her artistic goal and foregrounds it as a prefatory comment on her life's work, it is nonetheless a much diminished engine of her poetry and has become partly a matter of Page's self-interpretation.

In fact, there are two particularly marked styles of poetic all-inclusiveness in Page's poetry, extending before and after a long, mid-career hiatus from writing (*c.*1956-1967), during which time Page accompanied her husband to an ambassadorial post in Brazil and took up painting.[1] The earlier style of poetic inclusion is highly imagistic and seeks to *quantify* some elusive "whole" through illustration and demonstration; the later one is far more abstract and seeks to *symbolize* the whole. (In the transcendental gesture of the symbol, Page is better able to accept that the envisioned "whole" nevertheless remains at arm's length from her). And because Page's ideal of inclusion is linked to an ideal of self-perfection, there are consequently two models of complete selfhood, or, in a 1967 phrase of Page's, two versions of the "total I" ("Cry Ararat," *HR* II.182). The earlier "total I" is the one that actually reveals Page's "encyclopedic imagination," an "I" whose integrity is pervasively and obsessively in question. The later one (which does not exhibit the "encyclopedic" drive) is a mystical "total I" that serves as a conduit for the perception of a unity that already exists in the world, and to which the poem only needs to gesture. In her early work, and through the "I" whose "totality" is always illusory and in some way still incomplete, Page demonstrates the same "terror of failing in even one particular" that was so crippling to Buckler's David Canaan (Buckler 227). It is as though the artist imagines that, in noticing and giving form to *everything*, she frees the self from limitation, but that in *failing* to give form to everything, or even in balking before *one* thing, she imposes on herself an insurmountable sense of emptiness and loss.

The indication of the "encyclopedic imagination" in these early works is the poet's implication that both the self and the work can be utterly compromised by any single thing that the poet hasn't quite "taken in": any person, any percept, any social fact.

The earliest poems of *The Hidden Room* include intricate character studies that explore the fragility of individuality itself; remarkable poems of inner vision which express an anxiety about the dream life as a spooling and unlimited generator of images; labour-themed socialist poems that self-consciously regret that their outward focus cannot take in enough data to be transformatively internalized as a humane and entire vision. Page's early style conveys an observational (and accumulative) urgency that suggests that the poet feels bombarded by the world, as if she were unequal to the task of representing it fully enough. These poems reveal Page's constant concern with the viability of the self as an entity and place a sustained emphasis on the "limits" of both the self and the work. In Page's pre-silence "crisis" poems, the poet construes *any* insufficiency of observation or representation as (an unadulterated) artistic failure, only because her exacting standard for her art is implicitly one of total embodiment.

P.K. Page's mid-career silence and ensuing stylistic shift (Trehearne 43), together indicate the genuine creative crisis which seems to spring from her relentless preoccupation with her poetry's scope. I will suggest that the silence indicates Page's overinvestment in giving *total* expression to the infinite worlds—inner and outer—that she so movingly appreciates. It is common enough in twentieth-century poetics to employ silence or "failure" as a kind of trope, a theoretical proposition that allows the poet to approach and even *enjoy* the limits of art and the spectre of the unrepresentable. The American poet Lyn Hejinian, in her essay "The Rejection of Closure," comments, for example, on the revelatory aspect of poetic "failure":

> We delight in our sensuous involvement with the materials of language, we long to join words to the world—to close the gap between ourselves and things—and

> we suffer from doubt and anxiety because of our inability to do so. Yet the incapacity of language to match the world permits us to distinguish our ideas and ourselves from the world and things in it from one another. (56)

In another version of the same passage, Hejinian writes that a poet, in the process of failing to say *everything that is sayable*, nevertheless "discover[s] structure, distinction, the integrity and separateness of things" (qtd. in Woods 79). Hejinian describes a highly rhetorical and productive variety of failure, an "inexpressibility" *topos* that is actually a gateway to the discovery of form—and luckily so, since "the (unimaginable) complete text, the text that contains everything [...] would be insufferable" ("Rejection" 56, original parenthesis).

Page's long hiatus from poetry in favour of painting and diplomatic travel, on the other hand, implies a serious unsettling of her poetic identity and indicates the extent of her commitment to the encyclopedic ideal. In certain immediately pre-silence poems like "Arras" and "After Rain," it is clear that Page's investment in the imagination's power to reveal *everything* is more personal than that of the other writers in this study. For example, Buckler is himself complicit enough in David Canaan's style to give *credibility* to "encyclopedism" as a feature of the creative imagination, but Buckler's ultimate recourse is to irony and to the denunciation of "encyclopedism" in David. We will see, similarly, that Leonard Cohen diffuses his own "encyclopedic" will in *Beautiful Losers* by mapping it onto two personae. As well, his projection of "encyclopedic" ideals to highly speculative ends—a magical and apocalyptic world view—allows him to accomplish the particular feat of his own novel: the daring suggestion of his own resemblance, through the "total vision," to both the totalitarian and the saint. But Page

confronts the implications of "encyclopedism" personally, and to such an extent that she experiences the only true creative crisis of any writer we will encounter here.

The prefatory poem "The Hidden Room" not only anticipates the collection's drive toward *total* embodiment but also illustrates that the tenuous nature of that embodiment is closely related to the quandary of full and conscious *self*-possession. The poem describes the all-embodying "hidden room" as a personal, intractable containing space "*deeply hidden in my head*" (*HR* I.11, all italics Page's), a space that vanishes when the poet attempts to articulate it. The room belongs intimately to the poet but, paradoxically, it may exclude her: "*it is mine and notmine*" (*HR* I.11). In "the hidden room" the poet imagines the possibility of a fully represented world, a unity she has always intuitively known:

> *I have been coming here since I was born*
> *never at my will*
> *only when it permits me*
>
> *like the Bodleian like the Web*
> *like Borges' Aleph*
> *it embodies all* (*HR* I.11)

The poet's quest to articulate the room's perimeter ("*if I seek it / it recedes / down corridors of ether*" [*HR* I.11]) sounds like the theoretical problem of self-consciousness (in which being is assumed to dissipate in representation). William Earle argues that "no ego can objectively apprehend itself as itself" because to know oneself as an *object* is to know oneself as something one is not (24). By analogy, the objective *shape* of the

hidden room is simply unavailable to the poet, though she senses that the room must be a delimited and self-contained space. The room, moreover, may not be recognized by others in the light of its true character: "*I am showing it to you / fearful you may not / guess its importance*" (*HR* I.11). The "hidden room" vaguely resembles the "room" of consciousness, always much fuller than it can be shown to be in representation. But is it a private consciousness (so much "*mine*" that "*you*" will not know it for what it is) or is it a universal consciousness (and thus as full as Oxford's Bodleian library, or as full as Borges' Aleph,[2] revealing all human acts at once)?

Page is unable to resolve this ambiguity of perspective, in the same sense that she is unable to *locate* the room. The poet partially effaces herself in the strange voicing of the poem, which is entirely unpunctuated and italicized as if proceeding involuntarily from dream or from some private region of the self. Although the voice is personal, therefore, it does not foster a sense of the poet's real presence. Neither the "hidden room" nor the speaker is fully visible as an entity. The room is a total embodiment yet has no body; it is a rhetorical and paradoxical space into which the self cannot deliberately withdraw and from which it cannot deliberately emerge. The so-called room begs for discrimination against undifferentiated space (otherwise it cannot be a "room" at all) and acts as a metaphor for the self's own intuitive requirement for self-definition. This implicit yearning for delimitation is at odds with the poetic intention to achieve *all-inclusiveness*; the contest between (personal) delimitation and (impersonal) transcendence is a sustained tension in Page's work.[3] "The Hidden Room" is an ideal preface to Page's poetry and so she has used it; it illustrates the refractory strangeness of

the dimension of the personal, and it illustrates the tenuousness of poetic "embodiment," especially when it strives to incorporate, in the manner of a library or an aleph, an "all."

By placing Page's collection *The Hidden Room* in the context of other works that demonstrate an "encyclopedic imagination," I hope to illustrate P.K. Page's extreme attachment to the ideal of a "total" work. In particular, this context should make Page's absolutist tendencies clear. Critics, in important statements about Page's work to date, have tended to construe Page's poetic intentions as goals that are quite in line with the familiar aims of modernism, and so have missed their "encyclopedic" implications. John Orange speaks of Page's "hope for unity" ("Conversation" 73) without placing emphasis on the hyperbolic way in which Page *imagines* poetic unity. George Woodcock rightly observes that Page strives for an equally intense awareness of "the general and the particular" ("Smith's People" 99), but we should make especial note of the way this demanding double focus, this *particular yet essential* vision, has been heightened and brought to an extreme form by Buckler and others. An intensification of the critical rhetoric that has been used to describe Page's work will emphasize her proper place in the "encyclopedist" lineage I am seeking to define. This context will respect Page's especially ambitious aims for complete artistic inclusiveness and the intensity of her vision of an ideal subjectivity.

Elements of my argument have been anticipated by critics who have observed the extraordinary scope of Page's achievement and the yearning that animates her poems; I believe that my recognition of Page's encyclopedic ideal could consolidate some of these assessments towards a more marked recognition of Page's *insatiable* poetics. Constance Rooke, for example, praises the extraordinary inclusiveness of Page's *oeuvre*:

> Once inside her garden we feel it to be a precisely articulated and teeming universe; we have only to count how much is in it and how thoroughly each element is seen in order to have a sense of almost infinite duration in this richly compacted poetic world. The sun and the moon and the stars extend its space. Water and air are abundant. The animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms are all contained within its boundaries. Human beings of all ages and levels of consciousness are there: people who can recognize those other kingdoms of being, or connect with one another, or know an angel when they see one, as well as those who can't. The climate in P.K. Page's garden is variable, but the factor which determines it is always the intensity of vision. Another word for this is love.
>
> ("Chameleon" 169)

Rooke appreciatively underlines the subjective ("lov[ing]") principle of integration in Page's work. She suggests that the poet's love enables an imaginative translation of all the major orders of our outer reality. In the sense that it represents a rich, *personal* world, Page's body of work really does seem, to Rooke, to "embody all." And yet Rooke's portrait of Page's work contrasts significantly with Miriam Waddington's reflection on "the despair the artist feels at not being able to possess the world's beauty *absolutely*, although Page creates an inner myth to balance the outer one" (qtd. in Orange, "P.K. Page" 233, emphasis added). For Rooke, the poet's love is inherently adequate as a world-making principle; for Waddington, the "inner myth" is not ultimately inclusive but, rather, *consoles* Page for her inability to formulate the more absolute vision toward which she is driven. But Page's "encyclopedic imagination," particularly evident in her pre-silence poetry, determines that there *is* no such consolation available to her; she *must*

produce a vision in which the inner and outer worlds are not just "balanced" but integrated. Thus, her exaggerated incorporative drive reveals itself in its effects: an "unbearable" sense of "emotional reaching" (Marilyn Bowering 105); a "taxonomic agony" (Bartlett 104); a "suffering" that is "more [...] than stylish" (MacLure 31), and is, in some personae, "curiously aesthetic and real at once" (Trehearne 102).

The first section of my argument reveals, through an attention to several poems of Page's early career, the poet's anxieties about the basic unity of the self. The failure of identity seems to be the informing issue of the "encyclopedic" poetry, both as a cause and as an effect. The focal poems of this section illustrate the self's propensity for strange distortion and fracture, and reveal the intensification of this distortion when the subject is impelled to notice *everything* or to give form to a proliferating world. Page's troubling visions of selves that are vulnerable to dissolution give spurs to her desire for total poetic integration. The next section of the argument places emphasis on the way in which objectivity is as fraught and unstable as subjectivity in Page's poetics. I especially note the obscurity and instability of the objective "ground" against which Page's personae try to constitute themselves. This section also explores Page's concern that objective and subjective experience may ultimately be indistinguishable from one another. The failure of "real" things to achieve objective *body* is a source of threat to the poet's project of total and adequate embodiment. In the third section, I turn my focus to Page's more specific meditations on poetic representation itself, and I explore the "encyclopedic" belief that anything that escapes an artwork may completely invalidate the poet's art. I give new readings of Page's "crisis" poems, "Arras" and "After Rain," especially to show the intensification of Page's investment in the goal of complete poetic inclusion in

between the writing of these two poems. The final section serves this chapter as a kind of afterword. It explores Page's post-silence work as an illustration of the way in which the poet moves *beyond* her "encyclopedic" obligations even in light of her recognition of them, and renovates her poetics with new, less compulsive versions of poetic unity.

The Unintegrable Self

Although Page envisions that the poem—and by implication the self—might ideally "embody all," Page's early poetry also gives the reader several examples of *failed* "total selves," making "total embodiment," from the outset, an ambivalent and yet, as I will argue, an inescapable ideal. Page portrays figures that have either failed to *be* imaginatively total (as in "Man With One Small Hand") or whose totality *is* a failure, circumscribed by indifference, sustained by madness (as in "The Clock of Your Pulse" and "If It Were You"). These are poems that unfold around the threat of self-loss and world-loss, poems in which the speaker or character is driven to recuperate and reintegrate the world's details as a means of demonstrating the healthy unity of the self. Page's "Man With One Small Hand," for example, *must* re-incorporate his imaginatively fragmented self and cannot rest until he does so. The "totality" of the total self in "The Clock of Your Pulse" similarly calls to be destabilized and recollected, a potentially inexhaustible and certainly compulsive project. In "The Clock of Your Pulse" and "If It Were You," the speaker seems to be schooling an afflicted person in how to reconceive the (mad, solipsistic, unnaturally encompassing) self as the well-integrated subjective totality it *should* be. Significantly, though, the speaker never seems assured of her *own* integral selfhood. Thus, she is typically positioned somewhere in between the worst-case

scenario of completely random consciousness that each poem explicitly represents, and some elusive but forceful ideal of *total* personal integrity that seems to motivate each poem.[4] In the first two poems of this section, we can particularly appreciate that the unity of the self is presented as something that *should* be natural and intuitive. But the addressee of each poem needs to be sharply instructed in the perception of the self as single and whole. This peculiarly concerted self-awareness makes the integration of the self into an effort, if not indeed an art—moreover, an insatiable and finally unconsummated art. The basic instability of selfhood immediately emerges as a key incitement of Page's early, "encyclopedic" poetics.

"The Clock of Your Pulse" (1943) suggests that a person may become a perceptual machine, one that responds so randomly and automatically to the world that the (selective, preferential, valuing) self may be readily lost. The personal rhythm is gone; the pulse, despite itself, has become part of an aggressive and *overactive* system of outer monitoring; it "fires like a gunner / at the moving target of space with a false gunsight" (*HR* I.20). Thus, the poem establishes, early in Page's career, that an "encyclopedic" personality—one driven to respond to *everything*—may be by nature aggressive and anonymous. The poem describes an unacceptable "total self"—ostensibly the "you" of the title—whose particular failure is that he or she has become relentlessly attuned to a mechanical, impersonal and *exterior* sense of time. The person's vision, "target[ing]" everything, is hostile, even war-like. Space and the world of objects have replaced the personal "clock." It appears that an extreme form of the *Zeitgeist* has supplanted the addressee's individuality; thus, he or she has taken on a *monstrously* "total" identity that must be broken down.[5] The poem is obsessed with the corrigibility

of this "total self"; its world must be dismantled, apparently to be minutely re-possessed in what ironically looks like a *new* "encyclopedism" tending toward a *new* "total self."

Though the addressee's world has run amok through perception, it is also through perception that the speaker aims to re-establish the "form" of the self. The poem is not long, but it is one of a few in Page's *oeuvre* that is actually catalogic, an inherently anxious structure. The speaker opens each stanza with a new imperative, each one prescribing a new trick toward the perceptual retraining of the addressee. The speaker urges her interlocutor to "[r]efer to the clock of your pulse as an arbiter" and to rediscover the body's natural rhythm. She commands her listener to look at the world in an idiosyncratic—even a confused—way (but paradoxically, still a very strenuous way):

> Mark time like a year, registered in an hour,
> space Lilliputian, streets too small for the feet,
> unhurried history occur in the "now"[6] and the great
> body fold like a blade to slip through the door
> [.....]
> Know nothing sure, expand and shrink without warning,
> know neither the size of a room nor the height of a tree;
> the street like a land contracts to a map as you go,
> there is no certain length of time between evening and morning. (*HR* I.19)

The speaker tries to instruct her listener in a deliberate perceptual insecurity, as though he or she has instead tried to absorb the world as a kind of stable, "total" message in which every particular plays an equal part. The poet presses her addressee to perform erratic expansions and contractions of the body in space ("expand and shrink without warning";

"stop on the stumble of stairs"). These strange manoeuvres, in thwarting the spatial sense, purport to re-establish a more personal and intuitive sense of time in place of the impersonal time that has been determined through spatial inference. The addressee needs to be brought to self-consciousness for the sake of reinstating a humane, controlled, *temporally* organized, and personal vision of the world, against the unnatural totality and security of the too vigilant, "false," and war-like self.

But the project of re-integrating the self and making it more humanely "whole" is tinged with futility and irony, particularly because the speaker (the poem's counselor on "wholeness") seems to share a considerable part of her addressee's "mad[ness]" (*HR* I.19). Her own utterance, far from being spontaneous and self-assured, is uncannily well ordered and superbly metrical; her deployment of language suggests the high regulation of her own "pulse" as well as her own overdeveloped vigilance and observational power. The stanzas, as well, are so densely figurative that, in light of their pure originality, the speaker emerges as the single authority on what the experience of this suddenly impersonal and omni-attentive body is *like*. The speaker demonstrates her intimate understanding of the interior experience of this overregulated self, and shows that she identifies profoundly with that version of the self whose "clock" is still determined by its violent milieu. Indeed, the line between the addressee's madness and the speaker's ostensible stability is faint. Moreover, the pulse, in the speaker's characterization of it, hardly seems to be a likely "arbiter" of a fluid and natural outer reality:

> Refer to the clock of your pulse as an arbiter,
> hear it tick like a gong in your ear, by a madman beaten,
> hear it switch and click sharp as a dark death beetle,

explode like a depth charge, shrill like a howitzer.[7] (*HR* I.19)

Ironically, the speaker's recommended *cure* for the too perceptive, too encompassing self seems to replicate the problem in a new form (which shows that despite the perils of a vision that seeks to incorporate everything, the ideal cannot be abandoned). The poet suggests that one can figuratively re-set one's inner clock by deliberately ignoring the relationships among things and so by forgetting the connectedness of things: "know neither the size of a room or the height of a tree" (20). In other words, one must descend into a condition of *absolute* insecurity before one can re-claim the self. In order to reinstate subjective judgment one must greet the world anew as if nothing were connected, which makes the moment of personal liberation identical with the moment of total personal collapse. This "solution" is obviously itself rife with new encyclopedic potential, implicitly demanding that the whole world be repossessed item by atomized item. But other poems (like "If It Were You") will show that this same absolute insecurity produces in turn an abundant world that encroaches meaninglessly on the subject from every angle and from which the self may simply never re-emerge.

In "If It Were You" (1946), the task of achieving a state of ideal and total self-possession is potentially as infinite and obsessive as the task of tending a garden that is always on the brink of going to seed. In this poem, the self must struggle just to maintain the form of its own individuality; it is overwhelmed by its task of organizing an outer reality. We have seen that a garden is Rooke's appropriate later metaphor for a poetic world bound together in a lush and well-cultivated unity. And yet, in this early poem, a garden's *natural* tendency towards incontinent growth reflects the poetic effusions of the poem as well as the (presumed) natural incoherence of the self. The poet, again speaking

in the second person,[8] considers that the entire world might lose its definition and completely resist the form that the addressee, a gardener, is attempting to give it. The "you" to whom the poem is addressed might, in this scenario, succumb to madness and be absorbed by the garden that she can no longer perceive as separate from her own person. In this hypothetical portrait of complete self-loss, over which the *speaker* maintains a putative control and a putative understanding, the gardener would work at self-recollection but "grow lazy," succumbing to the self's natural shapelessness. Then she would be so deprived of identity that the violence she might do to herself would be "murder in the leafy lane"—not suicide (*HR* I.67). She would "grow phobias about calendars and clocks" because she could not be sure of her persistence as an entity (*HR* I.67). And the loss of self would be reflected in the untended world; the all-absorbing "leafy lane" would continue to grow, indifferent to the violence it concealed. The gardener's supposed inability to fix the garden's form would reflect her broader failure to find concrete purpose in her own activity and in her personal persistence in the world; her labouring fingers would "[want] a meaning for their continuing movements" (*HR* I.66).

The meaninglessness of the self's indefinite "continu[ation]" is intimately connected to the unlimited expansion of the garden's sinister "new shoots" and, in turn, to the structural incoherence of the poem. Page instantly demonstrates the unmanageability of both self and world by means of a fronding rhetorical complexity that stands between the opening proposition ("if it were you, say, you / who scanning the personal map one day knew / your sharp eyes water and grow colour-blind [...]" [*HR* I.66]) and its still preliminary answering clause ("would you call help like a woman

assaulted, / cry to be found?" [*HR* I.66]. The circumlocutory passage requires quotation at length:

> If it were you, say, you
> who scanning the personal map one day knew
> your sharp eyes water and grow colour-blind
> unable to distinguish green from blue
> and everything terribly run together as if rain
> had smudged the markings on the paper—
> a child's painting after a storm—
> and the broad avenue erased,
> the landmarks gone;
> and you, bewildered—not me this time and not
> the cold unfriendly neighbour or the face in the news—
> who walked a blind circle in a personal place;
>
> and if you became lost, say, on the lawn,
> unable to distinguish left from right
> and that strange longitude that divides the body
> sharply in half—that line that separates
> so that one hand could never be the other—
> dissolved and both your hands were one,
> then in the garden though birds went on with their singing
> and on the ground

flowers wrote their signatures in coloured ink—

would you call help like a woman assaulted,

cry to be found? (*HR* I.65)

The degree of removal separating "if it were you [...]" from the first "would you [...]" testifies expressively both to the extent of the addressee's self-loss, and to the speaker's own insecurity. As we saw, "The Clock of Your Pulse" portrayed a threatening world *too* sharply delineated, and this sharpness was reflected in turn in the speaker's metrical imperatives. "If It Were You" portrays a world *unloosed* upon a self who *no longer* has "sharp eyes" (*HR* I.65) and the speaker's verbal indirection is again a rhetorical complement to that condition. Both poems portray a variety of absolute self-loss that demands a compulsive, artful and equally absolute *reconstruction* of the self's perimeter.

It is again the *speaker's* premise of control, her claim to her own proper totality and her own overinsistence on her separateness from the addressee that are (as in "The Clock of Your Pulse") the poem's real subjects. Though the speaker explicitly states that the problem of self-loss is *not* hers (*HR* I.65), her conception of herself as a coherent entity mirrors the ironically total orientation of the addressee, whose body has forgotten, even, that it is divided into a left and a right (*HR* I.65); the speaker shares, then, in the *illusion* of the total self. It is the speaker's own fear of complete abjection that is implied in the poem's hypothetical scenario, in such a way that her apparent totality and control are understood as defensive postures that require further and further evidence, producing "encyclopedic" qualities in the poem, and perpetuating its somewhat uncommon length. There is an obvious identification between the speaker and the addressee though the speaker insists on their separateness, particularly contending against our implicit

assumption that a gardener (ideally, a modifier of the world) is an artist figure. The poem's disingenuous second-person address is self-concealing and self-revealing in equal measure; the speaker is unable to define herself as the subject of the poem, just as the gardener is unable to maintain her own autonomy in the garden. The speaker, then, is another self that has failed truly to materialize as a totality, though her *presumption* of totality authorizes her address.

The poem unfolds according to the speaker's need to substantiate her own questionable coherence, and to flesh out the hypothesis "if it were you." The poem generates follow-up clauses catalogically, stanza by stanza: "would you [...]," "would you not [...]". The meticulous exploration of the crisis in all its details reveals that, while the addressee cannot be engaged at all, the speaker is *exceedingly* familiar with the condition of self-alienation; she insists, however, that the victim is "not me this time" (*HR* I.65). The inability of the speaker to claim this scenario as *hers* nor yet to impart it convincingly to someone else is reflected in a haplessly elaborate poem; the schism between poet and persona is generative and begs for resolution. In "If It Were You," as in another early poem, "The Sick" (1944), the frenetic distress of symptoms makes a person self-*descriptive*, but, unless the interlocutor can be convinced that he or she shares the condition, hopelessly so.[9] Though a sick person's articulation is involuting and almost morbidly self-absorbed, the speaker is struggling to declare her more universal social and human condition, one that, like illness itself, "rarely knows itself to be the owner / of common dividends / though having interest in a hundred lands" ("The Sick," *HR* I.187). In these early poems, then, Page explores individuality as a bog of

indistinction; the self struggles to find its own limits or yet to establish its share of a more universal condition.

The conceit of the uncontrollable garden is an apt metaphor for the diffuse and uncertain self and also for the poem's taxing ("encyclopedic") rhetorical elaboration. The usual decorum of poetic expression lends itself easily to the metaphor of the pruned and decorative landscape (hence, *A Garden of Verse* or *A Garden of Eloquence*). But the *mad* garden ("if you raised your head / madness would rush at you from the shrubbery" [*HR* I.67]) reveals the compulsive element of the "accumulative style"[10] and underlines the poem's status as a "poetic vision run amok" (Killian 95). Page simply *cannot* close "If It Were You" thematically through a resolution of the poem's mounting subjective crisis; rather, she signals its closure musically through a long cadence (achieving formal closure where subjective closure is impossible). The poem elaborates its last image slightly more extensively over two lines, when the general pattern has been to introduce one or more image per line:

> If it were you, the person you call "I,"
>
> [.....]
>
> might you not
>
> grow phobias about calendars and clocks,
>
> stare at your face in the mirror, not knowing it
>
> and feel an identity with idiots and dogs
>
> as all the exquisite unborns of your dreams
>
> deserted you to snigger behind their hands? (*HR* I.67)

The final phrase is about the mind's lack of control over its own imagery (as the speaker imagines being disowned by her own thoughts). It illustrates the poem's carefully wrought relationship between a self that cannot hold itself together, a metaphorical space (the garden) that is recalcitrant to form, and the relative arbitrariness of poetic closure.

But poignantly, in "If It Were You," the speaker suggests the brief blessing of a glancing, half intentional moment of meaningful contact with the world:

> [...] you would be
> tense for a time beneath the morning sun
> but always lonely
> and birds perhaps would brush your coat and become
> angels of deliverance
> for a moment only.[11] (*HR* I.66)

The birds are a relief from self-obsession but cannot be held; they are elements of the garden that rise to meet the speaker but do not demand tending. Ever so briefly, they model the possibility of easy, natural thought. The birds are to the gardener as (we will discover) the saint is to the "sick" soul in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*: they extend the *possibility*, at least, of an effortless communion with nature and an intuition of higher orders. We have seen that Buckler, too, gives his "encyclopedic" artist moments of respite and uncomplicated pleasure, such as those David enjoys in the Baptizing Pool. These moments emphasize the nearness of, on one hand, a sensitive attunement to the world and joy in oneself, and, on the other hand, the obsessive trick of possessing oneself and one's experience *totally*. Although Page's poetry is thoroughly concerned to express the (Platonic) idea that "all being is one and self-contained" (*Theaetetus* 532), the *selves*

that purport to hold everything together (such as the speakers of these two poems) are strange and suspect entities that, moreover, mirror selves that are utterly lost (such as the mad interlocutors). Up until her silence, Page's various treatments of "total identity" include an element of self-consciousness: the poet cannot help implying that the "total self" is somehow sick, solipsistic, or unnaturally encompassing. And as soon as the element of irony or self-critique is perceptible in the poem, the "total" vision has failed, for an absolute vision must transcend self-consciousness.

The self falsifies its own (limited) nature through its strenuous effort to contain the entire world. And yet, there *is* no viable container but thought to express the integrity and oneness of things. The "encyclopedic vision" seems to demand, problematically, that the self keep an intuitive grasp of its own *form*—without which the value and meaning of things are lost—and yet transcend itself in order to accommodate a vision of *everything*. One way in which a self might transcend its ordinary limits is that it might be conceived of as a manifold. In Page's work, the self may become infinitely faceted—"A million reflections and his heart in each / a million names called and each one his" ("Freak," *HR* I.83)—but often pathologically so. Douglas Freake explores the presence of multiple selves in Page's poetry and observes that they help the author to give herself "access to multiple levels of reality" (950). In this way, Freake calls attention to the creative potential of the fragmentation of the identity; David Helwig, too, notes that, for Page, "the greatest insight is perhaps always found at the edge of dissolution" (11). But the fracture or multiplicity of the self in Page's work is just as often the source of anxious self-preoccupation which, paradoxically, only reasserts the category of the sovereign self and nostalgically seeks a unified self as a stable source of reference. Though Page's ideal

of total embodiment calls for some enlargement of the boundaries of the personality, her early poetry also demonstrates that the self *must* perceive itself as "whole" and *cannot* give in to dispersal or fragmentation. In other words, the poet is not happy with the self's limited nature, but without that delimitation, nothing else can be adequate or meaningful.

"Man With One Small Hand" (1947) portrays a character whose inability to perceive himself as *entire* makes him unable to engage with the world at all; he is obsessed, instead, with his own special "small hand" and with the task of imaginatively owning it. This obsession generates an inner complex, in which the mind restlessly generates dream imagery (or so the poem states, without fully recording this imagery). This poem shows us—crucially for my characterization of Page as an "encyclopedic" poet—that *any single thing* that the subject cannot manage to represent definitively produces an impasse that will *always* threaten the self's coherence. In a later section I will show that "Arras" suggests a similar argument for representation itself, where if *one thing* escapes "embodiment," there can be *no* possibility for the poem's satisfactory closure. Page's fixation of her poetic attention on whatever object remains somehow stubbornly external to the self or to the work is intense. Indeed, in "Man With One Small Hand," Page suggests that the imagination's failure to finish its engagement with a single object (the small hand) *amounts to* an imaginative exclusion of the entire world, for the man can think of nothing else. This is one instance, then, in which the reader must intuit the idealism behind the work, and must grasp the cost to the subject posed by the single, intractable object.

"Man With One Small Hand" literally presents a problem of incorporation or embodiment in that the man longs for his small hand to be conceptually part of his body;

his imagination can not be satisfied until the man has perceived himself to be whole. Since he feels that his small hand "requires attention constantly" and "needs his frequent glance to nurture it" (*HR* I.84), the man has a unique experience of selfhood; he is unusually aware of himself as subject *and* object. The little hand is alien enough that he extends to it an "interest" and even a "sympathy" that is somehow a different form of regard from ordinary self-love (*HR* I.84). At times he seems to grant it outright an aesthetically detached esteem: "Sometimes you come upon him unawares / just quietly staring at it where it lies / as mute and somehow perfect as a flower" (*HR* I.84). And yet his *attachment* to the hand and his investment in reclaiming it imaginatively as his own (even with its intermittently perceived flaws) are quickly evident:

> But no. It is not perfect. He admits
> it has its faults: it is not strong or quick.
> At night it vanishes to reappear
> in dreams full-size, lost or surrealist. (*HR* I.84)

The man's aesthetic fascination with the perfection of this special object, his unusual hand, seems to generate an interest in *self*-perfection, and thus, various imaginative scenarios of reunion with the hand; he meets his hand constantly in dreams. The hand is "perfect" in itself but "not perfect" in the way it undermines the man's own completeness and adequacy. The man can neither integrate the object so that it is conceptually part of himself, nor expunge the object so that it is "out of mind" (*HR* I.84). The way in which the hand is his yet *not* his, and perfect yet *not* perfect, aptly anticipates "The Hidden Room" (and the aporia produced by the space that is "*mine and notmine*," and total but indefinite). Both poems present conundrums of "embodiment" and "totality" and

obsessions with perfection that reveal the unshakeable ambiguity of the self's own boundaries.

Though "Man With One Small Hand" is more meditative and less propulsive than some poems in Page's oeuvre, it nonetheless *portrays* an imagination that cannot stop representing. The hand is "*never* out of mind" (*HR* I.84, emphasis added); it "needs" and "requires" his "constant" attention (*HR* I.84); it absorbs the man day and night; it is apparently his imagination's single theme; he figures it and refigures it in his subconscious (reflecting the poet's own habit of construing multiple comparisons to stabilize the nature of some poetic object). He is caught between the desire to put the object away from himself (even for the purpose of "loving" it) and the desire to claim it for his own. The man's indefinite body seems to reflect, as well, the poem's unworldliness (for Page indicates nothing at all about the man's social nature) and its timelessness. Indeed, the man's inability to grasp his own singularity and finitude may indicate an inability to enter into a productive relationship with anything outside himself; a person's assumption of his own "wholeness" must be the intuitive basis for everything else. Michel Foucault theorizes that the body's (spatial) definition determines other conceptual "positivities": language, successiveness, desire, value:

> [T]he space of man is articulated upon the space of things; to this same experience desire is given as a primordial appetite on the basis of which all things assume value and relative value; to this same experience, a language is given in the thread of which all the discourses of all times, all successions and all simultaneities may be given. This is to say that each of these positive forms in which man can learn that he is finite is given to him only against the background of its own finitude.

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The body is certainly not a lesson in personal finitude for Page's conceptually divided man. The hand itself cannot take on a consistent value or form (it is "perfect," "not perfect," "small" and, in dreams, "full-size"); the man and the hand seem infinite with respect to each other, barred from complete identification but similarly barred from an engagement with anything else.

The poet identifies with the man's imaginative desire for self-perfection. Her own sudden, surprise involvement mitigates the poem's full closure. The final stanza forces the reader's realization that the small hand, in effectively *doubling* the man, produces in him something akin to poetic self-consciousness. And it is the poet who, in the final stanza, seems ultimately seduced by the perfection of her own poetic object, the "small hand":

> Perhaps he loves it too much, sets too much stock
> simply in its existence. Ah, but look!
> It has its magic. See how it will fit
> so sweetly, sweetly in the infant's glove. (*HR* I.84)

The exclamation and the unexpected mannerism of "sweetly, sweetly" break the speaker's impersonal characterization of the man. The poem's final stanza feels like a closure, but it is also an invitation to witness *another* obsession. It calls new attention to the *poet's* delight in her poetic object's docility, definition, and ready containment; thus, the lines suggest her entrance into an enthrallment similar to the man's. The man's hand enchants him, but his imagination becomes restless in trying to define the perfection of the object and share in its independent, autonomous life. The speaker, too, concedes that

one cannot "set too much stock" in the existence of the hand (*HR* I.84). In saying so (and in employing a metaphor—setting too much stock—that alludes to *quantity*), the poet indicates how easy it is to be drawn imaginatively and indefatigably into the life of objects, especially as they tantalize the subject with the possibility of personal integrity. Page indicates that the threat of the subject's *total absorption* by the (obsessive) object exists for the poet too.

These three poems portray unintegrable selves. They show us that if the self does not know itself to be whole, its relationship to the object world and the inner landscape alike will be restless and indeed insatiable, *driven* towards a totality it will nonetheless never find. All three works present a problem of personal integrity in some focal character (or implied addressee) but show us the poet's own strong complicity. The implications of the unintegrable self for *poetry* are perhaps starkest in Page's exquisite 1954 poem, "Reflections in a Train Window." This work depicts a woman suffering behind a pane of glass, excluded from a reality she nonetheless embodies—or rather, from a reality her *image* embodies. The subject of the poem is a "floating woman" divided from another self who is her "trembling image" (*HR* II.52). The woman, travelling by train, is overwritten by a constant stream of images that permeates her likeness on the glass of the window as the train moves. This seminal poem, then, is the most explicit so far in relating the indefinite (and divided) self to the proliferation of imagery; it portrays, as well, the tenuousness of the embodiment of that imagery in a containing shape. As in her other "train" poems ("Round Trip," "Magnetic North"), Page depicts the train as a site of experiential poverty and removal from the world. In "Reflections in a Train Window" there is no present or presence; there is nothing but

transition, reflection upon reflections, and an insubstantial self. A host of images is superimposed upon the woman as her likeness incorporates (unselectively) every element of the world that the moving window also happens to frame. But the woman's image is *only* incorporative by virtue of the woman's own nonentity. She is a visionary martyr (a "haloed" saint, illuminated by reading lamps), transparent to the will of the impersonal moving power, the train. Her likeness is both fluid ("trembling" in the glass because of the tears in the woman's eyes [*HR* II.52]) *and* fractured ("merged with a background of mosaic" [*HR* II.52]). This fluidity and fracture suggest the woman's painful accommodation of different *kinds* of aesthetic totality to which Page gestures in *The Hidden Room*: incorporative ambiguities, intricate visual patterns.[12] The reflecting window presents a *real* self overlaid and in tension with an infinite realm of appearance.

The woman in "Reflections in a Train Window" is becoming increasingly divorced from her own image by a layer of fissuring frost crystals that are making the window opaque; in this way, Page links the crystalline, wrought world of poetry to the occluded identity of its determining consciousness.[13] The martyr of "Reflections in a Train Window" finds her image projected hopelessly onto an intractable world in which every object, "shin[ing]" like an icon (*HR* II.52), is sealed off from her in an identity that seems more secure, individuated and stable than her own. The window suggests a dichotomy between the world of perceptual reality and the world of (poetic) images and forms. The artist figure inhabits both worlds and, in doing so, is profoundly divided.

In a comparable poem, "Schizophrenic" (1944), Page presents a schizophrenic character (a female socialite) who carries a second self inside her (a male giant). In "Schizophrenic," the subject makes a leap of faith *through* a window, apparently

rejecting the doubleness of the self. (The poet may be seeking, in turn, through this clarification of the self's own nature, a more ideal form of artistic "reflection".) And yet, this "breakthrough" delivers nothing; the glass is merely shattered, along with the character's bid for full and single selfhood. In "Reflections in a Train Window," by contrast, there is *no* attempt at a "breakthrough" or, rather, no attempt to bind the world of being satisfactorily to the world of transient and proliferating forms; there is only a permanent sense of exclusion of each from each. "Reflections in a Train Window" seems to want to establish some functional self as the totalizing principle for a wildly teeming world, but the self cannot find any "real" manifestation.

In these few exemplary poems taken from Page's pre-silence period, the problem of total poetic "embodiment" is intimately related to the self's painful endeavour of establishing its own satisfactory "totality." The self's *failed* totality produces teeming inner and outer worlds, worlds without any possible limitation; conversely, the teeming world, in turn, guarantees the failure of the self. The self may become uncannily absolute and thus attentive to everything ("The Clock of Your Pulse"), utterly self-alienated and absorbed by an encroaching world ("If It Were You"), endlessly involuting because of a failure to assimilate one object of attention ("Man With One Small Hand") or perpetually excluded from a sense of "real" presence ("Reflections in a Train Window"). Much of Page's early poetry is moved (beautifully, and compellingly, despite her sense of "crisis") by a need to stabilize an inner and an outer reality. And it is her sense of *obligation* to these apparently unmanageable worlds that marks her out as an "encyclopedic" poet, one who is restless before the ideal of total embodiment, and driven towards better and fuller acts of poetic inclusion. Her poetry seems to seek out a self that will *take everything in*

without becoming overtaxed or painfully abstracted from itself. In other words, she seems to seek out a self that can comprehend everything while maintaining a comfortable (and meaning-conferring) sense of self-definition, without which the "total vision" can have no value.[14]

The "Silent Globes of the Eyes": In Search of Objective Totality

In the poems we have looked at so far, the poet implies that there is always something insufficient about the poem's scope, in much the same way that there is something terminally incomplete about the *identity* the poem is exploring. Other poems from the same period of Page's career (1945-1956) demonstrate a different orientation. These poems demonstrate the poet's inability to be satisfied in any conception of *objective* totality. Though the works reveal an attentiveness to phenomena that seems faithful to certain vogues of high modernism,[15] they ultimately illustrate Page's sense that the representation of objects is simply never complete or adequate. There is no spatial perspective that delivers a full and unmediated vision; there is no conception of any *single* object that is uncontaminated by the subjectivity. Just as the self is incoherent and alienated in its very nature, it also compromises the ground of the real and the integrity of the object. In much the same way that the self tends to surface in Page's poetry as a pale image of itself (in windows, underwater, in photographs), so do objects appear as *mere* images (ghosts, copies, imprints) unable to achieve a fuller form and a more stable embodiment. The poet apprehensively intimates that the "real" world of objects is neither larger nor *truer* than the subjectivity that circumscribes it. Page laments the

object-world's failure to suggest its own order or to ground the persona in a sense of the real.

Again, the poet's effort to articulate a thing's true character produces "encyclopedic" effects, suggesting insatiability. Page frequently asserts, over the course of her entire career, in fact, that she needs "extra senses."[16] She requires a "sounding board wider than the ear" ("Winter Afternoon" *HR* I.23), a heart "a size larger than seeing" ("After Rain" *HR* II.110), and especially a vision "behind the eyes" ("This Cold Man" *HR* I.59, "Stories of Snow" *HR* I.53, "Chinese Boxes" *HR* I.227, "Unable to Hate or Love" *HR* I.141). In the rhetoric of *wider than, larger than, other than*, one hears the idealist conviction that "the full nature of any hidden thing lies always behind it" (Mure 39), a sentiment more than confirmed in Page's desire to see "the rarely glimpsed bright face / behind the apparency of things" ("The Filled Pen," *HR* I.210). The inadequacy of the senses suggests that the work will struggle to find the "limits" of the object's objectivity, and indeed the "limits" of the object-world.

In "Photos of a Salt Mine" (1951), the poet presses herself to assume the most inclusive perspective on a scene. But though the poet hopes for a fuller, truer outlook, "Photos of a Salt Mine" suggests that a broadly inclusive perspective may not sustain a binding and essential vision. For Patrizia Cavelli "[Page's] poetry is in fact about looking and seeing" (10), and Page herself claims, quite to the point, that an objective orientation in poetry "can after all enlarge the boundaries of a poem" (qtd. in Wachtel 63). "Photos of a Salt Mine" moves *toward* an objective vision, but there is nothing ultimately to suggest that a disengaged perspective is larger or more aesthetically satisfying than an engaged perspective. In "Photos of a Salt Mine," the speaker studies

various photos, taken from different angles, of oppressed salt miners. Those that are shot from a more immediate perspective delight her so much that she deliberately confuses the stopes of salt with drifts of snow and indulges a dream of "innocence":

> muckers might make angels in its drifts,
>
> as children do in snow,
>
> lovers in sheets,
>
> lie down and leave imprinted where they lay
>
> a feathered creature holier than they. (*HR* I.48)

From this immediate, low angle, the facts of the scene are not what the speaker is witnessing, only the play of forms (here expressed in a multifaceted metaphor revealing the poet's fascination and involvement). From the low angle, the speaker prefers the "imprint" to the body that made it; in this highly aesthetic statement, the speaker favours the independent life of the image over the reality it strives to embody. The angelic imprint, in being "holier" than the miner who lay down to produce it, is also connotatively "more whole." Form, in this instant, is everything, and the play of forms is all-consuming, drawing the poet into an "Aladdin's cave" of wonders.

But the heavenly forms of the miner/angels cede to a hellish reality as, from the "acute high angle" of the next photograph, the endangered, oppressed miners more accurately appear to be trapped in a "black inferno," a Dantean "nether hell" (*HR* I.49). Now the poet understands that each perspective is implicitly selective or "filtered," and remarks, with a biting self-recrimination, that "the filter here [from the high angle] [is] not innocence but guilt" (*HR* I.49). In this revelatory confrontation with the moral relativity of vision, the poet realizes that although each vision has suggested its own

variety of "wholeness" to her, the perspectives clash and *cannot* be independently complete. Though the poet implies a desire to remove *all* filters from her eyes,[17] the poem also forces the harsh realization that subjective distortion is inevitable and the "total" vision is unavailable. The "low angle" and the "acute high angle" offer different and mutually uncontrollable visions. The former is subjectively rich and connotatively unlimited; the latter is a vision of unfathomable suffering that the poet literally cannot bear for long. The "high" and relatively objective perspective is thus also the point of the collapse of the vision.[18] The poet's ethics of seeing obliges her to expand her vision to the point of maximum material fullness. But in pushing her vision out of the domain of liberal creative involvement and into the domain of painful, "guilty" witnessing, Page implies the impossibility of a totally inclusive *and* subjectively engaging vision.

"Photos of a Salt Mine" ethically requires the poet to ground her subjectivity in the "real" world of objects, but denies her a satisfactorily inclusive vision, instead implying the inevitable, subjective "filtering" of perception. "Probationer" (1950, rev. 1954) confirms Page's intuition that all objects have an independent nature that cannot be captured and that will always remain outside the mind's (and the poem's) illusory and thus unsatisfactory totality. "Probationer" registers the concern that nothing can be grasped *as itself*, because the subjectivity of the perceiver circumscribes everything, and in far too limited a way.[19] The poem conveys the vision (under anaesthetic) of a recovering patient, looking up at a nurse. The scene changes fractionally as the speaker's immediate perception changes (the nurse is "a bird a bride" without so much as a separating comma). As the patient looks up at the nurse, she

> [f]loats out of anesthetic

helium hipped

a bird a bride your breath could bruise

is blurred

Re-forms in bright enamel, chips

into recurring selves

a hundred of her [...] ("Probationer," *HR* I.88)

As a patient being attended, the subject of the poem is in an egocentric universe. The half observed and half hallucinated nurse emerges as a figure for the poetic image itself.

Intrinsic to your pain

[she] lives in its acre

and only there because your wound has made her,

beyond its radius she has never been. (*HR* I.88)

"Probationer" implies that the image is a symptom of the "wound" of subjectivity, and that even the work of the eyes is inescapably imaginary. Observation is so personal that the nurse actually becomes "by a slow dissolve" you yourself (i.e. "you," the patient). But in a nice turn at the end of the poem the nurse becomes herself again in delivering "you" like a "present" to the world, in a stanza that opens up the possibility of a second solipsism. "You" are the nurse's creation too. She

[...] alters when you leave. From her stiff starch

she overflows in laughs, is proud and shy

and as if you are a present she has made,

she gives you away. (*HR* I.89)

With the re-formation of the nurse, Page reminds us that the "objects" of our vision have independent identities, part of which lies perpetually beyond our awareness, hence the nurse's sudden "alter[ation]" and "overflow" (*HR* I.89).

Like "Photos of a Salt Mine," "Probationer" strains to achieve a better perspective. Notably Page adopts a point of view that transcends that of her focal subject—the patient—as if to offer a *fuller* representation than that of her character, who is not present to witness the nurse's "overflow." But because the nurse has already been exposed as a stand-in for the poetic image, even the *speaker's* transcendent point of view is called into question as something limited by a "radius" of its own and simply unaware of its exclusions. The poem reveals that no perspective is really adequate to comprehend the essential alterity of its objects; the mind only creates these objects as multifaceted reflections of the self. Like "Photos of a Salt Mine," "Probationer" describes the inevitable limitations of perspective, and describes objects as simple extensions of a "sick" subjectivity.

In "Stories of Snow" (1945), Page unfolds yet another crisis of perception, by illustrating that seeing is not only mediated and insurmountably subjective but also inexhaustible. She implies that the exuberant, sensually perceived world can *never* be enclosed by representation. In "Stories of Snow" (1945), Page writes of a tropical experience so perceptually overwhelming that subject and object are not simply interdependent but grotesquely hybridized; Page speaks of flowers with "leaves [as] large as hands" and "protud[ing] [...] fleshy chins" (*HR* I.53). Instead of facing the exuberant flowers that "call their colours" with an absolute explicitness, the speaker retreats into a Nordic fantasy. Here, the mere *idea* of white snow generates an intricate, visual-narrative

dream of a swan hunt, in which the "feather bed" of the dreamer, the "plumes" of the hunters' breath, the writer's plume and the "plummet" of the swan are as harmoniously integrated as this diction implies (*HR* I.53). It is as if a perceiver would be *forever* perceptually answerable to the tropical flowers with leaves "as large as hands," whereas the "stories of snow" are delicately orchestrated in the mind's eye and brought to a full narrative closure that is nonetheless associated with stasis and death. The fantasy of the swan hunt in "Stories of Snow" is at the same time a dream of exhaustion and a submerged expression of the poet's desire for aesthetic delimitation. The dream is full of downward movement, spent energy, and slowing momentum. The swan falls in death, "pierced by the freezing bullet"; three of its feathers, loosened, drift gently to the ground; the hunters are reminiscent of woodsmen who, "lost in the white circle, fall at last / and dream their way to death"; the dreamer herself, in bed, "lie[s] back weeping" (*HR* I.53). Even the rhythm of this line—"and dream their way to death"—exhausts, with its ponderous three stresses, the movement of the predominantly five-stress lines that come before it. In sum, the attractiveness of the dream, for the speaker, is its finitude, its natural arrival at silence and closure.

In praising "raconteurs" and apparently seeking to identify with a genre other than itself, the poem implies that poetry is an art yoked to the eyes and to the illimitable world of sensual perception, but that *narrative* is an art that naturally finds its way to silence and to "the area behind the eyes / where silent, unrefractive whiteness lies" (*HR* I.54). Even though silence, whiteness and perfection also suggest death and stasis, the poet values them intensely. "Stories of Snow" implies, by contrast with the (narrativized) dream's natural gravity, that the perceptual world is *in*exhaustible, *infinitely* refractive,

and still bursting with undiminished colour and confusion when the dream is over (*HR* I.54). In this curious ambivalence about the intensity of the object-world, the poet projects the fear that, in the face of the (particularly Imagist) demand that the poet be an "eye," no principle of closure will ever emerge for the poem. Page's use of the dream as a poeticized approximation of story reveals her latent desire to *bind* images into resolution. The narrative harmonization of images enables aesthetic completion, even if such completion pervasively connotes death. Page rejects the too vivid perceptual world and, in doing so, implies her desire to bring poetry to a point where it will have "embodied all," a possibility specifically denied by the infinity of visual experience.

It is evident from the preceding readings that many of the same issues inform Page's objective orientation (and ensuing "encyclopedism") as inform her subjective orientation. The reality and nature of the object threaten to exceed the poem in such a way that the object cannot be grasped whole (and wholly as itself). So, too, the subject is frustrated (in "If It Were You," and "Man With One Small Hand" for example) by the task of *knowing* itself as a subject, and knowing itself to be entire. A sense of shortfall on both these counts drives the poet to gather more material into the poem in pursuit of its definitive wholeness. "Round Trip" (1945), one of Page's most appreciably "encyclopedic" poems, deals *at once* with a crisis of subjectivity and a crisis of objective seeing. The poem portrays a failed "total self" and, at the same time, describes a perceptual misadventure in which the eyes fail to render any true account of the object world. "Round Trip" illustrates that, however determined and voracious visual experience might be, it is ultimately uncomprehending and unsatisfactory. The roundness of the trip—its lack of a *new* destination—allows Page to give ironic emphasis

to the *mind*'s capacity for adventure (meaning literally its capacity to venture from itself in objective experience and be returned comfortably to itself in its own secure identity). The poem portrays two characters, a focal figure and a foil. A male passenger sallies forth in the spirit of an almost colonial confidence, furnished with all the trappings of exploration and conquest: "[...] a sword / binoculars and compass [...]" and "letters of introduction" (*HR* I.30). Page suggests in this swift characterization that the man intends to be in command of the world into which he ventures (and thus the poet sets the man up, in the light of this study at least, as an ironic "encyclopedist," assured of taking everything in). We understand the trip as *his* perceptual odyssey, though a female figure quakes beside him, almost unattended. Page writes of the dilation of the man's "pupil's I" (*HR* I.31) in a very typical wordplay connecting the eye to the "vertical pronoun" (Wiesenthal 12). In fact, the "vertical pronoun," with all its expectations and pre-conceptions, *does* circumscribe the entire experience and prevents the man from encountering the world freshly in the spirit of discovery. The poem eagerly catalogues the landscape over the course of six exuberant pages, but with the implication that these are *unreal* particulars, things seen but somehow unapprehended:

> [...] he approaches
> the perpetual great-god-green upending marshes
> where grey and ageing barns with a family likeness
> are scattered about like relatives in a village.
> A bridge against the sky,
> with metal girders—
> that droop in long black leaves,

forms a grove of palms—

a hot illusion set with circling birds. (*HR* I.31)

The "changing country is only a view that swings / the silent globes of [the man's] eyes" (*HR* I.31). The image of the eye as a globe (and thus the "I" as a globe) places emphasis on the inability of eye and the "I" alike to be not just meaningful delimiters but meaningful *total* delimiters of this experience. The only point at which the man believes himself able to "explor[e] the place, / where everything is foreign," is, ironically, when he goes to sleep. Then, the disinterested play of his mind's eye draws his own self-generated images into unfamiliar combinations. These images are so pleasing to him that they "fit together like glass arithmetic" (*HR* I.32) and the dream life takes on an aesthetic superiority to real experience; in this sense, the explorer has not ventured out at all. The external world, by contrast, is just perpetual, insignificant cinema to an unreceptive self.

In "Round Trip," the traveler's lack of meaningful connection to an abundance of external objects is directly related to the inaccessibility of an elusive metaphysical reality, an everywhere unconsummated identity: "But 'like' or 'as' is not what he is searching. / Something is hidden in the scenery still" (*HR* I.31). Part of the ungrasped metaphysical reality of the poem is the unintuited experience of the other. The passenger is only parenthetically aware of the misery of the girl beside him who, like him, is having only half of the experience of the "round trip." Unremittingly threatened by the encroaching view, the female passenger is experiencing *everything* as foreign, whereas the male passenger is experiencing nothing as such. Both orientations suggest the intractable relation between subject and object that Page's early poetry assumes. At the end of the track, both passengers step out, blinded by an impenetrable veil of mist, into a world

where "far and near are now identical," the furthest point of their journey undifferentiated from the point of departure (*HR* I.35). The self-completing "O" of the round journey is also a species of nothingness, an experiential zero. The "O" has incorporated much (and the poem has generated much material for itself), yet, in a profound sense, it has encompassed nothing at all. The complete indistinction of "far" and "near" suggests, as well, the mutual impossibility of immanent and transcendent experience in the poem. With the barring of these meaning-conferring possibilities, there is something sinister about Page's emphatic closural insistence that, for the man, everything is "forever, everywhere [...] the same" (*HR* I.35). The world is only a barrage of unreal, pallid furniture; the traveler's life is a half-life that suffers from a lack of meaningful outer reference. The world of objects finds no *amplitude* conferred upon it by the subjective glance. The poem is emphatically closed, portraying a vision in which six pages' worth of diverse particulars are realized in their oneness, such that everything is "forever, everywhere [...] the same" (*HR* I.35). But this complete identity of everything is highly ironic, as is the poem's closural totality, as is the experiential "roundness" of the trip.

"Round Trip" offers a nice summary of both the subjective and the objective crises we have encountered so far. It shows, as in "Probationer," that the perception of objects is terminally inadequate, particularly in light of the subject's tendency to see everything as versions of itself. It illustrates, like "Stories of Snow," that objective experience is so boundless that it prompts a retreat into the life of dreams (and, here, into the alternate morass of subjectivity). Like "Photos of a Salt Mine," the poem uses *two* experiential "filters" to show the final insufficiency of each. The poem establishes, familiarly by now, the false assurance of the "total self" and the personal obliteration of

the indefinite self, and shows that these selves are revealed in and confounded by the teeming world. And yet, we should note that these subjective and objective quandaries, though absorbing and though generative of a dramatic anxiety in the speaker, have still not amounted to a real crisis of *representation* for Page. When Page authored "Round Trip" in 1945, she was on the cusp of producing her first collection, *As Ten As Twenty* (1946), and apparently revelling philosophically in these aporias of being and perceiving of which her poetry would continue to speak for a decade. By 1954, the time of the publication of her second collection, *The Metal and the Flower*, such quandaries were a matter of marked ambivalence, and seemed to suggest Page's real reservations about the sufficiency of aesthetic embodiment.

"Outside my Rim": Page's Guilty Exclusions

It is one thing to suggest that the inner world is unlimited and unamenable to conceptual containment and that the outer world is "endless and open like ourselves" ("From Uncertain Ground," *HR* I.36). It is another thing to turn these irreconcilable infinities into a source of poetic "guilt" about how much a representation may hold and where it may fail. We have already seen Page express her poetic "guilt" in "Photos of a Salt Mine," as the speaker upbraids herself for having *enjoyed* a perspective that apparently did not take in the full truth of a scene. "Arras" and "After Rain" are poems in which the poet, even more powerfully, struggles to acknowledge that aesthetic inclusion is limited by its very nature and will always exclude some vital particular. The unassimilable object of each poem, in each case only half acknowledged by the poet, implies that the entire poetic structure is inadequate and that the poet is profoundly at

fault. Both poems suggest the failure of the poem if something remains outside its limit, and portray a self-castigation, even a disconsolate obsession, that intensifies profoundly in between "Arras" (1954) and "After Rain" (1956).

"Arras" (1954) conveys an anxiety about the firmness and finality of a *single* poetic "embodiment" and implies, by extension, the painful obligation of *total* embodiment. The poem only dramatizes the poet's effort to contain one thing, a bedazzling peacock. But the poem suggests (just as "Man With One Small Hand" does) that the failure of the poet to lay subjective claim to this *one* object opens up an *infinite* subject-object relation that compromises both the "totality" of the self and the "totality" of the work, forbidding anything but an illusory closure. And indeed, in "Arras," the task of containing the unwelcome peacock is identical to the task of bringing the peacock into the fold of an artistic world that is *otherwise perfect.*

"Arras" extends the poetic argument of "Man With One Small Hand" by compounding the earlier poem's portrait of an infinite sense of subjective incompletion with the explicit threat of artistic failure. In "Arras," the obsession that is cued by its *single object* reminds us of David Canaan's encyclopedic "terror of failing in even one particular" (227). The poem instates the power of every intractable item to produce, in the "encyclopedist"'s mind, a *total* aesthetic failure. The speaker of "Arras" is positioned ambiguously inside or outside a tapestry depicting a demure garden party. Though she is hidden, she literally cannot contain herself; her unacknowledged desire for self-exposure is surreally vivified in the form of a screaming peacock that struts unbidden into the frame of the tapestry. Chaotic and marvelous, the bird is an accusing presence, disturbing the poet's ability to order the work and to secure for herself a *definite* identity

as either the work's maker or its object of representation. The peacock wanders shrilly into the flat tapestry only to be momentarily concealed by its design. Likewise, the speaker's presence in her poem is at times impulsively self-concealing. Playing on a three-way pun that equates the poet's eye, the "I" of her consciousness, and the "eye" of the figurative needle of her craft, the poem dramatizes the struggle for artistic control over proliferating detail. This is the effort of the eye, the "I" and the (needle's) "eye" together to achieve the poetic "embodiment" that will *finish* the represented world of the tapestry's garden and liberate the poet from what has become a burden of representation.

At the outset, "Arras" seems to promote its own stylistic restraint as a vehicle for perfection and containment. With her choice of the word "classical" in the opening stanza, Page connotes intricate and *principled* poetic arrangement, portraying both the poem and the tapestry as works well disposed to being finally and totally realized. The first tercet is formal and contemplative: "Consider a new habit—classical, / and trees espaliered on the wall like candelabra. / How still upon that lawn our sandalled feet" (*HR* I.46). These wrought, end-stopped lines impart high authorial control. The embroidered tree is denaturalized in its comparison to a candelabra; the reference to sandals metonymically suggests a Grecian repose; the third line suppresses its verb. Page seems to respond directly, here, to T.E. Hulme's 1911 appeal for "classicism" in modernist verse and a "dry and hard" poetry eschewing all excess (66).[20] In that it shuns "excess," such poetry is definite in its own notion of "totality," and is by definition, realizable. Page, in an interview, praises authorial deliberation and control: "Artifice is the very nature of what one is doing. One is making something, one isn't just spilling something" (qtd. in Heenan 102). But "Arras" dramatizes the closeness of "making something" and

"spilling something" in its tense exploration of the by turns voluntary (and consciously *totalizing*) and involuntary (and unconsciously *infinitizing*) aspects of writing. "Arras" makes this interplay into a source of aesthetic distress. The speaker's inability to control the peacock aesthetically (as an unexpected outpouring of her own mind) suggests that the mind can always involuntarily produce more material, compromising the work's totality and extending it against the poet's will.

The peacock is the (romantic) principle of excess in the poem, as well as the principle of confessional artlessness. As both threaten the work's "totality," the poet feels compelled to disown the bird. At its first appearance, she prevaricates:

> But a peacock rattling its rattan tail and screaming
> Has found a point of entry. Through whose eye
> Did it insinuate in furled disguise
> To shake its jewels and silk upon that grass? (*HR* I.46)

And yet, the poet is *unable* to dissociate herself from the spectacular, seductive bird that succeeds in bringing vitality and spontaneity to this poetic world. The poet's commitment to her objective posture breaks as she concedes: "I confess: // It was my eye" (*HR* I.46). In this moment, the peacock shrilly proclaims the poet's unacknowledged desire for spontaneous and subjective presence in the poem; it surreally steps into the "frame" of the representation just as it has evidently broken into the "frame" of her conscious thought. And the enduring presence of the peacock on the arras reflects the poet's indecision about whether to take it in or cast it out, a decision related to her aesthetic inability to claim either a subjective or an objective perspective on her work.

Finding herself alarmingly twinned by art's double demand for spontaneity and "classical" technique, the speaker retreats back into her default posture of detachment. Her reprisal of simile ("the peaches hang like lanterns") is a careful stepping-back from the hyper-metaphor of the bird's surreal presence, the literalization of her unspoken desire to be *seen* (Rooke describes the bird as the poet's "royal and rampaging alter-ego" ["Arras" 66]). In the phrase "No one joins / those figures on the arras," the poet reinstates the object world's intractability and her own invisibility (*HR* I.46). The poet, in not "joining" (that is, not accompanying) the figures, is hidden; likewise the faculty that "joins" things conceptually—the subjective self—has withdrawn, favouring that half of the poetic persona who announces that "I am observer" (*HR* I.46). But it is quickly obvious that the subject-object relationship that the poem depicts is fractured, that the poet and the peacock are infinite with respect to one another, and that the representation cannot "hold" either one of them in place.

The introduction of this unstable element—the bird—prompts a representational crisis of "total embodiment." The work is now perpetual and unfinishable, except by an arbitrary closure. The bird enters the frame as a "bodied" entity ("voluptuous it came" [*HR* I.46]) but becomes an "insinuation" (reprising its "furled disguise" [*HR* I.47]), as the poet, admitting that it entered through her "eye," tries to put it in its proper place as a poetic abstraction. The poem also suggests that in becoming an "insinuation" it is the *bird* who has hidden from and thus eluded the *poet*, and that it will re-emerge to demand her own new confessional outcry, drawing her *out*, just as she has tried to draw it *in*. Poet and peacock alike alternate between palpable "body" and high stylization as they pursue one another through the unrestrictive scrim of the arras. The poet's realization that she

can neither hold her poetic universe in place, nor be "held" by it is a source of representational distress, as she speaks of the world of the arras and its other figures:

> I thought their hands might hold me if I spoke.
> I dreamed the bite of fingers in my flesh,
> their poke smashed by an image, but they stand
> as if within a treacle, motionless,
> folding slow eyes on nothing. While they stare,
> another line has trolled the encircling air,
> another bird assumes its furled disguise. (*HR* I.47)

The poet remains acutely aware of her lack of control over this represented world. She regrets her "confession," feeling baldly exposed on the austere, perfect world of the arras. While the poet is uncomfortably unveiled, the peacock appears particularly coy and elegant, moving into place on the tapestry *despite* the poet rather than *because* of her. Against the backdrop of the speaker's despair, the aesthetic harmony of the last two lines (above) is almost perverse. The poem's final two lines flaunt their own perfection: the lovely iambic pentameter; the anaphora; the euphony of "encircle," "bird," "furled;" the subtle tracery of the depicted "lines." The poem's moment of *formal* closure sharply underlines the unachieved *subjective* closure and calls attention to the way in which the poem remains unfinished and cyclical. The poem is ultimately a failed single embodiment and in some sense a failed *total* embodiment, though a resplendent, exemplary poem: in retrospect, Page's own favourite (Rogers 10; Pearce 37).

Page's crisis poem *par excellence,* indicating a more personal self-castigation, is "After Rain." This is a poem that critics often address because its self-critique is so

evident and so poignant, and because Page's publication of it in 1956 in *Poetry Chicago* seems to augur her poetic silence. The pivotal work describes the poet's delight in a rain-soaked garden. To the poem's halfway point, the garden experience is consummately aesthetic, "abstracted" and "geometric" (*HR* II.109), and meets the poet's thirsty eye with more and more details, to a point of visual surfeit and intoxication. The poet luxuriously compares the rain-dappled vegetation not just to textiles, but to the fantasy fabrics proper to the ballet: "lace," "broderie anglaise," "chantilly," "a kind of tulle, a flimsy mesh" "sagged with sequins" (*HR* II.109). But becoming gradually aware of the miserable gardener whose labour is spoiled (like his proletarian denim) by the rain, the poet realizes that she has let her enthusiastic perception bar her from compassion, and that her vision has excluded this man. Here Page's general awareness of the lack of connection between subjects and objects specifically settles on the poet's inability to connect with another human being, and *he* becomes the thing that the representation has failed to take in. She appeals to the birds of the garden to "choir" Giovanni and to "let him come to rest / within this beauty as one rests in love." (We might note the act of incorporation involved.) Then she extends her prayer to request a more sympathetic, "whole" vision for herself:

> And choir me too to keep my heart a size
> larger than seeing, unseduced by each
> bright glimpse of beauty striking like a bell,
> so that the whole may toll,
> its meaning shine
> clear of the myriad images that still—

do what I will—encumber its pure line. (*HR* II.110)

"After Rain" has been extensively treated by critics as a personal and self-critical retrospective poem, one that definitely proclaims the poet's responsibility to the world and to others. Many find "After Rain" to be the quintessential expression of Page's desire for personal "wholeness," without which there can be no perfection for the poem (Jamieson 76; Bartlett 106; Rooke, "Chameleon" 190; Sullivan 33ff). Indeed, this conclusion reflects Page's own apparent self-assessment.

But does the poet's assertion that she may *fully realize* her poetic world through a more loving and compassionate attention really suggest an avenue to a total poetic embodiment, the implied goal of the poem? D.G. Jones reflects on the artist's effort to see with an "optic heart" in a study that includes both Page and Buckler (and makes a significant gesture to the encyclopedic standard of A.M. Klein's "green inventory"). Jones makes a prescient observation:

> [...] [T]o say, simply, as these poets do, that we should look at the world with our heart and not our head, however much to the point, begs the question. Given a certain perceptual bias, a certain vision, the more we strain our eyes to see, the more we will end up seeing the same thing. In our efforts to achieve an "optic heart," we may well end up with a parody of any green inventory.
>
> ("Cold Eye" 181)

This insight reveals that an artist cannot simply *demand* of him- or herself that the objective vision be tempered by a better, more loving subjectivity. Seeing is *already* a combination of subjective and objective apprehension and we have a limited power to change the ratio: once the poet "strains" to *see lovingly,* the strain itself reenacts her

original vigilance. Brian Trehearne also calls attention to the ambiguity of Page's resolution in "After Rain." Trehearne points out that, in this poem, "Page is concerned to conceptualize images quantitatively—as things that can be counted [...] of which there can be too many per 'line'—and poems qualitatively, as declarations demanding wholeness and purity" (42). Thus, for Trehearne, "After Rain" indicates, despite itself, that the poet's deployment of images (even a *reformed* deployment of images) may *never* add up to wholeness. There is a core incompatibility between the kind of aesthetic unit the image *is*, and the kind of wholeness Page seeks.

And yet, "After Rain" *does* seem to anticipate a way forward for Page's poetry—not in love, but in a more perfect, less self-conscious, commitment to beauty. The considerable body of critical commentary that addresses "After Rain" is predominantly interested in its expression of poetic guilt and gives much weight to the exquisite (and self-reproaching) final stanza. But there are *two* parts to Page's prayer, one of which is often critically neglected. The poet asks that her heart may be expanded in order that the "whole may toll," but she also asks that Giovanni, the gardener, "may come to rest / within this beauty, as one rests in love" (*HR* II.110). In other words, even while suggesting that she herself must choose love over beauty, Page also comes to the conclusion that a perfect beauty is *translatable* to an inclusive love. The garden experience would be whole if the poet loved better, but it would also be whole if Giovanni were more susceptible to beauty. Page is not only seeking to reform the subject (herself, the perceiver and artist) in this poem; she is also seeking to reform the *object*. The elusive, excluded object of representation that denies the poem its wholeness (here, Giovanni) needs to be more tractable, and the poet intuits that it is not strictly her poetic

responsibility to make it so. The poet is not asking that Giovanni share her specific vision of the garden (which is self-indulgent, ornamental, and, the poet suggests, inadequately tempered by love), but that he be receptive to his own separate, uplifting experience of beauty. Then, the mutual *character* of Giovanni's experience and the poet's would unite them, even if they do not have an explicitly mutual vision or an identical relationship to the object world. Beauty would include them both. Thus, the idea of a simple, direct but radiant perception, increasingly suffused with beatific implication, becomes a dominant ideal in Page's work. If "After Rain" is a meditation on her career to date, then this conception of the *beautiful* as a full and self-justified principle predicts a new source of poetic inclusion for Page's eventual return to poetry.

"After Rain," gorgeous in its details and moving in its poetic conclusions, is the centrepiece of Page's *oeuvre* and the most significant of her poems to this study, as it seems to convey a sense of the poet's (and not just the writer character's) complete accountability to the world. This, then, is the ultimate intensification of Page's "encyclopedic imagination." It announces the poet's personal, self-critical determination *not to exclude anything*. "After Rain" is, in this way, different from an ostensible "crisis" poem like "Arras." Even though the poet figure in "Arras" "confess[es]" that she has made an untouchable world that cannot even hold *her* ("I thought their hands might hold me if I spoke / I dreamed the bite of fingers in my flesh" [*HR* I.47]), her confession, like her presence in the poem, is riddling and equivocal. The "confess[ion]" of "Arras" is quite different from the simple confession of "After Rain," in which the poet claims, starkly: "I suffer shame in all these images" (*HR* II.110). In "After Rain," it seems that

the poet *does* suffer, and here the "encyclopedic imagination" is clearly ascribable to the poet and not just to her poetic speakers and personae.

It is not just Page's ensuing break from poetry that confirms the depth and the personal nature of the poetic conclusions of "After Rain." The poem has provocative echoes in an autobiographical anecdote Page tells about becoming a painter. In a 1982 interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Page recounts the scene of "firing Salvador," the incident that laid the foundation for her development as a visual artist.[21] (Page subsequently published an account of this event in her travel memoir, *Brazilian Journal* [1987], which comically relates her struggle to be mistress of the ambassadorial mansion in Rio de Janeiro, where the unfortunate Salvador was employed as head servant.) Page recalls that her faltering Portuguese had required her to take notes from the dictionary before giving Salvador his notice. Then, in her nervousness during the scene of the dismissal, Page doodled extensively on the paper that was acting as her language aid. When her husband, (William) Arthur Irwin, found the sheet and asked Page what the drawings were, she replied, "that's me, firing Salvador" (qtd. in Wachtel 55). Irwin, pleased with the caricatures, produced a roll of fine white drawing paper for Page the next day and so fostered the growing dedication to visual art that led to several exhibitions of her work. In telling this story, Page belabours the beauty and uselessness of Salvador ("one of the most beautiful men that ever walked, but useless, utterly useless" [Wachtel 55]) just as the speaker's attention, in "After Rain," is diverted by the beauty and helplessness of Giovanni ("he so beautiful and diademmed / his long Italian hands so wrung with rain" [*HR* II.110]). Page exercises her class imperative with great difficulty throughout the scene of firing Salvador ("I am sorry for it, for all our sakes" [*Brazilian*

58]), which seems to match her guilt, in "After Rain" about her power to make "a broken man / [...] subject to my whim" (*HR* II.110). The story of Salvador culminates in Page's capping remark about the inhibiting white paper and the "very black pen" that Irwin brought her, which together "*meant that you had to be very sure of your line*" (Wachtel 55, emphasis added). The arc of this anecdote culminates in Page's comment about sureness and clarity of line, which, as a (perfectly appropriate) point of final emphasis, asserts Page's new enthusiasm for a principle of artistic perfection, but rather dispels her sympathy for Salvador. This final concern for the way the artist must refine her talent for doodles toward the discovery of a clean line certainly suggests the final words of "After Rain," which declare the poet's yearning for an unencumbered "pure line" of poetry through a reduction of its images (*HR* II.110). I would suggest that even the *naming* of Giovanni in "After Rain" functions like the naming of Salvador in "That's Me, Firing Salvador," a phrase that by now has gained its own apocryphal notoriety. There is both a sympathy and a flouting of sympathy implied in the familiar act of naming in each case, enacting the ambivalence that Brian Bartlett makes central to Page in his essay "For Sure The Kittiwake," where naming is both an affectionate and a possessive act. Page published "After Rain" in 1956 and fired Salvador in June of 1957. The similarities that are detectable in the poem and the anecdote do not reveal that the poem is based on the incident. Rather (and perhaps more significantly), Page *interprets* the scene of "firing Salvador" (and discovering painting) in a way that echoes "After Rain" in structure and imagery, thus concretely personalizing the poem's contents.[22] Both "After Rain" and "firing Salvador" suggest that, although Page may declare her "guilt" at pursuing beauty at the expense of some "other," her true commitment is, after all, to beauty.

Indeed, in "After Rain," the poet's discovery of her duty to *love* Giovanni and to absorb his experience for the sake of a completely inclusive representation is only somewhat persuasive. When she writes that she "[...] *almost weep[s]* to see a broken man / made subject to my whim" (*HR* II.110, emphasis added), it is too tempting for a reader to seize upon the qualifier "almost." The words actually echo the last line of Page's 1946 poem "Puppets," in which the poet describes puppets as very crude representations of human "types." The puppets are figures of both sympathy and an almost helpless derision, and they represent the way in which "[human] types perpetuate themselves" outside of history: the Italian Pulcinella, for example, becomes the English Punch (*HR* I.132). Though their identities are transnational, the puppets are *always* bound to the inherent cruelty of the representation and to the sharp alterity conferred upon them by being the objects of others' entertainment. But Page's puppets are similar to what Cohen will call "beautiful losers": the apparently necessary figures who in their abjection (or historical oppression) gain an iconic power to draw out and purge others of their guilt and shame. Page writes that the "negro" puppet's "hands[...] / are long and lonely" (*HR* I.133), exactly as she draws attention to Giovanni's "long Italian hands so wrung with rain" (*HR* II.110). And similarly, this puppet in his powerlessness invites the poet's quick perception of an undiscovered whole (here, nothing less than the pattern of "all history") that, again in the vocabulary of "After Rain," "*almost*" makes his audience "weep" (*HR* I.133, emphasis added):

> Oh, coming isolated from their plays but not
>
> isolated from their history,
>
> shaped and moulded by heredity,

negro and clown in microcosm, these
small violent people shake the quiet room
and bring all history tumbling about
a giant audience that almost weeps. (*HR* I.133)

"Puppets" presents a historical argument that "After Rain" does not. But both poems, in similar diction, raise the question of how much love the poet *can* actually extend to the objects of her representations, and whether the emotion they excite is not *inescapably* self-serving. Cohen's own treatment of his "beautiful losers" will emphatically imply that art cannot prescribe an ethics of loving and that the artist must instead dedicate himself wholly to the discovery of a beauty which may uplift every perceiver alike; this is the only form of "inclusion" art may fittingly produce. Page, too, in her later poetry, seems not to forsake her aestheticizing eye at all; she only learns to use it without self-recrimination and to understand it *as* a form of love. She herself will "come to rest in beauty / as one rests in love" (*HR* II.110), though it is the task she assigns to Giovanni, in "After Rain," and not to herself.

Page's work demonstrates that an ideal of total poetic inclusion, inseparably from an ideal of total identity for the speaking self, becomes a genuine source of poetic chagrin for the poet. Page tends to evaluate her poetic persona(e) and her poetry negatively in light of her very absolute drive towards totality, a drive that can only resolve itself in irony, in paradox, and in formal closures that nonetheless lack the final seal of *subjective* closure. I have argued that the extent of Page's apparent internalization of this ideal is what makes her unique among the authors of this study. But Page also gives us the opportunity to note that the impasse produced by the "encyclopedic imagination"—

though sincere enough to suspend Page's poetic career for more than ten years—is not a *final* impasse and an end to poetic productivity. When Page returns to poetry in 1967, and begins to place an active emphasis on her quest for the "total I," she also gives that "total I" a new complexion, and enables her poetry to proceed in a new direction.

Afterword: The New "Total I"

The poems of Page's later career (beginning with her new and collected works, *Cry Ararat!* [1967]) reveal that the poet's way forward is not precisely in love, but in a revolutionized perception and a reinvigoration of the sense of beauty. In particular, Page accepts that beauty is linked to a sense of ineffability, so that she no longer feels compelled to perceive things in their full, permanent, truly objective character. In the title poem of *Cry Ararat!*, Page places herself in the perspective of the Biblical Noah, and gives us the dream of a mind alone in a world that has been entirely lost but may also, by an act of (poetic) faith, be wholly restored. In her extreme solitude, and in the unreality of dream, the poet tries to find a perfectly "receptive stillness" (MacCallum 367) and a newly inclusive "total I" (*HR* II.185). The poet dedicates herself entirely to the *prospect* of the realization of her vision. She concentrates on the horizon where the whole world (first visible as Mount Ararat) *may* appear, but where the poet continually experiences it as a lack. The poet encourages herself to perceive the new world entirely and truthfully, without perceptual translation: "Return to your hand / the sense of your hand / Return to your ear / the sense of your ear" (*HR* II.183). In these words, the poet places a new kind of faith in the basic adequacy of the senses and redresses her earlier idealist requirement for a "sounding board wider than the ear" (*HR* I.23) and a vision "behind the eyes" (*HR*

I.59, I.53, I.227, I.141). The former requirement for "extra" senses seemed to guarantee the inadequacy of any representation. The new adequacy of the self's instruments—the senses—also helps to imply the innate wholeness of the "total I," as well as the basic representability of things (*HR* II.185).

Though the senses are now *sufficient* for the perception of the object world, the fulfilment of the "total I" is not strictly vested in objects themselves, nor in the ability of the "I" to take them in permanently and finally. Page recognizes her envisioned new world as a dream (without time, "without sound," without concretion [*HR* II.183]) and accepts the possibility of its loss at every moment. The new world will instate itself fully, but will also disintegrate in an instant. The poet abandons the dream of possessing it, and instead trains herself to be fulfilled in its reception and undamaged by its loss. The "total I" must persist when, inevitably, "so flies and blows the dream" (*HR* II.183). Although either the mountain or the dove with the olive branch may be the intended object of her vision, Page concentrates on the development of a vision that does not strictly *require* the permanence and full graspability of objects. Her "total I" finds its alternate fulfillment in the undiminished *endurance* of its own desire when the dove or the mountain cannot be seen. James Kirwan's study of beauty, similarly, encourages us to see that while we may believe that we find beauty in *objects*, the experience of the beautiful is *behind* the object in our recognition of our own desire.[23] Kirwan argues that, in particular, the experience of the beautiful involves the persistence of desire when the object is lost to the senses: "Beauty [...] involves the preservation of desire in the face of rationality, a holding fast to what exists only in its slipping away. The endeavour to persist, as Spinoza observes, involves an indefinite time, [and] is unbounded by reality" (49). Page's new imaginative

and ephemeral quest is "more real" than "strangers passing on the street" and is pursued at the total expense of "the immediate companion" (*HR* II.185). Page seems to have made the decision, in her later poetry, to *perfect* her solitary experience, rather than extending it to others, in keeping with the implicit (rather than the apparent) message of "After Rain."

In his review of *Cry Ararat!*, H. MacCallum notes that Page's new poetry is "less cryptic and more expansive" than her poetry of the forties and early fifties (367). Page renovates her idea of "wholeness" even at the level of her poetry's decreasing use of the image and more dominant use of the symbol. The symbol offers a different *kind* of plenitude from the concrete "wholeness" of the image. The image is presumed to be complete and adequate in its own uniqueness and "perspicuity" (Gage 36), and conveys a wholeness in itself that is "anti-eternal"(Gage 40). Hulme, praising the pure immanence of the image, pressed his fellow imagists to "admit the existence of beauty without the infinite being in some way or another dragged in" (66). The symbol, on the other hand, conveys another sort of wholeness, incorporating, as part of itself, something transcendent. The use of the symbol also speaks of a self interested in divining metaphysical unities that, by their very nature, are whole but will never be in full self-evidence. Albert Cook believes it falls to the symbolic object to "show a state of soul," or rather to allow the reader to "disengage a state of soul from it by a series of decipherments" (67-8). Indeed, the poetic image must cede its place to the symbol in the spiritualizing of the word that is increasingly Page's goal in poetry. The final lines of "Cry Ararat!" seem to put aside the image in favour of the symbol: "A single leaf can block a mountainside; / all Ararat be conjured by a leaf" (*HR* II.186). In these lines, the

same object—the leaf—is either an impediment to vision or a catalyst for vision, depending on how it is taken. As a concrete image, calling attention to its own vivid presence, the leaf supersedes the mountain that stands behind it at a distance. As a conjuring symbol, however, the leaf that the dove brings *evokes* that which is not present to the eyes: the mountain, the world entire. Page's adoption of the symbol as a more frequent expressive unit in her later poetry means that she may gesture, in fewer words, to larger ideas, *evoking* wholes that she no longer feels strictly compelled to *demonstrate.*

In the earlier, "encyclopedic" poetry, the poet was constantly pressed to overmaster the world's particulars: to see accurately, to name, to modify the world at the risk of becoming lost in it ("If It Were You"), or to possess some recalcitrant thing conceptually ("Man With One Small Hand," "Arras"). In these poems, the poet had to use her art to *make* the object part of the subjective domain, and was dissatisfied in finding herself unable to do so. These poems only finally suggested the object's resistance and enforced the alienation of the subject from the world of objects. In the newer poetry, Page seems to find it easier to suggest subject-object identity, again because of this symbolic appeal to the ineffable. Because subject and object are somehow understood to be *of a piece* and part of a larger metaphysical reality, the poet often readily finds herself to be *part* of the object's very substance, and absolved from the task of defining it or possessing it in poetry. Page's late poetry often insists on the substantial sameness of subject and object by offering passages in which the poet easily *enters* the object or is entered *by* it, as if they were implicitly one:

> And yet in a flash, from infra-red to ultraviolet,
>
> We saw the hologram glittering above us

Glistening in air we could suddenly enter like swallows

As the whole citadel, rainbowed, immediate,

Received us like time that has no break in it.

("Hologram," *HR* II.189, original emphasis[24])

The third [statue] was gold

ground to so fine a dust

it lay like pollen.

[.....]

I entered its gold dream,

rose on its shaft of light. ("Black and White," *HR* II.182)

[the shafts of lilies on the patio]

are like neutrinos touching us without our knowing.

Doing who knows what

As they pass through us?

Answer: *Who* knows what. ("Lily on the Patio," *HR* II.155)

These people in a circle reel me in.

Down the whole length of golden beach I come

willingly pulled by their rotation

slow

as a moon pulls waters

on a string

their turning circle winds around its rim.

("Another Space," *HR* II.170)

Obviously, Page's later, mystical orientation informs these passages, and other poems in which "I know not in or out" ("Dark Kingdom," *HR* II.154). In these cases, there are implicit assumptions about the oneness and unity of things in which the poet involuntarily participates, and which it is not strictly *her duty* to create. The access Page has gained to the world of objects and to the metaphysical world extends to the world of others; it is notable that three of the four passages above speak indefinitely of a "we" or an "us," an implied community. Held up against a poem like "Round Trip," in which one person's reality absolutely excludes his neighbour's, or "After Rain," in which the poet suddenly becomes aware of an unmet *responsibility* to the inscrutable other, the "we" of these verses is particularly striking. The almost offhanded companionship in these passages—an identification of the poet with a group in so natural a way that she barely calls attention to it—is the most stunning example of the formerly intractable and excluded object suddenly made tractable.

The privileged symbol of total inclusiveness, is of course, the circle. Before Page's period of silence, the circle was as definitely a symbol of exclusion as it was one of inclusion, and was pervasively ambivalent. The nurse in "Probationer" was *trapped* in the "radius" of the patient's thought (*HR* I.88); Giovanni's reality in "After Rain" was "outside" the "rim" of the speaker (*HR* II.110). Moreover, the "roundness" of the "Round Trip" was illusory and ironic. But in these newer poems, the poet is drawn into a circular dance ("Another Space") or a circular maze ("The Maze") or into a green world

"boundlessly encircling me" ("When Bird-Like, Air Surrounded," *HR* II.132): all ecstatic experiences, none implying exclusion or *illusory* totality. In "The Flower Bed," Page gives her reader a vision of circles within circles within circles. The poem describes a round garden bed containing a "forest of sunflowers" which are "shooting their eye-beams at their Lord the Sun" (*HR* I.159). The poet's simple pleasure in the formal echo of the round sun in the roundness of the flowers and the roundness of the bed becomes a poetic epiphany as she realizes that the pattern extends to and includes *her*, via the roundness of her perceiving glass and her eye. Typically of her later poetry, the poet feels inducted into the mystery of the world's *natural* and all-inclusive order. As in Thomas Moore's Romantic lyric, "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms," the sunflower's natural orientation towards the sun symbolizes the soul's disposition towards the divine. The poet's responsiveness to the beautiful flowers, in turn, supports the notion that "a longing for the divine reveals itself in the beautiful" (Kirwan 29). The poem seems animated as well by the (archaic) belief that the world itself is naturally rendered in "similitudes" forming a "semantic web" (Foucault 17). The poet initially wonders at the way forms effortlessly emulate each other, and when this emulation becomes a matter of formal poetic consciousness, the sense of unity is not disrupted but amplified. The defining circumference of each circle is never an exclusionary border, but rather a point of opening onto a still greater, more inclusive order.

The *inevitability* of poetic all-inclusiveness is almost as pervasively guaranteed by P.K. Page's late poetry as the *impossibility* of (meaningful) poetic all-inclusiveness is guaranteed by her early poetry. At the outset of her career, Page seems overwhelmed by the infinite and expanding nature of the world and the tentative unity of the self. The

representing self, in the early "encyclopedic" poetry, places no adequate control on the world; rather, the world problematically pours into the poem through the unselective eye and incoherent subjectivity of the speaking persona or central character. Then, the unrestrained nature of perception, conception and representation alike becomes a matter of dawning poetic self-consciousness in "Arras" and of acute poetic self-recrimination in "After Rain." When Page returns to poetry after her shift in medium, she is able to find the fact of her own occasional "disintegration" a source of pleasure; at least, she *loses herself* in her new poetic objects without returning painfully to an idea of self-loss. It is obvious that the intervening years of poetic silence, new personal explorations, and alternate professional endeavours have changed Page's thinking considerably. Her new poetry is suffused with new beliefs and convictions about the radical oneness of all things, a revelation available to the new, mystical, all-embracing "total I."

These differences reveal, as well, how effectively "The Hidden Room" works as a poem commenting retrospectively on the poet's *whole* career, for this poem suggests that the total representation is always there as a magic text to be discovered, not made. Page employs her late technique of *symbolizing* this whole (not only as a room, but also as a library, a web, an aleph, a magic square, a prism and so forth). However, the poet also replicates the early tendency to *layer* these tropes one upon the next, creating a sense of descriptive insufficiency, a feature generally gone from Page's late poetry. The poem dramatizes *both* the early anxiety of the poet's effort to determine and possess the whole (the "hidden room"), and her late conviction that her *unrealized* efforts to define the hidden room do nothing to compromise its absolute existence, which gives her comfort. She hopes that we, her readers, will arrive at a similar intuition, and come to recognize

the "hidden room" in its elusiveness and expansiveness: "*as prism / a magic square / the number nine*" (*HR* I.11).

CHAPTER THREE:

"Who Is the Lord of the World?": Leonard Cohen and the Ethics of the Total Vision

> There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus* [....] This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us, he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm.
>
> (Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" 392)

> I seemed to wake up in the middle of a car accident, limbs strewn everywhere, detached voices screaming for comfort, severed fingers pointing homeward, all the debris withering [....] [A]ll I had in the wrecked world was a needle and thread, so I got down on my knees, I pulled pieces out of the mess and I started to stitch them together [....] my needle going so madly, sometimes I found I'd run the thread right through my own flesh [....] and I knew that I was also truly part of the disaster [....]. Old friend, are you still with me? Do not despair. I promised you that this would end in ecstasy. (Leonard Cohen, "A Long Letter From F," *Beautiful Losers* 186)

History in the Flesh: The All-Incorporating Body

Above are two portraits of the universal accident, two views of history steeped in crisis. They express the human story not as an infinitely unfolding chain of occurrences but as a nightmarish moment of *total event*. Both are quintessentially twentieth-century visions, sharing with Picasso's *Guernica*, for example, an eschatological sense of universal violence. They respond to the fact that "comprehensive forms of domination have been conceived in the twentieth-century world" (Aschheim 14). These passages illustrate the fact that a sense of catastrophe drives our human desire for form. We envision the world's "barbarous finality"[1] and respond formally to the end of things with an answering image of wholeness and totality, even the *mad* totality that Cohen's novel depicts above. Walter Benjamin's essay (which features the above reading of Klee's painting) makes an argument that is also evident in Leonard Cohen's 1966 novel,

Beautiful Losers: that recorded history cannot help but pursue a theological-metaphorical resolution, a binding vision of "the end." This kind of cataclysmic historical consciousness invites the notion that all of humanity is "shot through" with restorative possibility and messianic potential (Benjamin 397). Such a power is pessimistically unrealized in Klee's image and is grotesquely parodic in Cohen's passage. Cohen implies that if history is unorganized in its very nature—an accident in which everything is simultaneously possible—then history also invites powerful and charismatic personages to intervene and *make* order. A notion of ultimate selfhood, for Cohen, is so intimately linked to this frenetic world-creation that the "universal vision" is inscribed into the creator's very flesh and thus inseparable from his person.

Klee's Angel of the New is radically powerless to "make whole" the human wreckage, but the speaker of Cohen's passage, the hipster-prophet "F" (who, by his own account, "laboured to become an Angel" [190]) has a mad and visionary power to do so.[2] Although "F" is a Member of Parliament, his occult human machinations seem to exemplify the "false, worldless politics" that Hannah Arendt regards as the foundation of totalitarianism (qtd. in Aschheim 125). The tremendous telescoping of time in "F"'s vision of the human accident is terrible and ecstatic. On one hand, it represents the "interruption" of linear history that is possible in a world where magic and miracle are always latent (Lebold 45). On the other hand, it conforms to the "acceleration of nature and history" that belongs to totalitarianism, which promotes a vision of historical change that is so rapid that *somebody* is required to make the immovable and eternal standard of God's laws into a human reality (Arendt 467). And yet, despite "F"'s almost godly presumption, there is much value in the revolutionary message that he is trying to send to

his historian friend, "I."[3] "F"'s bizarre creativity counters "I"'s ascetic and more conventional historical attitude. Cohen implies that a historian is, in Benjamin's own phrase, a "prophet facing backwards" (495) and that his view of his own and the entire human situation is therefore blind to any redemptive potential.

Two years before publishing *Beautiful Losers*, Leonard Cohen remarked that the font of all our ideas is our "absolute and ruthless longing for the presence of the divine" ("Loneliness and History"). When "F" intervenes so grotesquely in the universal accident, compulsively sewing flesh to flesh, his desperate, provisional creativity reflects this desire to assert a unifying principle in the world even if he must become it himself. Similarly, *Beautiful Losers* seems to emanate directly from the human requirement that Cohen describes as "absolute," namely to perceive the world as *a creation*—to have a vision of the world's *ineffable organization as one body*. But such a "total vision" may not be easily separable from the desire to see humanity created in the image of "One Man," which is the ideal that has informed totalitarian thought (Arendt 466). "F" in fact finds that he cannot neutrally recuperate bodies from the universal crash without being driven to recreate them as the "ideal man" (186), nor can he fashion them as entities separate from himself. Indeed, "F" cannot avoid creating *himself* as the total personality to which the universe is to be turned. The more his vision responds to the "absolute" human requirement for the perception of unity, the more he becomes, like all of the characters in *Beautiful Losers*, an extremist. In a way that is inseparable from the novel's own aesthetic, "F"'s desire for revelation brings him close to a dangerous ethic.

"F" makes an inclusive machine of his own body and person, attempting to find, in his own universal appetite, a container for all of creation. His body—his own physical

integrity—has been symbolically corrupted as a result. "F" writes his letter to "I" from the confines of a mental hospital where his brain and genitals are rotting from the effects of advanced syphilis. The novel suggests that "F" is dying of his indiscriminate incorporation of *everything*, his determination to eat or inject himself with any substance and sleep with anyone, in order to be true to his personal credo, "Who am I to refuse the universe?" (6). In *Beautiful Losers*, the Emersonian transcendentalist question "Why should we not enjoy an original relation to the universe?" (qtd. in Lardas 99) is refracted through a 1960s sensibility of violence, creativity, social protest and exuberant sexuality and apparently realized in "F"'s revelatory, omni-receptive appetite. Peter Wilkins has identified Cohen's character "F" as "a borderline totalitarian" in his personal desire for power and authority (46). But the novel is so steeped in a sense of absolutism, the characters' identities are so permeable, and the desire for the encompassing vision so pervasive, that it is more revealing to explore totalitarianism as an intimate part of the novel's aesthetic than as the quality of any single character. This chapter describes Cohen's characters' various models of all-incorporative, encyclopedic (and "extremist") representations of the world, and links these extremist postures and *styles of being* to the totalitarian aesthetic.

Beautiful Losers, like "F" himself, is "flamboyant" in its "inclusiveness" (Dragland 268). It radiates "bursting encyclopedic energy" in its wild assortment of literary forms (Nadel 74) and is "encyclopedic" in various other ways that this dissertation has already defined. The novel employs vast lists in order to show that the sought-after meaning remains ever outside and in advance of those details; and it puts forth the ideal of a "total" self as a precondition for the visionary "total work." Behind

and before its aspiration to be absolute as a work of art, the novel is concerned with absolute selves or dispositional extremes. *Beautiful Losers* explores the limit at which one's humanity becomes either superhumanity or inhumanity, and evokes a pantheon of saints, superheroes, angels and monsters. And the novel aspires to certain abstractions that few but Cohen generally venture to evoke so explicitly: purity, beauty, truth, worth, miracle. In its promise of ecstasy, the novel aspires to "literary totality" especially in the sense articulated by Philip Sollers, namely that the work of art is a "spiritual instrument" (77) and that which "delivers and delimits everything" (78). When Cohen was drafting his newly conceived novel under the working title of *Plastic Birchbark*, the scope of his book's deliverance and delimitation was already implied in its projected subtitle: *A Treatment of the World* ("Working Papers").

In addition to its formal and conceptual extremism, *Beautiful Losers* traffics in what Michel Foucault calls "limit-experiences": "eroticism, madness, drugs, sadomasochism, even suicide" (Lilla 144). In this way, the novel's sense of *historical* extremity or crisis is reflected in the extremity of individual experience. Characters attempt to open themselves absolutely to some total message; they attempt to create themselves as the perfect radio for what the novel repeatedly terms "ordinary eternal machinery" (35), whose "noise" (46) seems to be "the noise creation makes" ("Loneliness and History"). The first part of the novel is given from the point of view of the historian, "I," as he furthers his research into the life of the seventeenth-century Iroquois Virgin, Kateri (Catherine) Tekakwitha. "I" seeks the moment of Catherine's inspiration, her moment of election as a charismatic and saving figure. Tekakwitha, a Jesuit convert, fascinates "I" with her eroticized self-discipline and penitential self-

destruction. "I" identifies ambivalently (and sado-masochistically) both with Catherine's suffering and with the Jesuits' power to record her deeds, to find miracle in her pain, and ultimately to beatify her. Cohen equates Catherine's search for divine contact with a desire for a primal terror ("O God, please terrify me" [49]), in such a way that *all* inspiration in the novel becomes linked to the experience of terror and the mechanics of evoking it. "I"'s preoccupation with Catherine's self-mortification so frustrates his wife Edith (Catherine's contemporary avatar) that she crushes herself at the base of an elevator shaft in order to relieve "I" from his engagement with martyrs he has never met. "I"'s friend and lover, "F," also works a radical spiritual training on "I" through a series of humiliations culminating in the painful disclosures of his long letter promising personal and historical "ecstasy." "F" attempts to discipline "I" into joy via a doctrine of the self stretched to the limit of what it can bear. "F"'s "gift" to his friend is a gift of total revelation, but it requires a confrontation with certain painful facts: that "F" carried on his own affair with Edith and fantastically tampered with Edith's body to manufacture her beauty; that the Jesuit "system" that produced the saintliness of Catherine Tekakwitha is spiritually arbitrary and inherently terrorist; and that history is a catastrophe in which everything is simultaneously possible. "F"'s philosophy of total possibility is surreally realized in Part Three when "I" and "F" merge into a single figure, make sexual contact with a Catherine/Edith personage, and become transfigured into a Ray Charles movie projected into the Montreal sky. *Beautiful Losers*' thorough embracing of "limit-experiences" is intimately connected to William James's assertion, in "The Value of Saintliness," that "man's extremity is God's opportunity" (206). Cohen, while

thoroughly assenting to James's 1902 remark, ventures to add that man's extremity may merely be man's extremity—and Hitler's opportunity.

Cohen's characters quest more or less knowingly after "ecstasy" as a kind of ideal self-completeness that represents absolute identification with the divine and with all creation. This aspiration, however, proves inseparable from the ordinary human desire for power: to be utterly knowledgeable, self-creating, free from desire and hence free from suffering, at any cost. The needle that binds "F" ecstatically to the universal accident is analogous to the (often metaphorical) *hypodermic* needle by which Cohen implies that "I" is a junkie of history, incorporating its conquests and losses into *his* very body. Stephen Scobie points to the vast number of instances in which the Cohen *oeuvre* equates history with drugs (*Leonard Cohen* 52) and suggests the addictiveness of systems of control. "F" and Edith seek to replace the drug of history with the drug of miracle, injecting themselves with holy water from Tekakwitha's Spring purchased from the "Revelation Club" in New York. Cohen presents this injection as an apocalyptic act in the sense in which we will come to understand it, namely that it brings everybody and everything into a universal identity, one universal body. Northrop Frye explains that at the time of the apocalypse, water, usually associated with dissolution or chaos or a subhuman existence, is removed from the world and transformatively internalized: "Revelation says that in the apocalypse there is no more sea. Apocalyptically, therefore, water circulates the universal body like the blood in the individual body" (Frye 146). In a similar image of dissolution and the universal "sea," "F" and Edith hop into a bath with an Argentinean waiter who looks like Hitler. When "F" tells Edith that the Hitlerian waiter has a "treat" for them, Edith's reply very specifically invokes the language of the

hypodermic needle. "Shoot," she answers, thus implicitly proposing to internalize and embody his vision (194). In this instant, Cohen tellingly blurs the "pure" apocalyptic image of universal identity with the totalitarian vision of One Man and with the notion of personal ecstasy.

Obviously, one would wish to make moral distinctions among characters' desires to channel and embody the universe. For example, we see "F"'s mad, suspect fabrication of the "ideal man"; Catherine Tekakwitha's desire to make her own, absolute pain a gateway to the divine; "I"'s desire for palpable connection with the perfect suffering of the saint; and Edith's altruistic but shocking self-destruction in order to help him do so. As well, there is the Jesuit project of mass conversion; various apocalyptic images of the world as a unitary identity; and the pervasive shadow of genocide. These are clearly diverse moral situations, but what they share is their extremist *style*, along with the total, objective history that "I" attempts to write; the absurd, random catalogues that come from his taut emotionalism; the confessional "complete gift" of "F"'s long letter (158); and the "remote human possibility" finally realized in the miraculous epilogue (101). The novel's drive towards total representation reflects an *aesthetic* drive towards the absolute that underwrites human conduct in the world. Certainly, Jean-Paul Sartre suggested the relationship between artistic vision and totalitarian politics when he wrote that, "in a choice between Terror and Slavery, one chooses Terror, not for its own sake but because, in this era of flux, it upholds the exigencies proper to the aesthetics of Art" (qtd. in Kermode 112). Sartre argues that terror, like art, is a system obedient only to a set of self-determined standards. For "F," "[c]reators care nothing for their systems except that they be unique" (59). Creativity, in "F"'s view, is self-justified, nobly taking issue with

the world that *is*, and substituting its own philosophical coherence for the incoherence of the world.

Beautiful Losers' own status as a "total" vision rests mainly in the unusually *complete* sublimation of the artist in the artwork, and in Cohen's evident understanding of art as an act of veneration. Cohen insists on art's perfect right to pursue a representation of the absolute, so long as it does so as a sacramental discipline. Cohen minimizes his presence in the work in order to maximize the status of the work itself. He performs as a "saint or anchorite of poetry" (Frye 61) in withdrawing his authorial presence to the extent that that critics have remarked upon his extraordinary absence. Stephen Scobie comments on the "objectivity and extremism of Cohen's vision" (*Leonard Cohen* 125); Michael Ondaatje observes that "for the first time, Cohen has been able to completely eradicate himself"(55). There is no artist figure in the work, in the precise sense in which Atwood's Elaine Risley is an artist or Buckler's David Canaan is an aspiring one; nor does Cohen specifically meditate on the artistic vocation as Nichol, Dudek and Page do. And yet, Cohen's novel is *intimately* artistic, concerned not with vocation but with vision. Cohen evokes the artistic personality in "F"'s experimentation, his fundamental dispute with nature, his cultivated personality, and his love for his creations, as well as in "I"'s concern for posterity and detail, his hermetic withdrawal, and his desire to save and preserve the decaying remnants of his world. In being nowhere, Cohen is everywhere in the work, in much the same way that a saint's power to compel is more profoundly and universally felt after the saint is no longer in the world. The artist is completely subsumed into the two artistic personae, just as the actual personage of the saint is transmuted into his image and spiritual function. It is this role as spiritual functionary

that Cohen assumes in the work, and so he must do if he is to bear out the intention he formed in young manhood, to "consecrate" himself to art (Nadel 31). But Cohen has drawn such extended attention to the ethical ambiguity of what it means to "eradicate" oneself (in Ondaatje's word), that the author's invisibility becomes conspicuous. Cohen's invisibility and authority are implicated in every paradox of control that the novel presents. The work is visionary, but pervasively it demands: *whose vision?*

Beautiful Losers' status as a visionary work is also formally and thematically cued by its emphasis on apocalypse. "I" (third-hand, through "F" and Edith) learns the apocryphal legend of Tekakwitha's Feast. In this story, Catherine, sitting down to eat with the Jesuit brothers and colonists, spills a glass of wine. The wine stains the table and everything *on* the table, and then adds its pigment to the guests, the landscape, the sky and the moon, spreading its "imperial hue." The reddened world projects an image of universal bloodshed (and total identity) central to apocalyptic thought. In seeing the horror of the dinner guests, Catherine calmly remarks, "I guess I owe you all an apology" (104). *Beautiful Losers*' surreal epilogue in the third person *is* Catherine Tekakwitha's apology ("epilogue" and "apology" are cognate words) in the way it too collapses observable distinctions in the world. Just as everything at Catherine's feast takes on a single quality, identities of things in Part Three of Cohen's novel literally merge as they have figuratively merged throughout. The novel is apocalyptic, according to the definition given by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, because everything becomes "potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body," a world of "total metaphor" (136). The *realization* of this total metaphor is a messianic possibility, which the novel (also apocalyptically) attends.

Meanwhile, this messianic possibility becomes mixed up, at every turn, with an ideal of *total comprehension* that is not a godly but a human vision of mastery. This mastery takes on many aspects: the artistic desire for control over material, the subjective desire for self-knowledge, the spiritual/ascetic desire for the reception of truth and the existential desire for the attunement of the individual to the rhythm of the universe. And the novel underwrites even these dispositions with other, sinister aspects of the desire for mastery: imperialistic and even genocidal impulses, destructive self-abnegation, sexual exploitation, totalitarianism. As such, *Beautiful Losers* is our best lens on the ethical implications of the "encyclopedic imagination"; Cohen's novel illustrates the philosophical nearness of the "total vision" and the totalitarian aesthetic. It asks, with every shade of theological and secular connotation, what theologian Allen Dwight Callahan identifies as the one true apocalyptic question: "*Who is the Lord of the world?*" (461, emphasis added).

The History of Them All: "I"'s Encyclopedic Imagination

Beautiful Losers, in the absence of a traditional plot, derives its energy and its argument from its central comic pair, two apparently contrasting personalities and ego-extremes, two ostensible "lords of the world." "I" and "F" share the desire to perceive some organizing principle behind the world's "polarities" and disconnected particulars (18); both seem to respond to the world as to an environment from which the divine presence has withdrawn. But as Stan Dragland points out, "The desire for order is so palpable in the minds of both narrator/characters [...] that any conclusions they reach ought to be suspect" (265). "F" responds to the mad and various world by trying to find,

in his own creativity and in the uninhibited direction of his desire, an image of original creation. "I," on the other hand, withdraws from the world and assumes a posture of "traditional" suffering, anxiety and hermeticism (162). His research into the life of the Iroquois Virgin Kateri Tekakwitha painfully produces "The History of Them All," the deeply personal, catalogic narration that makes up Part One of the novel. His outcry's very boundlessness reveals, ironically, that "I" feels himself to be limited and lonely, in need of a contact he cannot establish. The soppy subjectivity of "I"'s confession to Catherine Tekakwitha is perhaps the messy by-product of his professional search for truth in factual and objective terms and his vocational effacement of himself. "I", the historian, is a "saint type" (Aldrich 2)[4] in the sense that the will of a historian or scientist is "the sublimated form of ascetic will" (Lingis 66). The historian prostrates himself and seeks to *overcome* himself in order to gain objective knowledge. "F," on the other hand, is a hero type or strong-man type; his own will to truth is fully identical with his "will to power." "F," the "hopped-up" epicurean of the flesh (4), enjoys a happiness that "I" cannot share, because "F"'s desire to find a controlling presence in the world does not mean denying his own ego; it means realizing it in the extreme. "F"'s search for the measure of meaning in the world means *becoming* the controlling presence (or, by implication, identifying with God). But Cohen shows us that both attitudes are limited in terms of the revelation that they seek and paradoxical in terms of the morality that they posit.

Cohen's portraits of "F" and "I" examine how one takes responsibility for the measure of control one exerts in the world. And Cohen illustrates through "I," in particular, that to give up one's power voluntarily is, in itself, a problematic act of power.

"I," throughout the novel, reacts against his sense of personal power (whether it be expressed in his desire for sexual dominance, his sense of historical advantage, his creative potential, or even his physical requirement for food). "I" makes a virtue of self-denial; he lives ascetically. Whereas one might expect his effort to limit the demands of the self also to limit the scope of his self-expression (whether this be his act of narration or his production of his history of the A_____ s, the First Nation of which Catherine and Edith are both members), the opposite proves true. His historical project refuses all containment and his personal lament attaches itself to any and every object it can find. "I"'s attempt to submit himself to an absolute discipline produces a kind of expressive incontinence that underscores the scope of his buried desire. His inability to suppress the "war-like" tendency of the mind to wander freely and to impose its own order on the world illustrates the extent to which (however he may avoid the recognition of this) the self remains an indomitable standard for all things. "I"'s troubled relationship towards his own authority and inability to finish his work contravene the novel's assertion of the *necessity* of deploying one's creativity in the world. "I"'s self-representation (in his personal monologue) and his objective historical project are both "encyclopedic" and unfinishable because they proceed from a diffuse (and covertly authoritarian) sense of self which he confuses with saintliness.

Indeed, Cohen offers his readers, through the ascetic character of "I," an examination of just how undesirable it is to be determined to "lose the world" in what seems like an appreciable saintly ideal of self-renunciation. But, as I briefly suggested in my opening remarks on "F," *unworldliness* is a characteristic feature of totalitarianism, in its (negative) total idealism. A real saint, for Cohen, is connected to and "*loves* the

world" (101, emphasis added). "I"'s forsaking of the world, as we will see, is *intended* as a saintly act of self-mortification and charitable self-denial. He does not want to impose himself on the world, so he secludes himself. But in creating living conditions in which he no longer can be led or tutored by anything outside of himself, "I" ironically reinvents the self as an absolute category. The full articulation of this and other paradoxes of control may usefully lead us away from an easy rhetoric of self-transcendence that often works its way into Cohen criticism, doubtless cued (recently, at least) by biographical facts surrounding Cohen's spiritual life and tenure as a Buddhist monk on California's Mount Baldy. *Beautiful Losers* does have a transcendental thrust and aspires absolutely to a universal compassion, evoking the humane impulse to enter into the life of all things. Yet, this universal compassion becomes provocatively entangled with the idea of "universal comprehension" that can be "fake" and problematic, even dangerous (17). When Linda Hutcheon interrogates Desmond Pacey's assertion that *Beautiful Losers* describes "the voluntary loss of self to a higher cause" (qtd. in Hutcheon 48), she takes issue with the idea that there is a "higher cause."[5] But the "higher cause" is no more or less stable as an idea than "the voluntary loss of self." In *choosing* the annihilation of identity, is the self not naming its ultimate priority and asserting itself absolutely?

The endlessness of "I"'s research goes hand in hand with his terrible, all-consuming loneliness. His seclusion produces his encyclopedic work, his boundless outcry, and the instability of character that make him both vulnerable to terror and a potential (totalitarian) terrorist. Although Leonard Cohen elsewhere characterizes absolute loneliness as a precondition for witnessing "the divinity of everything" ("Loneliness and History"), Hannah Arendt observes that loneliness as a disposition is

the "common ground for terror" (475). In Arendt's view, long social deprivation makes a person unable to trust himself as "the partner of his own thoughts" (477). This deficient self-communion robs a person of the capacity for independent thought and action. "I" is still able to project a "partner for his thoughts" in his imaginative resurrection of his friend and lover "F," five years dead, but "F" serves him as an intimate antagonist, one who humiliates and disciplines him. "I"'s love for but reactive distrust of "F" makes his life and his work ever more *un*disciplined, sprawling and inconclusive. Loneliness is different from simple isolation, Arendt explains, because isolation only takes away one's ability to *act*, insofar as one needs the social world as a field for action. But *loneliness* destroys as well a person's capacity for the independent production of work, and thus denies him the "most elementary form of human creativity," which is his ability to "add something of his own to the world" (475). Indeed, "I"'s writing of a sprawling and incomplete history is a gesture of modesty, for he actually cannot bear to consummate his authority by bringing his work to a close. Yet, paradoxically, as the history encompasses more and more material in its project of defining Them All, "I"'s becomes increasingly a god's eye perspective. "F"'s question "Who am I to refuse the universe?" suggests that there is an egotism, not in a total acceptance and incorporation of everything in the world, but in a saintly ideal of total refusal. "I"'s hermetic life and private, total work imply just such a refusal. He thinks of himself as a nonauthority, but creates himself as a *total authority* simply without a field for exercise, existing in an attitude of loneliness and reactivity that, in Euguene Goodheart's view, "nourishes revolutionary ideologies" (129).

The "monastic discipline" of "I" (Lilla 118) is underwritten with forcefully suppressed impulses. Because "I"'s pursuit of Catherine Tekakwitha as a subject is

inseparable from his lust for Edith (who is, like Catherine, an A____ and, similarly, dead at twenty-four), "I"'s quest for the saintly idea is inflected with the unrealized desire for power that he could not bring himself to impose on his wife. "I"'s inability to ask Edith for oral sex arises from his inhibition about the one-sidedness of the gratification it produces:

> --["I":] I want her to love me in *my* way.
>
> --["F":] You've got to learn—
>
> --No lessons, I'm not going to settle for lessons this time. This is my bed and my wife, I have some rights.
>
> --Then ask her.
>
> [...]
>
> --Of course I could ask her, that's obvious. But then she'd be under duress, or worse, it could become a matter of duty. I don't want to hold a strap over her.
>
> --Yes you do. [...] Great love is not a partnership [...] [Y]ou are stuck with two great loves, Edith's and mine. Great love needs a servant, but you don't know how to use your servants.
>
> --How should I ask her?
>
> --With whips, with imperial commands, with a leap into her mouth and a lesson in choking. (26-27)

"F"'s final remark, however shockingly explicit, expresses the desire for dominance (figured as natural) which I's self-discipline seeks to suppress. "I," guilt-ridden, is unable to find a source of authority in the self, and must seek it elsewhere, ambivalently: "I wanted to smile at dogma, yet ruin my ego against it" (21). "I" aims to make himself

diffuse and anonymous, lacking any specific desire. "F"'s comment implies, probably truthfully, that the self that does not seek to fulfill itself in love does not really love at all. But his exaggeration of that principle to the extent that the greatest love is, therefore, a tyrannical love makes "I" morally recoil. But to what extent is "I," in his reactive horror, rejecting the very principle of love itself? Does "I"'s saintly "discipline" disguise his humane *obligation* to assert himself in love? Cohen seems to suggest that the scope of "I"'s insatiate representation reflects his inability to rise to the demands of love, but more generally, to rise to *any* of the priorities of the self that he nonetheless strongly feels.

"I," smiling at dogma yet ruining himself against it, tutors himself away from conviction and into the "collective will." Whereas most people assume that it is a totalitarian principle to be absolute in one's convictions, Hannah Arendt writes that "the aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any" (468). "I"'s neutral adoption of the "collective will" can be quite alarming. In describing Edith's gang rape at the age of thirteen in a stone quarry (to which most husbands would respond, presumably, with an empathetic sense of injury), "I" editorializes, neutrally: "Who can trace the subtle mechanics of the Collective Will to which we all contribute?" (63). The American interests that owned the quarry, the school gossip network, the French Canadian schoolbooks that encouraged disrespect for Indians, and the Catholic Church all "delegated" the four individuals to pursue Edith into the quarry and relieve their collective hunger, and "I" doesn't blame them. Rather, he identifies profoundly with them ("Edith, forgive me, it was the thirteen-year-old victim I always fucked" [61]). His writing, as well, becomes a sublimated form of aggression especially in its supposed objectivity. His interpretation of Catherine's marriage as a

child bride is evidently influenced by the story of Edith's childhood rape in the quarry. As Catherine's would-be husband pursues her, "I" imagines that a Three Whistle Bird sings "Tcheue! Chireue! Tzeuere!," alluding to the rape of Philomela (55).[6] Yet, in "I"'s interpretation, the act is also beautifully consecrated; a "strange luminous fish smile[s]" as Catherine disavows her own body. The disavowal is a gesture of saintliness in the eyes of the Jesuits, and upheld as such by "I," consistently with his character. "The History of Them All," "I"'s life's work, is a long disavowal of the urges of his *own* body, a deeply ascetic document. The trilingual cry of the bird forms part of the novel's motif of three-way translation (usually from Iroquois to French to English) that represents the inevitable movement of patterns of dominance in history. "I" neutrally participates in these depersonalized movements as a supposedly objective recording presence. But Cohen reveals, in "I"'s ethics of "mores" (Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 58), a form of tyranny latent even in the abdication of the self, even in an acquiescence to collectivity.

"I"'s diffuse will is responsible not only for his occasional appearance of inhumanity but also for the many catalogues of Part One. "I" impotently and quasi-religiously cries "Let me testify! Let me prove Order!" but his are the "thousand oaths" of an undirected will (41). "I"'s first litany, an account of all "I" "wanted," illustrates his propensity to identify with every position on the ideological spectrum. Thus he identifies wholly and adequately with none:

I always wanted to be loved by the Communist Party and the Mother Church. I wanted to live in a folk song like Joe Hill. I wanted to weep for the innocent people my bomb would have to maim. I wanted to thank the peasant father who fed us on the run. I

wanted to wear my sleeve pinned in half, people smiling while I salute with the wrong hand [...]. (21)

His very long catalogue (briefly excerpted here) illustrates what is transparent even to "I": that he cannot find a perspective to "live in" (13). This lack of comfort in *any* particular conviction indicates "I"'s susceptibility to totalitarian ideals; significantly, the roles "I" imagines for himself above are different in tenor but are all, in one way or another, war roles. In the face of his inability to find a logic to the world in terms of his own consistent *personhood*, "I" searches for the Unitary Idea of the divine in a detailed address to God (again radically excerpted):

> [...] I Cannot Think of Anything Which Is Not Yours. The Hospitals Have Drawers of Cancer Which They Do Not Own. The Mesozoic Waters Abounded With Marine Reptiles Which Seemed Eternal. You Know the Details Of The Kangaroo. Place Ville Marie Grows And Falls In The Gobi Desert. Nausea Is An Earthquake In Your Eye. Even the World Has A Body. We Are Watched Forever. In the Midst Of Molecular Violence The Yellow Table Clings To Its Shape [...] I Am Frightened Because Death Is Your Idea. Now I Do Not Think It Behooves Me To Describe Your World [...]. (57)

This passage is obviously a kind of "transcendental metonymy" (Thiem 116), meaning that it conveys through its own wild randomness that it would enumerate, if it could, everything in the universe. Its only apparent theme is the largest theme possible: God's command of everything. When "I" writes "I Do Not Think It Behooves Me To Describe Your World," he undermines the authority he is nonetheless always covertly

assuming, and makes his own nothingness into its own all-encompassing idea, its own undeclared godhead.

"Steady, old scholar," "I" mutters to himself in his sub-basement, realizing that his incontinence has made his environment unstable. His unsuccessful bid to "contain" himself in his address to Catherine Tekakwitha has meant that he has spilled his bodily fluids all over the linoleum floor; he characterizes this personal/sexual spillage, significantly, as his "invasion of the world" (68). "Discipline," he reminds himself, and resolves to open the next day's "Indian chapter" with a quotation from St. Paul, "*Triompher du mal par le bien*" (68). It is as if "I"'s call for personal and bodily restraint also re-inspires him with a conventional morality, one that calls for good's triumph over evil. He does not want to give in to the ambiguity of these categories in the twentieth century. As Nietzsche writes in his preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, "We have defined and refined our ideas of good and evil so long, he says, that they are all worn out. They [...] have a disconcerting way of turning into their opposites" (v). "I" understands "discipline" as a faithful and rigid adherence to categories, while all around him even the distinction between self and world is dissolving, not to mention the distinction between "I"'s self-effacing attitude and "F"'s self-enlarging one. "I"s restorative location of authority in the saint (meaning his quotation of St. Paul but, more significantly, his inspiration by Kateri Tekakwitha) reflects the Nietzschean view of saintly discipline as one version of the will to power:

> Heretofore the mightiest of men have bowed reverence before the saint, as the riddle of self-control and intentional ultimate abstinence. Why do they bow? They intuited in the saint (behind the question mark, as it were, of his fragile and

> miserable appearance) the superior power that was testing and proving itself with the self-control, the strength of will, in which they recognized and honored their own strength and pleasure in dominating. By honoring the saint they honored something in themselves. (*Beyond Good and Evil* 58-59)

Nietzsche points to a very powerful and relevant paradox at the heart of veneration. He suggests that men find pleasure in paying tribute to the "intentional ultimate abstinence" of the saint not because they aspire to the spiritual purity that such abstinence signifies, but because they identify with the saint as a *successful dominator*, a paragon of (self-) discipline and personal "steadiness."

Another problematic aspect of saint veneration, for Nietzsche and his commentator, Alphonso Lingis, is that while we understand beatitude as a state beyond self-consciousness or self-recrimination, the entire *purpose* of the saint's beatitude is to produce guilt in others. The saint's perfection exists so that others may prostrate themselves before the saintly standard. They then identify the magnitude of their own *im*perfection in order to find the way of their redemption (Lingis 78). Nietzsche cynically describes beatitude as being like the most rudimentary form of penal law, which assures people that if they suffer (that is, if they are the victim of a crime), then it will be their turn to impose punishment on somebody else (*Genealogy* 72). Cohen, in his first (unpublished) novel, *Ballet of Lepers*, is already pointing to this ethically difficult relationship between coercion and salvation: "Could it be that the reward of the degraded is to degrade others? Could it be the painful chain toward salvation, because I know there is a chain" (62). The image of the chain is everywhere in *Beautiful Losers*[7] and expresses, among other things, a perpetual pattern of dominance and submission. Peter

Wilkins finds that the novel unfolds around the question of "how to fulfil the ego without abjecting the other" (25) and exposes many instances in which the victim becomes the victimizer. But Wilkins's argument suggests that there is a line of *conduct* which, if crossed, turns the victim into the bully or the loser into the winner. Hence, the end point of Wilkins's discussion is the *political* question of national identity – how do we sympathize with the "minority other" without appropriating their position? My nuance on Wilkins's observation is to contend that the simple *attitude* or disposition of total spiritual receptivity—like sainthood—if it is complete enough to make the person susceptible to miracle, also represents a dangerous extremity of personhood which, because it borders on godliness, also borders on inhumanity.

A saint helps "totalize" the saint venerator by purging him of decadent and excessive emotion in an "orgiastic release of feelings, feelings of anger, fear, voluptuousness, revenge, hope, triumph, despair, cruelty, and above all aggression" (Lingis 65). "I"'s monologue in Part One is purgative in this orgiastic way, documenting his own sense of dissolution. In one of the most uncontrolled prose sections of the work, "I" releases himself in a prolonged, "voluptuous," three-page masturbatory fantasy about Edith:

> [...] Edith listen to me smother darling love it is thy hairy hole I suck are we not joined Edith are we not proved Edith are we not breathing Edith are we not awesome lovers Edith are we not filthy postcards are we not good meals are we not conversing miraculously darling pink evil fartrisk terror position darling I swear I loved you [...] Edith Edith Edith please appear as mushrooming dream from this Aladdin cock [...]. (70-71)

"I"s attitude of supplication is extreme, and his solo attempt at "miraculous conversation" with his otherworldly wife parodies Catherine Tekakwitha's lonely efforts at communion with God. And yet, the passage's deepening self-indulgence reveals, uncensored, "I"'s intimate and dirty vision of personal power. "Awesome lovers" evokes a "terror position," which becomes a "mushrooming dream," which smacks of total devastation; all of these terms form a ballooning autobiography of desire. But because "I"'s morality persuades him that "desire changes the world" and "I" does not want to be the instrument of such a change (5), he swallows his desire and turns his back on the world in an attitude of *ressentiment*.[8] Purgatively, "I"'s drooling, three-page fantasy shocks him into self-restraint and is a gateway into metaphysical comfort; the next passage speaks sweetly and objectively of Tekakwitha's Spring, where Catherine finds the path to the clear pools. "How good to know something she did," sermonizes "I," serenely (72), finding something *revealed* to him. It is as if the most profound descent into personal chaos has given rise to the most powerful impulse to hold it all together. Alphonso Lingis writes that the ascetic will is "protective," and always implicitly fearful of its own absolute degeneration (69). And the testaments to "I"'s sense of personal degeneration are the sprawling prose sections of Part One; each represents "I"'s attempt to abstract his inner chaos from himself.

But Lingis also claims, along with Nietzsche, that ascetic or priestly intervention upon chaos is nothing more than a kind of active self-denial. The recurring need for self-suppression makes the subject into a "dyspeptic" who simply "cannot have done with anything" (*Genealogy* 58): an accumulator. "I" is not a "dyspeptic" but another type of "sophisticated invalid" (James 364) whose metaphorical meaning is virtually the same.

"I" views his chronic constipation as "the museum of [his] appetite" (42), and thus the expression of not only personal consumption, but historical dominance—he dubs himself a "dietary Nazi" (42). He is bodily "the vessel of yesterday's slaughter" (41), evoking Deleuze's contention that, in its very requirement for survival, "a body is a relation between dominant and dominated forces" (40). "I" sees himself as a machine of appetite, and thus a potential assimilator of *everything there is*, and worries that nothing will remain to exist outside the self. He fears total involution:

> Please make me empty, if I'm empty then I can receive, if I can receive it means it comes from somewhere outside of me, if it comes from outside of me I'm not alone! [...] Please let me be hungry, then I am not the dead centre, then I can single out the trees in their particular lives, the altitude of mountains, the different spellings of Tekakwitha [...] oh, I want to be fascinated by phenomena! (41)

The desire to be hungry (or "fascinated" or metaphysically engaged) amounts to a desire to acknowledge external *objects,* and not to be a single, all-consuming, monstrous subject. But even in distinguishing and inclining himself towards objects, the subject becomes aware of all he lacks. The lack gives spurs to his libido and his appetite. "I," for example, wants to be empty so that he can *eat again*. This cycle fosters more and more guilt: "All this functions to make the sick sicker; it locks the contaminated soul in a prison of self-contempt and reactive aggression. It gives an all-encompassing and unitary direction to the sick will, makes it into a longing for will-lessness" (Lingis 65). Because "I" cannot *bear* total self-fulfilment (any more than he can ask for the "leap" into Edith's mouth), he yearns for total self-loss.

At this stage in the narration, "will-lessness" is an aim for "I", but it is not beatific. Rather, it makes the self terribly obscure, and confirms "I"'s steady alienation from the world. "I lost myself in stroke after stroke of the small brush," mourns "I", evoking the "strokes" of Tekakwitha's saintly mortification (11); "you lost yourself in particulars," confirms "F" (29). "I" says of the dysfunctional body that keeps him at home and self-absorbed that "this is the way the world is lost" (65). Self-loss and world-loss are both paradoxically implied in "I"'s infinite *keeping* of things, a signature irony of the "encyclopedic imagination." Home alone, removed from experience, hoarding love, craving emptiness, desiring connection, spilling himself everywhere, desperately seeking the reinstatement of categories, unworldly "I" becomes both the unconscious terrorist and the ideal subject of terror. "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule," writes Hannah Arendt, "is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist" (Arendt 474). Certainly this reality and these standards (and much more) are becoming tenuous for "I" in his isolation; as a *personality*, he is becoming more dangerous. The more terrible implication of "I"'s world-loss and hermetic withdrawal is the apocalyptic possibility expressed by Catherine's Uncle:

> [...] Uncle told himself the story he had heard as a little boy, how Kuloscap had abandoned the world because of the evil in it. He made a great feast to say good-by, then he paddled off in his great canoe. Now he lives in a splendid long house, making arrows. When the cabin is filled with them he will make war on all mankind. (95)

Cohen's "I" retreats from the world (after feasting on chicken on the night that Edith died) and dwells in moral terror and preoccupation; meanwhile, his counterpart "F" plants guns and dynamite in Quebec, building a hidden arsenal. "I" and "F" are collectively like Kuloscap, their extreme egos burgeoning with explosive potential.

"Rush Me My Free[dom]": "F"'s Creative "Now"

Answering "I"'s will-lessness is "F"'s all-embracing will, uncomplicated by self-censorship. "F," disgraced in Parliament, disintegrating in a nuthouse, purveyor of roman candles, grey human soap, superhero myths, Miracle Drugs and factory romps, hardly seems to be a paragon of self-control in *any* sense. But if "I"'s is a "discipline of self-restraint" then "F"'s is what Gary Snyder calls a "discipline of following desires" (10): "Discipline of following desires, *always* doing what you want to do, is hardest. It presupposes self-knowledge of motives, a careful balance of free action and a sense of where the cultural taboos lay" (qtd. in Tytell 10). The "discipline of desire," contrary to what one might suppose, has a theological foundation, beginning with Saint Augustine's maxim, "*Dilige et quod vis fac*—if you but love [God], you may do as you incline" (James 79). William James notes that the dictum, of course, carries a significant "passport beyond the bounds of conventional morality" (James 79). It only demands that happiness be *strenuous*; it demands that vitalism be upheld against pessimism and weakness; it is almost Nietzschean. William James traces the history of Augustine's prescription as far as the transcendentalists and the "mind-cure" movement of the turn of the century. This movement diverted people from the "martyr habit" that divided the person into a shallower and a deeper self and then condemned her for the habits of the

shallower, the life of the flesh (James 97). "F" attempts to overcome his dividedness by attempting to disavow the "deep self" (the moralizing self) altogether: "We've got to learn to stop bravely at the surface," he counsels his friend, "I" (4). The deep self is the martyr-like and reflexive self that becomes distressed at its own imperfections; the shallow self, untroubled, is capable of realizing itself *perfectly* in the *now*. Hence, "F"'s "discipline of following desires"—his "mind-cure" or in the vocabulary of the novel "head-piercing"—attempts to express the perfection of his unitary will and the attractiveness of his "system" of affirming the equal beauty of everything.

The present instant means everything to "F"'s philosophy, not only because "F" is spontaneous in the extreme, but also because he thinks that how *he is* at any given time represents *everything*: all of the danger and beauty and crisis and possibility of mankind. F is a revolutionary; he smuggles guns and firecrackers and promises "revenge for *everyone*" (119, emphasis added). He promotes the idea that he has a complete command of everything that *has* happened ("I took you to a *complete* movie of the Second World War" [186, emphasis added]) and can see, with clarity, every element of the past realized in the present. He repeatedly tells "I" that his aim is to show "I" "*how it happens*" (or "*everything happening*") (179, 194, 198, 199, 200, 219), binding *everything* into the absorbing reality of his own joy: "it is in one's joy that one believes and must believe" (Lingis 86). Cohen gives comic emphasis to "F"'s total commitment to the *now* in the "Long Letter," which insists on the immediacy of its own composition in the Occupational Therapy Room. "F" is performing a sexual act on revolutionary/nurse Mary Voolnd with one hand while writing the letter—and documenting the sexual act—with the other hand. His long letter becomes the magic book of total possibility, at least

to the extent that it documents the infinite scope of his own joy. "F" treats his letter as a "total" representation that is utterly disclosive: "I always intended to tell you everything," he writes to I, "the complete gift" (158).

"F"'s total *now* is an antihistorical posture or, perhaps as "F" would conceive it, an *ultimately* historical posture. The phenomenon of "*it happening*"[9] constitutes, for "F," a culmination, and a universalizing of history. Walter Benjamin writes that

> Now-time, [...] as a model of messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation [...] [The historical materialist] recognizes the sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history. (396)

The historical materialist in *Beautiful Losers* is "I," and "I" must therefore be reformed. It is not enough for "F" to experience time explosively himself, he must *impart* this model of time to "I", give him the sign, show him the revolutionary chance, and, relieve him of "the useless History under which [he] suffer[s] in such confusion" (200).

No doubt "F" feels that his modes of perceiving are loaded with redemptive potential, but his emphasis on the "rush" of revolution in place of the ordinary successiveness of events continually substitutes *drive* for action ("Zoom!" [98]; "Hurry" [169]; "BOOM! WHOOSH!" [197]; "Hiss, hiss, run for your lives, the bombs are dying" (159); "RUSH ME MY FREE" [111]). "F" celebrates his first day as a Parliamentarian with a victorious drive to Ottawa, accelerating so fast that "I," beside him, is afraid for his life. "F," typically eroticizing the danger, turns the drive into an occasion for the "awakening" of "I." "F," while speeding, initiates a shared masturbation session that

culminates with the car tearing through an illusory brick wall, painted on a scrim of silk. The wall's hymeneal "Rrrriiiippppp" (99)[10] represents the piercing of the veil of truth and is designed to be the moment at which "I" ejaculates. But "I," justifiably horrified, goes limp, unable to find sexual self-abandonment in the glorious "death" that "F" and his collaborator, Edith, have engineered in a rented parking lot. "Button up," says F, disappointed, "it's a long cold drive to Parliament" (100). Cohen juxtaposes "the long cold drive" that will end in "F"'s role as an actual policy maker with the mad flight through the scrim (98) in which "F" expresses himself, symbolically, as the messenger of truth. "F"'s truth, though, proves only to be speed itself; if "I" "was suddenly more awake (for this fraction of a second) than ever before in [his] whole life," this "awakening" has no time to be anything but physical sensation (99).

It is a totalitarian principle that "all action aims at the acceleration of the movement of nature or history," particularly when the totalitarian ruler usurps Nature or History in dealing arbitrary death sentences (Arendt 467). Although the death "F" has dreamt for "I" has proven to be an illusion, "F" nonetheless illustrates Arendt's larger point, which is that, "[when] terror can be completely relied upon to keep the movement in constant motion, no principle of action separate from its essence would be needed at all" (467). "F"'s role in Parliament is completely superfluous; his domain is not action, but motion, acceleration into terror-producing ecstasy. It is at the core of Arendt's argument that totalitarian politics are essentially idealist, in the negative sense of being overdeveloped in theory and a massive failure in practice. Cohen's "F" is insanely committed to a system but is disgraced for it in Parliament, where systems are *judged*. Cohen's consistent use of the word "Parliament" (in place of "government" or "politics"

for example) ironically echoes the novel's inclination towards "miraculous conversation" and emphasizes that "F" is unable to find, in "conversation" with others, a basis for action; he is only obedient to himself and his half-baked ideals.

"F"'s strenuous happiness resides in his total appetite, a quality he strives to inculcate in "I," who consumes without enjoyment. "F"'s mentor-disciple relationship to "I" is mock-Socratic, and the novel is brimming with Greek motifs which collectively form a send-up of the Hellenic "care of the self" in terms of the "economy of pleasure" (Lilla 156). "F" consumes voraciously even to the end of his own self-destruction. Plato was chagrined at the thought that the failure to care moderately for the self might spill over into political irresponsibility; political tyranny was, for him, the rule of a "man who himself is tyrannized by his basest desires" (Lilla 4). "F" is well invested with the Platonic "frenzied desire to beget the beautiful" (Lilla 3) but, like Plato's Socrates, is unable to see that "either pleasure or power will fail as an end" (Figal 88). Douglas Glover valuably observes that "F"'s project is actually too absolute to be realized through any System: "F. is the epitome of the modern but is cruelly aware of the paradox of modernity, that it seeks by normal means, by reason and systems, to vault itself to ultimate ends" (14).

"F" reconfigures Platonic motifs—and thus mocks Platonic self-restraint—throughout Part One of *Beautiful Losers*. But, in the manner of all parody, "F"'s fundamental *resemblance* to Platonism is essential to his distortion of it, because "F," too, is an idealist, committed to "forms" which do not exist in reality. "F" specifically names the System Theatre as a Platonic edifice, where everyone sits chastely on their genitals while images are projected in front of them (recalling the "shadows" of Plato's cave, a

common trope for modern cinema). But Plato's house is also the ground for "F"'s most liberal creativity, the place where "F" originates a form of physical communion (the Telephone Dance) and a hybrid and monstrous factual-fictional reality (where the newsreel "escape[s] into the feature" [237]). "F" paints a model of the pristine Akropolis in apocalyptic red; he gives "I" a *mistranslated* Greek phrasebook as a prayerbook; he reconceives ancient Greek *agon*, the "love of wrestling, [and] inherent incapacity to unite for any length of time" as a series of sexual tumbles with Greek restauranteurs (10). In these Platonic mutations, "F" pays tribute to the Platonic love of beauty, but makes the idea of beauty more chaotic and more sensual. "F," like Plato's creature, Socrates, is a "wonderful monster" (*Symposium* 388) who, among his peers, is uniquely capable of enjoyment (389). He, like Socrates, has "wrung from his agony" lessons for his friend (*Symposium* 389). Like Socrates, "F" interprets his own lack of moderation as a hunger for the beauty that is everywhere in the world. And in the end, he will ask, like Socrates, whether his disciple is not "deceived" in him, while renouncing all his pleasure and all his power.

Despite his reverence of beauty, "F" is fundamentally at odds with the *selective* idea that is at the core of Platonism, namely the association of the beautiful with the good. Plato writes: "And so Love set in order the empire of the gods—the love of beauty, as is evident, for with deformity Love has no concern" (*Symposium* 362). This sentiment could easily be an ironic epigraph for *Beautiful Losers* as a whole, since the novel decries the way the idea of empire is created out of hierarchies of love. The persecution of so-deemed "undesirables" throughout history is *Beautiful Losers'* pervasive theme, especially with reference to the Jewish Holocaust and to the mass

conversion—and infection—of the Iroquois by the Jesuits. "I," the historian, is implicated in this imperial distaste when he discovers that Catherine Tekakwitha is not beautiful. The fact that Catherine has been pockmarked by the plague almost puts an end to "I"'s engagement with her ("The Plague! The Plague! [...] Can I yearn after pimples and pock marks?" [24]). "F," on the other hand, immediately lifts the "deformed" into the category of the desirable, when, on the third page of the novel, he makes a sexual conquest of a hunchbacked orphan. "F" insists on a total value equation of all things. He responds to "I"s question—"do you think I can learn to perceive the diamonds of good amongst all the shit?"—with a gem of *sagesse*, "it is all diamond" (9). Part of Cohen's constipation metaphor is that "I" is unable to "turn the food brown" (7), that is, to take something that is differentiated and reproduce it with a quality of undifferentiation. But when "I," half internalizing "F"'s teachings, speaks finally of "ideal brown Plato" (148), he turns brown (makes shit of) Plato's ideal of discrimination along the lines of beauty and thus value; in doing so, he starts to express "F"'s problematic world view.

"F"'s dogma of total affirmation—for it is dogma—is replete with paradox and terrible implication. "F"'s attempt to bring *everything* into the purview of his own joy (i.e., his creation of a "total self" that embraces everything) is wholly autocratic. In the first place, "F" lifts everything into the category of the beautiful by *manufacturing* beauty out of ugliness, which only covertly reinstates the category of the ugly (for if "F" were truly indiscriminate, he would not see any instance where beauty needed to be made). And his manufacture is inseparable from terror, as in the memorable scene where "F," as an adolescent orphan living in an institution with his friend "I," seeks to make "I" more

acceptable at a routine hand inspection. "F" cuts off his friend's warts with a scalpel, despite "I"'s screams and protests of "torture" (111):

> ["F":] When I see wart I think Speedy Removal. I think Before and After. I think Miracle Drugs. I think In Just Ten Days. [F, at this point, is emerging as a *personality*, and commanding a crowd. The other orphans interject: "Go. Go."] [...] I think Yours For Only. I think Try This SCIENTIFIC HOME METHOD. I think RUSH ME MY FREE. (111)

"F," here, is the conceiver of a system; he promises freedom from persecution by the orphanage officials via a METHOD. But in forcing beautification on "I," "F" is a dubious emancipator. In actuality, "F" is colluding entirely with the Inspectors and, in enforcing their standard, becoming part of the system that already exists. "F"'s act is sinister. "I"'s retrospective identification not with his past self but with "F" (the "brave boy who bit off his [own] warts" [104], the boy with the "hero's heart" [108]) is also sinister, making "I" not just a victim, but a vicarious victimizer. In a similar incident, "F" cures Edith's acne, making her beautiful to the husband she has not yet met. When, later, Edith's beauty needs to be re-tooled in Argentina, Cohen reveals that "F"'s miracle cure is a bar of soap made from human flesh. "F," therefore, produces a beautiful body from the bodies of those deemed unbeautiful in the ultimate totalitarian's view. To use the soap, "F" and Edith hop into a bath with an ersatz Hitler;[11] the bath is an obvious symbol of complicity (146). "F"'s machinations covertly perpetuate and deepen the categories of desirable and undesirable human beings, and liken him to all originators of total human systems (59).

As we saw, "I"'s personal dissolution is identifiable in the catalogic quality of his narration. Similarly, "F"'s total authority (the flip side of the same disposition) is visible in his total command of particulars, and his narration is likewise unreined. "We are now in the heart of our pain," writes "F" enthusiastically, finishing the story of Catherine Tekakwitha for "I," "we are now in the heart of our evidence" (218). The equation of pain with evidence is everywhere, making the relisher of evidence the fetishizer of pain. Père Choulenc, one of Tekakwitha's original biographers, documented the "*infinity* of miraculous cures" generated by the spectacular death of Kateri Tekakwitha and perpetuated by her "parts" as they became saintly relics (230, emphasis added). "F" assumes the encyclopedic voice of Père Choulenc, "he whom I most resemble" (230), in order to instruct "I" in the life of Tekakwitha. The language of Miracle Cures, is, of course, not only the Jesuits', but "F"s as well. "With a sense of pain you must now be able to imagine," writes "F" grandly, "I record some of the cures" (230); a long list follows, embedded in the similarly long letter. Here, "F" revels in the "gory details" of the workings of Catherine's dead body on the sick bodies of others.[12] Catherine is the "*Thaumaturge du Nouveau Monde*" (230)—miracle worker, total curative, total explanation or, to borrow a quaint phrase from *The Favourite Game*, Compleat Physician. Catherine here is the resolver of the universal malaise and Edith is "our perfect nurse" (158). One of the best ironies in the novel is Cohen's citation of the *Exposition du Système du Monde* (89) as a work being authored during Tekakwitha's lifetime, its author seeking the Enlightenment ideal of total objective clarity even as Tekakwitha is tearing the flesh from her bones. The irony is that Catherine's inordinate pain and terror are, to the Jesuits and to Cohen's various beautiful losers, the *real*

explanation of the world's total system. No amount of objective explanation can testify to the principle of cosmic organization to the same degree as one Iroquois girl's voluntary self-destruction in the name of God. "F"'s own encyclopedic narration in the several passages describing Catherine's death and the ensuing miracles attempts to tap vividly into the details of Catherine's self-annihilation for the sake of "I"'s redemption, as well as his own.

"F"'s more public act of persuasion in Parc Lafontaine illustrates his own acknowledgment that he "was never sure whether [he] wanted disciples or partisans" (173), and shows that "F"'s charismatic public presence resembles totalitarian authority. The scene in which "I" and "F" join a *Québec Libre* demonstration is the best demonstration of how F's totalitarian philosophy is supposed to work pragmatically "in the world of men" (97), and a paradoxical exposure of his system's unworldliness. The crowd in this scene is so uniform that it is characterized as "quicksand," (126) "a mass of bodies," "our family and the incubator of our desire" (128). Anglo-Jewish "I," in an act of surprise assimilation, spontaneously becomes a Frenchman. A warm, fanatical, female hand reaches down the back of his pants and "I" is erotically absorbed into the crowd, involuntarily shouting, "Fuck the English!" (126). Meanwhile, the crowd recognizes "F" as a Patriot and hoists him to the podium, where he begins a radical speech demanding that Blood reclaim Blood (129). But only the speaker who has come before "F" gives "F"'s cosmic demand its historical context, and imbues it with the specific implication that the *French* reclaim their blood from the *English* in a revolution. "F"'s nonspecific demand for blood sounds, instead, like the apocalyptic call for total bloodshed: the red moon of Tekakwitha's Feast, or "*revenge for everyone*" (110, italics added). "F"'s

demand, moreover, is as unimpeded as it is absolute. This scene, like the wart removal scene, shows "F" lifting a crowd into bloodthirsty agreement while "I"'s ego disappears. Frank Davey argues that the crowd's excitement at the *Québec Libre* demonstration makes them "anonymous" and bound together in undirected libidinal energy ("*Beautiful*" 19). The total anonymity of the crowd means that their subscription to revolutionary partisan lawlessness cannot be challenged by any of them. The speaker, from whom "F" seamlessly takes over, declares, importantly, that "History cares nothing for cases!" (462). This radical universality becomes "F"'s vision of apocalyptic justice: blood for blood. A concept of justice that *cares nothing for cases* or, rather, evades an acknowledgment of the individual, is totalitarian. It is "necessarily general and must be valid for a countless and unpredictable number of cases, so that each concrete individual case with its unrepeatable set of circumstances somehow escapes it" (Arendt 462). In serving everyone, it serves no-one. "F" happily evokes CASES for titillation and torture (tampering Edith's body into orgasm by citing "CASE HISTORIES [...] ALL ASPECTS of the sex act" [180]) but his view of history seeks to unite everyone into a single identity that eliminates all human difference.

Despite the politically charged context, "F"'s System is highly apolitical and profoundly unworldly. Late in the novel, "F" confesses: "I never saw the Québec Revolution clearly" (173), a shocking gloss on his earlier assertion that "The Revolution in Québec needs the lubrication of a little blood" (141). Despite his complete immersion in politics, "F" is no politician but an aesthete; he is, in fact, the "pure theorist" of totalitarianism. "F" speaks of universal violence and speaks no further. Arendt (alluding to Hobbes) writes that terror "makes the plurality of men disappear into One Man of

gigantic dimensions" (466). "F"'s revolutionary speech does not advance a *cause*, it simply creates this Man, just as "F" so literally fashions the ideal Man in the epigraph that opened this chapter. Terror operates by figuratively "pressing men against each other" so that they have no room to determine their individuality (Arendt 466), as the crowd literally presses in towards "F" as he speaks in Parc Lafontaine. Thus, the recognition of "F" as a Patriot in Part One is accurately echoed in the recognition of "I/F" as the Terrorist Leader in Part Three. And the inclusion of "I" in the terrorist identity is appropriate because of his willingness to replace his own reasoning with "F"'s, just as he surrenders himself to the erotic mob while "F" speaks in the park.

"F" hopes—against considerable odds—that "I" will not appropriate his style, acknowledging the strange collapsibility of their two putatively opposite identities. "I lead men too easily," he mourns, "my fatal facility" (161). "I" (passively) remarks that "["F"'s] style is colonizing me" (43). The physical stigmata that "I" and "F" share illustrate a certain continuity between their persons.[13] Both "I" and "F" have blown off their thumbs with "F"'s dynamite, and "I" fears that his brains and genitalia are starting to disintegrate like "F"'s. These physical similarities (though "F" is slim and muscular and "I" is fat) extend the merging of their styles and the scope of their projects. The potential of each figure to create and to destroy, the potential of each for cruelty and abjection, and the way these capacities are explored through a pervasive language of *teaching, training, discipline* and *preparation* marks *Beautiful Losers* as an ideological text that nonetheless strains to move beyond ideology. On the surface, the characters seem to fulfill Arendt's observation that "[w]hat totalitarian rule needs to guide the behavior of its subjects is a preparation to fit each of them equally well for the role of

executioner and the role of victim. This two-sided preparation [...] is the ideology" (Arendt 468). "F" believes that "I"'s saving grace—his passport beyond ideology—will be his power of interpretation: "dear friend, interpret me, go beyond me" (169); "go beyond my style" (161). "F" hopes, as he evidently begins to perceive the failure of his System, that "I" will rediscover his ability to select his influences, in other words, to discriminate.

"F" demeans himself, finally, as a messenger or prophet who is himself a poor interpreter. In the paradigmatic passage where he describes his efforts to bind the parts of the historical accident victims together in an image of the "ideal man"—the passage that provided my chapter on *Beautiful Losers* with its epigraph—"F" admits that he failed because the ideal "kept changing" (187). And yet, he never makes it apparent whether his disappointment in the changing form of the ideal is an ethical or an aesthetic disappointment. "F" is systematic, pyrotechnic, and charismatic but has no real *idea*. He has a "photographic memory" good only for endless appropriation. He exposes the danger of such a mind in his verbatim recitation of a long footnote that compares the cranial measurements of North American Indians to the "barbarous American tribes" of Mexico and Peru (209). This is a eugenic text "F" has learned by heart (and, shockingly, almost by accident) while reading over "I"'s shoulder in the library. "F" is brought to the recognition that his voracious and indiscriminate mind is effectively learning the text, writ large, of how humans dominate other humans. "F"'s incorporative mind and his incorporative style make him, to an unknowable extent, an involuntary parasite of personality, and a spokesman for causes he admits he has never examined.

The limits of "F"'s System are finally exposed in "F"'s own inability to subscribe to it. His long letter becomes momentarily mournful and, against its own philosophy, reflective. The ultimate limitation of "F"'s thinking is that, in his unrestrained power to create and *reveal*, he has barred himself from wonder, and made himself incapable of standing in revelation himself. "I cannot stop teaching," he says, and his words are a confession of his excessive certainty (163): "I was jealous of the terrors I constructed for you but could not tremble before myself" (163). Then, true to his intention to tell "I" *everything*, "F" reveals what could only have become apparent to him with the relaxation of the urgency and obsession that have driven his creativity thus far. "F"'s insistence that he *means* to tell himself these things indicates a very new-found receptivity to something beyond the self (which, until this exact moment, has been "F"'s encompassing principle):

> God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is afoot. Magic is alive. Alive is afoot. Magic never died. God never sickened. Many poor men lied. Many sick men lied. Magic never weakened. Magic never hid. Magic always ruled. God is afoot. God never died. God was ruler though his funeral lengthened. Though his mourners thickened Magic never fled. Though his shrouds were hoisted the naked God did live. [...] This I mean to whisper to my mind. This I mean to laugh with in my mind. This I mean my mind to serve till service is but Magic moving through the world, and mind itself is Magic coursing though the flesh, and flesh itself is Magic dancing on a clock, and time itself the Magic Length of God. (168)

When, early in the novel, "F", speaks from beyond the grave to offer "I" a "dedication" on the radio, the medium is appropriate. "F" *is* a radio (or, elsewhere, a seismograph

needle), a medium of perfect reception and transmission, but somehow devoid of the mechanism for internalizing or personalizing the message. What is required for *understanding* is an element of interference (confusion, requirement for interpretation) that would make the message meaningful. "I," attuned and confused, is better equipped to hear the truth behind the message, though we never see "I" contemplate "F"'s message of magic. And "F," keeping "I" in doubt, finishes the story of the Jesuits, but never assures "I" that Catherine Tekakwitha was divinely escorted out of her loneliness or that her pain achieved anything but service to the crowd. He ultimately encourages only "I"'s assent, not his conviction.

Arendt speaks of the "necessary insecurity of philosophy" as an antidote to the violence that comes from forcing men into (or submitting oneself to) conviction (470). She argues that *no* idea is sufficient to explain everything, *not even* the idea of God. This is why God must be understood as the *revelation* of a palpable reality, and not as an idea that exists behind and before everything: "A theology which is not based on revelation as a given reality but treats God as an idea would be as mad as a zoology which is no longer sure of the physical, tangible existence of animals" (468-469). A theology of revelation ensures that the principle of God is never held in a single, unitary idea. The political corollary is that nothing is deducible "from a single premise" (468); there is no *total* explanation. Accordingly, in "F"'s beautiful speech, neither God nor Magic is *anywhere* in the world; they are both *everywhere*, alive, afoot, in service and in command. And "F" and "I" must earnestly pursue the idea of the divine in the spirit of belief rather than conviction. There is no truth in the novel, Cohen's novel of revelation, culminating in apocalyptic capital-R Revelation; there is only the repeated act of lifting the veil.

Two years before Leonard Cohen published *Beautiful Losers*, he delivered an address to the Jarvis Public Library, entitled "Loneliness and History." Cohen's 1964 speech characterizes two historical dispositions that strikingly anticipate the character of "I," finishing the Jesuits' project, and the character of "F," showing his friend *how it happens*. History, for Cohen, comes from an absolute pursuit of "evidence of holiness" ("Loneliness and History"). Longing and terror are the font of all our ideas, and history "is the *description of the path of an idea* as it passes from generation to generation" ("Loneliness and History," emphasis added). At the point where the idea originates, the man who conceives of it is both its prophet and its priest. But "as the energy of the idea diminishes, the functions of priest and prophet tend to differentiate and soon no one man can perform both offices." The priest is the person who pays tribute to the original idea and, in so doing, binds himself to the community; he protects and honours "the dead ritual." The prophet is the person who "continues to [pursue] the idea as it changes form, trying never to mistake the cast off shell with the swift changing thing that shed it." The prophet "follows [the idea] into the regions of danger" and inevitably becomes an exile. As for the idea itself, it is "the noise creation makes," which is the noise that both "I" and "F" seek to characterize, and which is an untouchable concept that Cohen nonetheless treats with deep respect and curiosity: "I do not know what that original idea was, whose path [...] the generations attended with such beauty and terror. I want to know." It is apparent that Cohen's notion of "history" has precisely the theological-metaphorical cast that Benjamin finds so necessary to the idea of historical *meaning* and which will be best expressed in the apocalyptic closure of *Beautiful Losers*. And it is apparent too that

finding meaning, for Cohen, means coming into contact with one's original terror and the first appreciable moment of the intuition that one's existence has a purpose.

Beautiful Losers' pursuit of "the noise creation makes" ("Loneliness and History") (or the sound of "ordinary eternal machinery" [35]) is effectively the pursuit of an adequate terror, a sense of unmeaning that gives shape to the *discovery* of meaning. "I," the historian, quakes in his kitchen:

> You Are Listening To the Voices Of the Faithless Who Tarry On The Bridges of Spikes [...] I Am Frightened That My Prayer Will Fall Into My Mind [...] I Am Shivering With So Much Fear [...] O God, If There Are Fiery Journeys Be With Edith As She Climbs. (58)

But "I"'s terror appears insincere (or incomplete) when it can be overridden by what he himself characterizes as a "fake universal comprehension" (17), too ready in its "acceptance" of everything. In an early passage, "I" describes the "path" of his mind, recalling Cohen's idea of history, in his library speech, as "the description of the path of an idea":

> [...] [M]y mind seems to go out on a path the width of a thread and of endless length, a thread that is the same colour as the night. Out, out along the narrow highway sails my mind, driven by curiosity, luminous with acceptance, far and out like a feathered hook whipped deep into the light above the stream by a magnificent cast. Somewhere, out of my reach, out of my control, the hook unbends into a spear, the spear shears itself into a needle and the needle sews the world together [...] it goes through everything like a relentless bloodstream, and the tunnel is filled with a comforting message, a beautiful knowledge of unity. (17)

"I"'s needle connects the "disparates of the world," but his reluctance to see his own control over the path of his own mind ("out of my reach, out of my control") allows him to overlook the fact that his connective "needle" is also, for a moment, a "spear." Nonetheless, Cohen's careful use of the image of the spear underlines to *us*, at least, that there is always an ethical/ideological process behind the connections that people make. "I" evades the recognition that (as Cohen once told Pierre Berton in an interview) "there's something arrogant and war-like about putting the world in order" (Nadel 67), though he ventriloquizes the exact sentiment (101). "I"'s vision of unity masks rather than describes his terror. "I" reveals himself to be the priest and not the prophet of his idea insofar as it provides him with "comfort" and binds him to an illusory "acceptance" of the world.

"F"'s project, on the other hand, *acts out* his malaise. "F" attempts to locate his own spiritual terror by visiting terror on others. "F"'s terror, the mirror image of "I"'s, is sincere but not *adequate*. All of his fabrications are performed for the sake of achieving a greater terror vicariously. In much the same way, the Jesuits terrify Catherine in order to beatify her, working their "miracle" through her more profound fear and loneliness. "F"'s violence is the *solution* to the "glimmer of fake universal comprehension" that he detects in "I" (17). "F", prophetically, performs out of inspiration, but his inspiration is "a manic imperative that denies reflection" (Wilkins 45). When "F" sews the world together in his own way[14]—making new bodies for the victims of history—he "make[s] monstrous mistakes" out of "pure urgency" (187). "F"'s pursuit of his idea to the borderland of atrocity bears out Cohen's abstract description of the prophet venturing "into the regions of danger." "F"'s political disgrace and his commitment to the OT ward

are his "exile" from the "world of men" ("I"'s loneliness is not properly an "exile" because it is chosen). "F" confirms his identity as a prophet when he writes that "I was the Moses of our little exodus. I would never cross" (178). For Cohen, the Biblical Moses was very much a Beautiful Loser:

> [B]y the time [the divine idea] seized Moses it was no longer young, and he needed to create an elaborate law to bind himself to the community—for he was a prophet and he must have been anguished by the distance growing between himself and the community. When he smashed the tablets he signaled to all who followed him the futility of his project, and the anguish of knowing that, even so, he was bound to persist in it. ("Loneliness and History")

Moses' "elaborate law" is like "F"'s "System"; Moses' smashed tablets are like F's self-critical confession. "Go beyond me," "F" pleads of "I," "Oh darling, be what I want to be!" (241).

The epithet of "prophet" follows Leonard Cohen around; it is perhaps the most common critical shorthand for his particular role in Canadian literature. Ira Nadel speaks of Cohen's "consecrated" life and discusses Cohen as a celebrant of the prophetic tradition in Judaism (36). Douglas Glover finds that Cohen has made a religious concept of failure, especially in the trope of the narrator who can no longer narrate, and who tries, against the limitations of language, to name the unnameable (19). Sylvia Söderlind considers *Beautiful Losers* to be one of those rare modern texts that still search for the "original, sacred, absolute Word which would allow us a glimpse into the beyond" (87), and Stan Dragland adds, with emphasis on the *risk* of such a vision, that "Cohen pushes his system right up to the edge of the tolerable" (268). But Cohen necessarily rejects

the role of prophet (or, in one ironic self-characterization, "the Voice of my Generation" ["Letter to Dear People"]) and reveals his true idealism in his novelistic vision of the *reunion* of the prophet and the priest in a single, magical identity when "I" merges with "F" in Part Three of *Beautiful Losers*. Part Three is an ultimate bid for "intensity" that is a vision of completion or, in Cohen's more connotative language in "Loneliness and History," a "barbarous finality." This "barbarous finality" brings to a culmination the relationship between the "total vision" and the totalitarian aesthetic that runs throughout the novel.

Tekakwitha's Apology: An Epilogue in the Third Person

> Something was happening in Montreal history! A bitter smile could be detected on the lips of trained revolutionaries and Witnesses of Jehovah, who immediately dispatched all their pamphlets in one confetti salutation. Every man who was a terrorist in his heart whispered, At Last. (257)

Something happens in the final section of *Beautiful Losers*: something ultimate. To the bated breath of mothers, poets, "androgynous hashish smokers," a small "Nazi Party of adolescents" and a wild assortment of others, something happens "At Last" (257). Someone asks, "What's happening?" (258), as the event comes to the hallucinatory borderland nonetheless called "Montreal." Spring comes to the city, from the East. An old man in a treehouse (who resembles both "F" and "I") makes lustful comments to a strange little boy. Then the old man descends from his perch and hitchhikes into the city, performing a sexual favour for the blond housewife (with features of Catherine and Edith and also Isis, mother of truth) who picks him up. He ventures into the Shooting and Game gallery on the Main where the crowd recognizes him as an escaped Terrorist Leader and a notorious sex pervert. As the crowd closes in

on him, "I/F"'s body dematerializes and becomes transfigured into a movie of Ray Charles singing Old Man River. Finally, the Jesuits put in a brief bid for the beatification of Catherine Tekakwitha and the third- person narrator takes a formal leave of us. The poets in the crowd who see the inscrutable thing happening think of it as a "rehearsal," presumably for something that will take its form when later they write of it (257). But the scene is given to *us* in such marvelous formlessness and obscurity that we are convinced that we are *not* seeing only the "rehearsal," but a record of the "pure event."

In its spectacular closing section, the novel strives to overcome itself. It pitches itself into absurdity, trying to supersede its own status as an instrument of sense-making, and possibly, its status as a representation. It wants to be *beyond* device and devising; "[m]agic is no instrument," "F" had whispered, "magic is the end" (168). Susan Sontag explains that "it is in the nature of all spiritual projects to tend to consume themselves—exhausting their own sense, the very meaning of the terms in which they are couched" (33). The novel, in utter self-consumption, sheds the signatures of both "I"'s narration and "F"'s, and literally *burns up* its protagonist, turning him into light before the joyous crowd. When the third-person narrator finally steps in and claims, "I have come through the fire of family and love" (260), Cohen draws on the "ultimate status" of fire as a symbol, especially as an apocalyptic one (Frye 146). The total transmutation of the speaker(s)—their purification in fire and reconfiguration as simple images—is a liberating depersonalization that seems to express what James Joyce relevantly dubs "life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination" (Joyce 233). "I/F" recreates himself as a movie image of Ray Charles and thus a vision that the entire crowd holds in common—as if he, like a saint, has worked through all of their consciousnesses and

become a simple manifestation in place of a physical presence. The way in which the tale overcomes the teller imitates the way in which the Danish Vibrator—a voracious sexual machine which "F" uses on Edith—"*had learned to feed itself*," overcoming itself as an apparatus (190, original italics). This incident prepares us to view the novel itself as moving towards its own total autonomy, its own escape. But the DV is horrendous, a monster released on the world. And the ending of *Beautiful Losers* self-consciously appeals to every man who is "a terrorist in his heart"; why should the novel's ending, which is a revolution in perception, have terrorist appeal?

In the work's apparent attempt to overcome itself, to make itself a *total artwork* free from any speaker and uncontrolled by its implied author, all the old paradoxes of authority and freedom re-emerge. I suggested a moment ago that the absurdity and insistent spontaneity of the final section persuades us of the *lack* of an organizing (authorial) presence. Michael Ondaatje, as we noted, suggests that the novel is successful because of Leonard Cohen's hard-won "eradication" of his own presence in the work (56). In this deliberate effacement of himself as an artist, Cohen seems to establish instead an "extreme possibility" for the artwork itself, so that "the mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished" (Joyce 233). On the other hand, we could equally say that the closing section of the novel is *so* surreal and utterly inimitable that, instead of obliterating the author, it places emphasis on the total originality of Cohen's mind, and the complete subjectivity of its vision. In this way, we are brought back both to "F"'s own potential for "awful originality" as well as I's unacknowledged and underhanded control. As such, the Epilogue, underneath all its pyrotechnics, quietly

reinstates the novel's most dangerous idea, namely that, "creators care nothing for their systems except that they be unique" (59).

It may be that Cohen intended the epilogue's surrealism to be a posture of humility. For some artists, "integrating the absurd into the imagination is a process that violates the artist's sense of his own superiority, and leaves him more vulnerable to the wisdom of everyday experience" (Tytell 213). But one cannot ignore "F"'s assertion that everything original speaks *inevitably* of its originator: "O God, the dream leaves fingerprints" (218). Stephen Scobie points to the crucial conundrum that, even as the novel works through its thesis on the beauty of self-loss, "the theme of the loss of personality is projected in terms of what appears to be a very strong personality and ego, that of the artist himself" (*Leonard Cohen* 11). Marta Dvorak concurs, writing that where the text is most disjunctive and playful, it "calls attention to its fabricated nature, forcing us to acknowledge the writer's absolute control over his fictional world" ("Books" 58). The artist's ego is one that, once it has asserted itself in the world, *cannot* withdraw itself.

Cohen's poem "Gift" (connoting the poetic talent) illustrates that the poetic persona *itself* turns everything it touches into a "work":

> You tell me that silence
> Is nearer to peace than poems
> But if for my gift
> I brought you silence
> (for I know silence)
> you would say
>
> *This is not silence*

This is another poem

And you would hand it back to me. (*Stranger Music* 29)

In the hands of the poet, even a silence is a composition, or so his audience concludes; a poet cannot resign from poetry. Everything he does is a production; he even *produces* his silences. In *Beautiful Losers*, similarly, creative power is always power, even when it seems to abjure. The artist takes the revolutionary risk of transforming people's consciousnesses through his creation, or he risks responsibility for leaving the world *as it is* by not creating. If the organizing presence of *Beautiful Losers'* third section is invisible, "behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (Joyce 233), then is he or she not simply the *deus abscondus* whose seeming absence produces the "wreck" of history in the first place, the version of the world that requires re-injection with a theological-apocalyptic strain? On this note, as "I/F" parts company with the blond housewife (who represents truth or magical possibility), he tells her ominously and even callously, "have a magnificent crash" (251), returning the reader to the image of the universal wreck that I drew upon in my epigraph. The conclusion of *Beautiful Losers* is a reminder of this apocalyptic crash: a devastating accident and a miraculous possibility at once.

Critics have already argued that the epilogue of *Beautiful Losers* is apocalyptic, a reading cued by the explanation of apocalypse given midway through the novel itself when "I" remembers the story of Tekakwitha's Feast. "I" himself characterizes the event as "apocalyptic," meaning that it is the disclosure of, in "I"'s terms, "what is revealed when the woman's veil is lifted" (106) or "what goes on under [the] rosy blanket" of Kateri Tekakwitha (3). These terms define apocalypse as an encounter with the feminine

because of the sense in which apocalypse is "*mysterium tremendum*, the encounter with holy otherness" (Brown 806). To encounter the other in this most complete sense, is to abstract the self totally. Stephen Scobie has characterized the conclusion of the novel as "an apocalypse of utter impersonality" ("Magic" 56), in keeping with that part of the definition of apocalypse that entails that revelation "is the way the world looks after the ego disappears" (Brown 809). In becoming divested of their personalities and their bodies, "I" and "F" finally move beyond perspective and ideology to become (in a phrase of Cohen's that Scobie has used as the title for his article), "magic, not magicians" (60).[15] Linda Hutcheon also addresses *Beautiful Losers'* apocalyptic closure, showing that the Epilogue's motifs correspond to those of the Book of Revelations. Hutcheon finds echoes of Revelations in the image of the bloody moon, in the protagonist's descent from the tree of life, and in his entrance into the city (the figurative New Jerusalem) through an archetypal gate (the spread legs of the blond housewife) ("Polarities" 44). Hutcheon suggests that such extended Biblical allusion shows us that *Beautiful Losers*, like the Bible, "associates the fate of the individual with that of the nation" (45). She contends that in the novel lives are lived in "isolation" and culminate in "destruction," which projects the (apocalyptic) possibility of total "identity alienation" for the nation at large ("Polarities" 45). But in picking up *solely* on the implication of apocalypse as devastation, Hutcheon's reading tends to undermine the beauty of the apocalyptic vision. Neither does Hutcheon point to the minute distinction between total "identity alienation" and its equally plausible opposite—total identity. Nobody who has addressed the apocalyptic closure of the novel so far has taken apocalypse to mean the world unified in an absolute identity, which seems to me to be the most significant implication of the

Epilogue. This absolute identity is the culmination of the line of thought in the novel that describes the incorporative or self-perfecting body, and it extends the problem of total authority that has been important throughout the work. In the epilogue, Cohen creates a world that is so original and bizarre that it is aesthetically inviolable—no element can fail to "fit"; thus Cohen affirms his complete creative power in a way that appeals to the "terrorist" and the "[witness] of Jehovah" alike (257).

In Northrop Frye's definition of apocalypse, a world in which everything had been "unidentical and atomized, with no possibility of unity" (Bennett 821) finally coheres in identity. Rhetorically, this freedom from "atomization" means that a mimetic or realistic way of seeing the world has to be replaced with a poetic or abstract one. Christophe Lebold argues, along similar lines, that the "linearity" and "accumulation" of the historical consciousness, a consciousness faithful to reality, is resolved by the "interruptions" of magic and miracle (149). Frye explains that an apocalyptic vision is mythic, meaning simply that it operates with a high degree of stylization and a low degree of mimesis. An apocalyptic vision gives "no consistent sense of the separation of subject and object, but rather the easy mingling of personal and natural presence that we find in the god" (Bennett 824).[16] *Beautiful Losers*, in fact, explicitly tries to reject the world of simile (or *quasi*-identification) over the course of its Epilogue. The opening passage of the Epilogue is a catalogue of extravagant simile:

> In Montreal, the cafes, *like a bed of tulip bulbs*, sprout from their cellars in a display of awnings and chairs. In Montreal spring is *like an autopsy*. Everyone wants to see the inside of the frozen mammoth. Girls rip off their sleeves and the flesh is sweet and white, *like wood under bark*. From the streets a sexual

> manifesto rises *like an inflating tire*, 'The winter has not killed us again!' Spring comes into Quebec from Japan, *and like a prewar Crackerjack prize* it breaks the first day because we play too hard with it. Spring comes into Montreal *like an American movie of Riviera Romance*, and everyone has to sleep with a foreigner [...]. (246, emphases added)

In an apocalyptic world view, by contrast, the animal is completely identifiable with the mineral, the vegetable, the human and the divine; simile is not needed. The Epilogue is thoroughly given over to the idea of transubstantiation, in which the essence of one body is not just *like* but actually *is* the same as the essence of another. Cohen suggests that the "miracle" achieved in the Epilogue is the minimizing of the difference between subject and object. When he writes that "a cry of happiness escaped from each man as he closed in on his object" (256), Cohen is literally speaking of the crowd's capture of the old man ("I/F"), but the diction suggests the joy of achieving subject-object identity in a much broader sense.

"I/F"'s very memory is likewise all-incorporative and "represented no incident, [for] it was all one incident" (246); likewise he is no *person*, but a style of unlimited being. He comes ready to work an epiphany, which for Frye is the meeting point of the mimetic and apocalyptic modes; and which for "F", similarly, is the escape of the newsreel into the feature; and which for Cohen is the consummation of history in miracle. "I/F" sees the potential for his miracle—a total human unison—in the cinema, where he notices that

> [s]ometimes, when all the eyes contained exactly the same image, like all the windows of a huge slot machine repeating bells, they made a noise in unison. It

only happened when they saw exactly the same thing, and the noise was called laughter, he remembered [....] Now he understood as much as he needed. (252)

"I/F" is determined to create a human unison (the "unison" of spontaneous and simultaneous laughter) by means of a personal transformation. The old man's transfiguration of himself into an absurd spectacle is an attempt to achieve an encompassing form of being for himself and a universal identity for the crowd.[17] "I/F"'s slow disintegration imitates the way "a crater extends its circumference with endless tiny landslides along the rim," infinitely enlarging itself (248); he turns into an ever more inclusive form, a godly form to which all eyes are turned, if only for one magical second.

The transfiguration of "I/F" in the fire of the "Clear Light" mimics the many instances in the novel in which various figures hope that a spectacle or spectacular occurrence becomes a universal message or a universal bond. "F" recounts to Edith, in the Argentinean hotel, the story of the martyrdom of the Jesuit missionaries. As Father Brébeuf burns at the stake (in another image, significantly, of passage through fire), he quotes the words of Saint Paul: "We are made a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men" (183). The very fact that Brébeuf's words are a *quotation* points to the endless recurrence of such spectacular abdications of self, and to the world's unchanging and recurrent *requirement* for such spectacles. This requirement bespeaks the pure ruthlessness of our need for the universal bond. This is the same absolute need that has informed totalitarian political organizations; indeed, Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology* taught his generation that "'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts'" (qtd. in Lilla 90). "I/F"'s own transfiguration invites the crowd to react to the possible absurdity of the world (through laughter) in an echo of

the way the novel invites us, in an extended way (and often through the response of horror) to respond to the possibility of a *meaningless* universe, a suggestion of a total lack of organization that is always as plausible as a total organization. The "miracle" of "I/F"'s transformation is a playful version of some of the novel's darkest moments.

In many ways, the apocalyptic closure of *Beautiful Losers* recapitulates (rather than resolves) the novel's typical questions and problems, beginning with the idea that a world can be bound together under the charismatic hold of an individual ("I/F"'s, or the author's) and realized in his or her total personality. A saint is by definition a charismatic; Catherine Tekakwitha, in being recognized as the *Thaumaturge du Nouveau Monde,* had gained for herself a species of "total" status that merited universal veneration. A totalitarian leader is, likewise, a charismatic who draws the world into uniformity. F's problematic equation of Hitler and Jesus as originators of total systems that are "bound to fail in the hands of other men," thus returning everyone's attention to the originality of the creator (59), reflects the novel's underlying fear that any particularly persuasive and totalizing creativity may be an expression of the totalitarian spirit. "I" had envisioned a world entirely "sewn" together, and so had "F." The world *is* sewn together in Cohen's final, inescapably subjective dream vision. But the epilogue's visible emphasis on games and play (in the pinball machine, the movie, the laughter) is reassuring, helping us to see the apocalyptic, barbaric closure of the novel as an *imitation* of the dangerous totalizing impulse Cohen portrays throughout the novel, creating a (small) ironic distance between *his* "total vision" and others.

Frye insists that it is the work of culture to translate our dark impulses into imaginative *imitations* of those impulses; part of the way that the novel consumes itself in

its epilogue (as I have suggested) is through its playful reconception of its most serious themes. "F" himself describes this kind of imaginative "taming" when he originates the Telephone Dance (where lovers stick their fingers into one another's ears to appreciate the inner "hum" of the other, the sound their being makes) and reflects upon its purpose. "F" says, very much in the spirit of Frye, "I suppose that certain primitive bird and snake dances began the same way, a need to imitate the fearful and beautiful, yes, an imitative procedure to acquire some of the qualities of the adored awesome beast" (33). This observation of "F"'s as he imitates the mechanical telephone "beast" is a marvelous one. It shows that "F"'s creation, like all human creations, comes from an aspiration to the *power* of something terrible, the "adored awesome beast" (terminology that sounds as if it is straight out of Revelations). But "F" also suggests in this sentiment that the "imitation" itself should generate wonder; the work of the imagination *itself*, the "imitative procedure," always represents, for Frye, the "liberalizing of life" (148). The Epilogue might be seen as just such an *imitation* of the terror that runs throughout the novel, now divested of "real" consequence:

> --Just sit back and enjoy it, I guess.
>
> --Thank God it's only a movie. (259)

Art is neither History nor System; it is a liberalization of both. And the artistry of the novel's final section, which incorporates apocalyptic ideas and images, is an *ultimate* artistry that appropriates the terror of the Book of Revelations, but playfully transforms it.

I would like to put forth the speculative notion, furthermore, that Cohen means for us to understand "I/F"'s transformation as the saintly work of Catherine Tekakwitha (we might even be tempted to link the purifying waters of Tekakwitha's Spring to the

"Spring" that comes to Montreal). In other words, Cohen gives us the final bid for Catherine's canonization (in a strange ending "rented" to the Jesuits) because he means for the dematerialization of "I/F" to be final evidence of Tekakwitha's ability to work miracles. In Part One of the novel, as "I" works out an etymology of Tekakwitha's name, he decides that she should be understood as, "she who, advancing, arranges the shadows neatly" (47). If Catherine is the "arranger of shadows," and the book's final miracle is *cinematic*, then perhaps we are to suppose that Tekakwitha is the supernatural projectionist who squeezes "I/F" through the "strait gate" of time to become pure image. After all, at the moment of her own death, Catherine Tekakwitha anachronistically lights a spotlight upon her own face, making it white for the approval of the Jesuits: "At that precise moment the girl entered the eternal machinery of the sky. Looking back over her atomic shoulder, she played a beam of alabaster over her old face as she streamed forward" [...] (224). To suppose that Catherine Tekakwitha is this invisible presence working strange magic in the novel is to identify her fully with Leonard Cohen himself. In this case, what the Epilogue dramatizes is the reunion of the artist with his original inspiration, the historical Tekakwitha. In creating Catherine in her most absolute role so far, the worker of the novel's own magic, Cohen creates himself as well as the perfect artist: "The charismatic force of the genius is the result not of his identity with God, but of his perfect identity with his own inspiration (or ego) and hence with his own works" (Aldrich 10).

Stan Dragland has called attention to passages in the novel which are "part of a self-reflexive inquiry into order and chaos in life and art" (263) and, in doing so, has contrasted the passage in which "I" sews the world together (using the "needle" of his

mind) with the passage in which "F" tries desperately to stitch together a human form out of all the accident victims. These passages beg to be juxtaposed; I have drawn heavily on the contrast myself. But there is a third term in this sewing trope that is not to be overlooked: Tekakwitha sews. Catherine Tekakwitha "[has] a great gift for embroidery" (48) and is renowned for her decorative quillwork. It is difficult to see why this detail would even be *needed* in the novel, except as a corrective to the other two obsessive sewers, and to identify Catherine's "quillwork" with the writer's quill. Here, then, is an artist figure Cohen can identify with, *while* admitting to the "war-like" act of ordering the world—someone for whom sewing has nothing to do with imposing pattern and wholeness and has only to do with creating something beautiful.

The real value of supposing that Catherine is the palpable, unidentified presence moving the Epilogue, though, is that such an assumption re-asserts saintliness as a "realm of absolute value" (Aldrich 10). Catherine has been conscripted to causes throughout the novel, and she has taken on the appearance of everyone who has spoken of her. When "I" speaks of her she is miserable and alone, hating her body and submitting herself to mortifications. When "F" speaks of her, she takes on his manic energy and public adulation even in the way she tears her flesh from her body; "the crowd cheer[s]" for her in her final ecstasy (220). Only at one moment is she equivocal, uninflected by "I"'s misery or "F"'s joy. This is when, by Edith's account of Tekakwitha's Feast, Catherine declares, neutrally in the face of the disaster she has evidently created, "I guess I owe you all an apology" (104). This is nothing short of a promise of *return,* the guarantee of an afterword, the (linguistically cognate) "epilogue" that binds the world in a beautiful—and shadowy—unity. If she is a saint, Tekakwitha's realm is already entirely the "shadow

realm" of consciousness; it is her role not to act in the world but "to embody in pure unconsciousness and often practical uselessness the otherwise unknowable value that will become, in action and art, the identity and history of a people" (Aldrich 11). The saint is an embodiment of vague—but absolute—human value.

When the novel thus orients itself toward the absolute, Cohen acknowledges, it aligns itself with dangerous systems of "totalizing" thought. But to give up the goal of *absoluteness* is to give up on what seems to be, for Cohen, art's most important role, which is to mediate between the world of men and the realm of the magical and the eternal. Just as a saint aspires to "miraculous conversation," trying to touch something absolutely outside of him- or herself, Cohen's book tries to bind itself to the miraculous as well. The point is not to *succeed* in this binding of the limited subject to the realm of absolute value, but to make the *approach* palpable: "a cry of happiness escaped from each man as he *closed in on* his object" (256, emphasis added). "F"'s Long Letter, Cohen's novel, and the Book of Revelations itself all perform a tellingly similar gesture in this regard—they all reach out self-consciously to their reader. "F"'s literary promise of ecstasy ("And this is your lover, F., finishing the joyous letter which I promised. God bless you! [241]) imitates the novel's own closural benediction ("Welcome to you who read me today" [260]) and indeed that of the prototype of total disclosure, the Book of Revelation itself ("Blessed be he who reads" [Rev 1.3]). The idea of "welcoming the other" is common to all of these projects. Perhaps the address of the self to the other (the reader) imitates the absolute project of binding oneself to the "mystery" of the *ultimate* alterity of God. "F"'s letter shares with Cohen's novel and the recorded vision of John the evangelist the idea that revelation exists on the boundary of catastrophe,[18] and that

there may be a moment of consciousness in which one's implication in the universal disaster becomes a binding vision of the unity of creation, the "magic length of God" (169).

Cohen is aware of the implication of totalitarianism in his ideal of "total art" *but* insists on art's right to be absolute, nonetheless. In a 1964 letter to McClelland and Stewart, Cohen expresses his interest in contributing towards an understanding of the totalitarian spirit. Cohen's emphasis on the breadth of his formal experiment in the work concerned, *Flowers for Hitler*, may tempt us to suggest a relationship between the "big book" as an instrument of formal totality and the "totalitarian spirit" that is its subject; the same relationship is at play in *Beautiful Losers*. In both cases, it is as if the attempt to come to an *understanding* of this human type necessitates the work's own capaciousness, its own "total" status, its own unconscious identification despite Cohen's modest protests:

> Here is my big book. I hope you don't think it's too big. I want it to be the very opposite of a slim volume. I hope I've made some contribution to the study of the totalitarian spirit and I needed a lot of space and a lot of forms to make my try.
>
> ("Letter to Claire Pratt")

Beautiful Losers makes a prominent theme of the problematic desire to control the world. But its ultimate message of comfort *is* an assurance of control, namely that "God is alive, magic is afoot." Thus, Cohen defends a vision of wholeness so long as it is sacral, and mediated by a sacral figure (for Cohen, Catherine Tekakwitha, and for us, "Leonard Cohen," whose writing persona has been consecrated by the rhetoric that surrounds it). The trick of *identifying* the controlling presence without becoming it, is the worthy but perhaps impossible project of Cohen's art, his saintly discipline.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Margaret Atwood and the "Perverse Museum": *Cat's Eye's* Collection of the World

> I find this game tiring—it's the weight, the accumulation of all these objects.
> (*Cat's Eye* 53)

> The function of belongings within the economy of the bourgeois subject is one of supplementarity, a supplementarity that in consumer culture replaces its generating subject as the interior milieu substitutes for, and takes the place of, an interior self.
> (Susan Stewart, *On Longing* xi)

> He who collects nothing must be a cretin [yet] he who does collect can never shake off an air of impoverishment and depleted humanity. (Jean Baudrillard, qtd. in Pearce 132)

> I see there will be no end to imperfection. (*Cat's Eye* 138)

The Curator of Herself

Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988) is a novel self-consciously brimming with the "lost things" of a postwar Toronto childhood: coins bearing the head of King George; boat-like Buicks; pencil skirts and shortie coats; Brownie cameras and purie marbles; foundation garments and practical shoes; pressure-cookers and newspaper clippings of polio victims encased in iron lungs. *Cat's Eye's* first-person narrator, Elaine Risley, is a painter, and therefore the acute materiality of the novel is partly owing to Elaine's engagement with perceptible objects and visual form. While the novel is interested in the things of 1940s and 1950s vogue for their own sake and especially for the power of objects to condense and crystallize memory, Atwood also presents, in Elaine's keen attentiveness to the world of objects, a problematic creativity. Elaine's inventory of her social world is, in part, the by-product of her coming to her vocation as a "botanist manqué" (287) and possessing an imagination that is taxonomic and differential, interested in individuating. It is Elaine's own individuality, however, that is most profoundly at stake in her unremitting drive to see and record objective things exactly.

Elaine's special artistic capacity is not initially for creativity in the traditional sense, but for a vast, negative intuition, a social and metaphysical dread that drives her to objectify and differentiate and will not let her stop. She is obsessed with death, formlessness and decay in general and with her own possible incoherence and nonentity in particular. When she represents (in painting or in narration), she does so as a pathologically extensive act of clarification, an articulation of the boundaries of the world and the self.

The novel traces a psychological history that details Elaine's dogged attempts to subsume "the cultural organization of the material world" (Stewart, *On Longing* 30) to a personal order. In the frame story of *Cat's Eye*, Elaine has returned to Toronto after many years away, for a retrospective showing of her work. The novel focuses thematically on this exhibition and is also confessionally self-exhibiting, as Elaine's narration countenances the everywhere implicit question, "What do you have to say for yourself?" (117). This barbed demand is first posed by Cordelia, a childhood friend whose charismatic authority is ostracizing and cruel but also imaginative and compelling. When nine-year-old Elaine first encounters Cordelia in an apple orchard, she is "empty of [the] premonition" that the green-eyed child is to fascinate her, mobilize all her self-doubt, and engage her in a lifelong project of self-justification (69). Elaine first arrives in Toronto as a stranger to culture, having grown up, to the age of eight, in the remote bush country of the north where her entomologist father has been gathering data on the habits of the tent caterpillar. The little girls who befriend Elaine—Carol Campbell, Grace Smeath, and, a year later, the ubiquitous Cordelia—maliciously keep the mark of Elaine's strangeness upon her. Their games set up a childhood politic of inclusion and exclusion

and submit Elaine to judgment based on whether she can put on the right public face and whether she can demonstrate that she wants the correct things (a Veronica Lake cut-out book, a Barbara Ann Scott doll). Elaine develops an obsessive attention to exteriority that expresses her desire for "correct" and whole self-presentation. The young Elaine absorbs *everything* because she is unsure of herself and anxious to please. Her interests are everywhere because she is both circumspect and ambivalent—looking all around her, valuing on many fronts. She collects things; she is vigilant.

Meanwhile, there is a social emphasis on ways in which Elaine is terminally incomplete or unassimilable. Grace Smeath's mother, trying to draw Elaine into Ontario Protestantism, implies that Elaine maintains a heathenish resistance to full conversion (179); later, Elaine's first lover makes the Pygmalian pronouncement that she is an "unfinished woman" (273). Elaine's objective fascinations (for example, a catalogue beginning "I remember the shoes of my childhood [...]" [149]) come from her lifelong sense of personal insufficiency and a generally tenuous sense of self. Her narration is heavily incorporative—resurrecting the "lost things" of the past—in part because Elaine is driven to model her ideal personal completeness in the integrity of the *thing* or the completion of the set.

When Elaine, just out of high school, begins to paint, her future instructor Josef Hrbik looks at her portfolio (containing a portrait of a beer bottle and a drawing of a tree "like a whisk" [270]) and makes the appraising statement that, "You draw objects very well. But you cannot as yet draw life" (272). There is an address-to-the-apprentice condescension about this statement, part of Atwood's caricature of Hrbik as the melancholy, seductive master. But the remark also applies to the novel's very serious

reflection on the intractability of life and the contrasting amenability of objects to representation. It points to the concern, self-consciously thematized in *Cat's Eye*, of how to "draw life" from a series of "stills," and how, in the process, the object threatens to supplant or replace the subject. In *Cat's Eye*, Atwood portrays an artist who, early in her career, paints her personal past as a series of immaculate, technically controlled still lifes of "domestic materials" (348): *Wringer Washer*; *Toaster.* Elaine's description of her upbringing, likewise, is an objective parade of twin sets, rubber plants, and porcelain eggcups. All material evocations in *Cat's Eye* are deeply formal, and not merely incidental. Elaine does not evoke objects in neutral acts of scene painting, nor does she define material things "in terms of their use value" in such a way that they "serve as *extensions* of the body into the environment" (Stewart, *On Longing* 162, emphasis added). Rather, she aestheticizes them, hoarding them in memory in an embattled attempt to "subsume the environment into a scenario of the personal" (Stewart 162-3). The objects of the past give body both to Elaine's frustration and to her nostalgia, expressing through "forties colours" and outmoded shapes something she herself might recognize as the form and texture of her life (89).

Atwood herself describes *Cat's Eye* as "a celebration of the physical world we know," a novel in which she has commemorated "all those vanished *things* from my own childhood—the marbles, the Eaton's Catalogues [...]" (Atwood, qtd. in Sullivan *The Red Shoes* 43 and in Cooke, *Margaret Atwood* 193).[1] Naturally, it is a feature of both realism in general and life-writing in particular that the speaker's "angle of vision must [encompass] an image of the place and time span within which the subject's life story is played out" (Kearns 94).[2] But the proliferation of objects as tokens of the life behind

them also calls attention to the limits of depiction and description. *Action* is something we might understand as "objects which succeed each other, or whose parts succeed each other in time" (Lessing, qtd. in Bryant 3). The evocation of *still* objects, such as Elaine's signature still lifes, illustrates a belaboured temporality, a moment of reflection and representation, not of action. Elaine's visionary and animating "cat's eye," when late in the novel she comes to acquire it, finally *generalizes* objects to action; it can "only see things that are moving" (228). The novel reconciles Elaine's early collecting or objectifying persona with the later persona whose autobiographical explorations have made her capable of seeing the expansive shape and the essential motion of her life, "the moving edge we live in" (409). As such, *Cat's Eye* comes to express the way in which an accumulative depiction of the physical world may approach the life behind it.

Elaine arrives at a conception of herself as the Virgin of Lost Things, a Mexican icon whose name links the collector-gatherer aspect of Elaine's personality to its transcendent-beatific potential. Elaine treats objects as relics, supercharged with meaning. Elaine's egg tempera painting of a toaster with its door swung wide open to reveal "the red-hot grill within" (337) suggests, hilariously, *sacre-coeur* portraiture, rendered in the medium of medieval devotional painting; as such, Elaine expresses the mundane object as holy. Anthropologist Mary Douglas defines that which is holy as whole or "set apart," complete or exemplary of its category (8, 52, 54). It is this categorical definitiveness—this exemplary objectivity—towards which Elaine gravitates when she is drawn to household objects as themes for her paintings. The object, in its self-containment, is a figure for Elaine's own desire for wholeness and for the circumvention of her own learned sense of imperfection. Elaine's active enculturation

includes being invited to Sunday school with the Smeath children, where Elaine presents "white gifts" on White Gift Sunday. This ritual becomes the subject of one of her later paintings and an apt encapsulation of the novel's interest in the absolving object. A white gift is a donation, modestly veiled in white paper. It is something tendered against Elaine's own social and spiritual imperfection. If it is the right thing to present, it might mean, in Elaine's words, that "I no longer have to be admonished" (125).[3] The covered object suggests a veiled art-object in a gallery; indeed, Elaine views the art gallery as a penitential arena where she stands exposed: "Galleries are frightening places, places of judgment" (19). The idea that objects, and the representation of objects, are (spiritualized) *offerings* by which Elaine stands to be judged and by which she will either be rendered complete or found wanting has a rather archetypal overtone, one that Atwood draws upon in her recent meditation on the writing life, *Negotiating With the Dead* (2002). Atwood suggests that the artist makes a figurative underworld descent (in *Cat's Eye*, a descent into materiality, perhaps) in order to be granted a specific boon: "clairvoyance" and "the completion of her identity as [an artist]" (*Negotiating* 178). The novel's presentational quality, its constant proffering of objects, is tied to Elaine's hopes for self-completion, for her wholeness, and for her capacity to see the truth.

Exhibition or objective presentation, therefore, contributes to the novel's (heavily spiritualized) confessional mode. Studies of the novel's confessional genre tend, naturally, to be interested in *speech*, and especially in the illocutionary dynamic between the penitent Elaine and her absent confessor, Cordelia. For Nathalie Cooke, the confessional thrust of *Cat's Eye* is a "rhetorical and an ethical strategy" ("Poetics of Ventriloquism" 208). It "lay[s] bare the narrative contrivance" of the novel, creating a

"context of intimacy" whereby the reader stands in for Cordelia as a witness to Elaine's appeal for forgiveness and wholeness ("Poetics of Ventriloquism" 225). Sherrill Grace suggests that the novel's "discourse" presents the narrator's identity as an open "process," which is "iterative, cyclical, incremental and unresolved, even a mystery" (200). These readings have adopted a postmodern view of the novel as a speech-act that is dialogic in intention if not in fact (since Cordelia is never present to answer). Atwood, however, suggests an important alternation between speech and mute objective self-presentation that is consistent with Elaine's well-established distrust of the verbal and her conviction that "language is leaving me behind" (42). Elaine remembers these essential lines from Cordelia's adolescent ventures into Shakespearean drama: *"Then, if you speak, you must not show your face, / Or, if you show your face, you must not speak"* (302, original italics). Here Atwood suggests that there is possibly an irreconcilable relationship between subjective and objective self-presentation; the novel is interested in both. I find a residual modernism in the novel's alternate penitential mode, namely in what we might think of as a silent "mortification of the subject" (Mao 13) before the implied integrity of the object. A troubled Elaine relates in young adulthood that "I have no image of myself in relation to [things]" (337). She must find, in the object (and not only in the judgment of an imaginatively reconstructed Cordelia), an image of her own wholeness. Mutely, she submits herself to the object world just as she submits to her "confessor," hoping to emerge entire from her engagement with each. Elaine's troubled negotiation of the world of objects is perhaps even more fundamental and more intimate than her need to turn towards herself that *special* object, the "other." There is a sense in which *Cat's Eye* enacts a subject-object drama that is not so much dialogic and social as

it is painfully *monologic*; on one level, the novel tells the story of a consciousness alone in a world of intractable objects, working out its own troubled individuality.

The novel's material fullness, though it is invariably tied to Elaine's desire for self-completion, raises the troubling possibility that the subject can ultimately be subsumed to, or even lost in, a world burgeoning with objects. In his essay "The System of Objects," Jean Baudrillard makes the case that, even when spuriously arranged or imaginatively unconnected, objects furnish by their very accumulation and combination a buried narrative of the self:[4]

> And if there are too many objects, it is because there is too little space [...] And quantity makes up for the loss of quality in objects [...] [The personal, middle-class] museum is made up of humble hardware combined with a complete folklore of porcelain and terracotta animals, trinkets, cups, framed souvenirs and so on, a complete imagery of Épinal[5] which sits alongside the latest model of electrical domestic appliance. This detracts nothing, however, from the need for individualization, which is the same for everybody. Everyone simply takes from the past what he can. (Baudrillard 180)

In everyday life, as Baudrillard explains, material accumulation serves a desire for individuation, and yet the individual is never truly brought to the fore. The collection itself, in his view, is the dominant reality; the personality of the collector is only *implied* in it. Susan Stewart has similarly pointed out that, in a culture of belongings or "supplementarity," an "interior *milieu* may substitute for, or take the place of, an interior self" (*On Longing* xi). Atwood's Elaine Risley is "groaning under the weight of consumer icons" (York 243), and struggling to integrate those consumer icons into a self-

portrait. She is intent on objectifying her mourning by reifying and symbolically re-possessing the things of the past. Elaine is, in Leon Edel's phrase, the "figure under the carpet:" she is in possession of the figurative archive of herself, but not the "inner myth" by which "the subject stands revealed" (Edel 18, 34). Atwood's *Cat's Eye* involves the complex discovery of the subject, a compassionate release of Elaine Risley from the objects and collections of the past. The challenge of foregrounding the subject meanwhile, is that the object world helps constitute identity but also obscures it, almost in equal measure.

The Atwoodian Museum

A recurring trope in Margaret Atwood's *oeuvre,* which might be called "the perverse museum" (after a line in her poem, "A Night in The Royal Ontario Museum"), questions the subject's ability to locate herself in a world dominated by objective display. Does the aesthetic presentation of a milieu through its objects clarify or complicate the subject's position relative to the surrounding "world"? The museum is an institution that collects and condenses the outside world, striving for aesthetic self-completeness; it is a world-anthology. The "perverse museum" trope may come to stand for both Elaine's embattled attempt to collect, in Baudrillard's usage, the "personal museum" (180), and the novel's correspondingly earnest attempt to paint a culturally descriptive portrait of Toronto. *Cat's Eye* itself has been welcomed as an "an act of cultural cataloguing" and as a description of "the evolution of Toronto's tribal customs from the forties to the eighties" (Cowart 126; Manguel, qtd. in Ahern 8); it gamely carries the burden of cultural representativeness which is also the museum's. The novel describes an exhibition (*Risley*

in Retrospect) and also *is* an exhibition: a gallery *and* a museum, a place of material display. As well, the novel absolutely abounds in literal and figurative museums: the Royal Ontario Museum; the Conversat/ Zoology Building (which is "a kind of museum" [168]); 4-D's Diner ("the past done over as a museum" [385]); even the homes of the novel's minor characters, which in the spirit of *Better Homes and Gardens* are the venues of a strange kind of private tourism: Carol shows Elaine around her house "as if it's a museum" (51). The "perversity" of the museum in the Atwood canon reflects *Cat's Eye*'s ambivalence about the compulsiveness and inadequacy of expressing the past in terms of objective collections.

In Atwood's poem, "A Night in the Royal Ontario Museum" (1968),[6] a panicked speaker finds herself locked into the exhibit hall after hours. The pronounced contrivance of this poem's situation (for surely the R.O.M. rarely manages to entrap its visitors) highlights Atwood's long-standing theoretical interest in the subject's encounter with an assembled and objective world. A museum aspires to objective completeness and ideally has a self-sufficient "synecdochal relation" to the world outside its doors; it models, in this way, the work of art and, especially, the self-sufficiency and closure of fiction (Arata 216). But Atwood's poem portrays the museum as oppressive. The distressed speaker—the organizing consciousness—struggles to be "found" within its confines. Spatial indicators ("YOU ARE HERE") are insistent but absurd. "Who locked me // into this crazed man-made / stone brain?" the speaker wonders, comparing the museum's domed roof to an irrationally proliferate human cranium, crammed with decontextualized artifacts ("A Night" 189). A totem pole jabs at a Byzantine mosaic dome and Greco-Roman marbles flank the washroom; the abject speaker tries to locate herself among the

bronze horses, tarnished coins and EXIT signs ("A Night" 189-90). The imposing physical structure that Atwood emphasizes in this poem—walls, corridors and displays—suggests a museum's normal presumption of closural adequacy, but Atwood's museum cannot "stop" while its wandering human subject is interred there, an irrational disturbance in the metaphorical brain:

> I say I am far
>
> enough, stop here please
>
> no more
>
>
> but the perverse museum, corridor
>
> by corridor
>
> [....]
>
> repeats its memories ("A Night" 190)

Through her emotionally charged drama of corridors, and her participatory mole's eye perspective, Atwood questions the validity of the (high modernist) view of the museum as a "disinterested representational act" (Arata 215-216). And by extension, she challenges the museum's capacity to perform as an "object-lesson" for the artwork's own capacity for aesthetic self-sufficiency and "fictional closure" (Arata 215-216).

There is no way for the lost speaker of "A Night At the Royal Ontario Museum" to be found or liberated; her confusion cannot be resolved except by a still more complete confusion, a sublime self-effacement. In other words, the only way to disambiguate the museum is to annihilate the self who is confused. The poem ends with a demonstration of the speaker's surrender to an insignificance so vast her mind cannot broach it:

[...] I am lost

among the mastodons

and beyond: a fossil

shell, then

samples of rocks

and minerals, even the thundering

tusks dwindling to pin-

points in the stellar

fluorescent-lighted

wastes of geology ("A Night" 190)

These lines are suffused with motion, a dynamic "zooming out" ("thundering / tusks dwindling to pin- / points") that shuttles the speaker not only entirely out of the domain of culture but past the most elementary evidence of life. Regressively, the speaker feels herself drawn to a geologic display that takes her well beyond the fact of human time and therefore beyond the exigencies of representation. The phosphorescent pinpricks gleam like stars as the falsely conceived "world" dissolves at its borders and yields to the sublime waste of the universe. Coral Ann Howells suggests a strikingly similar reading of *Cat's Eye*, in which Elaine merges her literal (sensory) vision with her figurative (personal/artistic) vision in a final, utter, self-effacement: "Elaine recedes back into her seeing eye, voided of personality, as her narrative dissolves into light" (Howells 160). But I argue that Atwood's *narrative* management of the "museum," realized in the

novelistic medium of time, is different from her poetic one, moving towards the realization of the personality rather than towards its sacrifice.

In her other works, and their several ambivalent evocations of the Royal Ontario Museum (where, significantly, *Cat's Eye's* Elaine Risley receives part of her art training), Margaret Atwood depicts a visiting protagonist who is invariably helpless, swallowed up by the surrounding structure. The protagonist moves the wrong way, regressively, through worlds that are themselves lost, obsolete, or even explicitly life-denying (Atwood expressively evokes the unlikely rule, for example, that "kissing in the Mummy Room is not permitted" [*The Edible Woman* 220]). In a way that comments on the novelistic arrangement of the world, the museum has an unfathomable structure, though its objects may be perfectly aesthetically realized, even glass-encased. Atwood's customary portrait of the museum experience is one of confusion and disorientation:

> She enters the Gallery of Vertebrate Evolution, the wrong way, past the EXIT sign. (*Life Before Man* 285)

> They walked on, turned another corner, and found themselves in yet another room full of glass cases. By this time she was thoroughly lost. The labyrinthine corridors and large halls and turnings had confused her sense of direction.
>
> (*The Edible Woman* 218)

In *Cat's Eye,* there is a comparable instance of *temporal* disorientation in the museum:

> I sit in the darkened auditorium, downstairs at the Royal Ontario Museum [...] I spend a long time, now, writing obscure words in the dark [...] This class is a survey course. It's supposed to orient us in time [...]. (*Cat's Eye* 293)

Atwood's skepticism about the definitive power of the "survey" is significant to a novel in which the protagonist is obsessively concerned with the compass and quality of her representations. Further, the practice of "writing obscure words in the dark" is a point of closer than normal contiguity between Elaine's art and Atwood's, suggesting each artist's desire to "see" as much as possible and become "oriented in time."

The situation of being "lost in the museum," even when it is not explicit, is metaphorically pervasive in *Cat's Eye*. The novel has two strands of narration, both recounted in a visceral, present tense. In the present-tense but past-time narration, Elaine describes her childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. These episodes detail her nomadic early life and first arrival in Toronto; her active enculturation by her friend, nemesis and putative "other half," Cordelia; her occasional invitation into the sphere of her astrophysicist brother's private interests; her artistic development and career; her two marriages; her motherhood. The present-tense, present-time narration, on the other hand, extends over the few days before and after the opening of *Risley in Retrospect* and consists largely of Elaine's confused negotiation of downtown Toronto's labyrinthine commercial core, a Daedalian trope that recalls the experience of the museum. A number of signature elements link the "perverse museum" to the contemporary shopping complex: disorientation, glass displays, meaningless signs, a lost premise of inclusive and rational arrangement.[7] Elaine describes the "embalm[ing]" of middle-aged shoppers with perfumes and unguents, "anything at all to mummify" them (113); her eye surveys the "pyramids" of products (149). These Egyptian references consolidate the already striking rhyme between shopping scenes and Atwood's various scenes of self-loss in the museum. She evokes, familiarly, the total collapse of order, arrangement and cultural "taste."

Indeed the shopping complex seems to be nothing more than a slight degradation of the museum, a place which, in Jean-Paul Lyotard's words, "denies itself the solace of good forms" (qtd. in Harvey 151) but still quests after an ephemeral cultural identity by expressing it as a collection of desirable objects:

> I revolve through the revolving doors into Simpsons, where I become lost immediately [...]. It used to be sedate wood-rimmed glass counters, with gloves in standard models, appropriate wristwatches, accent scarves in floral prints. Serious-minded good taste. Now it's a cosmetic fairground: silver trim, gold pillars, marquee lights, brand-name letters the size of a human head. (112)

The spatial disorientation and overwhelming objective display of this passage recall the "perverse museum." This depiction of Simpsons extends to the city at large, as Atwood confers a familiarly displaced irrationality upon the city's perplexing urban design. Different districts and their random particulars press in upon Elaine's dimly glimpsed purpose. She enumerates particulars and consigns them to a kind of cultural detritus: "Chinese emporia, wicker furniture, cutwork tablecloths, bamboo wind chimes [...] I riffle furtively through the SALE rack, bypassing sequins, angora roses, gold thread, grubby white leather, looking for something" (44). What Elaine is looking for, though she can't remember it, is an article of clothing that will identify her as an artist in her upcoming public moments, but the token of identity is forgotten in its material surroundings. The prominent metaphor of the labyrinth (and implicitly, the museum) in the second strand of the novel's narration comments upon the workings of memory in the first; specifically it shows the difficulty of voluntary self-recollection, the challenge of bringing the self to the fore and putting the environment into relief.

In Joshua Kotzin's view, *any* museum is paradoxical in its presentation of the past, animating but never satisfying the (cultural) desires that put it into place. Kotzin takes up Walter Benjamin's assertion that the museum plucks objects out of the world and divests them of precisely that which gave them their value in the first place—their "[embeddedness] in the fabric of tradition" (Kotzin 3). This fundamental disconnection from the past informs the insatiable drive to recuperate objects (the Brownie cameras, the rag curlers, the saddle shoes), that is both Atwood's in her novel, and Elaine's in her painting and in her narration. Though longing drives one to objectify and display, the objectification figures forth but never satisfies the longing that engendered it:

> The museum, then, can be understood as a physical location where objects are amassed and preserved as a means of containing and conveying culture, but with the agreement that modern culture is experienced as an endless striving after an unrecoverable past. (Kotzin 13)

The museum cannot circumvent its own undercurrent of loss and its disconnection from the past; its "containment" of the past is only superficial. The museum's definitive act of world-encapsulation disrupts the continuity of everyday experience and ironically reflects the way in which memory itself is *already* discontinuous and episodic. "As the museum piece shows," writes theorist Didier Maleuvre, "history is not a discourse about the past or the present, but rather a way of conceiving one's alienation from time, a way of suffering the disjointedness of consciousness in time" (qtd. in Kotzin 12). *Cat's Eye*'s impetus to gather up the things of the past is underwritten by the dark spaces of memory. Where *Cat's Eye* is museum-like and artifact-laden, then, it also implicitly conveys the

magnitude of Elaine's self-alienation, her sense of disconnection from her world, and her desire for integrity.

The museum is a natural metaphor for a realist (or modernist-realist) novel and its special capacity for worldliness and detail. But novels risk sharing the museum's perversity, which is, most evidently, its ossification of life and its possible failure to "orient" the speaking persona. The museum, viewed cynically, is stiff and institutional, overencompassing and mausoleum-like. It is complacently self-contained. One experiences it in a curiously anti-social way. It is consummately about time, but fails to communicate the nature of time; it wrests its objects from their original contexts, giving their aesthetic value priority over the connective structures that bind one artifact to the next. An objectified past has a diminished validity, and yet one performs objectifications in order to tame experience: "The past isn't quaint when you're in it. Only at a safe distance later, when you can see it as décor, not as the shape your life's been squeezed into," writes Atwood, who appears, in this phrase, to *understand* her novel as a museum (*Cat's Eye* 363). The fact of the obsolescence of a museum's objects is also very important to the nostalgic function of any novel that sets itself up as a period piece. The project of putting the world on display and thereby making it permanent carries important emotional undertones suggesting the fear of change and loss, specifically the loss of self for those who identify with the lost world.

José Ortega y Gasset argues that the *generation* is our primary source of "vital values" (13) and suggests that the spirit of the generation might be embodied when we "reflect the character of phenomena with fidelity" (13). This goal is explicitly Atwood's when she speaks of the desire to commemorate "the physical world we know" (qtd. in

Sullivan, *Red Shoes* 43 and in Cooke, *Margaret Atwood* 193). The desire for generational self-definition is also "crotchety" Elaine's (225) when she tells a twentysomething interviewer that the inclination to *save* things is what separates "people who remember the war [from] people who don't": "There's a cut-off point, there's a difference [...] We have long attention spans [...], [w]e eat everything on our plates, we save string. We make do" (89). Of course, the fact that there *is* a "cut-off point" or an outer limit of generational identity means that the generation is *over*, which precisely reflects the anxiety underlying the rise of the museum as an institution:

> The German word *'museal' ['museumlike']* has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art. (Adorno quoted in Kotzin, 4)

Just as Adorno points out the implicit "death" of the museum's objects, Baudrillard too notes that, in the very instant of their cultural production, objects have "a calculated rarity" (179), a "lived moment within fashion" (179) and thus (despite our supposition that objects have permanence), a social life and a death: "*[...]the object must not escape ephemerality and fashion....The object must not escape death*" (177, original italics). The life and currency of the object is circumscribed by generational taste. And, in a more philosophical vein, the subject gives the object its "life" in the way that Elaine's brother Stephen explains it: "there are no such things as discrete objects which remain unchanged, set apart from the flow of time" (219).[8] It is plain that though the object may

have a certain physical immutability, the object *world* does not. And this changing world of objects also marks the *person's* "lived moment within fashion" (Baudrillard 179): her sense of having tastes and desires that are coordinated with the tastes and desires of others. Thus, the mutable object world informs and reflects a shared sense of social reality. And when that "lived moment within fashion" is over, so is one's sense of the real: "Everything is post these days, as if we're all just a footnote to something earlier that was real enough to have a name of its own" (*Cat's Eye* 86).

Elaine's interest in fashion and fashionability accounts for many of the novel's material attentions, and her abject fear of *un*fashionability taps into a fear, which a closer look at Elaine's personal history will reveal, of an individuality well enough defined to invite ostracism. Elaine's sudden prominence in her field, marked by the retrospective exhibition, makes her dread her fame for the way in which it foretells the imminence of her obsolescence; she wryly notes that she is "*Eminent*, the mausoleum word" (242). Here, Elaine conveys an ironic regret about being "finished," or able to take a retrospective stance, and expresses one double bind of the "encyclopedic imagination" which is that it yearns for an emphatic totality that also means incontrovertible finitude. A young woman at an art show singles Elaine out and observes, in what strikes Elaine as a devastating act of vivisection, "I love your early work...I mean, it really summed up an era, didn't it?" (434, original ellipsis). Elaine's early work—the appliance-themed still life pieces—become, along with the *passé* objects they depict, a testament to Elaine's (paranoid) sense of historical invalidity, her personal status as a museum piece.

In a critically neglected but deeply self-reflexive episode near the end of the novel, Elaine visits a "pretty authentic" forties diner (363) which itself "sum[s] up an era"

(434) by re-creating the past in all its material parts: "They have a soda fountain countertop, with stools along it topped in acid lime-green, and vinyl-padded booths in a shade of shiny purple that looks like the skin of an early shark-finned convertible. A jukebox, chrome coat trees, grainy black-and-white photographs on the walls, of real forties diners" (363). Here Atwood portrays the past "done over as a museum" (363), with a special emphasis on the "forties colours" for which Elaine and Atwood herself have both expressed nostalgia (*Cat's Eye* 89; Sullivan 43). Elaine, narrating, praises the diner for what it has managed to include. She also furnishes it imaginatively with an image of her past self, frozen in time with the person to whom her narrative is addressed, her friend and nemesis Cordelia: "They could have Cordelia and me in here, in our bat wing sleeves and cinch belts, stuffed and mounted or made of wax, drinking our milkshakes, looking as bored as we could" (363). The diner's objects are themselves self-reflexive in that the coat trees, batwing sleeves and black-and-white photos that furnish 4-D's Diner are part of the spectrum of eternally recurring objects in Atwood's novel-proper, and the portrait of a fashionably bored Cordelia is the novel's own opening image: "'Stephen says time is not a line,' I say. Cordelia rolls her eyes, as I knew she would" (4). Just as the diner is brimming not only with objects but representations of those self-same objects (in the photographs of the original forties diners), so does *Cat's Eye* abound in domestic things, and then representations of those things (in catalogues, in Elaine's artwork). Atwood suggests the diminishing power of the real, as it gives way to representations and then representations of representations. The 4-D's Diner episode contains an important reflection about the novel itself as personal and cultural museum; the past may be recreated in terms of its adequate furniture, but the *fact* of recreation is

always evident, its inauthenticity insurmountable: "'You've done it well,' I say to the waitress. 'Of course, the prices are wrong. It was ten cents for a coffee, then.' 'Really,' she says, not as a question. She gives me a dutiful smile: *Boring old frump*" (364). Elaine's enchantment with the museum/diner quickly becomes a self-denigrating reflection on her own obsolescence, complete with a typical projection of others' perceptions of her as "dowdy," "outmoded," a "biddy," a "frump," a "bag lady," and a "cantakerous old witch" (87, 112, 19, 363, 408, 265). There is nothing here that she can truly possess of the past, or that really speaks of her. *Cat's Eye* has been received as a figurative museum and bears out the concern, on a fictional level, that it too is a container for "stuffed and mounted" artifacts (363). The name of 4-D's Diner, with its double pun on "forties," and "four dimensions" takes up the novel's concern with dimensionality and the transitory nature of time as "the moving edge we live in" (409). The diner, like the novel, suggests that a cultural past, like a personal past, cannot ever be kept or adequately represented; rather, it must be endlessly recovered.

The Virgin of Lost Things

The history of Elaine's collecting habit and her fascination with objects expresses her desire to take and to keep, to consolidate her own identity, to guard against change and loss. But Elaine, over the course of the narrative, comes to revise her own view of memory and re-evaluates the aim of holding onto things. Elaine comes to realize that in her desperate accumulations and representations, she "may have thought [she] was preserving something from time" (409), an important insight into the illusion of "keeping." The Virgin of Lost Things, with whom Elaine eventually identifies, is not a

figure for the long *preservation* of things but for their loss and redemptive *recuperation.* The originator of the literary confession, Augustine of Hippo, once asked "[w]hat is it, in the soul, then, which makes it take more delight in the finding or recovery of things it loves than in the continual possession of them?" (qtd. in Spengemann 32). St. Augustine suggests that we arrive at our fullest sense of self-possession by *letting go* of the things of the past, so that they may be recuperated in the full light of their personal value. In this view, though, he also implies that collection is somehow self-negating, that the "whole" self is diffused and dispersed in the act of gathering-in. This negation raises the nagging question of the self's ability ever to comprehend itself and thus fulfill its inalienable spiritual aim of self-possession (Spengemann 32). The sense of nonentity that inspires the project of gathering-together in the first place is resolved in a similar movement *away* from materiality and *into* the intuition of loss. The "lost things" of *Cat's Eye's* narrative give Elaine a sense of herself not just because they are "things" (and therefore substantial) but also because they are "lost" (and therefore evocative).

When Elaine collects things as a child, represents things as an artist, recalls things as a narrator, she reveals her imagination to be substance-seeking, and, in fact, closure-seeking. As Susan Stewart explains, "the collection seeks a form of self-enclosure" (151), a hermetic boundary which reflects metaphorically on the quest for identity of the collector herself. The link between the completion of the set and the phenomenon of self-completion is what gives a sense of subjective satisfaction to collecting in the first place: "Creating the sense of closure—and deciding when this will be—is a major part of the collecting pleasure" (Pearce 161). But the brand of closure at which the novel arrives—the wholeness Elaine will at last envision—is not the

completion of the set, but rather an achieved freedom from the collecting compulsion. Margaret Atwood develops Elaine's "collector" persona in order to show that her formal imagination only finds the precise tenor of the past when the "accumulative" drive abandons itself to the dark spaces of memory, the visionary quality of intuition. This degree of self-abandonment is disciplined and hard won; Elaine *achieves* it over the course of (and through the process of) her narration.

Elaine's history as a collector reveals that her material attachments arise from and perpetuate her anxiety about her own substantiality. In the novel's opening pages, Elaine is making herself at home in her ex-husband's studio apartment, waiting for her show to open; her return to Toronto excites certain psychological echoes of her first arrival in Toronto as an eight-year-old. The repeated suggestion that contemporary culture is leaving Elaine behind recalls the broader sense of social exclusion that first made eight-year-old Elaine into an anxious inventory-taker. Speaking from Jon's apartment in the present time, Elaine remarks that "I'm supposed to have accumulated things by now: possessions, responsibilities, achievements, experience and wisdom. I'm supposed to be a person of substance" (13). Linked to her concern for her personal "substance" is a detached observation about Jon's domestic objects: "I'm lying on the floor, on a futon, covered by a duvet. *Futon, duvet*: this is how far we've come" (13). This alien eye, this taking of cultural stock, is a familiar posture learned in childhood when Elaine first encountered material culture as an expression of her own charismatic deficit. In her continued—and excessive—attention to the futon and the duvet, Elaine "[affirms] subject-object distance" (Mao 10): "My career is why I'm here, on this futon, under this duvet [...] The duvet is in a studio that belongs to my first husband Jon. It interests me

that he would have a duvet here, although his house is elsewhere [...] I get up off the duvet, feeling as if I haven't slept" (15-18). Theorist Donald Mao suggests that even when the subject seems to be *incorporating* elements of the outside world, an insistent attention to objects is an "ironically anti-social position" in which the self attempts to hold itself together against that which lies outside it, thus "defend[ing] the self from engulfment by the morass of the external" (10). And, indeed, from childhood to middle age, Elaine's general efforts to name, comprehend and represent her world have been marked by social ambivalence and the threat of self-loss.

Elaine's first friend, the conventional Carol Campbell, screeches with incredulity when she realizes that Elaine has never seen a twin set, a chenille bedspread, a coat tree or a pair of rubber gloves, awakening in Elaine the sense that to secure her own sense of belonging, she must demonstrate an acquisitive interest in objects. Overwhelmed, Elaine submits to Carol's (notably curatorial) authority:

> Carol is more and more gratified the more bewildered I am [...] She's eager to explain things to me, name them, display them. She shows me around her house as if it's a museum, as if she personally has collected everything in it. Standing in the downstairs hall, where there is a coat-tree—'You've never seen a *coat tree?*"—she says I am her best friend. (51)

Carol makes welcome social overtures but has a vested interest in guarding Elaine's essential strangeness intact, as she gains a certain amount of schoolyard cachet by reporting on Elaine and her family as if she were anthropologically revealing the "antics of some primitive tribe" (49). Carol's tour of the "museum" of her house initiates Elaine into Toronto material culture in a way that emphatically underlines her prior exclusion

from it. Elaine's impression of the doubleness of Carol's household objects (the twin set, the twin beds, the "matching bedspreads, the night-tables, the lamps, the bureaus, the doubleness of everything [...]" [51]) rightly expresses an ambivalence about Carol's own potential doubleness, her wavering acceptance: "Carol has another best friend, who is sometimes her best friend and sometimes not. Her name is Grace Smeath. Carol points her out to me, on the bus, the same way she's pointed out the twin set and the coat-tree: as an object to be admired" (51). Carol and Grace, newly "deploy[ing] possessive sel[ves]" (Pearce 128), are fascinated by "real things: toasters, ironing boards, the wardrobes of movie stars" (74). In their delight in such "real" material objects, the little girls benignly express a childhood anticipation of their future "real life," which is qualitatively far different from Elaine's own sense that the object has a "real" presence that she herself has not. Elaine's intuitively existential response to the object world, meanwhile, tentatively indicates her future status as an artist, her essential separateness from Carol and Grace.

It is collection—"accumulation, ordering, aggressive retention" (Pearce 131)—that constitutes the most significant part of Elaine Risley's early (and unconscious) artistic training. Elaine is not marked out for her vocation by any particular creative act, but by the deep self-consciousness of her participation in childhood acts of ordering: cutting out magazine items, acquiring the toys and symbols of girlhood, and finding various contents for her red plastic purse, an early symbolic substitute for a heart. (Later, Elaine will say of a depiction of the Virgin Mary's glowing chest that "It's the heart all right. It looks like my red plastic purse" [184].) Elaine's purse, also like a heart, hardens. The hardening of the purse in such a way that "things rattle around inside it" (55)

indicates again that Elaine's collecting tendency is anti-social and born of her loneliness and desire for self-protection. Elaine wishes to be "more ordinary" (221); her early representations specifically aim for full conformity. By necessity, Elaine's conscious display of averageness means being a (half-hearted) participant in bourgeois culture. To ingratiate herself to her manipulative chums, a miserable eight-year-old Elaine sits in a make-believe schoolroom, cutting objects out of a catalogue[9] and pasting them into a scrapbook, furnishing an iconic cut-out "lady" with belongings. Elaine is anxious to demonstrate her cultural competence and participates in the activity as a process of rote enculturation. She realizes that to perform her newly discovered gender role properly, "[a]ll I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the *Eaton's Catalogue* with embroidery scissors, and say I've done it badly. Partly, this is a relief" (57). Elaine's collection of cut-out images quite obviously prefigures her later work, breeding her fascination with "domestic materials" (348) as well as her cynical suspicion that she has never produced anything "that doesn't look like a random sampling from the Eaton's Catalogue" (327).[10]

The game teaches Elaine a specific artist-pathology: that an ever-incomplete sense of self can be relieved by the accumulation of (representations of) objects. The problem soon arises, however, that the objects become burdensome to the collecting self: "I find this game tiring...it's the weight, the accumulation of all these objects" (53, original ellipsis). This assertion of premature world-weariness sets Atwood's depiction of young Elaine against Walter Benjamin's claim that "[a]mong children, collecting is only one process of renewal; other processes are the painting of objects, the cutting out of figures, the application of decals—the whole range of childlike modes of acquisition, from

touching things to giving them names" (60). Elaine is not "inventing the world anew" in the sense of this idealized interpretation, but rather attempting to conform to it as it stands, impressed by the public faces of other girls. Elaine's sense of apathy and personal compromise brings her closer to Benjamin's self-deprecating portrait of the *older* collector, namely that his collection reveals him to be helplessly subject to a "dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order," and that he feels himself dissolute but driven towards self-refinement (60). In collecting, Elaine is acting out a compulsion towards self-perfection that means accumulating *everything* and satisfying the question, "How right should I be, to be perfect?" (124).

As Molly Hite argues in her detailed Foucaultian reading of *Cat's Eye*, Elaine must self-protectively appropriate the thing that takes note of her *im*perfection: the all-seeing eye.[11] Elaine's concern with her own incompleteness is linked to her sense of being pervasively under scrutiny: "Carol comes to my house and takes it all in—the un-painted walls, the wires dangling from the ceilings, the unfinished floors, the army cots" (52). The all-encompassing glance (Carol "tak[es] it all in") here serves to catalogue the properties of the other and thus to hold the self separate. The "recording" gaze, which is eventually and much more profoundly Elaine's than Carol's, is impersonal and judgmental in Atwood's own view. To Atwood, the particularizing eye is the "cold eye" which is the artist's after Yeats, but which also carries out the ancient task of judging the soul: "[t]his is the eye of the scribe of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian Underworlds, or the recording angel of the Christian Heaven. The eye is cold because it is clear, and it is clear because its owner must look: he must look at *everything*. Then she [*sic*] must record" (*Negotiating* 120, emphasis added). The artist's aestheticizing, encompassing,

judgmental eye is suggested in the pier-glass mirror depicted in Elaine's favourite painting, Van Eyck's portrait of the Arnolfini marriage; it is scrutinizing but is itself inscrutable.[12] Elaine, from childhood, is anxious about the social self, which, by virtue of its interactivity, is *both* scrutinizing and open to scrutiny. The fear of being seen and ill-judged by her friends, by the "bitter, whiskery old women" who are the *eminences grises* of the schoolroom (400), and especially by the "evil eye" of Grace Smeath's mother's bad heart, perfect in its own martyrdom, drives Elaine to adopt external perspectives in order to anticipate whatever negative judgments might be coming her way. Elaine starts to conceive of herself as an object of negative attention, and begins an overweening moral self-monitoring that collapses her own sense of integrity—"I know myself to be greedy, vengeful, secretive and sly" (153)—and makes her unrelentingly aware of herself as both subject and object. The outer world teems with particularity just as the inner world teems with unfulfilled ideal potential. A Sunday School motto that Elaine recalls twice with ambivalence tells her that "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU" (125, 397). As Elaine becomes both infinitely surveying and, in her imagination, infinitely surveyed, she becomes absolutely split, as much an object as a subject even in her own mind. Accordingly, she feels her humanity depleted, not only because she is seen and ill-judged, but also because she is pervasively and incoherently judgmental.

It is with the arrival of Cordelia a year after Elaine's move to Toronto that Elaine's desire to substantiate herself becomes most profound, most unrealizable. When the implacable Cordelia arrives on the scene, with an imagination steeped in "melodram[a]" (74), the girls perform their already familiar patterns of object inspection and display with a heightened sense of aesthetic purpose. Cordelia presents her

household objects as things saturated with exotic refinement ("Swedish glass is the best kind, she says" [71]) and even talismanic significance (her family's eggcups inspire Cordelia's remark that when you eat an egg, you must put a hole in the bottom "so that the witches can't put out to sea" [72]). There is something decadent and baroque in the way Cordelia presents the spectacle of her sister's viola lying hidden in the coat closet: "Cordelia takes it out and shows it to us, lying there mysterious and important in its velvet-lined case" (72). Cordelia, like Carol, takes her friends around her house and proffers objects in a kind of ritual exhibition of herself, a manner of self-portraiture that looks forward to Elaine's early still lifes of "domestic materials" (368). Cordelia's presentation of household objects, though, is unlike Carol's in that it is intended to consolidate her individuality and set her apart from the others. It establishes her "sociocultural superiority" (Bannerjee 516) but also reveals her curious vulnerability. Cordelia, for all her conspicuous charm, conceives of herself as the plain sister; she "turns away" when asked about talents her sisters possess, talents embodied in the fascinating object, the viola (72). Cordelia's ambivalent awe and resentment of the object reflect its embodiment of something that Cordelia *is not* and feels she cannot be; Elaine will come to feel much the same way about objects themselves–not for what they represent, but in their very *thingness*, their very substance. Like Elaine at this stage, Cordelia is conscious of being under scrutiny, and not only by social judges but by imaginary and even supernatural ones: the witches, the "dissolved dead people" in the creek by her house (75). Cordelia's imaginative proffering of objects and its corresponding relationship to a (masked) personal uncertainty suggests affinities with

Elaine, who not only "internalizes Cordelia's insecurities" (Ahern 15), but is effectively punished by Cordelia for having them.

"Cordelia," muses Elaine in adulthood, "you made me believe I was nothing" (199). From the age of nine, Cordelia effaces Elaine and aggravates Elaine's sense of nonentity. Arnold Davidson argues that Cordelia is a sinister version of her Shakespearean namesake, who spoke nothing when asked to speak of love (39). Davidson notes that Cordelia frequently turns a variation of Lear's question upon Elaine ("what do you have to say for yourself?"), to which Elaine can only answer "nothing" (117). For Davidson, Cordelia herself represents a menacing nothingness. Cordelia courts self-annihilation but turns it on Elaine instead. In the first such instance, Cordelia places Elaine in a backyard hole. Cordelia has dug the hole *for herself* as a private hiding-place, but she buries Elaine instead, as if one of their personalities must be deposed for the other to thrive. Cordelia and her games excite in Elaine a vast nausea, a metaphysical dread, an intuition of nothingness. Elaine remembers her time in the hole as a "dark square," a syncope which changed her, made her discontinuous. In school, subsequently, she *draws* a "dark square," heavily colouring in a black sky until her teacher leans over her and gently asks, "Why is your picture so [dark], my dear?" (162). Elaine, tormented, learns to black out, to faint at will, voluntarily bringing the darkness in upon herself: "When you wake up it's later. Time has gone on without you" (171). All of these are figurative deaths, looking forward to her suicide attempt in her mid-twenties and her temptation, in the present time of the narration, to set fire to her entire body of artwork. The sensation of dread is still with her in the novel's present time, as Elaine, panicked by her upcoming exposure, remarks: "Last night, I felt the approach of nothing"

(41). This is a classic formulation of Heideggerian dread or *Angst*, namely a feeling that affixes itself, by definition, to *no* object. It is the feeling whereby "we can get no hold on *things*" ("What Is Metaphysics?" 103, emphasis added).[13] In the interest of assuaging this dread, Elaine directs her attention towards the world and its things. She attempts to override her intuitive terror of nothingness with perception, or at least with the willed presence of memory's objects.

Representation comes intuitively *out of* nothingness when Elaine, in moments of utter abjection, is able to see things as they are. In *Negotiating With the Dead*, Atwood quotes Marguerite Duras's characterization of the act of writing as the liberation of oneself from a figurative hole: "Finding yourself in a hole, at the bottom of a hole, in almost total solitude, [you discover] that only writing can save you [...] Before something like living, [there is] naked writing, like something terrible, terrible to overcome" (qtd. in *Negotiating* xiii). Throughout *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's representational acts are often stimulated by such terror. Recalling the instance where Cordelia places her in the backyard hole, Elaine says, "When I was put into the hole I knew it was a game; now I know it is not one. I feel sadness, a sense of betrayal. Then I feel the darkness pressing down on me, then terror" (108). In the pressing darkness, however, Elaine begins to see mental "pictures" that prefigure the precise imagery of her later painting, *Deadly Nightshade*.[14] The incident portrays art as a repudiation of nothingness; Cordelia's excitation of Elaine's sense of non-being also involuntarily stimulates her imagination's natural tendency to set itself *against* nothingness. The figurative "hole" sparks the creative impulse, but elsewhere Atwood also portrays empty vessels as insatiable. In a manuscript entitled "Suffer the Little Children," an early draft of *Cat's*

Eye material, Atwood quotes from Proverbs: "There are three things that are never satisfied, yea four things that say not, it is enough: The grave and the barren womb, the earth that is filled not with water, and the fire that saith not, it is enough" ("Suffer").[15] The urge towards creativity and the terrified intuition of *insufficiency* are inseparable from one another; both are implied in the holes or dark spaces from which Elaine is twice "reborn" over the course of *Cat's Eye*. Elaine's emergence from the backyard hole after having had an artistic vision anticipates the episode in which Elaine is abandoned by her friends in a ravine. She falls into its frozen creek and is "saved" by a vision of Virgin Mary, who rescues her from death. This second liberation of Elaine from a hole gives her a (temporary) personal insight where the first had given her an artistic one. She remarks, strikingly: "There was never anything about me that needed to be improved [...] I am no longer susceptible" (193-194). Again, the experience of total self-effacement gives Elaine a chance to reconstitute herself from nothing, in a way that Atwood, in *Negotiating With the Dead*, feels is paradigmatic of the creative life.

Elaine's active intuition of nothingness is accompanied by a pervasive sense of formal ambiguity (at first ecstatic and synaesthetic indistinction, but later decay and dissolution) which also sparks her drive to individualize and particularize. Elaine's earliest, pastoral childhood summers in the north are (positively) characterized by indistinct and composite presences, largely non-visual: "wordlessness" and the "rhythms of transience" (143), "the drawn out rising note that sounds like wolves" (65), caterpillars that move as a single entity "like a rug come to life" ("'In some respects they're like one animal' our father says" [66]). In Toronto, however, ambiguity in general and lumpiness in particular are sources of horror; Elaine is obsessed with everything rotten, hidden and

revolting. Women's bodies, to Elaine, newly aware of gender, are "alien and bizarre, hairy, squashy, monstrous" (93) and bear "the aura of [Elaine's teacher] Miss Lumley's dark, mysterious, repulsive bloomers" (78). Into her adulthood, Elaine believes that being "*Lumped*" into a category with other women implies "oddness, deformity, sexual malfunction" (366, original emphasis). Nine-year-old Elaine dreams of "a huge mountain of mud" (167) in the wake of her mother's miscarriage, the amorphous image expressing Elaine's uncomprehension of the not quite hidden event. Decay is everywhere, unstoppable: the footbridge above the stream that Elaine believes is made of "dissolved dead people" is rotten (75). Also rotten is the black-spotted "horrible treasure" of Mrs. Smeath's omniscient bad heart, concealed under the bib apron that makes it look (again indistinctly) as if Mrs. Smeath has a single, ill-defined breast (58). Elaine's general revulsion is implied by mounting lists of distasteful nouns: boys "have a pungent, leathery smell, like old rope, like damp dogs" and "like "grubby flesh" (64, 105). The smell of the Smeaths' house is "a mixture of scouring powder and cooked turnips and slightly rancid laundry and the earth under porches" (52). Elaine is aware, on a largely visceral and certainly non-visual level, of the encroachment of formlessness upon form.

Such formlessness generates in Elaine a desire for objective certainty and categorical containment. The moment of vocational decision, when it comes to Elaine during her Grade Thirteen biology exam, happens as a revelatory moment of classification. Elaine is seized with a taxonomic, differentiating power that suddenly strikes her as with the force of an epiphany (or rather, in Atwood's words, an "epileptic fit" [255]):

> I can draw anything: the insides of crayfish ears, the human eye, frog's genitalia, the blossom of the snapdragon (Antirrhinum majus) in cross section. I know the difference between a raceme and a rhizome, I explicate photosynthesis, I can spell *Scrofulariaciae*. But in the middle of the Botany examination it comes to me, like a sudden epileptic fit, that I'm not going to be a biologist, as I have thought. I am going to be a painter. I look at the page, where the life cycle of the mushroom from spore to fruiting body is taking shape, and I know this with absolute certainty. (255)

The repetition of "I can," "I know," "I explicate" and so forth is important; it associates formal individuation with personality, power and decision. Here, again, we have a temporary emergence of the subject, a periodic (and always wavering) command of the self that recalls Elaine's sense of independence as she emerges from the ravine.

Her power of self-creation is intermittently evident throughout Elaine's life, but never permanent. At times, Elaine is helplessly immersed in a terrifying world, and at times she has conceptual mastery over it. And *both* situations can awaken in Elaine the feeling that she lacks integrity. In the first case, she is somehow "unfinished" (273) and thus a helpless assimilator of all things to herself. In the second case, she is ambivalent about her own ability to assume (representational) control of her environment. If she is *able* to abstract things (or people) from herself, it must be a demonstration that "there's something hard" and "crystalline" in her (193); that she has a "mean mouth" (235, 322); that she "cannot forgive" (180); that she would willingly divest herself of something important. She cannot truly give herself the freedom to abstract, or (more pointedly toward my characterization of "the encyclopedic imagination") to reject or select.

Although she walks away from Cordelia several times in her later childhood and adolescence following the ravine incident, she never does so definitively; the incident is endlessly repeated in new forms, as when she walks away from her first lover, Josef Hrbik. She has become disgusted with Hrbik in the aftermath of finding his other lover, Susie, bleeding nearly to death after a self-performed abortion. Elaine's refusal of Josef appears to be an act of self-assertion but in the end simply reinstates Elaine's own terror of rejection and her ambivalence about her proper power to reject:

> Josef waylays me outside the museum and announces I have driven him to despair [...] I walk away from him. It's enormously pleasing to me, this act of walking away. It's like being able to make people appear and vanish, at will.
>
> I do not dream about Josef. Instead I dream about Susie, in her black turtleneck and jeans but shorter than she really is, her hair cut into a pageboy [...] licking one half of an orange popsicle. She is not drained and boneless, as I've last seen her. Instead, she is sly-eyed, calculating. "Don't you know what a twin set is?" she says, spitefully. She continues to lick her popsicle. I know I have done something wrong. (322-323)

Elaine's description of her pleasure in leaving Josef is strongly reminiscent of her description of her pleasure in ostensibly "leaving" Cordelia ("I feel daring, light-headed" [193]). In each case, Elaine has made a decision to stop enduring a species of infidelity she has long known about (Cordelia's fickle friendships; Josef's overt second affair). Her rejection of each of these relationships is also a rejection of a sort of false mentorship, one that tutors her in her own insufficiency. But the act of "leaving" is terminally incomplete, and thus so is the intoxicating and almost solipsistic self-possession that the

"leaving" purports to offer. In leaving Josef, Elaine figuratively frees herself again from Cordelia, only to cast *Susie* as Cordelia/Carol/Grace in her imagination. Elaine believes that "there is never only one, of anyone" (6), and so can never secure her own liberty; she figures an accusatory bag lady as Cordelia, a hostile art show patron as Grace. Elaine's ultimate incapacity to reject her tormentors mirrors her inability to be satisfied in her general capacity to abstract.

Elaine feels she is personally dissolute when she is powerless, but morally dissolute when she is powerful, even when this "power" simply means that she is able to represent her environment. Elaine's most intense period of artistic production occurs, typically, when she is again "at the centre of nothingness" (336), ambivalently and accidentally pregnant by her other lover, Jon. She comes out of this nothingness by abstracting the necessary images from herself. Painting is a direct expression of her guilt and shame; her sense of non-respectability (quite akin to her childhood sense of social inadequacy) is readily apparent in her painted objects, which are obviously tinged with gynecological connotation: "I paint a wringer washing machine. The washing machine is a squat cylinder of white enamel. The wringer itself is a disturbing fleshtone pink" (337). Elaine mentions several times during these passages that she is "detached" and "sodden with unreality" (337, 338), that she greets her pregnancy with "unbelief" (336). As in aesthetic perception, wherein emotion is regarded as "the quality of a thing" (Santayana 42), Elaine's emotion is, at the point of its greatest intensity, disconnected from *herself* and wholly mapped onto the object: "it's not my own anxiety. The anxiety is in the things themselves" (337). As if in response to (and repudiation of) her sense of nonentity, Elaine's memories are strangely concrete, like objects; she notes that her

memories are "*there*, in isolation, as an object glimpsed on the street is there" (337, emphasis added). Her resulting paintings recall the original source of her anxiety about her personal "reality" in that they are increasingly occupied with childhood themes and subjects: three sofas are characterized to resemble Cordelia, Grace and Carol; another painting recaptures imagery that Elaine first imagined in childhood when she was buried in the hole. Then, morally self-conscious about her pregnancy, Elaine paints a proliferation of cruel, pornographic portraits of Mrs. Smeath, whose moral judgments she has not actually faced for years; these are paintings of which she will later be profoundly ashamed. Thus, even when she is *able* to abstract her anxiety from herself and make her feelings objective, the imagery, once realized, awakens her sense of shame and self-recrimination. She makes her feelings concrete and then judges them harshly *herself.* She is unable to assume any kind of appropriate representational control.

Likewise, Elaine cannot find an appropriate position of power with respect to Cordelia. When Cordelia fails a grade, becomes increasingly showy and inauthentic, and generally "lapses into mediocrity" in adolescence (Cowart 127), Elaine observes that "energy has passed between us and I am stronger" (233). In an inversion of the incident that Davidson notes where Cordelia asks Elaine what she has to say for herself and Elaine answers "nothing," the teenaged Cordelia affects the show business greeting "'But that's enough about me. What do you think of me?'" and Elaine "add[s] to the joke by saying, 'Nothing much'" (254), now obliterating Cordelia. But Elaine is no more comfortable with the relationship in its new form: "I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (227). What becomes evident over the course of the narration is that, whether she is powerless or powerful, Elaine is perpetually

simply "unfinished" with respect to the object world and with respect to that especial invigorator of her *interest* in the object world, her "twin," Cordelia. Cordelia comes to stand for the impenetrable world of others, as Elaine expresses the desire to "give [Cordelia] something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside" (411). In this particularly interesting formulation, Elaine figures their bond as a kind of fractured subject-object relationship, endlessly frustrated because Elaine cannot either adequately represent herself or address Cordelia in any immediate sense. Emmanuel Levinas observes that when we encounter another, we enter into a relation where the other's reality always excludes us and we always desire to comprehend it: "this desire is never satisfied, but feeds on itself" (16). Cordelia, whether she is actually present, or only evoked in memory, comes to stand for that element of Elaine's life which is simply, eternally, non-integrable.

If Cordelia generates a sense of nothingness that makes Elaine feel ever incomplete, Elaine's growing consideration of the relationship she has had with her late brother gives her the insight that a sense of nonentity, loss, or emptiness, may form *part of* the integral whole. As a teenager, Stephen instructs Elaine in the "new" atom, which is mostly empty space. The contrast between the "correct" atom, which holds onto its ephemeral outer parts by the force of its nucleus, and the "raspberry atom" which clings insistently to its appurtenances, forms a nice model for the integrity of the self in *Cat's Eye*. In the way Elaine *should* consider the self, the personality (or nucleus) does not need to keep all of its parts close, but rather holds them in orbit by its own inner force. This model, whereby the things belonging to the self are always within range though not solidly *attached*, recalls the Augustinian self which delights in the constant recovery and

not in the *keeping* of the things it values. Elaine's interest in the object world has always been connected to her sense of its substantiality; her recollection of her lesson in the "new" atom nicely points to the idea of space and nothingness as intimate properties of physical substance.

Elaine's brother Stephen is engaged in a quest for the "Unified Field Theory," a system of explanation for the laws that govern physical reality, just as Elaine is metaphorically pursuing the "unified field" of her own experience (Howells 210). Stephen, too, is fascinated by questions of boundedness and integrity, and is theoretically asking himself "whether the universe is infinite and unbounded or infinite but bounded" (219). Whereas Elaine is helplessly obliterated by the vastness of the material that lies outside her sphere (including the irrecoverable Cordelia), Stephen is blissful in the disintegration of his identity. His serial letters "unroll in time without greeting or signature" (290) and, symbolically, his favourite sweater is endlessly unraveling (214).[16] The contrast that Atwood draws between the siblings as to how they construe identity or value conceptual containment is perfectly epitomized in the scene in which Stephen wants Elaine to visualize a Klein bottle, a figure whose inner and outer edge are supposed to be the same. Elaine can *only* conceptualize the containing edge and responds by remarking that "I can't imagine a bottle that isn't intended to contain something" (219). This pragmatic response to the theoretical problem illustrates Elaine's formal and totality-seeking imagination, which is somewhat tempered by Stephen's influence.

The quality of Stephen's mind, his consideration of the problem of infinity (which, though approached through the lens of science, has idealist overtones and "sounds like metaphysics" [353]) and his spectacular and uncompromising death, make

him, in the scheme of the novel, an alternate artist figure. It is clear that Elaine considers him Icarus to her Daedalus.[17] As a carsick child he is enjoined to keep his eye on the horizon; Elaine associates him with the song "Coming in on a Wing and A Prayer"; her tribute to his fall from the sky is called *One Wing*. It is her delayed consideration of the loss of Stephen ("there was a great deal I didn't see or think about until much later" [392]) that sharpens the grief that finally gives Elaine's life its shape. In the novel's one truly dramatic (though largely buried) incident, Stephen dies at the hands of airplane hijackers and falls out of the sky. Throughout the novel, Elaine, navigating labyrinths, has seen her world from a mole's eye view and been overwhelmed while Stephen, taking flight into abstraction, has been a bird's-eyed Icarus, similarly depersonalized and with a diminishing connection to those around him (he informs his family incidentally, and well after the fact, that he has married). Just as Elaine's life has been chronically underrealized, Stephen has always, in the manner of a poet, "soared above his life" (Lukacs 24). One senses that the loss of Stephen is what gives value to the *recuperation* of the marble through which Elaine finally finds the middle road between their two personalities and sees "her life entire" (398). The stars in the novel's final pages suggest, for Elaine, Stephen's buried collection of marbles, radiating from somewhere beneath the bridge that Elaine was standing on when the novel opened, like an undiscovered influence.

Elaine's discovery of the cat's eye marble is the crucial event in the novel's movement towards closure. The marble, in showing Elaine her "life entire" (398), gives her an encompassing vision which is benevolent and compassionate, replacing her formerly sinister "recording" eye, the hard mirror that saw and refused to be seen. It is

particularly noteworthy that the cat's eye marble has a symbolic double ownership, whereby it is both a personal and a fraternal symbol. Whereas Elaine's desire to "see" everything has, up until now, been associated with social discomfort and anti-social scrutiny, Elaine ascribes her new "eye" doubly to herself and to her brother, making it both a personal and a fraternal lens: "'A marble!' says my mother, with a child's delight. 'Remember all those marbles Stephen used to collect? 'Yes,' I say. But this one was mine" (398). As much as Elaine is seeing anew through an object of her own, from her childhood, she is seeing anew through an object dominantly associated with her brother, her aestheticism thus united with an idea of fraternity and love. Elaine's cat's eye marble also illustrates (again with reference to the Augustinian trope of recovery and to Benjamin's assertion of the social life of objects) that the object becomes *qualitatively different* when it is lost and recovered. At the beginning of the novel, when Elaine first possessed it, her cat's eye marble was "like the green eye of the radio" and "like the eyes of aliens" (62-63). Through these descriptions, Atwood draws an analogy between the marble and Elaine's fearful, vigilant eye, which, because it is omni-receptive, is like an alien's or a radio's. We also cannot miss the implicit presence, in this "green eye[d]" symbol, of the likewise green-eyed Cordelia (for though the marble Elaine keeps is blue, she *likens* cat's eyes to green eyes, and when she hears children call *cat's eye, cat's eye*, she thinks of the conventionally "green" quality of [childhood] "avarice" [62]). But when she recovers her marble (and, specifically, "my blue cat's eye" whose colour is true [398]), the object is a reminder of Stephen and the collection of marbles in his "jar of light" (418). Whereas formerly Elaine was acutely receptive to nothingness (and thus

conversely attracted to things that conveyed substance and solidity), she is now capable of discerning "echoes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing" (421).

As crucial as Cordelia is to the original generation of Elaine's narration, Stephen is to its closure. Atwood recalls Stephen in the important trope of ascension by which she brings her own artwork to a finish. When Elaine boards the airplane in the novel's last pages (thereby completing her figurative ascent, which I shall discuss in the next section), she switches places with Stephen, just as she has once "changed places" with Cordelia (227). In boarding the plane, Elaine is assuming the role of Einstein's "projectile twin" who, shuttled into space, ages asymmetrically to his brother, illustrating the utter relativity of time; this is a favourite intellectual problem of Stephen's. "Now I will get older," Elaine reflects in the aftermath of Stephen's death, "and he will not" (392). She is acutely aware of relegating him to memory, and of the sadness inherent in that relegation. Elaine's meditation on the stars in the last few pages (their age, their distance) shows that her mind is no longer obsessed with its own experience and perfection, but is brokering a new infinity. Now Elaine is ready to accept that her own perceptions impose limits: the light from the stars is not overwhelming but "enough to see by" (421); the choice of the term "enough" is an important revision to the accumulative aesthetic. Elaine's hard won sense of what is "enough" indicates her more secure sense of her finitude and definition. Through a late identification with her brother, Elaine has come to see herself as existing on the edge of infinities that she can participate in but not begin to possess: the physical universe, the private lives of others, the involuntary movements of memory. Elaine comes to appreciate that the self does not have to hold all things unto itself at once. Loss, dread, and the possibility of non-being

are part of the self's essential structure. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, again following Augustine, notes that humans have "the capacity to introduce nonbeing into time experience" (qtd. in Stewart, "Proust's Turn" 80). Both Cordelia and Stephen show Elaine what is non-integrable into her experience, but Stephen teaches Elaine to *reconcile* herself to, even wonder at, the mind's occasional failure to encompass, to represent. Elaine, in the last pages of the novel, has relaxed her vigilance: "This landscape is empty now, a place for Sunday runners. Or not empty: filled with whatever it is by itself, when I'm not looking" (419). She wonders at the stars, a "word made of numbers" (421); she lets go of the compulsion to represent and lets herself *not look*; and in not looking, she finally lets herself live.

Margaret Atwood, Elaine Risley and the Object World

Cat's Eye is like other works in this study of "the encyclopedic imagination" in that its objective and accumulative representations are linked to the philosophical problem of an ideal self, somehow perfect and self-possessed. But *Cat's Eye* uniquely links this personal and artistic project to a general cultural impulse. The "encyclopedic imagination" emerges as an extension of a society's broader inclination to secure a sense of identity by mapping it onto a world of objects that may be held in sum, whether as consumables or as the set of objects contained aesthetically in (or *as*) a museum collection. And *Cat's Eye* portrays both the personal and the cultural drive towards this absolute self-representation as compulsive. Elaine's identification with the object world may be as absolute and as insatiable as any other artist figure's in this study, but it does not *in itself* mark her out as an "extremist," as in Cohen, or as someone particularly gifted

but particularly self-defeating, as in Buckler. On the surface, only a slight intensification of temper and difference of experience, only a slight elevation of self-consciousness, make Elaine's artistic deference to the object world different from what Atwood portrays as a basic, cultural inclination to seek out an expression of identity in a collection of *things*. Atwood's treatment of Elaine's formal material attentiveness as an intensification of an already irrational but common enough drive in the culture makes it all the more difficult to distinguish Elaine's "encyclopedic imagination" from Atwood's own. The "lost things" of Elaine's childhood are, after all, the "lost things" of Margaret Atwood's also, and the project of reifying and repossessing the objects of the past (even to the extent to which this novel does) may simply be the product of the novel's documentary quality, a quality that extends and augments its (fictively) "autobiographical" drive.

The problem of deducing to what extent the "encyclopedic" quality of Elaine Risley's imagination may reflect the same *authorial* bent in Margaret Atwood is a difficult one, and in some ways only re-enacts the problem of separating David Canaan's artistic identity from Ernest Buckler's. Atwood's portrait of Elaine alongside a materially inclusive representation of Toronto echoes Buckler's own intention to write his psychological study of David as, at the same time, "a comprehensive picture, descriptive and analytical, of Nova Scotian village life at the time of my childhood and later, in the vicinity of the historied Annapolis Royal" ("Correspondence"). Each work of fiction is also generically ambiguous in its relation to autobiography and suggests no uniformly ironic or sympathetic relationship between author and protagonist. Atwood herself has commented upon the relationship between Buckler and David in her study *Survival* (1972), which polemically argues that Canada's "Calvinist-Colonialist" literary

culture seems to prescribe artistic failure to its fictional artists, and possibly its real ones (192). Atwood briefly notes the theme of the artist's impulse to take an "inventory" of his or her world in her discussion of A.M. Klein, Ernest Buckler and Alice Munro, but she does not present this impulse as destructive in itself.[18] In Atwood's view, the artist is not thwarted by the desire to *be*, in Klein's words, the "*n*th Adam taking a green inventory" (192) (thus dooming himself, in my view, not only to an incomplete representation but an incomplete identity). Rather, the artist is defeated by a culture that is unwilling to grant the writer the *license* to name the world anew and is skeptical of any attempt to articulate the life of the community and make the act of "creation" at once an act of cultural "redemption" (193).

In *Survival,* Atwood asks herself if Buckler was destined to share in David's artistic problems and be "maimed" in the way that David is (191); is such an artist as Buckler, in general, compelled to share the protagonist's compulsion to take "inventory" of the world? Atwood tentatively answers no, with two conditions. The first is that the author may handle the character ironically. Irony, for Atwood, liberates the author and opens up the possibility that the writer may "write with freedom about blocked writers" (192). The second condition is that the artist character must discover the courage to write from the centre of personal experience *with or without* the approval of the community, accumulating particulars if required but recognizing the limitations of representation at the same time, boldly instating a more personal judgment. In other words, the author presents the "encyclopedic imagination" in the artist character in order to dramatize the protagonist's overcoming of it by means of an increasing personal and artistic self-confidence. Thus, Atwood praises Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* for its

portrayal of a character, Del Jordan, who struggles against the overwhelming particularity of her experience and wishes to "make lists" in response, and yet manages to arrive at an understanding that representation must have its limit (193). Munro's Del narrates:

> The hope of accuracy we bring to such tasks is crazy, heartbreaking.
>
> And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together—radiant, everlasting.
>
> (Munro, qtd. in *Survival* 193)

Atwood argues that "this vision is much like Buckler's," and yet the protagonist has managed, in the end, to be "a functioning artist" (193). The protagonist's *overcoming* of the inventory-taking compulsion, of course, is as absolving for the work's author as an ironic treatment of the protagonist's failure, for it suggests that the author always writes from the enlightened position at which the protagonist only later arrives. This second possibility, in which the protagonist manages to ignore others' attempts to authorize her art and tempers her "encyclopedism" to acknowledge the ephemerality of experience, seems to anticipate Elaine Risley more precisely, yet far too simply. *Survival*'s brief treatment of the "encyclopedic" problem is useful to an extent, as it shows that Atwood's critical attunement to this representational issue precedes the writing of *Cat's Eye*, and also shows her determination to allow an "encyclopedic" protagonist to thrive artistically even in the face of such a compulsion.

In *Survival*, though, Atwood is overly concerned with the safeguarding of the *author* from obsession and failure. She does not explore the possibility that the author's *implication* in the protagonist's "encyclopedic" problem may be richer than her freedom

from it. The broader point of *Cat's Eye*, written sixteen years after *Survival*, is not really that Elaine Risley survives and becomes *functional* as a Canadian artist, but that she achieves for herself a kind of grace. The novel exploits its confessional genre to the fullest in order to spiritualize the narrator's necessary immersion in worldliness. The novel's particularity and materiality are not the *opposite* of grace for Elaine; they are the avenue to it, the bottom of its "winding-stair" (Frye, *Spiritus Mundi* 81). The artistic disposition is, even in this novel's moments of apparent literalism, fundamentally a spiritual disposition; in extending itself everywhere, it "takes everything in" in a potentially destructive but also a potentially liberating way. Insofar as Atwood's novel suggests a relationship between "encyclopedism" and grace, it is really more like Cohen's than Buckler's. It shares the suggestion that the author's own complicity in the desire to see and record everything, even to an extreme of selfhood, is as vital and important as it is potentially damaging (there was the risk of totalitarianism for Cohen; there is the risk of abjection before ephemera for Atwood). When the artwork has the status of a spiritual instrument, the artist *cannot* extend him- or herself less than fully and thus cannot separate him- or herself completely from the "encyclopedic," gathering drive in the protagonist, without risking bad faith.

Elaine's sacralization of both the object and the collection (in the figure of the Virgin of Lost Things) reflects the novel's serious assertion of the imagination's intense obligation to come to terms with things outside itself, an obligation that must also be Atwood's. For most of the novel, Elaine receives the world outside her with a sense of ambush, responding to it as "a sinister or scowling 'pediment of appearance'" (Wallace Stevens, qtd. in Frye 281), but the world yields to "a different light" in the novel's final

pages (405). Augmenting the sense of the respiritualization of the object world is the trope of physical ascension that we noted in Elaine's final plane ride and in the novel's Dantean turn to the stars. David Cowart also notes the Dantean fact that the novel departs from a point of mid-life reflection (126).[19] There are more than a few such details of Dantean implication in *Cat's Eye*; there is a sustained narrative of spiritual emergence that actually *does* ultimately differentiate Elaine's personal and artistic "collecting" drive from the culture's at large though they often appear to be similar.

At the beginning of the novel, Elaine is standing on a bridge, from which she may fall, as in her painting *Falling Women* in which women are "falling as if by accident off a bridge" (268). These figures suggest both "fallen women" and "Eve and the Fall" to Elaine (268). But her painting *Unified Field Theory* depicts The Virgin of Lost Things floating ethereally on a bridge, apparently free from the threat of falling, holding the cat's eye marble. The painting, in the novel's final pages, implies that in falling one rises. The night sky emanates from *under* the bridge, its stars identified with underground pebbles (and of course, with Stephen's jar of marbles, buried under the bridge). The suggestion of the sky *in* the ground implies an equation of spirit with substance, and points the reader to the Dantean theme of *anabasis* or ascent. Elaine descends into dark spaces (the hole, the ravine, the sense of nothingness), navigates what she herself figures as the "Limbo" of materiality ("[s]omewhere in Limbo, all the old devices and appliances and costumes are lined up [...]" [364]), and is finally released into light.

The structure of *anabasis* is a master trope that gives final form to the entire novel, and helps Atwood achieve the aesthetic and spiritual closure that the novel's obsessive material attentions threaten to deny. In the end, Atwood definitively relieves

her novel's objects of their strict association with the mundane. Northrop Frye, in his interpretation of the *anabasis* theme in the poetry of Wallace Stevens, suggests that

> [a]t the bottom of the ladder is the sense of reality as an undifferentiated external world, or what Stevens calls a *Lumpenwelt*. Such a world, Stevens says, is "all one color," a "basic slate" [...] The *Lumpenwelt* is reality on the minimum imaginative basis; the imagination on the same basis is merely the unreal: reality is everything; the imagination is nothing. (281)

In one sense, the story of *Cat's Eye* is the story of Elaine granting her imagination permission to *act* on the world in a distinctive, purposeful way, and thus achieving a form of transcendence for herself. Though the objects of Elaine's early perceptions are usually well-defined and even aesthetically individuated, it is as if the *object world* to which these things belong is exactly this *Lumpenwelt* in which everything is (subjectively, at least) "all one colour" (Frye 281). Elaine and Cordelia, fourteen years old, speak mockingly of Grace, nicknaming her family, "The Lump-Lump family, headed by "Mister and Mrs. Catalogue," whose possessions are uniformly "grunt-colour[ed]" and who are destined for the "particularly gray [...] Lump-Lump Family Mausoleum" (232). Elaine and Cordelia, in their studied *ennui*, construct a hopelessly ordinary world in which the Smeaths, with their serviceable garments and Sunday school piety, are the paragon of banality, and indeed *reality*; theirs is the world of the catalogue and its meaningless, perishable objects. But in choosing to name the Smeath daughter Grace (whom Cordelia has forgotten they all "adored" [233] and bedecked with flowers as if she were one of Botticelli's own Graces), Atwood suggests the intimate *connection* between the material things of the world and the achievement of beatitude. It takes

Elaine the entire course of her narration to find this connection implicit in the mundane world. Frye argues that the sinister monotonousness of the all too real *Lumpenwelt* forces the grace-seeking imagination to define itself as reality's opposite: an absence, a nothingness. Certainly, the reduction of herself to nothing has always been the precondition for Elaine's creativity, however problematically. Then, according to Frye (who may be interpreting Heidegger), Being intercedes and reacts *against* nothingness, as Elaine does when she speaks or writes herself out of the novel's many holes, dark spaces, and undergrounds, towards her personal liberation and imaginative freedom.

In the end, then, the position Atwood takes with respect to her narrator is more subtle than the two possibilities she outlines in *Survival* (an ironic treatment of the "encyclopedic" failure of the artist character, or a dramatization of the character's liberation from the "encyclopedic" compulsion in such a way that asserts that the author is already free, already aware of the artistic tendency to represent everything).
One instance of added complexity in Atwood's novelistic as opposed to her critical treatment of the drive towards artistic "inventory" is that, in the novel, Atwood *does* dare to make herself at least somewhat complicit in Elaine's artistic tendencies. Atwood is identifiable enough with Elaine to create an "autobiographical illusion" (Cooke "Reading" 162); Elaine's painting *Cat's Eye* is a "self-portrait, of sorts" (407) and Atwood's novel by the same name is also one—of sorts. Atwood minimizes the potential for an ironic reading of Elaine and her hyper-objectivity by giving *Cat's Eye* a first-person narration and *rejecting* one common narrative strategy of the confession, which is to tell the story from a retrospective position of moral reform, as in Augustine's *Confessions*. In other words, in a typical confession, the "converted narrator" looks back

on him- or herself as the "unconverted protagonist" in order to "see each past event in its fixed relation to a present which has presumably achieved its final form" (Spengemann 7). In *Cat's Eye*, however, the past is not fixed and Elaine is certainly not enlightened from the outset; her revelation is a *process* that unfolds continuously over the several days of the novel's present time. It is through "utterance" itself, in Chinmoy Bannerjee's view, that Atwood's narrators find a "trope" for "their own condensation and finity" (514). Elaine's present experience of her past is a *mitigated* retrospective stance that is different from the absolute retrospective position of the art exhibition, or, in the Atwood canon, the oppressively retrospective position of the museum relative to its fixed objects. One implication of Elaine's "unenlightened" but retrospective point of view is that, as we bear witness to Elaine's process of understanding herself better, we also perceive Atwood's own stance with respect to her narrator as a matter of *diminishing irony*: greater when Elaine is obsessed with self-perfection, lesser when Elaine arrives at a sense of what is "enough." Atwood manages to imply that her own "recording" interest in objects is qualitatively different from Elaine's during the period when Elaine is a helpless accumulator. But Atwood also reveals that she understands and shares Elaine's sense that objects are powerful embodiments of subjective experience, worth the artist's careful attention. We do not assume that Atwood, authorially, has a strictly informed, superior, and detached perspective on Elaine's collecting habit and its implications for her self-representation. Rather, we assume that Elaine's *process* of revelation through self-representation in all its minutiae converges with a similar *process* Atwood perhaps finds latent in her own art.

The *anabasis* trope, as well, is a marked aesthetic gesture that separates Atwood from Elaine, but does not amount to a final irony. The device reveals Atwood's overall structuring of events to which Elaine (as the narrator) is very close, and in which she would be unable to suggest such an archetypal pattern. This trope is one way by which we may observe Atwood's conceptual separation of herself from Elaine. Yet this is not an *ironic* separation as complete as that which we find between Buckler and David at the end of *The Mountain and the Valley*. Atwood cannot sincerely depreciate the objective drives and the nostalgic motives that she seems to share with Elaine. Nor would she, I believe, fully distinguish the potential Elaine's art has to redeem the objects of the past from the redemptive potential of her own art. But the structuring of the novel through the ascension trope is a deep authorial contrivance that makes Atwood markedly distinct from her narrator-protagonist, Elaine; it helps confer a *symbolic* closure on the novel where a generic one is not really possible, given life-writing's notorious inability to totalize itself because of the limitless nature of subjective experience.[20] *Cat's Eye* shows objects to be embodiments of unique experience and illustrates why we must necessarily be invested in the object world. But objects, consistently with the "perverse museum" trope, are impossible to possess; an unrelieved attention to objects may generate an endlessly descriptive narrative in search of some lost emotional core. The ascension trope helps show that the "collector" can find a sense of satisfaction and personal wholeness through an immersion in the object world and through the discovery of the self's healthy relation to it. The cat's eye marble is a material thing *and* a symbolic "whole" and figures the total condensation of Elaine's collection to a single object. It is connected to her sense of grace; in the painting *Unified Field Theory*, the marble held

before the Virgin is effectively the Virgin's sacred heart. The cat's eye shows Elaine that the material ground of her being has overwhelmed her but that she remains connected to it and is in possession of it. The cat's eye is her "nucleus"; it lets her figuratively incorporate not only the tangible parts of herself, but also her own desire, emptiness and loss. And, finally, it shows her the possibility of transcendence and release.

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Encyclopedic Imagination and the Life-Long Poem: Dudek's and Nichol's Lives on the Line

> the i dies finally
> merges with the land's scape
> scope increases
> the folded page
> writes its way into
> the longed for
> beginning
>
> (bpNichol, *Martyrology 4*)

Louis Dudek's *Continuation* series and bpNichol's 9-volume *Martyrology* perform a shared poetic experiment in bearing out each poet's intention to write a "continual" poem that ends for no other reason than the poet's death. Dudek conceived his *Continuation* from the very outset as an open, polyvalent commentary on his own thought-process and resolved that the poem should not "stop" in his lifetime (Blaser 7). His *Continuation* poem spans several books, encompassing *Continuation I* (1981)[1] and *Continuation II* (1990), as well as the fragments of "Continuation III" that are included in two volumes, *The Caged Tiger* (1997) and *The Surface of Time* (2000). bpNichol, on the other hand, was already well immersed in his eclectic devotional poem to the "saints" of language (feeling as he did that words perform the saintly function of mediating between the self and the eternal absolute) when he realized that his poem was destined to be as continual and spontaneous as his own desire for speech and connection: hence, a "life-long poem" (qtd. in Multineddu 9). Both poets demonstrate a desire to match the "scope" of the poem to the "scope" of the self, but both poems paradoxically show that such an inclusiveness can only be achieved through the self's continual alienation and

objectification. The poems occasion many figurative, personative deaths to precede the literal, personal one. Ironically, each "life-long" poem generates a stream of personae who "die" serially in the open poem's anticlimaxes. These cadences enact the many small gratifications and instances of self-completion that predict the poem's larger—in fact, ultimate—search for an *encompassing* self, an inclusive vitality and joy.

Although "the i dies finally," in the above passage from *Martyrology 4,* this rehearsed "finality" becomes, in a very short space, a new beginning for the continual poem. The act of self-sacrifice ignites the poet's hope for the achievement of poetic "scope." In the "dead" poet's burial—his integration into the land's scape or shape—Nichol calmly rewrites the trope which, in A.M. Klein's handling,[2] had predicted the entire *problem* of literary "encyclopedism": the indistinguishability of the figure from his infinite ground. Nichol's image of the poet buried in the white page naturally brings to mind, as well, Buckler's David Canaan, dead and blanketed by the whiteness of the snowy mountain, suddenly part of the great natural continuum he strove unsuccessfully to represent. In Nichol's passage, however, the poet is confident of a resurrection, a new beginning, an earned continuation, as if any "self" might be readily divested in the poem's larger process of self-authentication.

In these lines, the "death" of the persona opens up new possibilities for the poet, so that "scope increases"; the poet himself seems to be enlarged by his re-absorption of the projected "i" (*Martyrology 4*). It is possible that in the phrase "scope increases" Nichol is actually drawing on the archaic sources of the martyrology genre to evoke the Old English word for "poet," *scop.* In a double-entendre very appropriate to our examination of the "encyclopedic imagination," the Old English *scop* does not translate

to its contemporary homonym, "scope," but rather, to "shape." The word names the poet as a shaper of things rather than a generator of scope. Both Dudek and Nichol multiply themselves and exploit the tension between "scope" and "shape" by achieving "scope" for their respective poems personatively and "shape" biographically. Both writers project exemplary personae—the martyr for Nichol, the social seer for Dudek—capable of gathering up the infinite particulars of the world. But the "shape" of the poem comes from the ultimate limitation of the poet and the expectation of his real end. Death, an always implicit terminus of the life-long poem, makes necessary the *constant* effort to reconcile the poet and the persona. It is death that animates the poet's ultimate desire to be true to himself. Death gives the poem its ultimate bearing and search for unity, even in the face of its overt intention *not* to proceed in a single direction.

This reconciliation of the "actor" and the writer is the definitive characteristic of the meditative poem. In *The Poem of the Mind*, Louis Martz describes a tradition of meditative (or devotional) poetry that begins with John Donne. Martz describes the "meditative" poet as one who objectifies and considers himself: "We might begin by saying that meditative poetry displays an actor who, first of all, seeks himself in himself; but not because he is self-centred in our sense of that term—no, he seeks himself in order to discover or to construct a firm position from which he can include the universe" (31). Martz explains that the "poem of the mind" proceeds out of the speaker's sense of incompletion or anguish, and aims to resolve his inner contradictions through a process of self-dramatization. The poem is finished when "this projected self, this insatiable actor, merges with the whole, larger mind of the meditative man, finding what will suffice" (5). In Martz's hyberbolic vocabulary of *universal inclusion*, we find a new version of the

"total self," a self that finds a sense of the entirety of the cosmos reflected in the hard won integrity of a personal *state*. In Nichol and Dudek, the dissatisfaction that occasioned the poem in the first place disperses in the poem's process, so that the closure of the work implies (and is conditioned by) the true happiness of the poet. This is a happiness based on the poet's sense of having an identity that *includes everything*, an identity that encompasses but also supersedes all the false "selves" necessary for its achievement.

Martz's discussion, however, is mainly limited to lyric poetry. The brevity of lyric allows for a "concentrated" and "undiluted attention to feeling and feeling alone" (Hardy 1-2), so that the reader is easily able to trace the progress of the speaker's immediate passions and be strongly impressed by the poem's emotional resolution. Louis Dudek's *Continuation* and bpNichol's *Martyrology* are long meditations—apparent records of the poets' minds—that move by "pulsations of affect" (Dudek, "Black Mountain" 45) but without any possible resolution of the motivating feelings. The poems' shared premise of "continual" composition clearly suggests that there is no closure-producing moment of subjective satisfaction to be found. Rather, the poems anticipate, through miniature climaxes and ironic "endings," an ultimate satisfaction they will not be able to represent. In keeping with Martz's claims, though, both Nichol and Dudek understand their own arrival at creative contentment as an "inclusive" principle of poetic sufficiency. In yoking the shape of his poem to the shape of his life, each poet makes the poem's closural principle identifiable with the incontrovertible aim of life—the pursuit of happiness. In this word, I do not imply the final, epiphanic, transfiguring happiness of *lyric* closure, but rather what we might think of as a sense of felicity that is always on the

horizon: "the poem is a spark of the happiness I *might* have" writes Dudek ("Questions" 36, original emphasis).

Despite this subjective, emotional basis for closure, the meditative poem is, as Martz suggests, not mainly personal but, rather, a *rehearsal* of the personal. Dudek concurs, suggesting that the meditative poem is never a reflection of life, as many readers assume, but rather a working-out of the *problem* of life ("Questions" 10). In this way, the poem does not emanate from a "self," but rather describes the search for one. The self is a prospect of the meditative poem rather than a presence within it. Even when the poem is as conclusively wedded to the life of the poet as Dudek's and Nichol's poems are (insofar as they are life-long works), the poet's sense of self is always on some unapproachable horizon of the poem's composition. Just as Dudek construes the poem as his own *potential* for happiness, Nichol too, always *awaits* some kind of real manifestation of himself in poetry, fearing that his "cumulous" work is only a "building up and bracketing of asides" (*Martyrology 4*).

When Dudek claims, starkly, that, "We should all write like John Keats, about to die" ("from *Atlantis*," *Infinite Worlds* 160), he seems to suggest that we should *continually* charge ourselves with the task of totalizing ourselves, *as if* before the prospect of death. Though critics inevitably study both *Continuation* and *The Martyrology* for their experiments in postmodern indeterminacy and continuity, the works are also purposeful and end-driven. Both poems illustrate an exaggerated, death-driven desire to integrate a whole universe into a perfect, complete subjectivity. Nichol writes, "I am afraid of writing something that does not end" (*Martyrology 3*), and reveals that even though he does not hope, precisely, for poetic closure, he needs to write his

work *as if* it will somehow end and sufficiently contain everything. Though both works declare their open-endedness, both are written towards an emotionally pressing *proposition* of closure, just as both speakers are confronting the hypothesis of death in every instant that they represent their living minds. The *Continuation* books and *The Martyrology* may be studied, despite their shared program of openness, as works that betray an inescapable requirement for form that is as intuitive as the human requirement for happiness in the face of death. These poems may not be closed, but they are as form-seeking as they are self-seeking. Though they seem infinitely, playfully regenerative, they are altogether oriented towards that moment when "we are our selves / finally" ("Chain 1," *Martyrology 5*).

"Last Night I Died, Today I Live": The *Continuation* Project

"I am not what I was, and I never was what I am," writes Louis Dudek (postscript, *Infinite Worlds* n.p.). In this phrase, the poet describes the separateness of his past and present selves, and gestures to the constant self-estrangement that belongs to the "endless differing and deferring of writing" (Eagleton, qtd. in Mandel 21). Here, Dudek also seems to revise Saint Augustine's portrait of the self as a *synthesis* of lived time. Augustine contends that a person's present sense of himself integrally contains both the past and the future, so that the person feels inalienably whole. Dudek, instead, portrays himself as a segmental *process*. The poem endlessly differentiates the poet's present self from his past selves (resulting in the work's explicit openness and infinitude) and yet the poet instinctively tries to overcome this difference (resulting in *Continuation*'s implicit yearning for finitude and unity).

Self is change for Dudek, and the key element of poetry that *represents* the self must therefore be movement. Dudek conceived his *Continuation*, begun at the dawn of the 1970s, as a poem that strategically imitates the mind's motion, a kind of music of the self. But although the continuity of the poem may descry or at least resonate with the continuity of the self, it can never stop for a concerted act of self-recognition. Thus, the very fluidity of *Continuation* makes "[t]he mind a process and the self unreal" (*Continuation I,* 42) as the poem obsessively "dislocates" the speaker.[3] Dudek's sense of the person as an entity that never stops diverging from itself is reflected in a poetics that is always in pursuit of a unity it cannot achieve but cannot give up. *Continuation* is a portrait of a mind that synthesizes itself constantly but never finally. Thus, though the poem is fluid and ongoing, it also is shaped by a series of marked anticlimaxes; these moments register epiphanic insights into the representing mind but cannot be sustained as an *achieved* self-portraiture:

> At the point of greatest awareness and primitive terror,
>
> the poem recommences
>
> Last night I died, today I live—
>
> the resurrection in Adonis' garden. (*Continuation I,* 18)

The "resurrection in Adonis' garden" is Dudek's constant rebirth in poetry. In Greek mythology, Venus promised her slain lover Adonis to perpetuate "the spectacle of [his] death" and, with it, the immediacy of her grief. Bereft, she transformed him into the (self-regenerating) anemone or wind-flower, named for "the cause which assists equally in its production and decay" (Bullfinch, "Age of Fable"). In this allusion, Dudek points

to the life-long poem's underlying paradox, which is that it is as much a self-renewing spectacle of death as a portrait of the living mind. The specific phrase "garden of Adonis" or "Adonis' garden" connotes "a very perishable good," according to the *Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*; it refers to the ancient Greek practice of commemorating the death of Adonis by planting herbs in lettuce jars simply to throw them away in the morning. Dudek's reference to Adonis, then, points to the poem's easy capacity to generate and dispense with new selves.

Dudek's allusion is all the more notable for its counterpart in Nichol's *Martyrology* 3, in which Nichol puns on the name of Adonis and reflects on Adonis' inability to die *finally*. The following passage departs from a play on the name "Adonis" ("A.D. on / is"). Nichol emphasizes the first two letters of the huntsman's name as a reminder of Christ's own death and resurrection (A.D.), and also pays tribute to the poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) whose line, Nichol writes, generated these variations:

> A.D. on
>
> is dead
>
> let the H
>
> supplant the D
>
> in your sweet poetry
>
> adonis head
>
> HE is the A.D.
>
> HE is not dead. ("CODA: Mid-Initial Sequence," *Martyrology 3*)

Nichol's lines are an act of poetic faith in which the poet conflates Adonis with Christ,[4] opening up the possibility that all of history is *not* contained, as he earlier claims, in the first four letters of the alphabet (B.C. / A.D.). Nichol's particular choice of the word "supplants" in the phrase "let the H / supplant the D" seems to allude specifically to Adonis' rebirth *in the garden.* It also calls attention to the succession of personae in the leaves of Nichol's own poem; these regenerated selves help constitute the poet's perpetual "mid-initial" perspective and seem to guarantee the overriding of "D" (Nichol's recurring glyph for "death") by "H" (Nichol's glyph for home and homecoming, and therefore, perhaps, eternal return).[5] Each poet—Nichol as well as Dudek—construes himself as somehow multiple and self-successive. On one hand, this multiplicity produces the celebratory openness of the poem, but on the other hand, as we will note, it makes the poet despair of his own integrity as the poem's maker and subject.

Dudek's poem reflects continually on the mind's inherent problem of integrity, but it also comments extensively on a world that disparages the life of the mind and stands in the way of every person's hope for a unified understanding of himself. *Continuation* is a soup of Dudek's signature concerns: the moral dissolution of the world; the public's indifference to the humanities and to the task of articulating the human character; the ubiquitous problem of evil; the banality of contemporary existence. The poem moves with unapologetic and distracting quickness from one theme and register to the next:

> The carrot greens are hanging out of the garbage bag
>
> They have served their purpose

Necessity is the will of God

What he wants most is to exist (*Continuation I*, 21)

Dudek says of his poem's scattered reflections that "[t]he open-ended structure corresponds to the open-minded problem" ("Questions" 12). He observes that his technique will produce "[n]ot perfect finished poems, but the essential thought-process, like the time-process with all life in it, always going on. Mainly, the poetry that is always going on in us" ("Questions" 12). *Continuation* is indeed complex and indirect: over the course of a double-sided page, it refers to "Messrs Joyce, Yeats, Eliot, Pound etc."; "the Beats, the Beatles, the Activists, the McLunatics"; "Pop & Op & 'multiple media'"; "psychedelia & Flower Power, / the New Left, SDU, CEGEP, UGEQ & MAUT" (*Continuation I*, 42). After this impatient spate of references, the poem mentions the number of atoms in "a smallish universe" (10^{75}), speculates on our chromosomal resemblance to the urchin, quotes Santayana, praises Irving Berlin's weekly output and settles down for "eccles tea and cake" (perhaps alluding to Proust's own "encyclopedic" self-documentation) (*Continuation I*, 42-43). *Continuation* is encyclopedic in its ambitious enumeration of the sources of the poet's social *malaise* (*Continuation I,* 42), but it is also expansive in terms of its amplification of the poet's inner constitution and in its conviction of art's power to "redeem reality" in an absolute, all-encompassing way (*Continuation I,* 42).

Continuation, over the course of its volumes, testifies to both positive and negative abundance in the world, and to the person's capacity to internalize and *express* such abundance. In his poem's concern with *copia*, Dudek foregrounds "that figural capacity of discourse which allows man to express the diversity of his nature, as well as

that of surrounding nature, and even to inaugurate mutations in its being. Without *copia,* there is only repetition" (Eugene Vance, qtd. in Derrida 138). It is indeed an apparent love of variation and abundance in nature that prompts Dudek to stand before an aquarium in his long poem *Atlantis*, and to list these species and many more:

> LOLIGO VULGARIS
>
> TRACHINUS ARANEUS
>
> SCORPAENA SCROFA
>
> SCYLLARIDES
>
> ANEMONIA SULCATA
>
> ASTEROIDES CALYCULARIS
>
> [...] ("from *Atlantis*," *Infinite Worlds* 150).

There could be no clearer demonstration of Dudek's "encyclopedic imagination" than the above excerpt, and no clearer illustration of his mind's delight in the minutiae of nature and of experience. In *Continuation*, the still more "infinite" and burgeoning work that *Atlantis* predicts, Dudek is effectively before the world-aquarium, realizing its vast contents through his own, ecstatic inner expansiveness ("to accumulate lines, is it not a pleasure?" [*Continuation I,* 13]). *Continuation*'s lines celebrate "the absolute individuality of each living thing" (*Continuation I,* 33) through the lens of the poet's own ever-changing individuality. If the self is regenerative ("unamiable, untamable, / innumerable, unnameable" [*Continuation I,* 16]), and each self inwardly expansive, then the poem indeed promises to be endless. But—crucially—anxiety underlays the poet's evident joy in accumulation. Dudek's fear that he "can't hold it in" and his concern that he "write[s] too much" (*Continuation I,* 46) betray his desire for integrity and his

intuitive hope for his poem's self-containedness and closure.

Given Dudek's overt emphasis on chance composition and formal irresolution, as well as his thematic preoccupations with unending, insoluble problems, it is easy to overlook *Continuation*'s vested interest in closure and order and in the phenomenon of the individual, complete in himself. Yet I cannot overemphasize that it is precisely the task of *integration* which, for Dudek, is ever and always the first duty of poetry. He describes the role of poetry as, foremost, the structuring of thought and individuality: "Thinking with images [...] is the most ancient way to organize one's relation to life, to relate different levels of action to one another, to work out the emotions that relate to these actions—in short, to integrate the self" ("The Poetry of Reason" 206). As well, Dudek's desire to "sew the earth together" (letter to Raymond Souster, qtd. in Blaser 7)[6] expresses his broader hope for poetry's *culturally* integrative purpose. Dudek, in a lecture, encourages his listeners to remember that "only poetry attempts the total integration of modern man, the criticism of religion, philosophy, manners, entertainments, politics, the arts, the analysis of our whole civilization and the dangers threatening it, the reconstruction of the very grounds of civilization" ("Introduction to a Course in Modern Poetry" 153).

In short, though Dudek's *Continuation* openly declares itself to be "a poem without direction" whose "vast accumulations / [...] may have a use / or none" (*Continuation I*, 20; *Continuation I*, 11), the poem is unable to enact its own pretense to randomness, potential purposelessness, and undisturbed continuation. As Dudek himself acknowledges in his book's prefatory remarks, the poem "reveals a confidence in the kinds of order implicit in all things" (*Continuation I*, preface, n.p). The pressing and

intimately personal motivation for the discovery of that order, in *Continuation*, is the prospect of the poet's death. *Continuation* not only belongs in this study of the "encyclopedic imagination" because it describes a ganglion mind that reaches after everything. It also belongs here because the speaker is fixated on an ideal of poetic inclusion and is indeed convinced that his task is one of "total integration," with "absolute truth the total intention" ("Introduction to a Course in Modern Poetry" 153; *Continuation I*, 62). If the poem lived up to the offhandedness of its first line—"So let's continue" (*Continuation I*, 11)—it would have no place in my particular genealogy. By Dudek's own design, the poem *does not* stop, but I include it here because, beyond the poet's intention, it *cannot* stop. The poet obsessively encounters a principle of poetic closure—his own death—that is unsettlingly arbitrary, dependent on chance rather than aesthetic design. Since the poet has no control over when his poem will close, he must—paradoxically—encounter the possibility of "stopping" at *all* times, and must *constantly* make the intuitive "totalizing" gestures that come with representing the mind in the face of death. Death motivates the "encyclopedic" principle of *Continuation* because it drives the heightened "passion for perfection" (*Continuation II,* 20) that goes against the grain of the poem's declared intention simply to open itself out to every element of the poet's experience, moment by moment.

The poet "dies" repeatedly throughout the poem as an expression of his submerged desire for aesthetic control over the poem's closure. Dudek writes that "[t]he imagination wants satisfaction as much as the body does" (*Continuation I,* 23) and seems to satisfy his imagination by peppering his poem with images of his body's demise, particularly as expressions of his impulse to close his poem. He calls attention to the

equation he has set up between death and aesthetic sufficiency ("[...] the poem is never finished / Death puts on the finishing touches" [*Continuation I,* 30]), and predicts the quiet and ultimate "containment" of death: "Each man's reality a psychodrama / of excited crazy words // Then the quiet face, in the coffin, containing a life" (*Continuation I,* 33). Unlike *The Martyrology, Continuation* does not precisely enact the poet's death through the deaths of *characters* generated by the poem, but certainly the poet perceives himself as a complex of *voices* and facets of the self. "All the archetypes" reside in him "like a pack of cards"; he is "the sum of all desires" (*Continuation I,* 23). To allow himself "to be born again, to be born anew" (*Continuation I,* 60) into the stream of being, he calls up alter-egos who appear and as easily disappear. Dudek *quotes* these apparently imaginary figures in the poem, as if they were nobody specific but certainly somebody other than himself: a zealot ("'And He shall pu-ri-fy'" [*Continuation I,* 39]), a scholar/idolator ("'The Eliot papers!'" [*Continuation I,* 13]), a critic ("'I don't want your fake poems / I want a record of your mind'" [*Continuation I,* 33]). It is as if the poet is assuming the godly function of being "the imagination that creates / an image of itself" (*Continuation I,* 21) in different guises—specifically, at one point, to assume a externalized perspective on death: "'I'm dying and you're laughing' / 'So? We're making it a little easier for you'" (*Continuation I,* 58).

The frustrated closural impulse that produces serial *personae* out of the poet's continual "self" also produces the miniature "closures" of the likewise continual poem. The poem may be ongoing, but there is also a marked anticlimactic structure that Dudek particularly develops in *Continuation II,* in which the poem is segmented by strategic stops and pauses. The second book of *Continuation* is unexpectedly definite in its units

of composition, finding structure in repetition, in a recourse to "framing" silences in the poetic notation, in an increasingly visible punctuation, and in a freighted imagery at the close of its sections: autumn bonfires, the hands of ancient priests, natural decay. Dudek makes the conspicuous gesture of concluding a number of sections in a row with a common device, a reference to leaves. Section two variously describes the pleasures of personal satisfactions that are indifferent to the "external check[s]" of "politics, doctrine, [and] religion" and ends with the line, "I sit here listening to the leaves grow" (*Continuation II*, 17). Section three, among other meditations, denounces personal extremism and the evil of "imput[ing] malignity where it is not" (*Continuation II*, 20) in order to animate revolutions. It concludes:

> A dead leaf hit me in the face
>
> this morning
>
> Must you insist, o revolutionist
>
> on your fanatical concerns?
>
> Can we not live awhile in peace
>
> While the single leaves fall? (*Continuation II*, 20)

Section four at one point speculates in a Kantian manner about the correspondence between the "undiminished" universe without and the infinite potentiality within. Dudek reflects that the person is "actualized" through contact with the real, but also capable of transcending the real in thought (*Continuation II*, 24). The section's final words, again including a mention of a leaf, are: "(A little boy, looking at the world through a leaf) // Thought about thought is the ultimate thought" (*Continuation II*, 25). Although *Continuation* is thoroughly interested in the mind's free play, its various rhetorical

repetitions (like this recourse to a common image to end sections) impart structure and make the poem appear *serial* rather than strictly continual. And Dudek implies that the poet figuratively "dies" at the end of each short section or rhetorical unit when he speaks of death itself as "the grand dissolution / for which small dissolutions prepare" (*Continuations II,* 60).[7] The closural image of the leaf in these particular "dissolutions," moreover, implies that each death is connected to that particular "leaf" of the book, as an "Adonis garden," or a death in poetry.

Perhaps Dudek's increasingly visible closural gestures are the elements of *Continuation II* that lead Antonio Ruiz to the conclusion (in my view, mistaken) that the second book of *Continuation* "deals with the *separate* thematic of old age and death" (65, emphasis added). The poem's death-orientation and structure of continual resurrection ("in Adonis' garden") are already well established in *Continuation I* as intimate, important properties of the poem (18). But Dudek published *Continuation II* a full nine years after he published *Continuation I,* and thus undoubtedly felt the biographical "close" of his poem drawing nearer. The heightened closural passion of *Continuation II* may also reflect the fact that his second work in this series is simply, and inevitably, more self-conscious than his first, so that Dudek is better able to exploit the fruitful tensions of his "continual" poem's buried hunger for closure and integration. Thus, while the first book of *Continuation* is occupied with establishing its overt program of "continuing," *Continuation II* is more conscious of the always-implicit desire for closure, and provocatively aware that the poem's *refusal* of closure may actually be indistinguishable from a *failure* to close.

Dudek's expressive punctuation is also different in the second book and likewise seems more determined to "stop" the poem strategically. *Continuation I,* as a testament to its perpetual incompletion, never uses a period to end its statements except, in certain cases, as part of a quotation of another work. Meanwhile, a conventional capitalization indicates where the periods *would* be, if they were present. *Continuation II* does use the period, but sparingly: Dudek punctuates his statements in order to quote accurately (as in *Continuation I*), to end individual sections (unlike *Continuation I*), and—curiously—to conclude sentences that make direct reference to death:

> [..] [T]he lucky cry, "Look! I'm succeeding!"
>
> (the athletes, the gerontologists),
>
> but all are carried down in the end
>
> to the same deep. (*Continuation II*, 16)

Thus, Dudek takes care to create cadences in his poem, especially where the thought of death gives him pause.

Throughout *Continuation*, Dudek's use of space often suggests conceptual structure and becomes another understated principle of organization in the "random" poem. Barbara Herrnstein-Smith's study of poetic closure notes that a "poetic work of art frames itself through the highly organized environment of sound and silence" (24). Wayson Choy, who contributed a 1962 essay entitled "Space in Poetry" to Dudek's magazine, *Delta*, influenced Dudek's particular interest in the closural or structural power of blank space. Dudek alludes to Choy on the first page of *Continuation* (11); elsewhere, in a memoir, Dudek reminisces about the pleasure he had taken in first encountering Choy's ideas ("Black Mountain" 44). Choy describes the expressive use of space in

Sung dynasty paintings as a meaningful aesthetic element of the work. He writes that space is a "dynamic" principle that "directs the eye" and implies relationships between things, invigorating the viewer's natural intuition of order (22). Dudek's *Continuation*, throughout, attempts just such a descriptive orchestration of its poetic silences into a constructive, integrative principle, just as it anticipates the ultimate silence that will lend the poem its final integrity. Dudek signals the poem's more reflective moments by decreasing the spatial density of the stanza; thus, though the poem will not stop for retrospection, it will "slow down" for meditation. The space, then, becomes a visual metaphor for the poet's attempt to "integrate" his mind, however incompletely. At the end of the fifth section of *Continuation II*, for example, the poet departs from the immediately preceding close compaction of his thought and indicates contemplation through the sparsity of his slowing lines:

There is always the living

Why make emotion out of words

Better the real thing

But the poem is not the real thing

is not made of the real

It is another thing

"Variations and inflections of the naked self'

Like nature's doughnut machine

Making the atoms

The key to identity and order (*Continuation II,* 28)

It is no coincidence that this passage, largely given over to blank space, ends with a mention of "identity" and "order," for these concepts are implied in space itself as Dudek (following Choy) would have it. Just as the poet's articulation is organized with respect to silence, the representation of his life gains structure and impetus from his anticipation of the ultimate silence of death.

The poet *must* die repeatedly throughout *Continuation*, because no single, small, rhetorical death manages to bind the speaking voice to the "complete" subjectivity that he seeks. Dudek's poetry can never resign itself to its own cessation (with the poet's death), though it rehearses both formal completion and subjective satisfaction many times over, always with a projected sense of inadequacy and provisionality. In "The Last Word"—which is, of course, *not* Dudek's last word—the writer proclaims:

I am nearly finished now

With what is probably my last word

In possibly my last line—

In this happy poem. ("The Last Word," *The Surface of Time* 33)

The next poem's first line is, "And yet it's spring again" and the poet is "reborn for awhile," just as he is reborn in the first pages of *Continuation*: "last night I died, today

I live" ("The Old Story," *The Surface of Time* 33; *Continuation I,* 18). This surprise rebirth connotes both the opportunity to continue and the failure to conclude, as do the various cadences of the earlier segments of *Continuation.* The poem constantly misses its desired fulfillment and must therefore continue. Its accumulated thoughts, despite being a record of the poet's mind, always fall short of an adequate self-representation. Dudek admitted to Michael Darling, two years before the first book of *Continuation* was published as an independent volume, that he had never addressed the question "who is this perceiving self?" to his own satisfaction (Darling 12). In making this statement, Dudek articulated the challenge that was to animate the *Continuation* series, which is that "self" can never actually be a satisfactory concept in poetry, to the extent that the *observed* and represented self perpetuates the poet's sense of self-division. The self never glimpses itself as whole, except perhaps in the fleeting, private ecstasies that punctuate the work as *another* little set of anticlimaxes: "a happiness between the thighs" (*Continuation I,* 16), "an ecstasy in the throat" (*Continuation I,* 38), a "quiet mind" (*Continuation I,* 12). Even these cadences, or "patches of perfection" (*Continuation I,* 38), only succeed in driving Dudek to imagine the larger perfection of a "finished" self. In "The Last Word," he comically assumes a transcendental perspective on his own death—"It'll be so nice / *to see me* / gone from the world" (*Surface of Time* 33, emphasis added)—and expresses, again, his desire for a vision of his "whole" self.

It becomes clear, over the course of *Continuation*, that part of Dudek's rationale for projecting his own death as his poem's finale is that it places a desirable control on the expansion of the poet's ego. "I am not like Whitman, a pipe open at both ends," remarks Dudek, suggesting a welcomed limit to the "encompassing" quality and

polyvalence of his own work ("Questions" 10). Dudek questions Whitman's mystical presentation of himself as a conduit, receiving and transmitting God's creation in all of its vastness. For Dudek, the catalogic quality of Whitman's work is inappropriately "omnific" ("Questions" 10): "[N]ine-tenths of Walt Whitman [...] consists of barbarous accumulations of catalogue material, volcanic rhetoric and illiteracy," writes Dudek, though concluding that "[t]he rest is pure gold and the greatest poetry" ("Is American Literature Coming of Age?" 220). Dudek describes himself as "temperamentally responsive to an open poetry, in the tradition of Whitman and Williams" ("Black Mountain" 41), but his criticism of many "open" poetic visions is that the poetic ego required for such a vision is so enlarged, or even so transcendent, that the poet is not adequately *involved* with his materials. The "open vision," as Dudek conceives it, must not come from a panoramic, detached perspective on the world or a sweeping intuition of cosmic purpose, but must be an effort to "live it through" in the dailiness of physical and mental life. Thus, the life and death of the body is one natural healthy limit to the potentially egocentric vision. The poet's personal, physical encounter with reality is paramount; Frank Davey comments that the "open phenomenological structure becomes the essential poetic of Dudek's later long poems" (*Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster* 52). Dudek disparages the "expanding vision" of much new American verse ("Is American Literature" 222). He tellingly observes that "process poetry, unless strictly managed, can be the suicide of poet and of poetry" ("Black Mountain" 45). The "*strict* manage[ment]" of process poetry is a complex idea, very nearly a contradiction in terms ("Black Mountain" 45, emphasis added), and it fosters some of *Continuation*'s vital tensions. These words reveal Dudek's formalism and cue the reader to respond to

Continuation's "open-endedness" as itself a kind of convention, worked under tight control. Dudek's attempt to write *Continuation* until his actual, biographical death insists particularly emphatically on the poet's human "limits" and operation *within* those limits.

In "Art As Subjective Vision," one installment of Dudek's CBC lecture series, *The First Person In Literature*, Dudek comments on the difficulty of a direct, controlled and moderate self-expression in literature. He implies that the poet will *inevitably* tend to create a radically self-effacing or self-aggrandizing persona. This poetic extremism is, for Dudek, not at all a matter of the writer's personal modesty or pride, but an almost insuperable problem of the self's authority in the twentieth century. Dudek comments, in a typically modernist vein, that our traditionally collective forms of truth (religion, community) have ceded their place to individual subjective visions. And he suggests, importantly, that the size and scope of individuality has changed to suit, to the extent that there no longer exists what we might think of as a true and limited subjectivity in art. The gradual process by which the individual has become the standard-bearer for truth has paradoxically made him incredibly small and "insecure": a "Rousseau, de Musset, you or I," claims Dudek ("Art As Subjective Vision"). But there are also "exceptional" men who are the very inverse of the timid ego, types who conceive of their authority in extreme, tyrannical or mystical proportions: Napoleons, Hitlers, Whitmans. Dudek claims that the poet cannot *help* but try to "convert" his subjectivity into a broad expression of universal principles: "The first person is incomplete in himself and demands for himself his opposite, universality" ("Art As Subjective Vision"). In this phenomenon, to Dudek's disapproval, the individual claims for himself a "spurious" universality and "tries to swallow the universe" ("Art As Subjective Vision").

Continuation is an attempt, among other things, to represent the mind in such a way as to find a place for individual authority, and to "include the universe" *legitimately* in the poetic vision (Martz 31). Dudek uses his own death, in part, as a marked "check" on the poem's potentially uncontrollable expansion; thus, the poet's understated but constant insistence on his own finitude is another manifestation of what Trehearne describes as the "sublimated ego" in Dudek's poetics (243).[8]

Dudek suggests that *each* ego-type—the milquetoast as well as the superman—is compelled towards exhaustive self-representation, whether to stabilize the "insecurity" of his small identity, or to assert the magnitude of his large one. He remarks that the first-person speaking persona "can never be made self-sufficient" ("Art As Subjective Vision"). In speculating that "the more [the speaker] insists on his own identity, the farther he seems to fly from [...] wholeness and unity" ("Art As Subjective Vision"), Dudek voices a central paradox of "encyclopedism." *Continuation* acknowledges the fact that the poet cannot fully establish his own "unity" in poetry. The poem concedes this impossibility by taking the poet's death as its radical final assertion of the speaker's "sufficiency" and its affirmation of the finitude and individuality of the poem's organizing sensibility. In adopting his own death as his poem's closural principle, Dudek makes a show to his reader of resolving in biography what he feels is absolutely irresolvable in representation: the achievement of a perfect identity. Thus, Dudek projects his own death as a perfect, authentic consummation of the poem's "personal" vision. *Continuation*'s constant but muted death-orientation reveals the poet's craving for a fixed, inalienable self. It expresses the poet's hope for an arrival, before death, at a summative perspective that finally does include everything and reveals to the poet his

true happiness.[9]

Dudek believes that writing is a process that *distils* from the "noise of existence" a "true self" (*Ideas for Poetry* 84). This philosophy suggests that his long poem's completion requires the emergence of not just a "finished" but a *single* self. One way in which *Continuation* signals its closure—wittingly or unwittingly—is in its reduction of the multiple selves that were necessary to the achievement of the poem's breadth. *Continuation* illustrates Dudek's theoretical belief that the "dramatic ego" (which may be showy, false, or swelled with authority) can be recuperated into a sense of "essential being" over the course of a work ("Art as Subjective Vision"); this is the fundamental process of Dudek's poetry. An occasional strategy of *Continuation I* is to double the speaking voice by projecting, specifically, a critic-figure. The critic challenges the poet to compose a "continual" poem ("'I don't want your fake poems / I want a record of your mind'") (*Continuation I,* 33), but he also externalizes Dudek's harsh self-criticisms about the randomness and potential purposelessness of his project: "'Who cares, does anybody care / About your precious mind and what goes on in it?'" (*Continuation I,* 13). These externalized, oppositional challenges give the poet the impetus to accumulate the poem's encyclopedic detail. But they also inevitably imply that these particulars, once recorded, answer this externally projected aesthetic skepticism rather than the true call of the poet's being. Ironically, then, these details, which were meant to stand as a full account of the speaker's mind, actually falsify the speaker, at least insofar as they serve the demands of Dudek's critical *double* and reinforce his self-division. The more "encyclopedically" Dudek justifies his project (in response to the critical voice), the more he himself seems to become lost in undirected bluster:

Personal charities "not deductible"

From income

Or the shit-slingers of Christianity on the radio

spouting of resurrections,

the soul, God, immortality, and fourteen thousand conversions [...]

In prisons, the homosexuality rate, 90 per cent

Orphans, recidivists

Middle-class juvenile delinquents increasing

Abortions prohibited—only in the womb

Prostitution, without pay

The sun shines for you as it shines for me

Playboy Cavalier

The shit shines! (*Continuation I,* 50)

Passages like this illustrate the potential aesthetic failure of the "encyclopedic imagination." M. Travis Lane writes of what she calls the postmodern "global poem": "If a poet removes all organic and traditional pattern, all causal and communicative reference, all the grammar of perception and the tact of reader/author relationship, the material left may represent an essential truth but it has become duller to read than a tooth chart" (150). The sheer compass of Dudek's concerns (pervasively demanded by the critical persona) does become an alienating quality of the poem at times. The work's

drama, perhaps necessarily and perhaps unintentionally, becomes a drama of self-salvaging; of *recuperating* the essential and finding the single voice; of discovering a meaning for the spate of particulars that have been allowed into the poem on an aesthetic pretext.

It is the increasing presence of death in the work that redirects the poet's accumulative energies and tempers his voice into authenticity. When the poem is especially inflected with the possibility of the poet's death and marked by his absolute vulnerability, then the artwork's "extravagant expansion of subjectivity" ("Art as Subjective Vision") seems meditative and inward, not declamatory and conspicuously determined to meet an aesthetic aim. It is in this context of writing towards death that Dudek, in a critical commentary, suggests that subjective writing may finally aspire to a vision of universal importance. He praises the vision of Proust, who himself closed his work only in the face of his very imminent death, denouncing the reality he had so minutely documented, and declaring his carefully culled details to be temporal "illusions" in the face of eternity. The title of the volume that contains Dudek's final fragment of "Continuation III"—*The Surface of Time*—points to just such a recognition, just such a summative, integral position. Dudek contends in "Art As Subjective Vision" that the dying man who faces life "in its totality" with all its "sad deceptions" and its unaccountable trivia and still manages to be moved to joy *does* finally feel something universal. Dudek remarks that this artist experiences something identical to that of "every man who ever lived and loved": the strong impression of his own felicity in living ("Art As Subjective Vision"). At the end of *Continuation II*, Dudek writes that, "when it's over, we know, don't we / that life has been magical" (114). We might note here, that

the word "magical" is *earned* by the poem's process; the diction might seem trite and even unpalatable if not for the presence of the earlier, cynical catalogues.

The poem, by the end of the final "Continuation III" fragment, is still "encyclopedic," but somehow the poet's valuation of detail has changed. Detail now has no authoritative or evidentiary weight at all. It is given in the spirit of an extended renunciation of the world rather than an accumulation of the world's details. In Dudek's last real catalogue, the poet sounds (stylistically) very much like an alter ego of Buckler's David Canaan, flooded with remembrance and speaking in Buckler's typical, strange second-person voice. But Dudek's speaker, unlike David Canaan in the final pages of Buckler's novel, is enumerating personal details in such a way that he indicates that he is *letting go* of past selves and, in so doing, clarifying his present self. The poet describes

> How you fumbled in class,
>
> How you failed in arithmetic,
>
> How you lost (or won) the prize,
>
> How your mittens got burned [...]
>
> ("Continuation III," *The Surface of Time* 83)

Unlike Buckler's David, Dudek recuperates these details into a recognition of their superficiality and ultimate insignificance. It is he himself, rather than the world, that is ultimately glimpsed "whole," as if from a distant perspective: "Like a scene in a glass, / Like a view from afar off. // As we shall be in the end" (*Surface* 83). The poet's self-recognition, in the end, is a kind of hard-won objectification that reduces him to a dot, bringing him closer to an end he will still never be able to represent. But however ungraspable this "end" is, the poet is able to come to a sense of satisfaction in

recognizing its imminence. Despite its affirmation of life, spontaneity and chance, and despite its premise of absolute continuity, *Continuation*'s meaning ultimately resides in its *expectation* of closure, even if it can never satisfy its own terms. Though the poem itself is a "lived experience," changing and transforming reality even in the act of documenting it, *Continuation* truly illustrates how, in Frank Kermode's words, we "live from the End, even if the world shall be endless" (38). The poem everywhere illustrates the poet's vital dependence on a concept of finitude.

I suggested, in my opening remarks upon Dudek and *Continuation*, that the poet seeks out the complete integration not only of his individuality but of the threads of social experience (politics, entertainments, religion, and so forth) in poetry. Whereas Dudek discovers the prospect of the personal "end" as, ultimately, a satisfactory and necessary prospect, he remains ambivalent about his poem's achievement of its much more challenging act of social "integration." Dudek's individual predicament—namely that he requires an encounter with the notion of death in order to celebrate the "openness" of his mind—is reflected, in turn, in his portrait of the world. Dudek's conception of his social reality, like his personal reality, is powerfully end-determined: sometimes utopian, sometimes surprisingly apocalyptic. Just as Dudek tries to integrate his own mind with respect to its eventual not-being, he likewise says of the world that "this is neither heaven nor hell / but it needs to be referred to both / as the end-point" (*Continuation I,* 32). The imagination makes its own reality, and it makes it in an image of the end. Thus, *Continuation* stakes out its claim to "encyclopedism" in *one* way by imagining a social "integration" so complete that it actually seems to imply the end of the world. Just as Dudek is waiting, in and through the poem, for his own death, he also remarks that

"[w]e're waiting for the death of time" (*Continuation I,* 36), a comment that ambivalently suggests both eternity and apocalypse.

Dudek writes in his 1967 long poem, *Atlantis*, that "all art is the resolution of contradiction in a single body" ("from *Atlantis*," *Infinite Worlds* 194). This sentiment reflects Dudek's opinion that poetry "attempts the total integration" of man ("Introduction to a Course in Modern Poetry" 153); it anticipates, as well, *Continuation*'s attempt to resolve its animating contradictions through the living and dying body of the poet himself. But the idea of "resolution of contradiction *in a single body*" is also the principle that we so skeptically encountered in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers.* In Cohen, the binding-together of "all the disparates of the world [...] all the polarities" into a single entity was both beautiful and monstrous (18). The self-perfecting body was always an uneasy reflection of totalitarian principles, whether it was the body politic, or the metaphorical apocalyptic unity of all creation, or F's omnireceptive sexuality, or the perfect abjection of the saintly body in its unilateral refusal of everything, or the "perfect man" created out of the pieces of the universal accident. In *Continuation*, Dudek makes the operations of his own body, in principle, the measure of everything (in a surprising, though muted, likeness to Cohen's "F"). Dudek insists that the real is a *lived* reality, and makes his actual physical death the principle of the poem's closure. But the death of the poet is, then, *inescapably* associated with the end of the world, which the poem covertly acknowledges. Subtly—almost inconspicuously amidst the poem's billowing concerns—the poet actually presents his own life as an *ultimatum to the world*: "'[...] It's either me / or you,' I said, and the world gave in" (*Continuation I,* 42). The poet's figurative death is mirrored in an apparent apocalypticism in *Continuation* that has never been explored:

Ai, ai, the dissolution of the world

(I used to be concerned about death)—

but the dissolution of the world!

Life a Tunnel of Terror

(I never talk to anyone

about what really concerns me)

The unreality of things

How everything vanishes

Like a vapour

The evil predominant & the good that beckons

Inside the body, the bursting drains

Fat, hanging in flitches

Nodules of pus dry dust (*Continuation 1,* 44)

This passage is a perfect example of Dudek's association of his own death with an apocalyptic terror. It registers a highly polarized moral preoccupation ("The evil predominant & the good that beckons"), and it connects a deteriorating physicality ("Fat, hanging in flitches / nodules of pus / dry dust") with the end of *everything*: the complete "dissolution of the world," into hellish "vapour." The poem, over its length, seems to alternate between continuation and "terrified" fragmentation, between a forward-reaching

rational positivism and an irruptive apocalypticism. It oscillates between, on one hand, a temporally progressive thought like "Sometimes I feel I'm really getting there / the words / little ladders" and, on the other hand, a sudden, desperate, and surprising proclamation like "Are you ready for the destruction of the world?" (*Continuation I,* 37; *Continuation I,* 36). This apocalyptic tenor reveals itself in moments of Dudek's apparent ambivalence about his own quest for "total form" (betraying, again, the poet's fear of the moral meaning of the "total" vision). The apocalyptic overtone is perhaps the most startling element of Dudek's self-portrait in *Continuation.*

Continuation, like *Beautiful Losers,* advocates a discovery of personal "freedom" but cautiously enjoins, "Learn to use your freedom without destroying yourself or the others" (*Continuation I,* 42). This fundamental ethical dictum begs the question of whether the "encyclopedic imagination" always disguises moral preoccupations. One implication of Dudek's pursuit of a sense of perfect (finished) individuality is that such individuality seems to project itself, beyond the poet's control, into an uncomfortable vision of his ultimacy. Though Dudek's writing persona is unfailingly modest and moral (Tony Tremblay identifies Dudek's as a "voice of intellectual integrity" [44]; Bernhard Beutler describes the poet as a "man of human concern," one who cares for "democracy [...] humanity and justice" [70, 72]; and Wynne Francis praises his search for "moral truth" [23]), Dudek at times seems pressed by *Continuation*'s aesthetic into a kind of personal extremism that apparently cannot be helped. In a fascinating moment of reflection on "The Method of Indirection" in his notebooks, Dudek remarks that "It is man's essential nature to mislead, to circumvent, to ensnare. That is why, in all the arts, the real intention is concealed in a technique of indirection—the sublimated art of a beast

of prey" (*Ideas For Poetry* 23). Though Dudek does not specifically apply this remark to his own *Continuation*, his poem's overt method *is* one of indirection, and it would seem at times that Dudek has a latent moral fear of what order, what end, what beast of prey, may be concealed in it.

Dudek's "encyclopedic imagination" ultimately reveals his rich ambivalence about the notion of individuality itself. The poem recognizes and shuns monstrous individuality (denouncing Hitler and Stalin, fanatical ideologies, "the executions, the purges" [*Continuation I,* 19, 38, 63]). At the same time—and this is important—the poet absolutely believes in the individual as a source of moral and aesthetic judgment and as an entity to which "the real" adheres. His notorious criticisms of the global visions of both Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye express the concern that theirs are "total" visions that fail to come to terms with any single mind. Frye's effort to articulate a time-transcending "central myth" and McLuhan's preoccupation with the "cascading effects of media on the crowd rather than the individual" are both collective visions that fail to account adequately for the individual (Dudek, "Frye's Untenable Position" 26; Tremblay, "Unrepentant" 136). These visions, then, may be examples of the "spurious universality" that Dudek identifies in "Art as Subjective Vision"—instances where the thinker, in speaking for everyone, seems to speak for no one. But although Dudek responds to these concerns with a vision that is thoroughly grounded in a single mind and everywhere intensified by the absolutely personal prospect of the poet's death, the poet still cannot avoid universal abstractions like the end of the world. Dudek's instinctive desire for form, control and *integrity* in his poem are understated, and yet so absolute that they can only be realized in the poet's death. The imminence of death gives the poet a sense of

subjective fulfillment, and he extrapolates his own private satisfaction into a universal vision of love and joy ("As *we* shall be in the end" [*Surface* 83, emphasis added]). And yet, the latent end-drivenness of Dudek's continual vision projects the end of *everything*, with universal implications that seem, at times, to be provocatively beyond the poet's control.

Nichol on Dudek / Dudek on Nichol

Despite their notable shared intention to write "a history of [the] present moment" (*Martyrology* 3) in a poem that becomes a life-long work, Louis Dudek and bpNichol are something of a literary odd couple. There have been few critical attempts to bring them into a poetic relationship, especially in light of their differing poetic styles and philosophies of writing. Nonetheless, Robin Blaser brands them "partners in poetic vitality" (8). Trehearne identifies their common project of writing until death and observes that Dudek's promise of "continual" aleatory composition may be yet more random than Nichol's in *The Martyrology*, insofar as Nichol's title at least betrays a "coordinating symbolism" (245). Though there is not, to date, a critical work that makes an extended and direct comparison of these two figures, their works are often *indirectly* compared (or compared alongside other Canadian poets) as part of a larger set of generalizations about the Canadian long poem, a well-theorized genre in Canadian literary criticism. Ann Munton names both Dudek and Nichol in her survey of "poetic diarists" who adopt the persona of the explorer in order to turn private accounts of personal journeys into public reflections (96). Eli Mandel, more to the point of this study, notes that Nichol, Dudek, and other practitioners of the Canadian long poem owe

something of their poetics to the collapse of the traditional epic. Mandel considers that the epic intention to produce a work of cultural definitiveness and exhaustiveness has been split ("since but not because of Milton" [14]) into separate "narrative" and "encyclopedic" strains (14). He argues that when a work appears descriptively "encyclopedic,"[10] it implicitly asks to be reconciled with its lost narrative strain, or, more accurately, it searches for a *new* "structural principle to replace the heroic narrative of choice and action" (14). Here we might speculate that the encounter with death in Dudek's and Nichol's poetry *is* this quasi-narrative principle, insofar as it charts a progress towards an end and provides an impetus for choice. The implicit omnipresence of death in these two long poems turns the poets' experience of lyric solitude into a *heroic* solitude demanding a kind of synthesis of the self, a definite confrontation with "the end."

One of the most compelling reasons for comparing these two poets is that their comments on one another's work reveal a richly *conflicting* sense of whether or not their projects are related. Nichol, for his part, pays tribute to Dudek by quoting Dudek's *Atlantis* in chain 5 of Book 5 of *The Martyrology*[11] (in a passage that confirms Mandel's sense of the "encyclopedic" poet's understated allegiance to epic):

> I want to learn how we can take life seriously,
>
> without afflatus, without rhetoric;
>
> to see something like a natural ritual,
>
> maybe an epic mode unrevealed,
>
> in the everyday round of affairs (Dudek, qtd. in Nichol *Martyrology 5*)

Nichol also co-edited with Frank Davey a 1981 special edition of *Open Letter* devoted to the poetry and criticism of Louis Dudek. In this volume, Nichol asks Dudek for an elucidation of the above passage. In response, Dudek remarks that it is the poet's task to elucidate the *entire* realm of the real, as a form of praise for creation. A missing detail would betray a lack of awareness of the "whole":

> It's a form of the ancient question: 'If God exists, why is there evil in the world?' If you have a total intuition of that kind, why do the details fail you? [...] All reality is not here and now. The potentiality is also real—all that might be possible is also real. That the essence is somehow 'an epic mode' to be poetically extracted, intuited, *created*—is all I can say. ("Questions" 10)

Dudek's response to Nichol, then, captures their shared sense of the spiritual necessity of "encyclopedic" representation. A resolution not to fail in the details testifies to the poet's sense that all of the world's palatable and unpalatable, real and potential details, if properly represented in as great a number as possible, and in an essential way, affirm the "totality" of creation. Such a view certainly informs Nichol's *Martyrology* as well. Nichol fundamentally implies the relatedness of the encyclopedic "list" to the religious "litany"; each is a paradoxically unexclusive "taking of priorities" that Nichol considers "the true and proper province of poetry and prayer" (*Martyrology* 3). Indeed, there are many fruitful similarities between *Continuation* and *The Martyrology*, but they are similarities that Nichol identifies more readily than Dudek does.

Nichol's sense of poetic commonality with Dudek was so strong that he wished Dudek to contribute *directly* to the never completed tenth volume of *The Martyrology.* Nichol began his ultimately nine-volume work in his early twenties and completed the

ninth volume just before his untimely death of cancer at the age of forty-four. Frank Davey and Roy Miki separately recall that, although Nichol died before the creation of *Martyrology 10*, he conceived his future work as a "bard project" (Miki, "TI'ME" 109), a collaboration among poets.[12] The other contributors to *Martyrology 10*, as Nichol had envisioned it, would be the other Canadian poets authoring "continuing" poems: Dudek, Robert Kroetsch (*Field Notes*) and Fred Wah (*The Music at the Heart of Thinking*) (Davey, "Remembering" 115). These poets all conceived "writing as notation for thinking and feeling" (Wah, "Introduction to *Music*" 33); in this, they shared a poetic kinship that fascinated Nichol.

Dudek, on the other hand, found the stylistic differences between his work and Nichol's to be so significant that they overwhelmed his sense that he and Nichol were carrying out similar projects. In the first place, the poetic authorities Nichol invokes in *The Martyrology* are invariably figures with whom Dudek has an intellectual quarrel. Gertrude Stein—*The Martyrology*'s St. Ein—furnishes Nichol's work with its epigraph ("Let me recite what history teaches. History teaches."), and Nichol draws on Stein's work—as well as her highly self-conscious treatment of language—repeatedly. *The Martyrology* is cryptic, playful, elliptical, expressively concrete. But to Dudek, "Gertrude Stein made experiments that went completely askew; they went into complete nonsense, I think, and became irritating failures in what was, at the beginning, a very real search for the essential rhythm that belongs to one's individuality and being [...] [T]hat's what I find in Nichol and [bill] bissett, I don't find aesthetic success [...]" (qtd. in Darling 6).

Thus, although both Dudek and Nichol seek to create poetry out of the "essential rhythm[s]" of their minds, the *concept* of "mind," to Dudek, refers more strictly to the active consciousness; poetry, accordingly, means artful ideation in language. Dudek tends to eschew any use of language that "stress[es] the surface properties of art" (Davey, "Functional" 28). On the other hand, *The Martyrology* calls attention to words and letters as physical objects, and deploys language in such a way that a "'non-rational proliferation of meanings,'" and even an element of "'unreadability,'" exist alongside those meanings which are intended by the author, in keeping with the esotericism and cryptic quality built into sacred texts (McCaffery, qtd. in Billingham 100).[13] Whereas *The Martyrology*'s concrete wordplay reveals the profound influences of dada and surrealism, Dudek impatiently brands surrealism "the stuff of subconscious regurgitation" ("Questions" 23), a view that reflects his regard for poetry as a device of sense-making. Although Dudek himself, at an earlier stage in his career, experimented on occasion with concrete poetry, and although he observes that his magazine of the late fifties and early sixties, *Delta*, encouraged such exploration, he also says that "Nichol and [bill] bissett and the other concrete poetry experimentalists seem doubtful to me" (qtd. in Darling 5). Dudek conservatively contends that "the plain synonym for deconstruction is destruction" (qtd. in Hutchman 166), and complains that Nichol's poetry is so determined to find meaning in the simple physicality of words—their sounds and visual appearances—that one can't *read* his poetry aloud; one can only look at it ("Whatever Happened to Poetry" 234). Nichol and Steve McCaffery object, in an interview with Dudek, to Dudek's contention that their verse "follows a line of simplification and regression" away from meaning: a progress whose end stage, in Dudek's view, is barbarism.[14] Dudek responds, "Don't

forget I want a *poem* to result. Poetry that merely investigates the nature of reality, or the human psyche, or the great mysteries of art—*at the expense of poetry*—is as bad as science that pursues genetic engineering, atomic power, chemical-food research or pure knowledge at the expense of life" ("Questions" 12). In this analogy, Dudek goes so far as to suggest a moral as well as an aesthetic shortcoming in an extremely self-conscious (and "superficial") treatment of language, while Nichol affirms that "the surface is where the depth is" (qtd. in Miki, "Lang" 80).

Another poetic influence that causes Nichol's aesthetic to diverge significantly from Dudek's, perhaps fatally for Dudek's sense of an artistic sympathy for Nichol, is that of Charles Olson and the Black Mountain school. Although both Dudek and Nichol write in what could be described as a "proprioceptive" verse based on the intimate movements of their own perceptions (Davey, *Louis Dudek* 63), Dudek is, for his part, at pains to differentiate his poetics from Olson's. Olson's "Projective Verse" (1950) describes poetry as an extension of the body, in which the poet's own breath is both the animating force of the poem and the determinant of its line-arrangements. Dudek's rebuttal is unreserved:

> You can take a full breath and talk a whole paragraph with it. There is no more sense to writing with the breath, as form and rhythm, than in playing the accordion with the air you have pulled into it. Rhythm and phrasing, in poetry and music, are something else entirely; something to do with emotional impulses, pulsations of affect, not breath. Olson's notion that 'the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes exactly the breath, the pauses'—produced in Canada, rather oddly, a poetry of quick staccato fragmented

> lines, like a dog's breathing, rather than the long sustained lines of Walt Whitman or Allen Ginsberg. ("Black Mountain" 45)

Dudek's construal of the formal impetus of poetry as "pulsations of affect, *not* breath" clearly reflects the aesthetic of Pound, not Olson. Pound's "absolute rhythm" describes the intellect's *interpretation of* the life of the body and its rhythms. Pound's rhythm, like Dudek's, "corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed" (Pound, qtd. in Tallman 160). Emotion "*monitor[s]*" the body's rhythm: the breath and the heart (Tallman 162, emphasis added).

bpNichol's poetry, on the other hand, is *directly* attuned to the life of the body, moving as the poet draws breath, and explicitly "notated" in terms of breath and voice: "what rules divide the line is / that way of breathing takes everything inside" (*sic*) (*Martyrology* 2). It is hard to miss the centrality of "breath" in *Martyrology* as a formal and thematic principle, linked as it is to (divine) inspiration, and connecting, in Smaro Kamboureli's words, "speech, logos, spirit, pneuma" (154). Part of *The Martyrology's* project of realizing the connectedness of everything is to link the physical pulsations of the body to the "vibratory axis of the universe" (Ondaatje, "Sons"). Thus, Nichol *is* "playing the accordion" with his body (Dudek, "Black Mountain" 45), as he strives to "become a master of as many systems of perception as possible" (Ondaatje, "Sons"). Many commentators remark on Nichol's dedication of the poem to the Hopi figure Palongawhoya, whose job it was to draw breath and use his voice "in praise of the Creator," making "joyful sound" and uniting all creation (Niechoda, *Sourcery* 46). In addition, Niechoda and Billingham both remark at some length on the influence of Olson on Nichol (*Sourcery* 10-11; 24ff). Poet Dennis Lee notes the ubiquity of Olson's theory

and verse to Canadian writers of his (and Nichol's) generation, and contends that he and his peers "had to spend nights on Black Mountain" and learn to cultivate a "hard-edged *extremis*" (xix). A note to *Further*, Nichol's abandoned book of saints (1970), reads: "today I heard Olson / had died late January to you MISTER Olson love" ("Scattered" 26).

Despite their different poetics, it remains germane that Dudek and Nichol *acknowledge* one another directly in their long poems. Aside from Nichol's quotation of *Atlantis* in *The Martyrology*, Dudek mentions Nichol in *Continuation II*, seeming to imply that Nichol is an undervalued presence in Canadian literature and paying Nichol the homage of a pun: "But in Canada's hot house literature, / who's to count Bowering's borrowings? / Or bp's nickles?" (*Continuation II*, 44). And however Dudek's deployment of language differs from Nichol's, Dudek's absolute conviction that "Language is the great saving poem, always being written" (qtd. in Livesay 28) beautifully coincides with Nichol's portrayal of words as saints: exemplary, saving figures. Nichol peoples his *Martyrology* with saints punningly created out of words beginning with "st-": St. Orm, St. Rain, St. And, St. Rand, St. Rike, St. Ranglehold, St. Ress, St. Rych Nine, St. Alwart and so forth. Nichol remarks in his work that "to the poet, every word in the language is a saint who continually intervenes between him and the world of sense" (*Martyrology* 2). As if answering Dudek's portrait of language as a single, ongoing, miraculously encompassing poem, Nichol quotes Jean Cocteau in the prefatory pages of *Martyrology 5*: "The greatest literary masterpiece is no more than an alphabet in disorder." This common emphasis on the *redemptive* possibility of language

is especially potent within their shared poetic ambition of writing poetry as a response to the prospect of death.

"He Meaned a Lot / & Then He Died": bpNichol's *Martyrology*

bpNichol's *Martyrology* (1967-1988) attempts to fathom, over the course of its nine volumes, the depth of its speaker's solitude and the extent of his desire for connection. A long, melancholy articulation expressing the speaker's separateness from a sometimes sacral, sometimes sexual "other," *The Martyrology* is a work of inexhaustible and immediate longing: "I throw up these poems / out of the moment of the soul's searching" ("The Sorrows of St. Orm," *Martyrology 1*). The poem constantly bemoans its lack of structural and subjective unity, offering the "encyclopedic" lament that "always you are conscious the world is not encompassed" ("Friends As Footnotes," *Martyrology 2*). Like Dudek's *Continuation*, *The Martyrology* is a sustained poem of personal meditation that, though it is written over many years, nonetheless figures the speaker as tragically discontinuous. Nichol subsumes his personality into a succession of various figures that make brief, quasi-narrative appearances, particularly the saints of (predominantly) Books 1 and 2. Beginning as an act of veneration to the alphabet itself, the poem punningly evokes its pantheon of "st"-word saints. Nichol places special emphasis on the life of St. And, fated to an interminable life of mediocre circus performance, and St. Reat, whose nominal pun is not immediately obvious because Nichol discovered him "lurking in the corners of language" (Scobie, *What History Teaches* 111) as an intimate familiar of language and poetry themselves.[15] Every saint is, in his own manner, a stranger or (therefore) "ranger saint": a permanent exile. Each is,

like bpNichol, a denizen of the "rim worlds," on a quest for breath, voice, connection, unspecified atonement, and, finally, a restoration to some "real" presence or homecoming through articulation.

Such quests are endless, as Nichol abundantly demonstrates, and as critics frequently note. The poem's claims to "encyclopedism" are many, and have been generally well-observed. Stephen Scobie likens the work to "those vast, compulsive, list-making poems" born out of the Imagist aesthetic (*What History Teaches* 108); Frank Davey brands it a "huge, obsessively continuing poem" ("Remembering" 113) and Roy Miki notes Nichol's single-minded "preoccupation" with "writ[ing] a long and all-encompassing work" (intro to *Tracing* 11). The poem's exhaustive quality reflects the poet's desire to plumb his own subjectivity, but also his need to come to grips with some idea of universality, collectivity, love and citizenship. *The Martyrology* intertextually enfolds many other writings and quests after the nature of the first civilization (drawing on Gilgamesh's journey to Dilmun) and the lost possibility of a universal language (after Babel). Billingham locates in the work the "encyclopedist"[16] impulse of the great modernist novels (specifically Joyce's *Ulysses,* similarly concerned with the personal and collective "map") (15), though Billingham argues (in a vein contrary to mine) that over time Nichol "bec[omes] less troubled by" the work's demanding scope and relinquishes the notion that the work should achieve some kind of encompassing totality (16).

The Martyrology's cryptic use of language makes the work still more impossibly expansive. Nichol's determination to be "led by language" (qtd. in Miki, "TI'ME" 100-1) in the writing of his poem undermines even the shaping force of the poet's own intentions, and attempts to figure language as a plane of infinite surprise and unlimited

possibility. *The Martyrology*'s saints—as saint-figures but more importantly as *words*—are charged with suggesting that there is a superabundance of meaning in the world, and that they themselves are the very system of that meaning.[17] The poet gives himself up to the hidden properties of language in order to diversif[y]" his perception and thus to make him as receptive as possible to the mind and being of the beloved "other" (Nichol, *Meanwhile* 18). In Nichol's oft-quoted phrase, the task of the poem is the task of "finding as many exits as possible from the self (language/communication exits) in order to form as many entrances as possible for the other" (Nichol, *Meanwhile* 18). The poem's attempt at an encyclopedic scope and its attention to the infinite possibilities of language everywhere reflect the essential loneliness of the self and its (unconsummated) desire for connection.

But, as in all "encyclopedic" texts, the poet fears that the point of greatest compass and perceptual "diversification" (and thus the point of greatest receptivity to the other) is the point where self and meaning collapse and communication actually becomes impossible. Nichol frequently articulates the concern that his dense and esoteric poetics compromise the poem's ability to mean at all, or to be understood as something other than "useless catalogues of sins & longings" (*Martyrology 4*). When Nichol takes note of his poem's burgeoning "lists of images [and] facts" and wonders, "what can I offer the world as real?" (*Martyrology 3*), he expresses the typical concern of the encyclopedic artist that the mass of presentation that is meant to *approximate* the very life of his mind actually forbids an intrinsically lively self-portrait.

Like Dudek's *Continuation*, *The Martyrology* increasingly demonstrates the pressure of the poet's mortality on his "encyclopedic" poetics. In the end, the poet is

compelled to share the destiny of *The Martyrology's* saints, who "[...] come down to / their mortality" (*Martyrology* 4) in descending to the earth from "cloud-town," their fabled home; so, too, does Nichol come down to his mortality in the writing of *The Martyrology*. As Nichol's life in poetry cedes to the biographical exigencies of his "real" life (for example, his submission to medical procedure, his *reading* of his own potential not-being in the descriptively graphic "X // ray" ["body paranoia: initial fugue" *gIFTS*]), the poet writes with an eye on the fact that "outside these books" there exists "that life" that has determined them (dedication, *gIFTS*). His evident delight in the unlimited free play of language cedes to the biographical, personal necessity of totalization. Martz's assertion that the meditative poem must ultimately "include the universe" through a reconciliation of poet and persona (31) is reflected in *The Martyrology's* last book, the posthumously published *gIFTS: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&*.[18] In the first six books of *The Martyrology*, Nichol places a sustained emphasis on the *painfulness* of "continuation," meaning both the work's apparently at times perverse self-perpetuation, and also the self's sometimes aimless persistence in time. The self's continuation is, in these books, overlaid by a sense of loneliness and self-alienation; these effects and the difficulty of achieving subjective *satisfaction* establish the interconnectedness of the text's "encyclopedic" nature and the problem of adequate self-representation. Nichol's seventh volume (*gIFTS: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&*) does not endeavour to establish a definitive *end* for *The Martyrology* (the titular ampersand alone implies its sustained textual "continuity"), but its increasingly weighty autobiographical gestures illustrate the subjective requirement for a sense of closural felicity (akin to Dudek's) through some act of self-recognition.

gIFTS does not *resolve* the work's "encyclopedism" but indisputably changes its quality. The first six books continue with respect to an unapproachable "other." *gIFTS* figures the elusive "other," increasingly, as the autobiographical self, the original mind that generates the objectified and represented version of itself. Thus *gIFTS* moves the obsessive horizon of the "unrepresentable" from an external point (i.e., "the other"; "the world"; "the past"; "the future") to an internal point ("the self"; "the present"). *gIFTS* reconceives the dominant desire for *inter*connection (in the previous books) as the desire for self-integration. The *Martyrology* is initially a work in which the poet feels tragically aimless, incomplete and "continual," moving towards some other or some end he cannot have; he inhabits an eternal present tense whose aims, ends, and origins he cannot quite glimpse. In *gIFTS,* though, his condition is quite the opposite: he is no longer *at liberty* to "occupy" his present because his awareness of his end has become profound and his self-regard has taken on an almost helplessly transcendental quality. He experiences himself in the text as a living anachronism who *is* ended, and who *is* "other," a shift in condition that changes the *source* and nature of the work's "encyclopedism," intensifying it without resolving it. The "encyclopedic" continuation of the early books cedes to the equally "encyclopedic" self-reflexivity of *gIFTS.* Though the latter form of textual repleteness still does nothing to resolve the work, it gives the poet an occasion for self-regard, which does move the work closer to subjective, if not to formal, closure.

The idea that the poet possesses a "true" identity that will need to be encountered at some future point is (at first unwittingly) reflected in the mythology of the saints, and the fact of their own assumed identities. Nichol's saints archetypally descend from an immortal "otherworld" to a finite, human existence involving provisional identities and

adoptive homes. The story of St. Reat's arrival from Cloud-Town, for example, reads much like Superman's childhood (Burnham 41) and introduces the poem's concern for the (possibly irrecoverable) "real" identity:

> *When saint reat took the trail from cloud-town to earth he was still a child &, in the first town he came to, found a family that adopted him. It was less than a year before the details of his life in cloud-town became so vague they were virtually forgotten.*
>
> from "The Great Migration" THE FOLK TALES OF THE SAINTS
>
> (*Martyrology* 2; above citation is given in Nichol's text)

In this passage, the superhero-saint is a kind of exemplary individual (worthy of remembrance in the faux-document "The Folk Tales of the Saints"); his life is lived in a kind of *absolute* present whose origins and ends are "virtually forgotten." Over the course of the first books of *The Martyrology*, the poetic speaker similarly experiences himself as *present* in his poem. The full reality of that presence, however, is somewhat compromised by its lack of a confirming response from the poem's sacral/sexual addressee, and its relation to vague origins and ends that the poet cannot satisfactorily intuit, namely his birth and death, the source and terminus of his "real" self. The poem begins *in medias res* and unfolds as an eternal "mid-initial" event (*Martyrology 3*), a continuation in need of some meaningful frame to give it significance. The undiscovered "real" self, however, exerts a certain pressure on the poem, and the poet cannot rest in his assumed identities.

On one hand, the poet declares an open allegiance to Gertrude Stein's (cubist) notion that a person is an entity, *not* an identity. (In other words, a person is a

consciousness whose coherence is only determined in *each instant* and in the very act of self-creation, not necessarily integrally *over time*).[19] On the other hand, Nichol also seems to crave some assurance that his identity will be somehow consummated, or, in other words, made meaningful in relation to birth or death, the poem's double obsession. As Dudek does in *Continuation*, Nichol *overtly* celebrates his own discontinuity, his rebirth in each instant, and yet he seems to crave a vision of himself as "complete" or "finished," just as he might crave the aesthetic satisfaction of the completion of his work. When all the saints suddenly die in Book 2, and yet the work fails to conclude, the poet experiences a dramatic despair, as if the poem's *requirement* for closure were profound and surprisingly personal, insatiable in terms of the life and death of its characters.

The speaker of *The Martyrology* is tormented by his pursuit of the inclusive closure the poem cannot accomplish. And yet, to complete the poem or to bring the speaker to satisfaction would rob the poem of its *immediate* "life" and its most valued aesthetic/moral attitude: that of a perpetual receptivity to the other. This receptivity is the source of Nichol's high—even extreme—valuation of the present and of presence. Nichol appears to assess his poetic and personal possibilities—a meaning-conferring closure on one hand and a responsive, revelatory openness on the other—with perfect ambivalence. "[...] [On the one hand," writes Nichol, "I love and embrace the fact that it doesn't end. On the other hand, I do keep issuing these statements saying it's over. As a totally subjective experience, I find writing to be a tension between the sheer delight of writing and [...] an almost unbearable agony about the fact that it's still going on" ("Syntax" 295). But since openness is something the poem *can* achieve and closure is

something it apparently cannot, closure becomes the poet's fixation, the strong emotional priority; thus, the poem actively and anxiously courts its own limits.

Like *Continuation*, *The Martyrology* appears to be consciously and aesthetically disposed towards openness while subtly and intuitively yearning for closure. Though *The Martyrology* presents itself as a paean to the infinite play of meaning, the poet *fundamentally* construes it as a "song to carry him thru / to the end" (*Martyrology 1*). "The end" remains outside the poem as the *Martyrology's* anticipated and obsessive limit. It is the moment of reconciliation with the (symbolic) father, representing the sovereign sense of identity and meaning. Nichol writes that "[he] who pursues his father *to the end* / finds him again" (*Martyrology* 3, emphasis added). The poet's overwhelming desire to close his poem is revealed in statements such as, "I wish this poem would end" ("Clouds," *Martyrology 2*), and in the tormented phrase, "I am afraid of writing something that does not end" (*Martyrology 3*).

The idea that his work would need to close through the advent of his death could hardly have been on Nichol's mind when he published the first book of *The Martyrology* precociously at twenty-three. The poem treats death and "the end," in its early volumes, as important and frequently recurring *tropes* but, obviously, not as pressing biographical facts. Whereas Dudek intended and wrote *Continuation* as a long, leisurely, encompassing final work, Nichol only *eventually* had to confront the fact that *The Martyrology* had become a "life-long poem" that "could end in any moment [...] It could end either because I die, or it could just end because it ends" (Nichol, qtd. in Multineddu 9, 22). Nichol's frustrated desire to finish *The Martyrology* is by now a well-known part of the history of the work's composition, with the poem's continuation thwarting the

possibility of "[...] the whole thing ended / as intended" ("Talking about Strawberries All of the Time," *gIFTS*). Smaro Kamboureli, citing Scobie, Kroetsch and Mandel, refers to *The Martyrology's* status as, in Mandel's doubly punning phrase, a "life sentence with an ever-present chance of 'parole'" (147). Miki and Davey both recall the number of times Nichol thought the work was behind him, and certainly *The Martyrology* itself is brimming with premature announcements of its own completion. Book 2 includes an "Afterword." Book 4 ends with the phrase "that is all I have to say," a terminal gesture no more conclusive than Dudek's not-so-final "final word." The line-drawn self-portrait and date captions with which Nichol ends each book give the impression of "tombstone engravings" to commentator Irene Niechoda (*Sourcery* 186), and yet the books continue. Book 5 announces "THE END" in block capitals in its 8th "chain" of composition (which could not definitely be "THE END" in any case, because Nichol intended the compositional "chains" of Book 5 to be read in any order, as a "shuffle-text"). After Book 5, Nichol tried not just to conclude but to disown *The Martyrology*, as Scobie reveals:

> Nichol proclaimed not only that *The Martyrology* was finished, but that it belonged to a whole division of his work, 'The Books of the Dead,' from which he was now prepared to move to 'The Books of the Living.' But soon afterwards, he had to admit that the first 'Books of the Living' were in fact Book 6 of *The Martyrology*, keeping on going in spite of its author. (*What History Teaches* 106)

In *gIFTS: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&*, Nichol announces not only the death of his poem but the entire death of poetry: "NOW THIS IS THE DEATH OF POETRY. // no—I have already said the poem is dead—dead beyond hope beyond recall—dead dead dead"

("Scraptures 7th sequence," *gIFTS*). But again, the form of the poem defeats Nichol's desperate closural announcement; not only does Nichol discover that he cannot write the death of poetry *in poetry*, there also exists the mitigating element that the announcement is given in a moment of self-quotation, which plainly reveals that the poem *has continued*, indeed years beyond the announcement of its end. Nichol's actual construal of his own death as a principle for ending the perversely ongoing poem occurred at a late stage. By *Martyrology 6*, Nichol finally began to consider the work a "life-long poem" (Davey, "Remembering" 113) and in the process of authoring *gIFTS: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&* he was in constant pain from his terminal cancer (Miki, "TI'ME" 108). But despite Nichol's late realization that his own death would likely end his poem, *The Martyrology*'s fascination with death is already well established in its first books, dovetailing with the poem's sustained themes of homecoming, ending, and the search for that other personal "limit," the moment and place of origin.

Nichol transforms the work's death-*thematic* into what might speculatively be called death-*consciousness*, particularly in *The Martyrology*'s seventh book (which I will contrast especially with *Martyrology 1*). He compellingly turns the poem's "encyclopedism" into a personal and invested expansion of consciousness. Like Dudek, Nichol repeatedly suggests that the closure of the poem is somehow beyond his authorial power. And, also like Dudek, Nichol dramatizes his *desire* for control over the poem's closure by generating poetic personae who will "die" before the poem finishes. Nichol authors the death(s) of various textual/iterative "I"s in a way that anticipates the finality of his real end. It is not necessary to establish at length that Nichol diffuses his own personality and self-presentation through the figures of the saints, for Nichol criticism has

abundantly addressed the author's illusory and evasive use of the pronoun "I" and his articulation of himself in the guise of "various subjects" (Barbour, *Lyric* 119). The work is what Steve McCaffery calls an "enunciator drama," whose "I" is hypothetical, a speaking position (42). Douglas Barbour, for one, discusses Nichol's assumption of different voices at various levels of authority (such as his "scholar posture" as the figure who quotes literary sources and who documents the lore of the saints' descent from cloud-town) (*Lyric* 119). Nichol is also "Suzette," the young girl whose binder doodles make up a page of *Martyrology* 3 in the iconography of adolescence: cryptic love-lorn initials, little rainbows, quotations from Kahlil Gibran, and so forth. The pose of the tormented youth ironically exemplifies Nichol's own self-dramatizing melancholy, whose expression, like the young girl's, is an uncontrolled outpouring of esoteric signs and figures. The more intimate the anguish, the more language becomes a "mantle that must be assumed" (*Martyrology* 3), and the more the sufferer seems distanced from the core of his grief, the core of his life. By the end of Book 2, all of *The Martyrology's* saints are emphatically "dead dead dead" but the poem continues, indeed cannot stop, for it is an "act of desperation" that cannot be satisfied ("Friends as Footnotes," *Martyrology 2*). After the death of the saints, the poet realizes that "i only stop writing when i cease to flow" ("Friends as Footnotes," *Martyrology 2*); the biographical fact of his own continuation overrides the failed aesthetic "end" that is the death of the saints. Significantly, Book 3, resuming after the saints' deaths, features the first-person speaker driving to Barrie (Ontario), the city that happens to bear the poet's own first name. It is as if the poet is driven by the death of the saints further into the domain of the personal,

and further into the necessity of being "at home" in the word, matching language and identity more absolutely.

As Miki points out, it is Nichol himself who *suffers* the continual writing of the work and who is, indeed, the titular martyr of *The Martyrology* ("TI'ME" 100).[20] There is an important paradox, however, surrounding Nichol's conception of himself in this summative identity, and it is a paradox connected to the poem's inability to end. When Nichol says, in quotation marks, as if eulogizing himself from a transcendent perspective, "'he meaned a lot / & then he died'" (*Martyrology 6*), he charges himself with the two essential functions of the martyr: to die and to mean—and to do both in an exemplary fashion, for others. The achievement of a death charged with universal meaning is the "comprehensive artistry" of the saint (Lingis 78); a martyr's body is the very system of his heightened cosmological awareness, and the spectacle of his suffering and death as an example for others disseminates that abundance of meaning into the world. This dissemination of meaning is possibly the principal gift of *gIFTS*. But the martyr cannot martyr *himself*—and here is the paradox—he must *be* martyred. He must be the *object* of his martyrdom, not its author. The one thing a true martyr cannot do is commit suicide; thus, Nichol cannot commit the literary "suicide" of projecting himself into the saint-figures, writing the deaths of the saints, and then finding those deaths to be adequate in their meaning. The poem's closural failure is a sort of "suicidal" failure for its implied author as well,[21] a trope which the poem employs several times. When Nichol writes, "I wanted to end it," for example, he is speaking authorially about his encyclopedic poem but he is also speaking in a suicidal cliché about his artificial "life" in poetry ("Book of Common Prayer," *Martyrology 2*). By the sacral terms of this text, Nichol can never

legitimately end his life in poetry, and thus, he cannot end the work. For the duration of the poem, Nichol is like the illustrated man hanged by his *ankles* in the graphic frames of *The Martyrology 2,* a figure of self-sacrifice who nonetheless is not immediately poised to die, only to be suspended for a time and to see his "end" helplessly deferred. Only the death that is visited on the author finally *from without*—his natural death—can truly objectify him and consummate his identity as the poem's martyr.[22] To add a nuance to Miki's useful characterization, then, bpNichol is *ultimately* the martyr of *The Martyrology*, but he is intermittently (i.e., in the process of its composition) its *false* martyr. The poem's continuation is an ongoing negotiation with that false martyrdom, just as life itself is a continual, vital contention against inauthenticity.

Though it is St. Reat, questing for the source of breath and voice, who is the obvious artist figure among the saints, Nichol's identification of himself with St. And—"I've looked out your eyes years now Saint And"—particularly emphasizes the martyrdom of continuation, which is the special martyrdom of this text and a source of its "encyclopedic" nature ("The Martyrology of Saint And," *Martyrology 1*). St. And's continuation exemplifies Nichol's early lament about his aimless occupation of the present tense, a lament which will later be transformed (in *gIFTS*) into a lament about the inability to occupy the present tense at all. St. And, doomed to a measureless futurity by his own nominal conjunction "and," is, significantly, "better off dead," for he cannot stop performing, and thus—like the work's implied author—cannot surmount his identity as a performer ("The Martyrology of Saint And," *Marytyrology 1*). St. And's name punningly combines "and" and "stand." In this figure, Nichol explores both the pain of continuation ("and") and the terror of groundless being ("stand"). St. And, a circus

clown, is a figure of dogged, burdensome continuation ("elephants / drag your words / over impossible hills") whose life is a kind of cruel, broken circuit that moves from one temporary big top location to another.[23] St. And's nomadic, episodic life of "bad beginnings" reflects the nature of parataxis (..."and"...) itself. Like a paratactic thought that cannot conclude, Saint And can never establish for himself a sense of real presence; instead, he lives out a long hapless elaboration of his own clownishness and falsity. Billingham, remarking on Jerry Ofo's line drawings of St. And (in which the saint's silhouette appears to disintegrate into dots), claims that Ofo and Nichol portray St. And as a "failed saint of connections" (161). St. And, representing the poet in the fact of his continuation and in the fact of his inexhaustible performance, is unable to *realize* himself with respect to either of two sources of alterity. One such source is the other (the "lady" of the circus); the other is his own end. The broken-up St. And is, for Billingham, literally "dotty," mad, unable to bear meaning; the reader must step in and "connect the dots" him- or herself (161). Certainly Nichol, as the work's author, *also* expresses an insurmountable frustration over the effort of "trying to connect it all" in the "impossible brief perspective of the present," the perspective of the "and" ("Hour 10," *Martyrology 6*). St. And's graphic "dottiness," by this reading, may also imply that he is a living *ellipsis*, an unspecified continuation, a being who simply cannot be represented whole—like Nichol himself.

Nichol calls attention to the fact that St. And, a paratactic creature, somehow cannot become *involved* with others despite his occupation of the supposedly receptive continual present. This failure suggests the solitude of the artist in general and the "encyclopedic" artist in particular. St. And's unsatisfied love affair with the unnamed

"lady" of the circus reflects the fact that no complete consummation is ever within reach of the interminable "and." There is a specifically Petrarchan and courtly overtone to St. And's pursuit of the "lady" (the connotation complements motifs, throughout *Martyrology 1*, from Thomas Wyatt). By drawing on this convention, Nichol calls special attention to the fact that St. And cannot properly *submit* himself to his unattainable love. Indeed, he cannot engage in any of the love-play of dominance, submission, enfolding, possession, or involvement that would be structurally connoted by the sub- and super-ordination of *hypo*taxis. Thus, "The Martyrology of Saint And" develops the auto-eroticism and sexual frustration that are recurrent features of Nichol's *Martyrology* as a whole. The phrase, "Saint And does not amaze," denigrating St. And's circus act, also suggests his broad failure to *involve* the other (here, his audience); the phrase calls attention to And's unenthusiastic but inexhaustible performance, and uses the inherent metaphor of the maze (perhaps a figure for hypotaxis) to suggest St. And's contrary inability to draw others in.

St. And exemplifies the burden of interminable continuation in *The Martyrology's* early books, a source of distress that will be replaced, in *Books 7&,* by the painful *inability* to occupy the present tense. In addition to his exploration of the valences of the word "and," Nichol also exploits the term "stand" in the name of St. And; in this particular bit of wordplay, Nichol suggests his own crisis of "standing," which amounts to a crisis of being. Martin Heidegger, explicating the etymology and grammar of our concept of "being" (and thus revealing, like Nichol himself, a confidence in the hidden and forgotten meanings inherent in words), notes the Greeks' fundamental derivation of the idea of *being* from the idea of *standing*:

> The words *ptosis* and *enklisis* mean falling, tipping, inclining. This implies a deviation from standing upright and straight. But this erect standing-there, coming up (*zum Stande kommen*, coming to stand) and enduring (*im Stand bleiben*, remaining in standing) is what the Greeks understood by being. Yet what thus comes up and becomes intrinsically stable (*ständig*) encounters, freely and spontaneously, the necessity of its limit [...] Coming to stand accordingly means: to achieve a limit for itself, to limit itself. ("On the Grammar and Etymology of the Word Being" 50)

The idea that being itself is a kind of *standing*—the achievement of a self-supporting self-consistency—is suggested throughout "The Martyrology of Saint And" and indeed, throughout *The Martyrology* as a whole. Heidegger's description of how the essent[24] *comes to stand*, asserting its own singularity and its own delimiting internal-external boundary, is repeatedly echoed and frustrated in Nichol's description of St.And and his untethered "tents cast on the sand." St. And's process of discovering his own limits and thus *coming-to-stand* is repeatedly marred by moments of "falling, tipping, inclining" (Heidegger, "Grammar" 50). Everywhere in "The Martyrology of Saint And," "centre poles fall," and Saint And "trips in a circle / on his head." The buffoonish saint repeatedly falls over, inclines, "cannot walk," "rests his head in his hands;" his tents fall down and are torn ("The Martyrology of Saint And," *Martyrology 1*). St. And's marked inability to stand and to "becom[e] intrinsically stable" (Heidegger, "Grammar" 50) reflects Nichol's own broader desire for presence and form, for *being* realized in the light of self-consistency and self-limitation, and not just the aimless continuation sometimes suggested by his "encyclopedic" text.

Though, on one hand, Nichol projects the (encyclopedically generative) conjunction "and" uncontrollably into the future, he also grants St. And a degree of self-reflection and pause, such as he himself has. Importantly, through this small measure of insight into his own condition, St. And becomes not just a performer, but a performer who realizes and acts out his own martyrdom. The language of self-crucifixion emerges when Saint And, unable spontaneously to discover his own limits and "stand" on his own, perversely wishes for an *external* bolster, a cross to bear him. For St. And, "every gesture of his hand / is another nail that has failed / to hold" ("The Martyrology of St. And," *Martyrology 1*). St. And, like the speaker himself, searches for his own "end," and, unable to find it, wills martyrdom upon himself. His assumption of the role of martyr reveals his exaggerated, even dramatic, desire to "end" himself. St. And's voluntary martyrdom is basically untenable, just as the poet's deliberate and *figurative* martyrdom cannot ultimately "hold." For Billingham, "Saint And is the embodiment of willing self-destruction, one who cuts himself off from others out of fear, taking perverse pleasure in his own suffering" (161). And yet, Saint And's (histrionic) desire to "end" himself reflects his (and every being's) natural disposition towards an understanding of his own totality and singularity:

> [...] A fundamental characteristic of the essent is *to telos*, which means not aim or purpose but end. Here 'end' is not meant in a negative sense, as though there were something about it that did not continue, that failed or ceased. End is ending in the sense of fulfilment (*Vollendung*). Limit and end are that wherewith the essent begins to *be*. (Heidegger. "Grammar" 50)

The general *inclination* of Saint And to "stand" and even to "end"—and thus to fulfil himself in the discovery of his own limit—is echoed in the short, important phrase, "and and and // end" ("Clouds," *Martyrology 2*). The fact that the catalogic word "and" can be minutely transformed into an "end" reflects the poem's quest for completion and full identity. The little phrase reveals the death-drivenness and end-drivenness of the "continual" *Martyrology* as a whole; the poem *must* discover its own terminus despite the aims of comprehensive awareness and receptivity that perpetuate its continuation.

The poet's underlying identification with St. And—as a being who helplessly continues despite an inability to grasp the nature of that continuation fully—produces the openness of the text, and the (alternately reassuring and frustrating) guarantee that the poem will carry on beyond the deaths of its personae. The saints are resurrected in various forms, and replaced in later volumes by other, similar textual entities. In Book 5, the various personified streets of Toronto produce "crossings" (a saintly word). Nichol implies that his verbal mapping of the city's intersections is itself a kind of genealogical diagram, like the genealogy of the saints that opened Book 1; the crossing of Spadina and Madison, for example, begets "Dina Madi's son." Civilization is regenerated and metaphorically resurrected in every individual "crossing." Here Nichol implies the absolute interdependence of the labyrinth of consciousness and the labyrinth of culture, and the tendency of each towards perpetuity and further complexity. In Book 6, there are yet more personae, more successions: the giant Buamundus, performing a grail quest across the Canadian shield is followed in his quest by disciples, who will continue his quest and be succeeded themselves. Nichol also depicts an autobiographical series of selves, each of whom occupies one of the twenty-four hours (and twenty-four

corresponding scenes) leading up to his daughter's birth; this is a "dark night of the soul" after which Nichol himself will have been succeeded, in a geneaological sense. This, then, is another perpetuation of the (personal and poetic) "line." Various characters appear, perform their finite role in the *infinite* task of mapping personal and cultural consciousness, and disappear again, to be replaced easily by others.

Books 7& of *The Martyrology* would seem, on the surface, to elaborate yet more emphatically on that sense of succession. The title of the volume is *gIFTS*, in which Nichol, dying, implies that he *gives* ("g") or signs the work absolutely over to the reader, if ("IF") he should die and become the "reversed man" who is, apparently, also a mirrored saint ("TS") ("Scraptures: 17th Sequence," *gIFTS*).[25] In this bequest of the work to the reader, Nichol almost suggests that "author" and "reader" are simply two more personae involved in the absolute perpetuation of the poem, where the reader supplants the author and extends his life. This compact is in keeping with the belief that Nichol shares with friend and frequent collaborator Steve McCaffery, that only the reader gives completion to the text. McCaffery quotes Barthes and then Sartre in observing that "'the work exists only at the level of the reader's capacity'" and that "'to write is to offer your word to others that they may complete it'" (44).

Despite the text's profession of continued "openness" and despite its gesture of self-renewal and continuity in "giving" itself to the reader, the contribution of *gIFTS* to *The Martyrology* is its presentation of a finally *indispensable* "i" who, in his very nature, somehow supersedes the prior personae, and *cannot* be replaced. This is an 'i' who, unlike Adonis (to whom Dudek and Nichol both allude) *must* "die finally" (*Martyrology 4*). The finality of this "end" is implied in the speaker's moving struggle to *understand* it.

Finally, the poem presents an "end" that is so personal that the speaker meets it anxiously and without belief: "uncalm // prehending" (*gIFTS*). Nichol, profoundly divided by the task of comprehending the incomprehensible, frequently refers to himself as "you" in *gIFTS* (for example in "You Too, Nicky") and consciously refers to his use of the second person pronoun as "tracking of such otherness" ("St.Anzas IX"). The long process of reaching out to the other that has animated *The Martyrology* as a whole now extends to that "other" who is Nichol himself. Nichol speaks from the perspective of a self who has *already* ended and is part of the work's fiction, finding himself pensively "caught in the pen's 'I've' mood" ("Assumptions," *gIFTS*). He now finds himself unable to write in the largely forward-reaching and projective manner of the rest of the *Martyrology* (articulated from the perspective of the "and") and is instead bound into an often painful plane of self-reflection.

Nichol anticipates this special, self-reflexive "i"—this final horizon where poet *meets* persona—in *Martyrology 1*, where he surmises that "all questions become rhetorical if the pose holds" (*Martryology 1*). *gIFTS* presents death, finally, as a "pose" that "holds"; death threatens to bind the poet into a finally fixed identity, and yet it is an identity that is so fundamentally unreal to the poet that he meets it incredulously, as if it were not his. The poet is confronting a moment in which he will become finally rhetorical, *only* textual. This strictly rhetorical self, of course, was the poem's opening, indeed its definitive, premise (McCaffery, as we have seen, characterizes the work as an "enunciator drama" [42]). And yet, the *shock* with which Nichol realizes that he is imminently to become a purely textual entity poignantly illustrates the disingenuousness of the idea that he could merely *assume* the perspective of the "i" over the course of a

poem that is so extended in time, and so finally identical with his own life and death. In light of his impending death, the poet *meets* himself in every persona: "the real i ties into faces / and every one of them my own" ("Assumptions," *gIFTS*). The fact that such "faces" are now "realities" ("real i ties") illustrates the binding of the poet to his writing persona. Here Nichol endeavours to achieve, for his poem and in his poem, a subjective sense of satisfaction and closure, though the poem still "continues" in being handed over to the reader and to the reader's infinite task of interpretation.

gIFTS looks different from the other volumes of *The Martyrology* in that its cover portrait of Nichol is a *full* portrait in which both halves of the poet's face are visible (Nichol looks outward to the reader and appears to blow a kiss). The previous books of *The Martyrology* all feature the same portrait of the author, in which Nichol is mostly hidden, surveying the reader coyly with one eye. The turning of the poet's full face is related to his obsession, throughout *gIFTS*, with "facing" himself:

> it is the face
>
> it is the realization of the face
>
> it is the facing
>
> it is the realization of the facing ("Scraptures: 17th Sequence," *gIFTS*)

The "face" is both essential and, by definition, superficial: personal and personative. This passage primarily manages to convey (in the transformation of the noun "face" into a verb) the simple *urgency* of what I have been referring to, following Martz, as the consummation of the poet's identity with the persona's. We might recall, too, that in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, encountering a "face" is the prime instance of

encountering otherness. The face of the other is the very sign of alterity, and instantly requires the self to "[do] justice to [the other's] existence" (13). Nichol, "facing" himself in *gIFTS*, tries to *reconcile* himself with his objectified, "other" self and to do himself such justice.

Nichol's effort to *meet* himself in poetry is ultimately indefinite; it produces both a sense of personal wholeness and a sense of voided identity. This ambiguity is reflected in the (whole and empty) "O" twice articulated in the opening lines of "Scraptures: 17th Sequence," where the "omega" of ending is also a beginning ("the religious man practices reversals // O // O"). The "O" is ambiguously a "whole" and a "hole" (or, as Nichol would say, the "the w hole / into which the world disappears" [*Martyrology* 3]); it is all-encompassing whether it is interpreted as a presence or an absence. The poet is fulfilling himself in "signing off" on his work, but in doing so he is also completing himself disingenuously and anachronistically, as though from a transcendent perspective beyond his own death, as though he were *already* a non-entity. Thus, the "o" could as well be an absence, as implied in the elisions of the phrase "say n't // n't ready // n't ready to die" ("bp: if," *gIFTS*). If the poet's "mid-initial" perpetual presence, or "and"-status, was, in the early books of *The Martyrology*, a helplessly generative state, then the poet's new and provocatively indefinite status in the text is an equally generative paradox of presence *and* absence. Notably, in this apparently personal statement of terror before death ("say n't // n't ready // n't ready to die"), Nichol has still managed to insinuate himself as a *character* in the punning doubleness of "say n't" and "saint," as though Nichol were now "Saint Ready To Die."

Everywhere in *gIFTS*, Nichol makes his personal presence in the text both credible and incredible. Karlyn Koh comments on the title page of *gIFTS*, in which the poet writes his own name horizontally, and turns it into a tidy vertical anagram, as though entering his name into a ledger book, an "initial" act that introduces the sustained themes of "accounting for" and "addressing" himself. Koh explains this name/entry in terms of Derrida's *The Ear of the Other*, a work which takes the Nietzschean view that a "signature" is, during one's lifetime, only a kind of *credit* that one extends to the other, and whose meaning is ultimately deferred. One's name is a promissory note which is not really "made good" until after the signator's death, at which point the full meaning of that signature is finally determined, the identity of the signator complete and resting finally in the full interpretive possession of the other (Koh 77). Nichol certainly seems to bear out this suggestion that his identity is only a *hypothesis* for as long as he lives and writes, as he says to the reader, "it is my sense of self your selves deferred to a better judgement" ("Talking About Strawberries," *gIFTS*); this is one of many ways in which Nichol experiences himself as *both* real and unreal—and as both person and persona—in *gIFTS*.

Koh might have used *The Ear of the Other* also to consider Derrida's fascination with Nietzsche's insertion of a blank leaf into his autobiographical work *Ecce Homo*.[26] The blank leaf implies, in Derrida's words, that "life [is] on the line" and that the autobiographer writes in expectation of his own death and posterity, and thus writes self-consciously from the "limit-position" of the "living dead" (Derrida 57-58). In *gIFTS*, that limit-position or blank state is immediately established as what Nichol calls the "elsewhere event." Nichol introduces *gIFTS* with an illustration borrowed from physicist Stephen Hawking, in which two cones, the point of one meeting the point of the other,

describe the convergence of "absolute past" and "absolute future." It is difficult to tell whether past and present converge to the absolute *realization* of the present, or to the absolute *obliteration* of the present. The present, throughout *gIFTS*, simply seems to be a reflective pivot, a mirroring point. Thus, the "elsewhere event" or present time of *gIFTS*, seems to be empty of *new* experience, but infinitely full of reflection. It seems to be the moment beautifully predicted in *Martyrology* 4, where the "folded [thus reflexive] page" is the new generative principle: "the folded page / writes its way / into the longed-for / beginning" (*Martyrology* 4). In other words, the "encyclopedic" principle of *gIFTS* is no longer the endless projection of the text into the future and towards some other, but the endless space of self-reflection where poet and persona infinitely and indefinitely meet.

In *Martyrology 1*, the poet had written, "I am afraid of writing something that does not end"; by contrast, he writes in *gIFTS* (as if coaching himself, in the ongoing trope of "meeting" himself in poetry), "say you're frightened of the whole thing ending" ("bp: if"). In the early books of *The Martyrology*, Nichol had *struggled* to bring his poem to completion; in *gIFTS,* he seems surprised to realize that language "is not just a surface you can travel on forever" (*gIFTS*) and indeed that language *serves* identity in the end, with some profundity. The poet writes that I was "lead [sic] by the one I did not recognize / deeper into language" ("Assumptions," *gIFTS*), and *gIFTS* suggests the beginning of self-recognition at the moment of leaving the self behind. Part of the book's reflective structure is its incorporation of old writings and its inclusion of new ones that will never be complete in themselves but which are harmoniously "rhymed" with past poems. The 7th book of *The Martyrology* is made up of "Assumptions (A Counting Bk VII 1984-1988)"; "St. Anzas: basis/bases (The Martyrology bk $(10)_8$—1985-1988)";

"Monotones (1967 to 1972)"; and "Scraptures (1965 to 1972)." The volume also includes *Martyrology 8* in loose fly-leaves "interleaved" throughout the text (Book 8 consists of all the leaves entitled "bp: if"); their "interleaving" forms part of the motif of the poet's "leaving." In Niechoda's interpretation, "[the Book 8 pages] will be the first to be lost, [thereby] merg[ing] the process of his writing life with the materiality of the book" ("Gift/Gifts/Giving: An Afterword"), another gesture that makes the book finally identifiable with the biographical life.

The apparent purpose of *gIFTS* is to be a "mirroring" work. In one sense, it shows the poet his own face (finally establishing the indispensable "i," an "i" worthy of, in Theresa Smalec's phrase, "self-mourning" [17]). In another sense, *gIFTS* occasionally appears to be simply interested in generating aesthetic symmetries, as a mirror also does, as part of its ongoing commitment to developing the "surface" properties of language. From its first poem, "read, dear," *gIFTS* offers the reader "mirroring" structures. It exuberantly issues a spate of palindromes ("ma I am / muse sum"; "em it is time emits i time" ["Assumptions: Mid-Initial Event: Two"]); instances of chiasmus ("[...] a wife took me, baby, / took me a wife" ["Assumptions"]), strong caesurae ("bp: if"); and other structures that imply a forwards-backwards symmetry or a line organized in "halves." These *linguistic* "symmetries" reflect the opening illustration of the "elsewhere event," in which two cones meet at a vanishing point.[27] Such mirroring structures suggest that death folds the poet in on himself, makes him finally encounter himself. The july 6 entry of "read, dear" is *entirely* palindromic:

tone not

tune nut

worm row

burrow or rub

mmmmmm hmmmmm

mirror rim

!AHA! ("read, dear," *gIFTS*)

Though this sequence of words may seem somewhat nonsensical in itself, it does reflect certain key themes of the *Martyrology.* The sequence is not only built on the *structural* principle of symmetrical reflection, it is a passage of supreme self-reflexivity. The central, "pivotal" letter of both the affirmative "mmmmm hmmmmmm" and the epiphanic "!AHA!" is "H," well known to be Nichol's favourite letter as it represented "home" to him in his childhood (Nichol grew up in "H-sector" of Winnipeg's Wildwood Park, where all the streets were named for letters) (Nichol, "Narrative in Language" 37). Thus, the axis of reflection is linked to the notion of homecoming, now overlaid with an obvious metaphorical relationship to death. "!AHA!" further recalls, for the reader, the origins of St. Reat ([...] a treat / as treat / has treat // "HA!!!!!!! // St. Reat // AH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!) ("Scraptures 4th sequence," *gIFTS*), which Nichol takes to be a prototypical moment of poetic inspiration. The phrase "mirror rim" may recall the dominant use of the mirror as an image throughout *Martyrology 2*, a glass in which (at that time) the poet persistently failed to recognize himself ("not this self confronts me in

the mirror" [*Martyrology 2*]). As well, "mirror rim" recollects Nichol's sense of occupying the "rim worlds" throughout *Martyrology 1*, ever on some *periphery* of the essential ("pain of reaching beyond touching"). In that book, the poet wistfully gestured to the transcendental possibility of moving beyond the horizon (or "rim") of his immediate presence, beseeching the saints to let him know "if you ever cross over" (*Martyrology 1*). In *gIFTS*, of course, that original sense of immediacy and presence is exactly what has been breached, as the poet has finally moved "BEYOND THE WORD" ("journal entry," *gIFTS*) to occupy a strange, transcendental self-enlarging and self-effacing perspective. Finally, the passage's opening palindrome of "tone not" is a very familiar pairing of words; Nichol puns constantly throughout *The Martyrology* on "tune," "tone," "one," "note," "not," and "net," particularly exploiting the easy transformation of non-being into being ("not" into "one") and vice versa through the poem's verbal and musical "note." His "mid-initial sequence" portrays poetry as "noise" against death: "last note // no t / no e / [...] / no is / e / against the silent sleep" ("Mid-Initial Sequence," *Martyrology* 3). When the "silent sleep" is imminent in Book 7, Nichol's poetry explodes into an infinitely rich plane of self-reflexivity: "out of the centre of any meaning another meaning" ("Moth," *gIFTS*). The poet's extended project of differing and deferring (*Martyrology 1-6*) is supplanted by the project of suggesting an infinite net of correspondences. Whereas continuation was the encyclopedic principle of the first six books, reflexivity is the encyclopedic principle of *gIFTS*.

The "facing" and "mirroring" structures of *gIFTS* perpetuate the "encyclopedic" nature of *The Martyrology* while still helping to grant the poet his *subjective* sense of closure. This volume's "mirroring," admittedly, positions the poet ambiguously on an

unapproachable line of reflection determined by his premature sense of having ended, but it also produces a proliferation of similitudes that reassure the poet and seem to liberate him from his quest for identity. The middle term of the sequence "not thant that" captures the poet's sense of having internalized death—thanatos—despite the phrase's effort to deny it ("St. Anzas," *gIFTS*), and bears out the claim Nichol makes in *Martyrology 2*: "you are the mirror of what you deny" ("Auguries"). But in *gIFTS*, unlike in *Martyrology 2,* the poet paradoxically *recognizes* himself in the mirror of his denials. He recognizes his being in the mirror of his not-being, and finds the experience both integral and ecstatic:

> as sum e-
>
> volves re-
>
> volves re-
>
> sumes a
>
> me's a mesa
>
> over which the dawn breaks
>
> like a line ("Assumptions," *gIFTS*)

The poet reveals the breakdown of what he had, in various guises, "as sum e[d]," and experiences himself, instead "as sum" (here, again, is the "accounting" motif), and specifically as a "sum" that has *come to be* (that which has continually "e-/volve[d]," now reflexively "re-/volve[d]") in the process of writing. "Sum," is, of course, Latin for "I am," and it implies that the poet *is* the sum of his personae; the "muse sum" of his book's personal museum ("Assumptions; Middle-Initial Event: Two"). The "*gIFT*" of the mirror is the gift not just of reflection but of *resemblance*, of things brought into

sudden and surprising affinity, as the poet finally recognizes "*every*" face as his "own" ("Assumptions," emphasis added). Nichol's book, like Dudek, recuperates past and projected selves as a final gesture. Thus, *The Martyrology* concludes with a manifold "sameness": within lines ("me's a mesa"), between personae, and between poems over the course of the poet's career. A 1967 poem from "Monotones," included in *gIFTS*, anticipates the fact that, whether or not the poet specifically reaches his addressee, "the poem ends // all the same" ("Monotones LXV"). The phrase "all the same" is flippant on one level but weighty on another, particularly in the poem's new context in *gIFTS*. It suggests that the closure of the work—achieved through the poet's death—will indeed impart identity, a rich, personal sameness.

The pressure of time itself produces synthesis, form and identity even in this long, fraught, obsessively "continual" work. Just as Dudek comes to rest in the notion that however various and fragmented our experience is, we come to recognize ourselves "[a]s we shall be in the end" (*The Surface of Time* 83), Nichol comes to a similar awareness as he confronts the possibility of not being. In the last volume of *The Martyrology*, the saints are resurrected (in self-quotation and revisitations of old works) and the poet meets them as versions of himself. This identity between the poet and his saints seems to fulfill a promise that the poet made to himself in the midst of *Martyrology 2*, the book that most seems to despair of the prospect of an integrated self:

> St. Reat I will know you when I meet you again
>
> as I must know myself when this life ends.
>
> ("Sons and Divinations," *Martyrology 2*).

The "Encyclopedism" of the Life-Long Poem

Louis Dudek's *Continuation* and bp Nichol's *The Martyrology* are written under the pretext of bearing witness to the life of a mind, and capturing the fluidity of the self as it constitutes itself in time. Necessarily, the poems broach the enormous subjects of any person's most introspective reflections: the immensity of God, the progress of culture as it moves towards unknown ends, the breathtaking complexity of the self, the essential alterity of the other, the aleatory and infinite nature of language and communication. The "life-long" poem defines itself in terms of a closure that can never authentically be represented (the poet's real, biographical death) but remains an intimate necessity of the poem, since the poem seeks to express—encyclopedically—the poet's "complete" subjectivity. The "life-long" poem exhibits a typically "encyclopedic" quality in that the poet is driven to represent his subjectivity comprehensively but feels his very self compromised by the poem's sheer compass and fundamental *inability* to close. The poet's overt intention is to write an open, free-ranging meditation on a range of subjects of personal concern. And yet, the implicit *identification* of the scope of the poem with the scope of the self makes the aesthetic expansiveness of the poem somehow unpalatable to the poet; it fosters a vision of a boundless subjectivity that is intuitively hard for the poet to accept. When the poem begins to exude a subjective anxiety about the limitlessness of the work, then the general thesis of this dissertation is confirmed: that an "encyclopedic" artistic vision *cannot* be identified with a self-concept, despite the artist's declared intentions. The self crave*s* form; if the artwork is *personal,* then the artwork must at some point make concessions to the self's requirement for delineation, and cannot be satisfied in openness and formlessness.

The life-long poem *is* personal mainly because it is explicitly determined by the poet's anticipation of his death, the most personal of all events. (Heidegger, for example, maintains that my death is intimately mine; nobody can die *for* me). Because the anticipation of the poet's real, biographical death inflects the poem at every turn, the poem is particularly form-seeking, though the moment of closure (the death of the poet) is naturally unavailable for representation. The poem stays open, as it must, by means of a series of personae, artistic dissimulations of self. And yet these dissimulations become problematic in their turn, mitigating the poet's desire for authentic self-representation and his impetus to glimpse himself whole. This wholeness is at once an aesthetic requirement of the poem, and a human requirement in the face of death. The poet must write his *presumed* end, expressing a satisfactory vision of himself. The poem stages a reabsorption of the poetic personae; the poet seems to dramatize and accept this integrative gesture *provisionally*, for though it requires a transcendental (and thus fictive) perspective on his own life, it conveys an earned subjective satisfaction about "ending" that finally disperses the anxiety of continuation. The "whole" vision is, then, bound to be as arbitrary and artful as any of the anticipatory closural gestures (realized mainly on the level of persona) that preceded it, but it is *personalized* through the fact that the end of the poet's life is persuasively imminent and subjectively apprehended.

The "life-long poem" insists on and underlines the poet's temporality, and in doing so, brings this study of "the encyclopedic imagination" full circle. In the opening work of this dissertation, Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, it was the *spatiality* of the artist-figure's perceptions that determined the "encyclopedic" quality of his vision. Buckler's David Canaan, in an increasingly disingenuous determination to

transcend time by attempting to take in more percepts than the moment could hold, compromised his sense of time and being by deliberately overwhelming himself with voracious perception. His determination to *use* perception (and later, representation) to suspend time and to avoid a sense of mortality or self-limitation helped him counterfeit an eternal present in which there was no such thing as an incorrigible action; he could always "begin again." Thus, his "encyclopedism" was a device by which he *undermined* death, and compromised his own as well as his future work's integrity. In denying death, he also denied the irrevocable horizon that determines our subjectivity and gives our actions moral meaning (for if we had an infinite span of time in which to revise our actions, there would be no such thing as meaningful choice).

For Dudek, and for Nichol (especially from the point when Nichol determined that his "mid-initial" work *was* a "life-long poem"), death and temporality are indispensable and obsessive features of the work; death is the eventuality that the poets are *always* encountering. This preoccupation with a totality that is always outside the purview of the work complements each poet's desire to achieve a personal, moral integrity. Both Dudek and Nichol seek, at certain points in their poems, to stabilize themselves by discovering and responding to the other's suffering; both commit themselves to the advancement of, in Nichol's words, a "new humanism" (*Meanwhile* 18). In other words, the intentions that shape these poems are in many ways opposite to those exhibited by David Canaan and reflected to an indeterminate degree in Buckler's own novel (prototypically for this study of "the encyclopedic imagination"). The overt purposes of the "life-long poem" are dominantly temporal and moral, not spatial and aesthetic.

But, provocatively, the life-long poem shares the "encyclopedic" qualities of *The Mountain and the Valley* nonetheless. Though the poet does not falsely and designedly inhabit an eternal present as David Canaan wills himself to do, he finds himself problematically bound to it in any case; though he actively courts a limit for the self and for the poem, he cannot achieve it. Similarly, though he means, by the terms of his poem, to be true to himself in poetry, the poem becomes inclusive and extensive by means of poses and personae, producing a disjunctive (even spatialized) self-concept anyway. Though the aims and ends of the artist-figures across the board of this study are not altogether identifiable, it seems that the goal of *radical poetic inclusion* alone produces many of the same effects in the artwork: an alienated speaker who feels excluded from a sense of "real" presence, and an artwork that is fixated on the limits it nonetheless denies (sometimes obliterating the distinction between the "total" and the "infinite" altogether). The life-long poem particularly reflects a remark of Wittgenstein's that Susan Sontag repeats in *Styles of Radical Will*: "Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything that can be said at all can be said clearly. But not everything that can be thought can be said" (Sontag 18). Sontag remarks, "Notice that Wittgenstein, with his scrupulous avoidance of the psychological issue, doesn't ask why, when, and in what circumstances someone would *want* to put into words 'everything that can be thought' (even if he could), or even to utter (whether clearly or not) 'everything that could be said'" (18). The life-long poem, though it does not pretend to be a literal transcription of everything the poet thinks, makes both a formal and a psychological issue of *saying everything* ("taking the time to tell you everything" [*Martyrology* 4, qtd. in Scobie, *What History Teaches* 108]) as it unrolls towards the impossible point where "I have opened

my mouth & / swallowed the whole note of / my longing" ("Monotones" XXVII," *gIFTS*).

Conclusion

The artists and artist protagonists of these six works share an aspiration "to encompass the world / to take it in," and to do so in such a way that the world-representation is still entirely identifiable with the self, the work's focal identity: "no separation no / [...] / I am these words these words say so" (Nichol "untitled poem," *gIFTS*; "song for saint ein 1975," *gIFTS*). The ideal identification of *everything* with the self through a perfectly inclusive representation cannot help but radicalize the artistic personality in thought-provoking ways. The self must be either enlarged or effaced in order to promote a properly comprehensive point of view. We have seen selves minimized through adherence to an aesthetic of impersonality (Page); through the wilful suspension of time and thought (Buckler); through ascetic self-discipline and saintly mortification (Cohen); through an existential encounter with the *via negativa* of formlessness and nothingness (Atwood); through the poetic humility of a poem rendered in "dailiness" (Dudek and Nichol). Likewise, we have noted selves maximized through a conviction in the self's ability to know and demonstrate "what everything was like" (Buckler 254); through its solipsism, but likewise through its mysticism (Page); through its total appetite and all-consuming desire (Cohen), through its capacity for generational and cultural representativeness (Atwood), and through its understanding of *itself*—the first person—as the intuitive basis for universality (Dudek) and divinity (Nichol).

But the self—made receptive either through its minimal or maximal status—cannot *will* itself to realize the "complete gift" of a full understanding and a transparent representation of its own encompassing subjective life (Cohen 128). Though the unrealizability of the utterly inclusive work is obvious to the reader from the outset, the

artist cannot pursue the ideal of the total representation in such a way that he or she is resigned to a limited success or a beautiful failure; nor can he or she be willing to come to rest in paradox. Any such relaxation of the artist's complete commitment to the ideal would threaten the final meaning of the representation. If the work that is motivated by "encyclopedic" intentions manages to resolve itself, it does so through an almost incidental discovery, through the strenuous pursuit of *absolute* values, of what is finally "enough." This is the case of Atwood's narrator Elaine, who, while striving to be "perfect" (124), achieves a vision of her "life entire" and a final self-acceptance (421). Similarly, Dudek's designedly endless ("infinite") poem makes every effort to be open and all-embracing but simply cannot avoid the intuitive totalizing gestures that it finally makes. The poem subtly displaces its aesthetic aims in favour of its biographical ones, and beautifully withdraws from its occasional (and surprising) implication of authoritarian personality and apocalyptic closure in order to recognize the "felicity" of the limited life, and the joy of seeing the self revealed "as [it] shall be in the end" ("Art as Subjective Vision"; "Continuation III," *The Surface of Time* 83). Nichol, too, somewhat redirects his insatiable address to the unknowable other in order to recuperate the "other," instead, as his represented self: " [...] I must know myself when this life ends" (*gIFTS*). Atwood, Nichol, and Dudek between them illustrate how the "limits" of the personality might incidentally be revealed through a converse engagement with the ideas of infinity, nonentity, and otherness. It is similarly true of *The Mountain and the Valley* that Buckler indicates his valuation of limited personality and temporal authenticity by means of David's (damaging) aesthetic repudiation of them. If the artist

relinquishes the "encyclopedic" project, it is because the identification of this project with the self's nature and scope makes it *intuitively* untenable.

Page and Cohen offer us slightly different models of the "resolution" of the encyclopedic ideal, in the sense that both are determined to discover an organizing principle *beyond* the self. (This impulse is somewhat characteristic of Nichol as well, though the prospect of his premature death also seems to produce a late impulse toward self-recognition in *gIFTS*). For Page and Cohen, as for the others, the artistic aim of including everything poses a terrible challenge to the self's coherence and is pursued profoundly in tension with the self's own requirement for limitation. But Page and Cohen are more inclined than the others to try to resolve this tension in the direction of the *renunciation* of selfhood. In *Beautiful Losers,* each protagonist's individuality becomes miraculously eradicated as the various personages merge and become purified in the absolving fire of the "Clear Light" (257). On one level, Cohen suggests that a vision of an utterly incorporated world is a politically dangerous and aesthetically unmanageable ideal when it is deployed wilfully. But Cohen's novel also leaves the possibility intact that the world *is* organized as one body by an impersonal creative power capable of producing a human "unison," as in the novel's final miracle (252). Similarly, Page's mid-career withdrawal from poetry (and from poetry's apparent commitment of her to the "tyranny of subjectivity") indicates a desire to retreat from and even disavow her idiosyncratic vision in favor of the creation that contains *her* ("Questions and Images" 216).

Though poetry and prose fiction have unique modes available to them for the expression of the "encyclopedic imagination, the "encyclopedic imagination" seems to

demand (for its most powerful expression) a hybridization of forms. Novelistic language, though obviously very versatile, is "prosaic" by default, whereas poetry implies (similarly by default) that its particulars are overlaid by affect or bound into numinous relationships. Thus, the novel may easily accommodate disaffected and catalogic narration (as Atwood's Elaine's sometimes is). But if those novelistic particulars should become less prosaic and more poetic or ecstatic (as in Buckler's novel or still more notably, in Cohen's), then the author may exploit the effect of an overdetermined language that is obtrusive in its very poeticism. The work's particulars stand out as being deliberately overextended, expressively taxing the limits of the medium and enacting an "encyclopedic" strain. Conversely, one way in which Dudek's poetic self-expression signals its "encyclopedism" is by incorporating a great deal of *prosaic* material and suggesting a surfeit of pure *information* that the poem struggles to assimilate and render poetic. As well, both *Continuation* and *The Martyrology* deliberately deny the principle of poetic (and particularly lyric) condensation by deliberately "encyclopedically" unrolling against the backdrop of time, thus claiming a narrative property for themselves, and again interrogating the limits of form. Each artist develops the "encyclopedic" vision to the full capacity of his or her respective form, but, more to the point, indicates the formal strain that "encyclopedism" produces.

The contradictory and sometimes self-defeating nature of the "encyclopedic imagination," which demands an identification of the limited self with the unlimited work, seems frequently to produce self-division and doubling. In particular, the "encyclopedic" artist's nature is often illuminated through a *charismatic* double who, by contrast to the diffuse personality of the "encyclopedic" artist, is in easy command of his

or her experience. The charismatic's particular gift is to find a source of authority in the self, which calls attention to the "encyclopedic" artist's inability to do so. Instead, the "encyclopedic" artist endlessly seeks his or her authority elsewhere or invests it in the impossible aesthetic achievement, so that the sense of having mastery over experience is always deferred (and thus, so is the satisfactory sense of self). Therefore, the double appears to be joyful[1] where the "encyclopedic" artist is perpetually incomplete and miserable. Buckler's David is so envious of his friend Toby's perceived "fulfil[ment]" that he constructs himself as an obvious Toby figure—"Tony"—in his work in progress, "Thanks for Listening" (204, 256). Atwood's Elaine is subdued by Cordelia, who, in the manner of all charismatics, has the gift of "linguistic elegance" and "suasion" (Hans 68), whereas Elaine's self-expression is, for a long time, a matter of frustrated objective demonstration. Cohen's "I," likewise, is abject beside "F," a revolutionary and creative personality who bends the world to his will with apparent ease. Atwood's and Cohen's works, of course, finally acknowledge that the "charismatic" may be the flip side of the alienated personality. Both authors show that neither orientation is finally assured of its own sufficiency, and that each, to some degree, yearns for the experience of the other.

Page, Dudek, and Nichol all exhibit a similarly troubled relationship with their poetic personae (or objectified second selves). Their poems are all generative in an embattled attempt to absorb all accessible perspectives, those of real and even imagined others: Dudek's projected critics and interlocutors; Nichol's saints and friends, his reflected self, and "you," the object of his yearning; Page's second-person addressees and intractable "others," such as "After Rain"'s Giovanni. Each work seeks an elusive, greater measure of self-assurance, a broader perspective permitting a broader identity. In

The Martyrology, the taunting of the poet by St. Ranglehold (a most capricious "other") indicates the poet's frustration at his inability to transcend his own "partial" nature and underlines his desire for an inclusive identity. The poet laments "the confusion of partial vision / the agony of half lies / the endless catalogues" (*Martyrology* 3). The poet's catalogic imagination comes from the partiality of selfhood and the perpetual inability to include the other. Dudek, too, desires a "point of view / that includes and transcends" all "special" and "narrow" views, yet is not "vapidly neutral" either (*Continuation I*, 26). Page imagines, throughout *The Hidden Room*, better and fuller perspectives than those she has, and experiments with her own extreme engagement and disengagement throughout the collection. Regardless of the point of view, it appears that "always you are conscious the world is not encompassed" (*Martyrology* 2), and that the quest for a better perspective is never satisfied. It is in the nature of all idealist discourse to yearn for the absolute point of view: "all representations seek confirmation, and all confirmations gesture endlessly towards other proofs from other perspectives. The only satisfactory confirmation comes from a point outside (and encompassing) all known perspective" (Moore 71).

One common implication of the radicalism of this particular artistic disposition is that in aspiring to be absolute, it also aspires to absolution. I suggested in this dissertation's opening remarks that one powerful motivation for the "encyclopedic" artist is the prospect of freeing the self from its tension with the world. The hope of the "encyclopedic" artist for not just a full but an absolving representation is evident in each of the focal texts. Buckler's David Canaan makes clear the relationship between exhaustive representation and "acquittal" from past wrongs when he imagines that his

family, reading his future, "total" work, will realize that he "must have loved them so well, to have known them so thoroughly" (294). The artist's very *thoroughness* is his absolving proposition, as he imagines giving full expression to everything he has denied and withheld in his daily life (for the sake of this ideal representation, ironically). Similarly, Elaine Risley's narration in *Cat's Eye,* spiritualized through its association with the confessional *genre*, has as its end-point the moment when Elaine will be spiritually "whole" and thus free from the burden of demonstration, which she has been meanwhile tendering inexhaustibly against her own "admonish[ment]" (125). In Page, the close association of representational exclusion with personal "guilt" conversely suggests that the all-inclusive representation will mean freedom from personal imperfection. In Cohen and Nichol, the sacral nature of the text and thus its redemptive overtone is obvious, but even in the most worldly of these works—Atwood's and Dudek's—the suggestion of spiritual liberty through the inclusive representation is strong. Such an implication is revealed in Dudek's critical claim that a full command of the "details" of life supports the artist's "total intuition" of God ("Questions" 10). It would seem that the very fullness of the "encyclopedic" artwork, its aspiration to include *everything*, makes it inevitably spiritually instrumental.

This dissertation has focused on the compulsion—even the pathology—of the artistic imagination that cannot stop representing and cannot be satisfied in its own aesthetic acts. We have seen this imagination's involution and morbid introspection; its outward possessiveness and unrelaxed attention; its unallayed agony of inclusion. In fact, it was in each work's painful evidence of the mind's "unquenchable leaven" (Buckler 285) that this lineage of writers suggested itself. But although I have foregrounded the

anxiousness of the all-inclusive imagination as a means of showing "encyclopedism" to be a deeply personal and seriously deployed ideal, it is certainly worth reaffirming that these works are *also* positive examples of passionate extremity in the Canadian artist figure.

Though severe in their commitments to the ideal of the all-inclusive representation, these focal artists and artist figures are also strenuous in their response to experience, and idealist in orientation. This idealism in itself makes the "encyclopedic imagination" worthy of examination, and also makes it desirable to keep this particular grouping of writers visible with respect to one another (despite, for example, the somewhat declining prominence of Buckler in the canon, the persistent underrecognition of Dudek, the increasing emphasis, in recent criticism at least, on Page's more recent and serene, or post-"encyclopedic," poetry). A very different portrait of the Canadian artistic disposition is certainly suggested by this study's small aggregate of perfectionist writers from that which David Stouck describes in his 1972 "Notes on the Canadian Imagination":

> While it is the special function of the [artistic] imagination [in general] to make us more fully aware of life's potentialities, the Canadian imagination has traditionally been obsessed with the limitations rather than the possibilities of human experience. The imagination allows us momentarily to see the world differently, shaped not by economics and politics, but in accordance with man's deepest anxieties and wishes. Most positively it gives us a glimpse of life lived with a sense of greater freedom and a fully expressed individuality, for at the centre of every imaginative response, buried however deeply is a vision of human

> existence liberated erotically. Canadian art, however, seldom directs us to the fulfillment of this vision; rather it accepts life's limitations and finds ascetic pleasure within their circumference. (9)

In Stouck's view, the Canadian imagination is accepting of limitation and welcoming of circumscription, uninclined to seek out the radical fulfillment of the self, unmoved to rise to the imagination's *general* vocation of pursuing freedom and possibility.

It is hard to reconcile Stouck's portrait of the bland and sharply bounded imagination with the six at hand. P.K. Page's imagination is so far from being satisfied with its own limitations that it may be spontaneously *invaded*, as in "Arras," by a figure that suggests that there are always imaginative worlds beyond that of the immediate representation. The lavishly bejewelled and screaming peacock makes palpable the poet's own imaginative distress and aspiration, and hints all the while through its own arresting nature that "when you stop at one thing, you cease to open yourself to the All" (James 300). Further, it is hard not to find at least the *desire* for a "fully expressed individuality" in the radical and eccentric prayer of Cohen's "I" that opened this dissertation. "I" seems to desire a mind co-extensive with God's, and prays that he might *add* to God's already abundant creation with something inimitable, a "[...] Small Perfect Thing Which Will Live In [God's] Morning Like Curious Static Through A President's Elegy. Or A Nude Hunchback Acquiring A Tan On The Crowded Oily Beach" (*Beautiful Losers* 58). Finally, it is impossible to consider that an imagination is "accept[ing of] life's limitations" when it is confident in its ability to "realize the whole content of everything there is" (Buckler 285).

An imagination that strives to encapsulate an "all" is in no way content with its own circumscriptions. Two of these writers (Atwood and Nichol)[2] make a substantial allusion to Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. They wonder what happens when past and future converge, and they meditate in awe on "whether the universe is infinite and unbounded, or infinite but bounded [like an expanding balloon]" (Atwood 220). This latter question, one of the most ambitious avenues of the modern mind's inquiry, is just as provocative in its metaphorical application to the nature of the self and its own curiously expansive, bounded but somehow infinite nature. These six works are insatiable meditations on both the littleness and the grandeur of life: its exquisite particularity, its irrevocable uniqueness, its brevity and its share in eternity. These are imaginations that strive to "get it all in" (Buckler 254) and cannot bear, because of their intense valuation of the sheer repleteness of time and experience, to leave anything out.

ENDNOTES

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

[1] As a note on documentation, I would like to call attention to my slightly different methods of citing P.K. Page, Louis Dudek and bpNichol, whose works, *The Hidden Room, Continuation*, and *The Martyrology,* are each contained in more than one volume. All quotations of Page's poetry are from her two-volume collection *The Hidden Room* unless otherwise indicated. The volume will be cited by the abbreviation *HR*, followed by a volume number and page number, as follows: (*HR* II.162), or, if the name of the poem is not otherwise obvious, as follows: ("Kaleidoscope," *HR* II.162). Whereas the volume numbers of *The Hidden Room* are *not* elements of the collection's title, but rather elements of pagination, the volume numbers of Dudek's *Continuation I* and *Continuation II are* elements of the works' titles. Thus, Dudek's Roman numerals, unlike Page's, will be italicized and the works cited as follows: (*Continuation I,* 20). (I would note here that the separation of the title from the page by a comma contravenes MLA practice, but it seems desirable to punctuate between numbers.) *Continuation* and *The Martyrology* are largely unpunctuated, therefore long offset quotations will generally not end (as might be expected) with a punctuation mark. As well, "Continuation III" will be cited in quotation marks, as it is a fragment contained within two longer works, *The Caged Tiger* and *The Surface of Time*. The volumes of bpNichol's *Martyrology* will be cited with Arabic numerals, as given in Nichol's text. Nichol's *Martyrology* is unpaginated; therefore, I will cite only a volume number and a section title wherever possible, as in the following example: ("Clouds," *Martyrology 2*).

[2] On the "naturalness" of the self's desire for limits, Paul Kerby writes, "we [...] tend also to harbor a firm belief in the unity and coherence of our life, for we generally believe in our identity over time" (16).

[3] Frye means "discontinuous" in the sense of not being patterned or cyclical.

[4] In "Cold Eye and Optic Heart: Marshall McLuhan and Some Canadian Writers," Jones paraphrases Klein in observing that "[i]n our efforts to achieve an "optic heart," we may well end up with a parody of any green inventory" (181); I shall return to this remark in chapter two on P.K. Page. In another essay, "Myth, Frye, and Canadian Writers," Jones again takes a survey that includes Page and Buckler, and alludes to Klein in his comment on Page: "for some years she is silent, preferring to map her own body's chart in a graphic line less prejudiced by analytic reason" (11). Jones's invocation of Klein in both cases shows the ubiquity of Klein's poem and portrays Page and Buckler as inventory-takers. It is also interesting that Jones should group Page and Buckler together in separate surveys that argue their allegiance to *both* Marshall McLuhan and to his frequent intellectual opponent, Northrop Frye. And yet, since McLuhan and Frye each argue for a system of world-connectedness (extensive and perceptual in MacLuhan's case, intensive and mythic in Frye's), this double loyalty is not as unlikely as it may superficially appear.

[5] Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* is an interesting case study in literary "encyclopedism" and has been treated effectively as such not only by Atwood but by Marjorie Garson in a highly relevant 1996 article entitled, "I Would Try to Make Lists': The Catalogue in *Lives of Girls and Women*." Garson suggests that Munro self-consciously exploits the "inefficiency" of lists to communicate "the mass of material

[they] cannot reduce to order" (46-7). Looking back broadly on the history of literary *copia*, Garson describes Munro's deliberate appropriation of the literary list and praises Munro's multifaceted handling of the list's obligation toward preservation as well as its helpless contrary testament to loss and forgetting (46-47). The list presents a metonymic, "horizontal" or contiguous relationship between things, but in doing so it also generates new, and more elusive sets. The list inevitably broadens onto reams of metaphorical, allusive and "vertical" associations that it cannot control (47). For Garson, Munro's use of the list in *Lives of Girls and Women* suggests her interest in various catalogic techniques of both the oral and written traditions, including the epic catalogue (50), the blazon (with its "scopic energy" [53]), and ultimately the (Chaucerian) "legend of good women" (57). Garson extends her definition of the literary list, even, to the texts of mass culture. She refers to Barthes' analysis of the "rhetorical operations of fashion magazines" insofar as they spout a "'profusion of tastes'" in order to proscribe "'a great richness of personality'" (Barthes, qtd. in Garson 50). Elements of Garson's argument predict my own treatment of my various authors. In her attention to the magazine list, Garson points to a catalogic function similar to that of the Eaton's Catalogue in Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. As well, the persistence of lists in the narration of Munro's protagonist Del is a function of Del's "appetite" and "greed[iness]" for life, as it is for Cohen's "F" (56). The list also exhibits a "compulsion to control," and particularly to "conserve" in the face of death (56); we will explore death, similarly, as one motivation informing the encyclopedic poetics of Dudek and Nichol. Garson generally argues that listing techniques in Munro call contrary attention to the ways in which such lists are

inescapably selective. Literary lists gesture to the "abyss" of unmeaning they purport to counter, as well as to the material they cannot include (60).

[6] Ilsetraut Hadot's article "Greek Philosophy and Encyclopedic Knowledge" explores the educational ideals of antiquity insofar as they sought to instill, in each scholar's individual mind, an *entire* body of knowledge, or a general theory that would explain everything. (Such a pursuit of the unity of the sciences is also suggested in Atwood's references, in *Cat's Eye*, to modern physics and the advancement of the Unified Field Theory.) Hadot explains that, for the ancient Greeks and Romans, "complete, encyclopedic instruction" without any disciplinary specialization was meant to be the avenue to ethical living; the *complete* education would lead students to "an untroubled life" and would help them to "find and keep their mental equilibrium" (39). The idea that total knowledge must be the key to happiness and even perfect morality came from the Aristotelian belief that "man's best and happiest life consisted in imitating, insofar as possible, the activity of the Divine Intellect" (39). The "encyclopedic imagination," as we will come to know it, reflects ironically on these ideals: the aspiration to godhead is ethically problematic, and the pursuit of a "total" knowledge is generally not the route to mental "equilibrium," but to utter disequilibrium.

[7] Indeed, every element of Altieri's description of Creeley and his work applies perfectly to Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, which, in being both a work of fiction and a work with strong modernist allegiances, embraces two categories that Altieri's study excludes. Nonetheless, I can appreciate that Altieri's larger purpose is not just to describe this artist-type but to suggest commonalties of poetic technique in his authors, thereby necessitating his particular generational focus.

[8] The careers of Dudek and Page, for example, are both so long that they bridge periods, as reflected in George Hildebrandt's assertion that Dudek's work "must be located [...] at the leading edge of (post)modernity" (8). Critics come down squarely on both sides of the issue of whether Nichol's affinities are mainly modernist or postmodernist, since his *Martyrology* employs techniques that could be attributed to the influence of dada, or, equally plausibly, to the influence of deconstruction. Moreover, his construal of words as "saints" of language has invigorated a debate over whether *The Martyrology* gestures transcendently to a world of essences, or whether it is bound (as it claims to be) to a meaning that lies and multiplies itself on the "surface" of language, which is effectively one distinction between modernist and postmodernist work. Susan Billingham offers an extended, extremely useful treatment of this debate, as does Frank Davey in asking whether Nichol's alphabet is a system of symbols or signs ("Exegesis" 42). Hutcheon has argued for *Beautiful Losers'* status as an "early postmodernis[t]" work (*Canadian Postmodern* 26), and Dragland likewise suggests that it may be the pivotal text in between Canadian modernism and postmodernism (261). Douglas Glover's analysis also puts the text squarely in between movements, but his emphasis is on the way in which the novel is written from a moment of modernist critique (14). There are strong elements of modernism in Atwood's postmodernism, particularly in her occasional obeisance to mythic and romance structures, in her protagonist's search for the *essential* self, and in her aesthetic veneration of the object world. Finally, even Buckler's novel, which seems, aside from Page's early writings, to have the strongest modernist allegiances, shows enough of a postmodernist tendency to allow Marta Dvorak to suggest that it may look immediately forward to postmodernism. It "anticipates the way postmodern art tends to

celebrate diversity yet to seek and disclose hidden or unsuspected analogies, rooted in the apperception of the similar in the Other" (*Ernest Buckler* 232).

[9] Louis Dudek almost exactly echoes Jameson's characterization of art as a "supreme vocation" that enfolds other disciplines (Jameson 80), yet without consigning that function to modernist or postmodernist expression. (Indeed, Dudek testily responds to the constant critical recourse to such frameworks: "We don't need modernism [and] postmodernism [...] at every point to provide our theory of good writing" ["Questions 35].) Dudek writes: "Remember, only poetry attempts the total integration of modern man, the criticism of religion, philosophy, manners, entertainments, politics, the arts, the analysis of our whole civilization and the dangers threatening it, the reconstruction of the very grounds of civilization" ("Introduction to a Course in Modern Poetry" 153).

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

[1] A condensed version of this chapter was published by the same title in *The Canadian Modernists Meet*, edited by Dean Irvine and published by the University of Ottawa Press in 2005.

[2] In foregrounding these phrases, I should like to acknowledge D.O. Spettigue's "The Way It Was," which similarly calls attention to them.

[3] The final indistinguishability of the artist from the landscape is a trope best and most profoundly expressed by A.M. Klein's "Portrait of the Artist as Landscape." Margaret Atwood's *Survival* places Klein and Buckler in a common genealogy of works in which the artist is "buried" in particularity and the figure is indistinguishable from the ground. Her poem "This is a Photograph of Me" is an extension and a revision of this idea.

[4] Willmott's specific discussion of *The Mountain and the Valley*, meanwhile, is slightly farther afield of my own discussion. Willmott explores the "unreal" and thus expressionist world of *The Mountain and the Valley* as a result of the largely unacknowledged imprint of urban consciousness by which David and others evaluate their own reality.

[5] Walter Pater, whose concern for the "whole scope of observation" David Canaan seems to share, would have no objection to David's cultivation of sense-impression at the expense of his manifestation of his individuality. Pater decried the "thick wall of personality" that refines and limits one's contact with the world (248). Pater's prizing of the strictly experiential response to the world (unfiltered by consciousness) anticipates early-modernist impressionism and high-modernist objectivity. Buckler's David Canaan embodies a Pater-esque attitude, but only ironically; we will find that Buckler implicitly calls for the reassertion of the personality, especially as a selective and limiting mechanism.

[6] Trehearne chooses the term *integritas* in consideration of Stephen Dedalus's extrapolations on Aquinas, and evaluation of the image in terms of its *integritas,* its *consonantia* and its *claritas*. Trehearne proposes that we take *integritas* to mean "the limits of reference and structural tension that stabilize a rich crowding of images and make submission to their density a pleasure rather than a frustration" (78).

[7] Quotations from unpublished documents in the Ernest Buckler Papers appear by permission of the author's estate.

[8] Buckler contrasts the moving waters where David is free from self-consciousness with the typically frozen landscapes where David is alienated from or ahead of himself: his

paralysis before the window and its frosty winter scene; his conviction, on the frozen pond, that he will be the "best skater in the world" (67); his death in the snow. Frozenness marks his artifices (in his planned seduction of Effie, David intends to show her where he is "frozen stiff") and also suggests his idealist "glass of the mind" (Bhojwani 116).

[9] Tristram Shandy obsessively "remembers" that at the moment of his conception, his mother sat up in bed and asked his father whether he had remembered to wind the clock. This, for Tristram, was the moment in which his own "animal spirits" were forever dispersed (Watt xiii). The fact that Tristram was conceived in a moment of ruptured spontaneity partially accounts, in his mind, for the inner division that compels him to write his life in place of living it. More to the point, his mother's question represents for Tristram the "unhappy connections" of consciousness: that is, his mother's momentary association of the monthly duties of winding the clock and fulfilling her marital duties (Watt xiii). For Buckler's David, the unlimited enchaining of perceptions (and associations, in the form of visually "glimpsed" memories) similarly illustrates a ridiculously unlimited sense of self.

[10] David Williams, in *Confessional Fictions*, also examines the connection between David's original line of prose ("his brother's face looked struck") and his propensity to guard his own pain as a matter of power and secrecy (163). Williams suggests that David must makes himself into a martyr (who is hurt and will not annul that pain) in order to write. Williams suggests that this self-martyrdom puts David into conflict: "If he writes, his hidden means of control [i.e., secrecy] is exposed; if he plays out his role as martyr, the story cannot be written [...] The pattern of punishing himself to punish others is the

real stigmata of [Buckler's chapter] 'The Scar'" (168). J.A. Wainwright also comments on David's first successful line, and remarks that the "violent twisting by Buckler of the art-catharsis image" predicts the stunting of David's creativity (81).

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

[1] It is difficult to discuss Page's poetic hiatus without some trepidation, particularly since the poet herself denies that the nearly twelve-year period in which she did not publish new work was actually a poetic "silence." Nonetheless, this period is a pivotal point in my characterization of Page as an "encyclopedic" poet whose deeply internalized ideal of poetic inclusiveness demanded, apparently, a period of retreat and psychic adjustment. Page's long break from poetry is striking, not least because it follows the tribute of a Governor-General's award (Canada's highest literary honour) for *The Metal and the Flower* in 1954. After receiving this award, Page accompanied her husband William Arthur Irwin to an ambassadorial post in Brazil and began to cultivate her talent for drawing and painting—beginning, in fact, a second career. The most accepted critical interpretation of this vocational redirection is that Page's mounting dissatisfaction with poetic expression prompted her to seek out different—and purer—forms of self-expression "less prejudiced by analytic reason" than the verbal art (Jones, "Myth" 11). In a recent interview with Christine Wiesenthal (2002), Page remarks that during her time in Brazil, she was merely absorbed in other pursuits, "immersed in a different language," and "trying frantically hard to learn Portuguese" (21). "I was overwhelmed by the world I was in," Page adds, "a totally baroque world in terms of the vegetation, architecture [and] people" (21). But the overwhelming of the poet by the world is quite to the point of

her possession of an "encyclopedic imagination," inescapably attuned to *and responsible for* phenomena. And for the poet to respond with silence or even with a shift in medium shows an attempt to come to terms with this teeming particularity through a re-ordering of the senses, an intimately artistic and perceptual activity that should be—and is—an important part of Page's vocational narrative.

The point of recognizing Page's temporary break from writing is not to denigrate her productivity nor yet to justify the silence by finding "the typical modernist experience of failure" poignantly expressed in it (A. Ross 9). Page's silence is, in my view, one form of the full realization of the "encyclopedic" aesthetic, and it is my contention that when Page emerges from her silence she is no longer an "encyclopedic" artist, though she maintains, as we shall see, the goal of poetic unity. An analogy suggests itself between Page's reflections on her retreat from poetry and Stéphane Mallarmé's essay remarking on his own mid-career silence, "Crise de vers" (a title that indicates a personal crisis as well as a crisis in French poetry in general). The purpose here is not to insist on a shared poetic style, but to discover what the creative personality looks like *in extremis,* disconcerted by the work's failure to respond adequately to everything in the world. In his own hiatus, Mallarmé, believing that "everything exists to end in a Book" (qtd. in Weinfeld xiv), finds himself distressed by the thought that "nothing will remain if it is not given form" (232). This rather special anxiety, which Mallarmé nonetheless supposes is a writer's "ineradicable prejudice" (232), is thoroughly implicit in P.K. Page's poetry as well, at least insofar as it communicates her intention to "embody all" (*HR* I.11). Mallarmé finds that poets are given to a special "idealism" in which art "refuses the natural materials and brutally demands an exact thought to put them in order" (Mallarmé

231). These two poets try to find this "exactness" of thought in the relation of poetry to other forms of expression: the musical "line" in Mallarmé's case (230), and the visual (especially painterly) line in Page's. And just as this exploration convinces Mallarmé of something the verbal art can never convey, namely the "magic" of "proportions" (230), Page feels the invigoration of her poetic spirit in a Mexican church and likewise "wonder[s] if proportion alone might actually alter consciousness" ("Questions and Images" 212). The period of silence, for both poets, then, is a kind of perceptual adventure, and a welcome indulgence of beauty in less familiar forms. The "conjuring" power of beautiful proportion reveals to both poets the possibility of an essential harmony between "the little world," man's symbolic works, and the "great world" of the cosmic order ("Questions and Images" 214). Though a more extensive comparison of the similarity of language in each poet's "crisis" prose is the subject for another inquiry, my point in drawing these initial parallels is to ask how these close similarities of poetic idealism have led to a disparity of critical response. Mallarmé's interpreters find his silence "seminal" and "central" to his overall aesthetic (Lloyd 227), but Page's commentators struggle to acknowledge her silence as a marked and meaningful break, considering it, rather, a "gap" in her creative life, as Wiesenthal observes (23).

[2] The Aleph represents an impossible and unrepresentable (nonetheless represented) simultaneity of experience, an all-inclusive "instant":

> In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them amazed me more than the fact that all of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was

> simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. (Borges 13)

Page makes a second reference to the aleph in "Chinese Boxes" (*HR* I.227). This is a poem in which the poet seeks to "know the order" of things by glimpsing some paradoxical expression of complete order. In doing so, the poet repudiates that *other* way of seeing "the absolute" which is to know it "in emptiness" (*HR* I.227).

[3] The idea that the room is absolute but delimited, and that the poet's perspective is limited but straining to be absolute, accounts for the elusiveness of the room's border. This prefatory tension, so central to Page's *oeuvre* as a whole, perfectly echoes the conundrum that had absorbed Buckler, and which we have already encountered: "the self-conscious being is, of necessity limited, and [...] the absolute being because unlimited, may not be personal" (Buckler, "Progress of Idealism").

[4] We will find that it is typical of the "encyclopedic imagination" to move dialectically between idealism and threat.

[5] Rosemary Sullivan draws the *opposite* conclusion from Page's early work, suggesting that the poet "wants to be more attuned to objective time or history" (35). I would agree that there is a point in Page's career when the poet presses herself to be more engaged with history, but "attune[ment] to objective time" seems to be a significantly separate issue, one that forces a radical depersonalization that rattles the poet in "The Clock of Your Pulse," for example.

[6] In fact, this poem very much predicts Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* in implying that a "fake universal comprehension" can prevent the unguarded perception of the pure *eventfulness* of a history occuring almost miraculously in the "now." In her desire that

we grasp "unhurried history occur[ring] in the 'now'" and the (almost messianic) "great body slip[ping] through the door" (*HR* I.19), Page joins Leonard Cohen in desiring to show us "*how it happens*" in the moment of the "pure event" (*Beautiful Losers* 194, 257).

[7] This five-simile stanza invites a comparison to the still more notoriously image-laden work, "The Stenographers"(1946), in which a monotonous office job traumatically shuttles a group of stenographers into a life of unrestrained fantasy. (The *direction* of self-loss in "The Stenographers" is different—absolutely inward rather than absolutely outward—the effects, though, are similar.) "The Stenographers," like "The Clock of Your Pulse," is overloaded with figures (with multiple vehicles for a single tenor) and driven by a rhythmic insistence; these together suggest *the speaker's* intuitive share of the represented "madness" (*HR* I.103). The dense figuration of "The Stenographers" not only suggests the troubled coherence of the representing personality, it has been perceived by some to threaten the coherence of the poem. John Sutherland suggests that "The Stenographers" "overwhelms by weight of numbers" (107). He implies that the poem is too much of a virtuoso performance and objects that it uses too many images. Although Sutherland remarks that "Miss Page's stanzas [are] crowded with new and exciting pictures," he also finds that the poet is "sidetracked by perspectives which the theme does not suggest" (107-108). But others have observed that the poem's fatiguing movement from one eccentric image to the next reflects Page's powerful insight into her subject. Desmond Pacey writes (in 1952) that "'The Stenographers' is [Page's] best poem for its sympathy and peculiarity" (160), and Constance Rooke praises its "generosity of spirit" ("Chameleon" 179). Brian Trehearne asserts that Page "remains an acute observer, able to spin arcane imagery for the 'madness' she feels in her peers; her

low-key personation is in tension with the poem's accumulative energy. 'The Stenographers' is poised on the edge of incoherence; that is precisely part of its vividness" (83).

[8] It bears remembering that long passages of *The Mountain of the Valley*—those that come up most frequently for stylistic criticism—are also (obtrusively) written in a second-person voice. These are passages that bring Buckler into sympathy with David's effusions without either the full identification of first-person or the full detachment of third-person. The second-person voice in certain poems of Page's, too, makes deliberately awkward the positioning of the speaker with respect to the interlocutor. The second-person voice very swiftly imparts the problem of self-definition that is crucial to "encyclopedism."

[9] In "The Sick," the sick are not elaborate *speakers* as in "If It Were You," but practitioners of a mad, "jumping semaphore" which, much to the same effect, reveals them to be prolific in their cryptic signals (*HR* I.86).

[10] This term is Brian Trehearne's in *The Montreal Forties*, and used with reference not only to Page but also to her peers who demonstrate a dense, post-Imagist poetics.

[11] The perception of birds as "angels of deliverance" in "If It Were You" anticipates Page's use of birds as the audience of her prayer in another garden poem, "After Rain" (1956), and perhaps also the dove that bears the salvational message of the world restored in "Cry Ararat!" Birds are one of Page's most frequently recurring motifs. Their specific association with angels ties them to the "higher faculties of man" that Page, in an interview, says she believes angels represent (Djwa, "Biographical" 49). Page, in the

aforementioned poems and in others, identifies birds with the innocent and accepting self, enlarged by love.

[12] Words like "mosaic," "tracery" and "arabesque," common in Page's poetry, are especially owing to Edgar Allan Poe, whose usage of them implied a strict, aesthetic effacement of the human form (Hoffman 203). The determined superficiality of such patterning reflects Poe's edict that "a poem should have nothing in view but itself" (qtd. in Eliot, "From Poe to Valery" 40). It is precisely the *problem* of "Reflections in a Train Window," though, that the poem "ha[s] nothing in view but itself."

[13] The situation of this poem very much recalls the paralysis of David Canaan before the window in the prologue and epilogue of *The Mountain and the Valley*; Buckler's David looks out onto a perceptually delineated world yet feels the encroachment of a paralyzing nothingness upon himself.

[14] In observing that Page attempts to define or even "make real" the limits of the inner world and the outer one, I would like to acknowledge the argument of S. Namjoshi, whose 1979 article "Double Landscape" discusses the struggle of Page's speaking persona to mediate between a public and a private reality. Namjoshi illustrates that Page reacts against the "isolationist" postures that she dramatizes in many of the poems (24); on some occasions, the poet inserts herself into the poem in the "mediating" role of a gardener or painter (28). Namjoshi's use of the opposite terms "private" and "public" (or sometimes "private" and "external") reflects the article's major emphasis on *social* alienation. The poet's "inability to mediate" means her inability to intervene effectively in the political oppression she sees in the labour-themed poems of her early career, or her inability to conduct herself in the world in a way that is true to her principles ("Election

Day"). Certain of Page's subjects or characters—especially the young—are unable to work out a reasonable relationship to the external world because of parental tyranny, societal notions of social or sexual deviance, or other repressive ideas and structures. Therefore, although Namjoshi's article argues, in a similar vein to my own argument, that "the central tension in P.K. Page's poetry arises from the effort to mediate between the private world and the external one" (21), the article deploys its terms (especially "private" and "external") somewhat differently from my less social and more existential notions of "inner" and "outer" realities. George Woodcock, in a deployment of the terms "inner" and "outer" closer to my own, argues that Page strives, in the manner of the Pre-Raphaelites or of Gerard Manley Hopkins, to create an "outer-inner light" in her poetry ("Light" 100).

[15] Even while apparently *seeking* some form of bravely encompassing self, Page continually reflects upon the poverty of meaning in a world where the self is *too* encompassing. This is a typically twentieth century anti-romantic reaction against the "total self" that helps consolidate Page's modernist sympathies. Brian Trehearne demonstrates that an "accumulative aesthetic" in Page's work of the 1940s and early 1950s emanates, in part, from her faithful adherence to modernist impersonality and her vulnerability to a culture of "authorizing criticism" that reinforced her modernist principles (105). Trehearne explores the efforts of Page and other poets of her generation to discover a principle of coherence for poetry in the wake of "late-Imagist accumulation" (73). He shows that the attempt of poets to adapt the "post-Pound image" to longer poetic forms often produced a highly paratactic poetry. Each individual image, ingeniously conceived and autonomous, could bind itself to other images by a

juxtapositional logic only, not by a lyric energy that would make the poet's "governing consciousness" the visible principle of organization. In other words, the high modernist *im*personality Trehearne describes produces much the same impasse as the problems of identity I have been outlining so far; the self (whether suppressed or over-asserted) simply cannot come to the fore in the poem as an active mechanism of will and selection.

[16] It bears remembering at this point that Buckler's protagonist believed himself to be *in possession* of "secret extra senses" (Buckler, *Mountain* 22).

[17] Douglas Freake and Constance Rooke both document Page's memory of popcorn prizes. These stereooptic toys revealed different parts of a picture when the child removed various filters. (Page first mentions such toys in her essay "Questions and Images" [1969] and interprets them metaphorically. The poet writes that, in life and in art, her "primary concern is to remove the filters" [216].) "Photos of a Salt Mine," of course, anticipates this rhetoric. Page interprets subjectivity itself as a succession of "filters" and "masks" which must be shed. Rooke writes that "[i]n finding consciousness altered we become aware of the previous consciousness as a refractive or distorting filter—a tissue of entrenched attitudes—and of the former self as a kind of mask" ("Chameleon" 173).

[18] There are a number of Page's poems that "break" at their point of greatest visionary inclusion. The mountaintop ecstasy of "T-Bar" (1954) collapses at the peak; there, the skiiers, the formerly ascending "wards of eternity," become spastic, mechanical and separate (*HR* II.37). On a related note, the enlarging radius of *sound* in "The Bands and the Beautiful Children" (1946) collapses as palpably as if it were actually an architectural perimeter, leaving the children "lost" in an "open space" (*HR* II.14). In this latter poem,

the phrase "band breaks" actually seems to suggest a double meaning, a *conceptual* band that breaks at a point of ecstasy, unable to include any more (*HR* II.14).

[19] In "Probationer," the object of visual attention is a person—a nurse—and thus not just an object, but a second subjectivity. The failure of the patient to perceive the nurse *truly* in her independent character anticipates Page's more marked "crisis" poem, "After Rain," whose excluded object is also a person. In both poems, Page registers a dissatisfaction with the self's limited "radius" ("Probationer," *HR* I.99) or "rim" ("After Rain," *HR* II.210), thus employing a specific language of inclusion and exclusion. In this concern with the limits of knowledge and representation, Page illustrates that the elusive nature of objects (or other subjects) threatens both the quality and the comprehensiveness of the representation.

[20] Shelley Hulan, in a not-yet-published article entitled "Canadian Modernism, P.K. Page's 'Arras' and the Idea of the Emotions," also connects Page's employment of the word "classical" in the first line of "Arras" to Hulme's usage of it (352, pagination tentative). Hulan goes on to suggest that the peacock is Romanticism incarnate insofar as it represents the possibility of unrestrained emotion and imaginative flight. Hulan also credits Geoffrey Durant with suggesting an affinity between Hulme and Page in his essay "P.K. Page's 'Portrait of Marina.'"

[21] For clarity, I am referring to the poet as "Page" throughout this anecdote, but in fact she used her married name, P.K. Irwin, throughout her years of diplomatic travel and in her work as a painter.

[22] Travis Lane seems to imply that there has been too much psychologizing of the poet through a study of her poetic personae: "how one chooses to conduct one's poetry is no

sign of how one chooses to conduct one's life" (106). With this point in mind, I think the *stylistic* similarities between "After Rain" and the personal anecdote do point to a way in which even the poet's self-interpretation follows the line of her poetry.

[23] Kirwan's study, *Beauty*, tries to address the problem that, while perceivers will all disagree on *which* objects are beautiful, we unilaterally accept that there is such an *experience* as beauty. Kirwan takes this to mean that beauty may not be, as aesthetic theory commonly assumes, the property of a thing. Rather, beauty must be a transcendent value. Kirwan's notion of beauty as something that does not *belong* to objects but is, rather, revealed in our yearning, also counters the idea of "disinterested pleasure."

[24] "Hologram" is a *glosa* derived from a stanza of George Seferis's "The King of Asine." The italics indicate Seferis's original line.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

[1] This is Cohen's own phrase, from a 1964 speech entitled, "Loneliness and History." All quotations of unpublished material appear by permission of Leonard Cohen.

[2] The image of the historical "heap" shared by my two epigraphs will prove to be a central image in Cohen's work. Cohen will evoke both the historical "wreck" of modernity and, as a complement and an alternate to that image, the idea of mankind bound together in a common humanity, the human "unison" of the novel's close.

Cohen's vision of the historical "wreck" bears a resemblance to the heap of broken, twisted bodies that A.M. Klein's protagonist imagines in Klein's experimental post-Holocaust prose work, *The Second Scroll* (1951). Like Klee, Klein portrays man's

barbarism as occurring under the very auspices of the divine. Standing in the Sistine Chapel, Klein's speaker wonders at Michelangelo's human panoply, his host of sinning and suffering figures. In Michelangelo's image, all the human figures are made into a single human collective. Adam—mankind— is bound by a near fingertouch to a dynamic and attentive God who remains ready to restore him to grace. Bitterly, Klein's first-person speaker imagines a horrific counterpart to Michelangelo's ceiling in the idea of a "Sistine limepit," a vision of humanity broken and degraded by the Nazi death camps. In this vision, the tiny space that separates Adam's hand from God's, the space interpreted by Michelangelo as an indication of the *proximity* of God, is reinterpreted by Klein's narrator as a broken compact, an eternal severing of man from the divine. In this primal despair Klein exposes, secondarily, the possible lie of art's confraternal, binding visions.

Cohen, in the 1964 Jarvis Public Library Address, "Loneliness and History," upon which I will draw throughout this chapter, comments on Klein's poetic silence and traumatic withdrawal from society which, by the time of this speech, had already extended across a decade. Cohen remarks that Klein "chose to be a priest and protect the dead ritual. And now we have his silence" ("Loneliness and History"). Cohen seems to suggest that Klein's view of the situation of the Jews in the post-Holocaust era was only backward-looking, though "it was as a prophet that we needed [Klein]." Does Cohen's interpretation of the "wreck" of history in *Beautiful Losers* as both a total human catastrophe and an occasion for total human renovation respond to the image of Klein's Sistine limepit? Even if it does not do so explicitly, the rhyme of Cohen's vision of the universal crash with Klein's own poses similar, difficult, questions about whether art is

equal to the task of representing massive human barbarism and victimization and what role it can play in the efforts of post-WWII artists to establish a sense of common humanity.

[3] It is customary, in Cohen criticism, after Desmond Pacey in "The Phenomenon of Leonard Cohen," to call the first-person narrator of Part One, "I".

[4] When Elizabeth Kaspar Aldrich uses the term "saint type," she draws upon categories used by both William James and Max Scheler, theorists who present the hero-type and the saint-type as "alternate forms of ideality" (Aldrich 2). The hero manifests his "ideality" publicly and for posterity; the saint's domain is "private and mysterious" (9). The hero *chooses* his ascendancy; the saint "does not choose but is chosen." Aldrich notes that when Scheler evokes his *Menschentypen*, his eventual intention is to efface the apparent dichotomy between them (9). "I" and "F" in *Beautiful Losers* are examples of the saint-type (who is not active, but "determinative" for the actions of others) and the hero-type (who acts in the world, and who is known and celebrated). As Scheler does in his analysis, Cohen collapses these categories over the course of his novel.

[5] In underplaying the higher cause or metaphysical order, of course, Hutcheon attempts to assert *Beautiful Losers'* status as a postmodern rather than a modern novel.

[6] T.S. Eliot alludes, in "The Waste Land," to the Ovidian myth of the rape of Philomela by Tereus. He introduces the motif in Part II, "A Game of Chess," in which Philomel is "[...] by the barbarous king / So rudely forced." During the rape, Eliot imagines that a nightingale sings, "Jug Jug." In Part III, "The Fire Sermon," the voice of the nightingale re-appears to accuse Tereu of the crime: "Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd. / Tereu" (71). Cohen's Three Whistle Bird seems to share the role of Eliot's nightingale,

except that instead of being inarticulate—sympathetically with the mutilated Philomela, whose tongue has been cut out—Cohen's bird is actually trilingual, pronouncing the name of the rapist Tereus with three inflections.

[7] Leslie Monkman's analysis explores chain or necklace imagery in *Beautiful Losers* at length, linking the Western idea of the Chain of Being to its native North American equivalent: "The particular element of Indian culture to which Cohen gives greatest emphasis is the Indian's recognition of his place in an eternal cosmic order" (57). The image of the "rope of days" from Catherine's Uncle's speech to the hurried Jesuit (who wants to convert the uncle before he dies) is imitated in various images of ropes and chains. Monkman cites, for example, "F"'s use of the metaphor of the "necklace of incomparable beauty and unmeaning" which expresses the particulars of the world joined by his mind whose "needle pierces it all" (qtd. in Monkman 58). (Monkman actually mis-attributes this passage to "F" when it is really part of a speech given by "I," but it is ultimately quite like "F"'s own assertion that "all I had in the wrecked world was a needle and thread, so I got down on my knees, I pulled pieces out of the mess and I started to stitch them together" [286-287]). Either way, the significance of the sewing/necklace image for Monkman is its connectedness to the needle of the Head-Piercer, who prepares the soul for its immortality.) Monkman notes that the chain/necklace image is picked up again in the *Québec Libre* demonstration, where the people are joined in "the sweetest bursting daisy chain" (59). I would add that the man who sets the telephone ringing in the basement of the System Theatre (thus giving "F" the idea for the Telephone Dance) is "wearing one of those Western string neckties" (33). As with most imagery in *Beautiful Losers*, the image of the chain/necklace is best

understood as a *double-sided* image, so that the chain is a symbol of not only connectedness but also of coercion and *false* connection.

[8] *Ressentiment* is Nietzsche's and Max Scheler's term for the typical emotion "of the weak and the victimized" (Goodheart 159); it is *reactive* rather than active aggression. Max Scheler writes that *ressentiment* is accumulative and is secreted in the person as if the person were a "sealed vessel" (Goodheart 159). Cohen's "I," of course, is withdrawn, hermetic, reactive, and literally a "sealed vessel" in the fact of his constipation. Eugene Goodheart adds that "[r]esentment is the emotion that nourishes revolutionary ideologies" (159).

[9] It would be negligent to continue to give weight to the term "happening" without acknowledging David Leahy's characterization of the closing section of *Beautiful Losers* as a 1960s cultural "Happening" (38).

[10] This sound--rrrriiiippp—is heard three times in the novel: when I and F drive through the scrim; when the police dogs tear the flesh from nurse Mary Voolnd's body, and when Catherine flays herself on a thorn. Thus, the piercing of the veil of truth is tied to horrifically violent imagery.

[11] Norman Ravvin characterizes the Argentinian waiter as "the Hitler of pornographic movies and trash novels, both of which draw on the Nazi ethos as a [popular] paradigm for domination and enslavement" (Ravvin 27).

[12] "I" had written, similarly, that "The Church loves such details. I love such details" (16).

[13] In *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a film that Leonard Cohen narrates for The National Film Board of Canada, the recognition of the reincarnated Dalai Llama has traditionally

depended, in part, on the visibility of bodily wounds and markings on the *new* Llama that are shared with the *old* Llama, indicating that they are the same person. In this way, the idea of "personhood" is not even delimited by the physical body. "F" and "I" share the mark of the blown-off thumbs. The prominence of the scar as an image in the Cohen *oeuvre* does not even require pointing out; though marks and scars are so often used as idiosyncratic features of individuality, they can also indicate the transcendent character of *being*, in Cohen.

[14] Stan Dragland, too, reads these two "sewing" passages as counterpoints (268).

[15] Actually, Scobie argues that "F" and Edith "promote the fulfillment of "I'" so that the Old Man of Part Three—the old man "I" has become—gains his ascendancy to the realm of magical transformation in becoming a cinematic image ("Magic" 60). Scobie suggests that the Old Man is *only* "I," not a conflation of "I" and "F." This reading acknowledges "F"'s spiritual limitation and suggests that "F" has been left behind in the novel's ultimate miracle. "F," in Scobie's view, never transcends his identity as a "magician" to become "magic." In the novel's Epilogue, then, "F"'s disciple *has* gone beyond him, as "F" wanted. Scobie's reading is persuasive in that only one physical person of the novel's four main characters survives into Part Three and certainly this physical person cannot be "F," who is already dead when "The History of Them All" begins. But perhaps the Old Man is "I" *and* "F" insofar as the novel seems to define "personhood" as a *style* rather than as a physical body; and by Part Three most distinctions between "I" and "F" have been lost. I would also refer the reader to my above footnote 13, which suggests that the boundaries of "personhood" can, by the inscrutable workings of the divine, transcend the physical body.

[16] Brown's and Bennett's articles on apocalypse come from a special edition of *The University of Toronto Quarterly* that treats apocalypse in Canadian literature. Though I have freely applied their remarks to Cohen's novel, neither article specifically addresses *Beautiful Losers*.

[17] At the moment between the absence of I/F's old shape and the beginning of his new one (as the movie image of Ray Charles), Cohen describes the point of his minimal presence as the "lovely briefness" when a grain of sand passes through the waist of an hourglass. "That is the point of Clear Light!" Cohen proclaims (258). The hourglass image reflects the "second of time" with total human potential that Mark Lilla describes in his commentary on Benjamin's "Theologo-Political Fragment":

> Historical materialism [must now replace its] belief in a progressive historical continuum [with] a conception of history closer to that of traditional Judaism, which believed that "every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter." (Lilla 118)

The people of the crowd had been markedly differentiated before I/F's transformation: hard women, doctors, mothers, Tantric love perfectionists, Nazi adolescents, teenage boy prostitutes "at the very bottom of Montreal's desire apparatus" (254), and (significantly) Jehovah's Witnesses. But the crowd is unified in their gasps as "I/F" changes, and then when Cohen calls attention again to an individual, he is a New Jew. The New Jew as "F" had described him in the long letter "is the founder of Magic Canada" (173), who "dissolves history and ritual by accepting unconditionally the complete heritage" (172). In the Epilogue, the New Jew appears as part of the characterization of the city,

apocalyptically, as the New Jerusalem, and marks the moment in which the historical chain of events becomes irrelevant beside the *now* infused with messianic possibility.

[18] Variations on the observation that revelation entails destruction are to be found elsewhere in Cohen criticism. Jenny L.M. Kerber's analysis of *The Favourite Game* studies the artist-figure Breavman's quest for permanence as compared to his lover Shell's willingness (observable in her cracked porcelain) to accept transience and imperfection. Kerber argues that the crack in the porcelain represents, for Breavman, his ambivalent position between preservation and destruction. "The paradox in [that] relationship [...] is that the site that affords a path to eternal insight and enlightenment is also the starting point from which destruction inevitably spreads" (60). Paul Nonnekes observes that, in *Beautiful Losers*, "F" trains "I" with an instrument of destruction, the box of firecrackers. The explosives represent the ego coming apart, everything becoming "unbound" (43). "F" shows "I" the possibility of escape from the "painful arrangement of things as they are" (43). Finally, Sandra Djwa characterizes Leonard Cohen's creative process as one that "moves between aspiration and disintegration" (qtd. in Stacey 217).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1] Fred Bodsworth, writing for Macleans in 1955, documents the rivalry of Simpsons-Sears and Eaton's, particularly the stores' aim of attracting catalogue shoppers. Bodsworth writes that the catalogues "set the styles for almost half of Canada" and notes that the Eaton's catalogue had a circulation of about one million in the years immediately following World War II (78). Bodsworth's wonder at the simultaneous availability of *things* looks forward to the way in which Atwood will show material culture

overwhelming the representing self in *Cat's Eye*: "You can buy a geiger counter with instructions on how to find uranium or a plumbing system, an astronomer's telescope, 'sizeless' nylons, car insurance, an electric alarm that wakes up Junior the second he begins bed-wetting" (Bodsworth 77).

[2] Certainly Atwood's own biographers evoke a sense of the local and the generational through attention to the *things* of the time. Rosemary Sullivan names "pop-up toasters, electric frying pans and Mixmasters" as elements of the quintessential 1950s home (*Red Shoes* 59); Nathalie Cooke reminds us that "this was the heyday of domestic innovation, the era of Tang and Pop Tarts" (*Margaret Atwood* 107) and comments on the ubiquity of electric kettles in Canadian homes (114).

[3] Cognitive theorist Stephen Pinker paraphrases Quentin Bell in explaining that, in fact, a covered object is generally *assumed to be perfect*: "If we wrap an object in some kind of envelope, so that the eyes infer rather than see the object that is enclosed, the inferred or imagined form is likely to be more perfect than it would appear if it were uncovered" (272).

[4] The idea that collected objects form a narrative from which the self struggles to emerge is reflected in the middle period of Elaine's painting (following the period of still-lifes), which has a highly surrealist character. This surrealism reflects Elaine's general summoning-up of memory's objects without a full articulation of the personal logic behind the appearance or arrangement of objects.

[5] French tradition of folk woodcuts, inaugurated by Jean-Charles Pellerin in 1796. The images featured religious subjects at first, and eventually included subjects drawn from songs and fables. Most famously, Pellerin gave the world its first images of the figure of

Puss in Boots ("L'Imagerie d'Épinal"). Apparently, these would be typical objects collected in the French homes of which Baudrillard writes.

[6] Though the "perverse museum" of Atwood's 1968 poem may not appear to be of the same vintage as Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Atwood's manuscripts of the novel reveal that *Cat's Eye's* scenes depicting little girls cutting out and collecting objects are as early as 1964-1965.

[7] The "complex" in "shopping complex" draws the wry comment from Elaine that shopping is like a "psychic disease" (111), echoing the madness of the "perverse museum" experience.

[8] Significantly, Atwood has put a similar sentiment in the mouth of *Life Before Man*'s Lesje, a museum paleontologist: "There are no immutable objects" (153).

[9] Atwood's portrait of the young artist cutting out frying-pans and coat trees echoes Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927), in which the protagonist, Mrs. Ramsay, hopes that her son James will become a great artist. Mrs. Ramsay, with maternal pride, gives her six-year-old a vocational nudge by finding pictures for him to cut out of the Army and Navy Stores Catalogue:

> All she could do now was to admire the refrigerator, and turn the pages of the Stores list in the hope that she might come upon something like a rake, or a mowing-machine, which, with its prongs and its handles, would need the greatest skill in cutting out. (*To the Lighthouse* 23)

[10] The phrase "random sampling" of course, recalls *Random Samples*, the name of the movie Atwood's character David is producing in *Surfacing* (1972). David's artistic intention in *Random Samples* is to film anything that catches his eye to the point where

his film is used up, and then to arrange the images he has collected. The irony behind the title of the film is that David's samples are increasingly *less* random, and are more and more guided by a violent aesthetic that the title disguises. The first "random sample" is only a house made out of pop bottles, but later "random samples" include a gutted fish, a crucified heron, a humiliated, weeping woman who does not want to be filmed. The film's pretext of "randomness" conceals the fact that David's editorial eye *selects* these incrementally more disturbing images. And the promise of *future arrangement* defers (indefinitely) the moment when he will be called to recognize these images as items that have appealed to him and that he has deliberately chosen for his film. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's artwork is a "random sampling" of a more benign order. She dispassionately selects very particular imagery from her childhood (items that could as easily be from the Eaton's catalogue) and paints them either individually or with a surreal organization that does not point to any specific self-recognition; it is only later that she will look at and *interpret* her own paintings.

[11] For Hite, *Cat's Eye* is about redirecting and diffusing a public gaze, and in so doing, authorizing the self. She writes that Elaine, as a painter, "can disengage seeing from being seen, and this disengagement gives her access to a key mechanism of what Michel Foucault has described as the modern disciplinary society. In such a society, power is dissociated, diffuse and pervasive; as such it is internalized and thus self-policing" (140). She draws a parallel to Foucault's interpretation of Jeremy Bentham's model prison, the Panopticon, "designed to individualize prisoners by virtue of their physical isolation while rendering them completely visible to an authoritative viewer who himself remains unseen" (141). Elaine and Cordelia take to outstaring people by way of reversing the

gaze. Surrounded by mechanisms of blame and self-blame, Elaine, meanwhile, internalizes the gaze of the many women policing her (Mrs. Smeath, Cordelia) and does battle with notions of willpower and "letting herself go" (144). Hite's argument brings out the important notion, following Foucault, that individualization in the form of ostracism is a mechanism of blame, which helps us to see that while Elaine wants to *be* an individual, she does not want to be appreciated as such, hence her ambivalence about her newfound notoriety. I would add that Elaine's distrust of the gallery and ambivalence about her public showing stem in part from the fact that the gallery, Sub-Versions, with its overt postmodern pretensions, excites in Elaine the same anxiety she feels about her conformity to any specific cultural ideology, whether its vehicle is the art world or three mean little girls.

[12] Elaine's concern for the painting of the Arnolfini marriage shows a fascination with the mirror in which the couple is reflected and encompassed; it is an all-seeing eye and it unsettles the viewer. All art is a mirror, and certainly not one that offers an unmediated reality" (Cowart 131).

[13] Heidegger claims that in the experience of dread, one feels an essential nothingness—a "nihiliation"—against which *Dasein* manifests itself in order to nihilate nothingness in turn: "Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom," Heidegger asserts ("What Is Metaphysics" 107). Elaine's acquisition of her seeing-eye depends on this intuition of nothingness that is intimately hers throughout the text; her specific repudiation of nothingness, I argue, accounts for the novel's interest in *things* and Elaine's own arrival at a (realistically limited) sense of self and freedom.

[14] The imagery associated with the painting *Deadly Nightshade* is prefigured in the backyard hole episode: "At first there's nothing; just a receding darkness, like a tunnel. But after a while something begins to form: a thicket of dark green leaves, and clusters of red berries, translucent as water. The vines are intergrown, so tangled over the other plants they're like a hedge [...] There's no wind but the leaves are in motion, there's a ripple, as of unseen cats, or as if the leaves are moving by themselves" (108).

[15] Unpublished material is quoted by permission of Margaret Atwood.

[16] Conversely, Elaine worries away at her own sweater's pilling, its minutiae: "I sit in my bedroom picking the pilly fuzzballs off my lambswool sweaters" (234); "I take care to pick all such woolen balls off my own sweaters" (208); "I check [...] for lint" (403). This particular preoccupation, known as "punding," represents a "sorting" behaviour that is intimately associated with the "ideational reinforcement of the boundaries of identity" (Dewdney 15-16), so that the clarification of the sweater's line metaphorically represents the real and finite self that Elaine desires.

[17] The characterization of Elaine as Daedalus, the artificer in the labyrinth, is echoed in the "perverse museum" situation, in which the subject is lost in a maze of corridors.

[18] Atwood calls the artist's inclination to take inventory of the world a "theme": in my study, it is a formal and thematic problem.

[19] I agree with this remark of Cowart's but dispute the point at which he feels Elaine's "deliverance" actually occurs. Cowart argues that Elaine is freed from "spiritual bondage" to Cordelia halfway through the novel and therefore that the second half of the work demonstrates a more "accelerated passage of time" (126-127). Cowart asserts that Elaine is freed of Cordelia's negative influence when she and Elaine figuratively change

places, in such a way that Cordelia becomes, instead, "an example of spiritual originality" and an artistic inspiration. This suggestion of Elaine's "freedom" seems premature, particularly in light of Elaine's suicide attempt in her twenties, and the way in which she is afraid, even in the present time of the narrative, that she may encounter Cordelia anywhere or *in anyone*: a shoplifting teen, a bag lady, a refugee.

[20] Many have remarked on the impossibility of autobiographical closure. John Pilling, in his study of "self-scrutiny," notes that autobiography is an "intractable form," caught between "truth and design" (2). Atwood's own critics have noted this as well. Coral Ann Howells defends *Cat's Eye* against the supposition that life-writing in general is an "ambiguous literary genre" which Paul de Man claims "is no genre at all" (204). Sherrill Grace adds to this discussion the conundrum that the self viewed retrospectively is always possibly a "fraud" (191).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

[1] The dates I have assigned to *Continuation I* and *Continuation II* are the dates at which Dudek published the works as complete, independent volumes: 1981 and 1990, respectively. Dudek began to publish fragments of the works much earlier, however. An early portion of "Continuation I" is included in Dudek's *Collected Poems* of 1971, and early versions of "Continuation II" appeared in *The Tamarack Review* in 1976. Thus, when I refer to the individual volumes of *Continuation I* and *Continuation II*, I cite the dates 1981 and 1990, but when I refer to the whole poem called *Continuation*, I give the dates as 1971-2000, indicating the whole span of the work's composition.

[2] Here I allude to A.M. Klein's poem, "Portrait of the Poet As Landscape," which I briefly discussed in my introductory chapter. Roy Miki, too, observes of *The Martyrology* in general that "Klein would have been relieved that his anonymous poet had surfaced in language, though to bpNichol's postmodernist mind, the surface of a language is exactly where the depth is" ("Lang Poem" 80).

[3] Smaro Kamboureli says of the Canadian long poem in general that dislocation is "a theme consistently used in the long poem" and that the long poem "declares a yearning that exceeds the lyric's potentiality to locate the self" (71)

[4] The grove in which Venus "bewailed" Adonis is associated with the grove in which the infant Jesus wept, and charts certain rites of commemoration that suggest an identity between Adonis and Christ (Bullfinch, "Age of Fable").

[5] While Dudek refers to "Adonis' garden," (*Continuation I*, 18), Nichol makes reference to the regenerative plants of another tradition. The poet dreams of Saint Rand diving into the river to find his father and to guard the sacred plants ["Sons and Divinations," *Martyrology 2*]). Irene Niechoda explains that the "sacred plants of regeneration" refer to the Gilgamesh myth ("Entering the Exits" 155). Utnapishtim helps Gilgamesh search for immortality by telling him of an underwater plant. Gilgamesh ties heavy stones to his feet so that he may descend to the deepest part of the river in search of it ("Entering the Exits" 155). Thus, an almost suicidal imagery bespeaks Gilgamesh's certainty of regeneration and resurrection. This regenerative promise animates *The Martyrology* as a whole and lightens its self-sacrificial motifs. The propensity of the poem to generate new personae across its own pages links the "sacred plants" of the Gilgamesh story to the "leaves" of Nichol's books.

[6] The similarity of this thought to the ambivalent "sewing" metaphor in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (i.e., the needle with which "I" hopes to connect all the disparates of the world, and with which "F" creates monsters from the wreckage of the universal accident) could profitably be emphasized.

[7] The idea that the poem is unrealizable in the sense that the poet will not be able to represent his death is plainly echoed in "The Great Poem," from Dudek's late collection *The Caged Tiger* (1997). Here, too, Dudek implies that the "end" must be mirrored anticlimactically in "smaller deaths."

So, the greatest poem has no witness
It is the memory of a death
Immense, unmentionable

And we can only speak now
Of our smaller deaths (29)

[8] Trehearne suggests that the "accumulative" structure of the work (by which Dudek incorporates random, irrelevant, and fragmented material) is a self-effacing gesture that mitigates the otherwise self-important poetic postures of *Continuation* (244). These potentially egotistical postures include the supposition that the poem, in continuing, "accretes meaning onto an ever-expanding whole," and the presumption that a "record of [Dudek's] mind" in all its detail will so deeply engage the reader that he or she will willingly labour to connect all of the particulars in its nonetheless elusively personal range of reference (244-47). Trehearne suggests that through fragmentation and

accumulation Dudek labours to create a portrait of himself that, *instead*, will remain partial, elusive and highly idiosyncratic.

[9] Despite Dudek's strong desire to separate his vision and poetic technique from Whitman's, Dudek certainly does echo Whitman's view of death as a felicitous "check" on the expansion of everything, as well as a moment of absolute individuality (hence "different" from anyone's idea of it): "All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses, / And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier" ("Song of Myself" 32).

[10] This is Mandel's own usage of the term "encyclopedic."

[11] The fifth book of *The Martyrology*, conceptually both a map of Toronto and a map of the poet's consciousness, is organized in short passages (or "chains") that are intended to be read in any order, making the reader an active navigator of the text.

[12] This imagined collaboration, if realized, would have taken its place among many strategies *The Martyrology* employs in order to diffuse the authority of the representing self (particularly as the ever-expanding *Martyrology* became a *magnum opus* and threatened to become the "hegemonic text among [bp Nichol's] writings") (Davey, "Remembering" 117).

[13] McCaffery's theories of poetry and Nichol's, as expressed in the reports of the Toronto Research Group [TRG], are often conflated by critics. Susan Billingham, in her commentary, notes that McCaffery's work probably places more emphasis on 'unreadability' than Nichol's does (109).

[14] "Barbarism" is a key term in Dudek criticism, and I would therefore not want to raise it casually. Its uses in Dudek's writing and in Dudek criticism are quite varied. Since Dudek's chief concern is with civilization and the civilizing effects of poetry, the idea of

"barbarism" crops up frequently as a diametrically opposed idea. Tony Tremblay notes that Dudek once looked to Marshall McLuhan as a mentor, but broke with him over the perception of a "barbaric" strain in McLuhan's thought; namely, McLuhan's conviction that humanity was a uniform "secular miasma" totally vulnerable to the "cascading effects of media" ("Unrepentant Idealist" 136). Brian Trehearne finds a reaction to "barbarism" visible in both Dudek and Irving Layton as members of a postwar generation of writers. Although Dudek himself explicitly holds Layton guilty of "barbarism" in *Delta* 9 (1959), he brands it a "typical contempt for people that balances Layton's abundant love" (18). On a different note, Dudek also held an aversion to the "barbarism" of youth culture, as he saw it. The young are increasingly represented in Dudek' s poetry as stampeding hordes, blind to culture; Dudek proffers articles on rockers Peter Wolf and Van Halen when pressed by Frank Davey to give evidence of the barbarism of contemporary art ("Questions" 17). Dudek saw a strain of primitivism, regression and destruction in the poetic lineage following the Beat generation, and he holds Nichol accountable as part of that generation. But when Davey asks Dudek to consider that there is a fertile, productive primitivism or barbarism revealed in Dudek's own long poem *En México* (1958), Dudek concedes ("Questions" 20). And in another instance, Dudek says to Nichol, "If what you mean by 'barbaric', bp, is some expression from the great source, in ourselves and in nature, I'm with you" ("Questions" 11).

[15] St. Reat is one of the oldest saints in Nichol's canon. He is prominently featured in many of Nichol's early writings and comics. Nichol's "discovery" of Reat is documented in *Scraptures* and then remembered in *Martyrology 7&,* a book that cites a number of poems from *Scraptures* as part of Nichol's process of self-recollection before death.

Nichol had been playing on a series of puns whose penultimate term was "has treat," when suddenly a new division of terms revealed: "HA! St. Reat!" St. Reat has a particular *embeddedness* in language, then, that distinguishes him from other saints simply made of words beginning with "st." He has a privileged status in *The Martyrology* and is considered Nichol's special representative of poetry and the poetic vocation.

[16] This is Billingham's own usage of the term "encyclopedist."

[17] Frank Davey similarly notes that "[a] martyrology participates in a system of revealed truth: a saint's life is exemplary by demonstrating certain essential principles of a continguous relationship between humankind and god" ("Exegesis" 42).

[18] My description of *gIFTS* as *The Martyrology's* "last book" is slightly provisional. *The Martyrology 8* is *included* in *gIFTS: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&*. There also exists *The Martyrology 9: Ad Sanctos*, which is not a "book" as such, but an opera.

[19] Gertrude Stein gives *The Martyrology 1* its epigraph ("Let me recite what history teaches. History teaches") and Nichol dedicates a poem to her in *gIFTS,* a 1972 work called "A Song For Saint Ein." The importance of Gertrude Stein to Nichol's *Martyrology* is best explored by Carl Peters, both in his long study of Nichol's artwork, *bpNichol comics*, and in his article "Notes Towards An Aesthetic Theory: Therafields and *The Martyrology."* Peters notes that for Stein, a *masterpiece* was always created out of an objective and atemporal experience of selfhood; a self uninflected by memory or recognition; a self who simply existed objectively in and for the moment of creation ("Notes Towards" 50). Peters also notes the special relationship of the comic strip to Stein's "continuous present" (*bpNichol Comics* 130). (Nichol, of course, incorporates

comic book frames into *The Martyrology*.) Peters reminds readers that Nichol had once cited Robert Warshow in observing that "the comic strip has no beginning and no end, only an eternal middle" (130); and *The Martyrology* in turn is most insistent about its project of "writing the continuous present" (*Martyrology 3*). Nichol makes an open allusion to Stein's notion of composition "in the moment" in "Sons and Divinations":

> there is a music in the moment comes together
>
> joyce thot he knew or that insistence stein found
>
> approximation of the one voice vision
>
> repetition condensation theory ways of speaking we can choose
>
> ("Sons and Divinations," *Martyrology 2*)

[20] Carl Peters also observes Nichol's "martyrdom": "The self in Nichol's long poem *The Martryology* is a martyred self—the self (the poet's) that falls into language and is transformed by it, and hence re-born in or through it" (*bpNichol Comics* 49).

[21] Susan Billingham notes the work's *biographical* reference to suicide in its dedication to Lea Hindley-Smith "without whose act of friendship / quite literally none of this would / have been written." Billingham explains that Nichol credited Hindley-Smith (the founder of Therafields, the lay therapy community to which Nichol belonged for most of his adult life) with curing him of his suicidal tendencies, thus enabling *The Martyrology* to be written at all. Billingham sees the return of these feelings in the "extreme loneliness" of the end of Book 2 (173-175). *gIFTS* is not dedicated to Hindley-Smith but to Nichol's wife, Eleanor Nichol (*The Martyrology's* "ellie"), which seems to reflect a new orientation away from the dramatized and considered self of therapeutic self-reflection and toward the lived self.

[22] In this statement, and others like this one, I am embarrassed to conflate Nichol's biographical death, particularly in light of its dreadful prematurity, with the *topos* of martyrdom in the text. When Nichol eventually decides, however, that his work will continue until his death, he himself turns his death into a kind of inevitable literary trope, a provocatively textual matter well-harmonized with the dominant motifs of martyrdom, suicide, and "endings."

[23] Nichol portrays himself as similarly nomadic and constantly on the road, driving between cities. This is part of the motif of "'automobility'" to which Shirley Neuman refers in her article, taking the term from chain 3 of *Martyrology 5* (57). The kind of journey signalled by the term "automobility," suggests to Neuman the difference between autobiography (which aims to discover life's patterns and its self-consistency) and journal (which aims to characterize "an inevitably undefined and undefinable self" [57]). Neuman asserts that *The Martyrology* is the latter. It is my contention, however, that *The Martyrology* reaches a point (noticeably, by *gIFTS: The Martyrology Book(s) 7&*) where the poet is no longer satisfied with the indefinition of the work's self-portrait. He becomes determined to "face" himself in poetry and to discover the essential sameness of poet and persona that the work has hitherto denied and deferred.

[24] "Essents" are "things that are" or "existents." Ralph Manheim, the translator of the 1961 Anchor edition of Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, explains his use of the word: "I have [...] taken the liberty to coin a word: 'essent,' 'essents,' 'the essent,' based on the fiction that *essens*, *essentis* is the present participle of *sum*" (xi).

[25] The work is biographically "given" to the reader as well in the very real sense that Nichol did not live to see its publication. Nichol's family entrusted its final compilation and publication to Irene Niechoda.

[26] One of the ways in which Nietzsche himself explains his insertion of this blank page in his written account of himself is that there is a riddle at the heart of his identity, as he was born to a father who had already died at the time of his (Nietzsche's) own birth. Derrida quotes Nietzsche: "Inasmuch as *I am* and *follow after* my father, I am the dead man and I am death. Inasmuch as *I am* and *follow after* my mother, I am life that preserves" (Derrida 16). Nietzsche's sense of himself as a paradoxical embodiment of both life and death, of continuation and arrest, may well be similar to Nichol's self-representation in *gIFTS* insofar as Nichol is the *father* of a deceased (stillborn) son and a living daughter. The notion that he has generated life and death is one source of self-division to which the poet repeatedly calls attention in *gIFTS*.

[27] The image is strongly reminiscent of Cohen's "point of pure light," the grain of sand suspended in the hourglass in *Beautiful Losers'* closural miracle.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

[1] Charisma is from the Greek *charein*, "to rejoice," and suggests giftedness, vocation, revolutionary personality, even grace (Hans 58).

[2] Atwood's novel has an epigraph from Stephen Hawking ("Why do we remember the past, and not the future?" [n.p.]) and doubtless Elaine's astrophysicist brother Stephen is named for him. Nichol's *gIFTS* borrows Hawking's diagram of two cones (past and future) intersecting at the "elsewhere event," as I discussed in chapter five.

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