Running head: **READINGS FROM A LIFE**

Readings from a Life:

Rural Educators Read our Rural Selves

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ABSTRACT

Readings from a Life: Rural Educators Read our Rural Selves is a cultural study of identity in place in Atlantic Canada. The study is developed based on hybrid methodology drawing on key elements of literary anthropology, self-study, autobiography, auto-ethnography, and geo-poetics. The literary landscape of rural Nova Scotia provides the principal site for the readings which are developed throughout in contrapuntal fashion, that is to say the readings move back and forth between global and local representations of rural space. Key to the development of each of the chapters is the concept of distance as a device for making the world strange and therefore knowable. The readings are contained within seven chapters based on the research question, 'What are you doing here?' This question is deconstructed first through establishing the literary landscape of rural Nova Scotia as a site for analysis, followed by a discussion of literary anthropology as method, which leads in turn to a close examination of how particular teachers read themselves through their engagement with the literary texts. These readings are followed by a critical examination of what kinds of reading count in official policy discourses when compared to the more literary representations. As self-study the readings are used to provide insight into a life lived for the most part in rural Nova Scotia and at the same time are used to highlight aspects of education and teacher identity in this place. The concluding chapter moves recursively in order to strengthen the insights contained in the previous chapters and at the same time articulates the ambivalent nature of the project as a whole. Policy implications, potential beneficiaries, limitations of the study, and future directions are indicated in the final chapter.

ABSTRACT

Readings from a Life: Rural Educators Read our Rural Selves est une étude culturelle examinant les rapports entre identité et lieu dans le Canada atlantique. La méthodologie composite mise en œuvre ici exploite des éléments clés venant de l'anthropologie littéraire, de l'étude de soi, de l'autobiographie, de l'auto-ethnographie et de la géo-poétique. Le paysage littéraire de la Nouvelle-Écosse constitue le milieu principal des lectures qui sont explorées d'une manière contrapuntique, la représentation de l'espace rural passant continuellement du niveau local au niveau global et vice versa. Fondamentale au développement de chaque chapitre est la notion de la distance. Celle-ci fonctionne comme une stratégie permettant de rendre le monde étrange et par conséquent accessible à la connaissance. Les lectures sont réparties en sept chapitres axés sur la question 'Que faites-vous ici?' Cette question est d'abord déstructurée dans un chapitre qui justifie le choix du paysage littéraire de la Nouvelle –Écosse comme site de l'analyse. Il suit une discussion de l'anthropologie littéraire en tant que méthode, ce qui débouche sur une étude plus détaillée de la manière dont certains enseignants se lisent à travers leur réaction devant ces textes littéraires. Ces lectures sont suivies d'un examen critique des types de lectures normalement privilégiées dans le discours de la politique officielle en comparaison avec des représentations plus littéraires. Sur le plan de l'étude de soi, les lectures sont exploitées pour éclairer une vie menée pour la plupart dans la Nouvelle-Écosse rurale. En même temps celles-ci permettent de révéler divers aspects de l'éducation et de l'identité de l'enseignant dans ce milieu. Le dernier chapitre tire les conclusions des perspectives accumulées au cours des chapitres précédents tout en soulignant le caractère ambivalent du projet dans son ensemble. Enfin, la conclusion considère les implications sur le plan de la politique, identifie les personnes qui risquent de profiter de ce travail et résume les limites de l'enquête présente, tout en suggérant des voies de recherche pour l'avenir.

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Readings from a Life: Rural Educators Read our Rural Selves is the product of many years spent wandering along the road to learn and between the covers of books. Many rural youth of my generation, especially boys, were not acknowledged by their teachers to be readers. Fortunately for me, my primary teacher Margaret Titus, set me up for success in school by letting me just get on with it when I was five years old. In the years between then and now there are many good and great teachers who have made a difference in my learning to read and especially in helping me to see some of the connections between reading and identity in place.

My grade three teacher Dorothy Tidd deserves special mention for her *joie de vivre*. A few years later, when I began to focus my studies in the area of learning to read I came in touch with extraordinary faculty members at McGill University and at the University of London, Institute of Education. I am especially grateful to have had the gentle encouragement of Patrick Dias (McGill), Jane Miller, and Margaret Meek Spencer (IOE) in my pursuit of insight into the intersections between literacy, reading, and culture.

When I became involved in reading our rural selves my colleagues provided a sounding board for this work. I am enormously grateful for the feedback provided by my friend and former colleague, Mike Corbett. Mike's willingness to help turn the most abstruse text, including my own, into an object of shared mirth has helped sustain my enthusiasm over the years. Fellow students have been helpful and kind. Layla AbdelRahim has been generous with her time, criticism, and food for thought. Under the guise of discussing the readings she has introduced me to the most wonderful vegan dishes on St. Laurent Blvd. in Montreal. In the early stages of this work my friend and now the angel Andrew provided an encouraging bond of trust which inspired a sense that anything including this work is possible. I hope as he peeks from behind the clouds that he finds a fair representation of rural reality within these pages.

While engaged in writing the chapters of this work I was able to receive valuable feedback through the excellent opportunities to share my writing and to participate in the Spencer Doctoral Students' Colloquium at the School of Education, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in August of 2004; to participate in the founding plenary of the Acadia Centre for Rural Education and Sustainability, Wolfville in March, 2005; and in the Symposium on Visual Methodologies for Social Change as well as The Rural Teachers' Education Conference at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban in February, 2006. I am grateful to the kind folks who hosted me during these events.

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Here, in this place, I have received enormous encouragement. My son Antony keeps trying to convince me that there has got to be more than the life of a ground mole in the basement. My daughter Gillianne has kindly suffered along the way. My life partner and best friend Anna-Marie MacKenzie provided close reading and text editing and she is surely delighted that this has finally found its last page. I am most grateful to each member of my family, including the MacKenzies of Parthenais.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iv

Table of Contents vi

List of Images xii

Chapter One: Introduction

Reminiscence: Locating an archive 1

In the Field: A site for analysis 4

A hybrid study 8

Readings from a Life as cultural study 10

'What are you doing here?' the question 12

The chapter outlines 14

Chapter Two: Where?

Introduction to the concept of place 20

Where? 21

Where? Place and space 23

On distance 28

Speculations of a philosophical surveyor 31

p'Bitek's 'Song of Ocol' (excerpt) 32

Retreat from the North 33

Polyphony 34

Soja's cosmos, thirdspace 35

Coming home 37

A geopoetics of space, Bachelard 38

Coleridge 40

Kenneth White, geopoetics 41

The city of words 42

A meeting place 43

From here 43

Chapter Three: Literary Anthropology

Literary Anthropology as Method 44

Endings: The Riddle of the Tea Cups 48

Mimesis: Auerbach 50

Fictionable lives 51

Dizzying effects of the doppelgänger 51

Manguel, a moral tale 52

The Stone Book, a metaphor 53

Nietzche's Doppelgänger 55

Vaihinger's *As If* 55

Literary anthropology as method in

Readings from a Life 57

Wolfgang Iser's literary anthropology 60

Reading 64

The role of narrative 66

Broken Mirrors 68

Foucault's *Las Meninas* 68

Chapter Four: Seeing our rural selves

Literary spaces and self-study 70

Literary texts and self-study 71

Somewhere, 'where' matters 72

There was a place 73

Our textual selves 74

(Our) selves in context 76

Textual seductions, MacLeod's

No Great Mischief 78

Two (+ one) readers respond 80

The quest for truth in fiction 81

Recognition and self-recognition 82

Moving on 85

Chapter Five: The Strange Heaven

Reading the local 88

Margaret M Saunders 89

Julia Sauer and *Fog Magic* 89

The 'folk' 91

Paula Fox 91

Budge Wilson 92

The matter of 'voice' 93

Lynn Coady 94

Margaret Doody and the novel 98

In the Margins: Holy Images, Aggrieved Fathers, and Fallen Daughters 100

Turning the lights on 105

Lotman and the use of symbols 108

Social mending 109

Discussion 110

Chapter Six: What counts?

What counts? Education beyond the city 115

Literature is like an ear 115

A prereading, Leafy and her goose 116

What counts? 118

Challenging fictions, policy matters 119

Dominant stories, linear plots 121

Circular narratives/ originary thinking 122

The Moomintrolls, a metaphor 123

Fantasia/ social facts 124

Transit points 125

Data 125

Learning for Life 126

New fiction and the view from the stage 129

Witnessing: I see their faces 133

The Farnsworth soliloquy 133

Discussion/ insight 135

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Recursive readings 137

Revisiting 'What are you doing here?' 138

Literary representations as sites for virtual travel 139

A sense of ambivalence 140

Revisiting Mistry's tea cups 141

Bauman, protecting the qualitative 141

Literature lends transparency to culture 142

Thomas King, the Native storyteller 142

The self as an ethical project 143

Cultural collage 143

Contradiction 143

An ethics of authenticity 144

Policy implications and possibilities 144

You are what you read 148

Emergence between the lines 148

Role of fiction in the construction of the self 150

Finding our place 151

Self-study, going forth 151

The promise of light 152

The beneficiaries of *Readings from a Life* 153

Difficult hope 154

The return of the stranger 155

References 157

List of Images

Grandfather Kelly near Natashquan, Quebec, circa 1950	27
The survey crew and tower, Lower North Shore, Quebec	28
The vestigial stairs with child, circa 1905	38
O. Gentileshi: *Christ with thorns,* circa 1613-14	102
Artemisia Gentileshi: *Judith slaying Holofernes*, circa 1612-13	104
The hospital birthing bed	105
Relief Smith and her goose	118
Great Grandmother Ella May (Mildred) Trask, undated photo	155

CHAPTER ONE

Readings from a Life: Introduction

> Wherever we are we can only discern profiles of things, there is no 'view from nowhere'--no universal view. Each view being incomplete, there is the sense of more being in reserve, an unpredictable possibility. (Greene, 2007, p. 2)

Reminiscence

(Locating an Archive)

I write in a place called Little River and about five hundred meters from where my late father was born. I imagine my father, round about 1931, as a young man in this tiny rural Nova Scotian fishing village being relieved to have escaped school in pursuit of a hapless life on and off the water as a fisherman and then a fish plant worker. There is no record of what my father may have read as a young man and only scraps and anecdote survive to tell me what he attended to as he aged. When he died, my father's wallet was stuffed with bits of paper clipped from local newspapers. Each clipping was an advertisement for a pony, a horse, or some bit of anachronistic farm equipment. After many years of involvement with the fishery my father, who was educated to the grade nine level in a two room school house, fancied himself a gentleman farmer or so the meager paper traces suggest.

Far away and across the ocean I imagine another man in very different circumstances unpacking his library. Benjamin's famous (1931) piece *Unpacking My Library* ensures that we do have insight into Benjamin's literacy and indeed the value he attached to that literacy. O bliss! O bliss! Such is the way in which Benjamin referred to a life lived inside books. Ownership, and movement are conjured by Benjamin as he pursues the unpacking of his books as ways to contemplate memories, not so much of the reading themselves but of the events surrounding the acquisition of this or that text.

Certainly the smell of a book triggers a means of returning to incidents in time and place where that book, that text, seemed somehow a central artifact in the development of the life's intellect. My little leather bound *King James Bible* takes me back to childhood and early forms of resistance when I gazed at the breasts of angels and the sparkling eyes of Christ while the choir sang *Jesus Loves Me*. My musty 1950ish copies of *The Little Red School House* remind me of the ambivalence I felt towards school. My small collection of student newspapers, which as a rebellious young man I authored, suggests why the good ladies of the local churches prayed for my soul.

My entire collection of mostly Marxist theoretical and historical texts, from my undergraduate years at King's College and Dalhousie University, suggest the kind of intellectual tea in which I was steeped. And then there are the few remaining copies of the Maoist *En Lutte/In Struggle* newspaper which in the mid 1970's I had some difficulty getting patrons of the Nova Scotia liquor store to buy on cold winter days on South Park St. in Halifax. Albania's vain glorious future, it seems, was a priority for neither the

beggars outside the store nor of the middle class students and well healed patrons entering the store. Memory leaps forward to 1983 when newly married we stood near the then Yugoslav/Albanian border and watched rural women in near thirty degree heat heap massive cone-like hay stacks by hand. I wonder what those now mute women would have written for *In Struggle* regarding their revolution.

And over there on my study's shelf, is a healthy collection of what might best be described as pedagogical material which has provided the lifeblood of *techne* throughout the course of my career as a teacher. As I write, all the texts from the graduate years in Montreal and in London are nearby. Surrounding the whole lot and on the main floor of the house is a rather large collection of literature, novels, the likes of which have made life full and rich with pleasure and insight into the spaces and places, both real and imagined I have traveled. A subset of the novel collection contains East Coast fiction and it is this subset which I have used over the years to experience the broader cultural flows at work in this part of Canada. The reading of these novels has provided a means of collaboratively generating cultural competence (Bartol and Richardson, 1998) on the part of colleagues and fellow readers in relation to life on the East Coast.

Libraries are no longer isolated or spaces which are closed onto themselves. I recall the mysterious logic of the towering Senate House Library on Malet Street at the University of London. That monolithic structure contains over two million acquisitions. I recall how when one moved in that building, literally shoulder to shoulder with books, the pulse quickened and an exhilaration was felt when finally one could handle the desired

text and investigate its shelf mates, and how that excitement[1] was in part a product of the physicality of the quest itself. In the elevated and dense spaces of the Senate House library a lightness of being emerged. Here, my own small library has grown in recent years and now includes a world neither my father, nor Benjamin, nor the designers of the Senate House could have imagined. At my fingertips and from my basement study I have access to the great urban academic libraries and the grand bookstores which, in response to digital request, send texts of all kinds to my hard drive or through the post to my door. Private acquisitions are in an instant supplemented and expanded through public (albeit paid) access. Through my electronic portals a new kind of labyrinth unfolds and the world as word is literally at my fingertips. And yet when I set the keyboard aside and pass through the hinged doors of my study and house, I sense and experience the rustic environ in which I work. Representation gives way to sensation followed by perception and both in turn feed a space in between[2].

In the field. My library provides both an archival field and a site for analysis and research. Individual texts within the library provide invitations and points of departure for understanding lived experience. Transit points abound. This then is the place in which I

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[1] This sense of excitement is akin to what Carolyn Steedman (2001) discusses as *archive fever*: the wakefulness, sleeplessness, and delirium which occurs along the way to that deep satisfaction of finding things. In this article, Steedman works to bring about an accommodation between deconstructionists and historians. She refers to archive fever as brain fever, the disease of 'literary men' (p. 1167). Of particular interest in the present context is Steedman's contention that it is from the dust of the archive that the absent ones, the nameless ones come to matter (p. 1177). This is the residue arising from the fever.

[2] A space in between is an allusion to Levinas (1990) and to Iser (2000) and their scholarly discussion of the work of Franz Rosenzweig in relation to liminal spaces or spaces which emerge during the act of interpretation such that the distance between the familiar and the strange may close but does not disappear and therefore poses a certain necessary challenge for humans to achieve a kind of coping strategy in the face of the other, of alterity, and of uncertainty.

prepare my *Readings from a Life*. These notes provide the background to my larger project which consists of literary and autobiographical[3] narrative readings arising from the curious question, 'What are you doing here?' This question was asked by a well intentioned, cosmopolitan friend, mentor, and world renowned literacy specialist from London who, having had time to visit my school district and observe my professional and familiar surroundings was somewhat perplexed at my 'being here'. There are layers to this question which can only be answered autobiographically[4]. In the question 'what' expresses my friend's puzzlement and 'here' refers to rural Nova Scotia. 'You' refers to a now middle aged likely white male school teacher whose personal and career pathways have been embedded in and crossed the general trajectories and educational flows in rural Eastern Canada since the time in the early 1960's when he had learned to read. 'Doing' suggests agency, living a life, perhaps something in the order of being productive.

And then there is the *here*. The refined urban accents of those who come from the great cities are difficult to read in the sense that 'What are you doing *here* (pronounced

[3] Grumet (1990) uses the language of healing to frame her conceptualization of the use of autobiography in relation to educational experience: "any writing and reading of our lives presents us with the challenge that is at the heart of every educational experience: making sense of our lives in the world. Autobiography becomes a medium for both teaching and research because each entry expresses the particular peace its author has made between the individuality of his or her subjectivity and the intersubjective and public character of meaning. The wound that haunts our consciousness by severing our private lives from our public world may begin to repair itself, at least on the level of text, as the languages of both worlds and their ways of being mingle in educational theory and practice. There is no formula for this relation. It is tuned to every writer and reader and to the situation they share" (p. 325).

[4] Miller (1997, 1995) makes a feminist argument for the use of autobiography in educational research but not so much in the sense of telling a life story *qua* story but rather as a way of articulating the personal sources (history) of a research question. In so doing she appears engaged in a kind of conscious rescue operation aimed at saving or inserting the self, especially the female self, into larger educational narratives in such a way as to declare our hitherto missing selves present within those same stories.

with a suppressed glottal 'r')?' could have been a compliment suggesting tenacity or dedication, perhaps a love of place, or it could have been an insinuation that really you are here but you do not belong here. You belong elsewhere. In any case, my friend intended no harm and her question, which is indicative of a failure of the urban imagination in relation to the countryside, is now my question and it provides the motivation and impetus to unearth aspects of rusticity in relation to education and to investigate how, as teachers in rural Atlantic Canada, we see our rural selves. Taken as a whole the essays comprising the chapters of this work, each a contribution to the cultural study of life in Eastern Canada, provide the complex and necessarily partial response to 'What are you doing here?'[5] Literary and autobiographical accounts of teachers' lives set against and interpolated[6] within the literary landscape of Eastern Canada are rare. A. Neilsen's (1999) *Daily Meaning: Counternarratives of Teachers Work* and L. Neilsen's (1994) *A Stone in My Shoe* provide inspiration for such a project. Places I have been and things I have said are to be found as afterthoughts in both those works (Corbett in A. Neilsen, 1999, p. 174, L. Neilsen, p. 40). Closer to home, Michael Corbett (2007), who once played my father or brother in a little 'professional development' play wherein we

[5] Methodologically, this question sits comfortably beside the one that Mitchell, Weber and O'Reilly Scanlon (2005) pose in their edited book on autobiography and self-study in teacher education: "Just Who Do We Think We Are?"

[6] On the matter of interpolation, this has its genesis in Althusser's (1970) reference to the coercive action of the police in the apprehension of a subject/ suspect. Subjects in this frame of reference are brought into being as guilty parties, ones who have nothing to say because caught/ transformed into a subject they are subsumed within a dominant discourse/ ideology. Interpolation reverses this ideological iron cage and interjects the voice of the subject while interrupting the dominant. The subject is quite able, as Ashcroft (2001) says, "to interpolate the various modes of imperialist discourse to use it for different purposes, to counter its effects by transforming them" (p. 14). The relevance of this notion here is linked to the suffocating effects of ideology which silence through their array of 'bony-structured' (De Beauvoir, 1963) concepts and which when reversed allow for escape, rather like in the old Russian folk tale involving Baba Yaga whose thin bones literally cage children disrupting their lives but in the end, through their own devices, they are able to escape. Literature provides a precarious site and device through which the speaking subject may escape the cage.

tried to imagine educational futures on Digby Neck, has developed our early suspicions into his general thesis that folks on Digby Neck do not go far in *Learning to Leave: the Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community*. In that work a former schoolmate, lacking poetry, suggests I am unemployable despite my years of education (p. 32). At the time I foolishly concurred. That said, there are moments in Corbett's text when his well honed musical ear allows local voices to punctuate his labor of love with little gems like this one: "So by the seventies and eighties, although they did see a slightly different world, if they could hang on to that old world, they saw nothing wrong with that. It's just that this world has almost disappeared now" (p. 232). The waves along our Fundy coastline crash in rhythm to local voices. Thus, Corbett's masculine tale of drift and survival in the face of the globalizing forces of history and time provides the sociological narrative underlying my larger project. Vistas from the literary landscape are described by Fuller (2004) in *Writing the Everyday*, Kulyk Keefer (1996) in her article "Nova Scotia's Literary Landscape", and in Ursula Kelly's (1993) *Marketing Place*. The literary works of Lynn Coady (2000, 2002), Alistair MacLeod (1999, 2001), and of the playwright Catherine Banks (2007), paint the scene. This work then opens space for further excavations using the literary as landscape in rural parts of Eastern Canada. This is in the context of my project which is not quite self-study, not quite fiction, not quite memoir, or not quite pure fantasy and which will stand, I hope, as a contribution to better understanding the development and lived experience of a teacher in this rural place.

Personal story making/telling is a form of cultural production which proceeds retrospectively and recursively through various life experiences which are by their nature

episodic, that is to say there is no totalizing master narrative to be found. Rather there exists a continuous life sequence and depending on where one freezes the frame, that is the particular story or episode which gets told. This framing of the narrative, the writing itself, has certain congruence to the way in which social space becomes personal space or place. These episodes in a life are conditioned by site effects which allow individual agents to experience their weight in the world (Bourdieu, 1999). Projecting that weight, that bulk, back into the world is a way of compensating for absence by inserting the presence of the self back into the larger social scene. At best, the move back into the world is not a dead weight, the supposed product of the great sleep brought on by Bourdieu's site effects, but rather a living transcendent presence capable of posing a challenge to the way things are (Greene, 2007, 2000, 1978).

Readings from a Life. The readings follow upon theoretical and methodological investigations in which I outline key aspects of literary anthropology and in which I discuss the concept of place as experienced from my doorstep. The overall work is hybrid[7] in nature, that is to say the work arises from mixed origins and differing yet complementary approaches to how one might go about setting forth readings from a life. In this hybrid sense, the present work is then part self-study, part fiction, part memoir, and part fantasy. An autobiographical project which aims not at the impossible task of

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[7] Soanes & Stevenson, (Eds.). (2005). *The Oxford Dictionary of English (revised edition)* provides the following definition: hybrid, Sense 2: a thing made by combining two different elements: jungle is a hybrid of reggae and house music. • a word formed from elements taken from different languages, for example television (tele- from Greek, vision from Latin).• bred as a hybrid from different species or varieties. - DERIVATIVES hybridism noun hybridity noun. - ORIGIN early 17th cent. (as a noun): from Latin hybrida 'offspring of a tame sow and wild boar, child of a freeman and slave, etc.'.

telling the whole story, rather which aims to relate those parts which shed light on rural realities, does of course involve writing about the self as the author imagines the past. That imagining is occasioned by an act of memory, always a tricky business due to lapses of memory, narrative gaps, or just the process of selection itself. Why one writes what ones writes in the composition of memoirs is in some measure mysterious or perhaps a side effect of where one happens to find oneself. The *his* or *her* story as is all history constitute part of the fictionable moment, that is to say crafty narratives arise in the absence of knowable and seamless self-stories. These are indeed fantastic in nature and yet they sit in an analogous relationship with the known world. They constitute a kind of evidence.

And so the *Readings from a Life* encompass aspects of each of these genre (self-study, fiction, memoir, fantasy) in order to capture in words various aspects of the author's particular real and imagined experience set as it were in real and imagined places. Overall, the account consists of a meta-reading of aspects of my life and career as only I can imagine them, drawn as they are, from various encounters with colleagues, friends, family, and texts. In an age of accountability, 'What Counts?' provides the just present rhetorical gesture, Barthe's punctum[8], which provides thematic structure to the

[8] The punctum (the *that was*) suggests the subtle beyond and is used here to indicate that there is more, in the places, real and imagined, that this work seeks to conjure or connote and this requires an imaginary pursuit on the part of the reader of this or that gesture. Barthes (2000, especially pages 55-59) uses the concept of the punctum in relation to the visual, that is to say photography. There is however in the relationship between a reader and a literary text a sufficient distance between perception and reality to suggest the need to animate a fuller, more complete reading/ fiction. Rancière (2007), criticizing Barthes, suggests that the punctum, as such, functions to erase the genealogy of the sign (p. 15). For my purposes the punctum suggests the possibility of new fictions in relation to the human traces we might associate with an object whether literary or visual.

subsequent chapters on self-study, where I examine how particular teachers read their life worlds through literary texts drawn from the literature of place in Atlantic Canada and in the chapter on the Strange Heaven where I provide a reading of particular cultural forces at play in Eastern Canada as well as a critical reading of the ideological tropes found within the culture. 'What Counts?' suggests throughout that there are issues of power at play here and that these issues are somewhat hidden from view through the absence of coherent policy in relation to rural issues in Nova Scotia. My work here suggests at the very least that should educational policy be developed with an awareness of, and a sensitivity to, literary representations and experience of place then the mediating institutions themselves would be better positioned to serve those who find themselves growing up in particularly difficult places. This literary and autobiographical work as a whole, then, is intended to provide a modest contribution and corrective to the situation wherein "our failure to expose the social construction of place has limited our understanding of class identities, just as it has restricted our appreciation of race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender" (Creed & Ching, 1997, p. 27).

Readings from a Life takes the form of a cultural study which seeks to answer questions "in the field" by working within the relevant archive. While it deviates from a more traditional research genre in terms of "the order of things", it nonetheless sets up a question – the question (What are you doing here?), offers method (through literary anthropology), draws on fieldwork (through memory, conversations, literary texts, and photographs), and offers a sense of the value of this kind of work. To do this has required locating the work within the broad range of studies in reading and culture which deal with

questions of identity in place but less from a sociological perspective and more from a literary and anthropological perspective. Culture, as Kelly (1997) points out, is about the processes and practices, by which the social relations that position a group are defined, contested, legitimized, and transformed (p. 16). These processes and practices include the phenomena of cultural representations found in literary texts and the way in which these texts function within projects of identity formation. Although throughout this work I place a great deal of emphasis on matters of representation, that is to say how people are seen in various forms of literary representation, in the end the thesis is aligned with Stewart's (2005) "cabinet of curiosities designed to incite curiosity" (p. 1041). That said, the questions are real and relevant to the shifting landscape of rural and especially Atlantic Canada. The question, '*What are you doing here?*' asked in the context of rural realities has led me to examine how rural spaces are constructed within the literature of place[9], and has led to an examination of my own reading in this particular rural place, and further this has occasioned an examination of how particular colleagues 'read' similar places. In this way the work is meant to contribute to the cultural study of place in Atlantic Canada.

[9] The literature of place is not to be confused here with that body of literature which champions place-based education. Although place-based education as such insists on dwelling, on rootedness, and on intimate familiarity with the local (see for example Berry, 2001, *Life is a Miracle)* and often is posed as an antidote for the excesses of both modernity and post-modernity place-based notions contain within them the immediate contradiction that an embedded plea to return to the mystical values of the past does not in the bargain allow for the fact that history does not it seems moves back in time. [The fact that things evolve, emerge, and change is, despite the current and real fact of the ecological breaking point, post oil, and the sustained critique of unsustainable economies, evidence that students must be positioned through their education to imagine the world other than as it was and other than as it is.] My work here, with specific appeal to consider the way in which literature feeds the imagination in rural places, is in my view post-place based and resonates with Gruenewald's (2003) 'best of both worlds' in which he calls for both a decolonization and a reinhabitation of the places in which we find ourselves: "Developing a critical pedagogy of place means challenging each other to read the texts of our own lives and to ask constantly what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved" (p. 10).

"What are You Doing Here?" The Study as a Whole

> The origin of the material in writing can only be myself. I is not I, of course, because it is with the others, coming from the others, putting me in the other's place, giving me the other's eyes. Which means there is something common. (Cixous, 1997, p. 87)

Following on from the autobiographical notes which were written in response to the overall question of the study, 'What are you doing here?', I work towards the establishment of a field wherein I am able to locate the main literary anthropological and autobiographical sites for this research. It should be noted here that in the literature, particularly in the area of teacher education and narrative inquiry, self-study and autobiographical accounts possess strong affinity to autoethnography. Self-study is a form of inquiry into one's own life story and occupies the same borderlands as autobiography. It is an intentioned method aimed not only at telling one's own story through a closely examined self but in the writing of the self, that is the self-study, the work is aimed outward and often speaks to both the political and the social in a bid for transformation and change (refer to Mitchell and Weber, 2005, pp. 4-8). Autoethnography, itself, has deep roots in feminist theory and as such arises out of the experience of a distancing and patriarchal gaze said to distort one's experience of the world lending such experience unrecognizable. "Autoethnography is part of a corrective movement against colonizing ethnographic practices that erased the subjectivity of the researcher while granting him or her absolute authority for representing 'the other' of the research. In autoethnography, the

subject and object of research collapse into the body/thoughts/feelings of the (auto)ethnographer located in his or her particular space and time" (Gannon, 2006, p. 475).

There are strong narrative underpinnings to autoethnographic research and as well there is a sense that so-called traditional paradigms may be, if not ignored, at least side-stepped or set to one side in favor of alterative[10], that is to say different, accounts of lived experience. Autoethnographic accounts and literary anthropological accounts have a great deal in common. In the presentation of self in the world these accounts share an attention to narrative, to an episodic sense of experience bordering on polyphonous discourse, and to a notion of liminal or in-between spaces. Such spaces constitute a home to the concept of eminence. Both literary anthropology and autoethnography provide ways to inscribe real and imagined experience on to the body of qualitative research (Cixous, 1993; Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2006, 2004; Gannon, 2006; Lau, 2002; Stewart, 2005).

As noted, these readings from a life, offer a series of linked essays which grow out of my experience moving into and out of rural places such that the movement allows for possible insight into the nature of rural spaces, and the way in which youth and colleagues read and construct themselves within these spaces. In the end I aim to suggest that the

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[10] Bochner, 2000, suggests that term 'alterative' is closer to what is meant when one attempts 'alternative' ways of representing lived experience: "But in qualitative research, alternative ethnography has evolved more as an alteration or transformation than an alternative—a change in form as well as in purpose. Although we may call it 'alternative,' what we really intend is 'alterative'" (p. 267). Refer also to Ellis, 2004, p. 194-218 and her extended discussion of 'creative analytic practices'. I use the term alterative to suggest that this work does not *substitute* for other ways of seeing the world rather it is *another* way of viewing lived experience.

stories told here function in part to address gaps and absences in official educational policy discourses here on the East Coast. On the political front the telling of these stories, the giving of voice here, makes it less credible for those with decision making power to plead a case of 'not knowing' in relation to the social issues which surface herein.

The Chapter Outlines

The thesis consists of seven chapters. This chapter, the introduction to the work as a whole, draws on the rhizomatic[11] (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983) approach to my *Readings from a Life*. Rhizomes, like the path traveled by the ever expanding crabgrass on my lawn, provide a metaphor for how one might capture interrelated aspects of what gets made in a certain place without succumbing to reductivity and in the process telling a story as if it were just one or the only story. This quest for meaning *here* on the East Coast proceeds in much the same way as my garden tiller plows the ground before me. Mindful of past experience in the garden I avoid certain areas and yet in the act of plowing I awaken new earthly delights.

The problem of 'being here' is taken up in the second chapter. This chapter entitled 'Where? An investigation into the concept of place' provides a hermeneutic and phenomenological account, characterized by a telescopic and heteroglossic[12] reading of

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[11] Refer to Deleuze & Guattari (1983) for more detailed discussion of the rhizome which "proceeds by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, stitching" and "refers to a map that must be produced or constructed, is always detachable, connectable, reversible, and modifiable, with multiple entrances and exits, with its lines of flight" (pp. 48, 49).

[12] For a full discussion of heterogeneity in relation to speech genres and to discourse in the novel see Bakhtin, 1992, pp. 60-67 and 2000, pp. 260-275.

the concept of place[13]. I use autobiographical memory to unpack the problematic notion of being *here* as a partial response to the more general question, *'Where?'* I use memory to allow me to present fragments from my lived experience which are themselves instantiated or brought to the fore as a result of examining artifacts and pictures found within my domestic spaces. A close examination of these artifacts serves to create an aura through which it is possible to think of a teacher's life lived for the most part on the margins. In chapter two I stress that *getting here* means that in some sense one is *away* and this dichotomy leads to a consideration of distance as a device (Ginsburg, 2001) used to make the familiar strange. Documentary records based on the idea of going north suggest a way of thinking about our collective ambivalence towards rural places. Towards the end of the chapter I move closer to the concept of home by entering childhood dream spaces. Bachelard's hermeneutics are evoked alongside the poetics of the wanderer, Kenneth White, whose work is used to underscore the notion that a sense of place involves groundedness or being here.

The third chapter centers on literary anthropology as research method as a precursor to more specific excavations of particular moments of my life and teaching career in what can best be characterized as rural space. This methodological excursion

[13] Refer to Bruner (1987) **Life as Narrative** for a discussion of place in the dual sense of being out there (the real world) and close up (home). These two places constitute for Bruner a 'psychic geography' in which one can situate the various 'scenes' associated with the telling of a life story (pp. 24, 25).

works to establish important categories and strategic moves such as the *as if* of fiction which brings about an alignment between reading the word and reading the world and *recursion* which allows readers to immerse and re-immerse themselves in fiction only to emerge and re-emerge with new or different insights into their worlds. In the beginning of chapter two, I invoke the notion of reflective angels with their strange presence hovering over the world. I quickly move to convey the sense that teaching in dark times requires conceptual or methodological tools in order to make it possible to see into the world in which I have taught. Literary texts and imagination provide excursions and shared opportunities to sense the kinds of imaginative spaces which inform my work. The extraordinary voice of Clarice Lispector is present or just beneath the text throughout. Reading as providing a means of boundary crossing and as a humanistic endeavor is outlined. This leads to an examination of the work of the literary theorist Wolfgang Iser against a backdrop of Vaihinger's philosophy of *As if.* Understanding *As if* involves examining the effects of the split or dual self and exposing the dizzying effects of the doppelgänger. I then move into the nature of fiction and the establishment of 'sites' for fieldwork through closer examination of Iser's anthropology. Nearing the end of the chapter, a link is made to the role of narrative along with further thoughts on reading. Finally, I arrive back with the angels and the notion that their mirrors may not be so bright after all.

The fourth chapter 'Truth in Fiction: Seeing our rural selves' is based on my experience in the field with colleagues who provided me with insights into their own readings of the literature of place. In this chapter I take the position that the

anthropological use of literary texts to examine aspects of the self in connection with others has the potential to shine a light on how we, as teachers, construct ourselves in relation to colleagues, family, and friends. Such texts provide a means of staging, or bringing into view, what is otherwise a taken for granted or a commonplace mode of existence. The literary text has what Iser (1993) in his work on literary anthropology refers to as a doppelgänger effect both in the lives of ordinary readers and in the invisible surround we call culture. "Staging," according to Iser, "is not a compensation but a doubling that enables the hidden aspects of a situation to assume a form" (pp. 54, 55). As Iser suggests, staging is a means of making available that which is generally unavailable or sealed off (p. 55). The staging which occurs during the act of reading is akin to a dream state wherein the dreamer dreams herself outside and above mere corporeal existence and yet retains much of what has been set aside during the dream. Literary fiction makes accessible that which happens to humans during the act of dreaming and "reveals itself to be pure semblance as regards whatever gestalt human beings make themselves into" (p. 86). "Semblance itself," according to Iser, "is the propellant for a variegated and limitless self-invention of what human beings are like" (p. 86). This chapter investigates these notions and provides insight into how two colleagues read Alistair MacLeod's (1999) *No Great Mischief* as part of their personal professional growth as teachers.

The fifth chapter provides a close reading of Lynn Coady's (1998) *Strange Heaven* with the aim of underscoring the ambivalence experienced by rural youth in less than idyllic places. 'A place called *Strange Heaven*' is an account of my reading of the young Canadian author, Lynn Coady, and where her (1998) novel *Strange Heaven*, has

taken me. The novel provides a window on rural Cape Breton, a place famous for its scenery, Celtic heritage, and its incredibly fertile ground for the arts. Cape Breton, in recent times, has produced such masterful works as Alistair MacLeod's (1999) *No Great Mischief*. The island is the ancestral home of Ann-Marie MacDonald whose (1997) *Fall on Your Knees* sheds a bright light on various and sordid aspects of Cape Breton culture. Because of the historic and largely forced migrations which link Cape Breton to nearly all parts of the world, these novels tend to receive a wide audience for reasons which topographically extend well beyond their solid artistic merit. In the popular culture, places like Cape Breton and rural Nova Scotia elicit strong emotions brought about by a multi-generational sense of loss and a nostalgic search for the rural idyll. Lynn Coady's novels and short stories explore much of this same landscape but because the subject of her work invariably involves youth, Coady has a certain appeal to younger generations and to those who work with rural youth. Coady's work grows directly out of her acute awareness of societal ennui in Eastern Canada. This chapter provides evidence that readers of the culture of Eastern Canada should rethink their nostalgia.

The sixth chapter entitled 'What Counts? Education Beyond the City, Does Rurality Matter?' intensifies the general sense of ambivalence I have experienced in rural Nova Scotia throughout my professional career and considers aspects of rurality which appear clouded in dominant policy narratives as these narratives attempt to provide insight into educational futures in rural Nova Scotia. In this chapter I suggest that alterative frameworks for investigating rural realities are useful when considering our rural selves. The frameworks are constructed through the anthropological use of literary

texts in order to more directly address the issue of whether or not rurality matters. I begin this chapter in a place of rural madness, followed by my question, "What Counts?" I end by staging the rural subaltern and giving voice to a member of my elementary school peer group.

The seventh and concluding chapter provides a metareading of the generative profiles emerging from the particular instances featured in the previous chapters highlighted in this set of readings from a life. In particular I will suggest that this work stands as a contribution to our collective understanding of how we have come to be in this place metaphorically referred to as a strange heaven. Further, given the richness of the literary landscape here, I will suggest that the contrapuntal structure embedded in this use of literary anthropology as method holds promise for further inquiry within the field of teacher self-study and narrative inquiry within the educational landscape of Eastern Canada.

CHAPTER TWO: WHERE?

An investigation into the concept of place

Introduction

This chapter investigates the concept of place through theoretical excavations aimed at answering the question, 'How might the concept of place be theorized appropriate to understanding the life of a teacher lived for the most part in rural Canada?' *Place* as a concept and as an existential reality, is best articulated close up which means 'here' where we meet. In and of itself, *here* is fluid and in some sense could be anywhere. Understanding the concept of place involves an act of interpretation or, in Iser's sense, translation (2000, pp. 5-12) in a broad field where there are many voices. The voices I attend to are those which resonate with my autobiographical sense of place which involves attention to the place we call home. Home is used here as a metaphor for what is not obvious: a site where things happen and something gets made: places conceal, homes elide. The 'unhomeliness' (Bhabba, 1992, pp. 141, 142) experienced in certain literary places suggests sites where the chance of coming to know the stranger is always in the moment and around the corner possible. As Hodder (1997) says, 'everything depends on everything else' and interpretation involves the creation of circuitry between different types of data (p. 694). I use this project to create lines of circuitry which connect certain aesthetic data to lived experience in both real and imagined places.

Where?

> … With his inner eye man experiences the space of his own imagination and reflection. Normally it is within the protection of this inner space that he places, retains, cultivates, lets run wild or constructs Meaning. (Berger, 1992, p. 51)

Where? is my topic and *Here* is the problematic which unfolds in this chapter. Here, I develop a sense of place relying on a felt and experiential sense of space which plumbs autobiographical memory. Memory takes the author to places which are part of my family's history and these are presented with the use of artifacts and pictures from the past. I have tried to create an aura through which it is possible to think of a teacher's life spent for the most part in rural places. Because *getting here* means that one is *away*, I take up the question of distance as a device (Ginzburg, 2001) which helps make the familiar strange. Glen Gould's *The Idea of the North* is explored as a way of thinking about our collective ambivalence about rural places. I then move closer to the concept of home through oneiric encounters from my childhood doorstep. Bachelard's notion of intimate immensity is evoked alongside the poetics of the wanderer, Kenneth White. White's work supports the general notion that a sense of place involves groundedness or being here. The chapter as a whole opens space for further excavations using the literary as landscape in rural parts of Eastern Canada. This is in the context of my hybrid project which is not quite self-study or fiction, not quite memoir or pure fantasy and which, as a study in reading and culture, stands as a contribution to better understanding aspects of the development and lived experience of a teacher in this rural place[14].

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[14] Refer to chapter 1, pp. 8, 9 and to endnote 10, p. 13.

Living in an age of migration, fluidity, and general post modern malaise, a life lived on the rustic fringe of mainstream Canada constitutes an increasingly marginalized presence. By marginalized I mean quite simply being away from the great urban centers which provide space, if not shelter, for most of this country's population. In Nova Scotia, where the urban population constitutes approximately fifty-six percent of the total population, the divide between urban and rural is in some ways differently constituted than the numbers[15] alone indicate. The gap is in part constituted by the larger culture's perception of rural space as well as by how folks living in that space see themselves and are seen[16]. The gap, constituted by the distance between the ever-shifting tectonics of urban versus rural (urbane versus rustic) is to be found in the places where one dwells. The notion of dwelling is used here to suggest the literary. The places one actually lives in or near are also experienced within literary spaces. These literary spaces provide a kind of 'by the side of the road' cultural representation[17] of both the landscape and lived experiences of those who inhabit, that is to say, live and die in, these rustic environs.

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[15] Statistics Canada (2005) defines the rural population for 1981 to 2001 as persons living outside centres with a population of 1,000 AND outside areas with 400 persons per square kilometre. The population density for the municipality of Digby was 4.8 persons per square kilometre. **Source:** Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1851 - 2001.

[16] Being in the country is to be seen as being rural, rustic, and close to nature. Fantasies abound regarding this state of being and are often captured nostalgically through a lens which connotes the rural idyll, a place of timelessness, repose, and escape. Leersson (2002) discusses the prevalence of this notion when writers produce literary landscapes in his article **Nature, History, and Modernity**. Of particular interest is his discussion of the chronotope or time space linkages in our perceptions of being in the country (p. 26). For a particularly evocative discussion of this theme refer to Simon Schama's (1995) reflection on Thoreau's encounter with the wild, hairy huckleberry: "Here grows the hairy huckleberry, as it did in Squaw Sachem's day and a thousand years before, and concerns me perchance more than it did her. I have no doubt that for a moment I experience exactly the same sensations as if I were alone in a bog in Rupert's Land, and it saves me the trouble of going there; for what in any case makes the difference between being here and being there but many such little differences of flavor and roughness put together" (p. 578)?

[17] Kathleen Stewart (1996) quoted in Kincheloe & McLaren (2005, p. 329) refers to culture in the following way: "Culture, as it is seen through its productive forms and means of mediation, is not, then, reducible to a

Where? Place and Space

Where am I? Where are you from? What is it like there? How did you get here? How far did you travel? These questions elicit a sense of place.[18] As well, the questions begin the process of exposing the structure of feelings which might be attached to a particular place. Structure of feelings is a phrase used by Raymond Williams (1971) to sum up his notion of a world view, seemingly ideological, arising from his attempt to close the distance between belief systems and the real structures as well as the social and natural relationships giving rise to such systems. Williams put his case:

> There were real social and natural relationships, and there were relatively organized, relatively coherent formations of these relationships, in contemporary institutions and beliefs. But what seemed to me to happen, in the greatest literature, was a simultaneous realization of and response to these underlying and formative structures. Indeed, that constituted, for me, the specific literary phenomenon: the dramatization of a process, the making of a fiction, in which the constituting elements, of real social life and beliefs, were simultaneously actualized and in an important way differently experienced, the difference residing in the imaginative act, the imaginative method, the specific and genuinely unprecedented imaginative organization. We can feel the effect, in all this, of major individual talents, and indeed I believe that there are discoverable specific

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fixed body of social value and belief or a direct precipitant of lived experience in the world but grows into a space on the side of the road where stories weighted with sociality take on a life of their own".

[18] A 'sense of place' captures Seamus Heaney's (1980) formulation that place is known in two ways: 'lived, illiterate, and unconscious and the other learned, literate, and conscious'. It is in the literary sensibility that both ways are said to co-exist in a conscious and unconscious tension (p. 131).

> reasons, of a social kind, in the immediate histories of writers, why this imaginative alternative was sought. But I am also sure that these creative acts compose, within a historical period, a specific community: a community visible in the structure of feeling and demonstrable, above all, in fundamental changes of form. (pp. 13, 14)

In addition to exposing the structure of feelings attached to a place, these questions suggest distance and the presence of the stranger. These are wakeful questions, that is to say questions which encourage attention to space: to movement, to moments of rest, and to where one happens to be. The questions are both significant and important when establishing matters of identity[19] since the problem of identity links to the rootedness or groundedness of one's self or a people. Here it is prudent to write for one's self and not for one's people. The trace, the outline of one's self, involves a set of rootprints (Cixous, 1997, p. 179).

One searches for frames which allow outlines or subjects to be set forth or to be exposed in a certain light. Framed, one comes into view; one becomes less strange, and somewhat familiar. Frames suggest images, a photograph or perhaps a painting. Berger (2002) says that a painting becomes a place and it does so through the activity of the painter. "A place is the extension of a presence or the consequence of an action" (p. 28). "When a place is found it is found somewhere on the frontier between nature and art. It is

[19] Regarding the matter of identity, Foucault (1997) had this to say, "Through the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing, one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read" (p. 214). In the present work of self writing it is possible to glimpse fragments of a self, my self, through the windows occasioned by the particular readings contained herein.

like a hollow in the sand within which the frontier has been wiped out" (p. 29). "When a painting becomes a place, there is a chance that the face of what the painter is looking for will show itself there. The longed for 'return look' can never come directly to him, it can only come through a place" (p. 31). And so it is the dialectic of presence and absence at play when a painting becomes a place. In similar fashion, and because words paint pictures, it is likely that the literature of place offers the chance of bringing into being a return look from those who inhabit that space. The process is recursive and exists within the realm of the possible.

"Northrop Frye famously wrote that the Canadian problem of identity was primarily connected to place, 'less a matter of 'Who am I?' than of 'Where is here?'" (Manguel, 2007, p. 77). In rural Nova Scotia the enigma of the stranger is penetrated not by asking Shakespeare's tragic question 'Who goes there?' but by asking in a round about way the more open question, 'Where do you come from?' Round about questions elicit round about answers.

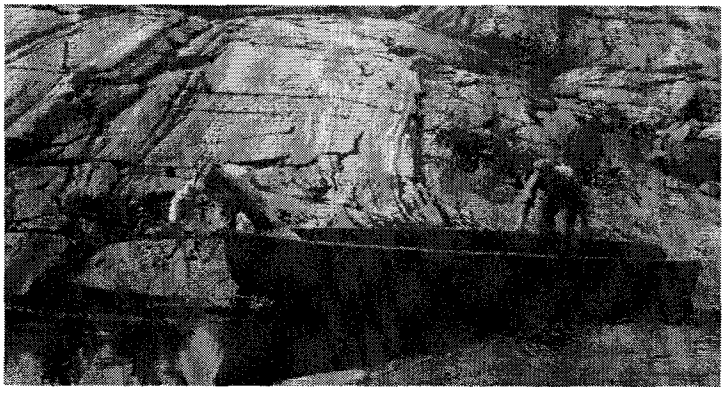
Benjamin spoke of the aura of an object of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. A work of any kind reproduced mechanically loses, as Benjamin says, its authenticity. Authenticity refers to the object's place in history including its original place of production. "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (Benjamin, 1992, p. 215). When objects are mass-produced, the plurality of copies exists as substitutes for unique existence. Such objects are reactivated once they come in contact with a listener or viewer. There is at this point of contact a new

life but what is lost or shattered according to Benjamin is the object's traditional[20] value as it contributes, in its original state, to the cultural heritage. Those things which were eliminated or 'withered away' comprise the object's aura (p. 215). "The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie" (p. 215). The hope of reconstituting an object's aura involves excursions into the past.

I have in my view a molded, threaded cover cast, it appears, from a soft metal. It is the sort of object one might find discarded in an old shed or workshop. Given the cover is malleable, the thing likely contains lead. It may be poisonous. I do not know. It is inscribed along the perimeter and in circular fashion: 'GEODETIC SERVICE OF CANADA N° 111. The center of the cover has the words OTTAWA and the upper case letters B M imprinted on the surface. Flipped over, there is a tube-like bar bisecting the hollowed circular space. There is rust in the threads, a fact which would make this cover difficult to screw in place atop a tubular marker near a decaying wooden survey tower somewhere on the ground in Atlantic Canada. Sixty or seventy years ago this object would have been new and would have been one in a sequence of markers placed as part

[20] Traditional is derived from the active process between at least two generations whereby a practice is literally handed down. This handing down has in the past entailed a sense of respect or duty which entwines the generations. In the modern world the term is used dismissively to suggest resistance to innovation and at the same time the traditions themselves are seen to be an inconvenience in the face of change. Refer to Raymond Williams (1987) pp. 318-320.

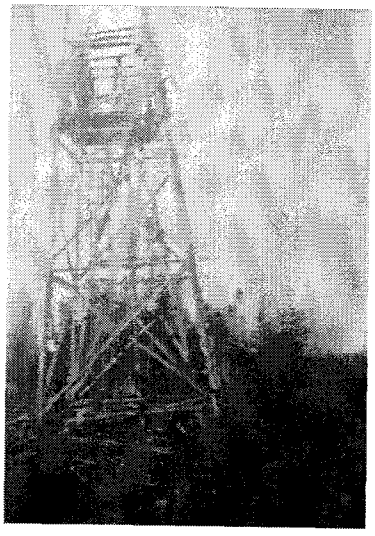
of the Geodetic Service's mapping of Eastern Canada including the Lower North Shore of Quebec, and Newfoundland. This cover came to me, not from outside, rather it was in



My grandfather is shown here along the fore of the boat, near Natashquan, Quebec. (Circa 1950)

my house a consequence of my father having inherited my grandfather's dilapidated tool box. The box contained remnants of my grandfather's life spent in wild places[21]. I found the artifact tucked into the corner of that ramshackle toolbox. Conversations with the dead might provide more detail but for now I have reached an end which invites yet another beginning.

[21] Gary Snyder (1990) says that every region has its wilderness. Walking horizontally and topographically, the region itself is an outcrop of place. As children we learn our homes, then our village or street, and in time we move for our day to day existence within a certain terrain or territory. That space we come to recognize because we move within it is, in Snyder's terms, our region. In a sense the region, once familiar, becomes a place. Those parts less visited, the parts where 'the bears are' are said to be wilderness. (pp. 25-29) Growing up, there was a 'rough part' to our house. This meant eerie framing but no walls, windows but no lights, a roof but no ceilings, and it was the place of discipline: "You will be put in the rough part if you don't stop with that silliness," my Mother would say when we misbehaved. That was my wilderness. My grandfather's wilderness was where the survey took him, parts on the remote edges of scarcely populated places, parts our father in Ottawa wanted to discipline.



Grandfather Kelly (with tie) and members of the survey crew at base camp near Natashquan, Quebec. The wooden tower built by the crew formed part of the mapping technology used in the 1940's and it allowed the surveyors to see into the distance. (Photos circa 1950)

On Distance

The story of my grandfather's toolbox and the survey marker is evocative of distance both in time and space. What is distance? Is it that which separates? Is it that which closes in and fills the gap so to speak? Is distance that which gives rise to the beyond, to the unfathomable likeness of being? Is it that which produces the stranger in our midst? Carlo Ginzburg (2001) reflects on the problem of distance in his book, *Wooden Eyes*. His book title points to the eyes of Pinocchio, the wooden puppet, who is asked 'why are you looking at me?' The things which have been made by hand look back at their producers and in that gaze a puzzle emerges, 'why are you looking at me?' It is as if the maker of the puppet does not recognize his own handiwork and more than that, it is as if the puppet has an intentioned life of its own. Why are you looking at me? Who asks such a question? Wooden eyes do not see. The question is: What do I see in that work of

art, that artifact, which I have or someone else has produced? The objects one sees are partly a function of distance and often a function of disguise.

Ginzburg quotes Shklovsky, "... to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art... By 'estranging' or 'defamiliarizing' objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious'" (p. 2). Device here means that it is the purpose of the work of art to disguise in such a way, that work is required in order for recognition to occur. This work is essentially a process of peeling back the imaginative layers. Ginzburg examines this process by referring to Marcus Aurelius' notion that reality exists in a form prior to perception. A delicious banquet for instance is to be seen as dead pig, the afterglow of good sex is to be seen as 'the attrition of an entrail and a convulsive expulsion of mere mucus' (Aurelius quoted by Ginzburg, p. 6) and so on, in order to arrive at things as they 'really are'. Ginzburg claims that Tolstoy, an admirer of Aurelius, was an early practitioner of this literary device called 'making it strange' (p. 7). Ginzburg demonstrates how the late 19th century Tolstoy wrote using 18th century enlightenment strategies influenced by Voltaire and indirectly by the earlier 17th century work of the French moralists. He cites La Bruyère's late 17th century description of the peasantry: "A number of wild animals are to be seen, both male and female, scattered over the country... they have, as it were, articulate voices, and when they stand on their feet they have human faces, and indeed they are human beings" (La Bruyère quoted by Ginzburg, p. 13). The riddle of the beast in the fields has been solved. They are in fact humans. Ginzburg then quotes from a remarkable text written by Voltaire in 1765. The text is describing a scene wherein European peasants are being served communion: "By the term 'savages', do you understand peasants, living in huts with their women and a few

animals, exposed at all times to the rigors of the seasons, knowing nothing beyond the land on which they live... gathering together on certain established days in a barnlike building to celebrate ceremonies of which they understand nothing and to listen to a man dressed in clothes unlike theirs, saying words that mean nothing to them..." (Voltaire quoted by Ginzburg, p. 14). Ginzburg suggests that these same passages clearly inform Tolstoy's (1899) description of the Mass in his novel *Resurrection*:

> The service began.
>
> It consisted of the following. The priest having dressed himself up in a strange and very inconvenient garb of gold cloth, cut and arranged little bits of bread on a saucer and then put them into a cup of wine, repeating at the same time different names and prayers. (Tolstoy quoted by Ginzburg, p. 16)

Aurelius wanted to arrive at pre-existing forms. Voltaire's project involved evoking sharp contrasts between the dull, beast-like, servile peasantry of Europe and the free noble savages found in the Indies and throughout the so-called new world thereby exposing the political issues of the day. Ginsburg's project, tracing as he does, the prehistory of the literary device we call 'estrangement' from the ancients through to the late 19th century in order to provide an account of this remarkable tool used to "overcome appearances and arrive at a deeper understanding of reality" (Ginzburg, p. 18) is to reflect on the nature of distance itself. And as fellow travelers on this historical roller coaster we in turn gain a sense of the work which is required in order to unveil or to at least explore the scene emanating from the aura of a literary object. Paradoxically, distance provides the condition of the puzzle and the puzzle itself.

Speculations of a Philosophical Surveyor

Ideas regarding space and place haunt the Canadian imagination and have provided grist for much of the country's artistic output. One such artistic artifact is Glenn Gould's famous (1967) radio broadcast *The Idea of the North* in which Gould provides a mesmerizing sense of place[22] and suggests both the vulnerability of the hinterland and the effects of distance on the human disposition. Gould in a 1968 interview referred to the broadcast as being about "'the dark night of the human soul'. It was a very dour essay on the effects of isolation upon mankind" (Timm, 2006). The broadcast, structured by Gould as a contrapuntal sound poem, fabricates a journey into Canada's north on a train, the Muskeg Express, bound for Churchill, Manitoba, with a cast of passengers whose voices interrupt, augment, and punctuate that of Wally Maclean, a surveyor whom Gould had met on his own journey North. Maclean tries to frame his sense of the North. Without romance but with commitment he eventually arrives at a metaphor derived from his thinking about the words of the great psychologist William James who said that there was no moral equivalent for war. Moral equivalent, Maclean suggests, is that which unites us in opposition, the thing we can all stand against. Maclean sees James' dictum as a challenge to discover the moral equivalent of war. He ends his speculation against a backdrop of the sound of the train nearing the end of its journey. His discovery is underscored by the strains of the final movement of Sibelius' Symphony No. 5 in E Flat, Op. 82. The discovery is this: going North is the moral equivalent of war. He arrives at this conclusion during the long clickity-clack train ride by sensing that the North itself is

[22] For another reading of Glenn Gould's work in relation to northern space see Kenneth White, 2006, A Sense of High North, pp. 84-85. White credits Gould with creating the "preliminary elements of a poetics based on solitude, space and silence".

the frontier and is about to be opened up and destroyed or so it seemed in 1967. This fictional account of the journey North and its conclusion that going North has moral equivalence to war includes key discursive themes present in most accounts of going into the country or of becoming rural: the notions of the retreat, of emptiness, of vast spaces, of scary futures, of recreational playgrounds, of holy sites where one learns through the soles of one's feet, of the south creeping north (the city moves to the country), and of a deep seated ambivalence towards the native. Of course the conclusion that we can and should, given moral imperatives, stand against going North, gives rise to the relationship between these two spaces (North and South, country and city, rural and urban) which in these times is in deep flux due to such phenomena as migration, globalization, and resource extraction. In retrospect Gould's evocation of the moral consequences of going North exposes the twentieth century dilemma of what it is to be caught, squeezed as it were, between and within the dialectical flows underpinning the planet's ecological crises. If however, as Jane Jacobs (1970) theorized, that in many ways the 'country' and its local economies were historically a necessary outgrowth of the development of cities first, then stopping or reversing Gould's train seems an unlikely eventuality (pp. 18-48). Okot p'Bitek's 'Song of Ocol' moves close to the heart of the dilemma:

I see the great gate
Of the City flung open,
I see men and women
Walking in ...
And what are you doing there
under the tree
Why don't you walk in

With the others?
Are you feeling homesick
For the deserted Homestead?
Or are you frightened
Of the new City?

You have only two alternatives
My sister,
Either you come in
Through the City gate,
Or take the rope
And hang yourself!
(p'Bitek, 1984, p. 149)

The world over the train rushes onward. What is important is to know how to live when one steps off the train.

Retreat from the North

Glenn Gould's evocative train ride gives pause to examine the nature of the aesthetic in relation to questions of power. The train ride north symbolizes the move from the center to the periphery, the colonial power over the colonized. The stance against the destructive expansion, that is to say the negation of the negation, is said to hold the moral equivalence of war. This lends meaning to the oft repeated notion of a righteous war. This train ride represents the view of the colonizer with a conscience, a missionary perhaps. And yet the colonizer and its agents (the like of my grandfather and his survey crew) enact both a disruption of the 'local' sense of place and an opening up of the same. In other words, the world shifts and a place which once harbored a home becomes less

familiar and the result is the failure of words (Lee, 1998) as the voice of the local gives way, grows silent in the face of what we now recognize as master narratives.

In literature, and in the world of criticism, this process is well articulated by such writers as Toni Morrison (1993) whose work provides witness to the incoherence brought about by total colonization of the subject, total subjugation which leaves the subject speech-less, and often home-less, unhinged in the world of the diasporas (Ashcroft, 2001). The aesthetic dimension, the literary representation of this process, is as Rancière (2005) suggests "first of all a matter of time and space... time and space as forms of configuration of our 'place' in society" (p. 13). The literary gives voice to those who otherwise "might have died too early to know they had lived" (Rancière, 1994, p. 62). Rancière, too, speaks of incoherence in terms of the 'stammer' (p. 62). The same theme appears in Thiong'o's (2006) *Wizard of the Crow* when the author uses the technique of 'orature' to capture the post-colonial experience. In the world Thiong'o evokes, words themselves repeatedly get caught in the throats of the speakers. The world the novelist seeks to create is repeatedly disrupted by the stammer, the 'as if' has no ready completion. In the Canadian context, the problem of speech-less-ness in relation to a colonized world was well articulated by Lee (1998, 1972) in his exploration of 'cadence'. Cadence in terms of time-space refers to the openness, the invitation of 'being' in the world to create. Lee refers to this as "the uncut stone" (p. 4). In an occupied/ colonized space (real and imagined) words fail due to the power of the center. In the struggle against that center words free themselves or are themselves freed. The way this comes about in democratic terms is not through the replacement of one controlling narrative by another, rather through a *polyphony* (Bringhurst, 2007, pp. 46-51; Bakhtin, 1992, p. 112;

Said, 1993, p. 51) of voices. Multiple voices, each hearing the other in a world where respect for radical alterity is at work, lay the groundwork for and configure our collective sense of habitable (and uninhabitable) places.

It is best now to pursue our excavation in a third space. Thirdspace is a nod towards the work of Edward Soja (1996) and his complex theorizing of spatial trialectics informing his concept of thirdspace. Soja's work owes a great deal to Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* and references a dense and stellar cast of post-colonial and post-modern thinkers including Homi Bhabha, Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, Baudrillard, bell hooks, and others. Soja's thirdspace is a radically open space (p. 57) capable of being seen from all angles and perspectives and this includes secretive spaces. It is difficult to disappear in such a space which in its most present form appears to be a kind of exuberant generality, an 'Aleph' (based on Borges' story by the same name) or the "only place on earth where all places are - seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusions or blending" (Borges quoted by Soja, p. 55). This appears to suggest that third space is, well, where ever, and by definition this would include such spaces as rural villages, settlements, the townships found on the edges of the great African cities, the Brazilian favela, and so on. At risk of being reductive, where ever is every where and to be thought of as non-fragmented space, it has the appearance (feel) of a dream space. The trialectics which link and are interrelated in the formation of thirdspace consist of perceived space, conceived space, and lived space (p. 65). There are social, historical and spatial qualities or aspects to the state of being and like a colorful, old fashioned child's toy top these aspects appear to spin by times foregrounding one or another of these features (see pp. 71-74).

The periphery and marginalia establish difference within Soja's cosmos. And so there is a kind of post-structural language play at work when we regard the horizon wherein we see this, not that and so on within an endless chain of signifiers. Despite this, Soja has very little to say about the part of the world which literally feeds his fantasy: the rural. Ching and Creed (1997) take him to task for this omission and his stance "that only the urban is worthy of critical attention: in his (Soja's) eyes, rusticity is not only idiotic but justifiably marginal and vestigial" (p. 8). The notion that rural spaces are peripheral, that is to say of minor importance, suggests the possibility of circumcision, or removal of all that wasted space. In human terms in the real world where we eat, this has meant removal of the flesh from the countryside, and dislocation and resettlement, with varying degrees of (un)happy results the world over. This process which has captured tides of humanity has provided Alistair MacLeod (1999) central thematic structure for his literary work. MacLeod, whose work will be considered in due course, lives in real-and-imagined places. In this literary sense Soja provides the setting in his third space: a combination, a multiplicity of first real, second imagined, and third real-and-imagined spaces (p. 6) for creative processes. For this we might be grateful because it is here in this third space constituting new or other places where the real and imagined coexist where we can resume our excavations.

Coming Home

I offer a daydream. Some forty-five to fifty years ago there was along the side of my family's house a set of vestigial stone stairs[23]. These stairs rose from the ground in a kind of promise. As youngsters we played on those stairs. It did not bother us that the stairs led nowhere except up and once up there was nowhere to go but down. There was no door at the top of the stairs. There was barely a landing. There were views and vistas available to us from those stairs but these were obscured and shaded by the dense foliage of the young maple trees surrounding the house. Occasionally the cat would join us as we sat on the stairs. The roughness of the cement surfacing the stones gave way to fissures and fragments which we could move around as if playing a game of jigsaw. Bugs lived on those stairs or more precisely they emerged from the cracks and spaces in the cement. The cat ate or toyed with the bugs. And yet the bugs continued to appear and then they were gone. Where? At night, in a time when there were no street lights, the rustle of the leaves parted the darkness enough for the celestial presence to break through. Indeed, if not for the leaves we would never have seen the stars. The tree branches cracked the silence. The time to go in had vanished. We looked at the stars and wondered at the immensity of it all. We still do. I have no memory of who might have accompanied me on those evening sojourns along the side of our house. The stairs are long gone but on summer evenings the verdant screen survives and continues to provide a closeness through which we can observe and open ourselves to the universe.

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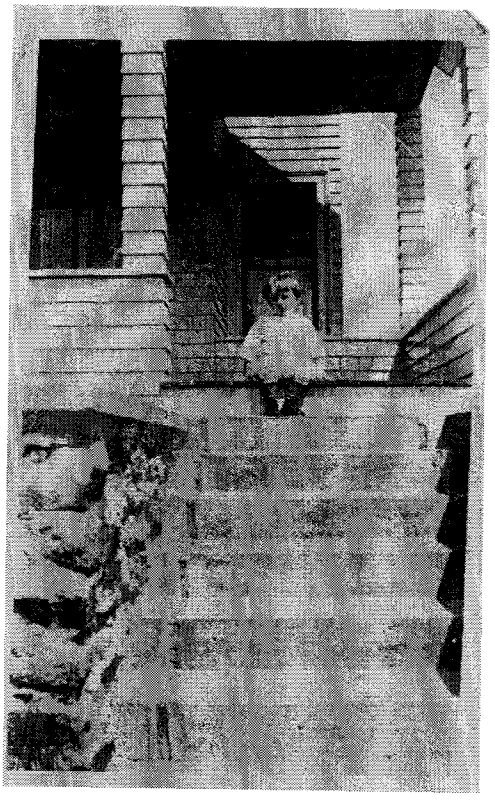
[23] Bachelard (1994) discusses stairs as a means toward heightened sensitivity: "our recollections grow sharper; the oneiric house becomes highly sensitized. At times, a few steps have engraved in our memories a slight difference of level that existed in our childhood home" (p. 26).



Prior to my existence and my later encounter with the cosmos, another little boy, aged two, sits on the same stairs. This photo circa 1905 shows the stairs as they were before the grand old house was destroyed leaving behind the corner stones (on the left) of my family's house and the foundation of my current home.

A Geopoetics of Space

Waking from this oneiric encounter with childhood, I turn now to Gaston Bachelard's (1994) *The Poetics of Space* and particularly to his comments on intimate immensity. Bachelard develops his poetics on the basis of the phenomenology of the dream, a phenomenology which invites readers into inscribed spaces in such a way that readers experience the illusion of authorship in relation to the dream (p. 21). This involves rereading the author's account and then with a mix of memory and imagination gaining access to the shared space arriving there as if alone. Regarding the distant light emitting from the hermit's hut Bachelard had this to say:

> I have dwelt somewhat at length on this apparently commonplace image, in order to show that images are incapable of repose. Poetic revery ... never falls asleep. Starting with the simplest of images, it must always set the waves of the imagination radiating. But however cosmic the isolated house lighted by the star of its lamp may become, it will always symbolize solitude. (p. 36)

These spaces of solitude are not to be construed as spaces which breed loneliness and isolation so much as they are to be seen as spaces for reflection, contemplation, and growth. Because we are cast into a world, a difficult world, it is essential that we have access to poetic images, and that these images be lived directly because they move us outside ourselves. In the dream one encounters the cosmos and we realize "that the cosmos molds mankind, that it can transform a man of the hills into a man of islands and river, and that the house remodels man" (p. 47). In other words, the spaces within which we live are close spaces. We have intimate experience of those spaces. The light which shines into those spaces acts as a beacon to the imagination and somewhat protected, fortified even, we open ourselves to experience in the larger world. We achieve what Bachelard calls a state of intimate immensity: "Tranquil foliage that really is lived in, a tranquil gaze in the humblest of eyes, are the artisans of immensity. These images make the world grow, and the summer too. At certain hours poetry gives out waves of calm. From being imagined, calm becomes an emergence of being" (p. 210). Bachelard, the phenomenologist, has contributed to our understandings of space in such a way as to make this reader want to withdraw for a time to a quiet space, an intimate, magical space,

a space between the covers wherein distant worlds open themselves in cosmic proportions:

From Frost at Midnight

... The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings: save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
And vexes meditation with its strange
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
With all the numberless goings-on of life,
Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Making it a companionable form,
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
By its own moods interprets, everywhere

> Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
>
> And makes a toy of Thought ...
>
> - S. T. Coleridge, 1798

Kenneth White, former chair of 20th century poetics at the Sorbonne, and an admirer of Coleridge, uses the latter's work along with that of Bachelard, as nodal points in the development of his geopoetics. Because the notion of geopoetics (the theoretical union of poetic imaginings and geographical/spatial realities) is one which holds promise for further investigations in the field (defined in this context as the literary landscape of Atlantic Canada) I offer this brief summary of the elements of White's work. McManus (2007) quotes White:

> Geopoetics is concerned with 'worlding' (and 'wording' is contained in 'worlding'). In my semantics, 'world' emerges from a contact between the human mind and the things, the lines, the rhythms of the earth, the person in relation to the planet. When this contact is sensitive, subtle, intelligent, you have 'a world' (a culture) in the strong, confirming and enlightening sense of the word... Geopoetics is concerned with developing sensitive and intelligent contact, and with working out original ways to express that contact. (p. 183)

Intellectual nomadism (the wanderings of the poet, essayist, and teacher) provides White the vehicle to support his quest for a place 'close to the ground of things'[24] where he

[24] The reference is to Coleridge who White says was 'looking for an abiding place for my reason' that would be 'close to the ground of things'. Refer to White, 2006, p. 104.

might find a home for his reason. Northern studies which involve wide open, seemingly empty spaces influence the geopoetics because, like Gould's train ride North and the apparent refusal to accept the colonization of that land, such studies bring a return and with the return comes poetic reflection, a meeting of landscapes and mindscapes which White argues have the potential to bring about "an intelligent republic, an open world" (White, 2005, p. 214). And it is within the intelligent republic, the open world that there is space to dwell. White asks, "Might it be possible to conceive of a 'great residence' that would reconcile movements and things, removing and remaining, stravaiging and staying" (1992, p. 177)? On their intellectual journeys, White and his mentor Bachelard found residence, time to dwell within the pages of literature and it is their literariness which leads us back into what Manguel (2007) calls *The City of Words.*

The city of words provides us a cultural space, a wordscape, a refracted landscape, within which to examine our ordinary selves. Mantovani (2000), who has the grand title 'Professor of Attitudes' at the University of Padova in Italy, says that culture is "not a closed space, but more like a system of boundaries. It is a way of taking seriously and appreciating differences... Culture is a boundary which we cross every time we find ourselves faced with "another" whose differences we perceive and respect" (p. 87). Mantovani quotes Bakhtin in suggesting that culture is a meeting place. Berger (2005) suggests the same. Here he is in conversation with his dead Mother:

> Everything in life, John, is a question of drawing a line, and you have to decide yourself where to draw it. You can't draw it for others. You can try, of course, but it doesn't work. People obeying rules laid down by somebody else is

not the same thing as respecting life. And if you want to respect, you have to draw a line.

So time doesn't count and place does? I asked again.

It's not any place, John, it's a meeting place. (pp. 6, 7)

From Here

I end this chapter with a line. On this side of the line I have attempted to theorize the concept of place under the rhetorical guise of the problem of being 'here' in response to the question, 'Where?' Methodologically, I have moved in a contrapuntal fashion from and to various places. These 'places' included a movement from my rural childhood home with excursions into dark places including those brought into my life by way of artifact and remembrance in relation to my patrimony; a train ride where the excursion North exposes something of the ambivalence attached to colonizing processes; literary moments through which I have read a humanistic view of time and distance; and finally meeting up with an intellectual nomad whose work in close spaces proffers the engaging possibility of an ecologically sensitive opening to the cosmos. Throughout this work I have evoked rustic places in order to convey the sense of location, the nodal point from which I write. The rustic, the rural, provides the stone from which it is possible to carve more stories, elaborating through polyphonic chorus and movement across time and space, moments in this teacher's reading of life grounded, as it were, here. And here is, by some accounts, a very strange place.

CHAPTER THREE

Literary Anthropology as Method

> The position of a reader in a book is very like that occupied by angels in the world, when angels still had any credibility. Yours is like theirs, a hovering, gravely attentive presence, observing everything, for whom nothing is concealed, for angels are very bright mirrors. (Paton Walsh, 1994, pp. xi, xii)

This chapter is centered on literary anthropology as research method as a precursor to more specific excavations of particular moments of my life and teaching career in what can best be characterized as rural space. Rural space can be open and inviting just as it can be closed and claustrophobic. Entering that space to see what has been made there requires a method, or a way into that space. The discussion of literary anthropology is presented in this context and as a further moment in these autobiographical *Readings from a Life.* I begin the chapter by invoking the notion of reflective angels with their strange presence hovering over the world. I quickly move to convey the sense that teaching in dark times requires conceptual or methodological tools in order to make it possible to see into the world in which I have taught. Literary texts and imagination provide excursions and shared opportunities to sense the kinds of imaginative spaces which inform my work. The extraordinary voice of Clarice Lispector is present or just beneath the text throughout. Reading as providing a means of boundary crossing and as a humanistic endeavor is outlined. This leads to an examination of the work of the literary theorist Wolfgang Iser against a backdrop of Vaihinger's philosophy of *As if.* Understanding *As if* involves examining the effects of the split or dual self and exposing

the dizzying effects of the doppelgänger. I then move into the nature of fiction and the establishment of sites for fieldwork through closer examination of Iser's anthropology. Nearing the end of the chapter a link is made to the role of narrative along with further thoughts on reading. This provides the theoretical lens for the particular readings of *Our Rural Selves* in Chapter 4 and of the place called *The Strange Heaven* in Chapter 5.

Teaching in *dark times* [25] is challenging and yet the fairly settled, routine, day to day existence as well as the repetitive act of teaching lulls the practitioner into a kind of sleep where the difficulties remain somewhat hidden. Years of learning to write with young children confirm that children are fond of writing breakfast to bedtime stories in which repetition of like or similar events dominates their storytelling. Such stories are life affirming in the sense that they expose familiarity and habitual performance. They allow young writers to establish themselves in new textual ways, ways which give them possibilities of at least telling their own stories and of becoming themselves. More importantly perhaps, these stories situate the tellers within the stream of life and allow them to assign meaning to their experience (Bruner, 1990, pp. 87-90). The stream of life flows through the works of the enigmatic Clarice Lispector who said, "What I write you has no beginning, it's a continuation...I shove the word into the barren emptiness ... a

[25] *Dark times* is borrowed from Kristeva, J. (2006). Thinking in Dark Times in *Profession, 9*: "Literature and writing constitute an experience of language transversal to identities (sexual, gender, national, ethnic, religious, ideological, etc.), and, whether open or hostile to psychoanalysis, they elaborate a risky, singular, and divisible understanding of the desire for meaning anchored in the sexual body. Thus literature and writing upset the metaphysical duo reason versus faith on which scholasticism was once founded. They invite us to construct an interpretive, critical, and theoretical discourse in response to developments in the human and social sciences. This discourse is a decisive element in the reconstruction of the humanism we need" (p. 16). Kristeva positions the much needed humanism against the new religious wars and the calls from various intellectual and religious sectors to return to faith.

word is like a fine, monolithic block that projects a shadow. And it's a heraldic trumpet that proclaims" (Lispector, 1989, p. 37). The Nietzschean will to create is at play: "O men, in the stone an image is sleeping, the image of images! Alas, that it has to sleep in the hardest ugliest stone! *Now my hammer rages cruelly against its prison.* Pieces of rock rain from the stone: what is that to me" (Nietzsche, 2000, p. 765)? That is the particularity of a life.

A teacher's life is similar to those youngsters' stories: A teacher grows up. He gets a job. On one day he does this and on another that and so on and at the end of twenty-five years he goes home. The teacher has a life, possibly a good life. At the end of the good life I expect most teachers will lie in the cold, cold ground and their lives will be bookmarked by two dates, birth and death. And yet, cemeteries are places which haunt the imagination. Their occupants whisper silently from the grave. Prior to the grave though there is the kitchen table where memory serves up many a feast. As Lispector (1989) wrote, "To live this life is more an indirect memory of it than a direct living. It seems like a gentle convalescence from something that could have been absolutely terrible" (p. 56). And it is this indirect memory of my life as a teacher, prompted through engagement with literary texts, I aim to probe. To do so, I need a spade, a set of tools which will light my way and help illuminate my subject. Again my subject is life, a teacher's life, lived in rural environs on the margins of what is now mainstream urban Canada.

I begin where I must eventually find myself and my subject, that is to say, near the end. To do so involves an act of imagination which at once projects just as it looks back. I

intend to do so at a distance and then once reading in the field move closer. The first section of this essay involves therefore a sense of an ending, but an ending seen from particular perspectives and view planes, perspectives and planes which I have gathered from literary theorists, literary theorists who give me the tools, I think, to behave like an angel: independent, for a few words at least, of time and place - I shall hover.

The second section of this chapter presents key concepts and arguments drawn from Vaihinger's foundational work informing Wolfgang Iser's (1993) *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. This provides the basis for a general summary of Iser's project followed by a complementary examination of the role that narrative plays in the writing of a life. I accept that literary texts offer important sites for educational fieldwork [26] in that such texts enclose fictions, narrative truths occasioned by experience within the landscapes fore-grounded by such texts.[27] I conclude the essay by creating a small border crossing bridge passing through a tiny door allowing me to carry the methodological tools into rural space, the topic of the second essay.

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[26] See J P Riquelme. (2000). Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Politics: Reading as Fieldwork. *New Literary History, 31,* wherein Riquelme discusses Iser's work in relation to interpretation: "Like reading, interpretation is to be understood as performance rather than explication; instead of unearthing of some buried object, interpretation is the process of digging itself" (p. 8).

[27] The notion of entering a landscape is suggestive of a journey and journeys happen in both time and in social spaces. They have both historical and sociological dimensions to them which serve in this context as a reminder to try at least to remain somewhat free of the scourge of *hermeneutic narcissism* which Bourdieu (1996) identifies in his discussion of the conditions of pure reading (pp. 302, 303).

Endings: The Riddle of the Tea Cups

In order to see things we must first look at them as if they had no meaning, as if they were a riddle (Ginzburg, 2001, p. 7).

Eight years ago I had just finished reading Rohinton Mistry's (1995) *A Fine Balance.* There is a scene in the novel which at that time seemed to me to sum up much of the tension I was experiencing as a teacher and yet the passage presented a bit of a puzzle. To this day, I have little trouble finding this scene in the book which exceeds some seven hundred pages. I quote the passage in full:

The pattern of each day, thought Dina at the end of the first week, was like the pattern of a well-cut dress, the four of them fitting together without having to tug or pull or make the edges meet. The seams were straight and neat...

At the end of the second week, Ishvar was still waiting to hear (how he could repay Dina for her generosity). *Then he took matters into his own hand. While she was bathing, he fetched the broom and dustpan from the kitchen and swept the verandah, the front room, Maneck's room, and the sewing room. As he finished with each Om got busy with the bucket and cloth, mopping the floors.*

They were still at it when Dina emerged from the bathroom. "What's going on here?"

"Forgive me but I have decided," said Ishvar firmly. "We are going to share the daily cleaning from now on."

"That does not seem right," she said.

"Seems just fine," said Om, briskly squeezing out the mop.

Deeply moved, she poured the tea while they were finishing up. They came into the kitchen to replace the cleaning things, and she handed two cups to Om.

Noticing the red rose borders, he started to point out her error, "The pink ones for us" then stopped. Her face told him she was aware of it.

"What?" she asked, taking the pink cup for herself, "is something wrong?"

"Nothing," his voice caught. He turned away, hoping she did not see the film of water glaze his eyes. (Mistry, 1995, pp. 472, 473)

The incident with the tea cups occurs just past midway in the story of how a young man, Maneck, comes to an Indian metropolis to study and finds himself living with his aunt, Dina, who herself, has fallen on misfortune. Acting out of mixed motives of kindness to her pleading nephew and her own desperate need to continue to do piece work for the garment industry she agrees to take in two tailors, Om and Ishvar, eventually allowing them to sleep and work in her crowded home rather than on the verandah.

Survival alone dictates that the members of this unlikely household need to come to know each other. But that knowing involves closing the huge chasm separating each of them in terms of social class and their lived differences attributable to their hitherto unquestioned social identities. The tensions which arise in this arrangement are real enough and it takes many gestures of the kind indicated by the sharing of the tea cups for Dina to begin to comprehend the nature of the gulf which separates her from her boarders, especially the low caste tailors.

Through the multi-faceted struggles contained in the novel Dina does in fact come to know herself and the members of the household by listening to the various stories each member relates from his past. Stories beget stories and what interests me about the tea cups is that they provide a metaphoric device for teachers to recall their own stories, to rethink as it were, their own positions within the larger community. Bruner (1982) credits the modern novel with turning our use of metaphor away from myth which lends meaning to life after death and towards new ways of assigning meaning to life before death, "with the style of awareness that gives death meaning in terms of life" (p. 57).

In his now classic work *Mimesis,* Auerbach (2003) explored the relation between literature and reality and noted that the modern novel is multi-vocal, i.e. the novel as we now know it coveys the impression of exploring an objective reality in which this or that character finds herself. "He who represents the course of a human life, or a sequence of events extending over a prolonged period of time, and represents it from beginning to end, must prune and isolate arbitrarily. Life has long since begun, and it is always still going on... But the things that happen to a few individuals in the course of a few minutes, hours, or possibly even days- these one can hope to report with reasonable completeness" (pp. 548, 549).

In discussing Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in particular the scene where a knitted brown stocking is being worked on by Mrs. Ramsay, Auerbach observes that the emphasis within the modern novel is on the random occurrence which links to other occurrences which constitute determining factors in our real lives. Such occurrences "concern the elementary things which men in general have in common" (p. 552). There is

no mystery or is there in the breaking of bread or the sharing of tea? A world reverberates in the reflection of that red rose border on the tea cups to which Rohinton Mistry drew our attention. Dina's sharing of her special cups is a conflicted act of kindness, generosity, and perhaps selfishness. All of this is contingent upon the social world in which she finds herself. Dina herself is revealed in the novel through a series of ordinary events in her life, extraordinary to the observer perhaps, but ordinary enough when one imagines the particular events Mistry relates.

What is extraordinary here is that each event is a kind of adventure. As Kermode (2000) puts it with reference to the song 'Some of these days' authentic fictions work against contingency. "This frail piece is human... It contains nothing which is merely a happening; its moments, such as they are, are *aventures*, a life may be looked upon as having them, and indeed as having a structure of them, so that it comes to resemble a novel..."(pp. 147, 148). And yet there is a kind of dissonance which joins our notions of the real world and that contained in fictional accounts. My hope is that in working towards locating that dissonance I might be engaged in an act of discovery.

The Dizzying Effects of the Doppelgänger

> *I myself have always seen literature, its conversion through the act of reading, as a process of expansion in which the text becomes a palimpsest as I read through its words the many layers of my other readings... Literature redefines itself out of its own materials, not by rejecting but by rereading, and I suggest that our task is to keep proposing new points of view, so that the presences and absences from which we now suffer can be more clearly seen- and*

to afford them ultimately their proper and common place. (Manguel, 1998, pp. 192, 193)

Manguel's suggestion that our reading of literature contains, within the activity of reading, a kind of imperative to keep proposing new points of view is part of his more elaborate argument that the reading of literature can act in a transformative way to bring shifts away from the cycles of violence which have plagued history. He tells the tale of an Argentinean father who is bent on revenge for the deaths of his family members under the military dictatorship in the seventies. The man retreats from this course of action after having been convinced by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, mothers of those who had been disappeared by the regime, that he was about to commit an act which would dishonor the memory of his murdered family members (pp. 198, 199). The point here is that a new story had been written by one man in response to the pleas of the mothers who had in effect inspired him with a new vision of how to live. He appears to have escaped the predictable narrative of the cycle of killing and revenge. This story is part of a larger story of both tolerance and intolerance, stances which according to Manguel reject the notion of equality (p. 190).

Manguel, the historian, critic, and storyteller, tackles the power of culture to both capture and determine life's trajectories just as he seeks to demonstrate that the trajectories are not predetermined. Hope rests with individuals like the Argentinean father whose encounters with the mothers of the disappeared led to a new story being told. I am telling this story here because I am concerned to locate this reading of Manguel, like my earlier reading of Mistry, in an area which feels to me very much like home. The reading

takes place along a certain boundary, a meeting place where folks come face to face to exchange among other things, their stories. Mantovani's notion that culture is a 'boundary along which exchange takes place' and a line we cross every time we face a stranger, underpins much of my storytelling and my choice of stories to be told here (Mantovani, 2000, pp. 86-88). It also suggests an important element necessary to an appreciation of literary anthropology as method, i.e. the notion of boundary as a device which refracts rather than encloses one's various selves.

Having moved closer to my sense of home as boundary I should like to consider another excerpt, this one from a story of childhood taken from Garner's (1983) *The Stone Book Quartet*. The story is about reading, the book, childhood, and it is about our fragmented world and the dizzying effects of the doppelgänger. Enter the story when Mary, the child, is tasked with bringing her father his lunch. The father is working high above the village on the church's steeple. Mary is persuaded to carry the lunch to her father atop the steeple:

> *... Mary stood and looked out from the spire. 'And the church,' she said. 'It's so far away.' She knelt and squinted between the planks. 'The roof's as far away as the ground. We're flying.'...*
>
> *The steeple cap was a swelling to take the socket of the spike of the golden cockerel. Mary could touch the spike. Above her the smooth belly raced the clouds.*
>
> *'You're not frit?'...*

Father picked (Mary) up. "You're really not frit? Nobody's been that high before." It was reared from the platform...

(Mary's father lifts her to the back of the cockerel.) The swelling sides were like a donkey, and behind her the tail was stiff and high. Father's head was at her feet, and he could reach her.

'I'm set,' she said. (and her father began to spin the vane in its socket)

'Faster! Faster!' she shouted. 'I'm not frit!'...

Mary could see all of Chorley, the railway and the new houses. She could have seen home but the Wood Hill swelled and folded into Glaze Hill between. ...The golden twisting spark with the girl on top, and everywhere across the plain were churches...

'There,' he said. 'You'll remember this day my girl for the rest of your life.'

'I already have,' said Mary. (pp. 11, 12)

This breathtaking scene sets the stage for Mary to beg her father for a book because she is not enrolled in the village school and she desperately wants to learn to read. Her father in turn sends her on a sojourn of discovery and in the end gives her what is literally a stone book. Mary sits by the fire and reads the stone book which "had in it all the stories of the world and the flowers of the flood" (p. 29). The text again becomes the palimpsest Manguel says allows him access to the many layers of his own readings. This access to meaning made possible by the act of reading fiction provides the means through which the reader is both transformed and transforms. Access in this sense fertilizes the imagination making new worlds thinkable and possible. It is *as if* the reader lifts herself

outside her own skin only to observe, in this double role of participant and observer, herself situated in time past, present, and future. It is an eerie presence.

> *This **dual** series of experiences, this access to apparently separate worlds, is repeated in my nature in every respect: I am a Doppelgänger, I have a second face in addition to the first. **And** perhaps also a third.* (Nietzsche, 2000, p. 681)

As If

To gain greater insight into functional aspects of the Doppelgänger and to lay further groundwork for Iser's anthropology it is useful to examine key concepts contained in H. Vaihinger's (1968) philosophy of 'as if'. Vaihinger's philosophy grew out of his attempt to provide what he referred to as 'a system of the theoretical, practical, and religious fictions of mankind.' He began with a collection of expressions used for the notion of fiction. Among those collected were: *inventions, quasi-things, method transit-points for thought, illusory idea, boundary idea*, and *starting point for investigation* (pp. 96, 97).

Vaihinger went on to describe general characteristics of fiction, namely that fiction contradicts reality, is arbitrary, and is violent. "The special character of a fiction is not only its arbitrariness but also its violence. Violence must be done not only to reality but (in real fictions) also to thought itself. … the greater the degree of abstraction the greater the *violence* done to thought!" (p. 98) A second characteristic of fiction is that fictional ideas disappear in the course of history or through logical operations. A third feature is the awareness that fiction is just fiction, i.e. that there is generally an absence of

a claim to actuality. And finally fictions are a means to an end. "For us the essential element in a fiction is not the fact of it being a conscious deviation from reality, a mere piece of imagination- but we stress the useful nature of this deviation" (p. 99).

In the general theory of fiction Vaihinger posits the utility of the fictional in terms of transit points: "All our mental life is rooted in *sensation* and culminates in movement: what lies between are mere points of transit" (pp. 101, 102). The tremendous importance of the fictional conceived in this way as transit points rests in its utility for the process of discovery (p. 105). What is discovered through fiction is in some sense recognized to be true. And it is truths thus discovered which provide the groundwork for action in the world. "We call our conceptual world true when it permits us best to gauge objectively and to act therein" (p. 108). For Vaihinger individual agency is inexorably intertwined with the fictive. In other words the capacity to imagine an other world, in contradiction to the world one finds oneself in, provides the context and impetus for the exercise of free will.

The meaning of *as if, as though* is expressed in the notion that man must act "*as if* he were free, *as though* he were free" (p. 258). Vaihinger's notions of freedom and agency owe much to Nietzsche whom he quotes at length: "Thus there arises in the wise man the contradictions of life and of its ultimate determinations: man's instinct for knowledge presupposes belief in error and life... To err is the condition of living. We must love and cultivate error: it is the mother of knowledge" (p. 347). An apt restatement of *error as the condition of living* might be that the suspension of disbelief precedes engagement with social activity.

Literary anthropology as method in Readings from a Life

Born in the late 1950's and having spent my formative years in rural Nova Scotia I was like most rural youth nurtured in a world which was hurriedly becoming much larger than that experienced by my parents' generation. We were post war and our communities were licking the wounds of that shattering event. Remembrance Day ceremonies meant real tears because the villagers knew the faces of those whose names were inscribed on the monument. In those days we sat on our aging wine colored sofa, itself positioned on a used and cracked congoleum tarmac-like floor covering common in our homes but in my case recently discarded from the living room of a more well to do aunt, and watched a grainy muscle bound Tarzan swinging through the bush, a hilariously inept Gilligan on his ship-wrecked island, and listened to silly ditties like 'Irving stove and fuel oil keeps your feet from freezing, Irving stove and fuel oil keeps your nose from sneezing' just prior to the presentation of the weather man who with chalk board like maps recounted the day's weather and predicted what we already suspected was true: the weather outside.

The weather man had maps and in those black and white images we got to see the world beyond our village as an extension through our living rooms of the place we were in. All this appeared on our first black and white TV which had a lead in wire. This antenna had to be variously positioned in order to catch the signal emitting from across the bay in St. John, New Brunswick. In those days I remember an abundance of fog outside my door and on the TV. I also remember the dime store novels which removed the blurred TV images and replaced them with stories of Gilligan, the suave Dr. Kildaire or Ben Casey, and of course the man himself winging gloriously through the jungle trees.

The then new media hinted a big world was out there but it was the books themselves which in my imagination colored the world beyond my village. The books and the news, the news of space explorations and imperial competitions for moon dust, and the news that the world we knew could ignite in a flash if some man named Khrushchev failed to back down during what we were all told was a crisis. An odd mixture of longing to be elsewhere, fear of and pride in military technology, and the realization that life could be short fuelled my pre-adolescent desires to be elsewhere.

When my cousin and I sat on his parent's doorstep and gazed at the clear night sky we both knew that yes, things could be hurtling towards us just as we realized that the world out there might harbor a safer place for us. Danger and desire sat side by side and no doubt heightened our sense of each and our drive to move on, to move away. Those realizations sparked a determination to achieve, for lifelong learning, and provided significant incentives to pursue educational pathways which could in the end, if we so chose, land us elsewhere. This was the background for personal identity formation in what Kelly (1997) calls a "contradictory politics of identity and cultural/geographical place" (p. 53). Scholarship boys both, we moved smoothly through school and post-secondary education with growing disattachment from place and eventually to part ways. Serendipity would return me to rural Nova Scotia and my cousin would at a young age disappear to the city and then into the memory book; his ashes spread in two provinces. Dust to dust.

In rural Nova Scotia I found myself in a similar predicament to that described by Kelly where ambivalence towards place means a deep seated questioning of spaces of

belonging. And that ambivalence has remained part of the existential condition I and many others have experienced in rural Nova Scotia. The nervousness of this condition, over the years, has found a measure of calm between the covers and at the same time suggests the problematic of how this might be so. What is there about the experience of reading and of certain literary texts which makes life more livable? This is the kind of question to which the work of the post holocaust and humanist literary theorist Wolfgang Iser addresses itself. Towards the end of his life Iser (2000b) wrote a short piece for the Modern Language Association called 'Do I Write for an Audience?' In that piece Iser states that in the beginning he wrote for an audience of one but that he hoped his preoccupations would 'strike answering chords in others'. In similar fashion this dissertation proceeds hoping to strike answering chords with fellow travelers who are most likely people who have found solace in literary works along with teachers and teacher educators who grow out of or want to understand teacher identity formation in rural environments.

The chapters presented here provide insight into issues of rusticity which could only be gathered through literary engagements. How and why this is the case has to do with the more universal and theoretical problematic of why human beings need fictions. Therefore, it is reasonable and appropriate to turn to Iser who addressed his life work to this question. I have relied on his authoritative work in the field to help me gain methodological insight into my own inquiry. Again, Iser's work, and the use Sumara (2002) has made of Iser's anthropology in terms of interpreting teacher identity, provide theoretical forte for this series of linked literary investigations in this rural space.

Situated as I am in rural Nova Scotia and conscious of the interplay between urban and rural spaces any investigation of the self and identity *here* needs to take in to account the literature of place. Of course literary giants, and here I refer to the great works of literature, provide insight into the human condition and yet they are less likely to speak to the particularities of place. And so, although I do use more universal examples of literature from time to time, this work relies on selected pieces of strong fiction set down east in Atlantic Canada to examine the function of the same as a co-determinant of individual identity. In particular because the work of Alistair MacLeod resonates with the kind of dislocation in place I have referred to his *No Great Mischief* is the kind of fiction which offers the possibility of rich exploration in terms of the larger question: *What are you doing here?* As well, Atlantic Canada is now home to several young or less experienced writers who take as their fictional object the social realities of the place they find themselves in. In Nova Scotia the work of Lynn Coady is extremely rich in terms of providing her readers the virtual experience of the rural. Other writers are used throughout this work and each has been chosen because an interaction or encounter with their work provides additional insight into rural realities.

Wolfgang Iser's Literary Anthropology

Iser extends Vaihinger's philosophy of 'as if' to develop his distinct notion of literary anthropology. In addressing the question, "What is literary anthropology?" Iser (2003c) focuses on the aims and methods of anthropology and then explicates the difference between explanatory and exploratory fictions. Anthropologists do ethnography; that is to say anthropologists place culture at the center of their enterprise and they do so because humans are themselves cultural artifacts. Iser quotes Geertz in

establishing the essentially fictional nature of anthropological writing: "Anthropological writings are themselves interpretations... They are, thus, fictions, fictions in the senses that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned' – the original meaning of *fictio*" (p. 160).

Explaining humankind's past is an exercise in weaving explanatory fictions based on the 'reading' of the actual occurrences of interaction amongst real life players. The explanation of any one occurrence arises as a result of the use to which the fiction is being generated. Explanatory fictions work through looped recursions into the past and function to allow human actors to adjust their future activity to that which has happened in the past. This adjustment involves continuous transformation of given realities. Rather than coming to an end, as it were, culture is constantly renewed as a result of this recursive process of human beings working to ensure their own survival. Drawing on the work of Eric Gans (1993), contained in his writing on generative anthropology, Iser moves beyond the notion of explanatory fictions to consider exploratory fictions. The latter arise from the peculiar role language through literature plays as a means of representation and the role language plays in the deferral and abrogation of conflict. Iser accepts Gans' notion that literature is *declarative* language. That is, literature operates to provide a representative model of what is desired, of what is absent in terms of given realities but which appears in the imagination thereby lending transparency to the working of human culture (pp. 166, 167). Literature, according to Iser, functions inside culture in a paradoxical way allowing the reader to move to bridge the gap between the

center and the periphery whilst, one might add, going nowhere. The paradox[28] arises because the pleasure, pain, hatred, love and the very condition of being human is experienced simultaneously within and outside oneself (p. 168). The literary esthetic, that which is perceived by the senses and cast back into the world through literature proffers myriad possibilities for observing the past. History is in this way mirrored in the present through this now literary anthropology. This allows for insights into what has been but this is not all:

> What distinguishes literary fictions from fictions used in anthropological research is the fact that it is not meant to grasp anything given; instead of instrumentalizing the explanatory capabilities of fictions, fictionality in literature functions basically as a means of exploration. (p. 170)

Literary fictions work as a means of exploration and in contrast to explanatory fictions they do not serve as a form of integration, rather dissipation[29] occurs and boundaries are crossed. Literary and explanatory fictions coexist and are in a gaming relationship with each other:

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[28] Feminists too discuss the 'paradox' arising through literary engagement. The paradox is framed by Kristeva (2002) as a rebellious experience. She says the literary experience is situated at the juncture between the unique and the social, the singular and the shared. Further she says that by questioning the identity of language, of the subject, and of the social bonds there exists an opening for both transformation and renewal. "Theory which listens to it (literature) and which would want to remain contemporary with this epochal transformation, has to be in itself a revelation of the person who gets involved in it: by analyzing, just as much as by judging these confrontations with the impossible which is this paradoxical (I mean rebellious) experience which we call literature" (p. 417).

[29] Literature, according to Lotman's semiotic theory, is the only communicative system where the amount of information conveyed is not smaller than the amount of information received. Refer to Thompson (1977, pp. 229-231) for a full discussion of entropy and literature. This underscores the dissipative nature of literature.

> What, then, is the relationship among these fictions within the text, bearing in mind that each of them has only other fictions as its environment? Instead of them looping into one another, they actually play with one another... (p. 172)

What emerges as a result of this is both unpredictable and intertextual. The continual play works against the 'catastrophe of forgetting' through the assemblage of fragments from a cultural heritage (p. 174) and coagulates to form cultural memory (p. 176). If individual memory can be said to exist within a cultural milieu, akin to a past landscape, then it is possible to imagine ourselves wandering through the fields in search not only of our pasts (always in some measure the story we choose to tell) but also our possible futures. It is as if we have no choice but to find ourselves there and to imagine ourselves elsewhere. We have again returned to *as if.*

Iser (1993) says, "To understand by means of feigning something is, however, a pragmatic necessity that aims not at insight but at production" (p. 147). Iser makes use of the various categories contained within Vaihinger's *As-if to* suggest that it is possible to link the doubling aspect integral to both the reading and writing of fiction to the more generative notion of agency driven by pragmatic concerns. The fictional categories constitute a kind of matrix which provides a "frame of reference for calculating and processing reality" (p. 150). However that reality thus revealed is less than stable. "The As-if reveals itself as a basically limitless catalogue of types of fiction providing the basis for paradigms that can only be models... The paradigms, therefore always under pressure to prove successful, stand in need of legitimization which depends to some extent on the

degree of assent accorded to the particular model. Consequently fictions are "consumed" at a high rate, because their situational effectiveness can be stabilized only through collective acceptance" (p. 151). Given the degree of assent it is possible to imagine on the one hand an open world and on the other a more constrained social space. Both worlds and the space in between are encountered for a time at least through close not closed readings of literary texts.

Reading

All my life I have been reading. Before I entered school I could read and the proof of this rests in the memory I have of reading at the back of the primary classroom while most other students gathered around the teacher to learn to read. When reading became performance as in round robin oral reading, at Christmas concerts, or in the church choir I seldom stumbled and often shared my knowledge of the words with others seemingly less assured of the meaning behind the squiggles on the page. Memory may play tricks and be boastful of the imagined abilities of childhood but the smells of old encyclopedia, novels and stories taken from the attics of older cousins, the images of a scantily clad Rock Hudson in my mother's *True Story* magazine, the sensation of the yellowed pages of hand-me-down texts, as well as the silky eared feeling of King James suggest in a visceral and sensible fashion otherwise. What was and is happening as a result of a life swimming in words, most gleaned from literary texts, links directly to the notion that words work, that is to say they do something. As Austin (1975) pointed out words are performative;

they carry, as utterances, illocutionary force. Something happens.[30] Engagement in and with literary texts is no idle pass time.

> In short, the performative brings to center stage a use of language previously considered marginal- an active world-making use of language, which resembles literary language- and helps us to conceive of literature as act or event... literature is not frivolous pseudo-statements but takes its place among the acts of language that transform the world, bringing into being the things that they name. (Culler, 2000, p. 96)

Rosenblatt's (1978, 1995) work on transactional theory and in particular the way in which she identified the relationship between the reader, the text, and the poem provides support for the notion that something does happen and something is produced as a result of a reader's engagement with text. Rosenblatt (1978) used the term poem to stand for the entire category and the various genres (novel, play, and so on) associated with the notion of literary work of art (p. 12). More to the point is her conception of the poem as an 'event' in time resulting from the compenetration of a reader and a text involving situated activity. The activity or the event has both historical and contingent aspects present throughout the event. The event is in some sense a networked phenomenon which becomes part of life experience and by extension provides a site for prospective fieldwork. (Riquelme, 2000) Understanding (interpreting) the poem as event means

[30] The notion that words 'work' or carry illocutionary force is intended to convey the sense that words accomplish a given task embedded within a social context. As Bourdieu (2001) points out, the captain will not clean the latrines under orders from the private. Conditions of felicity embedded in the social structure, including the power structure, must apply in order for words to act (pp. 74, 75).

coming to terms with what gets produced during the event. If reading is indeed a kind of fieldwork involving prospective activity then it is important to find ways of documenting what gets made during the event. Research in these terms becomes a generative act of world making or as Iser (2000a) puts it "mapping new territories" (p. 158). World making, the mapping of new territories, ironically involves hermeneutic closure through acts of narration of one kind or another.

The Role of Narrative

Reading generates stories. The process of story-making through textual encounters is far removed from a mere psychological phenomenon and is situated within particular historically determined conjunctures which are themselves structurally framed through presence and past, now and then. Story-making gathers up past threads and weaves the real from and into recognizable narratives. Jameson (1981) takes up the matter of the relationship between the narrative, as such, and the real:

> Still, we need say a little more about the status of this external reality, of which it will otherwise be thought that it is little more than the traditional notion of "context" ... The type of interpretation here proposed is more satisfactorily grasped as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*, it being always understood that that "subtext" is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality, nor even the conventional narratives of history manuals, but rather must itself be (re)constructed after the fact. The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active

> relationship with the Real; yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow "reality" to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at a distance. It must rather draw the real into its own texture... The symbolic act therefore begins by generating and producing its own context in the same moment of emergence in which it steps back from it, taking its measure with a view toward its own project of transformation. (p. 81)

Jameson is referring to the self-generation of texts which he further suggests "translates itself as the boiling emergence and disappearance of so many transitory centers, now no longer points of view so much as sources of language: each new detail, each new perspective on the anecdote, brings into being, as the very center of its whirlpool, another new speaker, himself for the moment the transitory center of a narrative interest which will quickly sweep him away again" (p. 224). Jameson is referring here to the sources of language as arising from and through in-the-world speech acts. This demystifies the notion that narrative is a function of mental or psychological phenomena and lends credence to the notion that stories encased within the bonds of literature are inseparable from the materiality of language; that is to say narrative arises and functions as social fact. Narrative iterations rely on memory and involve movement in both time and space. Movement can be traced and therefore can be mapped.

The notion of mapping points to the spatial dimensions of this project, a matter I should like to defer in favor of brief comments about the map maker or in this case the reader of culture as both the reader and the read. In attempting to document aspects of the story of surviving in a rural space it is necessary to acknowledge that people are themselves cultural artifacts which in a sense secrete their own presence through the use

of the cultural tools at their disposal. Language, perhaps the most powerful tool, gives rise to representations and self-representations, webs of culture in which one behaves spider-like, endlessly weaving, purposefully traveling along fine boundaries and borders as part of the necessary act of surviving contingency in the world. One does not behave alone within the web. There are fellow travelers, each with his or her own sense of the world, each with his or her own image. "If having images is something shared, a nascent sense of togetherness begins to emerge; a group is established. Representation of absence mobilizes the imaginary, which transforms the interdiction into a feeling of collectivity" (Iser, 2000b, p. 165). And so the exploration of one's own life becomes the nexus for exploration of a cultural landscape and travels across one's own cultural territory become a kind of rear view in which ones sees oneself, fellow travelers, and much more.

Broken Mirrors

This exploration of literary anthropology and related themes was germinated somewhere, some time ago when it occurred to me that I spend inordinate amounts of time reading. As a prologue to this essay I invoked the image of angels. I have noticed at various times when I write I conjure angels from figments of my imagination and from fragments of my world. Angels are indeed mirrors, very bright mirrors which turn out to have blinding effects. They make me squint to the point of seeing only this or that and then of course the problem is to put the pieces back together again to achieve a well ordered subjectivity[31]. Elkins (1998) wonders with reference to Foucault's *Las Meninas*

[31] Regarding subjectivities Eagleton (1996) makes the point that we are not quite both 'nature' and 'culture'. He notes the futility of the notion of the 'seamless' subject. Further he articulates the necessary role language plays in allowing humans to be creative, that is to say generative of self within culture. It is the self's embodied nature which provides the precondition for language. Eating is necessary for survival

why people puzzle so intently over pictures. Without putting too fine an edge on the solution to this problem it seems to me that the answer lies in the picture (image) puzzle itself. We are motivated by the gaming activity and by the discoveries that result from our explorations. To find angels is to look for ourselves in broken mirrors.

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and we share that reality with slimy slugs and the like. But unlike the predictable, yet marvelous to behold, life of a slug we humans through the reciprocity granted us by virtue of our languaging capability and through the generation of speech acts go beyond our embodied selves to enter into transgressive relationships with the other. The self in relation to the other constitutes an essentially unpredictable and exciting (creative) reality in which fractured images might be reconstituted in a myriad of ways. My mirror's brightness holds no promise of a stable image but it does refract a world of shards each of which contain the possibility of reflecting a bit of who we are as subjects condemned, being forever in between nature and culture, self and other.

CHAPTER FOUR

Seeing our Rural Selves[32]

In this chapter I move to the center of the Canada's literary stage and explore the problem of how we as teachers view our rural selves refracted within that literary space. In Canada and on the global scene there is a kind of representation at play which is written from on high and is considered part of the modern canon of English literature. And that literature, drawn from the Anglo-Irish traditions tends to have homogenizing effects (Kelly, 1993, p. 32) which means that we, the inheritors of that tradition, can agree that the literature links very closely to who, as a nation, we think we are. The key literary text for this chapter is taken from the work of Alistair MacLeod whose entire oeuvre is based on his particular reading of the history of Celtic people who were settled by force in Northern Nova Scotia. The exploration here then is about how particular rural teachers read MacLeod's work and see themselves through this fictional practice.

In other words, this chapter is a contribution from the East Coast to teacher self-study. The use of literary texts in this way is part of a growing sub-genre of teacher self-study linking a variety of research methods under the general rubric 'self-study'. This work regarding teachers' lives is auto-biographical in nature and is aimed at inserting teacher voice into educational discourse and at reclaiming a sense of

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dignity for the self within the larger educational context wherein positivism and instrumental technologies often dominate. Foucault's (1997) self writing and his technologies of the self, Derrida's work on difference, along with that of the wave of French feminist writers (refer to Moi, 2002, for an overview of these theorists) have close affinity to the self-study project. Memory work, fictional practice, collaborative autobiography, auto-ethnography, phenomenological, and image-based approaches all contribute to the genre itself. (See Mitchell, Weber, and O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005, for examples of these contributions.) Freeman's (2007) 'Autobiographical Understanding and Narrative Inquiry' situates this work within postmodern discourses. The present work on the use of literary texts in relation to self-study is one strand of a complex and dynamic field of educational research.

In addition to the above comments regarding self-study, I use this chapter to establish the position that the anthropological use of literary texts to examine aspects of the self in connection with others has the potential to shine a light on how we, as teachers, construct ourselves in relation to colleagues, family, and friends. Such texts provide a means of staging, or bringing into view, what is otherwise a taken for granted or commonplace mode of existence. The literary text has what Iser (1993) in his work on literary anthropology refers to as a doppelgänger effect both in the lives of ordinary readers and in the invisible surround we call culture. 'Staging,' according to Iser, 'is not a compensation but a doubling that enables the hidden aspects of a situation to assume a form' (pp. 54, 55). As Iser suggests, staging is a means of making available that which is generally unavailable or sealed off (p. 55).

came from China or some such large geo-political unit. This puzzled me because, as a teacher, I like to know where my students come from, in part I think, because I want to acknowledge their differences and at the same time learn from their experiences.

All experience is situated. The *where* in somewhere is important. Certainly when I try to understand how I became the particular teacher I am, I cast my net back to a little river in rural Nova Scotia and I re-imagine my beginnings, my family, my school, and most particularly my village. I used to ring the church bell on Sunday mornings and my hands felt the roughness of the hemp rope attached to the bell. Through the vents in the belfry I could smell the salt air from the nearby river. The bell summoned the church goers and then I made my way down to sit with my mother in a pew near the back of the church and always on the right hand side. I point this out because as the minister delivered the Word and the picture of the thorn-crowned Christ gazed down at us we were on the left. Positioned thus, I learned to read as I frantically searched the hymnal for the words to the various songs the choir wafted into the church, out the main doors, and into the village.

When I look back on this it is as if I have entered a richly textured, living museum, a museum of memories organized in a spatial surround. The structure of those spaces in that tiny village provides many of the clues as to who I am now; they set the story as it were. I am convinced that teachers who attend to various life settings will have fuller understandings of their selves. Methodologically, an outward gaze provides access to much of the fabric necessary for the recording of a richly textured self. In my case, in the beginning there was the river. For the teacher, *sui generis*, there was a place. Re-establishing contact with place must therefore be part of the

self-study project. The means for doing so are to be found in such textual artefacts as church bells, personal memories, and most especially the literature of place.

And so in this text, which bares witness to my experience, I work to tease out aspects of teacher identity as they are revealed through the interplay of lived texts. With respect to how I imagine myself and my own life story, I aim to explore teacher identity in rural environments. I want to share what particular rural teachers make of the way their environments are represented within rustic literature. To approach these issues I first consider the way in which reading texts contributes to a kind of distraction of the mind, a distraction which achieves focus through the act of writing, and then gives way to a form of drift or release as multiplicities of the self are set free within the culture. The texts I use, to 'inhabit my thoughts and direct my tongue' (Scholes, 2001, p. 81) include Alistair MacLeod's (1999) *No Great Mischief* as well as material provided me by two former students/colleagues who live and work in rural Nova Scotia. I am grateful to the latter for providing me permission to quote from their written course material.

Our Textual Selves

Too much reading or reading without pause constitutes a kind of scattering, a distraction, an agitation of the mind. So says Foucault (1997) whose turn to the ancients for countermeasure suggested a form of contemplation, a gathering up of life's threads known as self writing. Such writing works to assimilate in ways which produce identity: 'Through the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing, one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can

be read' (p. 214). Such writing is a form of taking care, taking care of oneself in relation to others (Olssen, 1999, p. 144).

Teachers who write must therefore be engaged in a process of identity formation. Genealogically such writing offers traces of our ties to each other, of our commonality. The traces are, in Cixous' poetic and metaphoric sense, a means of mapping a return to the Imaginary, a mythological time when mother and child were one entering life's stream by means of the economy of the gift, an uncontrollable offering, brought into circulation by means of writing (Moi, 1995, pp. 115-119). Cixous' sexual textual sense of the act of writing is homologous to that of the late Latin American novelist, Clarise Lispector, whom Cixous intensely admires.

> What shall I tell you about? I shall tell you about the instants. I exceed my limits and only then do I exist and then in a feverish way... I'm a concomitant being: I unite in myself past, present, and future time, the time that throbs in the tick-tock of clocks. To interpret and shape myself I need new signs and new articulations in forms which are found both on this side of my human history and on the other. (Lispector, 1989, pp. 14, 15)

What Lispector's novel appears to offer is the impression that the work of the self is immediate both in the temporal sense of a present moving through time and in the spatial sense denoted and demarcated by the notion of 'sides' used to create the self in a particular place.

The clock's rhythm mimics that of the heart beat giving rise to the possibility of language (cf. Barthes, 1991, p. 249) and language as Williams (1977) insisted "is not a pure medium through which the reality of a life or the reality of an event or an experience or the reality of a society can 'flow'. It is a socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already shared and reciprocal or may become so" (p. 166). Williams' pulsating 'or' is suggestive of the richness of the possibilities embedded in an examined life, or of what may become so.

Experience then is the stuff which gives rise to language. The connection between experience and language necessitates a fuller appreciation of the role of literature in moving or situating writing beyond mere communication and placing it in the realm of one of the 'most distinctive, durable, and total forms' (p. 212) of the social. The act of reading literature is a process akin to what might be called a bricolage of the self in society. Men do it. Women do it too. In the context of teachers' lives shared reading can contribute to a realization that identity, the id, is bound to the social in ways which suggest that multiplicities of the self are the flip side of a coin upon which I am *we*, not one but as Irigaray (2001, pp. 62-67) provocatively suggests two, perhaps more.

(Our) selves in Context

With this notion of the alterity of the self in mind I should like now to consider the response of two women teachers to a particular text offered in a course called 'Literacy, School, and Community'. The course was offered in rural Nova Scotia in the spring of 2001. The instructors, myself included, had set the course to allow

teachers to engage the topic through autobiographical and community investigations. Participants were expected to develop a response to a novel through which it was hoped they would be able to consider their personal and professional identities in the context of a particular place, which we loosely referred to as their community. In addition, participants were asked to produce a photo essay showing evidence of the linkages amongst the key themes of the course.

Most of the participants were women teachers who met on a bi-weekly basis in the staff room of the school. The school was located within a few kilometres of a magnificent harbour, famous I suppose for the ships whose holds had for centuries been laden with the unprocessed resources of this now underdeveloped province struggling to find its place amidst disturbingly familiar global realities. As my colleague and I crossed the province for the weekend sessions we caught glimpses of the tenacity of the inhabitants who continue to make their living in this place. As we drove along, domestic junkyards, and barren clear-cuts pocked the landscape eventually giving way to more groomed and urban spaces.

But the appearance of urbanity was betrayed by the clientele of the local liquor outlet lining up with their cases of twenty-four, the contents of which would disappear within hours in the trailer parks and outer reaches of the town. These things we noticed as we, ourselves, joined the queue to purchase the two cans of imported highland stout we had carefully selected from the specialty section of the store. In paying ancestral homage to our perceived bloodlines we, the now middle-aged university instructors, had perhaps failed to observe this small slight our choice objects presented to our Nova Scotian working class roots. Our loyalties betrayed, we

drove quickly to the school in order to offer brief book talks on the key literary texts we had hoped the students would use to refract their professional experiences of school, literacy, and community.

Textual Seductions

Alistair MacLeod's (1999) magisterial novel, *No Great Mischief*, was one text which attracted several of the women in the course. The novel is the grand tale of the MacDonald clan whose exodus from the Scottish Highlands in the late 1700's marked the beginning of the families' journeys to the highlands of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia. This was followed by two centuries of struggle for survival within the harsh realities of an unforgiving climate, fortuitous circumstance, and diasporic shifts. Over the long centuries, various members of the family move from Cape Breton to other parts of Canada, including mining towns, lumber camps, the cities of Calgary and Toronto, and indeed further afield to the New England states, to South America, and to parts of Africa.

This family and clan story is told by the narrator, Alexander, an accomplished orthodontist whose ambivalence towards his own success is slowly revealed as he tells the haunting tale of his family and especially that of his eldest brother Calum, whose life story underpins that of the successful professional. Calum's tragic life was one of hard labor and generous support for his family members up until the time of his imprisonment for the death of a fellow worker which occurred as the result of the treachery of a distant relative working in the same camp. Upon Calum's release, his younger brother Alexander, the story's narrator, cares for the increasingly isolated and alcoholic Calum. The young Alexander is known as the *gillebeag ruadh* or the 'little

red-haired boy'. The reddish hair color is the distinguishing hereditary feature of the larger clan.

The story, as a whole, is mythic in scale. At the same time, it is a conflicted meditation on the relationship between the life of the educated, professional, and privileged member of the middle class to that of the seething mass of humanity who literally drift about the continents doing the work of the harvest, and that of resource extraction. The bone-tired dreams of such workers offer no solace to the migrant except perhaps that of reconnecting to family and kin in a place called home.

This (re)connection in MacLeod's work is a kind of return motivated and occasioned by love, family love, and intense loyalty to kin accompanied by strong desire for the lost home. This longing borders on lust for place and it drives those in difficult circumstance to persevere despite the rather dismal odds:

> Grandpa used to say that when he was a young man he would get an erection as soon as his feet hit Cape Breton. That was in the time, he said, when men had buttons on the front of their trousers. We, his middle-aged grandchildren, do not manifest any such signs of hopeful enthusiasm. But we are nonetheless here. (p. 282)

Macleod's apparent ambivalence is embodied in the life of the orthodontist and resides in the latter's relative privilege in relation to his male siblings.

The novel as a whole is detumescently structured as wave after wave of family history is revealed, poignant and arresting in each moment, only to return for eventual and final subsistence in the calm drift encapsulated by the books constant refrain, 'All of us are better when we're loved.' This sexual formula bags sentimentality and exudes seductive charm.

Two (+ one) Readers Respond

I begin with the one in part because of the surprise I recently experienced when I opened a text in a Montreal bookstore to find my own conversation recorded by Neilsen (1994) in her book, *A Stone in My Shoe.* At the time, over a decade ago, I was reflecting aloud on the discomfort teachers must pass through if they are to achieve 'professional' growth (p. 40). In the years since then a certain discomfort has clung to my professional life. As a man, performing the male gender role, in the woman's world of elementary schools and teacher education, I am acutely aware that there are marked differences in the way women and men read their worlds. This awareness makes me want to cross borders whilst it makes me extremely cautious about reading the texts I now encounter. These are the texts authored by two women in response to their reading of *No Great Mischief.*

In the novel the title phrase is attributed to Wolfe's correspondence prior to the Battle of the Plains of Abraham wherein Wolfe wrote that it would be no great mischief if the Highlanders were to fall (MacLeod, p. 109). Positioned first in the scaling of the cliffs of Quebec, fall they did. MacLeod's use of the phrase suggests the ruthlessness and cynicism of those aligned against his Highland ancestors and in a metaphoric sense suggests his overall distaste for the arrogance of the powerful. I am

conscious that the pen is powerful and I intend no mischief, great or small, when I unpack two themes which appear in the literary responses of Sandra Graham-Muise and Katherine MacPherson.

The Quest for Truth in Fiction

The notion of the quest describes Graham-Muise's response to *No Great Mischief.* Throughout her writing Graham-Muise is concerned to authenticate the experiences MacLeod shares and she does this by interviewing her own family members who had been to Cape Breton. She in fact traveled to Cape Breton where she gathered images for her photo-essay. What she discovered was a view, shared by many in connection with Cape Breton that the past is always close to the residents' experience of the place. She blended her observations with memories of the clannishness of the characters in the novel as well as their love of the music. She searched the Cape Breton she visited for evidence of music, drink, and song and she was not disappointed. Graham-Muise's response reads like a detective file. Something has happened here and she sets herself the task of assembling the evidence:

> I searched for a house similar to the one I imagined the older brothers living in after the death of their parents. I chose this house because of its appearance and location. There were different pieces of fishing equipment in the yard which made it even more realistic. On one side of this house you can see the buoy; on the other side just out of picture range were traps. You can imagine Chrissy, the horse, running to meet Calum when he whistled, ready to haul the boat up the incline to receive her award. (Caption taken from the 12th photo in the Graham-Muise response)

It was important for Graham-Muise to gain a sense that the story MacLeod offered was something more than a story. The difficulty is that the thing which happened is itself a fiction and the camera at best plays tricks. The quest for certainty is in large measure beyond the grasp of the reader.

In relation to the camera, Barthes (2000) suggests: "No writing can give us this certainty. It is the misfortune ... of language not to be able to authenticate itself. The *noeme* of language is perhaps this impotence, or to put it positively: language is, by nature, fictional..." (pp. 86, 87). "With the advent of photography, people's resistance to believing in the past collapsed and 'henceforth the past is as certain as the present, what we set on paper is as certain as what we touch" (p. 88). What Graham-Muise found in Cape Breton were, of course, mere shadows of the vividness of MacLeod's world. As she retreated to her own home far removed from Cape Breton, her camera found images of her own son, Graham, learning to read. She ends having positioned herself in full view of her own story pinning her hopes on the new generation of the family Graham-Muise.

Recognition and Self-recognition

Recognition and self-recognition are identity issues which present strong unifying themes and which were woven into Katherine MacPherson's response to *No Great Mischief.* She found herself fascinated with this novel for reasons connected to her own life's story. For a person whose *pater nomen* dates back to the Highland clearances, her family's story runs parallel to that of the six generations of MacDonald's. Born into a family of twentieth century Scottish Canadians, Katherine became a MacPherson or the 'son of a parson'. Over the centuries, Katherine relates

how her family has maintained the tradition of producing a parson in each generation. Her father was a distinguished Baptist minister as is her brother. On the maternal side of her family there were many more Baptist ministers. In her response, however, Katherine is most concerned to offer glimpses of the life of her brother and less concerned to offer insight into the many women in the earlier generations of her family who married pastors.

Katherine focuses on her brother's accomplishments, which are many in diverse parts of the globe, particularly in the realm of social justice. The strong political ethic of caring was learned, Katherine suggests, in the many hours of talk around the family's table where the children were exposed to 'all manner of social, political, and literary criticism'. Like the MacLeod's accomplished orthodontist, the MacPherson's sibling parson is presented as a restless character by times engaged with farm workers in the United States, working with Japanese in Chicago, studying in prestigious universities, writing theological treatises, and traveling to the Isle of Skye to be told stories of the Battle of Culloden.

As with the MacDonald's, there is in Katherine's family a desire to explore the history underpinning their particular fascinations. This link to the past is not about nostalgia. It is more about uncovering those things which need care and attention. Katherine, herself a traveler, ends her photo essay with disturbing pictures contrasting the extreme disparities in people's living conditions in the city of San Francisco. She concludes, 'I am my grandfather's and father's child because I believe my job is to teach more than just skills and a set of competencies. It is to prepare a way for children to find expression and justice in a peaceful world'.

I believe Katherine's discussion of her family's story was occasioned by her apparently ludic[33] reading of *No Great Mischief.* She claims her experience was characterized by vivid imagery and language with the picturing being accomplished through the words and pauses between the scenes. She read with both anticipation and retrospection. She felt herself in the thrall of great literature. With little doubt her reading exemplified the fantastic state of being lost in a book.

There is a scene in *No Great Mischief* where Alexander visits his twin sister at her home in Calgary. During the visit the conversation is all about the past and the struggle to understand the family's story. The sister, an actress by profession, assumes the persona of the listener as Alexander commiserates with the past. She waits; silence and pause prompt her brother's reflections. He tells stories told him by his brother Calum.

He tells of a tree once cut near the roots which refused to fall held firmly in place by the branches of the entire grove. The tree could not fall whilst the grove stood. The sister hears the story and offers the photo album. In the album there is an outdoor picture of the clan which contains images of their parents. The sister had tried to have a photo technician remove the parents from the large group but the result was disappointing. The only thing to do was to leave them in the larger photo. It was the only thing to do (MacLeod, pp. 239, 240).

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[33] Victor Nell (1988) provides an authoritative analysis of the fantastic state of the ludic reader. In particular Nell's discussion of comprehension during the entrancement which occurs while engaged in the act of reading includes this comment: "Comprehension is an associative and therefore memory-enriched process; the enrichment derives from autobiographical episodic memory..." (p. 79). He goes on to liken this episodic memory to the concentric circles of a stone tossed into a pond whereby each widening circle moves further away from the immediate lived experience of the reader and I would add deeper into ordinary frames of mind provided by the culture itself. (cf. pp. 73-83)

As I imagine this scene I fantasize the Katherine, son of the parson, listening across oceans and time to her brother's well written sermons, imagining their good works in church, community, and school. Like the technician in the photo shop I fail to separate the images. I conjoin my informants in what Rose (1998) calls a state of fantasy.

Moving On

I began this chapter by wanting to think about teacher identity within particularities of place and culture. To do so I suggested that literary anthropology has a certain utility within the self-study project in that it helps us explore the limitless self-invention of what we as human beings are like and it does so by shining a light on those inventions or semblances of ourselves represented in both place and time. The self-study project helps us gain insight and as I move across textual representations of the culture of rural Canada, a kind of trouble or agitation confronts me. Partly the trouble arises from a sense that the state in which we find ourselves, characterized in the view from the center is a problematic and conflicted one where issues of rurality conjure a sense of loss and yearning. MacLeod's genius resides in how beautifully he conjures not only the loss and yearning, but also in the life affirming quality of his text; how he allows his readers to capture bits of themselves within the frames and pauses. The countryside, it seems, must always thrash its way into a modern culture. That is history. But history plays itself out in the real life stories of individuals, individuals who dream as I dream, as MacLeod dreams, and who hope as Katherine MacPherson and Sandra Graham-Muise hope. Rose suggests:

> We cannot bypass modern statehood; we are living in its world. Fantasy allows us first to acknowledge that as a more than external matter. But we should not forget fantasy's supreme characteristic is that of running ahead of itself... If fantasy can give us the inner measure of statehood, it might also help to prise open the space in the mind where the worst of modern statehood loses its conviction, falters, and starts to let go. (pp. 14, 15)

We know where we are; it's just that in this now instant we might not want to be here. Self-study then, for this teacher, involves a kind of methodological trawling of the spaces we have inhabited in an attempt to weave credible narratives, narratives which point toward open spaces whether in the classroom, the home, or in the larger community.

Summing up, the view from away, as seen and experienced through engagement with the national literature as represented by MacLeod can be said to shine a particular light on rural realities. If, as in MacLeod's imaginings, we could live in a world where longing and lust for a kind of place devoid of the arrogance of power and where things could be less harsh then perhaps we could more squarely face up to the issues of social incoherence and ennui endemic to the work of the young writers on the margins. This desire for what is hidden or forbidden, as well as the fear of death, is posited by the analysts (Rose; Žižek, 2001) as motivation to act in the world. If only the fiction were more real or more seriously attended to by the policy makers, then the policies themselves might be duly revised. In the next two chapters, these issues are brought into clearer focus, first in Chapter Five through a reading of Lynn

Coady's *Strange Heaven* and then in Chapter Six by addressing the question 'What counts?' in this strange world.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Strange Heaven

This chapter[34] continues to examine from an autobiographical point of view aspects of the literature of place in Nova Scotia and introduces the concept of voice. This concept is useful in terms of situating the range of literary texts associated with the Nova Scotian landscape including those from the margins in relation to social concerns regarding life in rural places. As a counterweight to the more abstract and theoretical readings contained within these *Readings from a Life* this chapter includes anecdotal evidence[35] from the popular media and from government records.

Reading the Local

The literature of place has strong presence in Nova Scotia. This literature constitutes a large part of the literary landscape. The notion of landscape in relation to cultural representation is in this context similar to that used by Schama (1995) who defines landscape as a kind of fusion between memory and the representation of what one sees as one looks towards the horizon. Landscapes emerge from the artist's brush and therefore are always a form of aesthetic representation of place. Landscapes bring the world into view and in so doing offer the possibility of seeing new or different things (p. 15). How one sees, what one sees, has a great deal to do with the relationship one has with the land itself (Keefer, 1996, p. 24). In Nova Scotia the literary landscape, the one painted with

[34] This chapter is an expanded version of my article 'A place called Strange Heaven' which was published in the British journal *Changing English: Studies in reading and culture 11(2),* October, 2004.

[35] On the use of anecdotal evidence as a methodological device refer to van Manen, 1997, pp. 115-121.

words, consists of literature which has been produced by local, national and international writers of considerable standing in the literary community. Refer to Jones, 1970; Keefer, 1996; and Fuller, 2004, for critical analyses of exemplars of this work. Here I draw attention to four authors whose novels receive little or no attention by the aforementioned critics but whose work has significance in terms of an autobiographical account of my reading.

In the world of children's literature, the late Victorian writer Margaret Marshall Saunders from Milton in Queen's County, Nova Scotia and contemporary of Lucy Maud Montgomery is most remembered for her now classic work and international best seller *Beautiful Joe.* This work contains strong animal rights themes. In 1897 Saunders also wrote the extraordinary novel *The House of Armour.* This work provides a sense of the closeness of a child's space just as it gives at times an almost Dickensian insight into the troubling realities of a thoroughly colonized Halifax. I recall at about age twelve finding that book in a box of novels I had inherited from older cousins. My reading of Saunders' work provided early insight into what I now think of as a social conscience. Although Saunders did not write against the empire as such her view from inside the empire did encourage attention to the social issues of the day.

The mid twentieth century view of rural space in Nova Scotia was brilliantly, yet sentimentally, crafted by the Newbury award winning author Julia Sauer in her (1943) book *Fog Magic.* Sauer's biographer notes that "Sauer implored authors to write realistic fiction of 'human history' that would convey the emotions of difficult living situations, inhuman conditions, and children dealing with frailties. Examples of subjects that she

(Sauer) cited were appalling housing conditions, how tragedies stalk families in mining towns, unemployment, more stories about blacks and refugees. 'Can unimpassioned books that depict social conditions be written?' Sauer asked" (Miller, 2003, pp. 212, 213). Oddly, Sauer retreated from her own commitments or her urban gaze failed her when she came to write about her summer residence in Nova Scotia. Locally, *Fog Magic* has provided residents in Digby County with a highly romanticized sense of their communities as what one might call good Christian spaces in which to find respite from the dark world threatened by the approaching Second World War. The book is a coming of age story in which the 'local' culture is seen to provide nourishment for a resilient population but at the same time in the novel the symbolic act of growing up leads to a loss of innocence. For many years Sauer, the worldly up-state New Yorker whose car was laden with books as gifts for the local children, made the annual trek from the Rochester, New York area to the Digby Neck. Sauer's love of her summer home and her engagement with rural culture returned her to the innocence of childhood replete with picnics and frolics by the sea. In more recent times Sauer's work has been appropriated by nationally prominent authors as part of the cultural arsenal used in opposition to the effects of globalization on their retreat spaces. In this regard see Noah Richler's (2002) review of *Fog Magic* in which he states:

> The Neck, you see, is just as it was in Sauer's time, when "on a clear day – with the sea a deep blue, with a crisp wind fanning the excitement of living, with gulls whirling in vast circles and mewing faintly from their great height — on such moments in this place the idea of freedom became so real that you could grasp it in your two hands". Why, even the names of the families are the same. What Anne

> of Green Gables is to Prince Edward Island, or Huckleberry Finn is to Mississippi, Fog Magic is to the Digby Neck, a signal that this bit of Canada is a national treasure.

Clearly Sauer and her admirers have seen a certain kind of Nova Scotia and Nova Scotians. These are the 'folk', the marketable lot of stalwart, rural humanity featured in places like the folk art galleries of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and in the Canadian Museum of Civilization. These folk are colorful two dimensional residents of a culture frozen in an idyllic past. They appear in every tourist brochure aimed at attracting those from away to the quaint countryside where they will be encouraged to consume the artifacts of yesteryear including such things as whirly-gigs and reproductions of primitive paintings of bucolic wide-eyed oxen and surprised looking pussy cats (see Bogart, 2002 for such images) whilst simple country folk take their cash. The notion of the folk has been thoroughly critiqued by McKay (1994) and although Nova Scotians continue to be dressed up and sold as the folk there are other more complex representations of rusticity which better serve the imagination here.

By way of contrast to Sauer, another author who passed through rural Nova Scotia is Paula Fox (1986, 2002). Fox, a Newbery award winner herself, in her quasi-autobiographical novels and in her memoir, recounts studying in Montreal and visiting Nova Scotia between the great wars. She describes the rural landscape as a place of dark secrets and secluded madness. Fox uses the memory of her visits to Nova Scotia to accentuate the tension she felt in relation to her Bohemian parents and especially to her alcoholic father. It was in the villages and backwoods of the province that Fox discovered

the perfect booze drenched setting in which to reveal her father's manic behaviors and her own ambivalence to what she herself had found in rural Nova Scotia. There is a scene from a visit to a local household to collect eggs wherein the teenager Catherine is introduced to an ancient woman whose hearing has gone and who does not realize that her pet parrot is deceased. The elderly woman, whose movements are like those of a 'doll with sticky works' inquires as to whether her American visitors have seen her Tweedy, the now dead parrot. As the scene unfolds the teenager is scolded by her father who wants his daughter to realize that they both, in time, could end up in a room full of madness just like the old lady (1986, pp. 84-87). Fox describes a Nova Scotia where "She had not dreamt people could drink as they had, pouring liquor down their throats as though they were trying to drown themselves" (p. 25).

Fox's depiction of Nova Scotian rurality as a problematic space akin to madness is a representation shared by several writers throughout the latter part of the last century. For instance, Budge Wilson, a Nova Scotian author, in her short story *The Leaving* (1992) details the troubled life of an Annapolis Valley housewife who leaves the smothering confines of her domestic situation and her abusive husband to both teach the husband a lesson about her own worth and to show her twelve year old daughter the promise that lay ahead for her at Dalhousie University in Halifax. Wilson situates this journey as an effect of the book *The Feminine Mystique* coming into the older woman's life. The subtext of the story suggests education provides a pathway, a way to leave the conflicted space behind. The young girl's excursion to the city became, for the child, a life lesson in learning to leave.

These authors have in their own right contributed to the literary landscape of rural Nova Scotia. Locally, they are well known and indeed are accepted as part of the literary heritage of Atlantic Canada. This is true despite the fact that for Sauer and Fox their own stories are as much a part of the American cultural scene as they are part of the homes they found here in Nova Scotia. These writers of children's fiction share cultural space with Elizabeth Bishop whose poetry and short stories magnify the sensual and often tragic experience of being in rural Nova Scotia. Bishop's work is matched in more recent times by the microscopic writing of Alistair Macleod whose work evokes in readers a romantic lust for home, a phenomenon discussed in the previous chapter 'Seeing our rural selves'. During the 1990's and beyond, a number of authors have emerged whose work represents a kind of gritty realism in relation to the social and cultural landscape of Eastern Canada. They speak with peripheral vision and in the context of the larger Canadian scene they speak from the margins (refer to Kelly, 1993, p. 25). It is in these works the 'voice' of hitherto disenfranchised groups and individuals begins to crack the landscape. Ursula Kelly puts the matter of voice this way:

> When the voice is "right" when the representation has a certain cultural "fit," readers often chose to speak of this accuracy in terms of collective "ownership," ironically enough itself a homogenizing tendency. (p. 32)

The matter of voice as Kelly sees it is one which on the one hand restricts what is 'ours' to works in the Anglo-Irish traditions or those which arise out of aspects of patriarchal influences. For the entire Atlantic region, the works of Macleod and even David Adams Richards fit this aspect of how Kelly defines voice. On the other hand, Kelly makes the

case for a broadening of this sense of voice to be more inclusive of marginalized individuals and groups such that voice works to claim a place for these groups in their "particular ideological *experience* of real history (Eagleton quoted by Kelly, p. 33)". On the one hand, on the other hand provides the deconstructive bridge to further consider the particular reading experiences evoked by Macleod whose celebrated work is certainly part of the Canadian literary canon and by Coady whose work provides a considerable contribution to allowing other voices to break through. The first reading evokes the marginal voice of youth in rural culture and that voice speaks from a place called 'Strange Heaven'.

What Hast Lynn Coady Wrought?

A place called 'Strange Heaven' is an account of my reading of the young Canadian author, Lynn Coady, and where her (1998) novel *Strange Heaven*, has taken me. The novel provides a window on rural Cape Breton, a place famous for its scenery, Celtic heritage, and its incredibly fertile ground for the arts. Cape Breton, in recent times, has produced such masterful works as Alistair MacLeod's (1999) *No Great Mischief.* The island is the ancestral home of Ann-Marie MacDonald whose (1997) *Fall on Your Knees* sheds a bright light on various and sordid aspects of Cape Breton culture. Because of the historic and largely forced migrations which link Cape Breton to nearly all parts of the world, these novels tend to receive a wide audience for reasons which topographically extend well beyond their solid artistic merit. In the popular culture, places like Cape Breton and rural Nova Scotia elicit strong emotions brought about by a multi-generational sense of loss and a nostalgic search for the rural idyll.

Lynn Coady's novels and short stories explore much of this same landscape but because the subject of her work invariably involves youth, Coady has a certain appeal to younger generations and to those who work with rural youth. Coady's work grows directly out of her acute awareness of societal ennui in Eastern Canada. As the social scientists tell us, there are serious issues unfolding in Eastern Canada, especially in terms of the social and emotional well-being of youth.[36] The issues are well documented by social policy analysts, some of whom appear genuinely motivated in their pursuit of an antidote to the general malaise besetting the culture (Stephens, et.al., 1999). Lynn Coady in discussing her book *Saints of Big Harbour* describes a memory from her high school years in Cape Breton:

> LC: ... When I was in high school, it seemed like guys roamed the streets in packs, literally "looking for trouble," like Howard and Hugh in the novel. I think that kind of focused, driven need for confrontation is very much the result, as you say of an "accumulation of angst,"—if not just plain rage.
>
> A few years ago, incidentally, I was asked to speak at a conference concerning adolescent mental health here in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The evening I arrived was the day after Halloween and all over the local news was a story about

[36]The 1994-95 National Population Health Survey found that depression rates are highest and psychological well-being lowest among youth, and that mental well-being increases with age. Remarkably, this is a reversal from the patterns of a generation ago, when seniors were more likely than younger Canadians to be depressed. The Atlantic provinces have reduced the poverty rate among seniors by more than half overall, and have proportionately less low income elderly than the Canadian average, with Nova Scotia recording the lowest rate in the country... Sadly, that substantial gain has been offset by rising poverty rates among children and unacceptably high poverty rates for single mothers and elderly women living alone (Colman, unpaged).

> something that had taken place in my hometown the night before. Basically over a hundred teenagers got together and went on a rampage of vandalism, breaking the high school and the courthouse windows and so forth. It certainly added piquancy to my speech. I thought, for the love of God; give these kids something to do, give them some hope. And all the authority figures were talking about was punishment—how these were bad kids with bad parents who needed to be held accountable. No sense that perhaps the entire community should be held to account. (Sunny, 2002)

When Coady goes close to home she does so with an intention to disrupt and shatter the pastoral landscape and along the way she manages unwittingly to take on a number of other bugbears, not the least of which is what Sharon Hays (1997) calls the ideology of intensive mothering. In her article, Hays exposes the conflict within the notion that mothering is the most important social task laid at the feet of women whilst women exist within and participate in the individualistic and competitive capitalist system. Women are simultaneously positioned to carry out the impossible and superhuman task of solving the world's problems (pp. 311-313). This ideology contributes to a damaged and damaging view of women's selfhood and it must be especially brutal in those circumstances where young women, or women who are deemed to be children, are forced by the logic of this ideology and religious belief to 'give up' the child. The act of 'giving' in these circumstances must contribute to a terribly conflicted mental health state on the part of the giver. Coady is well aware of the high stakes affecting the lives of young women as they are positioned within these ideological forces.

"It (Strange Heaven) was fiction, but it was drawn from my own experiences," says Coady, who gave a child up for adoption when she was 18.

> I tend to build stories around things that obsess me and what obsessed me then was teenage pregnancy and all the community politics that surround it. I remember growing up and it was always in the air that if you got pregnant, the best thing you could do was give your child up for adoption. Which really means to give it to people with money, who are joined in holy matrimony. It really has nothing to do with the woman's benefit or the child's benefit. If you grow up in a Catholic community, like I did, that's the only solution. Unless you keep it. But if you keep it, there's the taint of being, well, a whore. (Dafoe, 2000)

Youth, young people, entering a cultural stream, are variously constructed within texts and their identities thus constructed, are not for the most part autobiographical. They do not write themselves because they are members of what Lejeune (1988), after Bourdieu, calls the controlled classes. As members of this group, their lives are studied from above in the imagined "journalistic and fictional discourse of the dominant classes, and it nourishes both their dreams ... and their nightmares" (p. 199).

Having grown up in a rural environment, the same environment where I now work as a teacher, I am intrigued by the possibilities inherent in Coady's work, to help us, as educators, move beyond the nostalgia of the rural lament. Because I, myself, have experienced close up a rural cultural space, I experience a certain impulse, a kind of

automaticity[37], to push outward within that space in order to better grasp, or hold, something of the social reality present there. In suggesting it is possible to grasp 'something' of the social relationships I am referring to the some things which both mediate and bind us within the socius or general assembly.[38] One such thing, in this case, is the novel, the written word, helping us to see ourselves in new ways. Smith (2000) suggests the fruitful possibility of using works of literature to provide learning opportunities based on what happens to the characters. At the same time she suggests that literature provides a means of speaking back to the various circumscriptions offered youth within patriarchal culture (pp. 246, 224).

The notion of exploring literary artifacts to better understand social realities is supported by Margaret Doody's (2002) work on the novel. Doody argues our access to understanding identity construction in the social world is made possible, not so much by the presentation of sober descriptions of what is or was, plain views of simple matters she calls this, rather through literary, and I would suggest, metaphoric or novel devices. We must then look to objects such as novels to thicken our views of the dry bones of community life contained in such dreary places as government reports and statistical profiles.

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[37] The notion of automaticity is derived from the work of the Montreal Automatists specifically the work of Paul-Emile Borduas and the 1948 *Manifesto*. "Hoped for: a sharpened awareness of the psychological content of any form, of the human universe as it is made from the universe as such." (p. 47)

[38] This notion of the socius is taken from Raymond Williams' (1987) *Keywords*, "Society was virtually equivalent to relationship or to one of our senses of *associations*... the sense is that of an assembled company of guests" p. 292.

In this light, Lynn Coady's fiction, rooted in and informed by her experiences in Eastern Canada, provides a means of illuminating what gets made in those spaces. What Coady offers her readers is a problematic and complex view of life in one of Canada's most pastoral spaces. Atlantic Canada is increasingly constructed as a refuge, a playground, or recreational space and therefore can lay claim to the literary sense of the pastoral (cf. Cosslett, p. 94).

As in the *Secret Garden*, where the children must work hard to gain access and delight, in Lynn Coady's paradise the complexity of life is made present in that space. Coady succeeds in inserting complexity into the larger and oppressive narrative which positions Eastern Canada as a timeless retirement home. There are no innocents in Coady's Strange Heaven but there is an amazing cast of characters whose lives intertwine creating a world in which the teenager, Bridget Murphy, struggles to achieve a kind of cohesion of self [39] in a very fragmented and conflicted space. Bridget sees herself and is seen in this enigmatic place as an object in plain view of herself and others. Benjamin quoting Valéry says, "In dreams, however, there is an equation. The things I see, see me just as much as I see them" (Benjamin, p. 185).

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[39] *Sense of coherence* (SOC), or psychological well-being, refers to an outlook or enduring attitude whereby life is seen as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. It has been shown in a number of international studies to predict longevity and to relate to physical health,[12] a conclusion that appears to hold for the Canadian population as well.[4] The NPHS was the second population survey in the world, after Finland's,[13] to measure SOC at the national level. SOC was measured by means of 13 questions that were summarized into a scale with potential scores ranging from 0 to 78. On the basis of the distribution, a high SOC was arbitrarily defined as a score of 67 or greater. ... (Stephens, et al. unpaged).

In the margins: holy Images, aggrieved fathers, and fallen daughters. When writing Strange Heaven, Coady wanted to challenge received images of the culture of Eastern Canada and specifically that of Cape Breton. "So, simply put I try to stay true to my experience of Cape Breton without being stereotypical and reductive. I mean, that's the job of every writer" (Coady quoted in Berry, 2002, p. 83). In attempting to share elements of this broad culture which Lynn Coady writes against, it is instructive to consider two texts which appeared, as it were, in the margins of my reading of Strange Heaven. The first of these is a local news story and the second is a famous painting by the father of Artemisia Gentileschi.

The local news story is about a sighting of an image of Christ on the side of a doughnut shop in September of 1998 in Bras D'Or, Cape Breton:

> The doughnuts at a Cape Breton Tim Horton's restaurant are not only holey, they're holy. Staff there say hundreds of people have been flocking to the doughnut shop to view what appears to be an image of Christ on the side of the building...
>
> Helen Yorke of Florence, N.S., spent two hours looking at the image from the parking lot of the Lick-a-Chick restaurant across the street. "It's unbelievable," she said. "This is a good sign, seeing something like this." Yorke said her daughter overheard teachers talking about the sighting Wednesday. "I thought it was all a big hoax and couldn't believe it when I got here and actually saw it myself."

> Lori Steele of Glace Bay, N.S., heard the rumour while shopping Wednesday evening. "I can't believe it. The face of Christ - his hair, beard, robe - it's all there," she said. (Cape Breton News via the Vancouver Sun - Sept 25, 1998)

In presenting this news item, which was widely carried on Canadian national radio programs, the suggestion is that Lynn Coady is caught within the same flows[40] which produced the apparent face of the Lord on the wall of the donut shop.

Some years ago I showed several, mostly urban people, this news report not to lampoon the culture but to discover what the reaction of those 'from away' might be to such strange occurrences in this land. No surprises, my audience for this report were amused but strangely not bewildered as to how such witnessing might have occurred or if indeed it had occurred. Of course, depending on what one believes, miracles are possible. What interests me in this anecdote is the way in which the audience accepted the story and that their reaction may have been a function of how rural folk are seen in the view from away. The Lick-a-Chick view of the world or the view of the world that Christ with his wooden eyes might have seen from the wall of the restaurant contributes to a sense of poor lost souls out East and likely a sense that with such a folksy world out East the kind of gritty social world Coady describes is indeed on the edge, that is to say marginal. This may be the case.

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[40] The reference here is to Castoriadis' (1997) allusion to flows which he refers to as 'magma' within closed forms of 'imaginary significations' (p. 8). "Society fabricates individuals... who think as they have been taught to think, who evaluate likewise, who give meaning to that which society has taught them has meaning and for whom these manners of thinking, of evaluating, of imposing norms, and of signifying are *by the very construction of the psyche* unquestionable" (p. 264).

Lynn Coady, herself, invokes many images in her writing. Her evocation of the social world of family, youth, and patient is precise and is wrought through excursions into Bridget's thoughts and conversations as Bridget struggles through her depressive state. Readers become lost in the flow of Coady's story as a result of the repeat echo of images drawn from the larger cultural tropes. In her mammoth study of the novel, Margaret Doody (1996) includes the notion of the cut (or break), the notion of death, and the notion of mending in the tropic pantheon of cultural significations (pp. 309-318).

The status of certain significations and their extreme penetrations are such that evocations of time and place can be instantiated by certain symbolic and iconic images which resonate universally in both the local and western culture. I intend to use just such significations to further illuminate the texture of my own reading of Strange Heaven. In addition, I would like to suggest a contrapuntal movement between Orazio Gentileschi's (circa 1613-14) painting of Christ with Thorns and the folksy notion of the corporate coffee shop in a rural environment in order to produce a reified and stereotypical image of the local culture, the all too frequent kind of nationally projected image of rural Atlantic Canada which Coady disparages.

O. Gentileschi. *Christ With Thorns.*

Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum,
Braunschweig.

Christ With Thorns was completed two years after Orazia Gentileshi's eighteen year old daughter, Artemisia, was raped by Orazio's assistant Tassi. Nearly four hundred years later, Tassi's rape trial documents were used to create the 1997 French film *Artemisia*. The film created a well documented stir.[41] Feminists, including Mary Garrard and Gloria Steinem, make the case that the film demeans the daughter by outrageously presenting the rape as the source of Artemisia's creative powers as an artist in her own right.

Here, I am not so much concerned to enter the debate surrounding the film as I am to point out that in a certain way there are two fathers whose relationships to their daughters stretch across time and place and that these relationships indicate a destructive pulse within the broad western culture. One is Robert, the fictional father of Bridget Murphy, and the other is the painter, Orazio, the real father of Artemisia. Both daughters had, in their respective cultures, offended the patriarchal order. It appears that the 1612 rape trial was more about cleansing the name of the father than it was about justice for Artemisia. In the same way, the comic and tragic story of Bridget's homecoming after giving birth to a child, and subsequently spending time in the mental health unit of the children's hospital, is oddly about redemption for herself. With greater importance, it is about restoring Bridget's place within the Murphy family thereby removing the shame associated with the birth. In discussing Artemisia, Greer, citing de Beauvoir, notes that women artists principally portray themselves (cf. Clarkson documentary, 1992). In this case both artists are steadfast in their refusal of the patriarch's blessing. Artemisia did this

[41] Refer to http://www.efn.org/~acd/Artemisia.html for a more detailed account. Adrienne Clarkson's (1992) CBC documentary *Artemisia* provides excellent background information.

on canvas in such gloriously gruesome work as her portrayal of Judith's beheading of Holofernes which, as Dean Brown's censored Barbie doll version of the painting demonstrates, continues to bleed into the culture.[42] Coady's Bridget picks up the sword

Judith Slaying Holofernes (Naples Version) c.1612-1613

and tweaks many of the patriarchal strings which, as the Gentileschi story illustrates, have vibrated within the culture for centuries. There is nothing new in this but, in a curious twist which has to do with agency, it is worth noting that when the father paints his image of *Christ with Thorns* it is abundantly clear from the intrusive presentation of the hands in the painting that this deed, is one which was accomplished by the hands of men. In Lynn Coady's microcosmic world the beneficiaries of the social realities underpinning the images are less likely to be found in the world of the daughters than they are in the culture of the fathers. Horrific deeds, offended fathers, and the anger of women leap towards me as I contemplate the things which have been made in rural Nova Scotia and elsewhere.

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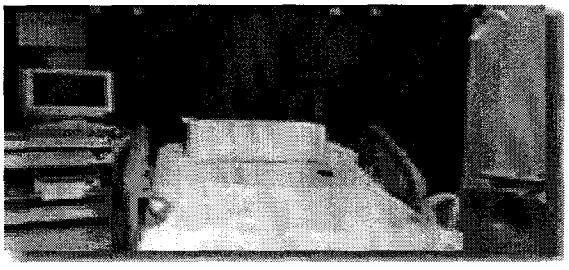
[42] When photographer, Dean Brown, cast Barbie as Judith, holding both the sword and Holoferne's head in full view of the camera, the corporate owners of the doll responded by forcing the image from the internet. Refer to http://members.efn.org/~acd/Artemisia.html, retrieved March 5, 2004.

Leaving this gallery and theatre behind I intend now to focus on one of the most poignant scenes in the *Strange Heaven.*

Turning the lights on. The grim closing scenes in the *Strange Heaven* consider matters of death and dying. They also suggest the nature of the task those who work with rural youth might wish to embrace.



The birthing bed is remarkably similar to the beds used to restrain ancient bodies from lolling to the hospital floor.

Bridget's Grandmother, Margaret P., who is nearly one hundred years old, and the eighteen year old Bridget exist in the strange heaven as congruent characters. Elemental bodily processes determine how these women are seen by health care professionals, family, and community members. They are represented through the activities of giving birth, defecating, vomiting, urinating, spitting and all imaginable ways of eliminating waste, babies, and unwanted fluids from their bodies. Because of this, the two women are in the process of achieving a kind of social death.[43]

These deaths, one which takes the form of the birth of a child who is to be 'given up', are partially enacted through the discourse patterns apparent in the following constructed and fragmented conversation between the three generations of women:

[43] Socially dead is the state achieved when the embodied self ceases 'to exist as an active agent in the ongoing social world of some other party' (Hallam and Hockey, 1999, p. 43).

Bridget, Margaret P., and Bridget's mother, Joan. The fourth voice in this re-imagined discord is that of the professional nurse, Gabby, whose fixation, like that of Joan, is Bridget's bowel movements or lack of the same:

Margaret P: *Who's that?*

Bridget: *Bridget*

Margaret P: *I thought I smelled ye.*

I've been shot.

Bridget: *You're not dead.*

Margaret P: *I'm praying.*

Bridget: *You were never shot.*

Why are you crying?

Now you're crying.

Margaret P: *Ooooooooh! Will nobody give me the bedpan?*

Joan: *Why is she shaking like that?*

Gabby: *It's the experience.*

Joan: *It's the experience. It's the experience.*

Bridget: *I'm sorry* (She remembered the sound of a hard pellet dropping)

See a round mouth opening and closing toward your

tit and live after that.

Live and live and live after that.

(fragments from Coady, 1998, pp. 142-144,147, 148, and 195)

The pregnancy and the birth have reduced Bridget to stinking excrement in the eyes of her grandmother and at the same time the grandmother, amidst the sound of her own banshee noises, is perceived by Bridget to be all body:

> Whenever (Bridget) closed her eyes she saw Margaret P.'s arm breaking off inside her nightgown. She pictured it like a doll's arm with a round, plastic knob at the end and a hole in the shoulder for the knob to fit into. (p. 188)

Both women, in these circumstances, are positioned on the border between life and death and in the closing moment of the novel, it appears that Margaret P.'s life has run its course. Resisting the stereotype, intensifying the irony, Coady turns up the light:

> ...now she sank into her bed twisting the rosary into the flesh of her fingers and making banshee noises...If she *did* die, she would of course be pleased ...and meeting God would remind her of her father. God would remind everybody of their fathers. And Jesus would remind them of their fathers, too. Margaret P. would take one good look around and know that it had all been worthwhile.

> But she would not die, Bridget knew. Because there wasn't any of that. (p. 198)

Lynn Coady's gift to educational research lies in the fact that she has turned the light[44] onto certain spaces and symbolic objects which require sustained new readings:

> She saw Margaret P.'s walls when she closed her eyes. What she never liked were the eyeballs of Christ and Mary and the saints looking down at her. Especially on the three dimensional plaques and statues. (p. 191)

Lotman's (2000) explication of the use and function of symbols within a culture provides a valuable heuristic for understanding the way in which Lynn Coady has created the horrific weight of the ordinary institutions of religion and family within rural culture.

> Lotman says that symbols are special kinds of signs which provide "important mechanisms of cultural memory, they can transfer texts, plot outlines, and other semiotic functions from one level of a culture's memory to another... A symbol stands out as something different from the textual space that surrounds it, like an emissary from other cultural epochs..." (p. 104)

Symbolic functions are evident for instance in the joy experienced when a family gathers round the Christmas turkey and when the stuffing from the bird is removed and shared. That joy is somewhat muted by the parallel, sober and miraculous text of the sharing of the body of Christ in communion post the birth, life, and crucifixion. Christ, of course, in

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[44] The notion of 'turning on' an object of material culture is borrowed from Tim Dant's discussion of the same in his (1999) *Material Culture in the Social World*, pp. 153-158.

the symbolic arrangement of cultural space, cannot be the turkey. The plot will not allow it. But the turkey can indeed be Christ.[45] Hence the entire performance of Christmas is a necessary fiction in anticipation of yet another miracle, Easter.

These linked scenes, across time and cultural space, are generative of a way of ordering ordinary life for those gathered round the Christmas dinner. Further in their symbolic form, they are instrumental in generating the kind of nervousness and ambivalence experienced by Bridget Murphy who does not like 'the eyeballs of Christ and Mary and the saints looking down at her'. When the symbolic forms of the culture grow dim, fail, and are experienced by youth as what I refer to as 'a destructive pulse' there is educational work (which is political work) to be done in order to achieve renewed and healthier relationships within the culture.

To accomplish this kind of social mending, James Glass' (1989) work in the area of mental health is at least suggestive of future directions. Glass suggests that in working towards a healthier society "it might be productive to think of place in a political language – the language of community and civility, productive activity and collaboration ..." (p. 214). Achieving such a shift which involves relocating the site for recovery away from the hospitals and the schools, and repositioning the mending of shattered selves within the community, requires an intense political engagement of the kind Irigaray (2001) imagines in her sustained critique of the family.

[45] For another reading of the problem Christ's birth see Žižek (2001, pp. 89-91) in which Žižek discusses Christ as excess (Man + God) and in which he refers to Christ as "a bone in the throat".

Discussion:

Political engagement involves being able to see the way in which power manifests itself within the family and in the larger political culture, however defined. Beyond this, it is necessary to engage in the kind of visual sociology which allows researchers "to *see* (emphasis added) their own work in the context of larger frames of power" (Harper, p. 37). Lynn Coady's work is a poignant reminder that we, as teachers, ought to be mindful in our future projects of the kinds of terrors concealed in the experiences of youth in rural culture.

In the following Hansard record from the Nova Scotian standing committee on community services there is an exchange between a prominent member of the Conservative government and a citizen who is attempting to discuss the issue of youth pregnancy in rural Nova Scotia. The cabinet minister, Jamie Muir (a former Principal of the Nova Scotia Teachers College, and in 1998 a future chair of Nova Scotia's powerful treasury and policy board) initiates the exchange:

> MR. MUIR: What I am going to say now, a person came up to me the other night, it is known around that I am on this committee, and a person came up to me on the street the other day and said, one of the things that I have difficulty with in the social service system is the very young women who are having babies. You did make mention of that in your presentation.
>
> What this person said to me was effectively, a person should sort of be entitled - whatever word they used - to one child, as a teenager, and I am talking about a young person. They had a lot of difficulty coping with the fact that there are cases

> of young women who will then have two, three or four children and they all stay in the social service system at that point. Do you have any suggestion as to how we might deal with that? What they were suggesting was, and it was quite frank, that past child number one, all others go for adoption.

A citizen responds.

> MS. GODSOE: Wow. I will not even honour that with a response, and I know that you are having trouble with that too, I can just tell. But I will say that there are members of our group, Women for Community Economic Development, who struggled with this presentation because that concern is shared. So it comes down to that the system must be seen to be fair by everyone.

Followed by a second citizen:

> MS. CROWELL: There are many socio-economic reasons too why these things happen. I do not think that we can go around blaming young women, teenagers or whatever, because our system says we will pat you on the back if you have three kids and then you can stay on social assistance and get yourself a cute little apartment. I do not know any teenager that would want to stay home and raise three children just because they were going to get $600 to $1,000 a month. It is kind of the socio-economic background or backbone of the situation that we have to look at and why is our system perpetuating this in any way.

And the Minister innocently responds:

> MR. MUIR: I just raise that because it was a comment passed on and the person was serious.

And finally the Chair (woman and a knowledgeable social worker) of the public hearing intervenes:

> I think just to comment more than anything, it is really important to have these discussions and debates, especially in public forums, because you have an opportunity to get the information out and to challenge perceptions that are based on either no information or poor information.
>
> We have had the opportunity to have presentations to this committee by the Deputy Minister of Community Services which included a fairly detailed account of who it is that receives social assistance in the Province of Nova Scotia. The vast majority of single parents who are on social assistance in this province have one child. I think people really need to go and look at those statistics and try to understand what the reality is in terms of what the department is dealing with.
>
> The other thing I think that is really important too, to always keep in mind, is that the majority of people, who receive social assistance in this province, as well as in every other province, are persons with disabilities and, in fact, it is not single-parent women. Then when you start to look at the breakdown of it, if you look specifically at single parents, of the single parents who receive assistance, very few of them are actually teenaged mothers. They tend to be women who are clustered anywhere between the 24 and probably 32 to 35 year group, and many of them have been divorced and separated.

In rural Nova Scotia the subject of teen pregnancy is a recurring topic in the news and appears to suggest the promiscuity of young unwed women who are said to use their babies as a source of income through the welfare system. Considered in light of Coady's general despair as to the opportunities afforded youth in Nova Scotia, the comments by Mr. Muir are instructive regarding the social world Coady mines for her fiction. Mr. Muir, himself a noted educator, uses the hearing to perpetuate a myth: the myth that says teenagers are in fact using community services support to gain income by having babies. During the hearing it took the response of three women to eventually sort the myth from the reality. But in the end Mr. Muir had the last word:

> MR. MUIR: I would just make one other comment on this thing. Like some others here, I have got a bit of a background in education. We have been trying to address these problems for some time and we haven't, obviously, been particularly successful because of the number of people who, for one reason or another, are forced to access a social benefits system. If you have any thoughts - and I am not looking for them tonight - but one of the things that I hope can come from this group is some preventive programs; extra money or additional services is great but somewhere we've got to get into the prevention mode as opposed to the remedy. I have said enough. Thank you.

In the exchange Mr Muir never acknowledges that he had presented a popular prejudice during the hearing and because he credits himself with a background in education his audience likely assumes he is still talking about teenaged youth when he says, "we haven't, obviously, been particularly successful because of the number of people who, for one reason or another, are forced to access a social benefits system". Of course the

antecedent to 'the number of young people' is likely understood as youth and especially girls who access the welfare system and 'for one reason or another' likely refers to teen pregnancy and its associated risks. Mr. Muir had indeed said enough to discount the measured response of the committee chair who wanted the audience at the public hearing to understand that it is in fact abused women, not teenagers, who are most in need of service within the rural areas. This real life exchange concludes our sojourn in the Strange Heaven and constitutes a small bit of evidence underpinning the truths to be found in our fictional worlds.

CHAPTER SIX

What Counts? Education Beyond the City, Does Rurality Matter?

'What Counts?' is the chapter in which alterative frameworks are used to investigate aspects of rurality which appear clouded in dominant policy narratives. These narratives are key to providing insight into educational futures in rural Nova Scotia. Alterative frameworks for investigating rural realities are useful when considering our rural selves in the context of the more official or tightly framed discourse found in policy documents. The frameworks are constructed through the anthropological use of literary texts in order to more directly address the problem of what difference rurality makes in the world of policy development. This investigation begins in a place of rural madness, and is followed by my question, "What Counts?" I end by staging the rural subaltern in the form of a friend whose life's trajectory has roots in the same rural setting from which I have emerged but whose pathway has diverged in significant ways from my own.

Literature is Like an Ear

> Literature is necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to whatever is without voice, when it gives a name to what as yet has no name, especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude. I mean aspects, situations, and languages both of the outer and of the inner world, the tendencies repressed both in individuals and in society. Literature is like an ear that can hear things beyond the understanding of the language of politics; it is like

> an eye that can see beyond the color spectrum perceived by politics. Simply because of the solitary individualism of his work, the writer may happen to explore areas that no one has explored before, within himself or outside, and to make discoveries that sooner or later turn out to be vital areas of collective awareness. (Calvino, 1986, p. 98)

A Prereading

This prereading is extracted from Donna Smyth's retelling of the story of Leafy and her goose. Donna Smyth, a well regarded novelist, poet, environmental activist and academic, has lived in various parts of Canada and in the United Kingdom and now resides in an old farm in Hants County, Nova Scotia. Her literary work has been favorably compared to that of the late Angela Carter. Her writing often crosses genre boundaries and deftly incorporates both fiction and non-fiction in a single gesture. (Carter, 2006, p. 127) In real life, Leafy, the fictional name of a person named Relief Smith, resided about fifteen kilometers from where I write. Leafy appears in the story to share with many of the parents with whom I've had contact a profound mistrust of the state which seemingly viewed Leafy and her goose as annoying debris.

> "There's a mistake, a mistake in livin'! God's cruel, Sarah! Cruel to make us, cruel to make such a wind it bites holes in the trailer. Sarie dear, you're the only one who hasn't left me. My first man, he beat me, then he beat it. The second one disappeared too, drove away in the middle of the night. Going somewhere. Animals know, the creatures do know. You crawl into a hole to lick your wounds. But folks won't let you, no sire, they send the social workers after you. Pryin' and

meedlin' till the day they die. I spit on social workers! I spit on men! I spit on the whole lot of them!"

The rum in the bottle worked its way down inch by inch. Leafy stopped ranting to swallow, sat down at the table, drunk - carefully rolled a cigarette, smiled at the goose.

"Come to mamma, Sarie. There, there, don't be scared of the old woman. You're the only one who understands me, God's truth you are. Kids they see me – you know what they do? Run away, scared. Scared. Think I'm a witch. Maybe. Maybe. Kids ain't what they used to be. Up here, Sarie dear."

Lifted her to her lap where she settled like a cat, Leafy stroked the feathers and sang:

All things bright and beautiful,

All creatures great and small!

Another swallow of rum, contemptuous wipe of the mouth with the back of the hand.

"Hah! What about the ugliness, Sarie? What about the ugly, the dirty and the lonely? Who made them? You tell em that and you're a wiser bird then I am. God. God! If He was to come down here tonight, I'd call Him to account. That I would!" (Smyth, 2003, pp. 10, 11)

Relief (Leify) Smith appears in this 1912 photo showing the goose and onlookers near Centerville, Digby County, NS. (Photo courtesy Bull, 1978, p. 107)

What Counts?

Clearly evidence comes in many forms. There is data of the kind one can access from Statistics Canada or the OECD libraries and many other repositories and archives. There is new data such as that generated by experimental explorations of such ideas as concept density. And there are the commonplaces provided for instance by forays into fiction. All these generate a plethora of social facts which provide transit points. It remains the imaginative task of the researcher to connect these points in such a way as to create new frameworks for educational research.

I wonder if the use of such frameworks might not provide the opportunity for an intense examination of lived social experience and at the same time the necessary criticism of everyday common sense so desperately needed if in life's circle dance we intend to take down the barriers and find our way home. As to whether or not rurality matters much depends on the location of the transit points. Situating the point of the transit in the world of alterative fiction one stumbles upon various works, novels, stories, and testimonies which themselves are aesthetic objects. These kinds of work function on our rural horizons as individual works of art. The work of art opens, as Foucault (1973)

puts it, "a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself (p. 288)." 'What counts?' attempts to evoke such a breach.

Challenging fictions. I use the word challenging in relation to fictions to indicate those fictions which are challenging to read just as they challenge our own readings of the world. Leafy's story provides challenging fiction, so too do those fictions known in the official world as educational policy narratives. Educational policy within Nova Scotia exists as part of the larger national neo-liberal policy flouted by the Council of Ministers of Education and their transnational task masters located within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and then implemented in Eastern Canada through the various departments working within the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF). An explication of the details of this body of policy rests outside the present work. However, the broad contours include an emphasis on teacher professionalism enforced through various mandatory and sometimes quasi-voluntary schemes, centralized control of financial resources and key decision-making over curriculum content (especially the outcomes based curriculum) whilst downloading responsibility for the reforms to the local levels, meaning the school and the amalgamated school boards. Central to the implementation of all recent policy shifts in Nova Scotia has been an increased reliance on standardized testing as a form of quality control which aims to discover implementation weaknesses and invariably leads to departmental prescriptions for improvements which in reality tend to be more of the same as contained in the original outcomes oriented pedagogy. The complete policy narrative is summarized by M. Corbett, D. Copp, A. Wright, and M. Monette (2007) in their chapter on Nova Scotia in S.

Chan, D. Fisher and K Rubenson's *The evolution of professionalism: educational policy in the provinces and territories of Canada.* Their concluding summary reads:

> Accountability is still the driving force in the system and teacher professionalism is increasingly defined in terms of student performance on national and international standardized tests. While there is now more recognition that educational performance is complicated by social factors (eg. Population health, social class, race, ethnicity, and gender), the central questions in public education policy in Nova Scotia continue to relate to how to increase measurable performance on standardized tests. (p. 162)

Increased performance on standardized tests means that the province accepts that education exists as a kind of ladder upon which we wobble in our endless race to move upward or at least to catch ourselves when we slip.

Because policy narratives, as a host of thinkers regularly remind us, are inseparably linked to questions of power[46] I feel like Menocchio before the inquisition: "My opinion is that God was eternal with chaos, but he did not know himself nor was he alive, but later he became aware of himself, and this is what I mean that he was made from chaos (Ginsburg, p. 54)." Certainly the inquisition had some difficulties with Menocchio's views. His was not a neat and tidy world given to simple solutions and

[46] S. Ball's (2002) 'The Teachers' Soul and the Terror of Performativity' provides compelling argument linking policy shifts to the politics of power.

linear outcomes. Menocchio's fiction tested that of the authorities and he was burnt at the stake as a result.

One person's challenging fictions placed in the face of powerful authoritative fictions signals danger. No matter, neither Menocchio nor I can help ourselves. We have, I hope, moved beyond those nasty and very European bundles of sticks and fire through which to resolve our differences. And yet, policy is powerful stuff which requires I think alterative fiction. By alterative I mean what Ellis (p. 194) implies when she says we need to change the traditional ways of doing research. In part this means examining the kinds of stories which arise in particular places as a result of both the dialectical movement in history and the dialogic nature of our utterance.

Dominant stories, linear plots. One of the dominant stories which we need to examine is the progress story. It is the one that says we are always getting better, but really and curiously we don't know how to get better, and if we are not getting better then there is something wrong with what we are doing. In Eastern Canada the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS) issues an annual report card on the success of high schools in the region. These report cards rank the schools and invariably lead to headlines like 'AIMS report: High schools are 'going backwards' as reported on April 4, 2008 in the *Telegraph-Journal.* When schools attempt to deal with issues such as the personal safety of children AIMS enters the media frenzy with headlines like '*No wonder our students can't read',* as reported in the Halifax Chronicle Herald on June 26, 2008, in an attempt to suggest that when safety issues trump achievement our schools have misplaced priorities.

The progress story is captured by the notion that time moves forward and we all must march to its rhythm. Hoeg's (1994) *Borderliners* exposes time as a great linear plot which when applied to educational institutions creates endless years of squirreling through tunnels towards the light. Teachers recognize the tunnel and its curricular benchmarks ending in familiar celebrations leading of course to more of the same as young folk gather credentials and find their way eventually into an increasingly unstable world of work. *Borderliners* troubles the story that educational policy narratives are those which end in light. Hoeg implicitly suggests we change our ways when it comes to thinking about schools and policy impacts. *Borderliners*, though, is an urban story. We need to look closely at rural stories, ones which grow out of the fabric of rural experience in order to trouble the notion of progress in our place.

Circular narratives/ originary thinking. I am reminded of another story, this one, a rural story, comes from Finland, a country which does very well on international tests to the point where it has been hailed by the OECD as having the most successful education system in Europe.[47] But the test scores are indeed a different story. The Finnish story I am most interested in for its metaphoric value as a counter narrative to stories of progress is by the late writer Tove Jansson (1999) called *Comet in Moominland* in which the tired little trolls find themselves lost and weary and they think they are at the end of the tunnel.

[47] Finland tops the global school league tables. Refer to news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4073753.stm - 45k - 14 Mar. 2005 for the complete story.

> The Snork Maiden leant her head on Moomintroll's shoulder. "It's just what has happened to us," she sobbed. "Here we are almost dead beat on tired little feet, and we shall never get home."
>
> "Yes, we shall," said Moomintroll, "don't cry. And when we get there mamma will have dinner ready and she'll take us in her arms, and think what fun it will be to tell them all about what has happened to us."
>
> "And I shall have a pearl ankle-ring," said the Snork Maiden, drying her tears, "And what about a pearl tie pin for you?" (p. 130)

Well there we have it, by way of metaphor[48], another version of history and this version is not about progress, moving forward as such, but it is about not being lost, and after walking in circles finding ourselves, returning as it were to the nest. This is not about family values but it is about values and sharing, propping each other up until we can be safe, yes safe, in the arms of the maternal force. This is an example of what Eric Gans (1993) calls originary thinking: "The originary sign, by designating the central object, brings about a communal sharing that cannot henceforth be excluded from the sign's meaning. The textual sign is thus the germ of narrative" (p. 106).

Humans are the strangest creatures in that we spend our time looking for, among other things, our selves. This is nothing less or more than the author(ity) behind narrative, making sense of life through the stories we tell. "Human temporality operates by turning

[48] In his discussion of anthropological poetics and the new literacies Brian Street, 1999, discusses the linguistic turn in the social sciences and outlines the need to bridge the gap between the dehumanizing hard social science and more poetic approaches to generating understanding of social phenomena. Street quotes Fernandez (1991): "revitalization movements in culture, for instance, tend to 'be built upon a congeries, a mixing, of metaphors asserted and enacted. Anthropologists, unlike philosophers, find that cultural worlds are brought into being by the performance (enactment) of mixed metaphors'" (p. 5).

texts into narratives, and the return to the text is only of value if a new narrative can be extracted from it (p. 112)." The task of understanding ourselves within all narratives including I dare say 'policy narratives' was once a problem for religion. Today, says Gans, this task of self understanding can be assumed by anthropology (p. 113).

Fantasia/ Social Facts. Anthropological investigations within a culture are fused with what Isaiah Berlin (1990), after Vico, called *fantasia.* "To hear men's voices, to conjecture... what may have been their experience, of expression, their values, outlook, aims, ways of living; without this we cannot grasp whence we came, how we come to be as we are now, not merely physically or biologically and in a narrow sense, politically and institutionally, but socially, psychologically, morally; without this there can be no genuine self-understanding (pp. 64-65)." Imagination, *fantasia*, lies at the heart of all inquiry. Fantasia in other words is central to method, a reality which gives rise to skepticism regarding possible truth no matter what our methodological framework.

Engaging stories do emerge from human experience and in many ways stories constitute that experience. We are in part constituted through our own particular fiction or set of fictions which in turn function in the world as social facts. This notion of fiction as fact is derived from Raymond Williams (1977) discussion of the aesthetic function wherein Williams discusses Mukarovsky's earlier work in this field. Williams states, "At the same time the aesthetic function is "not an epiphenomenon of other functions" but a "codeterminant of human reaction to reality" (p. 153). In this light it is especially important to attend to our reading of fiction in order to see what might be discovered

about ourselves or if it is possible to ascertain that which is missing, missing that is in terms of the dominant narratives.

Transit Points. Within Vaihinger's (1924) theory of fiction, ideas, that is to say fictional ideas, act as transit points between sensation and action. Fictions constitute a space which is in between our experience of the world and what we do in the world and, according to Vaihinger, the importance of fiction resides in the contribution of the fictive to processes of discovery (p. 105). Reminding ourselves that the return to the text is occasioned by the possibility of new narratives, it is important to acknowledge, at the same time, that the text offers the possibility of infinite narratives just as it may offer none. Our textual world is fluid, transitory, and inherently unstable in these post-modern times. To quote Iser (2000):

> The interplay among the plurality of fictions generates a penumbra of possibilities, which are presences just as virtual as the cultural memory produced by intertextuality. These possibilities are distinctive insofar as they cannot be logically or even casually derived from the fictions themselves. Since the possibilities are not extensions of what is predicted by the fictions of the text, the emergent order is not a utopian fantasy, and yet it is fantastic, because the possibilities generated are to a large extent unpredictable. (p. 177)

Data/ Measurement/Reform

Let me permit myself a small sojourn into the world of data as it is derived from key texts relating to policy developments in two of Canada's more rural provinces. All

provinces in Canada provide portals or electronic windows on educational matters through their ministerial websites. The ministry of education known as Manitoba, Education, Training and Youth has produced Manitoba's strategic plan called 'Manitoba K–S4 education agenda for student success, 2002–2006'. Nova Scotia produced a similar document in 2003 entitled *Learning for Life.* These two provinces have relatively high rural populations (defined by Stats Canada as less than 1000 persons per square kilometer[49]). Manitoba is 28.1% rural; Nova Scotia is 44.2% rural; whereas Canada as a whole is a largely urban society with a total rural population of 20.3%. In approximate numbers the Canadian population consists of 24 million town and city dwellers while the rural countryside contains 7 million people.

Canada as a whole is a literate nation. For instance, on the OECD's, 2000, *International Adult Literacy Survey* Canada ranks just behind Sweden, Finland, and Norway, and is in the same league as the Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, Denmark, Australia, the United Sates, and Belgium on the prose literacy scores of adults aged 16 to 65 (p.19). In other words, as a population Canadians, ranked internationally, are at the very highest literacy levels. And yet the data also shows that more than fifteen percent of the same population has a 'literacy problem'.[50] Given that in some rural areas of Nova Scotia there is a relatively high school drop out rate it is likely that young adults, aged 15 to 24, are well represented in that subset of the population who are said to have a literacy

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[49] All statistics in this section are from Statistics Canada, the 2001 census, available online at <www12.statcan.ca/English/census01>.

[50] Refer to the National Literacy Secretariat's *A Snapshot of Literacy in Canada* available online at <http://www.nald.ca/nls>.

problem. In the western region of Nova Scotia for instance 42% of young adults were not in school in the late 1990's.[51] Statistics Canada defines this region of the province to be about 78% rural.

During the time period from which the demographic and literacy data was drawn all provinces were undergoing an intensive period of educational reform. These reforms are of the much discussed and debated 'neoliberal' variety and are very much touted by the OECD and implemented in Canada through the various mechanisms found in the provincial ministries and nationally through the powerful inter-provincial body known as the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada or CMEC. The reforms are ongoing, top-down, outcomes-based, increasingly test driven, and problematic on a range of levels to do with the lives of people engaged in the education sector and in terms of educational futures. Levin (2001) has looked closely at the reforms in five jurisdictions and makes the wry observation that it "is hard to find evidence suggesting these reform programs have had any positive impact on social cohesion or on equity" (p. 189) and that their effects on social outcomes "hardly appear to have been very positive" (p. 189).

Levin was looking at the reforms up to the turn of the century. What, I wonder; could we say about the future? To address this question it is useful to explore language density as this relates to key words which often appear in discussions of social futures: community, equity, poverty, rural, family or families, income, outcome, data,

[51] For greater detail refer to: Population Health Research Unit, 1999, *A Child and Youth Profile of Digby and Clare.*

accountability, and taxpayers. To do this one simply counts or tracks the occurrence of key words within policy documents. One then converts the new data to percentages and this allows the investigator to arrive at a sense of the density of the key concepts within the documents. This density, it might be assumed reflects in some measure the value the particular educational agency attaches to the concept within the overall plan. When one applies this process to the strategic plans for the provinces of Nova Scotia and Manitoba interesting data results. For instance Manitoba achieves a density of 2.19 on the community value and Nova Scotia a miserly 0.44. Manitoba has a family values density of 1.47 while Nova Scotia has a density of just 0.15. On another key value, accountability, Nova Scotia scores 0.25 and Manitoba scores 0.09.

In Nova Scotia's *Learning for Life* mission statement the word rural appears five times. Three of these instances are indexical with the remaining two referring to meeting the challenges of isolation and declining enrollments. This involves one paragraph out of sixty pages of text. In the Education Partners' Forum (which represents the provincial government's attempt to consult various stakeholders regarding the current and future direction of public education within the province) held in Truro, Nova Scotia on February, 18-19 of 2005 the emphasis of the consultation was on 'raising the bar', 'closing the gap', and on 'measuring and reporting success' (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2005, Education Partners' Forum Consultation Paper, pp. 6-16). The word rural did not appear in the key consultation paper. It is as if these withering and isolated spaces had ceased to exist.

Now the process of exploring concept or language density is reliable in that if I track the same documents several times I will get the same results. But what does this process tell us about social futures? The question remains to be investigated but my suspicions are that educational realities will unfold somewhat differently in Manitoba than in Nova Scotia as a result of the values revealed by the density of language contained in the documents.

My point here is that a close analysis of the language of key policy documents suggests the values underpinning those documents and to the extent that the social science data is a product of the sensory awareness of the social scientist it provides grist for the imaginative interpretation of the world by the social scientist and for those entrusted with translating policy into action. In other words policy *fictions* arise in the world of social science and what appears certain might in other words be an appearance or more likely a semblance of power. Policy documents thought of as fictions provide a transit point in my discussion here. I want to point to yet more literary fictions and then close with some testimonial thoughts which might help with the problem of alterative frameworks in light of what matters in relation to things rural.

The View from the Stage

Thus far, the representations included in this set of readings have acknowledged the various ways that rural culture in Nova Scotia has been viewed in the literature of place. This literature has been produced by those who have grown up in the culture and by those who have, as it were, passed through the local culture. In general there is a sense of ambivalence towards the rural in Nova Scotia and this ambivalence in part arises from

the fact that the representational evidence itself is conflicted in terms of how rural places are viewed. Lynn Coady's (1998; 2000; 2002; 2003; 2003; and 2006) work provides an increasingly mature view of the nature of this ambivalence. Much of this work possesses a haunting quality and eschews the older myths involving a love of place and the desire to return to a former Eden. Coady's literary peers in Atlantic Canada have made substantial contributions to this genre of gritty new realism. Many of these authors have been anthologized and examples of this material are included in Coady's (2003) edited collection *Victory Meat* and in the more recent *the Vagrant revue of New Fiction* edited by McIntyre and Anderson (2007). The stories contained in these collections absolutely refuse nostalgia, the tourist gaze, and the older tropes of religion. What is left is a steady parade of complex characters that have, as Coady (2003) suggests, 'grown up'. Troubled as they are, the characters in these fictions led remarkably ordinary lives for people who have been thrown into urban areas as a result of all the ordinary things which encouraged them to go there: education, loss of jobs in the country, and the lure of the big lights; naively emigrated to rural areas; or entered into challenging personal relationships with the land, the beasts of the fields, or each other, where ever they find themselves.

Occasionally representations of rural realities make it out of the pages of stories and novels and on to the stage. Catherine Banks' (2007) *Bone Cage*, which won the 2008 Governor General's Literary Awards for drama, and is set in rural Nova Scotia, is a case in point.

Banks' script begins with a quote from Wallace Stevens:

There are men of the valley

Who are that valley.

Bone Cage involves the complex set of relationships within a family and rural community. Jamie, the lead character, works as a tree processor and is engaged to be married to a high school student Krista. Krista's goal in life is to get married and to live the cozy life of those with automatic washing machines and the accoutrements of modern domesticity. Jamie, on the other hand, wants to escape the local scene and work in British Columbia as a pilot. The rub is that he does not have the high school qualifications for the training. The lack of qualifications is a result of earlier decisions made by his teachers and by his grieving father. Clarence, Jamie's father, is haunted by his young son's untimely death from cancer and by the fact that his wife had left him at the time of the child's illness. The alcoholic Clarence puts his faith in a variety of dime store hoax's to try and get his dead son back. This desperate hope includes resorting to a cloning scam Clarence has heard about in the media. Kevin, Jamie's troubled friend and Krista's brother, is a fine wood carver who spends his life distraught by the kind of destruction the local logging companies are wrecking in the area. Kevin's sensitivity towards nature and his sexual ambivalence make him a prime target for violence at the hands of local males. On stage this is an explosive brew and one which credibly resonates with a semblance of life in the resource based communities of rural Nova Scotia. The play concludes with a note of uncertainty as to who stays in the rural environment and who leaves. There is however a deep sense that the Bone Cage itself sounds the death knells of the countryside as a home

or at least as a place where healthy communities can thrive under current non-sustainable environmental and economic practices. Jamie's closing soliloquy speaks to these issues:

> Earl's gonna call me up. Tells me he's gonna sell the wood processor. Tells me if I buy it he'll hold the mortgage for me. And I do it cause maybe it's the way a dumb ass can get somewheres. And I'm inside the machine every night, I'm doing it, taking the woods down in two counties cause there is always the payment the goddamn *fucking* (*this is Jamie's most deeply felt moment---it is of a fox forced to chew off its own leg to escape the steel trap*) payments.
>
> The alcohol's always right there too so I don't have to think about why I never went away that time.
>
> The bird in the cage is me.
>
> I am the bird of death with the soul of the woods in my beak.
>
> Only I can't say that stuff except with my fists. (pp. 82, 83)

Bone Cage, *Strange Heaven*, and the variety of new fiction cited in this chapter are cultural artifacts which constitute portrayals of grim realities in Atlantic Canada. As aesthetic objects these texts provide a library of human reactions to the kind of circumstances people find themselves in and as Williams noted these objects act as co-determinants of human reaction to that reality. Additionally, the objects grow out of or arise from human experience in particular places. They are attempts at capturing what has been seen.

Witnessing: I see Their Faces:

I want to give voice to a former classmate and local friend, Terry Farnsworth, in this final section of 'What Counts?' In the early 1960's Farnsworth attended the same elementary school as I did. He sat in the same classrooms and heard the same readings from the Bible that I did. Terry sang in the same Christmas concerts that I did. He grew up very close to the place where Liefy Smith in an earlier time had carried her bewitched and disabled thirty year old goose whilst stravaiging the land for a meager living (Bull, 1978, p. 111). In his own words, Terry saw sorrow on Digby Neck. And as he grew his pathway diverged on to the sea where he fished using sustainable yet labor intensive technologies. With the modernization of the fishery which led my own father off the sea and into a dank, wet fish plant to make a living, Terry has seen his own living increasingly marginalized to the point where he must decide as each year rolls round whether or not to remain in the fishery. In the new century Terry, along with a handful of men who die hard, have become the subject of wistful attempts on the part of various artists and politically progressive academics in their efforts to show solidarity with those whose faces appear as potential icons in our collective efforts towards a sustainable future.[52] The words I have selected to present here are those Terry spoke at a hearing assessing the environmental impacts of a proposed mega-quarry which was at the time threatening not only local sea life but the land itself.

> I've seen this in the fisheries in my experience in the past years. They have their graphics, they tell you what is out there from year to year, but it doesn't match up

[52] Refer to Stiegman, 2006, for poetic and visually stunning profiles of Terry Farnsworth and his battle to survive.

> with what's (in the) water. They never listen to the communities, they never listen to the little fellows like myself, and all I can say now on the state of our fisheries is, "I told you so." And more and more each day it's -- you know, today I was sitting home there and I got thinking about my life, all my struggles through the years, and I just broke down and cried. And I say that (with) embarrassment because Digby Neck has been a place of sorrow and it's been a place of good things as well, and to have some large corporate interest group come in there and intimidate our community like it has and undermine the values --our spiritual values, our social values, all of these things that Tony Kelly expressed last night and others, is so intimidating. I'm at a loss right now as to what I want to believe in this place we call Canada, but I know it can't be mitigated and I know it can't be minimized, because it's gone all around the world. We're not alone, and it worries me. I've walked many times along that shore. I got history back to the 1500s. This is the place that God's put me, this is the place God's keeping me, and I forbid anybody to try to move my feet from this place. I see people, I see their faces. (Terry Farnsworth speaking at the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency's Whites Point Quarry and Marine Terminal Project Joint Review Panel Scoping Meeting #2, Jan. 7, 2005, Digby. NS, transcript, pp. 21, 22)

I was there when Farnsworth spoke. This extraordinary testimony to the joint federal and provincial panel studying an extremely contentious environmental problem in Southwest Nova Scotia was met with contempt, embarrassment, silence and tears. Businessmen rolled their eyes, others shifted in their seats, the learned judges showed little emotion, and adults, mostly women, wept. In less than three hundred words Farnsworth had

summed up his life story, exposed the harshness of the contradictions between the global and the local, and gave the assembly strong pause. With such few words Farnsworth managed to subsume the rural/urban, empire/colony, center/periphery binaries to the larger and more important stories which Farnsworth, himself reads on the faces of his ancestors and of the people he meets.

When Farnsworth turns from the landscape to see the people he makes a fundamentally ethical turn. To quote Levinas (1997), "One's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to *Place,* without which the universe would become insignificant and would scarcely exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers. And in this light technology is less dangerous than the spirits (*génies*) of the *Place"* (p. 132). Levinas argued that technology does away with enrootedness and the related sense of exile wrenching us free of "the superstitions surrounding *Place"* (p. 233). This gives rise to the opportunity "to perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity" (p. 233). This ethical turn is supported and encouraged by the active sharing of the kinds of cultural artifacts I have summoned in this chapter, namely the stories, stories told from near and far, stories crafted from the dry dust of data, and the stories which encase or, at times, erase our rural lives. These stories constitute evidence. But do these stories count?

Discussion/ Insight

Sumara (2002, pp. 155-157) makes reference to the gaining of insight through all the small stories. Insight is a kind of precursor to recognition, empathy, and to sustaining or abandoning relationships. The practice of reading and writing literary texts functions to

allow the reader/ author to gain insight into worlds not of their own making but in which they find themselves. The writing itself exposes for all to see what sense the writer makes of all the loose ends or fragments of her world. This is the work of interpretation or as Iser (2000, p. 145) suggests *translation.*

Writing from my perch in rural Nova Scotia I have presented a selection of stories which function to fill in a few of the gaps or silences one encounters within the documentary evidence regarding education located within government repositories. Filling in the gaps with stories of madness, frustration, and loss may seem an eccentric act and yet failing to do so is akin to an act of erasure. Including the stories helps ensure a more complete account of what has been made in rural Nova Scotia and as a result provides a source of hope and recognition for those who want their stories to count as the province moves to engage its notions of educational futures.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Concluding in a Space Between

This chapter weaves together key ideas from the readings and points to questions and problems worthy of future investigations. This chapter moves recursively in relation to the *Readings from a Life* project.

Recursive readings function as a form of rereading such that each return has the possibility of increasing what it is as readers we take from a given text. A reader engaged in re-visiting literary texts is, as Sumara suggests in relation to his own reading, "continually reminded of the complex and ever-evolving relationships among language, memory, forms of representation, and senses of personal and cultural identities" (2002, p. 97). A writer looking back finds a version of what she meant to say, or indeed realizes what she did mean to say and as well engages in a process wherein the self is potentially transformed as the result of the reengagement with work that in a new time may appear worthy of further consideration through contemplation, revision, or deletion. Writing like the ancient cave paintings is a form of cultural secretion intimately connected to social imagination and how in the end we see ourselves. The play between the reader as reader and the writer as writer hinges in large part on the circularity and recursiveness intrinsic to the production of written language as such. "Interpretation," writes Iser "highlights the fact that human beings live by what they produce, which points to an important facet of the human condition: humans appear to be an unending performance of themselves"

(2000, p. 156). According to Iser, interpretation as an activity to make phenomena (knowledge, understanding, meaning) emerge remains an inconclusive act and requires what he calls the infrastructure consisting of both circularity and recursion and these in turn act as umbrella concepts (p. 157).

Revisiting 'What are you doing here?' Looking back, this literary and anthropological investigation was motivated by the autobiographical problem arising from the question, 'What are you doing here?' The question was found to be laden with historical, personal, emotional, class, experiential, and representational undertones. Not having been posed in a prison as such, the question implies openness and a world of choice if not freedom. One seemingly innocuous question leads to others which in this case meant an unpacking of the question along autobiographical and spatial lines of inquiry. The broad framework for this investigation was provided in the first chapter and this was followed by an inquiry in chapter two entitled 'Where?'

'Where?' situated the readings in relation to an autobiographical sense of the self. Over the course of the chapter an ambivalent tone emerged in relation to the notion of place, especially place as a harbinger of home. Distance was used as a literary device to help structure the feeling tone the author experiences and wishes to convey in relation to his being in rural or rustic places in Eastern Canada. That feeling emerges through a rhythmic movement or cadence which itself emerges in historical time through an indication of family ties which have acted as a precursor to my own experience. The story of my grandfather who moved in and out of *wild* or unmapped spaces as part of the federal government's post first world war mapping projects provides parallel structure to

my own movements as I have traveled away from here, meaning rural Nova Scotia, to such urban places as Halifax, Montreal, or London and back again. I have first hand experience of rural places along the Lower North Shore of Quebec, in villages and towns throughout the old Yugoslavia, in the circumpolar villages near Tromso in Norway, and seemingly remote rural villages within two hours of Durban in South Africa. These travels have provided occasions to further contemplate the meaning of being rural in an age of globalization and post modernity and have always involved a return to this place in rural Nova Scotia.

My travels have been both real and virtual. For instance when I began a teaching career in the early 1980's I was able to move along the same shores my Grandfather had visited several decades earlier. Since that time my commitments to enhancing my own professional competence have taken me far afield in pursuit of pedagogical approaches for use in the classroom, and to explore and share what seem to me to be important questions of a reflexive nature. Questions involving what have been made, what is made, by teachers who live and work in rural places and who consider themselves, their students, and neighbors, as others might see or imagine them have involved me in a number of uncharted excavations of past experience. These are uncharted in the sense that there is no ready road map into the past but there are a plethora of ways that fleeting images from the past come into focus. For me, literary representations have provided the most challenging and, in certain respects, the most productive ways to consider from various perspectives the narrative beneath the question, 'What are you doing here?'

Literary representations provide the site for virtual travels to and from what appears in later chapters as the strange heaven. The act of reading, after Bachelard, has been presented as hermeneutic practice, a way to close in on life's circles, recognizing that the circles themselves are a source of light just as they constitute a space in need of translation. Translation occurs at particular junctures and radiates outward as re-presentation of lived experience. Juxtaposing the poetic musings of Kenneth White, the leading Scottish theorist of geopoetics, to the late Canadian Glenn Gould's meditation on the consequences of colonizing northern spaces, gives rise to an expression of the tension one feels when confronted with impossible yet seemingly inevitable choices. Confronting the reader in this way is generative of the sense of ambivalence encountered when one moves between the two transit points: the north in Canada conjuring images of the rural, and the south in Canada conjuring images of the urban. Reading White's geopoetics and his quest for an abode or 'great residence' presents a sharp contrast to the terrifying exposure and brightness found in Soja's conjuring of the Aleph where humanity is seen but wherein there is no blending, no mixing. By way of further contrast, quiet country spaces, including a set of vestigial stairs were described as a means of inviting the reader to experience first hand the kind of rural and peaceful solitude found here in this place, but which in part were generative of a confused desire to be elsewhere. The confusion is about being in a space which seems warm and yet too close and in that space realizing the seductive lure and the loneliness encountered in the city. The contrast, the contradiction really, is in part resolved in chapter two through conversations with the dead and the clear statement in Berger's work that 'here' is a meeting place. The establishment of such a place served to provide the setting for seeing our rural selves and for the reading of the strange heaven.

In chapter three theory, itself, necessary in the construction of the response to the 'you' and the 'here' and the 'what' of the question became a matter of seeing Iser's hermeneutics, its antecedents and relatives, through juxtaposed readings of fiction. The theoretical excavation in its presentation is as paradigmatic of the practice of reading for pleasure and for new readings as is the readings of the various fictional encounters placed throughout the project. In the chapter on literary anthropology we encountered the riddle of the tea cups; an excerpt from Mistry's *A Fine Balance.* I have read this piece several times since its publication, on my own and with colleagues and friends. Each successive and recursive reading has reinforced for me the power of literary images to illuminate not only the emotionally complex reading of class and race relations but the reading also underscores the common elements of what it is to be human and to reach out in a humanistic way to cross the otherwise barbaric breach in human relations brought about by the larger structural relations in society. What Mistry evokes in those tea cups, and we should remember that the leavings in tea cups are long associated with projections of the future, is the need to protect the qualitative in our lives. This is a theme echoed in Bauman's work when he reflects on the lessons of the Holocaust:

> From the point of view of its victims, the Holocaust contains different lessons. One of the most crucial among them is the jarring insufficiency of rationality as a sole measure of organizational proficiency. This lesson is still to be absorbed in full by the social scientists. Until this is done we may go on researching and generalizing the tremendous advance in the effectiveness of human action attained

> thanks to the elimination of qualitative criteria, moral norms included – and all too seldom thinking through the consequences. (Bauman, 2000, p. 150)

In a series of post-prandial moves the riddle of the teacups gave way to an insistence that the moral and the ethical need to be kept nearby during the literary excursions. Manguel insists on the redemptive value of the story and the small parable inserted from Garner's (1983) *The Stone Book* was intended to underline Manguel's position as the small child looks without fear through the stone book which "had in it all the stories of the world and the flowers of the flood" (p. 29). The panoramic view experienced by the child provided the basis for a closer look at Iser's literary anthropology and his developed sense of what it is that the reading of literature makes available to the culture. That is, literature operates to provide a representative model of what is desired, of what is absent in terms of given realities but which appears in the imagination thereby lending transparency to the working of human culture (Iser, 2003c, pp. 166, 167). Literature, according to Iser, functions inside culture in a paradoxical way allowing the reader to move to bridge the gap between the center and the periphery whilst, one might add, going nowhere. In other words our travels through Iser's anthropology leave us in a space between. As we lay the book aside, a project remains and that project in these postmodern times is that of the self in relation to others.[53] Thomas King, the teller of Native tales, puts the matter somewhat differently:

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[53] Refer to Castells, 2004, pp. 8-12 for a summary of the notion of project identity.

> Take ... (the) story, for instance. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Make it the topic of a discussion group at a scholarly conference. Put it on the Web. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story.
>
> You've heard it now. (King, 2003, p. 60)

Summarizing chapter three, the novelists, the sociologist, the literary theorists, and the storytellers give up cultural artifacts, each in their own way an offering, contributing to our collective awareness of the self as an ethical project.

In chapters four and five we entered the fictional world of Eastern Canada through the collective reading of our rural selves and through my own nuanced reading of the *Strange Heaven*. The fiction used in these chapters was drawn from the stable of regional literature and from literature which accentuates the pastoral or rural environs. The literature was presented in contrapuntal fashion, moving between national, more global representations of place and local representations of the same. With the aim of gaining insight into local and autobiographical forms of knowledge this contrapuntal movement was done in order to make the local world appear strange and therefore eminently knowable. What has emerged during the process of reading and rereading fictional representations of space, space which encompasses the various real and imagined places I have been, is a cultural collage (Saukko, 1998, p. 271). This has emerged from and reflects the various view planes I have experienced here in this place and in my travels to and from this place. As noted, my travels have always involved looking beyond and towards the place, sometimes the unhomely place, called home. As Saukko points out,

collage is often torn by contradiction. Given the range of contradictions between the global and the local as well as between the various and interested actors on the ground involved in the lives of those who live in rural spaces it is not surprising that the *Readings from a Life* as a whole present a contradictory cultural artifact. Contradictions like contractions impel us back into the world and in this case returned us to the world of power and policy.

Finally, questions of what kinds of fiction count in terms of recognizing what has been made here on the East Coast were addressed in chapter six. This involved a foray into the world of data and the way in which current policy initiatives remain silent in relation to matters of rural identity. This chapter provided a stage for the voices of those who have dropped out of school to be heard, one through the ventriloquism of the playwright and the other through transcript evidence from a local hearing into our ecological future. These voices like that of the storyteller encourage a return to what the philosopher calls an ethics of authenticity (Taylor, 1991, p. 91) that is to say there is recognition that the identity project must assume a caring stance in relation to the other.

Policy Implications and Possibilities

More than the problem of ethics, the identity project, as project assumes that in making the case for literature as evidence and for the reading of literature as a constitutive act in relation to the sources of the self it is implied that there does exist an audience, an other, which has the ability to hear what has been said within this tale of lust, lure, lore, and leaving. When Calvino (1986) says that literature is like an ear and an eye that can see beyond he is referring to the political. The extent to which the headless ear which is

the state wishes to step back from its authoritarian role to embrace the lessons contained herein and if indeed it is possible to move beyond dominant stories and linear plots there are several areas in which policy initiatives might be strengthened or extended in order to counter progress and more closely align theory and practice. I offer these as possibilities:

1. Literacy policy should continue to encourage and support the ongoing project of implementing reader response curricula. This project with its pedagogical roots in Rosenblatt's early work is as important today as it was in the inter-war years when she wrote the original *Literature as Exploration*. In our bellicose times, Rosenblatt's statement that "Literature fosters the kind of imagination needed in a democracy – the ability to participate in the needs and aspirations of other personalities and to envision the effect of our actions on their lives" (1995, p.212) must stand as a dictum in relation to the importance of including reader response within both literacy and citizenship education.

2. Recursive reading, as I have undertaken it within this thesis is a slow practice, one which requires a patient and calm demeanor in anticipation of the rich rewards which flow from greater self-awareness and empathy for others. It should be the policy of the state to encourage slow practices because, despite the hyperactivity inherent in globalized, ultra-competitive environments, identity (including whatever identity we claim as citizens) arises through processes, especially literacy practices, which give youth time to contemplate their 'place' in the cosmos. Honoré's (2004) *In Praise of Slow* reinforces the notion that policy makers should encourage a step-back from the onslaught of outcomes rushing towards youngsters as they enter the curricular tunnel (pp. 246-272).

3. A third policy implication relates to what is read in schools. The drive for efficiency in learning and in achieving outcomes has contributed to the presence in schools of so-called passages which are extracts or reduced versions of longer literary texts. Such meager offerings are a gold mine for the educational publishing industry but in the end they provide no substitute for encouraging youth to spend time in, to dwell in, rich literary spaces. Such spaces are essential because they provide context for the constructivist approach to learning in schools in that they enrich the cognitive space we recognize as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. (Readers should refer to Vygotsky, 1987, 339-349 and 1996 for a discussion of the nature of imagination and the linkages between the child's spontaneous concepts, cultural tools, and a child's mastery of her language.) Policy, therefore should seek to minimize the use of text passages and the like in favor of extended dwelling within literary spaces.

4. Educational policy should seek to maximize access to the cultural and historical artifacts found not only in the literature but also in the visual imagery of museums and the like and within their virtual counterparts found on the internet. In a throw away culture young people need opportunities to handle and engage with the tools of their communities in order to more fully appreciate their personal and collective identities. Photographs and artifacts of the kind I have used throughout these readings are suggestive of possibilities.

5. Curricular and pedagogical initiatives should emphasize responsible translation over the correct interpretation of literary texts within English classrooms. In my experience, too often students who are most in need of expanded literary and therefore personal horizons are tracked into situations where they believe it best to sidestep literary

engagement because they 'just don't get it'. As one student quite recently said to me, "I just want to get the Shakespeare out of it!" The not-getting-it-ness of literary engagement has a great deal to do with the entrenched notion that truth is in the text. Responsible translation has the effect of moving readers closer to the truths revealed through their own experience of the text than does any notion that there exists a something which must be or could be gleaned by setting aside that experience.

6. Related to my fourth point, it should be the policy of the state to strengthen and provide ongoing access to the productive tools of the culture which will extend the range of students' audience so that they do not become 'place bound'. It has been nearly three decades since Willis (1977) talked about young boys as being 'too square in a self-referenced world'. Hermeneutics aside, using the communication tools, especially the new digital technologies to open global conversations regarding the experience of identity in place, has the potential to strengthen and broaden students' horizons. (Refer to Barnes & Kelly, 2007, for an account of possibilities in this area.)

7. As the train ride North and our excursions into the literature of place have suggested, it would be wise for policy makers to de-emphasize progress, at least in terms of the ladder, and to move to an emphasis on well-being in the places we find ourselves. (Refer to Egan, 2002 for further a trenchant critique of our progressivist inheritance.)

8. The eighth implication grows out of the previous ones and should be seen as an ethical imperative for policy makers and for teachers alike. During my quarter century in the classroom it has been easy to observe that when students become marginalized within

mainstream education they are shuffled into various scenarios where they have more and more concrete, so-called hands-on experience offered them. Often, in the moment, such offerings solve the presenting institutional problem but in the end extinguish the hope which burns at the tip of the imagination's slow fuse. If it is not possible to get off the train, then we ought to enhance the train ride through practices linked to the imagination and one such practice is the shared practice of reading literary texts in the constitution of a commons wherein students can imagine their worlds otherwise.

You Are What you Read

In the writing of the *Readings from a Life*, fiction provided the main sites for investigation, a deliberate choice in response to a sense that the 'What are you doing here?' raises questions about how the 'you' is imagined and represented in the place called 'here'. And so the inquiry led inexorably to further examinations of literary representations *here* which are geographically speaking here in Eastern Canada with a particular focus on readings from Nova Scotia. There is the assumption that an investigation of a cultural landscape contributes insight into the 'I' carrying out the investigation as both author and subject and hence the 'auto' aspect involved in this work. The 'I' emerges between the lines. But insight in this project is clearly not restricted to the composer of these words. Insight extends well beyond the self and invites readers to assume the wandering view point of the literary *flâneur* whose movements allow one to see social realities within the particular rustic environs under consideration here.

That said anyone who spends as much time as I have messing around in the world of lies must eventually face the truth. As Goody (2006) points out, fiction, as distinct

from stories of actual events, are on the surface plainly not 'true'. Stories sitting alongside memories of lived experience and claiming status as evidence could be described as alchemy. And so spending time in stories is to spend time in some kind of illusion. This is one of the truths in need of further elaboration. The second problem which appears to be true is, as Goody suggests, "Any form of re-presentation may raise doubts and hence ambivalence about its relationship with the original" (p. 33). This gives rise to the problem of trust. How can one trust what is on the surface a lie and in the scheme of things raises doubts as to its veracity? Goody's response to these problems is to suggest that these problems are ones we are stuck with because they are inherent in the nature of 'language-using animals facing their environment' and, one might add, animals which think when they look into mirrors or stare into the past. Of course trust is earned when the re-presentation resonates with our sense of the past and of our individual and shared experience. In other words common experience, in common places, is generative of common sense which is a version of the more we get together the happier we'll be! There are limits to such happiness and these limits are encountered each time we face the stranger both as enigma and as threat. Coming to know and facing danger are dual prerequisites for gaining insight into who we are where we are. Insight, as Sumara (2002) has told us, is a by-product of using literary anthropology to interpret, that is to say translate, our life worlds into words and back again.

Clearly, the multi-layered response to the question, 'What are you doing here?' has opened a broad reading of identity issues in rural space. As noted, spatial metaphors have provided guidance throughout the readings. In addition, Gadamer too (2003, p. 370) wrote about the horizon of the question as going behind or beyond what is said and

Bauman (2003, pp. 35-39) discusses the relevance of the notion of horizon as a kind of coping mechanism for getting to know the stranger within the gates of the city. Literature, as Sumara insists, opens up common places for understanding and for going beyond what has been asked. Gaining insight into a self through an examination of what has been read and in a certain place, juxtaposed and then brought into contact with the readings of others, creates a fusion of horizons and therefore widens the cultural space of the reader. This fusion is generative of the kind of hope encountered when we read our rural selves. Beyond this the successful reading of the literature of place has the potential to stretch, change, and transform those who enter into the common places. This is because the readings are themselves relational in the sense that the texts are evidence of the excess of another self and that excess flows dialogically into the constantly reconstituted self:

> It is thus not that the self is sitting back within its inner citadel gazing upon its objects of consciousness; it is rather that self is, here again, in part *constituted* by that experience- the very idea of the self is given content by the relations into which it enters. And this is just as … the reader is in part constituted by literary experience. (Hagberg, 2007, p. 168)

This does suggest truth in the metaphor: 'you are what you read is to the mind what food is to the body'.

With the stammer of the self-conscious fibber (a word the thesaurus associates with liar and with storyteller) it is important, as these readings move to a close, to stress that the stories we live inside of and which are constituted in the spaces between

ourselves and our others are themselves part of the material conditions of our existence. Recognizing the social fact of the story means that we begin to have emergent frameworks for thinking about, accepting, rejecting, struggling against, or acquiescing to these conditions. Literature provides one space, the means through which, we can as Pearce (2002) suggests, negotiate our 'spaces of belonging' thereby finding our place, and in that place sense how we want to be, that is to be at home in the world. A successful act of reading in fictional worlds, an act in which the reader dialogically engages the text, implicates the reader to the extent that he or she comes to (re)define her sense of place and of belonging in new sometimes transformative ways. In this case, the new and the transformative means an intensification of ambivalence and doubt as I step back into the world knowing not only the complexity of how this place is seen and therefore experienced by others but also the realization that there is more than a little truth in the realization that you don't belong here leaves the lingering question, 'Where?' More than this because life implies movement and change 'Where?' is appropriately followed by 'whither to from here?'

Self-study, Going Forth

This overall work contributes to a sense of the complex weave raised by interrogating identity in place in rural Nova Scotia. As self-study this work demonstrates how one can spend a life time involved in both teaching and in literary engagement and in the presentation of the same gain insight into social as well as personal aspects of rural identity. As self-study, I have relied on the activity of reading itself as a means to gain insight (personal, social, historical, collective, political, and professional) and to challenge (Bullough, Jr. and Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20) stereotypical and received views of

rusticity. I have suggested that the act of reading broadens one's encounters with the world and collectively broadens our horizons. To read the world is to locate oneself and in this case to locate oneself within the broad landscape brought into view through an examination of East Coast rural horizons. Clearly though the act of reading, in and of itself, is not sufficient to an identity project. As educators we must be mindful that reading involves both word and world in dialogic relationship to each other. The reading itself stands in an analogous relationship to life and living in the world one engages with others in the production of our collective being. In the classroom one engages in a pedagogical relationship with students which is aimed at fulfilling something of the old promise contained in Mendelssohn's (1840) celebratory piece for the four hundredth anniversary of the Gutenberg press, that is that collectively and together in our various places and encounters (Noddings, 2002, pp. 171-175) we shall come into the light. In these times, the light means opening the world in an imaginative way so as to be able to move beyond nostalgia (C. Mitchell and S. Weber, 1999) and a sense of loss and to a problematic zone wherein teachers and students take stock of where they are, and attempt to work to create qualitatively different ways of being within our communities.

This move from reading to action is prodded along by what we must see as an ethical stance; stance (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 10 and Loughran et al., 2004) referring here to the way we stand, the way we see, and the lenses we see through and in the end how we stand in relation to each other and more particularly to the relationship between the knowledge we might gain through engagement with literary texts and its relationship to practice that is to say, what we do in such places as our classrooms. The little stories contained in the readings of our rural selves are illustrative of the possibility inherent in

this enhanced textual method. When the rural teachers 'read' their places through the literary lens provided by McLeod they gained insight into their familiar relationships and in my writing about their stories I wrote as both participant and observer straddling the middle ground in relation to their projects as family members and as teachers. Along the way, our collective work serves to illuminate the lives we live here on the margins just as it serves to remind us that as teachers we must be finely attuned to how our students are reading their worlds in the hope that becoming in tune with each other we can work to change those things which leave us adrift in unhomely places.

As self-study, this work augments our sense of who we are in that it complements more sociological studies and even those studies which present themselves as autobiographical counter-narratives here on the East Coast. The educational dimension of this work places alterative ways of seeing our rural selves in the hands of the profession. Colleagues and teacher educators who are interested in how to close some of the gaps between policy research as such and in how to place a more human face on those who are on the receiving end of policy initiatives should find this work productive of insight. Those who are interested in gaining an empathetic stance towards youth in rural environments should also benefit from a close reading of this work. For those engaged in the teaching of English this work opens avenues for teachers to move beyond consideration of texts as texts and more towards helping youth understand the ways in which engagement in literature itself is generative of personal identity and certainly provides youth with ways of seeing the world from other points of view. This is complementary to the yet unfinished project of implementing reader response approaches within core literacy programs. In addition to the barely begun project of literary

engagement within literacy pedagogy in relation to identity, this work speaks to the significance of this kind of reading project within not only self-study but also pre-service and in-service teacher education.

In my own practice, this work confirms the use of literary texts to help educators and young people grapple with aspects of their identity which remain problematic and contested. For instance, recently during my first year of teaching high school English, matters of race came to the fore and we were able to tap into the literature dealing with that topic. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* became what Sumara calls the literary common place for our investigation and students produced extraordinary arts based projects gesturing ways of bridging the gap between the often narrow representations of race found locally and the profoundly complex representations found in Morrison's work. This classroom work, yet to be documented, has set the stage for future investigations in to how rural youth situated in disparate parts of the globe read common texts in relation to their sense of identity now and as a project. I plan along with my colleague at the local high school to be able to facilitate interactive global conversations between students in disparate rural settings using internet technology along with Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1988) *Nervous Conditions* as a literary common place. Documenting this work will provide additional insight into how as teachers and youth we see our fractured and rural selves. The difficult hope as an educator is that rural youth in a global society might find a space, as in the parable, wherein we and they do not fear for their futures whilst more fully engaging our own stories. Indeed our own stories in the telling sometimes resonate with the ethical shift I have pointed to in these concluding pages. I now return home very close to those vestigial stairs we encountered earlier in this work.

Great Grandmother Ella May (Mildred) Trask (undated)

As I bring these readings from a life to a close it is worth noting that the readings constitute a form of life *writing*. MacLeod (2006) says that writers write about what worries them and what worries writers he says is almost always the experiences found in the local (p. 230). Prairie writers do not write about coal mining in Cape Breton. Our topics tend to be bounded by where we have been. In looking back over these writings and standing on my deck looking towards the cascading mysterious and fog shrouded promontories I see each day in their endless variegation, I was thinking of the stranger, the man with the tie we encountered along the wild shores of Quebec who had arrived on Digby Neck, and the fact that he had arrived *here* in rural Nova Scotia. Serendipity really led to him making his life here and he did so with the daughter of this wizened rural woman seen in the photograph near her place of lodging in the Boston area. Mystery surrounds this Ella May who left her family of ten children shortly after her youngest son was born in 1909. She took with her, her fifth child Hilda, and together they ended up

near Boston where it is said she worked as a domestic or in service to a care-giving institution. The particular circumstances of Ella May's life in New England remain vague. However, quite recently I learned from my father's sister and daughter of the surveyor that it was the surveyor, himself, who aided my great grandmother along her journey away from this place. He took her first to Halifax for a rest and then he bought her passage to New England where she lived out her years. My own Grandmother, Vera (Trask) Kelly, as a young woman was a telephone operator at the local phone exchange. I wonder if she did, from time to time, talk with her own mother by switching and plugging in and out those heavy black cords one sees in the local museum or did she write letters and were those letters answered or returned. Clearly, as this photo, which came from my Grandmother's collection, suggests there was the occasional visit to New England. Long separated by time and space, how awkward might the two women's conversations have been? These things are mysteries but what is not mysterious here is the fact that my Grandfather, then a stranger on these shores, did good deeds in helping extract this Ella May, a woman who was by the time of her departure in her mid forties, from a rural life which for whatever reasons, maybe the ten children, she felt she had to escape. I do not think my Grandfather knew he was involved in an identity project but most assuredly he knew he was living a life.

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