

Representing the Canadian North:  
Stories of Gender, Race, and Nation

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## Résumé

Cette thèse porte sur la relation téléologique entre l'identité et la conscience nationales dans la définition spécifique du Canada comme pays nordique en offrant un exposé descriptif de textes représentatifs où le Nord constitue un thème principal: ethnographies, récits de voyage, autobiographies, récits d'aventure, poésie, et romans. Elle propose que l'identité collective canadienne idéalisée dans la représentation du nord n'est pas organique mais plutôt construite en termes de certaines caractéristiques comme l'autosuffisance, l'indépendance, et l'endurance; que ces caractéristiques sont infléchies par les notions de genre et de race; et qu'elles sont évoquées afin de donner un «sens profond» de nation à l'État canadien. Dans cette description de définitions interdépendantes d'identités sexuelles, raciales et nationales, cette thèse critique la représentation du nord en tant qu'origine d'une identité canadienne collective et distincte.

## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the teleological relationship between national identity and national consciousness in the specific definition of Canada as a northern nation by giving a descriptive account of representative texts in which the north figures as a central theme, including: ethnography, travel writing, autobiography, adventure stories, poetry, and novels. It argues that the collective Canadian identity idealized in the representation of the north is not organic but constructed in terms of such characteristics as self-sufficiency, independence, and endurance; that these characteristics are inflected by ideas of gender and race; and that they are evoked to give the 'deeper justification' of nationhood to the Canadian state. In this description of the mutually dependent definitions of gender, racial, and national identities, the thesis disputes the idea that northern consciousness is the source of a distinct collective identity for Canadians.



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## Introduction: The North and the Canadian Nation

As long as the north wind blows, and the snow and sleet drive out over forests and fields, we may be a poor, but we must be a virtuous, a daring, and if we are worthy of our ancestors, a dominant race. . . Let us, then, should we ever become a nation, never forget the land that we live in, and the race from which we have sprung . . . We are the Northmen of the New World.

--R. G. Haliburton, "The Men of the North" (1869)

. . . I need wisdom. Wisdom to understand why Canadians have so little comprehension of our own nordicity, that we are a northern nation and that, until we grasp imaginatively and realize imaginatively in word, song, image and consciousness that North is both the true nature of our world and also our graspable destiny we will always go whoring after the mocking palms trees and beaches of the Caribbean and Florida and Hawaii; will always be wishing ourselves something we aren't. . . .

--Rudy Wiebe, Playing Dead (1989)

In the years between R. G. Haliburton's speech and Rudy Wiebe's lecture, the focus of Canadian nationalism turned northward at various times and in various discourses. Throughout Canadian history, the idea of Canada as a northern nation surfaces at moments of intense nationalist feeling. It had a great influence immediately after Confederation, and again from the 1960s to the mid-1970s when the brief ascendancy of thematic criticism coincided with an explosion of publications on the north. The

specific definition of Canada as a northern nation may not dominate every historical moment in Canadian history, but it never really goes away.

Critical accounts of the north in Canada are dispersed over many disciplinary and historical contexts, and writing about the north shows an impressive intertextuality, necessitating the interdiscipline of northern studies. Yet critical appraisals of literature representing the Canadian north have concentrated on aesthetic features and influences to the virtual exclusion of the impact social, historical, and scientific disciplines have had on it.<sup>1</sup> I. S. MacLaren's aesthetic mappings of exploration narratives, Sherrill Grace's explorations of representation and art, Penny Petrone's collection of northern voices, and Robin McGrath's history of Inuit literature stand out as examples of cultural criticism focused specifically on the north and on the aesthetic characteristics of literature representing the north. At the same time, the north inspires a variety of writer-critics such as Margaret Atwood, Rudy Wiebe, and John Moss to comment on its significance in Canadian

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<sup>1</sup> Such studies include I. S. MacLaren's "The Aesthetic Map of the North, 1845-59"; "The Aesthetic Mapping of Nature in the Second Franklin Expedition"; "Retaining Captaincy of the Soul: A Response to Nature in the First Franklin Expedition"; and "Samuel Hearne and the Landscapes of Discovery;" Barbara Belyea's "Captain Franklin in Search of the Picturesque"; Robert Stacey's "From 'Icy Picture' to 'Extensive Prospect': The Panorama of Rupert's Land and the Far North in the Artist's Eye, 1770-1830"; Richard C. Davis's "Vision and Revision: Sir John Franklin's Arctic Landscapes"; and Sherrill Grace's "'Mapping Inner Space': Canada's Northern Expressionism."

culture. When John Moss concludes his essay "Imagining the Arctic: From Frankenstein to Farley Mowat, Words Turn the Arctic Landscape into Unreality" (1990) with the assertion that, for many, the north is what writers imagine it to be, he indicates the central debate about representing the north: that is, the contrast between the imaginary or imagined north and the real or true north.

At least since Justice Thomas R. Berger's Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland (1977), studies of the north have recognized the difference between the north imagined by outsiders and the north experienced by its inhabitants. In literary criticism, discussions about the representation of the north reflect the distinction between the "true north" and "the north of the imagination," drawn by Farley Mowat in his remark that the "magnificent reality behind the myth" is "obscured in drifts of literary drivel, obliterated by blizzards of bravado and buried under an icy weight of obsessive misconceptions" (Canada North 6). This imaginary north created by and for southern Canadian audiences by writers in southern Canada has been described by critics such as Peter Buitenhuis, John Moss, Linda Roth and Aron Senkpiel.

The representation of Canada as a northern nation by Canadian nationalists goes back at least to Confederation. When R. G. Haliburton, son of Thomas Chandler Haliburton and member of the Canada First movement, exhorted the members of the Montreal Literary Club to become the "Northmen of the

New World," he signalled two issues which would become perennial in Canadian history and in the representation of the north: the preoccupation with national unity and the relationship between national identity and the environment.

In his speech, "The Men of the North and Their Place in History" (1869), Haliburton, unlike generations who would come after him, felt confident about the nation's future: what unified the new Dominion was the common race of its citizenry, sprung from a mythical Northland they would recreate in the New World. Haliburton's idea of race as a collective identity moulded by the land and the climate slips easily into a definition of a nation. Bound by "national ties of blood, and language" (3), he proclaimed, northern people would unite to "form a New Dominion in this Northern land" (2).

The conflation of race and nation at the heart of Haliburton's comments reflects discussions about emerging nationhood in the nineteenth century. Reading Haliburton's "The Men of the North," one cannot help but recall Mme de Staël's literary appropriations of the German Romantics, especially her description of the relative merit of literature from the "sensual South" versus literature from the "disciplined North" (Mosse, Nationalism 32). Indeed, Haliburton praises the "healthy vigour" of northern poetry as compared to that written in southern climes where "the vigour of manhood is lost in dreamland" (8), and W. A. Foster, who was also active in Canada First, called northern

culture "more manly, more real, than the weak marrow-bones superstition of an effeminate south" (Canada First 16).

Almost one hundred years later, in 1966, Carl Berger critiques their thesis that "Canada's unique character derived from her northern location, severe winters and her heritage of 'northern races'" ("True North" 5).<sup>2</sup> By referring to both race and gender--Canadians inherit from "northern races;" Canada is personified as female--Berger acknowledges two constants in the representation of the so-called northern character, and he locates qualities traditionally identified with masculinity in Haliburton's call for the reconstitution of northern manly races in the "self-reliance, strength, hardness--in short, all the attributes of a dominant race" (5) and the "hardness, strenuousness, endurance" which follows the "stoical acceptance of the strenuous life and the performance of duty irrespective of rewards" (18).

In short, the north represented as a source of national character or consciousness in terms once identified specifically with masculinity comes to describe the nation as a whole; thus, representation which at first appears to present an authentic, mimetic account of the relationship between Canadians and the north must be considered within

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<sup>2</sup> For a quick genealogy of the word "north" in Canadian studies, see David Heinimann's "Latitude Rising: Historical Continuity in Canadian Nordicity." Although Heinimann maps the changing definitions of north, noting that in "the last 10 years, the association of North with Native has intensified" (136), he does not cover the north's history as a discursive concept.



the context of nationalism. Shelagh Grant traces the history of this connection in "Myths of the North in the Canadian Ethos" (1989) arguing that:

Conflicting images of north have persisted, causing confusion and debate as to the degree of influence and meaning, but most concede that Canada's north has inspired a sense of national unity by creating a unique identity in an American dominated continent. (17)

Grant concludes that the myth underwriting all other northern myths of national consciousness is the belief that "the vast wilderness regions still impart a distinct character to the Canadian nation, its people, and its institutions" (39).<sup>3</sup>

As Grant writes, the representation of the far north as "our northern heritage" remains "an amorphous, obscure, yet recurrent theme in Canadian nationalism" ("Myths" 17). Part of what makes this theme "amorphous" and "obscure" is the conflation of its definitions as a geographical and as a discursive term. The representation of Canadian geography merges with the representation of the Canadian nation in public discourses, especially in public policy pertaining to issues of territorial and political sovereignty and

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<sup>3</sup> In "Canadian Art: Northern Land, Northern Vision," Patricia Morley expresses this belief succinctly: "The experience of wrestling with a rigorous northern climate and wilderness conditions has shaped our people and, of course, their art" (22).

identity. As Bruce Hodgins illustrates, the north has been a "territorially shifting concept" in Canadian historiography because there has always been "a confusion between Northern Canada and Canada as North" (12).

As W. L. Morton remarked in 1970, the "North" is a relative term that each Canadian can define in his or her own way (229). In what follows, the north is the shifting concept Hodgins describes. First and foremost, it serves as the setting for literary representation and corresponds to real geographical locations north of the sixtieth parallel.

As a setting, however, the north can also refer, not to that specific geographical area, but to the wilderness. In this case, it is a relative term, meaning north of somewhere civilized and urban. As the definition of the north expands and its southern boundary becomes less distinct, it starts to describe all of Canada. That shifting definition occurs in representation, and as the boundary shifts, the meaning of the north shifts, too: from the real geographical location to a descriptive term signifying the nation as a whole. In the following chapters, I describe this north, the imaginary north of Canadian nationalism, by studying representations of the geographical north.

As a geographical location, the north provides writers with the setting for quest narratives and heroic tales of survival. Such stories require their characters to attain qualities traditionally, though not exclusively, associated with masculine identity, including self-reliance, autonomy,

and physical endurance. By having these qualities, the individual embraces and embodies the northern "spirit" or "character." A national consciousness shaped by the north, therefore, tends to encompass the same qualities of rugged, masculine identity.

In what follows, my task is not to defend the severely limited claim that literary representation of the north articulates a northern character that all Canadians share even though making it the focus of this study may suggest that it does; rather, it is to show how the "Canadian identity" based on literary representations of a supposedly northern character is inflected by ideas of gender, race, and nation. In writing depicting the north, identity takes on specifically gendered characteristics. These characteristics do not necessarily correspond to sexual difference but to mutually exclusive definitions of gender based on an obsessive reiteration of certain characteristics: independence, strength, individuality as masculine; dependence, weakness, collectivity as feminine. The contingency of both gender and race becomes apparent when these characteristics are studied closely: for the gender characteristics of women can be applied to men of non-white races.

In her popular thematic study, Survival (1972), Atwood signalled some of these issues when describing the choice of "exotic" settings available to the Canadian writer of romantic adventures:

The available locations are the forests,  
the mountains, the North or the Arctic;  
the available civilizations are the  
Indians and Eskimos, though something  
else might be invented. . . . (114)

Although all Canadian writers may not choose to write about these particular locations and civilizations, many have, and Atwood's study describes patterns and indicates the importance of the environment in critical, especially thematic, accounts of Canadian literature:

Our stories are likely to be tales not  
of those who made it but of those who  
made it back, from the awful experience--  
the North, the snow-storm, the sinking  
ship--that killed everyone else. (33)

Atwood's main concern throughout Survival is the conflict between human beings and the environment, which she refers to either as "nature" or as "the wilderness," both of which are often represented by the Arctic or the North in her study as well as in Second Words (1982):

The North, the Wilderness, has  
traditionally been used in Canadian  
literature as a symbol for the world of  
the unexplored, the unconscious, the  
romantic, the mysterious and the  
magical. (232)

Describing Canadian history, Shelagh Grant also notes that "the north is often referred to as 'wilderness,' a place beyond southern civilization, agricultural settlement, or urban life" ("Myths" 16), and in The Bush Garden (1971), Northrop Frye conflates the wilderness and the north when he describes how individual identity is conditioned by the regional environment. "The imaginative Canadian stance, so to speak," writes Frye, "facing east and west, has on one side one of the most powerful nations in the world; on the other there is the vast hinterland of the north, with its sense of mystery and fear of the unknown. . ." (Bush Garden iii). If the north has "long excited the imagination of Canadians," as Ken Coates and William Morrison suggest (Purposes of Dominion 1), it has been with that distant, terrific fascination, a fearful attraction to the unknown. Throughout The Bush Garden, Frye grounds his reading of Canadian literature in the notion of a collective mythology that emerges from the environment and that is reflected in the individual writer's sensibility (199). As Patricia Morley concludes from Frye's account of the Romantic tendency in English-Canadian literature, "[c]ourage and strength are needed for survival: this fosters a romantic admiration for heroic qualities" which are thought to be "encouraged by rigorous northern conditions" (25).

The frozen, empty hinterland, an imaginary and unpeopled place, has been a powerful symbol reflecting Frye's question: where is here? It is the imaginary, empty

north that represents the nation as a whole: the Group of Seven's north or the white blank page evoked by many writers. The north represented a source of mystic inspiration to the Group of Seven, affirming the theosophic impulses behind their view of nature, and this sense of the north as mysterious and mystical also informs the national consciousness evoked by thematic critics.

At the time when thematic criticism was gaining ground in the 1950s and 1960s, the potential of the north's resources were the focus of interest in public discourse, leading to concerns over Canadian territorial sovereignty. The north was increasingly described as a source of national wealth and heritage. By the 1970s, scholars including Morris Zaslow, Kenneth Coates, William Morrison, and Shelagh Grant had exposed the Canadian government's relationship to the north as a neo-colonial one, citing the "extensive powers of the national bureaucracy, the continued reliance on federal subsidies, and frequent federal intervention in regional affairs all make plain the north's colonial status" (Coates, Canada's Colonies 9) and thus signalling the importance of territorial sovereignty in the relationship between the Canadian nation and the Canadian north. Public policy discourse from the construction of the DEW line and the voyage of the Polar Sea equates the far north, the Arctic in particular, with the outer limit of Canada as a sovereign state--Canada's frontier--and conservationists, such as Mowat, with their interest in saving "our common

heritage," reinforce the connection between possessing the north and being Canadian.<sup>4</sup> The representation of the north and its transformation into an imaginary frontier by historians, natural conservationists, and thematic critics also serves to differentiate Canada's national identity from that of other nations, especially the United States and Britain.

### **Canadian Literary Criticism and the Environment**

There is a long tradition of imagining Canadian identity as an effect of place or environment, especially in the "topocentric" literary criticism identified by Leon Surette. In "Here is Us: The Topocentrism of Canadian Literary Criticism" (1982), Surette coins the term "topocentrism" to describe the "belief that human cultures are in some not clearly specific sense the product of the physical environment" (22), in effect offering the sort of spiritual connection between the people and the nation identified by the German Romantics in the nineteenth century. The topocentric impulse characterizes Canadian literary criticism designed to explain and to justify the literature's distinct Canadian identity. "Canadian literature," writes Surette, "must be literature that is

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<sup>4</sup> Shelagh Grant explores the correlation between interest in the north and fear of losing it as a territorial possession in Sovereignty or Security? Other studies of the north and the Canadian state include Franklyn Griffiths's The Politics of the Northwest Passage and Edgar J. Dosman's The Northern Interest: The Politics of Northern Development, 1968-1975.

proper to Canada," and, consequently, criticism on Canadian literature has been dedicated to the "discovery and identification of its subject of study" ("Here is Us" 45).<sup>5</sup>

The national model of literary study organizes literature by national affiliation and suggests a teleological relationship between literature and the nation. In order for there to be a national literature, there must be characteristics unifying the literature within its national boundaries and distinguishing it from other national literatures. National literatures tend to be teleological because they arise from the discovery of national characteristics, that is, from their own definition.

Echoing Frye's description of the Literary History of Canada (1965) as a "collection of essays in cultural history" (822), Surette argues that literary criticism in Canada can be more accurately described as cultural history and identifies two accounts of culture: the top-down culture imported from British tradition through "paternalistic acculturation," or the grassroots culture emerging from "the people" and sharing an "organic continuity" ("Creating" 22). On the Romantic account, the "organic continuity" of nationhood assumes a spiritual connection between the nation and the people ("Creating" 20). This connection is

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<sup>5</sup> Dermot McCarthy's study of the nationalistic impulse in Canadian literary history similarly identifies the teleology (and tautology) of canon-formation (41), and uses Surette's term to note a "topocentric fusion of place, identity, authenticity, and authority in the process of Canadian canon-formation" (35).



expressed in language and literature, so the nation becomes something "sacred, eternal, organic, carrying a deeper justification than the works of men" (Horace B. Davis qtd. in Chatterjee 18).<sup>6</sup> The latter type resembles accounts of national culture given by German Romantic thinkers such as Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte; however, according to Surette, "even if Herderian nationalism had not acquired an odour of evil, it could hardly serve the interests of English-Canadian nationalists as it does French Canadians" ("Creating" 22). Québécois nationalism will not be addressed specifically in this thesis although popular novels depicting the Inuit by francophone writers and available in translation have been included. To the extent that the definition of Canada as a northern nation purportedly includes Québec and acts as a unifying discourse, however, it can be said to refer to the threat that Québécois nationalism poses to the official national identity. But it is important to note that the Canadian identity based on a northern consciousness is generally applied specifically to Canadian literature written in English.

National consciousness is often invoked for official and oppositional purposes. The influence of "paternalistic

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<sup>6</sup> The German Romantic tradition developed through literary criticism and historiography at a time when Germans were a stateless people. According to Partha Chatterjee, the German Romantics were first to put forth "the argument that culture, and more specifically, language, uniquely defines a nation" (8-9).

acculturation," that is, the influence of British or American culture, on national consciousness inspires national resistance and the particularly oppositional form of nation-building whereby the post-colonial nation attempts to rid itself of the influences of the dominating colonial power.<sup>7</sup> National liberation means eliminating the colonial, or to use Surette's term, paternal culture. According to post-colonial literary criticism, "[t]he study of national traditions is the first and most vital stage of the process of rejecting the claims of the centre to exclusivity" (Ashcroft et al. 17); therefore, the nation's liberation depends to an extent on the existence of a separate, distinct national tradition. Any dichotomy between the Romantic and the Enlightenment definitions of where national culture originates can be modified to allow that the two are not mutually exclusive. Such a dichotomy rests on the dual origin of the nation traced to both the Enlightenment and "the romantic and metaphorical tradition in political thought and history," the thought of Fichte and Herder (Bhabha, Nation and Narration 1). Even the Romantic thinker Fichte acknowledges the importance of resistance to the Roman Empire in defining the emerging German nation in his Addresses to the German Nation (1806-1815) while also drawing on Herder's argument that language determines

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<sup>7</sup> As Bruce King argues, national liberation movements in emerging nations develop in response to imperialism as "[t]he catalysts of nationalism are proto-élites who are or feel excluded from power" (43).

national consciousness (122-23). Although the German Romantics support the teleological position that the nation emerges from a shared national consciousness, the "deeper justification" manifested in culture and tradition, they also recognize the importance of politics and history.

The Herderian model of nationalism may not accurately describe Canada, but Surette locates its influence on Canadian nationalism in a post-colonial type of resistance, describing the formation of a distinct national identity as a means of severing ties with Europe. Language does not differentiate Canadian literature from British or American literature, so nationalists look to place for that difference, and "[o]ur topography, climate, and local history are recruited . . . to establish the imaginative distance" from European heritage ("Creating" 22). By concentrating on Herder's emphasis on language and literature, Surette's account of Romantic nationalism overlooks the Romantics' equally important emphasis on the spiritual connection between the nation's people and the land, a link that Margery Fee shows forged in the symbolic appropriation of the "autochthonous claim to the land" belonging to aboriginal peoples in various works of Canadian literature ("Romantic Nationalism" 18). Because Canadian national identity necessarily follows the dispossession of aboriginal people, thinking about nationalism always means thinking also about race.

The topocentric impulse in Canadian literary criticism accounts, at least in part, for the continued interest in the north. The connection between the Canadian nation and "the north" has always seemed transparent, as Aron Senkpiel suggests in his assessment that:

Given the contiguity of the northern wilderness to the experiences of Canadians, it is not surprising that it has had a special, formative impact on their identity, particularly as it has been developed through their literature.

(135)

But the relationship of literature to the nation is deeply conflicted and historically contingent. As Timothy Brennan argues in "The National Longing for Form," nations are "imagined communities" that "depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role" (49). Brennan draws on Benedict Anderson's insight into the way readership forms "the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (44). Indeed, as Brennan notes, the birth of the nation in the writing of German Romantics, including Herder and Fichte, coincided with the rise in importance of the novel (49).

Language, culture, and national consciousness are manifestations of the connection between the people, the land, and the nation according to the Romantic ideal, but this definition is challenged by the reality of settler

nations in which the "organic" connection between people and the place exists for aboriginal people only. In Canada, where there are official languages and no national language, official culture and many different cultures, it is strange that national consciousness has often been constructed in agreement with the Romantic assumption that "climate and 'ecology' [have] a constitutive impact on culture and character" (Anderson 60).<sup>\*</sup>

Attempting to define national consciousness helps to carve out a place for Canadian literature as a field worthy of study. Such attempts tend to be self-fulfilling, for as long as literary criticism deals with something called Canadian literature, it simultaneously constitutes the "consciously nationalist criticism" that T. D. MacLulich calls for in "Thematic Criticism, Literary Nationalism, and the Critic's New Clothes" (1987), one that gives "a convincing rationale for making Canadian literature a separate field of academic inquiry" (18). Speculating that "new theories" from abroad may not do for literature written in Canada, MacLulich turns to the northern climate, indicating 'cold' and 'winter' as characteristics marking the distinctiveness of Canadian experience (19). It was precisely this interest in discovering indigenous ways of

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<sup>\*</sup> Germaine de Staël's literary-critical method of distinguishing the literature of northern and southern Europe advances an account of the national imagination based on what she identifies as the chief feature of a nation's "spirit" derived from the leading proponents of the German Romantic movement including Goethe, Schiller, Fichte, Humboldt, and von Schlegel (Folkenflik 8).

thinking about Canadian literature that led to the momentary dominance of thematic criticism and to its role as the bête noire of many literary critics ever since. Although MacLulich's account of Canadian experience does not explain how Canadian experience is different from that of other places that know "cold" and "winter," he links the national model to the Romantic strain of nationalism, remarking that the "desire to identify a distinctively Canadian literature" originates in the "assumption that every self-respecting nation ought to have its own linguistic and cultural identity" (19). As for the German Romantic nationalists, MacLulich insists "we take them so much for granted that we hardly notice how pervasively they colour our approach to literary studies" (21), pointing to the influence of Herder on "the nationalistic desire to recover the Volksgeist, or true spirit of the nation" (22) and offering Atwood's remarks on the "national habit of mind" as an example (25).

Allison Mitcham's slim study, The Northern Imagination: A Study of Northern Canadian Literature (1983), makes the boldest claim concerning the role of the north in Canadian literature by identifying "the Northern Imagination" as the "most exciting creative force in Canadian fiction--French and English" (9). Although many writers see all of Canada as northern, Mitcham writes:

It is, however, the far North--the still  
vast and deserted wild places--which

increasingly dominates the Canadian  
literary imagination. (10)

The writers who take this north as their subject share a preoccupation with conservation, argues Mitcham, and this contrast between the materialistic south and the "unmaterialistic regenerative potential of the vast northern wilderness dominates the contemporary Canadian literary imagination, distinguishing it from that of other countries" (11). As the "last vast North American frontier," the "northern wilderness setting" provides an "exceptional dramatic background" in which, on Mitcham's topocentric account, the "recurring themes in contemporary Canadian fiction" are explored (10). The nationalistic impulse takes on a specifically gendered form in Mitcham's equation of the north with the image of the frontiersman:

The North--a new utopia, as many seem to see it--stands out frequently in contemporary Canadian novels as perhaps the only place left, not only in Canada but in all the Western world, where man can yet pursue a personal dream--where he can hope to be an individual. (17)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Shelagh Grant observes that "in folktales, art, and music, an image of the northern wilderness has been indelibly linked to freedom, adventure and challenge" ("Myths" 20-21), especially in the nineteenth-century notions of the far north as a "place of adventure and challenge" ("Myths" 28).

The frontier, as Mitcham describes it, corresponds more accurately to the American frontier, an imaginary, expanding space whose representation in Canadian culture must be considered derivative.

Although Allison Mitcham claims too great a role for the north in Canadian literature generally, the literary focus on the region has been significant. As Atwood observes, going north in Canadian representation often means entering a mysterious world whose harsh and alien landscape provides a suitable setting for the heroic quest formula, and Robert Kroetsch uses going north as a metaphor for writing. As more Canadian writers choose to travel north and to write about it, there has been a shift away from the romantic individualism inherent in the traditional quest motif towards a (just as romantic) search for a collective identity. The "true north" sought in these "non-fictional," first-person accounts continues to place the north at the centre of the would-be national consciousness.

In this dissertation, I address the specific definition of Canada as a northern nation and Canadians as a northern people, building on the research of those scholars, such as W. L. Morton, Carl Berger, and Shelagh Grant, who have explicated the role of the north in Canadian history. The Canadian national identity I refer to is one based on a vision of national consciousness or character whose imagined



core is, in Louis-Édmond Hamelin's terms, nordicity.<sup>10</sup> The attention given to nordicity as a feature of national identity is a product of trends in Canadian cultural history that seek to unify and to shape collective experience which can be traced as a thematic pattern in the history and criticism of Canadian literature. With this dissertation, I bring a new dimension to the study of the Canadian north by considering how the notion of national identity based on national consciousness is inflected by race and gender.

### **Gender Studies and Feminism**

The rise of "gender" as a subject of study has been described in Elaine Showalter's introduction to Speaking of Gender (1989) as "a shift from the women-centered investigations of the 1970s" to "the study of gender relations involving both women and men" (2). This shift also marks the movement away from the essentialism of the early consciousness-raising feminism to the constructivism produced by materialist accounts. Broadening women's studies in this way was also a reaction to the ghettoization of feminism within institutions and an accommodation of men within feminism.

While constructivism currently dominates gender studies, critical accounts of gender remain divided between psychoanalytic and materialist theories. Psychoanalytic

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<sup>10</sup> Hamelin has worked out a statistical formula for determining a country's nordicity which he applies in Canadian Nordicity: It's Your North Too.

gender theorists, influenced by the work of Jacques Lacan, "believe that gender is primarily constructed through the acquisition of language, rather than through social ascription or cultural practice," prompting critics such as Christine Di Stefano to caution against their ahistorical approach. On the other hand, feminists "with a materialist or Marxist orientation" look to representation in "literature, the mass media, film, and popular culture" to understand the way gender is constituted at a given time (Showalter 3).

Meanwhile, men's studies, gay, and queer studies began exploring masculinity as a subject rather than as the norm. Pioneering critics of masculinity, such as Andrew Tolson, acknowledge the origin of men's studies in the reaction to the Women's Liberation movement. Tolson's The Limits of Masculinity: Male Identity and the Liberated Woman (1977) defines gender as the cultural significance of sexuality, a historically and culturally specific identity with political as well as social significance (11). While the so-called men's movement now ranges from consciousness-raising, in the work of critics such as Victor Seidler, to thinly-veiled misogyny, in the "Iron John" phenomenon, for example, it has been most valuable for providing a critique of masculinity.

For those who study it in these terms, gender is a "complex convention" (Di Stefano 3) or form of representation, a representation of sexual identity; it has a relationship to biological sex, but they are not

identical. When I describe the way women are depicted in ethnography, for example, and speak about "gender," what I am referring to is the representation of the way those biological females are, what they are like, what they do. Looking at such representation, it becomes clear that the instability of gender identity is brought about by the obsessive differentiation of gender characteristics by which differences between men and women are often depicted as mutually exclusive. However, I would not go as far as Judith Butler does when she argues that gender opposition arises from the enforced "heterosexualization of desire" (17) or that gender identity is stabilized only as an effect of its societal regulation (31).<sup>11</sup> What interests me is why gender characteristics become mutually exclusive. Why does the rugged individualism, self-sufficiency, and toughness of a masculine hero require the passivity, silence and frailty of someone other than the hero, usually women, the landscape, or racial others? Why is it that when others display these characteristics, the representation is considered "subversive"? Why is it that gender and race are yoked together?

In recent gender studies, gender has been defined not as mutual exclusion or opposition but as performance (Butler passim), as a complex convention (Di Stefano 31), or as an

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<sup>11</sup> Butler's position is a self-contradiction: the enforcement of "compulsory heterosexuality" removes choice while homosexuality is itself a choice; if heterosexuality were as coercive as Butler suggests, homosexuality would not be the option it is.

ideological category (de Lauretis, Technologies 9; Di Stefano 56). Such metaphors highlight the instability of identity, and the difficulty of describing identity once and for all. By examining how the representation of the north relies on the construction of masculinity, it is possible to identify similarities in the establishment of gender identity and national identity.

### **Gender and National Politics**

The relationship between national and gender identity can be traced through three striking correspondences. First of all, as concepts of identity, both function to articulate relations with others. As relational terms, gender and national identity are derived from "inherence in a system of differences" (Parker et al. 5) and function to explain and, sometimes, to contain difference. National identity can work to smooth over unruly elements within a state by creating the sense of belonging to a community and sharing a common heritage. Ernest Renan first defined the nation in these terms in "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" (1882) when he stressed the importance of shared suffering and sacrifice in constituting the nation: "Une nation est donc une grande solidarité, constituée par le sentiment des sacrifices qu'on a faits et de ceux qu'on est disposé à faire encore" (904). The self-sacrifice necessary to achieve such solidarity overcomes differences in moments such as the ritualistic expression of "dying for one's country," an historically

gendered activity that is also "a distinctive form of male bonding" (Parker et al. 6).

Secondly, national belonging expressed as self-sacrifice has been represented in terms of friendship and love, which are also important terms in discussions of gender. Benedict Anderson writes, "the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship" (7), and George Mosse demonstrates how that particular kind of relationship emerges from the eighteenth-century cult of male friendship (Nationalism 30). According to Mosse, European nationalism "co-opted the male search for friendship and community" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, appropriating male friendship and manly beauty as symbols of national identity throughout Europe (Nationalism 76-77, 90). Although the fraternité at the heart of the nation emerges from a representation of the nation as a collective bond of love which is male-centered but empty of explicit sexual content, the relationship between the individual and the nation can be erotic; indeed, Fichte clearly eroticizes the relationship of the individual to the nation in his eighth address, when he describes the nation as an eternal, sacred community using love as a metaphor:

Love that is truly love, and not a mere  
transitory lust, never clings to what is  
transient; only in the eternal does it  
awaken and become kindled, and there  
alone does it rest. (117)

Literature celebrating the nation expresses patriotic feeling as a pure love, and almost any time "the nation is invoked--whether it be in the media, in scholarly texts, or in every day conversation--we are more likely than not to find it couched as a love of country: an eroticized nationalism" (Parker et al. 1).

But the most significant correspondence between national and gender identities concerns their expression as politics. Because "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Anderson 3), especially in calls for independence and unity, it informs the tactical use of opposition which is common to all political movements. In "Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity," R. Radhakrishnan asserts that nationalist politics "acts as the normative mode of the political as such," so any movement, including those concerned with gender issues, like the feminist and queer movements, will be expected, even "constrained to take on a nationalist expression as a prerequisite for being considered 'political'" (78), because the "immense political freight" carried by the nation means that "disenfranchised groups frequently have had to appeal to national values precisely to register their claims as political" (Parker et al. 8).

The political weight the nation carries as perhaps the form of political expression is nowhere more obvious than in those post-colonial states where, to use Partha Chatterjee's

terms, national thought is a derivative discourse (8) that allows the emerging state to find its own place in the world order (168).<sup>12</sup> Goals of legitimation are as acute for historically-subjugated groups, such as those represented by feminist or queer activists, within states as they are for newly independent states.

Because the nation is primarily an ideological concept (Chatterjee 40), imagining specific traits of national consciousness suggests the fulfilment, albeit teleologically, of the nation's ideological requirement for independence and autonomy. The Canadian state sometimes calls upon the notion of a Canadian nation for this reason. According to Hugh Seton-Watson, the state's need for independence or for unity will inspire nationalism (3); therefore, states aspiring to one of these goals must call upon their status as nations, which is justified by the identification of national consciousness and culture. Renan's definition of the nation as people united by what they have in common resurfaces in Seton-Watson's distinction between a state, which is "a legal and political organization, with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens," and a nation, which is "a community of people, whose members are bound together by a

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<sup>12</sup> Radhakrishnan raises the same point and criticizes post-colonial subjects for embracing nationalism as a concept while ignoring the fact that nationalism developed under specific historical circumstances in Europe (87). Brennan also demonstrates how imperialism contributes to the development of national ideology (58).

sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness" (1).

Where history does not provide the circumstances requisite for a common heritage, an "official nationalism" can still be imposed on the people living in a state by an élite wishing to give the government of the state legitimacy (Seton-Watson 148); this is often the case in Canada. Describing the north as a common heritage is one attempt to provide such an official narrative of national identity and unity. The existence of a northern consciousness or character would cement the state's legitimacy by giving it the "deeper justification" required to be a nation. As Rob Shields argues in Places on the Margin, myths of the Arctic are symbols of specific Canadian nationalistic discourse that attempts to reconcile differences (162).

A nation must be united, independent, and distinct from other nations in order to gain recognition; that is, it must show signs of traditionally-defined masculine identity. By elevating the "engendered north" that I show permeating representations of the north to the position of "national consciousness" writers and critics enhance Canada's status as a nation while playing a unifying role in official national discourse. Because having a rugged, individualistic national character means fulfilling the ideological requirement for the independence which creates nations, the representation of the north as a source of



national identity can be described as emerging from the ideology of nationhood.

I critique the definition of Canada as a northern nation and Canadians as a northern people by describing the representation of the north and by acknowledging the topocentric bias in Canadian cultural history that works to unify and to shape collective experience into a northern identity that all Canadians share. This definition of national identity is severely limited because it bases itself on the notion of national consciousness which is also severely limited. As Eric Hobsbawm observes, to insist on national consciousness is "to subordinate the complex and multiple ways in which human beings define and redefine themselves as members of groups, to a single option: the choice of belonging to a 'nation' or 'nationality'" (8). Hobsbawm signals the impossibility of establishing identity once and for all, an impossibility which is particularly true in the case of Canada.

### **Summary**

My goal in the argument that follows is to demonstrate what the representation of the north can tell us about the diversity and contingency of ideas about gender, racial, and national identities. As textual analysis reveals, the inscription of traditionally-defined masculinity depends on the exclusion or the opposition of the feminine, represented as the other, the unknown, the wilderness, so the

construction of borders between masculine and feminine infuses the thematic and formal dimensions of Canadian writing on the north. In general, representations of the north trace the binary formation of gender, defining it in terms of opposition.

In examining these issues in literary representations of the north, I consider a number of genres: ethnography, autobiography, travel writing, the adventure narrative, the novel, and poetry as well as texts that cross these generic boundaries. Because ethnography influences the representation of the north both as a source of information that writers draw on and as a model that writers can emulate, it announces many of the characteristics of representation of the north observed in other genres. In chapter 1, I analyze ethnographies written about the people inhabiting the north, exploring how each text constructs gender both in its depiction of the subject culture and in its construction of the ethnographer's subjectivity. Gender becomes a function of ethnographic authority with the establishment of fieldwork as the test of the anthropologist. Fieldwork requires an initiation into the subject culture which is not only expressed in sexual terms as "penetration" of the culture, but also recalls the quest pattern characteristic of masculine initiation. In ethnography, subject cultures are feminized in order to achieve the ethnographer's initiation as an ethnographic authority. In order to gain professional acceptance, the

ethnographer, regardless of his or her sex, becomes masculinized in order to dominate the feminized subject culture which paradoxically revolves around the activities of men. Within anthropology, ethnography becomes a discourse of homosocial relations, in the words of Trinh T. Minh-ha, a dialogue of "speaking man to man."

Chapter 2 responds to the images of aboriginal people, specifically the Inuit, presented in ethnography. Although ethnography represents Inuit culture as male-dominated and organized around the struggle to survive, Inuit self-representation in oral and written form does not support many of the facts reported by ethnographers, especially the general impression that Inuit culture is under constant threat of extinction. While outsiders pursue survival as the most important theme in Inuit culture, Inuit writers, especially Inuit autobiographers, record experiences that ethnography either ignores or understates, providing important information to counter the often limited perspective of ethnography. Autobiography accomplishes this revision by fusing personal and political concerns. Gender roles as represented in ethnographic representation are disputed in Inuit writing which alters the received view that Inuit women are made subservient by the division of labour and counters the image of the silent Inuit woman permeating literature, especially fiction, set in the north.

In chapter 3, I take on a genre in which Inuit women are idealized as silent and acquiescent by examining popular

adventure narratives written largely, if not exclusively, for young, white men. Adventure provides an imaginary initiation for boys and a training ground for gender roles in which the feminine is either absent or decorative. The exclusion or suppression of women involves going to great narrative lengths to create all-male communities in a northern adventure setting, usually the Arctic. The boys in Arctic adventure narratives are initiated into these communities by accomplishing a series of physical tasks and occasionally by uniting with aboriginal people either by befriending another boy who helps accomplish the tasks or by becoming embroiled in an erotic triangle including an aboriginal girl.

Arising as the popular adventure did in the context of British imperialism and appropriated as it was to the aims of American westward expansion, it is not surprising that the representation of gender in these narratives serves a didactic function in creating good citizens fit for nation-building, or that these stories idealize white racial identity as superior. At the end of the nineteenth century, adventures prepared young men, imaginatively at least, to "light out" for the colonies or for the frontier. In the late twentieth century, with the absence of such an immediate use for adventurous youth, the adventure becomes a genre in which the traditional characteristics of masculine identity can be expressed in a time when they are under attack elsewhere.

Chapter 4 challenges the claim that 'the north dominates the Canadian literary imagination' (Mitcham 9-10) by considering its function in poetry. The personification of the nation as a northern mother to healthy, vigorous, masculine children characterizes patriotic verse from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, and many of the idealized traits of individualism found in the prose of the period are found in poetry too. The popular poetry of Robert Service continues this trend by mirroring the representation of the north in prose with its idealization of qualities associated with masculinity as well as with the so-called northern races. In contemporary poetry, notably that of Al Purdy and Paulette Jiles, as in the reception of Inuit poetry, personal experience takes on greater importance as the poet acts as a storyteller.

In representations of the north, the individual must exist outside society, a stance which can only be sustained by constant flight. In this, the northern individual bears a similarity to the theoretical masculine individual, always aspiring to something that cannot be attained permanently. Chapter 5 discovers the northern hero in a number of novels and travel books, demonstrating the ways in which this figure displays characteristics associated with masculine identity. In some cases, the hero's opposition to the dark feminine forces of nature signals the opposition of masculine and feminine which comes to define the northern hero and his quest. Postmodern parodying of the quest and

the masculinity it defines, in the work of Robert Kroetsch for example, reaffirms the opposition it seeks to subvert.

The conclusion considers the meaning that the thesis argument might have for Canadian culture and offers some final observations about Canadian nationalism and the role of the north in it. "Canadians have long taken the North for granted," remarks Atwood in Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature (1995), "and we've invested a large percentage of our feelings about identity and belonging to it" (115). As part of a unifying, national discourse, the north figures in the stories Canadians tell about themselves, and how they imagine the nation is reflected in images representing the north. As Carl Berger tells us:

If Canadian nationalism is to be understood, its meaning must be sought and apprehended not simply in the sphere of political decisions, but also in myths, legends and symbols like these.

(24)

## **Chapter 1**

### **Speaking Man to Man: Ethnography and the Representation of the North**

In this chapter, I describe how ethnography creates ideal masculine communities and explore the extent to which engendering the subject, in this case the north, inheres in ethnographic practice. Why is it significant that northern ethnographers construct an ideal of masculinity in their descriptions of the subject culture? Adherence to certain gendered characteristics is an important, if little recognized, component of ethnographic authority. Exposing these characteristics helps to explain why gender differences in other cultures are interpreted as they are by ethnographers and points to some common ways in which the Canadian north is engendered.

#### **Gender and Ethnographic Authority**

Despite continued adherence to the realist conventions developed around the traditional fieldwork model by most ethnographers, recent ethnographic theory focuses on issues concerning the production of texts, including the problem of what constitutes textual authority. In this chapter, the discussion of what constitutes the new or experimental ethnography will show how most experimental approaches involve an inquiry into textual authority that ignores how textual authority is inflected by gender.

In 1982, George Marcus and Dick Cushman published the first historical overview of ethnographic practice entitled "Ethnographies as Texts."<sup>1</sup> In it, they outline the way in which "the traditional boundary between factual and fictional modes of writing has been severely strained" (33) in contemporary works, and they call for a "rhetorical awareness" that would lead to a critical inquiry into the practice of ethnography (58). The development and acceptance of storytelling as a model for a "new" ethnography responds to this heightened awareness of the ethnographer's position within the narrative, the self-reflexivity often linked to the refusal of positivist assumptions underwriting early anthropological methods.<sup>2</sup>

When Clifford Geertz describes ethnography as "thick description," a "stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures," which is "produced, perceived, and interpreted" by the observer ("Thick Description" 7), he overlooks the role of the perceiver in creating the reality observed. In arguing the social construction of the subject culture,

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<sup>1</sup> In his "Realism and Reification," Steven Webster provides a useful summary of the definition of realism Marcus and Cushman give (51).

<sup>2</sup> Steven Webster writes that Geertz's "renewed hermeneutic restored the social scientist's narrative role, an ordinary story-teller alive again in the mundane world, telling a story about a past experience" ("Ethnography as Storytelling" 191). The ironic use of "ordinary" is unmistakable here, for Geertz suggests that the ethnographer must possess some special empathetic powers summarized in the troubling notion that the ethnographer's aim should be "putting one's self into someone else's skin" (Basso and Selby 224).



which his positivist predecessors do not, he fails to see the same process at work in the constitution of the observer's culture: others are in the process of being constructed, but the ethnographer arrives fully formed as an individual. By consciously imitating storytelling, ethnographers go even further than Geertz does by recognizing the role their subjectivity has always had in the establishment of textual authority.

To appreciate the challenge posed by the new ethnography, or what has been called the postmodernist turn in ethnography, it is necessary to define the tradition of ethnographic realism that the new or postmodern ethnography claims to replace. Ethnography is a young genre. The term "ethnography" first appears in the English language in James C. Prichard's Natural History of Man (1842). It seems to have been translated from the French ethnographie, a linguistic term appearing in the work of linguist Adrien Balbi as early as 1826--although the Penny Cyclopaedia (1834) cites the word as deriving from German, translating it as "nation-formation," and Science and Religion (1836) contains the term "ethnographic family." Ethnography seems to have emerged in a number of disciplines simultaneously, including geography, linguistics, and anthropology, as the name for writing that describes groups of people.

North American ethnography came into its own in the nineteenth century as a direct result of cultural contact affecting disciplines as varied as geography, law, medicine,

and geology. Early ethnographers came from these and other disciplines and professions, and ethnography developed as the 'writing up' of notes taken while doing their jobs. Henry R. Schoolcraft, an American Indian agent, was one of the first of these men to turn his attention to ethnology and ethnography full-time. Another early ethnographer, Lewis Henry Morgan, used his training as a lawyer in his description of Iroquois institutions, League of the Iroquois (1851). Influenced by the prevailing assumption that Indians and their cultures were vanishing forever, these and other writers rushed to learn as much as they could. From these interdisciplinary beginnings, ethnography gradually became the specialized writing of scholars trained in anthropology, and by the end of the nineteenth century, largely due to the influence of Franz Boas, ethnography was the focus of rigorous standardization. The conventions of ethnographic realism, as it came to be known, were established at this time in order to distinguish ethnography from other forms of writing.

Ethnographic realism resembles its literary counterpart only to the extent that both are concerned with matters of accuracy and truth in representation; in literary terms, what Marcus and Cushman call ethnographic realism is actually closer to the nineteenth-century concept of

naturalism.<sup>1</sup> The accepted conventions of ethnographic realism emerged with the appearance of the fieldwork model, especially the fieldworker's attempt to provide an account of the whole world or form of life under study (Marcus and Cushman 29). Anxious to distinguish their genre from popular works by travel writers, nineteenth-century ethnographers developed a detached, authoritative narrative tone, intended to resemble scientific discourse. As one of the conventions of ethnographic realism, the "marked absence" of the narrator as a first-person presence and the use of the omniscient third-person point of view, "manifest only as a dispassionate, camera-like observer" (Marcus and Cushman 32), distinguished ethnographic narrative from travel writing.

As Marcus and Cushman point out, the third-person point of view "heightens the sense of objectivity projected by the text" while it "helps to sever the relationship between what the ethnographer knows and how he came to know it" (32). Thus, early ethnography created a paradox wherein the style of writing obscures the fieldworker's experience even though fieldwork experience forms the foundation for the authority of the account. Anthropologist Sally Cole describes how

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<sup>1</sup> Here I am referring to the aim of ethnographic realism "to discover and represent faithfully the true nature of social phenomena" (Marcus and Cushman 44). Sally Cole describes this type of ethnography, the type she was trained to write as a student of anthropology, as "ethnographic naturalism," that is, a style which creates a "taken-for-granted representation of reality" (117).

writing acceptable ethnography still involves this alienating "discursive shift" from the "personal, subjective, and sensual experience" of fieldwork to the "post-field experience of producing a scientific monograph" whose "authority 'resides in the absolute effacement of the speaking and experiencing subject'" (121). The absence of the ethnographer's voice or personal comments demonstrates the ethnographer's adherence to the genre expectations informed by anthropology's attempt to consolidate its scientific and disciplinary status.

The other characteristics of ethnographic realism that developed with the increasingly central role of fieldwork include: suppression of the individual in favour of the whole, organization of the text by cultural unit, generalization, use of jargon, and preference for exegesis (Marcus and Cushman 32-36). Those specific techniques are incorporated in the four common realist conventions that will be identified in the analysis of Franz Boas and Diamond Jenness: 1) the absence of the author from the text; 2) the emphasis on minute detail described in documentary style; 3) the description of the "native point of view"; and 4) the interpretive omnipotence of the fieldworker, which ethnographer John Van Maanen calls the "godlike pose."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Van Maanen offers examples of these conventions and explanation in Tales of the Field (45-54). Paul Atkinson concurs with Van Maanen's description of ethnographic realism as "conveyed through textual representations of the concrete, the local, the detailed" (33).

Each convention asserts the central authority of the ethnographer as the one who obtains and communicates the truth about the culture in the most accurate way possible.

Ethnographic realism camouflages representational techniques by leaving the author out of the text.<sup>5</sup> The result is an illusion of certainty, the "godlike pose" or, as Donna Haraway calls it, the "god-trick."<sup>6</sup> Craig Owens's critique of realist aesthetics, "Representation, Appropriation and Power," argues that the resulting mystification supports an authoritative claim to truth. Owens shares concerns about how the real is produced with film-maker and critic, Trinh T. Minh-ha, who raises the same issue in When the Moon Waxes Red (38). Trinh summarizes her position with a call for critical reading:

By putting representation under  
scrutiny, textual theory-practice has  
more likely helped upset rooted  
ideologies by bringing the mechanics of  
their workings to the fore. It makes  
possible the vital differentiation  
between authoritative criticism and

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<sup>5</sup> In this way, ethnographic realism resembles the marginal positivist strain of epistemology which, Lorraine Code points out, depends on excluding anything outside its own paradigm in order to make truth claims (16-17). Code's critique targets academic philosophy concerned with defining what knowledge is, but knowledge can depend upon a similar process of exclusion in other academic disciplines as well.

<sup>6</sup> See Haraway's Simians, Cyborgs and Women (191).

uncompromising analyses and inquiries. .

. . (42)

Trinh does not assume that these "rooted ideologies" are stable, homogeneous, and unified sources of power; rather, her point is simply that they may not be what they seem. Unmasking authoritative texts involves understanding the assumptions underpinning authority, including the supposed transparency of ethnographic realism.

The innovations of postmodern ethnography target these issues by calling attention to the constructed nature of all descriptive accounts and by challenging the idea of ethnography as simply the "writing up" of fieldnotes. Advocates of the new ethnography, such as James Clifford, call for the demystification of the narrator's authority through dialogue, intertextuality, and self-referentiality. The new ethnographer poses as a storyteller who stresses his own subjectivity in an attempt to demystify his authority over the text and the subject culture. "Informed by the notion of culture as a collective and historically contingent construct, the new ethnography claims to be acutely sensitive to cultural differences and, within cultures, to the multiplicity of individual experience" (Mascia-Lees et al. 12).

The emergence of new or postmodern ethnography allows ethnographers to question the unity of the speaking subject by favouring "dialogics, polyphony, and heteroglossia" (L. Turner 239). Drawing on Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel,"

James Clifford defines "heteroglossia" as an "ambiguous, multi-vocal world" in which "people interpret others, and themselves, in a bewildering diversity of idioms" ("Ethnographic Authority" 119).<sup>7</sup> The importance of Clifford's insight for anthropology lies in the implicit challenge to the idea of separate, stable cultures studied by members of other separate, stable cultures. Yet, despite such evidence of the close relationship that has always existed between ethnography and literature, interventions based on interdisciplinary contact with literary theory tend to be met with resistance by most anthropologists. To preserve the crumbling disciplinary boundaries, theorists of ethnography set up a dichotomy between literary and scientific poles, or as Paul Atkinson calls them, the "humanistic" and the "sociological," and hastily qualify terms such as "fictional" and "literary." The opening of Atkinson's The Ethnographic Imagination, for example, addresses this problem with an assertion that paying "attention to the 'literary' or 'rhetorical' features of sociological texts in no way undermines their scholarly credibility and status" (1). Atkinson studies conventions used by ethnographers and foregrounds the creative features

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note, however, that the introduction of the term "dialogic" in anthropological discourse occurred before Bakhtin was widely known in the west. Published in the 1970s, Kevin Dwyer's "On the Dialogic of Fieldwork" and "The Dialogic of Ethnology" advocate an exploration of the "Self" in dialectical relation with the "Other," an argument made without reference to Bakhtin.

of the text; that is, the elements of ethnography that resemble fiction. He views the ethnographic genre as only one of the "many ways in which cultural representation has been accomplished throughout this century" (4), an assertion that acknowledges the convergence of social science and literary theory in the analysis of cultural representation.

With this recognition, Atkinson justifies his own methodology and supports the validity of reading social science as literary representation. Marcus and Cushman take a different tack by insisting on "blurring the distinction" between fiction and ethnography, thus attempting to preserve the conceptual integrity of both genres.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Steven Webster criticizes the failure of their theoretical discussion to consider how ethnography might actually resemble a fictional genre ("Realism and Reification" 44).

Despite their seemingly radical departure from tradition, the new ethnographic theories preserve a methodology grounded in an epistemic position that is now facing numerous attacks. As Trinh T. Minh-ha asserts in When the Moon Waxes Red, reflexivity in anthropology does not alter the relationship between ethnography and the reality it creates if it is used only as a new trope to

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<sup>8</sup> The blurring of boundaries between the discursive practices of anthropology and those of fiction has been noted by Graham Huggan ("Maps, Dreams, and the Presentation of Ethnographic Narrative" 57).



perpetuate its traditional epistemology (46-47).<sup>9</sup> Nor does reference to a unified entity called the subject contribute to renovating ethnographic authority, especially if, as Stephen Tyler writes, it "describes no knowledge and produces no action" (qtd. in Krupat Ethnocriticism 54).<sup>10</sup> Reflexivity does, however, serve the postmodern goal of displacing epistemology in favour of rhetoric, as Jane Flax notes, creating one great conversation (32). For example, when author Robin Ridington describes his book, Trail to Heaven (1988), as "a commentary on the ideas and assumptions of the thoughtworld we call anthropology" (ix), his personal, self-reflexive style makes an attempt to assess his impact as observer on his own observations. Yet, throughout the text, he occupies the position of objective observer typical of ethnographic realism by retelling the Dunne-za people's tales in English, transcribing their words verbatim as though no mediation, analysis, or interpretation was involved in the task. Although Ridington acknowledges the impact of his own subjectivity, he is unable to translate this acknowledgement into practice.

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<sup>9</sup> Some ethnographers and theorists, such as John Van Maanen, recognize how cultivating a literary style has become an attractive option that does not change the methodology upon which the ethnographer's work is founded (34). Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen also voice the concern that postmodern innovations may be nothing but a matter of style (31).

<sup>10</sup> It is precisely this claim by postmodern ethnographers that makes their work problematic for a politically-grounded approach such as feminism.

Even when experimental ethnography alludes to its own textual construction, it relies on the narrative authority of the storyteller over that construction and, consequently, the observer's authority over the subject culture. By suppressing evidence of the representational apparatus, the ethnographer can dominate and appropriate reality and thereby secure his or her transcendent position. The focus on ethnography, the "writing up" of experience, by anthropologists such as James Clifford may also simply justify anthropology's interdisciplinary contact with literary theory: that is, concentrating on the status of ethnography as writing rather than on the science of anthropological method gives institutional credibility to going outside the discipline. As Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen have argued, postmodern ethnography works to secure a position within the academic institution, as questioning ethnographic realism becomes a means of making a place for one's work in relation to ethnographic tradition and securing one's niche within the discipline.

It is ironic that postmodern ethnographers find this place by collapsing ethnography into literature, since the inception of ethnography was characterized by its attempts to distinguish itself from literature, especially travel

literature."<sup>11</sup> In fact, the problems indicated in recent critiques have exercised ethnographers since the practice developed though without leading to the important questions: is ethnography still a defensible practice? was it ever?

Asking these questions means questioning the founding assumptions of ethnographic authority, and contemporary ethnography must deal with a tension between supporting a theory that highlights its own role in generating reality without abandoning the idea of the independent reality that it seeks to describe. As Martin Hammersley observes, ethnography continues to tend towards a "naive realism" (50). Even postmodern ethnography claims to represent a set of facts, no matter how fragmented their presentation might be, and the storyteller model admits the author's creative role without undermining the "story's" truth claims. As a result, ethnographic realism continues to influence postmodern innovations even though the postmodern ethnographers tend to reject the convention of narrative omniscience, favouring instead a more visible authorial presence. Even here, in this branch of ethnography, a single perspective emerges through the ever-present, self-

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold Krupat makes an extended study of the relationship between literature and ethnography in chapter 1 of Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature. John Van Maanen's Tales from the Field includes a description of how early ethnographers tried to distinguish their writing from travel writing by providing an exhaustive treatment of the culture (14).

conscious narrator who is constructed as both storyteller and hero of his own quest.<sup>12</sup>

The quest pattern shapes the experience of fieldwork, and fieldwork has been the authorizing test of the anthropologist. As Van Maanen writes in Tales from the Field, "[a] lengthy stay in an exotic culture (exotic, that is, to the fieldworker) is the central rite of passage serving to initiate and anoint a newcomer to the discipline" (14). The quest provides the ethnographer simultaneously with an identity within the text and an identity within the profession--once again it is difficult to separate the work of the ethnographer from his professional life.

The typical description of fieldwork experience follows this pattern: the hero (ethnographer) becomes separated from his own society in order to enter an alien world, and the rest of the story develops around his or her initiation into that alien world. Upon return, the hero shares this experience with readers either by creating the feeling of "being there," so that his or her experience becomes the readers' experience, or by establishing intimacy with readers through a confessional style. Although this style breaks with traditional ethnography's rejection of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ethnographic practice is described frequently as a kind of heroic quest. See Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen who link the quest motif to the romanticism of some ethnographers (25). The list of essays describing the general proliferation of quest pattern motifs in Canadian literature about the north is too long to reproduce here, but Maurice Hodgson's "Initiation and Quest: Early Canadian Journals" is representative.

personal, the newly popular confessional storytelling model, for all its promise of experimentation, still relies on the notion of an accurate and independent reality reflected in the ethnographer's confession. Increasingly, the ethnographer's experience presents the story gained at the completion of the initiation. "Thought of initially as a type of story, the ethnographer's journey of discovery and self-discovery/revelation constitutes an account of personal development. It has features of a quest--a sort of voyage of search, adventure and exploration" (Atkinson 106).

Initiation means a transformation from cultural "outsider" to cultural "insider." In ethnographic discourse, this means getting in touch with the 'native point of view.' When Clifford Geertz reasserts the romantic notion of empathy in understanding the native point of view, he returns to the positivist foundations he previously challenged by looking to the authentic in the subject culture--the something essential beneath the other skin which must be articulated. By displacing the observer's impact on the culture represented, Geertz takes the constitution of the ethnographer as subject for granted, just as his storytelling colleagues do.

Trinh Minh-ha, on the other hand, insists that the subject, not just the subject culture, but the entire notion of subjectivity, must be reevaluated through experimentation, otherwise: "Left intact in its positionality and its fundamental urge to decree meaning,

the self conceived both as key and as transparent mediator, is more often than not likely to turn responsibility into license" (Trinh, Woman 47-48). Responsibility becomes licence when authors conceal their own textual construction while maintaining the belief that the truth about the culture in question can be located and, once located, revealed. Most ethnography involves this conflict between the desire to expose the naked truth about a culture and the desire to ensure the text's authority by concealing the means by which this truth is constructed.

Ethnographic realism and postmodern ethnography both involve an attempt to get to know other cultures, to bring the other out of obscurity. Despite commitments to portray fairly or "objectively" one culture to another, ethnographers cannot resist the specificity of their own experiences or the expectations of the readers' reception--as the gestures towards the ethnographer's subjectivity in postmodern texts seems to recognize. In both moments, ethnographers mediate between the subject culture and the culture of the reading audience, a configuration whose first assumption is the ontologically given nature of both cultures.<sup>11</sup> Both subject culture and receiving culture are assumed to have a single, locatable story, not a variety of stories. Finding this narrative focuses the various methods

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<sup>11</sup> Postmodern ethnography views "culture as a collective and historically contingent construct" (Mascia-Lees et al. 12) which undermines the discrete, given culture suggested by ethnographic realism.

of ethnographic practice.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as I have argued, claims to objectivity made by ethnographers who rely on realist or postmodern conventions do not extinguish the individual author's desire for textual authority and institutional support. Desire becomes masculinized metaphorically in the discourse of fieldwork where the subject culture is often described as a body to be "entered" or "penetrated" by the concerned outsider who must undergo a complex process of initiation--as in Clifford Geertz's description of ethnographic interpretation as "the penetration of other people's modes of thought" ("The Native Point of View" 235).<sup>15</sup> By uniting with the culture in question, ethnographers pass the initiation while the satisfying notion of their own individuality remains intact.

### **Gender and Ethnography**

The sexualized language of ethnography points to the centrality of gender relations in the traditional initiation model of fieldwork. When Trinh Minh-ha describes

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<sup>14</sup> Marcus and Cushman observe that ethnographic realism relies on "the idea that there is a reality independent of the researcher whose nature can be known, and that the aim of research is to produce accounts that correspond to that reality" (43).

<sup>15</sup> The sort of language I describe here is too ubiquitous to summarize adequately. It is, however, implicit in many accounts of ethnographic practice, even Paul Atkinson's description of ethnography as the "constantly rehearsed dialectic between 'in-' and 'outside'" (163).

anthropology as "speaking man to man," she recognizes the traditionally triangulated ethnographic model consisting of male anthropologist, a readership comprised of male colleagues, and a textualized, feminized subject culture. By looking at this relationship through a reading of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (1985), especially its description of the continuum between 'men loving men' and 'men promoting the interests of other men,' one recognizes how the desires informing anthropological method are satisfied in the creation of a shareable beloved, the subject culture.

According to Sedgwick, male bonds construct all social interaction in a male-centred culture; that is, the type of culture presumed by most ethnographers in light of their own cultural biases. The most basic manifestation of homosocial bonding is the erotic triangle, a hierarchical arrangement of male rivals, friends, or partners united by a common desire for a female object. While Sedgwick's thesis concerns literature, anthropology provides an illustration of a similar bonding at work because it involves the suppression of women's experience in order to develop theories about what unites men. Women, at once invisible and much too visible in their absence, are the collective term of reference for the all-male world, as Eve Sedgwick explains with reference to a literary context:

It has been clear that women had a kind  
of ultimate importance in the schema of



men's gender constitution--representing an absolute of exchange value, of representation itself, and also being the ultimate victims of the painful contradictions in the gender system that regulates men. (134)

The roots of this exclusion run back through the history of ethnography, and they indicate the extent to which gender identity impacts on ethnographic method. From anthropology's early days as a discipline, as Lynnette Turner's "Feminism, Femininity, and Ethnographic Authority" (1991) shows through the example of nineteenth-century ethnographer Mary Kingsley, women ethnographers have used their writing to appeal to male mentors and to disavow their gendered identities publicly, effectively excluding themselves, because in a discipline defined by a tradition of masculine perspectives, ethnographic authority is "defined as a male prerogative" (L. Turner 248). These roots are so strong that, a century after Mary Kingsley wrote, contemporary theorist Paul Atkinson asserts that most ethnographic texts are still apt to "construct and presuppose a male perspective" (Ethnographic Imagination 146).

The case of ethnographer Sally Cole's professional development, as told in "Anthropological Lives: The Reflexive Tradition in a Social Science" (1992) is instructive. Cole describes how, as a feminist, she

undertook her research with the desire to "minimize the resultant hierarchical nature of the traditional relationship between the anthropological researcher and the subject" (115). Because she wanted to produce a collaborative project, she chose the life history as a model that would allow individuals in her subject culture to speak for themselves. When she approached her professors with the idea, however, she was told she "would have to do 'more than' life histories in order to do anthropology" (117). "Life histories, they said, are too individual, idiosyncratic, subjective, anecdotal; the data they represent is non-comparable, non-generalizable, non-scientific" (117). Although she continued to search for a means of integrating her own experience, Cole went on to pursue a standard research project that would help in the "task of producing an ethnography that would pass the examining board that would license me as a professional anthropologist" (118).

Stories such as Cole's do not belong to the distant past of ethnographic practice, and neither are they merely the product of institutional adherence to the methods of ethnographic realism she describes. On the subject of gender, especially the integration of feminist approaches, the new ethnography is dismissive, even hostile, as James Clifford's appraisal in the introduction to Writing Culture (1986) indicates:

Feminist ethnography has focused either on setting the record straight about women or revising anthropological categories. . . . It has not produced either unconventional forms of writing or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such. (20-21)

Rejecting feminist ethnography allows postmodern ethnographers to occupy the position they claim as the most inclusive approach to the discipline when, in fact, they seek to exclude any approach but their own. Feminists from Nancy Hartsock to Judith Stacey, who suspect the impulse behind postmodern theory to be a will-to-power, show how "the postmodern claim that verbal constructs do not correspond in a direct way to reality has arisen precisely when women and non-Western peoples have begun to speak for themselves and indeed, to speak about global systems of power differentials" (Mascia-Lees et al. 15), suggesting that postmodern ethnography's rejection of feminism works to preserve its institutional position, not to mention the institutional position of anthropologists such as Clifford.<sup>16</sup>

Historically, the intervention of women in the male-dominated discipline of anthropology has not altered

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffen take an even stronger position by claiming that the "crisis in representation" at the heart of post-structuralist inquiry "functions as a technology of containment and control within the cross-cultural theatre of neo-colonial relations" (After Europe xi).

ethnographic convention significantly.<sup>17</sup> To assume that it might would be to assume an inalienable difference rooted in the gender of the author alone, or in the words of Gayatri Spivak, to assert the simple alterity of women ("The New Historicism" 291). Representations of the north, as the subsequent chapters show, display no such simple alternate positions since women clearly do write masculinist texts. While ethnography by women brings different perspectives to the subject of study, it nevertheless must gain authorization through already-established conventions, and it must submit to the scrutiny of an audience whose criteria have been formed in a historically male-centred professional environment. Therefore, any text written in an ethnographic mode can reveal gender expectations at play, because, gender itself constitutes a category of ethnographic authority.

Issues of authority in ethnography are inflected by gender because in a tradition defined by such masculinist institutional perspectives, as Lynnette Turner observes, "the construction or negotiation of authority is where the difficulties and ambivalence of gender inhere" (239). Some feminist theorists, Marilyn Strathern among them, suggest that ethnography can be written from a standpoint that accepts the partial nature of truths in the fieldworker's experience (34). But while ethnography can be read as a

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<sup>17</sup> Despite this fact, there has been a critical development in ethnography of Inuit cultures signalled in the work of Bodenhorn and Fienup-Riordan.

collection of partial perspectives, Cole's story shows that it can not be written authoritatively or institutionally approved as such. In the discussion below, Naomi Musmaker Giffen's work stands as an example of how ethnographic authority depends on certain patterns and conventions that are alien to her synthetic and comparative method. This may be the reason why her work does not enjoy the authority of the single perspective narratives written by Diamond Jenness. That these conventions depend on 1) an exclusion of women from the culture represented, and 2) an initiation model based on the masculine quest pattern, indicates how gender assumptions inhere in the practice of ethnography.

For most of this century, ethnography about northern peoples has been produced as the result of fieldwork carried out by individuals trained in anthropology or sociology, although its appeal extends beyond those disciplines. In general, contemporary ethnographers are more aware of the literary tools at their disposal than they once were, and many are engaging in the experimental style of the new ethnography. Writers from outside the social sciences have also had an impact on recent ethnography; for example, Marie Wadden writes as a journalist, not as an anthropologist. However, as the following analysis shows, the new interdisciplinary and experimental approaches have not undermined the theoretical assumptions inherited from anthropology and grounded in ethnographic realism.

### **Franz Boas and Northern Ethnography**

Ethnography and travel literature are the most prolific and authoritative genres contributing to the way Canadians envision the north. Ethnographies such as Diamond Jenness's The Life of the Copper Eskimos (1922) and Hugh Brody's The People's Land: Eskimos and Whites in the Eastern Arctic (1975) head the list of popular books describing Inuit culture from the point of view of the professional or amateur anthropologist. In this section, my readings of selected ethnographic texts will show how traditional ethnography encodes gender expectations, specifically, how the subject culture comes to represent the feminized object of the ethnographer's masculinized desire. By creating a world of men, by excluding women's experience, and by grafting his own (western) gender assumptions on to the roles of both women and men, the ethnographer reflects and anticipates the expectations of the receiving audience. Interventions into the tradition by women such as Naomi Musmaker Giffen, a contemporary of Jenness, and Ann Fienup-Riordan, a contemporary of Hugh Brody, illuminate the gaps in the male-authored and -centred texts.

The history of ethnographic theory and the history of northern ethnography meet in the legacy of Franz Boas (1858-1942). Before Boas arrived in North America, anthropologists and ethnologists generally took a holistic approach to cultural systems, assuming human nature to be constant and all societies to be part of the universal

progress towards civilization. As the editors of Boas's collected Ethnography, Ronald P. Rohner and Evelyn C. Rohner explain, Franz Boas criticized the notion of "psychic unity" behind theories of cultural evolution, especially the comparative basis on which societies could be placed along a hierarchical scale of development (xvi). "Cultural improvement is relative," he argued; "it is not an absolute, with Western man representing the apogee" (qtd. in Rohner and Rohner xviii). Charging that ethnology was ethnocentric and speculative, Boas called for an empirical approach to anthropology that stressed the importance of fieldwork. The fieldwork Boas undertook was dedicated to presenting the subject culture from the culture's own point of view (Rohner and Rohner xxiii). In this, it differed from the work of other nineteenth-century ethnographers, whose methods were an undisciplined attempt to collect as much as they could about unacculturated Native life because they believed it was about to become extinct. This "naive ethnocentrism" allowed them to select data that would support their theories (Rohner and Rohner xxiv).

The Rohners describe the Kwakiutl of the North Pacific Coast as Boas's "first love" (xxiii); however, Boas was also the first anthropologist to study the "Central Eskimo" of Baffin Island and Hudson's Bay. Although the data for his work in The Central Eskimo (1888) and in volume 15 of The Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History (1901) was collected during his visits to the north, Boas was more

concerned with collecting artifacts for presentation in museums than he was in joining the daily routine of his subject community. Nevertheless, in these accounts, Boas originated conventions of ethnographic realism such as scientific tone, attention to minute detail, and narrative omniscience. These conventions would become the hallmarks of ethnographic authority in general and northern ethnography in particular.<sup>18</sup>

Although Boas is credited with "the scientization of anthropology" (Krupat, Ethnocriticism 65) influencing the ethnographic theories that would follow his, Rohner and Rohner charge that his commitment to empirical and inductive approaches applied to fieldwork, not to the "writing up," and assert that his own writing does not always foreground his fieldwork experiences (xxix). The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay, a 570-page tome, illustrates the importance of minute detail to Boas with a text devoted to physical descriptions and illustrations of the pieces collected by military officers during contact with the people of the region. Except for a reference in the two-page introductory section, the author's presence can rarely be perceived in Boas's work, and no references are made to his fieldwork. Using the detached tone and omniscient perspective that would become standards of ethnographic realism, he describes

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<sup>18</sup> Sally Cole also notes how the invisibility and omniscience of the narrator became and remain hallmarks of the professional ethnography (118).



common practices and stories to account for Eskimo social organization. In this characteristic passage, Boas uses a passive verbal construction to introduce information on myths:

A few additional notes relating to the  
Sedna and Omerneeto myths have been  
obtained. It is believed that. . . .

(483)

How the myths were "obtained," by whom, and from whom disappears in the all-seeing perspective of the narrator. Boas makes few remarks on his own experiences in the region; instead, he explains each observation without reference to the methods used in the field or the interpretive process involved in determining the meaning of data. As a result, the account presents the subject culture the way it is when, to use Geertz's words, "only God is looking" (Geertz qtd. in Jacobson 2). In this passage from The Central Eskimo as in others, there is a palpable resemblance between ethnographic narrative and the realist novel, a genre whose popularity coincides with the prolific period in Boas's career:

When the sun has reached such a height  
that the snow begins to melt in favored  
spots, a new life begins at the  
stations. The skins which have been  
collected in the winter and become  
frozen are brought out of the store room  
and exposed to the sun's rays. Some of

the women busy themselves, with their  
crescent shaped knives, in cutting the  
blubber from the skins and putting it  
away in casks. (59-60)

Boas encouraged the separation of ethnography and literature by insisting on the scientific basis for ethnography; his rejection of the personal in ethnographic accounts and his choice of narrative conventions contributed to the founding of what Marcus and Cushman call "realist ethnography."<sup>19</sup> These developments, thought to expunge the "literary" from ethnography, ironically, also solidified the importance of both the authoritative voice of omniscience that postmodern ethnographers now oppose and the role of the ethnographer as cultural exegete that postmodern ethnographers now celebrate by returning to the literary. Because the kind of fieldwork Boas advocated depends on initiation into the subject culture, it simultaneously encourages the sexualized metaphor of cultural contact contributing to the engendering of ethnographic authority. Ethnographers to come, including Diamond Jenness, would follow his example.

#### **Diamond Jenness and Northern Ethnography**

Diamond Jenness (1886-1969) remains an influential figure in northern studies. The Canadian Museum of

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<sup>19</sup> This coincidence has been observed by Arnold Krupat in Ethnocriticism (70-71). Interestingly, the influence of realism has also functioned to unite works on the north written in various periods.

Civilization's 1993 exhibition "Diamond Jenness and the Inuit" was a tribute to the longevity of Jenness's career. Rudy Wiebe's Playing Dead attributes its opening story to Ipakuaq and Uloqsaq, but their stories are quoted from Jenness's reports. In quotations, footnotes, and bibliographies, the authoritative voice of Diamond Jenness continues to be heard in matters concerning the north. While Jenness's purposes were "scientific" in the sense of the word in his day, his work has since become part of the structure of north-south relations in Canada, and it provides a basis for the representation of the north and its people.

Early ethnographers such as Jenness did not acknowledge the clearly literary source of their descriptive methods, even though the literature they produced from fieldwork structured their experience around the familiar quest pattern--separation, initiation, return. The initiation model functions at a symbolic level: the world the ethnographer enters--the sexual overtone of the verb has been recognized already--may seem to immerse him, but that world reflects his own vision. Some cultures appear through the gaze of the male ethnographer as all-male or at least as structured around a strict division of labour in which males are privileged. Women are peripheral in such accounts, or they are treated as unreliable informants, even when they are asked to tell their stories. In most cases, a

collective yet almost exclusively male subject is presented as desirable.

Diamond Jenness invoked the initiation pattern in The People of the Twilight (1928) through a series of references to his journey away from civilization (7, 129).<sup>20</sup> These allusions are integrated into ethnographic convention with reference to the process of initiation. Jenness notes almost wistfully: "little by little civilization slipped from me and I settled down to the routine of Eskimo life" (95). In another instance, leaving civilization fulfils a methodological requirement as Jenness refers to "the purposes for which [he] had shaken off civilization and adopted the Eskimo life" (129). Jenness leaves out an important qualification in these passages, namely, that "settling down" or "adopting the Eskimo life" in his narrative does not mean initiation on even grounds; rather, it means being received with honour in most households, offered a special place to sleep, given food, and served as a guest. He also benefits on several occasions from the labour of the others, mostly women, who provide such services as cooking his food and building his snow shelter.

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<sup>20</sup> I have chosen People of the Twilight and The Life of the Copper Eskimo rather than the more recent collection compiled by Jenness's son because of their earlier publication and popularity. As narratives circulated from the time shortly after the fieldwork was done, these books can be seen as foundational texts influencing attitudes towards the north.

Despite the lack of interest in the community's women, especially the tendency to ignore them as potential informants, Jenness's text contains glimpses of women's experience. The most shocking of these anecdotes, for they amount to textual asides rather than detailed observations, concerns the practice of infanticide. The birth of a baby girl at the moment of migration seems unfortunate to both Ikpuak (also known as Ipukkuak, Ikpuakuak, and Ikpuquaq) and Jenness because "[a] boy would have augmented the ranks of the hunters; but a girl, well she was only one more to support" (207). At this point, Jenness suppresses his earlier observations concerning the Eskimo division of labour, according to which women provide him and the others with a range of specific services, and emphasizes the difficulty of Eskimo life. In other places in the text, women go sealing (93), make clothes (57), prepare and serve food (31 and passim) and tend the lamps (57).

Even in the passage describing the worthless girl, Jenness contradicts himself and recognizes women's labour when he describes how mothers resume their harsh tasks almost immediately, sometimes only hours after giving birth (208); despite all this, the potential life of a female is seen by Jenness only as a burden on the community's economy.<sup>21</sup> After recounting how the new parents "had crushed

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<sup>21</sup> A similar prejudice surfaces in The Life of the Copper Eskimo when Jenness describes how widows are considered to be a "burden" on the others (159).

out its little life and laid the body on the wind-swept snow" (207), and noting that he knew of four mothers who had killed their infants at birth, Jenness offers the following justification:

Terrible as their crime may seem, they should not be condemned too hastily. Every society has devised some method, conscious or unconscious, for checking the full and unrestricted growth of its population; and infanticide, the simplest of them all, was in past ages the most widely spread. (207)

After this statement, Jenness shifts the responsibility from the parents to the mother alone who is seen as having no choice given the difficult life of the Eskimo people (209).

Jenness does not comment further on the fact that the infant killed was a girl; rather, he moves from the specific example of an unwanted girl to a general discussion that does not refer to the sex of the babies at all. Jenness thus avoids commenting on or documenting a practice often observed in other ethnographic monographs of his day: the extermination of female children. One must look to another text by Jenness, The Life of the Copper Eskimo (1922), for specific comments on gender preference, in which he rationalizes it by alluding to the difficulty of survival in

the north: "Boys, in fact, are seldom exposed, for they will support their parents when they grow up" (166).<sup>22</sup>

The absence of the women's experience in the account of infanticide is striking. Ikpuck's wife, Icehouse, goes immediately to visit the new mother while the men seem to pay no further attention to the matter (207). The meaning of Icehouse's gesture and the mother's response are left out and seem almost invisible to Jenness, so the account points to an entire area of experience outside the ethnographer's view and indicates how selective his vision is: only the stories of men interest him, and even they are subjected to the trivial comparison with Aesop's fables and to the assertion that he did not pay much attention to their stories at all (142).

In another story, Jenness again ignores the content of women's experience while referring to it. When two consecutive husbands reject a nameless fifteen-year-old girl, presumably because she did not take to married life, Jenness and his companions convince her family not to marry her off for another year (57). The girl's resistance to her community's gender expectations is not pursued in the text;

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<sup>22</sup> Jean Briggs calls this particular justification the "common belief" that "a boy grows up to be a hunter--a provider--whereas a girl is only a drain on her parent's household until she marries and moves away to be useful to her husband's household" (266-67). Briggs disputes this view by pointing out that infanticide was only practised regularly by the Netsilingmiut and that her fieldwork showed no widespread preference for male children. Significantly, Franz Boas never mentions infanticide.

neither is it part of Jenness's stated focus in telling her story.

Jenness narrates a similar incident in which Icehouse's anger turns to laughter after Jenness upsets his tea on the best of the sleeping robes (113). Jenness does not mention apologizing for the accident, nor does he indicate why her indignation melts away, even though her interception of a smile and a wink shared by Ikpuck and Jenness only makes the situation worse. If one reads across the text, however, to Ikpuck's harsh rebuke of Icehouse for quarrelling with a neighbour, another interpretation emerges. On that occasion, Ikpuck orders Icehouse to sleep in an empty tent rather than join the warm bodies on the sleeping platform. When she protests, he banishes her naked from the tent. Again Jenness makes himself the women's champion by finding her in another family's tent and by assuring her safety if she returns. Icehouse's words, "Ikpuuk is too angry with me. I am afraid" (182) articulate her position within the family and society. The last comment on the incident describes Icehouse as "unusually quiet in the morning" (183), and it is difficult to read this observation or her general submission as anything but a sign of subordination. Jenness's claim that "[m]arriage involves no subjection on the part of the woman" (Life 162) collapses in this story as well as in the description of a fight during which Ikpuak beats his wife with a "tomahawk" while she butts him in the stomach with her head (162). Whether or not women were



truly powerless is difficult to tell. What matters is Jenness's representation of the events in which women are overpowered by Inuit men and must be rescued by white men. Like the story of the fifteen-year-old, such anecdotes reveal him and his companions as chivalric interlopers.

The chivalric role depends on the availability of a woman in distress, and the resigned, silent Eskimo woman who fulfils this role is a ubiquitous stereotype in ethnographic texts. In The People of the Twilight, she surfaces again in the person of Sculpin, a young girl whose smile and laughter make her a favourite with the white men, who also call her Jennie (perhaps for Jenness?). Described as more intelligent than the others, Jennie "knew how to keep out of our way," writes Jenness, "and spent many quiet hours in a corner mending the rents in our clothing, or gazing at the pictures in our books" (57). Servitude, silence, and usefulness are Sculpin's attractive qualities.

Besides constructing a gender ideal through Sculpin and representing the general subordination of women through Icehouse, The People of the Twilight internalizes the homosocial bonds arising from a traffic in women with its justification of "wife-swapping." Jenness takes a radically relativist position on the practice, commenting: "The people were not really immoral, for they were doing no wrong according to the standards of life handed down to them through countless generations; and the transfer of wedlock was not made indiscriminately, but according to definite

regulations" (53). He goes on to recognize the way the practice allows men to form bonds with one another, gaining access to hunting territory or assuring safe travel in strange places (53-54). In Life of the Copper Eskimo, he refers to the way men "cement their friendships" through the practice (239). Jenness stresses the instrumental value of exchange from the men's point of view while indicating how women use the same practice to get from one man what they cannot obtain from another.

The division of labour described in Jenness's account emerges from assumptions about gender identity and differentiation grounded in his own culture. Women's work, integral as it is to the hunt, assumes a subordinate position in a hierarchy of useful tasks. The exclusion of women's experience reflects the general tendency to undervalue women's roles, a tendency which is most graphically demonstrated in the rationalization of infanticide. Most of all, the representation of the division of labour underlines a bias emerging from a western notion of masculinity. As John S. Matthiasson has explained in his critique of the anthropological accounts of Inuit life, ethnographers studying the Inuit have been "men of adventuresome spirit who were enamoured of the hunt itself" and who equated control of the hunt with social dominance (73). While he does not name Jenness in particular, Matthiasson observes how the experiences of most ethnographers supported their assumptions because their

involvement in the community's daily life was limited to the activities of the men (73-74).

The discussion so far indicates the particularity of the traditional ethnographic vision and the importance of the ethnographer's subjectivity by pointing out absences or contradictions in the text. None of these gaps are recognized in the narrative, which displays all the expectations of its generation through the single, all-seeing subject who records life by creating the illusion of looking "as through a one-way screen, seeing others as they really are when only God is looking" (Geertz qtd. in Jacobson 2). Jenness's authoritative accounts emerge from his experience and from the organizing principle of the work: his journey into "Eskimo life" from "civilization" seeks to discover something about the Eskimo culture, but his writing reveals how important subjective interpretation--including gender blindness--is in forming his observations of Inuit life.

### **The Roles of Men and Women in Inuit Culture**

The fieldwork model, though preferred, was not the only method in anthropology in Jenness's time, and the claim to objectivity made in texts like The People of the Twilight should be reevaluated through a reading of different texts.

Naomi Musmaker Giffen's The Roles of Men and Women in Eskimo Culture (1930) erodes the authority of the individual fieldworker's experience by demonstrating how that authority

depends on its own textualization. Generally, Giffen's method consists of assembling all the "partial" perspectives she can locate in ethnographic monographs in order to give approximate, not final, conclusions. In this early example of standpoint method, the researcher studies the monographs available to her and compares what they represent. In one instance, after speculating that curing fish falls to the women because "the use of the needle is invariably associated with feminine pursuits," an assumption grounded in her own culture, she notes that "another partial explanation" could be that the women usually catch the fish in the first place (14). Instead of presenting an observation as the "truth" about the culture, Giffen leaves interpretation open to possibilities that may not appear immediately, and by so doing, she (perhaps unwittingly) highlights the textual and representational characteristics of ethnography.

Giffen's method synthesizes the monographs written by others, and whether her lack of access to the initiatory practice of fieldwork was related to her gender is uncertain. Despite the radical difference between her method and that of the texts she analyzes, she too naturalizes many of the assumptions about Eskimo culture that her male colleagues make. On the troubling issue of infanticide, she writes: "it is easily understood why male children are highly prized while girls, who are considered to some extent as 'unproductive consumers' are often killed

at birth" (1-2; emphasis added). Like Jenness's discussion of infanticide, Giffen's comment assumes survival as motivation for infanticide and, ironically, undervalues the subject of her study: the roles of women.<sup>23</sup> In another instance, she accepts that "petting-songs" or lullabies are "naturally" the way women tend to express themselves.

While Giffen's tendency to reflect the assumptions of her time indicates the extent to which women ethnographers had to disavow their own gender by identifying with male authorities and by reproducing established views in order to be authorized by the profession, it does not diminish the challenge her little-known work makes to the contributions of her contemporaries. Nor does it undermine her conclusion that the Inuit possessed a "relatively sophisticated point of view" on the division of labour, because they readily perform each other's roles (83). Where many of her contemporaries defined the division of labour as if it were an inviolable separation of genders, Giffen showed the division to be highly permeable. Giffen's work may not be as influential as Jenness's--his reports are probably the most often-quoted documents on northern life, and his observations continue to influence southerners seeking

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<sup>23</sup> Giffen's comment affiliates her with a general pattern in anthropology about the Inuit. Jean Briggs criticizes male anthropologists for creating the impression that female infanticide was widely practised when in fact it was only the Netsilingmiut who did it regularly; she disputes the notion that male children are more highly prized than female (267).

contact with northern peoples--but her method challenges the single perspective of his authority as well as the strict division of labour ethnographers believed the hunting society to be.

### **The People's Land**

In The People's Land (1975), Hugh Brody employs many of the conventions of the realist form established in the tradition of Boas and Jenness, supporting his truth claims almost exclusively with his personal experience of life in the north. The People's Land fits somewhere between the scientific accounts of Boas and Jenness and rhetorical new ethnography proposed by James Clifford. As narrator, Brody is only minimally present in the text, creating the illusion that readers are visiting a world while they participate in its textual construction. The text does not acknowledge the ways the ethnographer filters all this information, but renders a complete and global perspective as if the position of the narrator, who consistently refers to himself with the generic label, "the social scientist," transcends the reality he describes. The People's Land assumes the self-effacing tone of a scientific paper, the same assertive voice that makes a heavy claim to truth. Anecdotes are offered to substantiate what Brody asserts as "facts," but with little or no explanation of the oral nature of the anecdote's origin, the context of its telling, or the possible motives of its storyteller. Brody's informants are

either anonymous, or they are identified by generic function as the "white government worker," the "young Eskimo,"<sup>24</sup> or the "oldtimer." Stories told by Inuit are relayed with no mention of who translated them or under what circumstances they were recorded.

Suppressing the text's own representational apparatus and confidently presenting the authentic or essential nature of the subject culture is a convention of ethnographic realism that establishes the ethnographer's authority. The illusion of authority presents the ethnographer as spokesperson reading the text written by the subject culture itself; however, it also involves persuading readers that superior (scientific) knowledge of that culture authorizes the ethnographer to speak on its members' behalf. The omniscient narrator takes this position, looking through the "one-way screen" Geertz describes. With the narrator's superiority established through what Donna Haraway calls the "god-trick," the text looks like a mirror of the subject culture's authentic life.

Despite the problems posed by its use of ethnographic realism, The People's Land identifies certain powerful and pervasive stereotypes of the north and the people who live there and raises some important issues about how northern people are represented. From his omniscient perspective,

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<sup>24</sup> When referring to Brody's The People's Land and Jenness's work, I will use the term they use to refer to the Inuit.

Brody recognizes the colonizing gaze of others in the desire northern whites have to fix the "native" within a convenient image. A chapter on "White Attitudes to the Eskimo" analyzes the "white" image of the Inuit as both "tough and benign" (77). White northerners are said to disdain their individual Inuit neighbours while holding on to an ideal of the "real Eskimo" (86). Their admiration for an abstract Eskimo-ness idealizes the land and the traditional but--and this is equally important--now extinct life of the Inuit which in turn allows them to judge real live "Eskimos" according to harsh and artificial standards. Those who cannot live up to them are lamented for having lost their true identity. In general, fatalism, guilt, and paternalism are said to inform white nostalgia for the disappearance of the Native way of life (54-55).

Brody's courageous position on the paternalistic desires of whites takes an ironic twist in his own preoccupation with the bad influence of white contact. Within the ellipses of the story, Brody constructs a traditional way of life and documents its passing. According to him, trapping destroyed Inuit self-reliance (133); carving is a "consequence of southern domination of Eskimo economic life" (134), and every other aspect of traditional life has been transformed by southern culture too (190). By naturalizing his own cultural assumptions, for example, by representing the culture as a dying one or by blaming current drug and alcohol problems among Inuit



people on the fact that the young have nothing to keep them occupied, Brody places the emphasis on cultural survival rather than the physical survival stressed by earlier ethnographers, but he risks sounding like his fatalistic white informants, a risk he never interrogates.

### **Maps and Dreams**

A more recent book by Brody, Maps and Dreams (1981), though not about the culture described in The People's Land, provides a critical and theoretically up-to-date account resulting from an invitation extended by the Native people of northeast British Columbia to help with the land surveys being carried out in their region. The invitation may be regarded as an endorsement of Brody's professional or personal appeal, and it certainly gives more authority to his account. In the introduction, Brody immediately situates himself within the experimental mode of the new ethnography:

[Maps and Dreams] is a book of anecdotes as well as a research report, its structure being the result of an attempt to meet two different needs. . . . There is a need for scientific detail, evidence that must stand the test of scrutiny by academics and cross-examination in uncomprehending or hostile courtrooms; yet it is also

essential to bring to life unfamiliar  
points of view. (xxiii)

The Look usually remains true to this method with a blend of detailed information and descriptive narration.

What Maps and Dreams describes is an ideal hunting society lacking the problems often associated with life on the reserve: alcoholism, domestic violence, unemployment, despair. The possible subordination of women within the division of labour does not receive attention, and the absence of any reference to children implies that all is well with them. Like the ethnographers John Matthiasson describes, Brody reduces the hunting society to the act of tracking and killing animals, ignoring the various interconnected activities sustaining the community. From this limited perspective, the society can be described as male-dominated, because men carry out this particular function.

However, some anthropologists now question the hierarchy of labour thought to be associated with hunter-gatherer societies. They argue that the division of labour is produced by the anthropological model employed, because, in fact, the sexual division of labour in many northern communities shows flexibility which many anthropological studies fail to notice.<sup>25</sup> Barbara Bodenhorn's "'I'm not the

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<sup>25</sup> Jean Briggs writes: "There is nothing holy to [the Eskimos] about the sexual division of labour; neither is there, in their view, anything inherent in the nature of either sex that makes it incapable of doing some of the jobs that the other sex ordinarily does" (270).

Great Hunter, My Wife Is': Inupiat and the Anthropological Models of Gender," makes this point based on the observation of "unexamined assumptions about the meaning of hunting, marriage and gender" (55) in studies of hunter-gatherer societies. Such assumptions suggest that ethnography's construction of gender roles reflects the ethnographer's own background and prejudices.

In her book The Nelson Island Eskimo: Social Structure and Ritual Distribution (1989), anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan describes how the emphasis on survival in the work of ethnographers actually excludes the social conditions and values attached to the hunt.<sup>26</sup> John S. Matthiasson takes this point even further by linking presumed male supremacy in the subject culture to the gender of the researcher. Noting that with only a few exceptions, those ethnographers who have studied the Inuit have been men, Matthiasson suggests first of all, that "[i]t is possible that for them control of the hunt also meant social dominance" and, second, that "the very fact that they were male limited their observations to the sphere of male activity. They were not as privy to the female realm, and so could not describe it as they could that of the male" (73-74). While Matthiasson does not blame them for their blindness, he does

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<sup>26</sup> Farley Mowat, an amateur and unreliable ethnographer, criticizes the way "we smugly assume that because these people live unarmoured by our ornate technology, they must lead the most marginal kind of existence, faced with so fierce a battle to survive that they have no chance to realize the 'human potential'" (The Snow Walker 15).

call their observations "skewed and male oriented" (Living on the Land 73-74).

In The People's Land all the whites are men; in Maps and Dreams all the Indians are men.<sup>27</sup> This fact alone illustrates the highly selective nature of Brody's method even though a caveat speaks to the absence of women in Maps and Dreams:

The continual and essential work of the women, less conspicuous precisely because it is a matter of steady routine, should be kept firmly in mind. . . . Women drew maps and made direct contributions of all kinds to the project. But their contribution is not adequately expressed here. (196-97)

Perhaps because Brody chooses to depict hunters as disembodied entities corresponding to one particular hunter, a figure that best suits the representations of northern individualism, the social framework sustaining the hunters' maps and dreams does not interest him, and his apology does not compensate for its loss.

Exclusions based on the ethnographer's assumptions inform other aspects of the text also. An even more authoritative voice results from the elimination of

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<sup>27</sup> For Brody's discussion of the division of labour, presented from a strictly male perspective, see The People's Land 192.

references to the source of each observation, as in the following section describing a sort of global Indian value system:

In the family, in homes, in the privacy of the bush, in the very shyness that often pervades Indian dealings with Whites, in that stillness, almost a withdrawal, that is considered a mature, wise, and thoughtful presentation of self--here is the Indian life that the people themselves value most. (252)

Brody's presence is almost indistinguishable in this passage, yet his interpretation of what he sees (summarized as "the Indian life that the people themselves value most") forms the substance of his observations. Despite Brody's relative awareness of theoretical debates in ethnography and his experimentation with form, his narrative is given to statements that seem to assume the ontologically given nature of the place to be entered. Brody must take outsiders into the places they cannot easily enter thus reproducing the method based on the initiation model. Readers, for their part, are bound to believe his version of things. After all, as Clifford remarks, experience is like intuition, one either has it or one does not.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Of course it is difficult to say very much about experience," writes James Clifford. "Like 'intuition' one has it or not, and its invocation often smacks of mystification" ("On Ethnographic Authority" 128).

Maps and Dreams includes much valuable statistical evidence as well as the maps gathered during Brody's fieldwork, even if the experimental narrative form belies the author's position as all-seeing observer. The licence with which Brody describes his subject signals his position in relation to the representation he provides. Being experimental involves giving free rein to his own creative voice, for not only does Brody sift his experience through a series of generalities, but his narrative invents around what it records. The most basic evidence itself is inscribed with literary devices, especially synecdoche, not the hard evidence and "scientific detail" mentioned in Brody's introduction.<sup>29</sup> In the most obvious use of synecdoche, one man, Joseph Patsah, the oldest hunter on the reserve,<sup>30</sup> becomes the representative of his people after his first appearance, told by Brody as follows:

Joseph's eyes, softly opaque with age,  
were startlingly attentive. He had not  
only the expertise but also the  
authority of his eighty-some years. But  
his composure and eloquence were not  
those of an old man; they expressed the

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<sup>29</sup> Theorist Paul Atkinson observes how the use of synecdoche masks the analytical process at each level of the ethnographer's project and sets up a "strong narrative contract" between the writer and the reader (62).

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly enough, Brody describes how the whites he spoke to showed a preference for "old" Eskimos in The People's Land (87).

completeness and distinctiveness of a culture. (6)

Many proponents of experimental ethnography, including Geertz, rely heavily on this literary device as well as on metonymy, though they do not use these literary names.<sup>11</sup> If one accepts Joseph as example, the rest of Brody's assertions must follow. From this passage on, everything about Joseph and his household 'stands for' all Indians of northeast British Columbia and sometimes North America.

The intimacy between Brody and his subject in Maps and Dreams, typified in his friendship with Joseph, is a departure from the use of the term "informant" with its mixed connotations of tattler and traitor in The People's Land. Yet, the pressure exerted upon an individual exemplar like Joseph to "carry" the ethnographer's argument seems excessive.<sup>12</sup> For example, the universal terms used to describe the lifestyle of the hunter, in passages like the following, derive from Joseph's single example:

The Athapaskan hunter will move in a direction and at a time that are

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<sup>11</sup> For Clifford Geertz's explanation of his use of exemplars, see "'From the Native's Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding" in Meaning in Anthropology. Lynnette Turner notes the vital importance of the exemplary informant in nineteenth-century ethnography ("Feminism and Ethnographic Authority" 246). Neither author recognizes the practice as synecdoche.

<sup>12</sup> By contrast, the use of synecdoche in autobiography written by native people voices political concerns. See discussion of Krupat's definition of the synecdochic self chapter 3.

determined by weather. . . . He will  
also have ideas about animal movement,  
his own and others' patterns of land  
use. . . . (37)

Of course, this textual pressure seems to contradict the introduction's recognition of the literally hundreds of different cultures collapsed into the terms "Native" and "Indian." But Brody justifies his common-denominator approach by stressing the need to simplify the task of describing the cultural complexity of the region (28). The intimacy suggested between ethnographer and informant through the use of this trope functions as a way of covering up unequal power relations."

Representations based on synecdoche are refuted easily. One can obviously reject Brody's generalizations about hunters by rejecting his narrative construction of the character, Joseph. Another problem inherent in the idealization of the hunter resides in the false expectations it sets. If readers take Joseph as truly representative, they will expect all other informants, or worse, all Native people to be like the traditional person represented by Joseph, and blame or pity those who do not meet the standard. In other words, Brody's heavy dependence upon synecdochic representation risks playing into the fatalistic

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" Judith Stacey's recognition of this strategy has been discussed in Mascia-Lees et al. (21).



attitude towards Native peoples which he himself identified in The People's Land.

Brody's tendency to generalize away the specific and the individual manifests itself in his treatment of dialogue. As a typical fieldworker, he is unequipped, for while he admits memory's imperfection, he also claims not to have brought a tape recorder into the field (44), so he approximates the hunters' conversations by parodying the individual voices and vanishing behind their words with the stealth of the realist ethnographer--as Graham Huggan observes in his discussion of Brody's writing, it is often difficult to tell if he speaks with or for others (66). Consider, for example, the following ventriloquized speech:

White officials were always saying that  
bits of paper were of special  
importance, but right now there were  
other important matters at hand: the  
beginning of the autumn hunt, marmot,  
caribou. . . . (259)

The voice assumed here, which is surely not Brody's own, seems at best uncomplicated, at worst politically naive.

Brody's method fails to acknowledge that ethnography is synthetic and that there is no innocent place outside representation, no innocent place beyond the relationship of self and others from which to judge (Said? 216). As transcendent observer, he assumes the existence of such a position and occupies it by manipulating conventions of

ethnographic realism. The author's subjectivity, shown in his approval, displeasure, admiration, and disappointment, gleams on the surface of the narrative without any direct interrogation of its impact on his interpretation. Although Maps and Dreams displays an awareness of the literary conventions used, it retains the perspective of a realist monograph by inadequately exploring the author's subjectivity."

Despite a slightly more visible authorial presence and rhetorical awareness in Maps and Dreams than in The People's Land, the pressures of ethnographic authority cause Brody to fall back on the strategies of realism when he approximates the Boasian "native point of view" and disappears behind an omniscient perspective. Furthermore, the manipulation of data and literary devices contributes to an idealized vision of the hunting society, which risks comparison to the noble savage myth. By creating an ethnography based on an invisible interpretive process rather than a dialogue between the author and his subject, Maps and Dreams betrays a (perhaps unwitting) paternalistic attitude towards the people it tries to portray.

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" This is also Graham Huggan's point in his review essay "Maps, Dreams, and the Presentation of Ethnographic Narrative."

### **Nitassinan**

As theories of ethnography "blur the boundaries" between genres, it becomes increasingly difficult to define what ethnography is, especially in light of the travel writing and other works of non-fiction that present information about other cultures. Marie Wadden, a journalist and writer who is perhaps freed of the expectations concerning a writer trained in social science, offers a look at Innu culture in Nitassinan (1991) by telling the story of the community's political awakening in the face of military encroachment on its land. Rather than concentrate on the skills needed to hunt successfully, Nitassinan focuses on the daily life of the community, which means that instead of portraying one individual "informant," she lets a variety of characters into her text: a teenager named Makus shows her the sweat lodge he built (19); a young mother, Manimat, prepares a carpet of boughs in her home (169); a hunter, Ben Michel, brings home the first goose of the season (35). Early in the narrative, Wadden confesses to the practical and cultural reasons that caused her to stick close to camp instead of following the hunters:

I didn't accompany the men on their hunting while I was at Penipuapishkunipi. It would have been highly unusual for a woman to do this, and I also knew I would have trouble keeping up with them, as they often travel long

distances on snowshoes in search of  
game. (18)

The result is a narrative whose depiction of Innu community life balances the preoccupation other white authors often have with the "authentic" way of life represented by a stereotyped version of the hunt, and this revision means articulating the experience of women.

By reporting the words of the Innu community, men, women, old, and young, Nitassinan describes part of their world. It does not shy away from the obvious and continued effects of contact on the Innu whose traditional lifestyle mixes technologies; it rejects the fatalist and self-serving opinion of non-Natives and government agencies that "because the Innu have adopted some of the ways of European-Canadian society they no longer have a distinct culture, and therefore no legitimate claim to their land" (43). The political activism of the Innu provides a compelling counter-example of a politically radical circumstance: The Innu, a people who do not accept the authority of the Canadian constitution over their people, wilfully submit themselves to it, not merely to jump up on a more public platform, but to bring about real change.

Read as ethnography, Nitassinan is a study in what Linda Alcoff refers to as "the practice of speaking with and to rather than for others" ("Speaking for Others" 23). Wadden tells her version of Innu resistance to low-level flying as she reports the views and arguments of the people

around her. Experience underpins some of her authority, as it does in a realist text; for example, in one chapter she tells how she witnessed the terrific noise created by low-flying jets and how she managed to get it on tape. However, the text innovates the realist ethnographic form by devoting even more space in the chapter to the experience of the other witnesses in the community. Wadden's authority comes from these voices as when Janet Michel endorses Wadden's right to use her tape recording with the remark: "They never believe us when we say this happens, but maybe now they will, when you play that on the radio . . ." (38).

By giving precedence to the speech of the Innu, by using each person's real name, and by quoting directly, Wadden uses the dialogic form favoured by anthropologists such as James Clifford while never obscuring the representational apparatus of her account or losing sight of the independent reality it describes.<sup>3</sup> Nitassinan achieves this not only because of the heightened awareness of the ethnographer's subjectivity, but also because it is as detailed and careful as Boas first insisted ethnography should be. Wadden's work seems to answer feminist concerns and to support Sally Cole's argument that ethnography should be "not only about the anthropological self but also about

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<sup>3</sup> Clifford's essay "On Ethnographic Authority" calls on different cultures to "form complex concrete images of one another" without forgetting that such representations are made "in specific historical relations to dominance and dialogue" (119).

context--about the subjectivity and historical specificity of the field experience as well as the social and political realities of the lives of anthropological subjects, the traditional Other" (125). The rejection of realist conventions for a more effective form of realism involves the delineation of the context. As narrator, Wadden is ever-present with explanations of how she came by the knowledge she has, what she did in certain situations, what personal connections gave her access to Innu homes and confidence; moreover, she refuses to universalize the feelings of individuals or to paraphrase their conversations. Her book meets the challenge posed by Edward Said to "see Others as historically constituted" (225) by looking at a culture and a struggle in all its particularity of detail and historical specificity.

Comparing these contemporary texts calls attention to some of the problems arising from the ethnographic representation of the north. Although Brody belongs to the contemporary generation of theoretically aware ethnographers, he tends to replicate strategies for creating authority that are inherited from the realist tradition, strategies a comparative reading of Wadden tends to accentuate. The currency carried by realist conventions indicates the important legacy of pioneering anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Diamond Jenness, and the use more recent texts have made of their example can clarify readings of their writing.

## Conclusion

Writing ethnography requires the negotiation of gendered expectations as Naomi Musmaker Giffen's momentary internalizations of masculine bias suggest. Gender expectations inhere in ethnographic method with its reliance on narrative techniques such as the initiation model, and realist conventions such as the omniscient narrator, which further enhances the author's credibility and authority. The gender bias responsible for the misrepresentation of the division of labour within hunting societies thrives in northern ethnography with influential ethnographers creating an all-male world through a series of important exclusions.

In the choice of male informant, the reliance on synecdoche following that choice, and the omission of women's experience, the ethnography of Hugh Brody and Diamond Jenness builds a male-centred world out of the north, a world in which the exigencies of survival explain most social practices, especially concerning the social organization of the hunt. Although produced in different contexts, their work demonstrates a singular perspective grounded in their own cultural assumptions about these matters, a singular perspective which texts by Wadden and Giffen tend to highlight.

While the tendency towards "naive realism" (Hammersley 50) undermines the accuracy and reliability of ethnographic representation, the postmodernist turn does not correct its vision. Ethnographers might have had good reason to take

the postmodernist turn given the problems caused by the failure to consider the observer's biases and cultural assumptions in ethnographic realism; however, the postmodernist turn creates an even greater problem by failing to resolve the tension between the independent reality it describes and the textual construction of that reality. Nevertheless, the ethnographies described here remain influential as authoritative sources of information and examples of representational method for other texts on the north discussed in the chapters to follow.



## Chapter 2

### **"Everybody Likes the Inuit": Inuit Revision and Representations of the North**

In the preceding chapter, the authority of the ethnographic methods used to study cultures, including Inuit culture, was shown to be grounded in ideas about gender. In this chapter, I compare the different concerns of Inuit and non-Inuit writers: first, by considering how texts by non-Inuit establish expectations in the non-Inuit audience, and second, by examining the forms Inuit writers use to counter such images. It will also show how an emphasis on the ethnographic function of literary representation, manifested in the tendency to read for anthropological content and relevance, influences the critical reception of Inuit writing.

Literature by non-Inuit often contains romanticized images reflecting a preoccupation with two supposed elements of Inuit experience: Inuit access to the stone-age past as a "contact-traditional" hunting society, and Inuit access to an exotic spirituality.<sup>1</sup> Writers attracted by the idea of the hunt, such as Barry Lopez, disseminate masculinist images of the hunting society and how it functions. In it, men dominate the cultural landscape because they hunt big game. As John S. Matthiasson observes, most literature

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<sup>1</sup> This tendency points to a general trend in the representation of aboriginal people. "Real Inuit," like the "real Indians" Louis Owens refers to in Other Destinies, are always part of the past (4).

about the Inuit works this fantasy into "an image of the chauvinistic male hunters dominating their women and trading them back and forth as if they were property" (73). Some writers pick up on this image by failing to notice the role played by women in the men's hunt or the fact that women hunt sometimes as often as men do. What interests these writers is not how the society works or what hunting represents within the culture; rather, it is the rugged individualism that can be displayed in such deeds, as in the staged hunting scenes in Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North (1922). The importance of the second supposed attribute of Inuit culture, traditional spirituality, can be observed in highly personal travel writing about the north, narratives in which the individual fulfils a quest for self-knowledge or greater wisdom through contact with aboriginal people.

Travel writing, like ethnography, tends to portray Inuit men as hunters, interpreters, and guides, and to leave women out of the picture, creating an image of a culture dominated by masculine pursuits. Yet in their dealings with whites, the Inuit men are made subordinate to those who hire them; that is, they occupy the role Inuit women are assumed to play in Inuit culture. Frequently depicted as poor, defenceless creatures, they undergo a symbolic emasculation that allows them to play a subordinate, passive role, as the feminized counterpart of the masculinized explorers and travellers. The north described in such accounts is what

Margaret Atwood calls "[t]he Robert W. Service North of popular image [which] is assumed to be a man's world; even though the North itself, or herself, is a cold and savage female, the drama enacted in it--or her--is a man's drama, and those who play it out are men" (Strange Things 90).

While ethnography portrays only the experiences of men who hunt, and adventure-writing creates all-male communities, these genres also cast the inhabitants of the north, aboriginal people like the Inuit, in the subordinate, passive role, as the feminized counterpart for masculine heroes. Inuit self-representation tells a different story.

Traditional stories and contemporary writing represent Inuit men and women in ways that challenge non-Inuit representation. By merging their traditional conventions with European literary forms such as autobiography, Inuit writing plays a historical role in preserving details of past traditions, a pedagogical role in addressing and educating outsiders, and a political role in making statements on behalf of all Inuit.

Images of aboriginal peoples, especially notions of what is traditional in aboriginal cultures, have been defined for non-aboriginal readers, outsiders, by social scientists in ethnography. In books such as Hugh Brody's The People's Land, even the term "traditional" synthesizes many perspectives, including those of the ethnographer's culture.

Reading these books is an encounter with the images that have allowed sustained paternalism, even neo-colonialism, in

Canada's governing of the north.<sup>2</sup> While providing the information obtained through research, representing the reality before him, the writer of ethnography inevitably speaks for the members of the culture by also describing them. Although most ethnographers would now insist on the difference between these two practices because of the controversial issue of who speaks for whom, the connection between speaking about others and speaking for others described by Linda Alcoff remains strong ("Speaking for Others" 9).

The debate concerning who speaks for whom in literature has been a polarized one, with one side advocating the absolute creative freedom of writers and the other insisting that writers should tell only their own experiences.<sup>3</sup> Some writers decide to take the middle ground by not becoming embroiled at all. Refusing to write about the inhabitants of the north or to report their words may be a well-meaning attempt to avoid appropriating the voice of others; however, it can have the same effect if the voice of northern inhabitants cannot be heard elsewhere. I mention these

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<sup>2</sup> That colonialism characterizes the relationship between the Canadian state and the north is a commonplace of northern studies reiterated in, among others Canada's Colonies: A History of the Yukon and Northwest by Kenneth Coates, The Modern North: People, Politics and the Rejection of Colonialism by Coates and Judith Powell, and The Canadian North: Source of Wealth or Vanishing Heritage? edited by B. W. Hodgins, J. Benidickson, R. P. Bowles, and G. A. Rawlyk.

<sup>3</sup> This polarization accounts in part for the postmodern turn in anthropology which encourages ethnographers to stress their own experiences.

issues here, because they bear on the reception of writing by Inuit to be discussed later in this chapter and because non-Inuit writers effectively "speak for" Inuit by reaching an audience Inuit writers cannot and by influencing how that audience will receive writing by Inuit.

This criticism is not an argument against the practice of speaking for others; instead, it is a warning of the impact that speaking for others can have in the absence of dialogue, that is, when some have no voice--as has been the case, historically at least, with aboriginal writers. I argue in this chapter that when Inuit writers speak on behalf of other Inuit it is in the interests of giving voice to collective concerns, so rejecting the practice of "speaking for" would not be feasible. Without a modified version of speaking for others, Robin McGrath would not be able to say that Agnes Nanogak speaks for the storytellers of the Western Arctic (Nanogak xii) nor would Heather Henderson be able to say that Minnie Aodla Freeman "speaks for" her people (62). Without the practice of speaking for others, aboriginal people would not find voices that could reach the people who need to learn about them most, and non-aboriginal people would continue to imagine aboriginal people according to prevailing stereotypes; thus, "speaking for others" cannot be rejected outright. Inuit self-representation, autobiography in particular, seems to reflect Linda Alcoff's observation that sometimes it is

politically expedient to have others speak on one's behalf ("Speaking for Others" 13).

### **Representations of the Inuit by non-Aboriginal Writers**

Long before anthropologists such as Franz Boas appeared, Norse myths (circa 1001-05) depicted the people the Vikings encountered in North America as bizarre troll-like creatures. Olive Patricia Dickason offers an account of how the Norse portrayed the people they met in the Arctic (called "Skraelings" by the Norse, these people may not have been Inuit but Beothuks) as "ill-favoured," resembling the vile trolls of Norse legends (Dickason 52). In the sixteenth century, Europeans believed that the Inuit were cannibals (Dickason 52, 56). The Inuit do not fare much better in explorers' accounts. In A Journey to the Northern Ocean (1795), Samuel Hearne observes that the Inuit are "but low in stature, none exceeding the middle size, and though broad set, are neither well-made nor strong bodied" and have "a dirty copper colour" except for some women who were "more fair and ruddy" (108). Although Hearne's description is unflattering, his attitude to the Inuit in his famous account of the massacre at Bloody Falls is one of pity not scorn. In this passage, Hearne refers to the Inuit as "poor Esquimaux," "poor unsuspecting creatures," "poor unhappy victims," and "poor expiring wretches" (98-101). Throughout

the passage, Hearne depicts the Inuit as helpless, innocent victims of a vicious and treacherous attack.<sup>4</sup>

Such are the images of the Inuit offered in one of the earliest texts studied as Canadian literature. Since Hearne cannot speak the languages of those he encounters, he does not make a study of the whole culture, as later ethnographers would, yet the minute detail in descriptions of Indian and Inuit implements, weapons, dress, and customs in his text is characteristic of what would later be called realist ethnography. Hearne's observations reflect his dealings with aboriginal peoples in the specific context of exploration; however, the images created by his observations leave a legacy for writers to come. In most of the narrative, the image of the helpless, dying Inuit at Bloody Falls cannot be countered because Hearne has very little contact with them and refers to them infrequently, except to compare details of tools and armaments with those of the Indians who accompany him. The reason for this absence is offered by Alan D. McMillan's Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada (1995) which shows that when Hearne and his Chippewyan companions travelled across the barrenlands, the area was inhabited only by other Athapaskans, for the Inuit had not yet moved into the region (280).

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<sup>4</sup> In "Samuel Hearne and the Inuit Oral Tradition," Robin McGrath uses Inuit accounts to dispute the likelihood that such a battle actually took place. McGrath identifies this passage as key to the stereotype of the savage Indian and the peaceful Eskimo, a version of the "noble" versus the "howling" savage described by Paula Gunn Allen (5).

With the exception of David Thompson, the eighteenth-century explorers had little or no contact with Inuit. Although it refers to passing places where "Esquimaux" have had encampments (258-59), Alexander MacKenzie's Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793 (1801) contains no report of contact with Inuit. Because his various Indian guides were enemies of the Inuit who took pains to avoid meeting them (257), MacKenzie resorts to reporting what other aboriginal people have to say about them: Esquimaux are "treacherous" (284), "very wicked and malignant" (245) murderers of men and abductors of women (255).<sup>1</sup> These remarks are emphasized when MacKenzie narrates the antics of a guide who mimics "various indecencies, according to the customs of the Esquimaux, of which he boasted an intimate acquaintance" (253).

In contrast to the war-like images presented by the Indian guides on these expeditions, the predominant attitude towards Inuit in exploration literature is not antagonistic.

Calling the Inuit "a people with whom we are very little acquainted," David Thompson's Narrative 1784-1812 (1916) refers to the Inuit as "very industrious and ingenious" and "cheerful and contented" (14). Two passages in Thompson's

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<sup>1</sup> Europeans often named one aboriginal group using their name in the language of another aboriginal group: this is the purported origin of the word "Eskimo."



narrative repeat these terms as Thompson compares the Inuit favourably with the Indians (16, 352):

Nothing can oblige an Indian to work at anything but stern necessity; whereas the Esquimaux is naturally industrious, very ingenious, fond of the comforts of life so far as they can attain them, always cheerful, and even gay. . . .

(16)

Hearne's hapless Inuit at Bloody Falls have developed into a stoically if tragically contented and peaceful people.

Because the activities of explorers such as Hearne, MacKenzie, and Thompson were undertaken in the service of empire-building and mercantile capitalism and not science, their accounts of aboriginal cultures differ substantially from those provided later by scientists such as Boas and Jenness. Paradoxically, the explorers are frequently less prone than the anthropologists to interpret Inuit life through their own cultural biases and tend to offer what are admitted to be opinions not explanations. However, certain characteristics featured in the representation of Inuit people are strikingly similar to the ethnography that would come later.

During the nineteenth century, Arctic exploration increased beginning with Sir John Franklin's unsuccessful attempts to find a Northwest Passage and continuing into the race for the Pole straddling the beginning of the twentieth

century.<sup>6</sup> In one of the intertextual moments characterizing the representation of the north, Sir John Franklin describes how he and his men reached the place Hearne called "Bloody Falls" where they find what they believe to be evidence of the attack Hearne witnessed (350). Throughout his narrative, Franklin's attitude towards the Inuit reflects the innocent and afflicted images he had encountered in Hearne's journal, and the authority he grants to Hearne's conclusions perhaps accounts for Franklin's general attitude towards the Inuit. Franklin seems sceptical concerning the Indians' constant warnings that the Esquimaux will overwhelm and kill them all, and he wonders what would happen only if "the Esquimaux were as hostile to strangers as the Copper Indians have invariably represented them to be" (343). Despite the fears of his Indian guides, Franklin characterizes the Esquimaux as a "harmless and defenceless people" (265) and a "persecuted nation" (289). When the Inuit flee at their approach, leaving only a terrified old man who is too frail to escape, Franklin's scepticism seems justified (351-52).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive study of gender and polar exploration, see Lisa Bloom's Gender on Ice (1993).

<sup>7</sup> As David Woodman's excellent study Unravelling the Franklin Mystery: Inuit Testimony shows, published accounts of the Franklin expeditions do not depict details of contact with the Inuit. Although highly unreliable historical sources, the texts include details selected in order to depict the authors' attitudes towards the Inuit.

Contact between white explorers and Inuit increased during the nineteenth century, and, gradually, explorers began to adopt Inuit methods of travel, dress, and diet in order to increase their chances of survival and success. At the same time, the Inuit continue to be regarded as alien, primitive people. For example, Elisha Kent Kane, who led an expedition in search of Franklin, records many encounters with groups of Inuit in Arctic Explorations (1856). Kane describes those who come aboard his ship as "rude and difficult to manage" (207), and he suspects them of trying to steal whatever they see (208). Even by his own account, Kane treats the Inuit as inferior, ordering them about, detaining them, and granting them "leave" to go as he wishes. In one instance, some women accused of stealing are stripped, tied, and marched thirty miles on his orders (366).

The stereotype of the Inuit as primitive yet pleasant and happy develops in twentieth-century travel literature. In Glimpses of the Barren Lands (1930), the fur-trading inspector for Révillon Frères, Thierry Mallet praises his Inuit friend Kakoot for doing his work "cheerfully" (93) and for being "the most intelligent and the most prosperous" in the region (85). Signalling the preoccupation with Inuit survival which still dominates representations of the north, Mallet passes most of his time pondering Inuit gravesites and envisions a day when "Indians and Eskimos would vanish"

as whites moved in (33).<sup>8</sup> The book ends with the dramatic tale of a young Inuit girl who, despite the death of everyone in her company, keeps travelling "with the unfailing courage of her race, until death, at last, mercifully struck her down" (142).<sup>9</sup>

Travels in the north increased in the 1940s and 1950s with the growth of nationalist feelings about the region brought on by enthusiastic plans for northern development. In 1943, Malcolm MacDonald, a member of Parliament determined to make Canadians "North-conscious" (viii), published Down North after two brief visits. MacDonald describes many aspects of Inuit material culture, arguing that the Inuit are a "distinct people and society" who risk being destroyed by "civilization" (202) and recommending policies to preserve "all that is best in Eskimo character and custom while adapting them to the inevitable changes of those times" (203). MacDonald's paternal attitude reveals itself in his choice of descriptive verbs: Eskimos "dawdle" and "gossip" (155) and are seen "gesticulating and chattering in incomprehensible gibberish" (63) while his efforts to make Canadians aware of the north is a striking

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<sup>8</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, Ann Fienup-Riordan identifies the emphasis on survival as a bias in ethnography about the Inuit in her book The Nelson Island Eskimo.

<sup>9</sup> Many critics, including LaVonne Brown Ruoff, Thomas King, and Louis Owens, acknowledge this pervasive "dying Indian" motif in North American culture.

example of how the north has been appropriated to the ends of official nationalism.

The representation of Inuit as primitive people threatened with extinction as a result of the inevitable arrival of civilization dominates this period. Mrs. Tom (Ella W.) Manning's Igloo for the Night (1946), an account of the author's years spent with her husband on the British-Canadian Arctic Expedition, records the encroachment of civilization as observed by a middle-class woman. In her preoccupation with social etiquette, Mrs. Manning acts as the civilizing feminine presence on the frontier that oldtimers fear: as more women arrive and houses are built, one oldtimer complains to her that the north has become "too civilized" (206).<sup>10</sup> Manning, who displays a keen interest in cleanliness and manners, is appalled by a group who are "dirty, ragged, and untidy," she writes, "especially the women and children, although a fatter lot I've never seen" (139). In another instance, she marvels that, despite the lack of discipline applied to Inuit children, they are "polite and well-mannered" and grow up to be "for the most part, such charming people, obedient, cheerful, courteous" (55). These comments underline her assertion that the "Eskimos are a happy people" (140).

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<sup>10</sup> Decades later, Hugh Brody observes nostalgic regret for the "life of nature" that has given way to the "life of culture" among "oldtimers" in The People's Land (1975).

Manning's book is typical of a post-war trend towards travel accounts written by the wives of Arctic adventurers.

Most of these books, including American Miriam MacMillan's I Married an Explorer (1951) and Jean Godsell's I Was No Lady . . . I Followed the Call of the Wild (1959), celebrate a husband's achievements. In their roles as feminine counterparts to their masculine partners, these women reproduce the binary structure of their relationships in the world they describe. Thus, descriptions of the Inuit contain implicit and explicit comparisons between the civilized and uncivilized as when Macmillan judges that the Eskimo although a "primitive people appear to be as bright and intelligent as the educated persons of a civilized world" (139).

The strict definition of gender roles structures Jean W. Godsell's book which, despite the title's claim to the contrary, ironically records the domesticating influence of a "lady's" presence in the North. By her own account, Godsell spends much energy creating a social scene that resembles southern life, throwing a Christmas party (75), organizing a dance (63), and making sure to cut the crusts off the sandwiches made by the Inuit women (59). In contrast to her genteel ways, Native characters are seen as primitive. One Native character "grunts," "sneaks," and has a "crafty look in his beady eyes" (64). Although she laments the end of northern isolation, Godsell regards the history of the North as a history of white pioneers, each of

whom "stood out, stark and alone, on his own pinnacle for opening up the Northland, and pushing back the frontier, was a job for individualists" (208).

Although she blames the degradation of the Native people on contact with whites (in an ironic demonstration of her point, all the Native people who attend her dance contract smallpox) and speaks out against residential schooling (109-10), Godsell represents little about Inuit culture, apart from female infanticide and ancient blood feuds (132), for which she draws on Hearne's description of Bloody Falls. In these passages, the Inuit are primitive, albeit innocent, objects of paternal care; thus, they are represented in the position of subordination Godsell and wives like her occupy in their own lives, and racial difference reflects gender difference.

Women and men from Canada, the United States, and Europe writing about their travels and experiences in the north in this period construct their narratives around a civilized-uncivilized binary. Thus, the Parisian author of Kabloona (1941), Gontran de Poncins, chooses to study the people of Central Arctic, the Netsilik, specifically because "they inhabited regions so remote and difficult to reach" and "still lived their primitive life of thousands of years ago" (4-5). For de Poncins, as for Jenness and others before him, the voyage north means gradually shedding the civilized self: "I, a child of civilization, had wandered in the course of a few weeks into the stone age," he writes

(xxvi). Kabloona emerges from the diaries and notes taken by de Poncins during his visit to the Central Arctic in 1938 at the historical moment that produced the modern ethnographic method based on fieldwork, the era dominated by the legacy of Franz Boas through the careers of his students Margaret Mead, A. L. Kroeber and others. The Netsilik exemplify the "uncivilized" mind, the "elementary being" (26) because they cannot "participate in an exchange of ideas," do "not think at all," and possess "no capacity for generalization" (109). As one who can "think" and "generalize," the Cartesian de Poncins considers himself to be only fulfilling a task the Netsilik are incapable of performing themselves.

Travel writing of the 1940s and 1950s shares certain tendencies with the fiction of the period, especially the use of the voyage north as a self-imposed exile away from feminizing civilization which allows the male protagonist to become an idealized masculine individual. The rough, violent, inarticulate men in Harry Bernard's Les jours sont longs (1951), André Langevin's Le temps des hommes (1956), and Hubert Evans's Mist on the River (1954) encounter aboriginal people who are an extension of a brutal and exacting natural world.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In The People's Land (1975), Hugh Brody observes that white inhabitants of the north he encountered during his stay still viewed Inuit people as "an embodiment of the land" living beyond civilization (82).



Realist representation dominates the fiction set in the north by Québécois and other francophone writers of the 1960s. Themes of cultural loss are figured in Gabrielle Roy's La rivière sans repos (1970) which thematizes the dilemma of encroaching modernity in the rape of an Inuit girl, Elsa, by an American G. I. The rape takes place in an atmosphere of cultural shift after Elsa and her friends walk home from the movies, linking their arms as girls in films do (3). The rape scene plays on the impact of the cinema as Elsa "était stupéfaite au point de séparer mal la réalité du buisson, de l'histoire d'amour vue à l'écran plus tôt dans la soirée et dont ceci pouvait sembler la suite" (127) and feels "tout était cependant tel qu'au cinéma, étrange, lointain, à peine vraisemblable" (126). The son conceived in this act becomes a symbol of the ambivalence of acculturation as Elsa takes on the daily routines of white people, sheds her own customs, and becomes confused:

Elle était une personne toute changée.

Elle aussi maintenant croyait en des  
choses comme l'ordre, la discipline,  
l'heure. (151)

It is difficult not to read Roy's text as a metaphor of north-south relations with the Inuit girl representing the north and her aggressor, the south. However, the opposition of a north defined by association with the feminine and the native to a south associated with white masculinity in this novel does not facilitate the masculine quest; rather, it

functions as a symbol of cultural contact. Roy's romantic image of Inuit culture threatened by modernity and miscegenation reveals a concern with the survival of collective identity.

Yves Thériault's Agoak (1975) also views acculturation as detrimental to Inuit culture, especially to the strict gender roles that Thériault depicted in Agaguk (1963). Yves Thériault's Agaguk, the first critically acclaimed novel about the Inuit, depicts Inuit culture as the violent, primitive continuation of the stone age.<sup>12</sup> Agaguk created stereotypes of Inuit characters as remnants of a brutal stone age by glorifying the representation of Inuit culture, especially of gender roles, in ethnographic accounts. Inuit life is depicted as primitive, and Inuit actions are instinctual. For example, when his wife, Iriook, gives birth, Agaguk is depicted as a savage who, consumed with fear and rage, believes she is possessed by an evil spirit.

Throughout the novel, Thériault depicts a lifestyle filled with gratuitous violence and ignorance, a hunting society in which Inuit women are subservient: the castration and cannibalism performed on RCMP officer Henderson seems to be included mainly for shock value as is the treachery exhibited by Chief Ramook when he murders his own people and frames his own son.

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<sup>12</sup> Although he has since recanted, John Moss once endorsed Agaguk as an "authentic representation" of Inuit life (Reader's Guide 325), a view shared by critics in Quebec until recently.

In Agoak (1975), contact is shown to have eroded the division of labour by gender, and the ideal hunting society has been corrupted by civilization. In Agoak, the narrator describes Agoak as far removed from Agaguk and the world "de froide misère et presque sauvagerie" (19). In this passage, the narrator describes Agoak's accommodation of white ways in a baffled tone:

Lui, l'Inuk versé en informatique, agréé  
comptable de banque, préférant les  
vêtements des Blancs et la nourriture des  
Blancs, et ayant délaissé depuis  
longtemps le mode de pensée esquimau,  
rejetait par un instinct aussi spontané  
qu'incompréhensible, la vie parmi les  
Blancs, à leur niveau et presque dans  
leurs meubles. (21)

Thériault seems to lament the disappearance of the real Eskimo along with "la prescience qui avait été longtemps l'arme la plus efficace de l'Inuk, et qui expliquait plus que toute autre chose son incroyable survie à travers des dizaines de milliers d'années dans un pays soumis à un climat impossible à décrire tant il est cruel, destructeur, implacable, inexorable" (25). This loss is most acute in the case of women who signify an even closer link to nature and whose emancipation, therefore, represents an even greater loss of culture:

A travers les millénaires, la fille esquimaude a joué son rôle de bête de somme, d'esclave, de femelle soumise sans rechigner. Il en était ainsi, et personne n'aurait songé à changer le cours de choses. Depuis toujours la femme apprenait la patience, la résignation, et comme toute pensée de révolte n'avait aucun sens dans l'organisation humaine qui l'entourait, elle n'éprouvait finalement pas de frustration réelle. (15)

The reaction of Judith at Agoak's leaving is "instinctive, nullement raisonnée" (16). In Roy's gentler depiction, the concern is with a loss of collective identity not with the individual's quest. Similarly, in Mordecai Richler's The Incomparable Atuk (1963) and Solomon Gursky Was Here (1989), the Inuit are used as figures in the representation of other cultures not their own.

Contemporary works set in the north, no longer depict Inuit people as part of the natural environment or as remnants of the stone age; rather, novels such as Rudy Wiebe's A Discovery of Strangers (1994) and travel writing such as Aritha van Herk's Places Far from Ellesmere (1990) attempt to describe Inuit culture in its own terms by inquiring into and trying to represent the Inuit point of view. In this endeavour, such texts resemble the

ethnographic accounts discussed in chapter 1. Yet, while the representation of Inuit people has veered away from some of the images used in the past, it is still characterized by a preoccupation with cultural survival and an emphasis on traditional and pre-contact culture.

### **The Inuit in Children's Literature**

The two predominant themes in children's literature and school textbooks about the Inuit, survival and extinction, mirror those in books for adults. Children learn that Inuit culture is "a miracle of survival" (Shemie 3) because "they accepted what life brought them and improvised when it fell short of their needs" (Siska 11). Many books written about the Inuit for children stress the environmentally-sound lifestyle of the hunting society. This gives a slight twist to the survival theme running through most accounts of Inuit culture as children learn how the Inuit "took from the land only what they needed to survive" (Siska 8). However, they also learn that the Inuit way of life is disappearing, a message reflected by titles like Jan Reynolds's Frozen Land: Vanishing Cultures (1993). Encouraging children to learn about the Inuit before their way of life vanishes, as Reynolds's text does, replicates the "dying Indian" motif

prevailing in other genres." In the most hopeful convergence of the survival and extinction themes, the Inuit are said to have "found new ways of surviving in the Arctic" although few of the old ways survive "except their art" and although "the lives of the people of the ice have been changed forever" (Siska 46).

If, as ethnographer John S. Matthiasson writes, "[s]chool children from around the world know about the romantic people who lived in igloos and hunted sea mammals for food" (9), it is because Inuit culture has been used (along with other aboriginal cultures) to teach tolerance of differences in new programmes of multicultural education. It is not only the ethnographer's view of Inuit culture that children encounter: Inuit literature itself has been classified as children's literature, as Robin McGrath explains, probably because much of it is illustrated. As a result, readers have had a tendency to read it as such and to dismiss the literary value of traditional stories. Indeed, most writing transcribed from Inuit oral tradition has been categorized and taught as children's literature.

In adventure stories written for a young audience, both spiritual and material aspects of Inuit culture are usually represented as Inuit characters intervene in the conflict

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" Canadian readers would have encountered the motif in the work of Confederation poet Duncan Campbell Scott, especially his article "The Last of the Indian Treaties" in which he remarks that the "Indian nature now seems like a fire that is waning, that is smouldering and dying away in ashes" (Oppel 495).

between the individual and the environment by offering the means of surviving. The aboriginal characters help and guide the individual on his journey to freedom and self-discovery. In C. W. Nicol's White Shaman (1979) and in James Houston's Spirit Wrestler (1980), the spiritual transformation of the hero forms the basis of the plot. The hero of White Shaman, Richard, has mystical experiences of increasing intensity throughout the narrative culminating in his sacrificial death. Here, the Inuit are depicted as having access to a distinct spiritual experience. Most of these experiences occur when he is alone hunting, such as the time when he suspects that "he had sprung from a form that had feared land, and that this thing, remnant within him, drew him to the Sea Mother" (112). Each time Richard has such an experience, he describes it in terms of his knowledge of Inuit traditions; as a result, his initiation into manhood runs parallel to his gradual assimilation of Inuit spirituality, until the narrator acknowledges the successful transformation:

His was a metamorphosis of the spirit,  
with Tik gone, and Tikkisi emerging as  
one of strength. The slate was wiped  
clean by shock and amnesia, and Richard  
Tavett, once known as Tik, had indeed  
become Tikkisi, but while Tik had always  
been searching for self, the thought  
that such a problem should even exist

never crossed Tikkisi's mind. He was.

He lived. (150)

Richard's successful initiation is an affirmation of self. By mimicking Inuit spirituality, he gains access to an ontologically given status ("He was. He lived.") which means that he no longer has to worry about becoming. Because he is a "white shaman" mimicking Inuit identity, he is freed from problems of self-definition because Inuit identity is not achievement; it simply is. And Richard simply is a man.<sup>14</sup> As I will show in chapter 3, shaman status also allows Tik to transcend the troubling ethical consequences of his actions. As Tikkisi, he possesses the power to will things into being, and his threats against Philip become reality. While Tik's mentor, Ipeelee, warns him against abusing his power, he does not blame Tik for Philip's death, and Tik never comes to terms with the role he has played in that event.

James Houston's Spirit Wrestler features the voice of Shoona, "a shaman of the northern Paleo-Asiatic type, one of a long line of shamans so ancient that we can only guess when their order first began" (305). Houston based the experiences of Shoona on knowledge gained during twelve years living among the Baffin Island Inuit where, he claims, "[a]ll the events and shamanistic practices recounted here were not unusual" (305). Shoona's story is narrated by a

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<sup>14</sup> For an extended discussion of how he works to secure his masculine identity, see chapter 5.



Northern Service Officer who receives the story mysteriously from Shoona's spirit and who mediates his position as ventriloquist by asserting that "[t]he important thing is that the story of Shoona's life was given to me" (14).

Like the narrator of Houston's The White Dawn (1971), Avinga, Shoona narrates from a first-person point of view, but his story is framed by the events following his arrival at the Service Officer's door. At the end of the book, it becomes clear in the framing narrative that Shoona has been dead throughout his communication with the officer. While his power as a shaman, tested throughout the story, seems to be articulated in this communication, it does not alter the fact that Shoona is one more dead aboriginal person in Canadian literature whose voice has been taken over by a white.

While children's literature romanticizes the traditions of the past as authentic and laments their contamination by influences like television, literature for young adults focuses on timeless spirituality. The reception of literature by Inuit people shows a preference in southern audiences for images of Inuit life before these influences were felt. By romanticizing tradition, texts for young people give Inuit culture a pure, ahistorical form that has

value as a static repository of difference and identity."<sup>15</sup> Maintaining a notion of Inuit cultural purity, represented in the images of smiling Eskimos and igloos illustrating children's books, allows Canadians to foster an image of the Inuit as innocent and afflicted, a passive, feminized image that dates back to Hearne's description of Bloody Falls.

### **Inuit Self-Representation**

The Inuit have fascinated writers of ethnography and fiction perhaps more than any other single aboriginal group. Because the Inuit are still subjected to the anthropological study which produces ethnography, and their literature to readings for anthropological information, a study of Inuit self-representation makes an appropriate and necessary complement to the preceding chapter's study of the representations made by anthropologists in ethnographies. Moreover, as members of a society living in neo-colonial conditions, the Inuit occupy a privileged position in relation to representational issues; that is, as Donna Haraway would say, they are on to the god-trick, the "denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge" (Simians 191). Aboriginal people have what the authors of The Empire Writes Back call "a capacity, far greater than

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<sup>15</sup> It has come to my attention that Arnold Krupat uses the same image, quoting David Hollinger's theory on how cultures (and something called "sub-cultures") can be used as "repositories" available to humanistic studies or "that can be drawn upon in the interests of a more comprehensive outlook on the world" (242).

that of white settler societies, to subvert received assumptions about literature" (Empire 144). However, it does not seem necessary to me to look only to the ways aboriginal writing can be valuable to an understanding of non-aboriginal literature or to the "received assumptions" the post-colonial theorists mention; rather, the task of literary criticism of aboriginal writing should be understanding its own features, not embedding it in a national or post-colonial canon. Criticism of literature by aboriginal people in Canada, in this case the Inuit, should also be a forum for examining how aboriginal writing undergoes an appropriation of experience and imagination paralleling the appropriation of real territory by the Canadian state. In this context, the uniqueness of the Inuit case lies in the way Inuit culture has been depicted by national discourses of identity.

As early as the 1960s, some anthropologists questioned the accuracy of depicting the Inuit as culturally homogeneous and distinct. While these anthropologists argued that a contact-traditional lifestyle was emerging in response to rapid social change,<sup>16</sup> the representation of Inuit art and literature, especially by museums, continued to focus on the past life of Inuit culture, and, as the previous chapter notes, this past life is commonly figured through a focus on the hunt and the theme of survival.

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<sup>16</sup> For an expanded discussion see John Matthiasson's Living on the Land (1992).

Today, although Inuit self-representation exists, museum exhibits still tend to reflect southern Canadian interest in artifacts from traditional material culture; hence, the story of the Inuit as told by another culture for another culture.

With institutional approval to back their position as authorities, anthropologists, explorers, and even curators have come to play a significant role in defining what is authentic about the traditional culture (Harry 148). In this process, they are led by a consuming interest in survival. Traditions--identified, preserved, and, in some sense, created by outsiders--are valued because they are believed to have survived unchanged from the pre-contact past. The preference for past tradition, evident in the popularity of Native storytelling, "places Native people in the museum with all the other extinct species" according to Daniel David Moses (Moses and Goldie xiii). A similar reification of Inuit culture as a remnant of the stone age past informs anthropological readings of Inuit literature.

While non-Inuit writers have historically depicted Inuit in ways that enhance and serve their narratives, Inuit self-representation deals with local political and material concerns.<sup>17</sup> Speaking for others within the culture comes to

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<sup>17</sup> As Arnold Krupat notes, Native American fiction features "homing in rather than moving out" through the quest (114).

be an act of political as well as aesthetic representation."<sup>18</sup>

Inuit writing does not affirm the attributes conferred by outsiders. Unlike writing about the north by southern Canadians, which situates the north and its inhabitants neatly within the Canadian nation, Inuit writing refuses to invoke a national position; nor does it celebrate its own "Canadianness" or "nordicity." In fact, Inuit leaders usually address Canada from the oppositional position indicated in John Amagoalik's promise after the 1984 First Ministers' conference to "continue to have discussions with the government of Canada on Nunavut" (qtd. in Petrone, Northern Voices 264).

While contemporary representation of Inuit tends to romanticize Inuit culture and to homogenize differences in timeless images, Inuit writing tends to present a complex integration of the insider's information and the outsider's expectations. As members of a minority, the Inuit bear the burden of explanation: southern writers might imagine the Inuit to be whatever they want, but Inuit writers have a responsibility to themselves as a misrepresented or unrepresented constituency. The pressure to explain oneself to those with more power, whose position means not having to know or even to listen, a privilege that exercising

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<sup>18</sup> This feature of Inuit writing has affinities with post-colonial literature as theorized in The Empire Writes Back; for example, in the way African writers stress the social relevance of their work and its importance in the community rather than the individual's career (126).

tolerance implies (Spelman 182), typically falls on the members of the marginal group. In this abstract sense, the struggle for self-representation accompanying the struggle for self-government in Inuit and other First Nations communities resembles the discovery of subjectivity by other marginalized groups including women in various societies. Yet Inuit literature in English is distinct in that its political form comes from the traditional belief that words can bring events into being, and it serves a practical political purpose by addressing the national culture in one of its official languages.

Anthropologists generally agree on the status of Inuit culture as "a way of life that is rapidly vanishing" (Briggs 262) or, more dramatically, "for which the death knell has already been tolled" (Matthiasson 12). When Inuit suggest that their culture is dying, their meaning is quite different, because it is inspired by a desire for continuity and renewal, not a wish to commemorate what is past. Many older Inuit people fear that their culture will die with them, and their initiative has produced collections such as Mark Kalluak's How Kabloonat Became and Other Stories (1974). An example of what Robin McGrath calls "authentic literature," Kalluak's collection attributes each story to its teller and cites Kalluak as editor and translator. Included in the collection are a variety of tales about traditional figures such as Kiviok, Mahaha, and Kaugyagyuk as well as the usual stories of orphans and animal spouses.

The stories preserved at the insistence of the older generation do not corroborate observations made in ethnographies; in fact, traditional stories dispute many assumptions held by outsiders, especially concerning gender roles. The notion of Inuit culture as a pure and dying one allows for the naturalization of gender categories in the writing of outsiders. By concentrating on traditional Inuit life in the past, outsiders can project naturalized gender differences onto Inuit culture, and, in the worst cases, to describe gender in terms which are comforting to those confused about changes in contemporary gender expectations.

Differences in how outsiders represent the Inuit and how the Inuit represent themselves demonstrate the ideological function of representation, specifically with reference to the representation of gender. For example, although Alice French mentions female infanticide and notes a preference for boys because a girl is "of little value until she married and brought home a hunter and trapper" (4), traditional stories do not reflect this point of view.

Similarly, Jenness's acquiescent Jenny and subservient Icehouse are nowhere to be found in the traditional stories collected by Kappi, Kalluak, and others. Neither are the pliant, silent, Inuit women who populate the adventure stories to be discussed in chapter 3: Houston's Panee, Horwood's Nasha, or Kelley's Anu. In traditional stories, there are strong women, women who act without men, and women who, far from needing to be saved, save others. "The

Huntress" tells of a wife who learns from an old woman that her husband is tired of her and plans to kill her. The wife not only escapes him, but travels to another shore where she saves a town from a terrible ogre (Nanogak, Tales N. pag.).

In both "Mother Bear and Two Sons" and "Raven Who Took a Sea Gull Wife," a deserting husband who leaves his wife for another woman is killed when the original wife decides to take revenge (Kappi N. pag.). "Flying Sledge" tells of a girl who refuses to take a husband because she is a successful hunter herself and who, when she agrees to marry an orphan boy, is carried away with him on a magic sled as a reward for her act (Kappi N. pag.).

Traditional stories are also filled with murdered and murderous women, but there seems to be no predisposition in either men or women to be evil or good, and no activity restricted to one sex or the other. Instead, the stories suggest, as ethnographer Jean Briggs argues, that "[t]here is nothing holy to [the Eskimos] about the sexual division of labour; neither is there, according to the Inuit, anything inherent in the nature of either sex that makes it incapable of doing some of the jobs that the other sex ordinarily does" (270).<sup>19</sup> Despite the interesting opposition to anthropological accounts these stories make, problems

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Bodenhorn's "'I'm not the Great Hunter, My Wife Is': Inupiat and the Anthropological Models of Gender" and Ann Fienup-Riordan's The Nelson Island Eskimo also show the observed division of labour to be a product of the ethnographer's assumptions about gender.



arise when moving from the representation of Inuit life in traditional stories to the way Inuit people actually live; these are the problems posed by reading for anthropological meaning and value. While Inuit literature attempts to represent real experience accurately, it is not the transparent window realist ethnographers seek, the window on the real life of the Inuit as they are "when only God is looking."

### **The Reception of Inuit Writing**

One of the major critical positions undermining the reception of literature by aboriginal peoples assumes that writing by aboriginal people carries a primarily anthropological value. Aboriginal cultural expression of any form has been judged for its value as artifact perhaps because, as critics Thomas King and Tony Hall point out, scholars continue to believe that Native cultures are rapidly becoming extinct. Traditional stories have been collected like the other bits of material culture furnishing museum displays which commemorate the death of aboriginal culture. Transferring ownership of culture through ownership of artifacts to the state allows the nation to consolidate its ownership of the land, for, in the words of Michael Walzer, the connection between people and the land is a "crucial feature of national identity" (44). Native culture must be swept aside for this to happen, and as Margery Fee's important article argues, the transfer of

cultural material from aboriginal to Canadian ownership is analogous to the territorial appropriation of land ("Romantic Nationalism" 17). Both actions help build the nation's institutions from museums to literary canons.

Literary criticism has played a role in this colonization. In his introduction to an issue of Canadian Literature devoted to Native writers, W. H. New describes how the intersection of anthropological and literary interests in criticism denies the literary value of writing by Native people:

Native speakers, writers, singers, and tale-tellers have long contributed creatively to tribal culture. Indirectly they have contributed to national culture, too, but to the degree that the nation did not, would not, listen, their activities were regarded (when acknowledged at all) as primitive, pagan, curious, quaint, and collectible rather than as intrinsically artistic.

(7)

Critics treat writing by Native people much as Canadians treat most issues pertaining to Native peoples: as a point of reference for the national culture, something to be accommodated, tolerated, and sometimes assimilated. Rather than consider how aboriginal writing, art, or politics is constituted through its own conventions and methods, many

assume the aboriginal culture to be ontologically given; it can be appreciated or collected without explanation or interpretation. Indeed, New's remarks introduce a kind of collection, the special issue on Native literature, which, Frank Davey argues, is "a token compensation for a continuing exclusion" if it "becomes a lavish token of kinds of criticism that have not occurred in preceding regular issues" (70-71).

As part of what Benedict Anderson calls the "totalizing classificatory grid" imposed by the "state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth" become part of the nation's treasures (184). In a startling example of Anderson's identification of the relationship between census, map, and museum, the Canadian state began its bid for northern sovereignty by sending in the Geological Survey and by issuing serial numbers to all Inuit people on disks worn around the neck. Tony Hall points out how the activities of intellectuals in universities continue this project of territorial colonization:

Just as museums have not shaken their legacy as educational handmaidens to colonization, so too universities often represent imperialistic orientations to knowledge and authority that are often antithetical to Aboriginal systems of knowledge and belief. (81)

Hall's assessment of how universities treat aboriginal subjects and aboriginal students by submitting them to non-aboriginal methods warns against committing a similar mistake by relying on the limited view of Inuit culture as a static survivor from the stone age past and making that view a point of reference for national culture.

### **The Problem with Authenticity**

Inuit literature in English has been newly acknowledged by the anglo-Canadian academy that once excluded aboriginal writing in English because the challenge such literature presented to received notions of form and genre made it difficult to categorize. Inuit literature, with its ancient oral tradition and varied contemporary forms, can only be considered a new or emerging one in the limited context of this new reception. Inuit texts in English merge conventions from oral and written Inuit literature with forms from other literary traditions in order to preserve tradition and to accommodate modernity. As a result, what Inuit literature in English requires is the "ethnocritical" approach advocated by Arnold Krupat and described as "complex interactions between a variety of Western discursive and analytic modes and a variety of non-Western modes of knowing and understanding" (Ethnocriticism 43-44). By drawing on diverse critical approaches, critics can listen to the voices of subjectivities and communities in process, and thereby refuse to make those voices refer back

to national culture. This is the task set for those who wish to study aboriginal people's literature in an ethically defensible manner.

While it is important to emphasize that individuals can often describe their own experience accurately, and that realism is an important tool in this representation, emphasizing authenticity means reading texts only for their mimetic function, for the reality they are supposed to reflect. Because most literature written about the north represents people inhabiting the north, it is possible to refer to that literature as ethnographic, regardless of its affiliation with fictional, scientific, or historical genres. Native literature is expected to present the real native point of view as if it were unmediated and readily accessible to the aboriginal writer. In critical discourse, this expectation may arise from the heavy investment in realism made by other forms of writing about aboriginal peoples, especially in the north, including ethnographic monographs, westerns, and adventure stories. As I argue in chapter 1, the postmodernist turn in ethnography has not altered this situation substantially. In the preceding chapter, "realism" was discussed in the context of the "ethnographic realism" and the postmodern responses to it serving anthropology's institutionalization as a discipline.

Ethnographic realism, as Marcus and Cushman observe, relies on "the idea that there is a reality independent of the researcher whose nature can be known, and that the aim of

research is to produce accounts that correspond to that reality" (43), a configuration which depends on the ontologically given nature of culture. What happens when the "subject culture" uses realism to speak out? The realism deployed by Inuit authors functions in different ways to represent the north and to express different concerns about the north.

Anthropological readings of aboriginal literature, that is, those readings which treat Inuit literature as if it were ethnography by focusing on the description of the culture, ignore literary value and value authenticity. At a time when postmodern ethnography and post-structural literary theory challenge the real, aboriginal literature is expected to provide "real" anthropological and historical detail, and this expectation suggests, according to Thomas King, that "race imparts to the Native writer a tribal understanding of the universe, access to a distinct culture, and a literary perspective that is unattainable by non-Natives" ("Introduction" 4). Given the intense desire to be heard expressed by Native writers, positing incommensurable perspectives in this way seems inconsistent, and King calls it "a romantic, mystical, and in many instances, a self-serving notion" ("Introduction" 5).

It is necessary to distinguish between the assumption that revising myths and stereotypes of Inuit culture is useful and the assumption that Inuit authors access some essential truth about their culture by virtue of being.

Inuit. The latter assumption reflects the "dying Indian motif" that aboriginal writing seeks to undermine. The difficulty with outsiders' versions of Inuit life is not that they are more or less authentic, but that they are received as authentic. Images of Inuit have been controlled historically at least, by non-Inuit as Victoria Freeman writes:

While many books have been written about the Arctic or about Inuit people, very little of what has been written has reflected an Inuit viewpoint: Inuit and non-Inuit alike have seen Inuit culture reflected through southern eyes.

("Baffin Writer's Project" 266)

Inuit self-representation seeks to revise this situation by providing images to counter prevailing stereotypes and by revising traditional forms. When Inuit writers use realism, it functions quite differently from ethnographic realism; when the real is represented by a subject culture, realism is used both as a claim to authority and as a counter-discursive move against the representation provided in the writing by non-Inuit.

For a long time, talking about Inuit culture has meant talking about Inuit traditions, that is, the traditions as they were before contact. As a result, Inuit literature in English has been expected to reflect only an idea of the authentic, that is, the past, in northern experience. In

Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition

(1984), a book dedicated to proving that Inuit culture is not dying but changing (53, passim), Robin McGrath identifies several problems arising from the stress on authenticity in Inuit literature written in English besides the fact that it tends to relegate Inuit culture to a stone age past. The reception of Markoosie's Harpoon of the Hunter (1970) illustrates the first danger of reading traditional stories only as representations of the authentic: because reviews of the novel emphasized the mistakes in the text, they failed to assess or, in some cases, even address, the literary value of the story (83-84). The second danger arises when Inuit writers borrow songs and images from other cultures, and, as in the case of Mary Panegooshoo's "Where are the Stories of My People?," readers may assume they are reading an authentic description of Inuit life when at times they are reading the words of an African (112).

Inuit literature challenges the supposed transparency of the authentic text, which suggests that the text has immediate access to the real; indeed, it calls for a new meaning of authenticity. "Authentic literature," in Robin McGrath's estimation, names the storyteller and any translators involved, lists the languages the story may have been filtered through, identifies any additions or omissions, and retains inconsistencies in the translation. In other words, an authentic text of traditional aboriginal



literature looks something like a critical edition. It is not enough to accommodate Inuit literature through tolerance, McGrath argues; instead, she advocates subjecting Inuit literature in English to "the same academic attention that we give literature by English-Canadian or French-Canadian writers" (702).

### **Inuit Autobiography**

Inuit literature's accommodation of modernity, which undermines the stability of the "authentic," reflects intersecting linguistic, historical, political, and social pressures. Inuit literature written in English merges oral and written, Inuit and European, past and present traditions. It is characterized by attempts to preserve tradition and to accommodate outside influences. For example, some of the earliest Inuit writings in English, autobiographies written by the Inuit of Labrador, show the ambivalence towards identity indicative of the cultural métissage that Dale Blake explores in "Women of Labrador: Realigning North from the Site(s) of Métissage." Some writers used the autobiographical form to espouse English culture while disowning aboriginal identity.

In Northern Voices, Penny Petrone traces Inuit autobiography back to testimonials recorded by Moravian missionaries as early as 1776 (58), and continuing in the Inuktitut after a written form was developed (103). Writing one's life story began as a religious imperative, encouraged

by Christian missionaries, and, as such, early examples tend to show the author's appreciation for and assimilation into the new, colonizing culture. For the missionaries who solicited works by Inuit people, the autobiography testified to their success in converting aboriginal people (Petrone 57). For them, English ancestry, Christianity, and English literacy, not aboriginal heritage, authorized individuals as writers. In Woman of Labrador (1982), Elizabeth Goudie tells how her son was named Robert Bruce to celebrate her husband's Scottish background (53) yet speaks of "Eskimos" with a distance that denies her own Inuit heritage. Almost one hundred years earlier, Goudie's great-aunt, Lydia Campbell, distances herself from her mother's Inuit identity in her Sketches of Labrador Life (1893) by apologizing for her father's choice of bride:

Then of course they had to take wives of  
the natives of this country. There were  
very few white men here, much less  
women. . . . (8)

When Campbell describes the decline of the Inuit, which she blames on alcohol and tobacco, she never includes herself among the afflicted population--although she is half Inuit.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In the course of correspondence with Dale Blake, I have come to consider the distance that Campbell creates between herself and other Natives to be part of her assertion of an independent, "authentic" self, and not necessarily a sign of self-loathing. In her essay "Women of Labrador: Realigning North from the Site(s) of Métissage," Blake argues that Campbell, Goudie, and Baikie celebrate mixed blood heritage specifically, and this celebration accounts for the differentiation from other groups (MS 17).

Dale Blake notes that Campbell's sense of racial identity is "oblique" although her autobiography is "generally highly suggestive of Inuit oral myths and legends, with their humour, violence, excitement, superstition, and often unhappy endings" (MS 8) it also relies heavily on Christian themes. In a passage that must have pleased the Anglican father, Campbell engages her religious values by writing that when the Inuit were more plentiful, the "poor souls had no religion whatsoever, besides the rum bottle and biscuits and butter" (11). Campbell concentrates on her father's tales of his home in England (7-8) and continues to describe the poor "Eskimo" as if she has no connection to them (10-11, 29). The use of autobiographical form shows signs of colonial acculturation through identification with the authority figure endorsing her work and disavowal of the aboriginal mother. At the same time, in the autobiographical form, one hears the voices silenced by ethnographers like Jenness, the voices of Inuit women speaking about their own experiences, or, as Blake suggests, they provide a complex representation of and engagement with aboriginal heritage.

Autobiography becomes increasingly political in the twentieth century although the tradition of white sponsorship continues, albeit with quite different motivation, in publications such as Anthony Apakark Thrasher's autobiography, Thrasher . . . Skid Row Eskimo (1976). According to the book's foreword, Thrasher was

first encouraged by his lawyer to write his story and wrote it while waiting to stand trial for manslaughter; later, two journalists made it their job to "collate what was essentially a loose-leaf diary into narrative form, authenticate that narrative as thoroughly as possible and expand it" (x). The editors' interest in Thrasher's manuscript can be described as anthropological. Sceptical about the accuracy of his statements, they verified every detail before publication. Their concern with accuracy means ignoring the account's form or literary characteristics even though they claim responsibility for putting it into narrative form.

Like his contemporary, Minnie Aodla Freeman, Thrasher first left the north to attend a training course; like Freeman, he suffered the culture shock of coming south. But unlike Freeman, who took a job in Ottawa, Thrasher was deposited in a Skid Row motel in Edmonton and never got much further. He remembers beatings he received, liquor he drank, and women he slept with as well as the incidents he has in common with Freeman, for example, learning how to cross the street at the traffic light (72-73). While his story concentrates on the sordid aspects of street life, its political subtext can be observed in his nostalgic memories of life in the north and in comments concerning changes to Inuit way of life. Describing his difficulty coping with life in the south, Thrasher writes,

My people in the North were struggling with the same problems. Southern ways were spreading into the Arctic, and my people knew nothing of these new habits and customs, and couldn't grasp many simple things that the white man had accepted for decades. (75-76)

Thrasher makes his experience of alienation a political statement on behalf of other Inuit. He idealizes his past life and promotes a view of the Inuit as "a docile people, trusting and loving" (161), a view which his own violent life hardly makes plausible. By presenting himself as a victim, he undermines his responsibility for his actions, including the death for which he ends up being convicted, so his account seems problematic at best.

There are many narrative inconsistencies in his book; for example, when Thrasher claims he "read in a medical book that alcohol slows your body's blood pressure down, and gives you resistance to heat" right after he writes: "I couldn't read labels at all, and I ended up chewing laxatives like candy" (75). If these are exaggerations, they suggest that Thrasher's autobiography might be better understood in the tradition of the song duel, just as I. Nuligak (1966) can be better understood as a meeting place for the autobiographical form and the structure of the Kaujjarjuk legend (McGrath, Canadian Inuit 103). Thrasher's boastful exaggeration and his unreliability can be read as

participating in the general one-up-man-ship of the song duel form that allows for both the settling of an account and the proof of one's masculinity. However, Thrasher . . . Skid Row Eskimo has been read as a window on the miserable life of urban aboriginal people rather than a book with possible literary merit.

Alice French's My Name Is Masak (1976) features the same integration of romanticized views of traditional life and sordid scenes of the effects of acculturation. French concentrates on her childhood, especially life in residential school, but her autobiography also preserves details of material culture such as a passage in which she describes the use made of a whale carcass (70). In both autobiographies, the author tells the life story of the community while telling her or his personal story, and this gives the autobiography a broader political significance.

Although autobiographies provide valuable ethnographic information to contradict the often skewed perspective of ethnographic representation, they are not simply artifacts of a culture. As products of close collaboration with white editors, the autobiographies by Campbell, Goudie, and Thrasher are what Krupat identifies as "Indian autobiographies" rather than "autobiographies by Indians" which are self-written and edited (Ethnocriticism 219). How much influence can be attributed to editing by clergy is uncertain. The editor of Lydia Campbell's sketches admits in the preface to "omitting only a sentence or two of no

particular interest," yet more subtle narrative blanching could have occurred. Despite the efforts of authors and editors, however, signs of Inuit culture persist in these texts. For example, Lydia Campbell concentrates on the errors of her youth, because Inuit women are taught that it is "unseemly to discuss their accomplishments, although it is quite acceptable to recall the errors of childhood and adolescence" (McGrath and Petrone 316). Two more recent autobiographies, Alice French's My Name Is Masak (1976) and Minnie Aodla Freeman's Life Among the Qalunaat (1978), repeat the Inuit convention by dealing primarily with childhood experiences. As the cases of Thrasher . . . Skid Row Eskimo and I. Nuligak show, autobiographies written by Inuit form a continuum with Inuit oral tradition, and, as Life Among the Qalunaat and My Name is Masak show, their authors act as political spokespeople for the community.

Minnie Aodla Freeman's Life Among the Qalunaat is perhaps the best-known Inuit autobiography and serves as an example of the important political function of Inuit literature written in English. According to Heather Henderson, Freeman "speaks for" her people (62) because, by "[m]oving beyond the personal to the public and political, she becomes a spokeswoman protesting injustice" (65). Because the "egotism" needed to write autobiography is antithetical to Inuit ways, Henderson argues, Freeman subverts autobiography by using her life story to voice the collective experience of her people. But Henderson need not

submit that the Inuit way, that is, one not driven by ego needs, is the authentic experience underwriting Freeman's authorization as a spokeswoman. One need only look to the content of the book to understand it as literature with a political value. In fact, Freeman makes her book's thesis plain when she laments the passing of the Inuit culture she knew, writing "I miss my dear people who are becoming stranger, even to me, covering their familiar ways with another culture" (217).

In passages like this one, the self represented is not without ego, but it is identified with the rest of the community. This is the "part-to-whole" relationship that Krupat has called the "synecdochic self," one marked by a sense of the self "in relation to collective social units or groupings" rather than the more prevalent North American notion that each person possesses an interiorized self separate from other distinct individuals (Ethnocriticism 212). It is clear that people who do not base definitions of the self on individuality would not represent themselves as rugged individuals, and this may be the most important factor contributing to the differences between Inuit and non-Inuit representations of the north and the people in it.

Throughout her autobiography, Freeman demonstrates her connection to her community by documenting experiences bearing on important political issues, such as the racial prejudice evident in an encounter with the teacher who refers to students as "you natives" (195) or the stereotype



contained in the white vision of Inuit as "smiling happy people" (194). She describes how she was used to represent Northern Affairs while she worked for the department as a translator in an ironic account of how Eskimo images are made:

I found myself one day in a building with a lot of big cameras. Then I was made to put on a parka in the middle of July, when the temperature outside was eighty degrees. It would not have been so bad inside the building, but up I went, right to the roof, where the sun beamed down. A man made a movie of me while I drank ginger ale. I understood that I was advertising the ginger ale.

(41)

While the irony in the situation gives the passage its humour, Freeman uses that humour to underline her feeling of exploitation by following it with the understated yet painful observation: "Seeing my picture on the back of Pure Spring Ginger Ale trucks made me feel uneasy" (41).

In another moment when an event in her life takes on a political meaning, she tells how she was asked to pose for a photographer sitting at a desk with something in her hand and later discovered her picture in the newspaper:

The story read: 'Eskimos buying bonds, keeping up with progress,' some remark

like that. I felt sick. I had no idea what bonds were. My parents had never even heard about them, let alone buy them. Today my father still has no idea what bonds are, though he has been working with Northern Affairs for the last thirteen years. I felt sick because I was being used to show the gallunaat in the South how well the Inuit are treated in the North. (65)

In such passages, Freeman speaks of her own experiences while placing them in the collective context. Freeman's work signals the political relevance of most Inuit literature written in English.

Autobiographies record experience that other accounts downplay or ignore, especially the experiences of women, and for that, they are important as ongoing revisions of ethnographic documents. Lydia Campbell's autobiography contradicts fictional descriptions of love stories involving white men and Inuit women by exposing the cruelty of one Englishman towards his Native wife (27) and by telling a cautionary tale about how a woman who died "under her husband's care" haunted him after he took up with a young girl (14). Meanwhile, her admiration for her sister, Hannah, acknowledges the abilities that go unnoticed in images of passive, silent Inuit women:

I wish there were more Hannahs in the world for braveness. She brought up her first family of little children when their father died, taught all to read and write in the long winter nights, and hunt with them in the day, got about a dozen foxes and as many martens. (6)

When Alice French describes how her grandmother Susie runs the household, she adds that many women acted as heads of the household in her community (60). According to French, women also decided who should marry whom (76).

The responsibilities outlined by French stand in sharp contrast to the lack of freedom described by her contemporary, Elizabeth Goudie. Goudie describes the difficulty she has adjusting to her life as a trapper's wife as follows:

I was young and liked gay life. I liked dancing and visiting friends. Jim thought I ought to stay at home with him. Life was very dull for me at first but I got used to it. It was the custom for the man to run the home, the women took second place. A woman could have her say around the house but about the main things in life, the man always had his say. His word went for most everything. (50)

In several instances, Goudie complains of boredom, which is part of her construction of her life as one hardship after another.<sup>21</sup> The discrepancy between her version of women's place and French's may be attributed to regional cultural differences or the greater degree to which the Labrador Inuit mixed with Europeans, but it is clear that they stem from different values, with Goudie's experiences most closely resembling those reported by ethnographers.

Although Minnie Aodla Freeman's autobiography does not describe the enforcement of the division of labour according to gender roles, it does articulate certain expectations affecting her during her youth. In one instance, she describes the kind of woman Inuit men dream about as "gentle, kind and understanding" (187); in another, her father's advice suggests that women are expected to make their marriages work (201). In matters of gender, she wants guidance, but she equates her confusion about gender expectations with the loss of her Inuit identity. At residential school, as she approaches puberty, she experiences a kind of culture shock when she realizes that, in her absence from the community and her family, she has not been trained in the appropriate womanly tasks (140). She feels that her development has been stunted. Yet, she

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<sup>21</sup> Comparisons can be made between her experiences as a trapper's wife and those recorded in Olive A. Fredrickson's The Silence of the North (1972). Fredrickson, a white woman living in northern British Columbia, glorifies the pioneer lifestyle by focusing on hardships, too.

is just as confused and alienated when her period arrives while she is at home in her community, and she complains that no one will tell her what is going on (145).

Introducing Armand Tagoona's Shadows (1975), George Swinton recognizes how the fusion of political and personal narratives as well as the on-going revision of traditional forms meet as the "self becomes part of history-- autobiography is extracted from the myths and legends and becomes projected into, and renewed in, myths" (N. pag.). Shadows consists of twenty-three plates, with commentary by the artist, autobiographical segments, and a number of stories. As Tagoona tells his life, he represents the history of his region and his people with understated clarity: "I am often asked how the Inuit felt about being brought into settlements. It is not an easy thing to talk about; the Inuk himself is not sure how he feels. I myself have lived in settlements almost all my life but I tasted a little "out there" in the Inuit camps in winter. I love it 'out there'" (N. pag.).

Increased interest in the north and activity in the field of communications created an explosion of writing about and by the Inuit in the 1960s and 1970s. Many collections of traditional stories appeared, including those by Kalluak, Kappi, and Nanogak, and many Inuit writers published in northern periodicals such as Inukshuk, Nunatasiag News, Inuttitut, Inuit Today, Inummavit, Inuit Monthly, and Keewatin Echo. While this activity continued

into the 1980s, a number of anthologies also appeared, including Paper Stays Put (1980), Northern Voices (1988) as well as the first study of Inuit writing, McGrath's Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition (1984).<sup>22</sup> Illustrated autobiography, such as Normee Ekoomiak's Arctic Memories (1988), continues to be an important genre in Inuit literature.

Ruth Tulurialik's Oikaaluktut: Images of Inuit Life (1986) precedes Alootook Ipellie's Arctic Dreams and Nightmares (1993), but both are examples of the importance of the illustrated text in Inuit representation. Tulurialik's text performs the ethnographic function of cataloguing and interpreting the culture. It provides definitions (for example, the passage "Tukipqutaq" indicates the word's denotation of a rock marking a good fishing spot) and stories of cultural practices (those on traditional birthing do not mention infanticide). Other sections describe modern features of northern life, "The Bay," "Minister," and "Bad Policeman," as Tulurialik demonstrates the coexistence of ancient and modern ways.

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<sup>22</sup> At the same time, ethnography was proliferating. Writers such as Richard K. Nelson, whose Shadow of the Hunter appeared in 1980 along with Michael Mitchell's Singing Songs to the Spirit: The History and Culture of the Inuit, and Fred Bruemmer, whose Arctic Memories: Living with the Inuit appeared in 1993, based their texts on brief time spent with the hospitable Inuit and children's writer, Carolyn Meyer collaborated with Bernadine Larsen on a fictional account entitled Eskimos: Growing Up in a Changing Culture (1977).

In Arctic Dreams and Nightmares (1993), the stories inspired by the ink drawings collected in the book are intensely personal, but they draw on stories and images from oral literature instead of adopting the western autobiographical form. In fact, Ipellie introduces his book as a "smorgasbord of stories and events, modern or traditional, true or imagined" (xix). Like the Inuit culture represented in ethnography and other forms of writing about the Inuit, Ipellie's Inuit culture revolves around survival. However, unlike other representations, Ipellie's celebrates the "resilient culture" (xiv) for standing up to the "constant threat of cultural genocide" (xv). In the contemporary world, survival means cultural survival:

It is to the will and the perpetual  
pride of our elders that has helped us  
to retain the old myths, stories and  
legends so that our present generation  
can absorb them and pass them on to  
future generations. (xiv)

Part of the goal of Ipellie's work is to continue their work, and by featuring traditional figures like Sedna or stories like "The Woman Who Married a Goose," the Inuit world he creates represents the traditional alongside the modern use of technology and several references to contemporary events.

In "When God Sings the Blues," the narrator's "spirit journey" occurs after he performs a secret chant allowing his spirit helper to travel to the Magical Kingdom where God dwells. The god depicted is an ironic portrait of the Christian God brought to the Inuit with contact. Known by his Inuit name, Sattaanassee, which means Satan, this god possesses a "large array of fax machines" and a "high-powered telescope" with which he looks in on humanity (48).

Sattaanassee's power comes from technology, yet another ironic comment on the influence of contact on Inuit belief.

More concerned with the money going into his coffers than anything else, the economic recession sends Sattaanassee into a depression causing the narrator to invite him to a Blues Jam to cheer him up. The satire on the Christian religion is complete when the Arctic audience is entertained by Sattaanassee singing the blues. Ipe'llie's work continues the conventional use of satire in Inuit oral literature while commenting on the aspects of modernity that continue to affect Inuit life.

### **Conclusion**

In nationalist discourse, Inuit culture has been treated as a kind of "apex" of Canadian nordicity by theories that posit the centrality of northern experience in defining Canadian identity; after all, the Inuit inhabit



regions that fulfil Hamelin's ten criteria of nordicity."<sup>23</sup>

In a 1972 survey, Canadians described Inuit in terms of the noble savage, as a people possessing a pure ideology under threat of southern civilization (Hamelin, "Images" 8), and Hugh Brody observes similar attitudes in The People's Land.

Inuit culture can be claimed within national discourse, whether that discourse is based on the concept of nordicity outlined by Louis-Edmond Hamelin or the multicultural values described in government documents.

Images of Inuit life in painting, carvings, and photographs represent "Canada" in public places and publications. Inuit culture plays a dual role in national myth as both the ultimate of identification and the ultimate of difference. That is, as the most northern culture, it represents the idea of north in the Canadian identity, and as a culture under anthropological study, it represents the difference that multiculturalism claims to accommodate. Writing by non-Inuit reflects the preoccupation literary criticism on Inuit writing has with anthropological content and relevance, and this preoccupation establishes expectations in the non-Inuit audience concerning gender and national identity which Inuit writers counter in their revisions.

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<sup>23</sup> As explained in chapter 5, the "nordicity" of the Inuit attracts Rudy Wiebe whose Playing Dead relies on a theory of language as a key to knowing the nature of northern people.

While non-Inuit tend to depict the Inuit as ideal Canadians, inhabiting the territory of Canadian national difference, Inuit writers are concerned with the collective experiences and problems of Inuit, not Canadians. As Minnie Freeman's discomfort with the use of her image in advertisements indicates, non-Inuit representations of Inuit do not reflect these differences. Most importantly, writing by Inuit does not refer to the Canadian identity of the north, recalling Thomas Berger's often quoted observation that its inhabitants view the north as their homeland not as the national heritage of the multicultural state.

In recent years, multiculturalism has replaced biculturalism as the official discourse of the Canadian government. To understand the ideological ambivalence of multiculturalism it is necessary to look no further than government publications concerning the renewal of the constitution which advance tolerance as the multicultural ideal at the heart of Canadian identity. When a 1992 publication asserts that Canadians are "recognized around the world for the values we cherish--tolerance of differences and respect for different cultures and minorities; generosity; compassion for the less fortunate; freedom and opportunity for the individual" ("Our Future Together: An Agreement for Constitutional Renewal" 1), it seems clear that the "we" refers to Canadians who share the same things, including the ability to tolerate differences and to respect other cultures. Paradoxically, the "we" does

not encompass the object of tolerance, so the passage actually excludes those who are "different" while claiming to accept them. Moreover, the text remains silent about what these cultures are actually different from and thereby implies that the majority members do not have ethnic, gendered, or otherwise defined identities. Such categories (gender, ethnicity, race) serve as repositories of difference that the norm somehow transcends. Whatever the norm tolerates defines it. Both Leslie Monkman (5-6) and Mærgery Fee ("Romantic Nationalism" 29) identify a similar binary opposition in the constitution of Canadian identity by recognizing how aboriginal difference comes to define the (white) Canadian norm.

The most salient point in the critiques offered by Monkman and Fee respectively concerns the function of aboriginal culture as a point of reference for defining Canadian culture. National models of Canadian literature, and writers who espouse them, have been known to romanticize "the native" as a means of consolidating ownership of the territory claimed as Canada.<sup>24</sup> Such a romantic image and endorsement of what the native point of view has to offer readers introduces William Mowat and Christine Mowat's Native Peoples in Canadian Literature (1975):

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<sup>24</sup> Fee makes this argument in "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature."

Possibly this book asks the impossible:  
 it asks the reader to step outside his  
 own ethnic consciousness and to walk a  
 mile in Indian moccasins. . . . If the  
 reader is able to shun any sense of  
 paternalism or superiority that he may  
 hold, if he is able to open himself to  
 upside-down concepts of time, and to  
 fresh relationships with people,  
 society, and the land, he may find his  
 perceptions of Indians and Eskimos  
 jolted but enlarged. (1)

In other words, the native point of view will provide what the national culture, here represented by "non-Indians," lacks. Aboriginal culture plays the same role with Canada that white women have played for white men by representing the "other" by which the "self" can be defined. Mowat and Mowat are right about one thing, however: it is impossible to step outside one's own ethnic position in the way they desire, and it is even less desirable to pretend one can."

Romanticization results from fixing "the native" in a national image, because to fix something as complex as

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<sup>25</sup> Although I will discuss Linda Alcoff's work elsewhere, it is necessary at this point to acknowledge the important distinction she draws between the mistaken notion that one can transcend the epistemological and discursive contexts one inhabits as a critic and the potential of "positionality" characterized by continuous shifting between and within those contexts.

culture it is necessary to settle on a limited range of attributes. In the case of Inuit culture, the native as reference point defining Canadian culture collapses into the north as reference point defining Canadian national consciousness. The Inuit become ideal Canadians, as those who possess the "autochthonous claim" (Fee, "Romantic Nationalism" 18) to both the land and the north. The result is a romantic image that characterizes the representation of Inuit culture in Canada as well as the reception of Inuit writing. In a well-known passage quoted in Penny Petrone's Northern Voices, Inuit writer and politician Nellie Cournoyea sums up the role of the Inuit in Canada:

They glamorize and romanticize the Inuit  
. . . and give us status the others  
don't have. Canadians like to talk about  
us eating frozen meat and living in the  
cold. It gives Canada something that  
other countries don't have. Everybody  
likes the Inuit. (286)

### Chapter 3

#### **To Fight, Defeat, and Dominate: Arctic Adventure, Masculinity, and Nationalism**

Adventure narratives set in the Arctic often depict idealized forms of masculinity and, therefore, are integral to the formation of masculinist narratives representing the north. In this respect, they continue the tradition of American frontier literature and bear a striking similarity to the popular genre of the western. Observing this similarity, Aron Senkpiel shows how the north in Canadian literature has come to signify an imaginary border to civilization that heroes cross to freedom (137-38), as the stories surrounding one of the most popular northern historical figures, Albert Johnson, seem to affirm. Today, as Senkpiel notes, writers are most likely to live out the northern quest by travelling in and writing about their personal experiences in the north, but a significant body of literature exists celebrating fictional heroes as well. In this chapter, I engage with this literature and its impact on the representation of the north by considering the influence of the American frontier topos on Arctic adventure narratives and by outlining the characteristics of Arctic adventure heroes from the height of the adventure story's popularity in the late nineteenth century to the present.

### Arctic Adventure Stories

In The People's Land (1975), Hugh Brody describes the myth of the frontiersman for whom going north is "a going away from the constraints and inhibiting social forces that restrict self-expression 'at home'" (47).<sup>1</sup> From Samuel Hearne to Albert Johnson, the history of the north has been "the saga of a few heroic individuals" (Brody 17), a history made possible by a dual image of the north as both the frontier utopia "where man can yet pursue a personal dream--where he can hope to be individual" (Mitcham 17), and as the frozen dystopia represented in the phrase "the land God gave Cain" (Mowat, Canada North 6). While scholars including Shelagh Grant, Wilfred Eggleston, and Rob Shields have applied the term "frontier" to the north and west of Canada, Bruce Hodgins's definition of the north as a "territorially shifting concept, somewhat analogous to the frontier" most accurately describes the conceptualization of the north in Canadian history ("Canadian North" 4). This is not to say, however, that the history of literary representation of the north does not contain elements which liken it to the literary representation of the frontier; on the contrary, the same type of hero figures prominently in both.

Heroic, rugged individuals, usually male heroes, people the literature set in the north, and they usually share

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Stephansson's Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic (1938) devotes itself to the stories of Franklin, Simpson, Andr  e the Swedish balloonist, as well as the disappearance of the Greenland colony.

common characteristics. As Margaret Atwood summarizes:

"They are out encountering the land--they penetrate it, they open it up, they stake it out, they grapple with it, they fight with it, they wrest its secrets and its treasures from it, they win or lose" (Strange Things 97). Whether it is an American draft dodger lured north by an ad in a magazine, like the hero of Thomas York's The Musk Ox Passion (1978), or a sensitive, penitent veteran, like the hero of Fred Bodsworth's The Atonement of Ashley Morden (1964), the northern hero leaves his southern home and sheds his past in order to find freedom and self-affirmation.<sup>2</sup> These aspects of the quest are heightened in adventure tales which add particularly dangerous settings and events to the voyage. Because adventure takes place in exotic settings far from home, it represents freedom from social connection, responsibility, and moral reason, that is, "a breaking of the social contract" (Green, Adventurous Male 71).

The challenge presented by the endless possibility of the frontier or by the intractable forces of nature creates opportunities for heroism. "In the adventure tale," as Martin Green writes, the person "responds to that challenge with a series of exploits which make him/her a hero/heroine, that is, eminent in such virtues as courage, fortitude, cunning, strength, leadership, and persistence" (Great

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<sup>2</sup> The term "northern hero" is used by Peter Buitenhuis in "'Born Out of Fantasy and Caused in Myth': The Writer and the Canadian North" to describe the typical rugged hero of northern adventures (4).



American 1). As I demonstrated in chapter 1, ethnographers who become the heroes of their own stories participate in this tradition of representation by idealizing the "cherished outward-bound, lone-wolf, muddy-boots image" (Van Maanen 74) of the northern hero who continues to be male, white, and alone. In exploration literature, this figure embraces the landscape as he follows rivers ever deeper into his sublime, mother nature, naming them like a New World Adam; later, he continues to penetrate virgin wilderness like the American frontiersman (Kolodny, Land Before Her 5).

The hero seeks the frontier as an expression of individuality for as John Moss observes "[f]rontier exile is solitary, the experience of an individual in the wilderness" (Patterns 36).

Perhaps the most commonly known Canadian version of the American frontiersman story was Archie Belaney, or Grey Owl, that famous Indian ventriloquist from England. In The Men of the Last Frontier (1931), Belaney describes the trapper as:

Dependent entirely on himself, he must be resourceful, ready to change plan at a moment's notice, turning adverse circumstances and reverses to what slight advantage he may. (8)

Belaney's account depicts the solitary frontiersman, the American Adam mythologized in stories of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. The north, for Belaney, was "the last

battle-ground in the long drawn-out, bitter struggle between the primeval and civilization" (29). As Annette Kolodny has demonstrated, the dichotomy drawn here between the primeval and the civilized, or the wilderness and the settlement, especially in representations of the American frontier, is deeply gendered. Kolodny's research describes the "psychosexual dynamic of a virginal paradise" (3) in early American literature as an effect of the masculine desire to dominate and to possess a feminized environment, thereby challenging Frederick Jackson Turner's influential vision of American expansion by exposing the frontier as a gendered concept. Kolodny argues that the frontier, as "geographical locus" for this fantasy, pushed westward as women arrived and the masculine desire was frustrated by the influence of women on frontier society (4). Linda Ben-Zvi supports and updates Kolodny's reading by applying psychoanalytic terms:

The myth of the frontier, then, becomes not only the historical account of conquest, but also the psychological tale of masculine individuation, separation, and schism. (219)

The literary genre appropriate to this "psychological tale" is the adventure, and its literary motif is the quest.

Although Archie Belaney's The Men of the Last Frontier (1931) concerns men exclusively, it is dedicated to the civilizing influence of Belaney's aunt, for the education she provided enabled him "to interpret into words the spirit

of the forest, beautiful for all its underlying wildness" (N. pag). This gesture towards the influence of feminine-identified civilization is answered with a text in which the wilderness is a theatre for defining masculinity through conflict, the classic struggle between man, represented by the trapper, and nature, personified as a male deity: "the grim Spirit of the Silent North, who stalks each lonely traveller's footsteps relentless and implacable, whose will is law in the White Silence" (13).<sup>1</sup> This figure reappears in the text as a tyrannical and scheming king:

In the fastnesses of this rapidly fading  
frontier, the last on this continent,  
reigns the Spirit of the North Land.  
Enthroned behind the distant mountains  
with the cohorts and legions of his last  
grand army massed about him, he sallies  
forth, brooding over the length and  
breadth of the land, seeking whom he may  
destroy. . . . (35)

For Belaney, as for many writers who would follow him, the division between civilization and wilderness is inherent in the context imposed on the individual by the frontier, not in the constitution of the individual's masculinity. However, history, biography, and fiction which perpetuate

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<sup>1</sup> This is the north of which Kipling wrote "there is a fine, hard, bracing climate, the climate that puts iron and grit into men's bones" (qtd. in Berger, "True North" 18).

this image of the northern frontier also represent the hero actively seeking out the context for his exploits and recreating the frontier in order to find it. It is the geographical location of the frontier that changes with the need to find certain conditions and to accommodate the frontier myth, not the individuals who change with the arrival in a particular location.

In Desert, Garden, Margin, Range: Literature on the American Frontier, editor Eric Heyne frames the discussion of frontier literature with the assertion that crossing the frontier, conceived as a territorial border or margin, constitutes the American national rite of passage (7). Heyne's critique recognizes the gendered aspect of initiation: to fulfil the frontier myth the American hero, usually though not always biologically male, must be masculine. However, as the narratives examined in this chapter suggest, biological maleness, although required, does not guarantee success on the frontier, and it is in the complex articulation of his initiation in the interstices between wilderness and civilization, not in the identification of his biological sex, that the hero aspires to masculinity.

The adventure hero, perhaps more than any other type of hero, exemplifies the masculine as a status achieved by successfully acquiring recognized traits. Manhood has been conceptualised, as Genevieve Lloyd argues, as a matter of accomplishment throughout Western history (Lloyd 86), and

while the content of the characteristics associated with masculinity change with the times, the acquisition of masculine characteristics remains essential to forming masculine identity. As a result, men can never be "at home" with masculine identity; rather, they must constantly aspire to an identity based on an externalised sense of self by continuously proving their right to it (Seidler, Rediscovering 149).

Literary representations of masculinity as this kind of attainment tend to structure identity around the quest. According to Mircea Eliade's seminal study Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth (1958), there are two compelling cases for the specifically gendered form of the quest narrative and for the importance of initiation in the development of masculine identity.<sup>4</sup> First, although Eliade is concerned primarily with so-called "primitive societies" in which initiation rites have religious significance, he also considers the secularized versions of initiation in modern society in which "initiatory themes remain alive chiefly in modern man's unconscious" and are expressed in the production and reception of literature (134). These initiatory themes are based on the common cross-cultural features of the initiation of pubescent boys and include a "test of courage,

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Green also observes how the experience of adventure has been a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood as exemplified in the Boy Scout movement (Great American 6).

resistance to physical suffering, followed by magical transformation" (82) wherein physical ordeals are heaped on the initiate leading to great suffering and symbolic death into new life (30). Second, when Eliade demonstrates how themes in modern literature reflect rituals in societies throughout the world, he suggests a connection between the quest in modern literature and the quest pattern in the initiation of males. The stories of the quest as we know it probably originate in such ceremonies. The events and patterns represented in adventure narratives written for boys lend support to his suggestion.

By differentiating the male from the female initiation, Eliade's study demonstrates the specifically masculine character of the quest pattern or motif. In most societies, female initiation is signalled by the mysterious beginning of menstruation, which occurs at different times for different individuals. Most female initiation involves separation from the society, like the early stage of male initiation, followed by a moment of being welcomed into the community as a woman (43). However, although female initiates may undergo tattooing, mutilation, and other painful rituals preceding reentry into society, the series of physical ordeals, torture, and other tests of endurance that boys must pass are largely absent from female initiation. In most initiation ceremonies, boys do things while girls have things done to them. As a result, it would be impossible to equate the development of the quest pattern

or motif, which involves "doing things," that is, fulfilling certain physical tasks to achieve a certain goal, specifically with female initiation or with femininity.<sup>5</sup>

In its modern, secularized form, the quest narrative provides an imaginary opportunity to take on tasks which prove one's masculinity--which might explain the proliferation of adventure stories aimed at young men. Masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, to Native people, to nature, all of which represent the primitive, or to childhood, another primitive state, which is why male characters in juvenile adventure literature always try to act like men rather than boys (Green, Great American 6-7). Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century adventures often also align attaining gender identity with demonstrating patriotism or serving national interests. As boys learned how to be men by reading adventure stories set on the frontier, they also learned to imagine themselves taking up the challenge "to advance that frontier--against native populations or natural barriers--to extend the domain of civilization" (Great American 2).

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<sup>5</sup> Some recent accounts of the quest, such as Dana A. Heller's The Feminization of the Quest-Romance (1990), claim that the quest is being transformed by women writers to articulate feminine identity (15). Heller's account of how women writers are taking on the role of the hero does not provide any evidence to suggest that this feminization is anything more than derivative of and dependent on the patterns associated with the development of masculine identity.

### Adventures and Empire

In America and Britain, adventure became "the energizing myth of empire" (Green, Great American 4), its didactic function emphasizing the importance of turning boys into good citizens of the British Empire or into young men willing to settle on the American frontier (Bristow 19; Green, Great American 8). During this period, attitudes towards boys reflected concerns British Social Reformers had about educating the "rough lads" or working-class boys in London. The situation of the rough lads presented upper-class Reformers with a paradox: the primitive nature represented by rough lads was both romantic and dangerous. In order to contain it, upper-class men opened social and athletic clubs and established "vertical bonds of comradeship across class lines" (Koven 365) intended to improve the working-class children. At first produced in a cross-generational setting, these goals were also set in cross-cultural and cross-racial situations in which missionaries established paternal relationships with aboriginal people.

At the end of his study of these aspects of the British adventure genre, Empire Boys, Joseph Bristow concludes that "male identity is something that can never be fully attained" (226). Boy's narratives place too many opposing demands on their idealized heroes and must find extraordinary means of smoothing over narrative inconsistency (226), and Canadian literature is certainly



replete with stories containing convenient plot twists and implausible events in order to allow the hero to display his individuality. For example, in Caspar Whitney's "The Winged Snowshoer of the North Land," the narrator can live out his solitary heroism only after alienating his Indian servants to the point at which they abandon him in the middle of the wilderness (in Whitaker, Stories).

The tension between opposing social pressures--for example, the young heroes are expected to display both moral restraint and unrestrained even unscrupulous individuality--requires concealment to ensure the unity of gender identity.<sup>6</sup> Bristow analyzes narratives by Conrad, Stevenson, and Kipling to demonstrate the relationship between perpetuating a specific form of masculinity consistent with the great man and safeguarding the interests of the British Empire. His work supports the connection between constructing gender expectations in representation and generating the so-called master narrative that is the imperial history of Britain.<sup>7</sup>

This connection between gender and national identity suggests the term "mastery narrative." Mastery narratives

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<sup>6</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also identifies this concealment of fissures in masculine identity (119).

<sup>7</sup> In a similar argument, Martin Green observes "close connections between the love of adventure, the writing of adventures, the progress of democracy, and the expansion of trade, between adventure and, for example, the expansion of the American empire in this modern sense" (Great American 8).

rely on the possibility of dominance in the struggle between man and nature, his own internal nature and the external forces of nature he encounters. In Arctic adventures, heroes persevere through hunger and cold by sheer will, ignoring the immediate needs of the flesh in order to reach their goals. In the face of great danger, masculinity is achieved through self-discipline, a scenario which Christine Di Stefano argues is an externalisation of castration anxiety (34). Because needs indicate weakness, masculinity becomes a matter of controlling or mastering the hero's inner nature while also mastering the elements of an external Nature (Seidler, Rediscovering 55). Such conflict traces the nature-culture binary defined by Judith Butler as a notion of "culture" based on its subordination of nature (37). The hero contains the nature-culture binary in his relations to himself and to the world--he cannot exist without them. Adventure narratives set on the frontier illustrate this in the most graphic ways. As Eric Heyne writes,

The hero who negotiates the middle ground (between civilization and savagery) must, of course, ride off into the sunset at the end, he cannot be accommodated by the stable community. .

. . (10)

The hero also disputes the middle ground because his identity, constituted as it is by never-ending attainment,

is unstable. In constantly striving for the elusive goal of masculine identity, he is constituted by the binary and cannot transcend it.

Joseph Boone presents a very different view of the frontier, conceptualising it as an outward journey geographically and an inward one psychologically, both journeys allowing for the redefinition of the self (187). Boone rejects the explanation given by James D. Hart, and quoted by Fritz Oehlschlaeger, that male readers of frontier literature dream of "rugged-individualistic successes that reality [does] not allow them" (177); instead, Boone argues, the chance to remove oneself from strictures imposed by society allows the hero to find "an affirming multiform self" that rejects traditional definitions of manhood (188).

Whereas most critics writing about the frontier consider it to be a place where the illusion of "free-individuality" can be created through the dominance inherent in the nature-culture binary, Boone supposes that the quest can move into "unknown spheres" where new forms of masculinity await discovery (209). In this way, he seems drawn by the same lure that draws the adventure hero: the metaphor of endless possibility represented by the frontier. Unfortunately, Boone's exciting hypothesis, especially the implication that gender identity can be imagined outside social roles and textual conventions (212), finds little support in the realist texts he describes and even less in the Arctic adventure narratives studied here.

If Boone is right about the transformative potential of frontier literature, then the Arctic adventure stories set in the Canadian north are reactionary representations of masculine identity. Existing codes of masculinity and femininity are reinscribed and reified not transcended in northern adventures, so that rather than reconceptualising gender outside boundaries, as postmodern writers would claim they do, they ensure that the same boundaries are simply redrawn.

In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periods, magazines such as Chums and The Boy's Own Paper and books such as R. M. Ballantyne's Ungava; or, A Tale of Esquimaux-land (1857) were part of a popular juvenile literature that "fixed the Canadian north as a great stage for boy's adventures" (Waterston 132).<sup>8</sup> Adventures juxtaposed English or American boys engaged in masculine pursuits against primitive Natives or the brute force of Nature in exotic settings. The Canadian north became a popular exotic setting with its harsh climate and unfamiliar people. The Inuit are the people most frequently depicted in adventure stories set in the Canadian north; as "Huskies" and "queer little men" inhabiting the scenery, these characters represent a difference that must be claimed or overcome on the way to the hero's initiation.

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<sup>8</sup> This trend continues in juvenile literature into the twentieth century in the novels of Farley Mowat and the writers examined later in this chapter.

The differentiation of racial characteristics structures adventure stories of the period, especially those which attempt to revive the sagas. According to Martin Green, adventures patterned on the sagas reached the height of popularity at the turn-of-the-century as many agreed with J. F. Hodgetts, a The Boy's Own contributor, that: "English boys were too straightforward to like the Greek gods, while the Norse ones would appeal directly to their natural 'Teutonic' impulses" ("Adventurers" 83). Allen French, author of the Victorian children's novel, The Story of Rolf, attributed racial origins to the saga form and cites these origins as the reason for their popularity and superiority:

The sagas reveal the characteristics of our branch of the Aryan race, especially the personal courage which is so superior to that of the Greek and Latin races, and which makes the Teutonic epics (whether the Niebelungen Lied, the Morte d'Arthur, or the Njala) much more inspiring than the Iliad, the Odyssey, or the Aeneid. (qtd. in Green, "Adventurers" 83)

Arctic settings provide the appropriate backdrop for new sagas in which British characters display revived Viking spirit, drawn from their supposed racial heritage. This spirit inflects national identity with racial attributes that exemplify the kind of independence the nation must

have; as Carl Berger concludes, "[t]he northern theme also assumed a racist aspect, holding that the capacity for freedom and progress were inherent in the blood of northern races" (22). Moreover, such stories serve didactic purposes because the successful adventurer's independence makes him the kind of pioneer who could go out and claim territory on the nation's behalf. Although the nations that adventure heroes come from may differ, their role in nation-building does not.<sup>9</sup>

While the adventure genre was largely shaped and defined in the turn-of-the-century atmosphere of imperial expansion in Britain and in the United States, it was no less popular in former colonies and new nations such as Canada. Furthermore, works by British and American adventure writers were disseminated throughout the English-speaking world in boy's and girl's magazines. Not only did the audience for Arctic adventure stories include Canadian readers, but Canadian writers embraced the form as they joined British and American writers in using it to represent the north.

In her survey of boy's adventures, Elizabeth Waterston remarks on the centrality of the Canadian wilderness in the international adventure genre. In the nineteenth century,

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<sup>9</sup> Green concurs, writing "It is impossible to account for national competition and national identity as forces without the idea of adventure" (Adventurous Male 159).

adventure writers depicted the boy hero following the quest pattern in Waterston's sardonic summary:

Moving through woods and waters  
 accompanied by an admiring comrade, he  
 pierces the heart of darkness, undergoes  
 ordeals at the hands of animal and human  
 antagonists, and emerges to begin the  
 upward return to his own kingdom. (129)

In the twentieth century, certain characteristics of the adventure have changed; for example, Native people are no longer adversaries and extensions of the wilderness, the boy's companion is usually a Native person, and the boy's experiences involve trickster figures. Despite the appropriation of Native culture in adventure stories, to the point of all-out mimicry in novels such as Ernest Thompson Seton's Two Little Savages (1903), the characteristics displayed by the boy hero do not change considerably. As Waterston notes, in boy's books and magazines "physical prowess and scorn of sentiment remained the required heroic qualities" well into the twentieth century (137).

The Scottish writer R. M. Ballantyne set two of his adventure books in the Canadian north, Ungava; or, A Tale of Esquimeaux-Land (1857) and Snowflakes and Sunbeams; or, The Young Fur Traders (1856). Fearsome inhabitants enhance the danger confronting heroes in Ballantyne's threatening northern landscape. In Ungava, the Indians who befriend the adventurers may be "honest" (213) and "good stout, broad-

shouldered, thick-set specimens of the race" (88), but the Inuit are depicted in not so sympathetic terms:

. . . it was known, or at least supposed, that the Esquimaux were fierce and cruel savages, if not cannibals. Their very name implies something of the sort. It signifies eaters of raw flesh, and was bestowed on them by their enemies the Muskigons. They call themselves Innuit--men, or warriors; and although they certainly do eat raw flesh when necessity compels them--which it often does--they asserted that they never did so from choice. (37-38)

In these ethnographic descriptions as well as in the geographical details, the narrator instructs the boys to whom the narrative is addressed with great didactic authority. The heroes can be imagined as even more daring and admirable for running the risk of meeting with dangerous races and cultures, and the audience learns how to be such heroes.

Canadian writers J. M. Oxley and Egerton Ryerson Young also chose the north as a setting for adventure. J. M. Oxley, author of the adventure novel The Wreckers of Sable Island (1891), wrote short pieces glorifying the history of the Hudson's Bay Company in the north with the same elevated language and didactic tone. In these pieces, explorers and



traders display "self-sacrificing heroism" in their efforts "to pierce the ice-defended mysteries of the Arctic Zone." In "The Romantic Story of a Great Corporation: The Hudson's Bay Trading Company," Oxley openly acknowledges his use of the adventure form to tell the story of the company, writing that "[t]here has been a romance of commerce no less than a romance of war" (325). War, another perennial subject of adventure narratives, and trade are essential to empire-building. By representing these pursuits as adventures, the narrative constructs masculinity as physical, territorial, and economic dominance, the convergence of national and personal interests that Martin Green observes in his analysis of adventure narratives. The boys reading such narratives would be expected to admire and emulate such heroes in similar scenarios.

Egerton Ryerson Young drew on accounts such as those written by J. M. Oxley and William Butler for his Three Boys in the Wild Northland, Summer (1896) and Winter Adventures of Three Boys in the Great Lone Land (1899).<sup>10</sup> Young's Winter Adventures shows three young lads, Scottish, English, and Irish respectively, as they learn about the north from a retired Hudson's Bay clerk and his "Indian" wife. The clerk and his wife seem to govern the Native people, overseeing their activities and remarking on everything with great

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Waterston asserts that both novels are based on "an obviously intense reading" of Butler's work (134).

authority. The Native people, for their part, comply willingly with white dominance and express gratitude to their "kind loving missionary and his family" (126), and the "Christian Indian boys" are described as "[n]oble fellows" glad to have left behind their "pagan," "heathen" ways and "disgusting rites" (119). Conveniently, the Gospel, according to the narrator, has changed the Indian and "transformed his one cruel nature, but has not marred his cleverness and skill as a hunter or a guide" (N. pag.). In contrast to the laudatory tone in the description of Indians, a horror of miscegenation--the boys themselves are interested only in the white missionary's daughters--shows through the description of the "treacherous halfbreeds" who attempt to cheat in the dog-sled race.

The three boys distinguish themselves in sporting competitions, of which dog-sled racing is the most thrilling and significant, as well as by becoming well liked by the "dusky Indians" (146). Throughout their adventures, the boys display the "courage, fortitude, cunning, strength, leadership, and persistence" attributed to masculine identity, and although their Christian beliefs prevent a complete break with the social contract, they display the rugged individualism that characterizes northern heroism, particularly in their dealings with Native people. Native people are helpers or obstacles in the threatening northern environment, and both roles help to define the roles that the young heroes must play.

Adventures featuring girl heroes around this time make strikingly different use of the wilderness. Girl heroes in books such as Agnes Machar's Marjorie's Canadian Winter (1892), Helen Reed's Amy in Acadia (1905), and Anna Chapin Ray's Janet: Her Winter in Quebec (1908) rarely get much farther north than Montreal, and their adventures involve social outings in the winter setting but emphasize "a love of home, a deference to authority, and a suppression of any personal dreams of success and fame" (Waterston 114)--quite unlike their male counterparts. For girls who behave like heroes, one must look to Bessie Marchant's daring girls in novels beginning with A Daughter of the Ranges (1905), but Marchant does not create settings in the far north.

Both boys' and girls' stories followed the patterns found in The Boy's Own Paper and the Girl's Own Paper whose stories were usually topical, and books such as Gordon Stables's Wild Adventures Around the Pole (1888) and Off to Klondike (1890) reflected contemporary events. Exploration adventure in exotic settings popular during colonial expansion and boarding school stories reflecting Victorian mores were replaced by war stories in the early twentieth century. The change in focus may account for the relative lack of adventures in northern settings in the early part of this century. Harris Patten's Wings of the North (1932) evoked the north in its title, but it is really about flying, and Stephansson's Kak the Copper Eskimo (1924) has more in common with ethnography. At the same time, Donald

French turned events in Canadian history into tales of adventure in Famous Canadian Stories Retold for Boys and Girls (1931).

### **Contemporary Adventure**

What is perhaps most striking about the adventure genre, despite its content's historical contingency, is the genre's relative formal integrity to the present day. "In the farthest north," writes Elizabeth Waterston, ". . . young travellers are presented as still moving along clear paths of heroism, as is apparent in the tragic novels of James Houston" (147). Popular works of fiction written for juvenile audiences share many characteristics with their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century counterparts, as the rest of the chapter will show. Heroes continue to display the "personal courage" that Victorian writers looked to the sagas to express, and adventure narratives continue to juxtapose the white protagonist and Inuit although the Inuit are no longer represented specifically as an inferior race. Even more striking, however, is the continued influence of so-called "Viking" characteristics on the development of the northern hero and the racist content it implies; for example, in Farley Mowat's The Curse of the Viking Grave (1966), a Cree boy, a half-Inuit boy, and a blond, blue-eyed boy set out across the barrens in search of a Viking site after becoming "particularly interested" in a book on Viking exploration read to them by a Scottish

trapper. Mowat's Lost in the Barrens (1956) also centres on the possible discovery of a Viking site by Jamie MacNair, a young Torontonionian, and his Cree friend Awasin. Lost in the Barrens and The Curse of the Viking Grave are both "buddy stories" featuring the initiation of non-Native boys through cross-cultural contact with other boys; however, the features of masculinity boys must attain are represented as the same for all. All the boys become men through feats of daring and through physical trials, by displaying the "Viking spirit" that adventures often attempted to revive.

In the twentieth century, the Canadian north continues to serve as a setting for adventure stories written in the popular mode, and adventures continue to target young adults, mostly boys, as their audience. As Green writes, "the adventure tale was written almost exclusively for a masculine audience. It has been the main literary means by which males have been taught to take initiatives, to run risks, to give orders, to fight, defeat, and dominate; while females have been taught, both by being ignored by the genre and by being reduced to passive roles within it, not to do those things" (Green, Great American 1-2). Adventure stories usually initiate the hero into a male community by requiring him to overcome a series of obstacles under harsh circumstances. The typical Arctic adventure narrative takes place in a predominantly male world and features a white boy, whose father is aloof or dead and whose mother is absent or dead, and a Native boy who befriends and protects

him.<sup>11</sup> Whereas Native people were once decorative obstacles for heroes, now they tend to be helpers or mentors although sometimes, as is the case in James Houston's Whiteout (1988), a love triangle develops between the white boy, a Native girl, and the boy to whom she has been promised. The boy's identity develops in opposition to the passive feminine character, whose lack of agency is accentuated because, as a Native girl, she cannot even choose her husband. The feminine and the native are brought together to signify what the boy hero must not be. In other adventures, like Fred Bodsworth's The Strange One (1959), falling in love with a Native girl parallels initiation into the northern world. As demonstrated in chapter 2, the masculine identity achieved by demonstrating self-sufficiency (albeit mediated by the help of aboriginal companions) and accomplishing certain feats earns ratification by differentiation from the passive, the feminine, the native.

### **Erotic Triangles**

Male-authored frontier novels in American literature form triangular relationships between the lone white male, the male Indian, and the white woman in which the women need protection (Person 671). The woman facilitates conflict

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<sup>11</sup> The hero resembles Robinson Crusoe as a stranger stranded in an exotic land who maintains an exploitative friendship with a native inhabitant.

between white and Indian that ends in the subordination of the Indian through violence or death and of the woman through reintegration into the patriarchal order after she is saved and (probably) married to her rescuer. Alternatively, the frontier ideal of the man alone in nature prevails if the hero rides off into the sunset. In contrast, female-authored frontier novels, as Leland Person's research shows, present an alternative fantasy that has the woman and the Indians join together to exclude the American Adam (670).

In Arctic adventures, erotic triangles are usually interracial, and they often result in the departure of the hero. For example, in the novels of Fred Bodsworth, such as The Atonement of Ashley Morden (1964), the feminization of the main character, Ashley, serves to accentuate the importance of traditionally defined masculinity. Ashley's effeminacy defines his actions: "Ash's hand was slender, the handclasp weak and limp" (13). In the erotic triangle that develops between Ashley, Ron Dorkett, and Lilka, Ashley's feminization makes a homosocial connection possible.

Houston's novel, Whiteout (1988), features a frontier-style hero, community, and friendship. Having displeased his mother by turning down a music scholarship and by being charged with possession, the hero, a white adolescent named Jonathan, finds himself faced with an ultimatum written in the elegant prose and stylish "scrawl" of his mother, whose words are emblematic of civilization:

If by the time you're twenty you have proven to be "a sensible and steady person," as your father stated in his will, we will authorize payment of the substantial sum of money that your father left you. If your uncle and I do not approve of your behaviour, then that money will be held in trust until you reach the age of forty. (2)

Reading this, Jonathan "realize[s] that something different in his life was going to have to happen unless he planned to totally self-destruct" (3). His mother, the paradoxical embodiment of the feminizing impact of civilization and the one who advises him to go north in the first place, disappears from the narrative although she is reported to have given him the copy of Kabloona that he takes north with him (5). Jon's quest begins with his separation from his mother's world of dove grey envelopes, Steinway pianos, and expensive scotch, a world which serves as the opposite of the wilderness up north.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, when she reappears, it is again only in the words of a message, this time a radio message acknowledging Jon's intention to stay north another year, regretting that she cannot visit him,

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<sup>12</sup> It is significant that Kelley's Albert Johnson also describes his mother as the epitome of civilization, "an aristocrat to her fingertips": "She was wealthy, she was intelligent, and she was an outstanding beauty" (Rat River Trapper 114). Although he provides few details, her demise causes him to forsake human society and go north.



and confirming that the sculpture of Sedna, which he has seen in a vision while up north, has not been removed from above the piano (159).

With his father dead and his mother remote, Jonathan's separation from social and parental relations allows him to undertake his quest and to become a man by initiation into the northern world. His paternal uncle, Calvin, a cantankerous Hudson Bay Company trader from Scotland, mediates the initiation by treating his nephew harshly and by forcing him into an ascetic existence of hard work, early mornings, and lumpy porridge. Another trial involves Jon's fight with the principal who refuses to allow him to fulfil his community service by teaching music lessons. The antagonism does not let up until news arrives that a young, single woman will replace the mannish Dorie as the community's schoolteacher, and the principal's mood immediately softens. In the absence of Dorie, Panee becomes the only female character in the community of men and takes her place at the heart of the erotic triangle.

At first, Panee attracts Jon's attention and becomes the subject of one of his sketches because she is the sister of Pudlo, Jon's best friend, and because "She looked somewhat like Pudlo, but her dark eyes had a softly beautiful curve to them. Her whole smooth face had a bright, intelligent look" (49). Then, despite Pudlo's warning that Panee has an uingasak called Edlout and will be married soon (69), Jon and Panee begin to meet in the

abandoned whaler's house and to entertain ideas of living in it together (82). An erotic triangle develops around the desire Jon and Edlout share for Panee which is mirrored in the triangular friendship between Jon, Pudlo, and Panee. Both triangles are necessary to Jon's initiation as both play an important role in the final test presented by the whiteout.

Although Pudlo seems to endorse Jon's relationship with Panee, he represents a friendly impediment to it during their journey to the fish lakes. At night, when Panee reveals herself to Jon, Pudlo is the literal impediment to their desire:

He saw Panee propped up on her elbow,  
her dark eyes staring back at him. He  
could see that she was naked in her  
sleeping bag. Jon sat up quietly and  
reached his arm across Pudlo. Panee  
smiled and drew back inside her eider  
robe. Jon started to rise, to go to  
her, but Panee shook her head and  
pointed at her brother. (116)

Pudlo acts as a surrogate for Edlout whose presence produces a more direct confrontation as he and Jon "stood stiff-legged as two strange dogs, their hackles up, deciding whether they should confront each other over Panee now, or later," and Panee gives Edlout "a long look full of uncertainty and sadness before she turned away" (123). As

the pivotal figure in the triangle, Panee facilitates both friendship and rivalry.<sup>11</sup> When she disappears in the storm, Pudlo and Jon crawl about blindly calling her name, and when they cannot find her, the two men stick close together to ensure their own survival (134). After the storm, they find her buried in the snow and near death (138); knowing that she must be taken to camp, Jon guides them there by following the instructions given by Pudlo, whose snowblindness incapacitates him. The whole camp rushes to save Panee, but Edlout replaces Jon as the hero by suggesting they send for the nurse. In a moment of reconciliation, Jon pens the note that Edlout will carry.

Jonathan gains self-understanding through these trials.

By the end of the novel, he has decided to accept the music scholarship, his uncle has authorized his inheritance, and, with the knowledge that Panee does not want to go south, he has given her up to Edlout. Jon gives Panee what her culture will not: a choice. In a significant gap in narrative logic, all those who seemed to approve of the relationship between Jon and Panee advocate its ending. As he flies off, Jon sees the reunited couple, Edlout and Panee, wave to him while the music he composed in the north "rose all around [him] in the plane" (175).

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<sup>11</sup> In Sedgwick's terms, Panee has the "kind of ultimate importance in the schema of men's gender constitution" shared by women in all homosocial narratives by "representing an absolute of exchange value" (134).

### Albert Johnson Stories

Discussing the influence of British adventure on Russian writers, Martin Green notes how much "making legends out of reality" has been admired as a specifically "Anglo-Saxon" tradition of adventure (Adventurous Male 155). In Canadian literature, the attraction to the real-life adventure is exemplified in the fascination writers have with the story of Albert Johnson, a story possessing the common elements of the adventure genre within a particular Canadian context. Thomas P. Kelley concludes his novel Rat River Trapper (1972) with a comment indicative of the proportions the legend has taken on:

The story of Albert Johnson's last stand remains an epic of courage almost beyond belief. No matter what else he might have been, he had without question a bravery so utterly contemptuous of death as to be awesome. (141)

In Rat River Trapper, the omniscient narrator describes what will follow as "[a] true story of howling huskies, dangerous trails, and desolate tundra in a frozen world across which a fugitive flees before oncoming posses" (1); however, the same narrator who exhorts readers to remember it is "a true story" asserts the "sheer fiction" of most tales told by the "Eskimos" concerning Johnson later in the narrative (96). In the gap between the truth and the fiction about Johnson, the narrative creates another Albert Johnson who is devoutly

religious, abstinent, and romantic, and whose flight allows him to "play his favourite role of a lone Adam in a world devoid of any other human life" (5). Kelley also writes in a love interest called Anu, a halfbreed girl who searches all her life for Johnson, knowing "[t]here could be but one man in her life" (43). In his connection with Anu, the true woman, and his solitary life on the land, Johnson becomes the typical rugged individual who spurns society in favour of the wilderness. Because society cannot accommodate his individuality, it destroys him. In heroic fashion, he goes down fighting "[w]ith the instinct of the wilderness strong within him--the instinct that decrees you must battle till the last--wildly his gaze swept around as he sought at least a temporary shelter where he could make his last stand" (134-35).

Rudy Wiebe meticulously assembles the details of the manhunt which he tells in "The Naming of Albert Johnson" and The Mad Trapper (1980) and which he revisits in Playing Dead (1989). For Wiebe, the story of Albert Johnson, like the Franklin expedition, is one of the Arctic's great mysteries.

By "making legend of reality," Wiebe represents and revises the northern hero as it figures in other novels. The Albert Johnson depicted in Wiebe's fiction is not the glorious hero he is in Kelley's novel even though he typifies the flight from civilization across the frontier and the rupture of the social contract characteristic of adventure. Johnson's survival depends on his flight, and, through most of the

story, he is alternately motionless, trying to evade impending capture, or restless, leaving yet another temporary shelter. He ingloriously kills small prey with his bare hands, cowers over small fires, and dies with an animal snarl on his face. But while Johnson's escape across the frontier to the north ultimately ends in his death by the representatives of society, the RCMP, his real defeat comes when faced with his identity:

the name come to meet him in his journey  
north, come out of the north around the  
bend and against the current of the Peel  
River, as they name that too, to  
confront him on a river he thought  
another and aloud where he would have  
found after all his years, at long last,  
only nameless silence. (404)

The Mad Trapper offers a self-consciously historiographic depiction of events giving them a linear narrative form. In it, the "red-handed fiend" and "mad trapper" in sensational newspaper stories is set against the mysterious, silent stranger encountered before the shootings who claims to Nerysoo: "I never bother anybody . . . If they don't bother me" (53). In frontiersman fashion, Johnson guards his privacy as fiercely as his identity, but Wiebe's narrative speculates as to his motivations suggesting that a man and a woman revealed in the snapshots Johnson later burns have caused him to run. Alone by his fire, the

fictional Albert Johnson mutters "Never smile at a woman" and "Call no man your friend" (29).

Like Kelley, Wiebe tells the story from the perspective of an omniscient narrator in The Mad Trapper and in "The Naming of Albert Johnson," but he leaves much of the story unresolved. Although Wiebe's Johnson resembles Kelley's in that he too is a fugitive from society, Johnson emerges as a shadowy, strong and silent character who leaves the men who track him down and kill him asking, "who is he?" (189). If Kelley's Albert Johnson becomes an epic hero fleeing the stultifying effects of civilization into the wilderness, Rudy Wiebe's Albert Johnson is a hero whose unknown identity stands for the mystery of the Arctic, the elusive goal of Wiebe's quest in Playing Dead.

### **Rugged Individuals**

In literature about the north, the hero must display the attributes of the rugged individual, all of which are classic traits of masculine identity. Like the "idealized Viking" (10) who is the hero of Harold Horwood's White Eskimo: A Novel of Labrador (1973), the rugged individual must be "sufficient unto himself" (38).<sup>14</sup> Because the hero must live out the masculine narratives of quest and

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<sup>14</sup> Viking exploits have a particular resonance in stories from Newfoundland and Labrador. For example, Labrador explorer Sir Wilfred Grenfell is dubbed "Christian Viking" in William Byron Forbush's dedication to Pomiuk (1903).

initiation, adventure stories tend to recreate the frontier context. At first glance, the north may seem a natural setting for adventures with its harsh climate, mysterious peoples, and remote landscapes all providing the circumstances in which the hero can be tested or proven worthy. Certainly, many real adventures such as the hunt for Johnson have taken place there. But by choosing to set the fictional quest in a northern landscape, the writer responds to and reflects the southern audience's preoccupation with the theme of survival.<sup>15</sup>

The north as the scene for adventurous exploits is a highly contrived concept. What has been naturalized as the reality of northern adventure serves the ideological content of the stories. Martin Green coins the term "adventure landscape" to describe such imagined settings in which "men seek out danger" (Adventurous Male 159). By refusing this naturalization and disrupting the notion that the north produces the adventure story, a study can be made of constructions of gender expectations and ideals. The following symptomatic readings of some popular Arctic adventure stories highlight gender differentiation by demonstrating how this structure works through a consistent

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<sup>15</sup> The quest motif also takes on religious dimension as in Thomas York's The Musk Ox Passion (1978). In it, a draft dodger who describes his life as a religious quest, travels north to the MacKenzie Highway lured by an ad in Macho, a feminist magazine.



pattern in the narrative including the construction of an idealized, all-male community and the identification of ideal masculine characteristics.

James Houston's Frozen Fire: A Tale of Courage (1977) provides an example of the narrative which centres on an all-male community. It tells the story of a young white boy, Matthew, and his geologist father, Martin, whose quest for a copper deposit leads the pair north. When Martin and his friends and pilot, Charlie, do not return, Matthew sets out to find them with the help of his Inuit friend, Kayak. After losing all the gas for their snowmobile, Matthew and Kayak continue on foot only to find themselves lost. They encounter a "wild man" who takes them in, feeds them, and sends them on their way back to Frobisher. Many more trials await them as they attempt to cross the ice floes, including escaping an attack by a polar bear, but the most significant concerns Matthew's failed attempt to carry the gold he finds on the way, a mistake that almost costs him his life. Matthew and Kayak are eventually rescued by Charlie in his helicopter, the "Waltzing Matilda," and return to find Matthew's father recuperating in hospital.

The fantasy of male community ends with the boys, their fathers, and Charlie in Martin's hospital room. Although Martin seems an inadequate parent at first who barely acknowledges his son, he recognizes the greed that drove him to search for the copper as his chief flaw, just as Matthew realizes that his attempt to carry the gold was foolish and

that the flint-stone had been the most valuable of all. Martin ends up taking a teaching job, settling down, and promising to stay that way. While the father rehabilitates himself as a parent by the end of the book, the mother continues to be inexplicably absent, and the Inuit women function mainly as silent providers of food who never leave the igloo. The peripheral position of women ensures the community's all-male identity. In the end, all the main characters choose the community of men, with Charlie, the tough, daredevil from the Australian outback having the last word.

Gillingham, the hero of Harold Horwood's White Eskimo: A Novel of Labrador (1973), becomes the stuff of legend for a group of men travelling north by boat. Gradually, stories of an epic hero unfold, representing him as the agent of political change for the Inuit of Labrador. Although White Eskimo distinguishes itself from other books discussed in this chapter by its layering of narrative perspectives, the fictional world emerging from these perspectives represents the typical northern hero as rugged individual. Gillingham is identified with a tough, rugged kind of masculinity from his very first description as "shaggy, picturesque, heroic," a man idealized by the other men who speak of his weight and of how "he gave the impression of hugeness rather than height" and conclude that "[w]ith his bold, far-seeing eyes, high brow, and blond hair falling to his shoulders, he looked rather like an idealized Viking" (10). Gillingham's

self-imposed exile is reminiscent of other heroes of northern adventure, and, like the narrator of Harry Bernard's Les jours sont longs (1951), he possesses all the characteristics of the strong, silent type. Faced with a storm, his Inuit companion, Abel, strokes a raven's foot, but

As for Gillingham, he said nothing, no doubt being in his own eyes sufficient unto himself in his living and his dying, and feeling it beneath his dignity ever to call on god or demon or nature spirit in any kind of extremity.

(38)

Although spirituality would be a sign of weakness in Gillingham, he is quite forthcoming on the subject of Inuit spiritual needs, advocating a "return to paganism--tempered, I hope, with rationalism and education, like the paganism of the late classical Greeks" (74). Idolizing Greek civilization is consistent with the construction of the ideal homosocial activities centred on Gillingham, including wife-swapping, which Gillingham defends, saying the women are "exchanged like partners in a dance, in a game played among friends" (97). Despite this, Gillingham is said to find real love with Nasha who, significantly asks him to beat her, even kill her, for a momentary negligence (216).

The idealized Inuit woman in Horwood's text resembles the "true woman" found in American westerns who,

Oehlschlaeger observes, is typically either half Indian or half Spanish, who is close to the earth and who knows her place (184). Uniting with Nasha is part of what makes Gillingham a white Eskimo.<sup>16</sup> By uniting with her, the white hero not only dominates "nature" but also takes over her connection to the land, illustrating how the indigenous claim to the land is key "from a nationalistic point of view" (Fee, "Romantic Nationalism" 18) and how capturing the "native" in literature comes to legitimate capturing the land which, in turn, amounts to an ideological colonisation of real and imagined territories.<sup>17</sup>

An excerpt from the transcripts of "an emergency meeting of the Inuit Tapirisat" introduces and authenticates C. W. Nicol's The White Shaman (1979). In the excerpt quoted, Eastern Arctic representative. Billy Toby, tells a story of a "real white man from England, who became a shaman and then got shot by his own people for it" (xv). The body of the man was said to have been taken to the bottom of the sea where the goddess Luma (or Sedna) "would let the soul out and magic it into the body of a new-born baby, one that

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<sup>16</sup> The same will be true of the "white shaman," Richard Tavett, who has a sexual encounter with the ghost of a revered wise woman in a dream while simultaneously "reaching" the body of his lover many miles away (176-77).

<sup>17</sup> The native woman represents the nature side of the opposition in many books about the north. For example, in Thomas York's Snowman (1976) the local native women are called "wildees" (14 and passim). While the Priests expound against the dangers of the wilderness, including the native people, the character called Bard procures native women for sex with the workers at Giant Mines.

was half white, half brown, and that this baby would grow to be a leader for all Northern people" (xvi). Toby uses this story to protest against the "hot-headed talk" (xi) of some young people at the meeting. It is a reminder of traditional means of understanding and communicating as well as an allegory of what political change might entail: a combination of Qalunaat and Inuit ways. By including this introduction, Nicol calls on the authenticating voice of the Inuit leader to support the story that follows and constrains the reader's interpretation of the story. The hero of The White Shaman will live out in fiction what Toby reported as historical, and readers have no choice in the context of Toby's words but to equate the hero with the soul that will eventually become the northern leader.

Although his life comes to take on mythic proportions, the hero, a young Welsh man called Richard Tavett but nicknamed Tik after the Rikki-Tikki in the Kipling story, shares many characteristics with other heroes in other adventure stories.<sup>18</sup> Like Jonathan and Matthew, he is an adolescent; like Gillingham, he is "a fairly impressive specimen" who is "just short of six feet tall, with a wrestler's chest and arms" (24). He displeases his family by quitting school and saving his money to go to the Canadian Arctic (25). The separation from his own society

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<sup>18</sup> Joseph Bristow analyses the function of Kipling's writing as part of the imperial adventure tradition in Empire Boys.

and initiation into the Arctic world happen under the guidance of two mentor figures: first, the scientist named Philip that he works for, and then gradually the Inuit hunter Ipeelee. Initiation feats include being made to endure physical tests like running beside the komatik (28) and learning to succeed at hunting (28, 36, 94 and passim).

As the story progresses, Tik does everything he can to become part of the land, including making up his own rituals (160). At first, his body is an ally in his search for a way to connect with the land:

He ran by komatik over the moonscape of  
sea ice, the day clear and blue  
overhead, his body functioning true and  
strong, his face going browner with  
reflected light, his breath and the  
breath of the dogs falling behind in  
clouds. . . . A man became vividly aware  
of his body here, of movement, of body  
sounds and body heat for his body marked  
his existence in a clear, strange land  
of frozen water and wide sky. (35)

Later, however, the connection he desires comes not through the body, but through its transcendence and a "metamorphosis" of his spirit.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the typical character on a quest, Tik does not return to his own society

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<sup>19</sup> See chapter 5 for a discussion of his assimilation of native spirituality.

after his initiation. Instead, he becomes a sacrifice and a potential saviour when he dies at sea, and his soul remains in the Arctic awaiting resuscitation by Luma. The Christ figure motif figured in the fate of Richard Tavett is reminiscent of Gillingham, the white Eskimo's function as saviour of the Labradormiut.

In this part of the narrative, the kind of troubling gap in narrative logic that Joseph Bristow locates in a variety of adventure stories occurs. As Tikkisi, the aspect of his self that has "gone Inuit," Tik finds that he possesses powers which allow him to will things into being.

When he threatens to kill Philip, Ipeelee warns him: "Then Tikkisi must take responsibility for his words, so carelessly spat out. Tikkisi must suck them back out of the air and digest them, lest they run and hide and wait to do evil, like the tornait of the windy places" (120). While Ipeelee's warning makes Tik tremble, he does not heed it, and that failure has disastrous consequences for Philip. When Philip dies, Ipeelee does not blame Tik, and Tik never comes to terms with the role he has played in Philip's death. As a white shaman, it seems that Tik transcends the ethical codes of either culture, so despite his rather unheroic actions and his failure to atone for them, he retains his hero status in the story as well as his location in the adventurous place outside the social contract.

## Conclusion

The impact of Arctic adventure on the concept of north in Canadian literature merges with issues of national sovereignty and identity in the adventure genre's historical connection with empire-building in Britain and with nation-building in America. Mastery narratives written for young male audiences serve the didactic role of engendering masculine individuals who will "light out" for the territories. The Arctic provides "an adventure landscape" in which heroes seek adventure and become men. Those who write adventures choose the north for this purpose and create it as an all-male community where masculine characteristics are attained through a binary inflected by gender and racial differences in opposition to the feminized Inuit, environment, or civilization represented by women. The feminine, represented by internal and external nature, provides the central organizing factor in the texts surveyed as the element that must be mastered in order to fulfil the quest. However, the identity achieved through adventurous exploits requires endless striving that renders it highly unstable. Constituted in opposition to the feminine, the masculine identity imagined in such narratives cannot transcend the binary and must continually replicate it.

Adventure, which has played such a decisive part as a training ground for gender roles, often requires women to either adopt a passive role or to take on the same "masculine" characteristics. As Martin Green argues,



feminists who might act as "an important source of opposition to adventure" often "disapprove of 'adventure heroes,' in books and in real life, but feel free to claim some truer idea of adventure for their own cause" (Adventurous Male 1, 93). The final chapter will discuss the reappropriation of the adventure narrative in the creation of northern heroes and heroines.

## Chapter 4

### **A Fav'ring Clime: Race and Gender Canadian Poetry of the North**

In this chapter, I survey Canadian poetry depicting the north by tracing northern themes back to the patriotic verse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and later to the popular verse of Robert Service. I then turn to two of the few contemporary poets who have focused their attention on the far north, Al Purdy and Paulette Jiles, and finish with a discussion of the reception of Inuit poetry. If, as Allison Mitcham claims, "the far North. . . dominates the Canadian literary imagination" (10), then it should figure prominently in all genres of Canadian literature, but Canadian poetry demonstrates the limitations of the claim that Canadian national identity relies on a shared national consciousness originating in northern experience. Providing an exhaustive historical account of Canadian poetry is a task beyond the scope of this chapter; however, such an account would probably reveal the comparative marginality of the north as a theme in Canadian poetry.

Since accounts of Canadian literature which are based on topocentric readings claiming "northern" experience as a starting point for national culture are exposed by the north's marginal position in certain periods and genres, it may be useful to think of the north as a theme that suits certain genres and forms but not others rather than as a sign of a transhistorical national character or

consciousness. As I have argued so far, the notion of a northern consciousness emerges from gendered, romantic (and often racist) representations of the north particularly at moments of intense national feeling.

### **The Ecology of Canadian Poetry**

D. M. R. Bentley's ecological theory of Canadian poetry offers a framework for understanding the innovations to poetic form that might follow from a shared northern consciousness. Despite the relatively marginal space occupied by representations of the north in Canadian poetry, northern experience is present as a component of what he calls the "hinterlandscape." In an argument analogous to Leon Surette's description of the topocentric impulse in Canadian literature, Bentley advances an "ecological model" of poetic continuity to account for a distinct Canadian poetry, an account rooted in Northrop Frye's question "Where is here?" as well as in an interpretation of Canada's colonial history.<sup>1</sup> Bentley's point is that the history of poetic form and technique in Canada is one of "importation and adaptation" ("New Dimension" 1); however, rather than consider Canadian poetry derivative, he stresses the particular strength of poetic adaptation and hybridization:

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<sup>1</sup> Although Bentley's focus on the distinctiveness of Canadian poetry suggests a definition of national literature based on autonomy, his inquiry reveals Canadian poetry to be intricately involved in what post-colonial theorists call "abrogation and appropriation," and therefore to be somewhat dependent on other forms.

Canadian poetry, though its forms and techniques are imported and though it has not, so far, produced innovations of the major kind that affect the course of poetry elsewhere, is yet a distinctive body of literature by virtue of the talents of its authors and by virtue of its uniqueness as, in A. J. M. Smith's words, the "record of life in the . . . circumstances of a northern plantation."

("New Dimension" 2)

Smith's reference to Canada's northern location suggests that it is a source of distinct experience that will be reflected in a distinct national poetry, and Bentley quotes him to indicate the impact that location may have on the development of national poetry.

By considering the development of form in Canadian poetry, Bentley signals the particular situation of poetry in a settler nation, which has also been described by Brian Trehearne in Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists: Aspects of a Poetic Influence (1989). "In Canadian and in most colonial literatures," writes Trehearne, "poetry began in an effort to maintain or extend the artistic, social, and moral standards of the mother country in a geographical and cultural situation that was perceived as inhospitable to received normal behaviour" (8). These origins account for the derivative poetics of colonial Canadians who would look

abroad for the "life-giving transfusion of order and authority when no such order was provided by the environment" (Trehearne 8). What colonial poets might consider an inspiration, later poets might feel as a shadow, as, in the words of Tom Marshall, Canadian poetry found "its way out of the English confinement of those hedge-rows, rhyme and meter" (5).

Many critical accounts of Canadian literature explicate this struggle between the legacy of tradition and the reality of place.<sup>2</sup> Northrop Frye's description of patterns in literary approaches to the wilderness in The Bush Garden (1971) signals the striking post-colonial impulse in Canadian poetry. Smaro Kamboureli's On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem (1991) credits colonial anxiety in the absence of a national literature with turning Canadian poets to the genres and conventions of the past so "they could name Canadian experience in a manner that gave it literary credibility and a place in the continuity of long-established genres" (8). In Canadian Literature in English, W. J. Keith describes the impulse to adapt form and technique as a matter of grappling with "a truth that became increasingly evident to poets in early Canada: that the language and metrical forms evolved over centuries to suit the needs of European life and literature were ill-equipped

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<sup>2</sup> These remarks can be contextualized in terms of post-colonial literary criticism, especially Helen Tiffin's description of the ways in which new literary forms adapt language and meaning in a new setting ("Commonwealth" 29).

to convey the very different North American experience" (26). According to Keith, this realization grew out of a "discrepancy between content and language" (28) which inspired the "rugged popular verse" that presented a "vernacular challenge to gentility" (30).

These critics describe the history of Canadian poetry in aesthetic terms and, therefore, refer to poetic tradition. Since, on Bentley's account, poetic and aesthetic traditions are imported and then adapted in settler nations, it is difficult to imagine them originating in the poet's relationship to the land. The specific post-colonial reality of the settler nation therefore challenges the Romantic definition of national identity, suggesting that whatever influence the northern-ness of Canadian experience has on Canadian poetry would have to be a matter of content rather than form. Yet, the ecological model also allows for the influence of environment on the adaptation of form and technique if not on the creation of new forms. Although form and technique may be imported, their adaptations are "region-specific with regard to the various physical and cultural environments that go to make up Canada" (Bentley, "New Dimension" 3). Because the northern regions form part of the "hinterland" places, it may have some impact on the adaptation of poetic forms made referring to those places.

### **The Men of the North and Canadian Poetry: Charles Mair**

In the nineteenth century, the north came to stand for the energetic good health that signified moral virtue; the South, the effeminacy and disease that result from moral corruption. Such ideas were expressed by proponents of Romantic nationalism from European writers such as Germaine de Staël to the Canada First supporters such as R. G. Haliburton. Colonial poets believed that Canada's northern climate would engender health and strength in its people, as these lines from Joseph Howe's Acadia (1874) suggest:

Still there is health and vigour in the  
                   breeze  
 Which bears upon its wings no fell  
 disease  
 To taint the balmy freshness of the air  
 And steal the bloom thy hardy children  
                   wear. (6-7)

Not only were northern people considered to be healthy, strong, vigorous, and brave, but these qualities were associated with manliness in the Victorian period.

Howe's verse exemplifies the conjunction of gender and race evident in political rhetoric of the time whereby the idealized northern race possesses the attributes of the idealized masculine person. When Howe's fellow Nova Scotian R. G. Haliburton refers to "northern races" in "The Men of the North" (1869), he means specifically those descended from the Vikings, and he lists the English, Celtic, Saxon,

Teutonic, Scandinavian, Swedish, and--for the sake of including their descendants in Québec--Norman. Noticeably absent from Haliburton's list of "northern peoples" are the aboriginal people inhabiting the northern land, and this absence reflects what amounted to the Canada First policy of racial dominance. It is important to remember that the ideas shared by the Canada First party's members were not the idle or blustery chat of a few young men; in fact, the coincidence of political activity and literary activity in the career of their member, the poet Charles Mair, stands as an example of how imagining a northern nation in poetic form and taking actions to create it would have devastating consequences for the "races" excluded from their vision of Canada.

Charles Mair's involvement in the Red River settlement is well-known: not only did he publish articles encouraging settlement in the Northwest but he settled there himself, and, later, he went so far as to call for military action against Riel. Another Canada First member, George T. Denison, wrote to him in response to Mair's articles in the Toronto Globe:

I am very glad to hear such good accounts of the resources and fertility of the great North West. When filled up with a loyal population and a prosperous one, I have every confidence that in time it would prove a great source of



strength to the Dominion, and that we,  
the Men of the North, as Haliburton  
says, will be able to teach the Yankees  
that we will be, as our ancestors have  
always been, the dominant race. (qtd.  
in Matthews 83-84)

For his part, R. G. Haliburton was encouraged by western settlement and told Mair that he envisioned the Northwest as part of a "whole new free nation called Norland instead of Canada" (qtd. in Matthews 85). When Mair decided to "light out" for the Northwest Territories, perhaps with the words of his colleagues ringing in his ears, it was in support of territorial expansion and settlement. In his eyes, the end of the Red River Rebellion and the eventual displacement of the Métis would make way for the new, loyal Canadians to take possession of the territory.

For Mair, as John Matthews notes, literature served nationalist purposes, for he believed that "the development of a national literature would solve the problem of creating a national sentiment" (81). Although Mair did not represent his western adventures in literary form, some of his poems seem to be shaped by his public life; for example, the speaker in his poem "Wood-Notes" (1868) lays claim to a charming brook with the following comment:

The Indian sought it year by year,  
And listened to its rippling glee;  
But he is gone, and I am here,

And all its rippling is for me. (128)

Mair's poetry played to audiences who might share his assumption that Native people were a waning race. The ideas of race circulating in political discourse and the depiction of race, particularly in northern adventures of the time, share a historical context as well as an ideology witnessed in the politics of the day.

After setting out the history of "sacrifices endured, hardships encountered, and brave deeds done. . . when every faculty sprang into earnest, vigorous action" in the settlement of Canada, William Foster asks: "Think you, now, that Canada has no claim to rank with those lands where adventure has had play and romance has had a home . . .?" (Canada First 6, 13) Writers from Canada and elsewhere certainly thought it did, and the Canadian north, or at least the north adjacent to Canada at the time, became the landscape for a proliferation of adventures that juxtaposed English or American boys engaged in masculine pursuits against primitive Natives or the brute force of Nature. With its harsh climate and unfamiliar people, the Canadian north became an exotic destination for travellers, a subject of anthropological investigation, and a setting for adventure. In poetry, this setting was also appropriated to the ends of the national discourse of patriotism.

In 1886, Mair's "Tecumseh" "was widely acclaimed as the country's outstanding literary achievement and Mair as its greatest national poet" (Shrive xxiii). Mair himself

described "Tecumseh" as a "labour of love and patriotism," and as Norman Shrive remarks, the fact that Mair was a Canadian was probably more important to the poem's reception than the Canadian content of its themes (x). In fact, Mair's verse is highly derivative of English Romantic poetry, presenting the Canadian landscape "viewed as through an English filter and interpreted by reference to English models" (Shrive x).

Despite Mair's Romantic nationalist politics and his exaggerated reputation as the "Canadian Keats," Mair's Canada is not a nation in the ideal, Romantic sense. In Mair's poetry, the nation is not a spirit arising from the people or the land, but a loyal child to Britain, whose freedom would extend to and enfold the northern territory, and become, as in his elegy, "In Memory of Thomas D'Arcy McGee" (1868):

A mighty realm where Liberty  
Shall roof the northern climes from sea  
to sea (139)

The "northern climes" inspire awe and dread in many of the poems published in Dreamland and Other Poems (1868). In "Alice," a child longs for the spring rains to come and fears the "death-flakes" of winter (93-95). In the "North Wind's Tale," adventurous men succumb as the sadistic personification of the wind delights in killing everyone in a nautical disaster (27). Although Mair's nature poetry varies from a Romantic reflection of the speaker's feelings

in "My Love-A Rhapsody" to what seems to foreshadow the twentieth-century poets in "Midnight" with its speaker's plaintive "Some ghost had hid me in a wilderness" (145), it is unified by an imperialistic appetite for conquering the wilderness rather than a Romantic desire for a connection between nation and land.

Given the stage of settlement and the imperialist sympathies of loyal citizens at the time, it is not surprising that Mair does not evoke a strong sense of personal connection to the land even though his work is concerned with asserting the settler's claim to the land. To achieve the imaginative possession analogous to territorial possession, Mair figuratively kills off the Indians by showing them dying and disappearing, as in the last stanza of "Night and Morn":

But, in the ancient woods the Indian old,  
 Unequal to the chase,  
 Sighs as he thinks of all the paths untold,  
 No longer trodden by his fleeting race.  
 And, Westward, on far-stretching prairies damp,  
 The savage shout, and mighty bison tramp  
 Roll thunder with the lifting mists of morn.  
 (40)

Unlike the other "exotic" cultures compared in the poem, such as those of India, Africa, and China, the culture of the Indians does not survive. In his own life, Charles Mair acted on the conviction that Native people would disappear

by encouraging white settlers to head west and by settling there himself as well as by taking an active role in suppressing the Rebellion. Mair does not put forward the notion of Canadians as a "northern race" in a northern land, as his friend Haliburton does, but his poetry envisions racial displacement: the removal of the Indians both physically and imaginatively from the landscape.

To look back at Mair as "part of an emergent, distinctive poetic tradition," as Norman Shrive does (xxix), one must consider his choice of content rather than form. His descriptions of nature clearly refer to Canadian landscapes and his inclusion of legendary "Canadian" figures, such as Laura Secord and Tecumseh, show his focus on Canadian subjects. Mair's technique, however, is always derivative, but more than that, it is particularly bad derivation, and even an admirer such as Norman Shrive must admit to "the forced archaisms, the trite epithets, and the evidences of almost snobbish affectation" that Mair tried to expunge from his poetry later in life (xxviii-xxix), and the facile, alternating rhymes and "jog-trot metre" (xxvii), as well as the slavish devotion to conventional forms, that remained part of his style.

Mair's poetry and politics developed in a period of intense national feeling that can be noted in the work of other poets as well. In 1888, after the Red River Rebellion was over, Frederick George Scott's "In Memoriam Those Killed

in the North-West, 1885" evoked the fraternity of death in war as a moment of national maturation:

Growing to full manhood now,  
 With the care-lines on our brow,  
 We, the youngest of the nations,  
 With no childish lamentations,  
 Weep, as only strong men weep,  
 For the noble hearts that sleep,  
 Pillowed where they fought and bled,  
 The loved and lost, our glorious dead! (Hardy 53)

It is striking, though not surprising, that Scott should choose to personify Canada as a child initiated into manhood by war. In this poem and other examples of patriotic verse, the conflicts of settlement help procure the northern territory that becomes the source of independence the nation must have, and through it, the healthy form of Victorian manliness that the north was believed to engender.

### **The North in Patriotic Verse**

Charles Mair's patriotic verse evokes the larger context of literary nationalism infusing patriotic Canadian poetry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The enthusiasm poets had for the new nation, which was usually referred to as the new dominion, can be seen in poems from before and after Confederation which depict the nation as a colony but appeal to the heritage of northern races as a source of its greatness. For example, Edward

Hartley Dewart's Selections from Canadian Poets (1864) contained Helen Johnson's "Our Native Land," a poem later reprinted in E. A. Hardy's Selections from the Canadian Poets (1920). In it, Johnson uses images that evoke freedom: the American slave who "envies every little bird / That takes its northward flight!" (Hardy 31) and the "oppressed" who turn to the "Polar star" (32). Combining loyalty to Britain with enthusiasm for the new country, patriotic verse exhorted citizens to display cultural pride and national unity, as in James David Edgar's "This Canada of Ours" (1893):

May our Dominion flourish then,  
 A goodly land and free,  
 Where Celt and Saxon, hand in hand,  
 Hold sway from sea to sea. (Hardy 77)

Sir Charles G. D. Roberts called for patriotism ("O strong hearts of the North / Let flame your loyalty forth" 31) with "An Ode for the Canadian Confederacy" published in William Douw Lighthall's Songs of the Great Dominion (1889). For W. J. Keith, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts "begins the much-needed task of expressing Canada and its landscape in poetic terms" (32) but he also penned patriotic lines in the style of Edgar's verse, for example in "Canada" (1889):

The Saxon force, the Celtic fire,  
 These are thy manhood's heritage!  
 Why rest with babes and slaves? Seek  
 higher

The place of race and age. (18)

The presumed "race" uniting Canadian subjects was a key rallying cry in patriotic verse as in Agnes Maule Machar's "A Song for Canada" published in the aptly titled Lays of the True North (1899):

Saxon and Celt and Norman we:

Each race its memory keeps;

Yet o'er us all, from sea to sea,

One Red Cross banner sweeps. (43-44)

Like the adventure writers who claimed that the saga made an appropriate genre for the northern races and the nationalists for whom Canada constituted an environment in which northern races would find their former glory, these poets see a direct relationship between the north and the nation.

In idealized poetic tributes, the nation tends to be personified. Nathaniel Benson's "Canada" (1930) personifies the nation as a woman, specifically as a dutiful daughter to Britain, who reigns over the landscape: "And the North's green fires at midnight were / her altar-lights austere" (226-27). In Alexander McLachlan's "The Genius of Canada" (1900), the national consciousness is a woman who comes across the "eastern wave" and, hearing the cries of slaves in the south, looks northward for a home:

"I'll seek the northern woods," she cried,

"Tho' bleak the skies may be;

The maple dells,



Where freedom dwells,  
Have special charms for me;

"For moral worth and manhood there  
Have found a fav'ring clime.

I'll rear a race  
For long to grace  
The mighty page of Time."

(Poetical Works 194-95)

It is worth noting that the "race," later referred to as a "brood," founded by the "Genius of Canada" issues exclusively from the three nations represented by the image of the intertwined shamrock, rose, and thistle.

As one of the poets who Tom Marshall includes among "the necessary, competent drudges who prepared the way for the more accomplished, more genuinely native poets who followed" (3), McLachlan articulates a particular historical moment in Canadian poetry, one characterized by overstated national identification. In McLachlan's verse, the north brings the health and moral virtue which moulds ideal masculine and racial identity, an image that characterizes other forms used to represent the north at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The personification of the north in these poems cannot be separated from these patriotic intentions.

### Poetry of Rugged Experience: Robert Service

At this time, the north was a central theme in popular poetry, especially in the ballads of Robert W. Service. For part of this century, Service's critical reception has reflected E. K. Brown's assessment of him as a "marginal figure" who had no influence on subsequent generations of poets. In On Canadian Poetry (1943), Brown writes:

. . . if it were not for the Canadian  
themes of so many among the most  
effective of his pieces, there would be  
no tendency to regard him as a part of  
Canadian literature. He caught a noisy,  
highly coloured moment in our history--  
the Yukon gold-rush--in his noisy,  
highly coloured verse. (61)

Brown, thinking the appeal of such popular poetry to be on the wane, could not have known that Service would one day be the subject of serious academic attention, including two biographies, nor could he have foreseen the rehabilitation of popular literature brought about by late twentieth-century cultural studies.

In "The Age of Brass: Drummond, Service and Canadian 'Local Colour,'" Jay Johnson remarks that popular poetry of the early twentieth century is interesting for "its attempt to mythologize, to imaginatively recreate, specific regions of the country, thus making them, for the first time, accessible to all Canadians" (15). In his biography of

Service, Carl Klinck seems to concur by claiming a singular importance for Service's poetry which gave "recreations of life in the Canadian Yukon--vast, cold, hard, savage, magnificent, alluring, beautiful--a frontier of adventure for exiles from cities," in which "[t]he Northern wastes were no more blank: they were given a meaning, an individuality, a language, and symbols of man's restless endeavour" (Klinck 36).

The image of the poet opening up the imaginative frontier to the north, like a rugged explorer or pioneer, would have no doubt pleased Robert Service who, more than any other poet, mythologized the north as the other side of civilization, the place roamed by "The Men Who Don't Fit In." After arriving in the Yukon in 1904, and working as a teller for the Canadian Bank of Commerce in Whitehorse from 1908-10, Robert Service also enjoyed a lively social life, giving amateur theatrical recitations of such dramatic ballads as Kipling's "Gunga Din" (Klinck 33). The rhythm of the ballad and the sounds of the music halls Service (like Kipling) had always frequented inspired Service's "sourdough" poems while the northern setting provided him with stories and experiences he could write about and the kind of values he could admire.

In Vagabond of Verse: Robert Service, a Biography (1995), James MacKay presents Robert Service as self-deprecating and shy of the limelight, a travel writer and tourist who admired Robert Louis Stevenson and who

considered losing his toiletries on the ship to America his first taste of "roughing it" (111). MacKay also notes how Service describes himself as a "shrimp" (157) who "energetically cultivated laziness" as a kind of freedom (123). "The public image of the reckless gold-seeker, the man of action and the rugged outdoor type was only partially true," for although he adopted the life of a wilderness man, acceptance from the masculine, northern men he admired was slow to come (MacKay 15). In fact, compared to the men whose lives he made into legends, Service, with his love of books and lonely walks, was hardly masculine in the conventional sense. I would argue that Service's fascination with the rough men of the north and the vernacular they spoke arose from his own desire to be such a man and the painful realization that he was not.

Service describes the "brotherhood of men that know the north" (164), at the beginning of Ballads of a Cheechako (1909):

The nameless men who nameless rivers travel,  
And in some strange valleys greet strange deaths  
alone;

The grim, intrepid one who would unravel

The mysteries that shroud the Polar Zone. (77)

When addressing this audience, he often positions himself in relation to these men in self-deprecating ways. Because the poet's membership in the fraternity is tenuous, he can more heartily sing their praises, as in "Men of the High North"

(1909): "Children of Freedom, scornful of frontiers, / We who are weaklings honor your worth" (79).

That Service was fascinated by the heroic, rugged individual found in northern adventures can be no surprise given his own comparatively insecure masculinity. These are the men in "The Rhyme of the Restless Ones" (1907) who "break the hearts of kith and kin" (42), and sing: "But we'll never stay in town and we'll never settle down" (63).

In "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" (1907) they are the men who are drawn to the call of the "Great Alone" (30); in "The Call of the Wild" (1907), they hear the "Great White Silence" (17). In these and other poems, Service "reflects an outward bound, centrifugal phase which points toward the frontier and celebrates the tribe of misfits who inhabit the far outposts" (Johnson 16); his is the poetry of the rugged individual, the particular masculine individual found in other representations of the north.

The counterpart to these restless men is, of course, a beckoning and dangerous female north made even more fearsome by her comparison to the civilized women who make cosy, inviting homes for wayward men. In many of the poems published in Rhymes of a Rolling Stone (1912), such as "The Rover," adventure is made more pleasurable by the thought of home, and "Home and Love" even equates its rewards with heavenly bliss. In "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," the music speaks to the lonely men's hunger for a home and the "lady that's known as Lou" evokes the absence of the ideal woman,

for Lou is not: "A woman dearer than all the world, and true as Heaven is true" (31). By juxtaposing this vision against that of the treacherous Lou, Service makes the contrast explicit: the woman in a domestic setting provides comfort; the woman on the frontier poses a threat. Fear of women outside the domestic sphere suffuses poems such as the bitter "Virginity" (1940), in which the speaker wishes her mother dead for bearing her to the shame of spinsterhood, or "The Harpy" (1907) in which the speaker is an old, painted prostitute who endures the rapacious sexual desires of men.

"The Law of the Yukon" (1907) personifies the Yukon as a terrifying yet maternal woman who, like the whore, is desired and despised and who waits "lonely, shunned as a thing accurst" dreaming of a day when "men shall not rape my riches, and curse me and go away":

And I wait for the men who will win me--and I will  
not be won in a day;

And I will not be won by weaklings, subtle, suave  
and mild,

But by men with the hearts of vikings, and the  
simple faith of a child (12)

As I have argued, the allure of the north in this particular period speaks particularly of the racial superiority of northern white races, as Service's idealization of Vikings seems to confirm. The white speaker in "Little Moccasins" (1912) reflects such an attitude when he laments the death of his blond, blue-eyed daughter with the improbable

statement, "Your mother was a half-breed Cree, but you were white all through" (237). Service lets Vikings stand as an ideal of northern masculinity, as other writers of the time do. "Death in the Arctic" (1912) features a cast of Nordic characters, including Olaf, the Blonde, and Big Eric, who are no match for the north's merciless climate. As Atwood remarks, "popular lore, and popular literature, established early that the North was uncanny, awe-inspiring in an almost religious way, hostile to white men, but alluring; that it would lead you on and do you in; that it would drive you crazy, and finally, would claim you for its own" (19).

The superiority of these heroes does not ensure their success or even survival, for the north has a will of its own. Beyond the frontier is civilization's antithesis, where "strange things" are done, as in "The Cremation of Sam McGee," and lawlessness prevails: "For things are done in the midnight Sun that no tongue will ever tell; / And Men there be who walk earth-free, but whose names are writ in hell" (93). While the north is clearly outside the law in Service's world, outside society's rules and conventions, it is the civilization of the south that inspires fear for the speaker in "I'm Scared of It" (1912) who feels oppressed by trains, subways, and automobiles, and longs for the "Land of the Blizzard and Bear": "Oh, I wish I was snug in the Arctic once more, / For I know I am safer up there!" (263).

"The Call of the Wild" (1907) celebrates the transparency of the north's laws of survival, "[e]ternal

truths that shame our soothing lies" (17). What comforts the speaker in his ballads is the strength that was also associated with superior northern races in "The Law of the Yukon" (1907):

This is the Law of the Yukon, that only the Strong  
shall thrive;

That surely the Weak shall perish, and only the  
Fit survive.

Dissolute, damned and despairful, crippled and  
palsied and slain,

This is the Will of the Yukon,--Lo, how she makes  
it plain! (13)

From this perilous region, a superior strain of men rises up. In "The Pines," they are the "steadfast legion of stalwart knights in dominant empery," who claim: "To us was the Northland given, ours to stronghold and defend" (21-22).

Service's affinity with Kipling, who he mentions by name in "The Nostomaniac" (1912), is clear in the references to being driven out to new lands and from empire to empire. Service worked in the literary shadow of Kipling with his themes of "manly adventure on the frontiers of the world" (Johnson 23).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Melody Webb's history of Alaska, The Last Frontier (1985), appropriates the rugged individualism celebrated by Service in the Canadian north as a specific feature of American identity. Webb depicts the "red-blooded Americans" of the era as more manly than the heavily-taxed and bureaucratic Canadians in the north (129).



The influence of Kipling indicates the late Victorian context for Service's work although the masculine traits displayed by Service's men of the north correspond only slightly to Victorian ideals of manliness such as self-restraint and duty to one's country. Like the heroes of late nineteenth-century adventure, the men in Service's poems face the challenge set by an unrelenting northern environment, but unlike those heroes, Service's characters do not always possess moral virtue. The north is a place for misfits including those whose "names are writ in hell" as well as for "stalwart knights"; it is the place where the social contract can be broken.

In Service's poetry, the north is primarily a place where rugged individuals thrive rather than a symbol standing for the new nation. As Margaret Atwood remarks in her Clarendon lectures, Service reiterated the images of the north circulating in popular literature before and after the turn of the century, making him the "great mother-lode of Northern cliché" (Strange Things 17, 80). Atwood's characteristically witty comment points to the lasting impact of Service's verse, for as Rob Shields argues, the cliché bears a cultural significance, and "the entry of many metaphors into the realm of cliché is partial evidence of the diffusion of Northern images" (Places 172)--as Ken Coates and William Morrison point out, even the "True North, Strong and Free of our national anthem is a cliché worn smooth by generations of repetition" (Purposes of Dominion

1). Service certainly offers a wealth of such images in his poetry. The strong oral quality of the ballad combined with vernacular language in the work of Robert Service announces a tradition in northern verse which would continue to develop in narrative poetry.

### **The Romantic Response**

While Robert Service sang of the Yukon's rugged men and patriotic poets called on the north's children to rally round the Canadian nation, exciting, new Canadian poetry was happening elsewhere. In contrast to Service's menacing northern wilderness, a benign, regenerative wilderness developed in the work of the Confederation poets and, later, in the painting of the Group of Seven. As their contemporary critic, F. B. Housser, wrote:

The message that the Group of Seven art movement gives to this age is the message that here in the North has arisen a young nation with faith in its own creative genius. (215)

Emerging as it did from modern dissatisfaction with the effects of industrialization and urbanization and alongside the growing North American conservationist movement, the late Romantic vision of nature in the Group of Seven displays a "vague Transcendentalism" (Altmeyer 32) which was "inspired as the result of a direct contact with Nature herself" (Housser 24). Like the Confederation poets, as Eli

Mandel observes, the Group of Seven participated in the "reinterpretation of nature, not as environment to be transformed," as it had been in the territorial claims of Mair's poetry for example, "but as a transformative and generative process" (20).

As remarks by both Housser and Roald Nasgaard indicate, the Group of Seven "conceived of their art as national Romantic" not only in its content, but also "because it found its motivation in a mystical bonding with the land, the character of which provided the basis for common experience and, by analogy, national unity" (Nasgaard 166).

The ideas shared by the Group of Seven were informed by an interest in mysticism, especially theosophy, which they expressed as national feeling. Indeed, Lismer's article in a 1925 issue of The Canadian Theosophist confidently predicted that Canadians "would come to produce fine art and fine craftsmanship because gradually they will become esthetically aware of their environment" (qtd. in Housser 13). "Harris too," writes Roald Nasgaard, "spoke of the informing spirit of nature and national expression in the most transcendent and mystical terms, giving the North itself a special place in his ideology" (169).

The north represented a source of mystic inspiration to the Group, affirming the theosophic impulses behind their view of nature, and this sense of the north as mysterious and mystical would encourage the Romantic nationalist vision. According to Ramsay Cook, the Group of Seven worked

to create a national aesthetic by eliminating European influences in their painting: "For the Group, especially for its most articulate spokesman, Lawren Harris, the natural environment was the North" although "[t]he discovery that Canadian nationality was connected with the north was hardly new" (16-17).

The influence that the Group of Seven had on the way the north was and is imagined cannot be overstated. The national focus of the Group's painting contributed to the conflation of "the Canadian north" and "Canada as North," and the "imaginary north" in Canadian literature owes a great deal to their Romantic nationalism, too. Many Canadians could probably identify with the experience David Booth describes in Images of Nature: Canadian Poets and the Group of Seven (1995):

Throughout my life I have been aware of  
paintings by the Group of Seven--on bank  
walls, in school halls and on postage  
stamps. . . The Group captured the  
natural heart of Canada and wrapped me  
in its vision as if inside the flag.

(3)

The northern wilderness becomes a national icon in their painting, and it has been received as such. In the Group's work, the north is the blank page from which the presence of aboriginal people has been erased leaving "a territory to be occupied and possessed, and a symbolic space, a topos being

named" (Bordo 102). As Bruce Hodgins remarks, the Group of Seven "rarely put people in their North" ("The Canadian North" 2). It is therefore appropriate that David Booth's collection of poetry and painting pairs their work with poems depicting the north as tabula rasa such as Earle Birney's "Ellesmereland I" (1952): "No man is settled on that coast / The harebells are alone" (qtd. in Booth 12).

Among the remaining vestiges of the Romantic vision, Modernist poets would turn to nature, too, but less frequently to the far north. Canadian Modernist poets would also turn away from nature poetry in which "images such as the red maple of autumn and spring's first crocus" flourished, and Canadian Modernists F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith, A. M. Klein, and Leo Kennedy, in Patricia Morley's words, "rocked these tired native symbols" (27).

Because Modernist poets were part of an international movement, as Brian Trehearne's Aestheticism and the Canadian Modernists (1989) shows, the rupture with others that causes the individual to go north is less frequent in their poetry.

Another reason why the north does not figure prominently in Modernist poetry derives from the poets' specific influences. "The Canadian Modernists," writes Trehearne, "are set keenly apart from the poetasters of their time by virtue of their recent Aesthetic rather than late Romantic poetic derivation" (13). Wherever the north can be found in literature, there can also be found some form of

Romanticism, and that Romanticism seems to account for its appeal to the idea of national consciousness.

Although the post-war decades saw the foundation of various national periodicals and institutions, the Romantic nationalism that caused earlier poets to look to the north waned. To find the same kind of interest in the north in Canadian poetry, more often than not one must look to content, to landscape imagery and narrative, to the kind of submerged description of northern experience that Atwood traces in Pratt's The Titanic.

In his summary of E. J. Pratt's contribution to Canadian literature, W. J. Keith observes: ". . . it seems fair to conclude that Pratt celebrated the individual hero, the strong man endowed with determination, physical strength, and the all-important vision, yet realized that he could only operate within a social context or a like-minded group" (Canadian 57). As D. G. Jones asserts throughout Butterfly on Rock, the individual may temporarily seek solitude for regeneration and self-understanding, which Jones suggests is the case in Lampman's poetry (100-01), but the individual emerges from interactions with others more often than not in Canadian poetry, and this can be seen in both the poets' works and lives (140-41; passim).

According to Northrop Frye, separating oneself from the community in the way the theoretical masculine individual does means leaving the safety of the garrison for the perils of the wilderness and inspires the "tone of deep terror in

regard to nature" that impressed Frye in Canadian poetry ("Conclusion" 830). Rather than initiating the individual, the separation can lead to the annihilation of self if the wilderness destroys the individual. Individuals, therefore, often emerge in relation to other people in the confines of society rather than as the result of a successful quest. Yet, Canadian Modernists did feel the influence of their contemporary nationalists like the Group of Seven--it is there in F. R. Scott's "North Stream" ("Ice mothers me") or the "Inarticulate, arctic, / Not written on by history" of "Laurentian Shield" (1954)--but it is through Bentley's identification of formal adaptation as the grounds for a distinct Canadian poetry that the complex ways in which the environment as depicted by the Group and the emerging literary form can be seen to interact.

According to the ecological model proposed by Bentley, form emerges from the experience the poet seeks to articulate; thus, the formal strictures of Imagism, and possibly Modernism as well, are less suitable for poetry inspired by or expressing the vast spaces of the hinterland while the possibilities of free verse give the poet a freedom that is more appropriate to its expression ("New Dimension" 10-15). The poetry of Al Purdy, the Canadian poet who has been most devoted to the expression of northern experience, exemplifies the formal characteristics that Bentley identifies.

In contrast, W. J. Keith compares the bold clarity of W. W. E. Ross's Imagist verse to the paintings of the Group of Seven (Canadian 58) and asserts that "The Lonely Land" is A. J. M. Smith's best-known poem "not because it offers an unforgettable verbal impression of the northern Canadian landscape but because it represents a triumph of subtly controlled vocabulary and carefully modulated rhythms. To call it descriptive would be absurd" (59). Keith finds Modernist "avoidance of the verbally ornate" and "honest precision" (40) as well as the need to assert order over chaos at particular moments in the development of Canadian poetry emerging not from a response to the environment, but from a series of intellectual clashes such as the tension between cosmopolitan and local influences (74). Stressing the differences between poets, Keith treats the poets as steadfastly individualistic in their attempts to find a voice, and this leads him away from the shared experience that might indicate a national consciousness. For him, the poet's greatness is told in the ability to dramatize a particular situation, and then in creating the distance needed to transcend it (38).

Landscape has long served poetic language in Canadian literature--one need only look to A. M. Klein's submerged poet in "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" or to the "beauty / of dissonance" in Smith's "The Lonely Land" to appreciate its role. Literary critics stress its importance, too; for example, in Headwaters of Canadian



Literature (1924), Archibald MacMechan cites "interpretation of the land" as a quality that makes poetry "Canadian" (116). Fifty-five years later, poet Tom Marshall's critical overview of Canadian poetry describes how, in the colonial period, "[t]he eeriness of Canadian space, the apparent emptiness, the silence required another expression" (5).

Whether the northern landscape can be best evoked in Imagist or free verse, by modernist or postmodernist poets and despite whatever effect environment may have on poetic form, Canadian poetry has not demonstrated an identification of the environment with the north as readily as certain prose forms have. In fiction, travel writing, and even ethnography, common experience and shared identity can be thematized. The rugged individuals populating prose set in the north do not often find a home in Canadian poetry (with the notable exception of the poetry of Robert Service), or, if they do, they are more mad than mythic as in Earle Birney's "Bushed" or Margaret Atwood's "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer."

The solitary figure of the poet in the work of Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Patrick Lane, and, to some extent, Eli Mandel, may have certain characteristics of the northern individual, the self-sufficiency and aloof stance, but the poet exists outside society in order to be a poet, not necessarily to forge a distinct, masculine identity. The poet may exist apart from society, but it is to better "sing" and "serve," in Irving Layton's terms, and though the

speaker (Layton's in particular) might revel in masculinity, and might even figure his celebration in the images of the romance or quest, the north does not necessarily become linked to those images. The interest in identity, through the exploration of the self, the interior mind and spirit, at the heart of so much poetry differentiates it from the kind of identity achieved through the mastering of physical ordeals and the conquest of the northern world found in adventure and travel writing. The north, however, does inform the content of representational and narrative poetry, especially in popular and patriotic verse and recently in the poetry influenced by techniques of storytelling.

### **Poets and Storytellers**

As the case of Robert Service illustrates, the north appears to play its greatest role as a theme in representational and narrative poetry. Increasingly, the north has become the subject of poetry by poets who are or who aspire to be storytellers: poets such as Al Purdy and Paulette Jiles. Central to the work of such poets is personal experience, just as it is to contemporary writers who have worked from their northern travels, writers such as Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, and John Moss.

The contemporary poet who, as Lorraine York remarks, has "probably more than any other, set up cultural shop in the Canadian North" is Al Purdy (48). Purdy's poetry shows us the aestheticized north we will see in the travel writing

of postmodern writers such as Barry Lopez and Aritha van Herk, but it also constitutes a break with these patterns in representation. York sees Purdy "playing with the myth of the north as a blank page, but starting to question it at the same time," so that the north in Purdy's poetry resists the kind of representation in which "the North becomes a huge, white narcissistic playground, passively offering up to us the image of our imposing selves" (48-49).

Al Purdy has been praised by Peter Buitenhuis as one of the writers who "have done their best to pierce the illusions and myths in order to write about the North without attempting to colonize it with the imagination" (6) and who "break through the barriers of perceptions, to reach beyond illusion, myth or utopia to create a convincing image of the North and its people" (4). For Buitenhuis, Purdy's poems are "reminders to us in the south of what is really there behind the myths and illusions" created by representations of the north (12).

These analyses can be supported with reference to Purdy's rejection of the Romantic national ideal represented in the work of the Group of Seven. Purdy's lack of enthusiasm for the A. Y. Jackson plates that form the marginalia to North Of Summer was expressed in a letter to George Woodcock: "They don't fit," he writes, "what the hell, they'll sell books I guess" (qtd. in Van Rys 3). Purdy recognized that the Group of Seven's north, the blank, mystical north that was so closely associated with Canadian

nationalism did not resemble the north of his poetic imagination.

Initially, Purdy wanted to illustrate the collection the way Inuit writers do by using Inuit drawings, and his interest in Inuit culture points away from the aesthetic to the ethnographic focus of his poetry. In her reading of "Lament for the Dorsets," York suggests that Purdy indicates the north's resistance to aesthetic representation in part through attention to ethnographic detail. As the Kudluk's carving becomes "an analogy" for Purdy's poem (York 50), it seems the poem is built on the artifact he imagines, or at least, on the possibility for reconciliation of past and present it holds. Throughout North of Summer (1967), attention to ethnographic details signals the basis on which Purdy builds his poetic vision of the north. As George Woodcock remarks, Purdy shows "the ability to turn intensely felt experience into fine loping poetry without much of Wordsworth's 'recollection in tranquillity'" (Introduction 115). The extent to which ethnography and travel writing influence Purdy's poetry is difficult to assess; however, his work shares the ethnographer's emphasis on the authenticating and authorizing role of firsthand experience.

In subject matter, Purdy's poetry shows an interest in both the role of experience and the continuation of the past into the present that I have noted in representations of Inuit culture. The young Inuit woman in "Girl," like the Dorset hunter bending over his carving in "Lament for the Dorsets"

(Wild Grape Wine 1968), remains as an emblem of cultural survival and endurance long after the individuals are gone.

Cultural survival is assured through art, especially the poet's ability to reconcile the life of the imagination and the real, to make experience meaningful.

Survival is also the theme of Purdy's "Trees at the Arctic Circle" which begins with the speaker's angry reaction to the "Coward trees" as they are mocked by his memories of southern trees (29) and ends with the realization "I have been stupid in a poem" (30), for the speaker has come to appreciate the trees as emblems of survival. In "Postscript to 'Trees at the Arctic Circle,'" Purdy further praises their endurance since the ancient time when they appeared "unnoticed by anyone" (31). In Naked with Summer in Your Mouth (1994), he continues to seek survivors who might reconcile art and experience, mortality and immortality, as in his elegiac poem for Stan Rogers: "he is not there / but 'driving hard across the plains' / for the Northwest Passage" (63).

In form as in content, Purdy's poetry depicts the north in terms of lived experience. According to W. J. Keith, Purdy's "poetry of plain speak" stresses his vernacular style, his resistance to metric convention, and feeling for finding the past (98-99). This is Purdy the storyteller, whose poetry is "rich in flora and fauna, and rich, too, in anecdotes (full, in fact, of sloughs and ships, and arctic rhododendrons, and cactuses and Sam McGees)" (Bentley, "New

Dimension" 15). The element of story in Purdy's poetry accounts in part for the praise it earns as representation of the real north; however, the adaptation of form also reflects an attempt to deal imaginatively with the northern reality. D. M. R. Bentley cites Purdy as one of those poets who adapts the free verse form to the hinterlandscape:

"Purdy's well-known response to the 'vast lonely' spaces of the Arctic was to use a short-lined, open-ended free verse and to concentrate, by his own admission, on details and on people" ("New Dimension" 15).

By way of adaptation, North of Summer includes what John Van Rys describes as "low and sub-literary genres," such as the diary and the explorer's journal (8), forming an intertextual link with writing by other travellers as well as "blurring of boundaries" of genre. These formal elements allow Purdy to counter dominant Arctic myths. For example, Purdy takes on the explorer's mystique in "The North West Passage," answering the title with the first line ("is found") that announces the obsolescence of Arctic exploration (20). The speaker, bored, lounges on his bed waiting for dinner. Everything has been named by the time the speaker arrives: Baffin, Boothia, Ungava, Thule after explorers such as Frobisher and Amundsen and the incongruous Ringnes brothers, the "heroic Norwegian brewers whose names / cling alcoholically to islands up there" (21). Heroes, like myths and illusions, are undone in Purdy's poetry: "The mirror is broken / (glass is fragile anyway) /. . . all

heroes die" ("Heroes" Naked 61). The Arctic requires no more exploration, and the speaker's imaginary journey "in search of dead sailors" (20) on the map ends with disappointment:

but the Terror and Erebus sank long ago  
 and it's half an hour before dinner  
 and there isn't much to do but write letters  
 and I can't think of anything more to say  
 about the North West Passage  
 but I'll think of something  
 maybe  
 a break-thru

to strawberries and ice cream for dinner. (21)

The speaker's inertia and decadence contrast with the glamour of exploration as the speaker is found in an unheroic position. According to John Van Rys, in Purdy's "carnivalized version of epic heroism," the poem creates an epic world in order to turn it upside down so that the reader sees the Arctic world in a new way (6).

When Gwendolyn MacEwan turns to the Franklin expedition as a subject for her verse play, Terror and Erebus (1987), she also questions the myths surrounding the north's history of great men. To do so, she uses ballad form for those passages in which the explorers speak. As Atwood remarks, MacEwan "knows her ballad lore" and its rhythm (Strange Things 27). The ballad form suits the myths of the north, the tales of men prevailing in harsh circumstances,

explorers and traders and miners on the margins of the society they flee. Although Terror and Erebus is in free verse form, it also evokes throughout the quatrains of alternating four-stress and three-stress lines and the abcb or abab rhyme scheme used repeatedly by Service:

How could they know, even stand back and see  
 The nature of the place they stood on  
 When no man can, no man know where he stands  
 Until he leaves his place, looks back  
                     and knows. . .

As though you created the Passage  
 By willing it to be.

Ah Franklin!

To follow you one does not need geography.

(Afterworlds 41-42)

The thematic content of MacEwan's Terror and Erebus describes certain myths, including the north as "the land God gave Cain" and the north as an imaginary space. In its narrative of Rasmussen's search for Franklin, the poem demythologizes the explorer's episteme: as the speaker, Rasmussen says, addressing Franklin, "You carried all maps within you" and died:

Seeking a passage from imagination to  
                     reality,  
 Seeking a passage from land to land  
                     by sea. (Afterworlds 42)



In Rasmussen's sections of the play, the clash of knowledges is explicit. As Franklin tried to find the maps in his head by leaving "Cryptic marks" (56), the connection between writing and mapping is made clear in the image of the remains of the Franklin expedition "Like shattered compasses, like sciences / Gone mad" (41) scattered around "cairns / like compasses" and "Marking out all the latitudes / and longitudes / Of men" (56). Throughout the verse play, space is textualized by the movements of the explorers who turn what they imagine into the maps, journals, diaries, and official reports that Rasmussen says "Nobody needs to read" (56). Yet, it is that creation in representation which brings the Northwest Passage into being:

The eye creates the horizon  
 The ear invents the wind  
 The hand reaching out from a parka sleeve  
 By touch demands that the touched thing  
                   be. (42)

Like the "hand of Franklin" in Stan Rogers's ballad "The Northwest Passage," "[t]racing one warm line through a land so wide and savage," MacEwan's Franklin wilfully pursues the imaginary passage, leaving Rasmussen asking the question that ends the verse play:

Or. . .is it that the way was invented,  
 Franklin?

That you cracked the passage open  
 With the forces of your sheer certainty?

Or is it that you cannot know,  
 Can never know,  
 Where the passage lies  
 Between conjecture and reality . . . ?

(Afterworlds 56-7)

Al Purdy's work also traces the tensions between northern myth and northern reality explored in MacEwan's verse play.

Based as it is on his travels in the north, Purdy's northern poems appeal for the experience at their core, for the stories he tells in poetic form.

Another poet who bases poetic description on personal experience is Paulette Jiles. In an interview with Elizabeth Mills, Jiles admits that she considers herself a kind of storyteller in the tradition of her Ozark mountain upbringing, particularly the legacy of her grandfather (245; 251). Women tend to write stories about their interior lives, says Jiles, so experience is important (247). Northern travels led her to write about the north, turning personal experiences into poetry. While her position with regards to the culture she describes resembles that of an ethnographer, Jiles points out that, unlike the "invading tribe of white experts, the anthropologists and the shaman-groupies and the Indian Affairs advisors," she was invited, hired, and employed by the Ojibwe ("Spontaneously Created People" 269). Jiles was authorized to speak by the people, but she describes her own strangeness as the source of her insight:

When you change cultures you develop antennae that the people whose culture you are entering do not have because they are in it. By virtue of the fact that you are a stranger, you develop very sensitive antennae and maybe my antennae become over-sensitive, but I learned not to take chances and not to make mistakes because they're costly.

(248)

Her account of cultural initiation is strikingly similar to the initiation of fieldwork, and it confirms the importance of experience in her work. By virtue of her outsider status, Jiles believes that she can represent other cultures accurately, thus she eschews the self-consciousness of postmodern texts and turns to realism to describe her northern travels.

Susan J. Schenk observes that Jiles finds a distinctly "female" voice in poetry by developing a narrative poetic style that allows her to articulate women's experience (67).

Although Schenk bases her remarks on a poorly defined notion of histories as "predominantly male" and uses that definition to assess the subversive nature of Jiles's Jesse James poems, her identification of the important role of experience in the feminist focus of Jiles's poetry is valuable. The "female" response, Schenk asserts, is "to transform that experience into story, and in doing so, to

reject silence and passivity" (78). The poetry that Jiles writes about the north shows a similar focus on experience, her own and that of others.

In her poems, as in her account of northern travels in Northern Spirit (1995), Jiles "fashions a contemporary female myth of the woman as picaresque hero, inverting the male myth of Ulysses" according to Francis Mansbridge (153).

Although his term "male myth" lacks definition, Mansbridge signals the connection between travel and identity in Jiles's work and suggests that it overturns the usual masculine-feminine binary. For example, he notes that, as if to reaffirm the revision of the myth at the heart of her work, men are associated with the "civilized past," replacing the idealized women who represent southern civilization in the poetry of Robert Service. However, despite Mansbridge's interesting observations, Jiles's work is surprisingly free of the gender opposition it is said to overturn. The narrator in Northern Spirit takes on the masculine characteristics described in quest narratives, but with an interesting difference: the initiation into the northern world does not involve the feminization and subsequent marginalization of the land and the people living on it. Nor is the return that completes the cyclical quest assured. Like the "blending of voices" Robert A. Kelly observes in the Jesse James poems, the absence of binary opposition indicates the difficulty of establishing "firm

boundaries between selves, between the external world and the poet's conception of that world" (28).

Yet, Jiles herself refers to The Odyssey in the preface to Song to the Rising Sun (1989):

In university I would hear my professors  
expound on The Odyssey, and the  
techniques the poet used, and how  
brilliant they were, and I could never  
figure out why poets or writers weren't  
using them now. So I used them. (11-  
12)

In the title poem, the techniques to which she refers include "repetition, variations in sentence structure, those long series of driving imperatives, the fall-back into softer lyric, the direct address to the audience, and doubled or chorused or massed voices" (11).

"Song to the Rising Sun" is the only poem in the collection bearing its name that deals with Jiles's northern experience. As she points out, it was written with "very old devices" in mind, and for that reason, it reads well as a radio performance, which it was originally. The poem's rhythm comes from the repetition of words and phrases, mostly in the form of anaphora. "What did we do all winter while we waited for the sun?" the poem begins as the speaker asks and then answers ironically: "We listened to the radio, we listened to the seductive / and fraudulent voices," following with a long list:

we drew up plans,  
 we cut our losses,  
 we re-read our contracts,  
 we visited everybody in the village,  
 we dreamed,  
 we were dreamed . . . . (13)

Like the storyteller of oral tradition, Jiles's speaker relies on repetition and the rhythms of speech to give the poem its rhythm, and like the work of Inuit writers, these techniques are enlisted to serve political purposes.

As the refrain indicates ("Junk is lethal"), the poem's politics are environmental. From the comment of the pilot, "and he said, you know, / I think Big Stuff will save us" (16) to the imploring statements of the speaker, the poem calls on readers to take notice of what is happening to the world around them:

I am trying to reach you by radio.  
 Listen. Take thought, take thought,  
 think. Listen. Watch.

I am trying to reach you by radio telephone,  
 waiting for the sun to come back. (17)

The speaker's voice is insistent; the language is colloquial:

because we have torn a hole in the ionosphere,  
 because we are pouring out 100 million tons  
 of sulphur dioxide a year,

because we have soaked the Arctic pole in a  
 pollution  
     haze  
 that pilots cannot fly through,  
 because we have blamed it on everybody else,  
 because we have said that poetry will be only  
 small lyrics of pastoral love. . . . (24)

In "Song to the Rising Sun," the political content gains force from the influence of oral tradition on the form, and in this adaptation of tradition to contemporary purposes, it is derivative of aboriginal writing such as Inuit literature.

#### **Inuit Poetry**

I call forth the song. . .  
 I draw a deep breath. . .  
 My breast breathes heavily  
 As I call forth the song.  
 ---Akjartoq (qtd. in Colombo 44)

"There is no such thing as Eskimo poetry," wrote Edmund Carpenter in 1971, "there are only poetic acts by individual Eskimos" (I Breathe 13). Carpenter's remarks are some of the first in the criticism of Inuit literature as literature. Much of what we know as Inuit "poems" are actually traditional oral songs, chants, and prayers transcribed, collected, and translated by ethnographers, and, therefore, Inuit poetry is subject to the problems of

authenticity discussed in chapter 2.<sup>4</sup> While ethnographers who collected traditional songs and stories were moved to do so by their fear that the Inuit traditions were dying, Richard Lewis collected poems in I Breathe a New Song (1971)--whose title alludes to the fact that the Inuktitut word for "to make poetry" means "to breathe"--in order "to help preserve a culture that began to disappear in 1955" (6).

The reception of Inuit poetry in the south has been deeply influenced by the value of its anthropological content. As part of the essential, sacred culture, poems are treated as artifacts to be collected and preserved. Robin McGrath describes how attempts to popularize Inuit poetry have resulted in "all Inuit poems [being] regarded as sacred, unspoiled flowers that were simply to be admired in a passive way, never subject to the intense light of criticism" ("Inuit Literature" 702). It is not enough to accommodate Inuit literature through cultural tolerance, McGrath implies; instead, she advocates subjecting Inuit literature in English to "the same academic attention that we give literature by English-Canadian or French-Canadian writers" (702).

Although Inuktitut does not have an equivalent for the verb "to create," Carpenter describes the Inuit idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Robin McGrath outlines these problems with specific reference to the transcription and translation of the oral in "Editing Inuit Literature Leaving the Teeth in the Gently Smiling Jaws."



poetic creation thus: "Poet, like carver, releases form from the bonds of formlessness: he brings it forth into consciousness. He must reveal form in order to protest against a universe that is formless, and the form he reveals should be beautiful" (14). Inuit poets are not concerned with representing the landscape, Carpenter asserts; rather, they interact with the environment which "requires a creative human act before the world explored becomes a world revealed" (15). There is no distance between the poetry Carpenter describes and the prayers and chants of the oral tradition. The poetic brings things into being.<sup>5</sup> In this Iglulik poem, sung by Aua, the hunter sings for strength "to lighten heavy loads":

I will walk with leg muscles  
which are strong  
as the sinews of the shins of the little caribou  
calf.

I will walk with leg muscles  
which are strong  
as the sinews of the shins of the little hare.

I will take care not to go toward the dark.  
I will go toward the day. (Lewis 36)

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<sup>5</sup> In Inuit culture, writes Joseph Epes Brown, "[t]o name or speak of a person, a being, or some phenomenon in Nature, is to make really present that which is named, or indeed is actually to call forth the spiritual essence of that which is named" (142-43).

Characterized as they are by the repetition of words, phrases, and images, traditional Inuit poems collected and translated for English readers give a sense of the diversity of Inuit culture even if, by taking written form, they cease to be part of the oral tradition. Collections of examples from the oral tradition function as synecdochic statements on the culture because they can only evoke the tradition they belong to.

The traditional hunting songs and weather chants that are primarily narrative indicate the male-dominated hunting culture non-Inuit imagine the Inuit to be. In Orpingalik's "My Breath," the speaker mourns his former strength, remembering his hunting prowess and lamenting the state his woman is in:

Sad, I would that my woman  
 Were gone to a better protector  
 Now that I lack strength  
 To rise from my couch. (37)

The representation of gender difference also inheres in certain distinctly Inuit forms such as the song duel. Song duels, which are also called nith songs, drums songs, or satirical songs, are a form which seems to be unique to Inuit culture. In these, the poet or singer responds to a challenge or challenges another by deriding himself, someone else, a group or a type of behaviour (McGrath, Canadian Inuit 48). Song duals use irony and satire to various ends depending on the purpose they serve which may include

settling disputes, gently criticizing another, accusing another, or binding the friendship between song brothers, but they are also intended to amuse listeners. Song brothers engage in duels also to prove their masculinity, and their derisive remarks usually focus on the hunting and sexual prowess of the adversary.

These Inuit traditions once preserved on paper are claimed within the national literature. In his preface to Poems of the Inuit (1981), John Robert Colombo admits that his interest in the Inuit is closely related to his "concern for things Canadian" and his belief that "the oral art of the Inuit adds a distinctive element to the national mosaic" (7). The Inuit represent that absolute difference and identity which justifies the definition of Canada as a multicultural mosaic; moreover, the cultural diversity represented by Inuit poets is as distinctly Canadian as the work of canonical poets:

Aua, Netsit, Uvavunuk, and Orpingalik  
are new--and strange-sounding--names to  
place alongside those of Saint-Denys-  
Garneau, Raymond Knister, W. W. E. Ross  
and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, their  
better-known contemporaries. Yet the  
mix could occur only in Canada and the  
two groups of singers have much more in  
common than is immediately apparent.

(7)

Despite Colombo's enthusiasm, however, relatively few contemporary Inuit writers choose poetry as a genre in which to express themselves, preferring the rhetorical advantages of the essay, speech, and even short fiction. Those who do write poetry have reached an audience beyond their community in literary anthologies such as Penny Petrone's Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English (1988). As Petrone remarks, contemporary Inuit writers devote much of their talent to journalism, and "with a new political consciousness, unknown to their ancestors, they are writing a literature of opinion and information, largely derivative and imitative of western models, reflecting the new realities of political and social change" (201).

What little contemporary Inuit poetry there is uses forms and treats themes common to the oral tradition as the poems collected by Petrone indicate.<sup>6</sup> For example, Liz Semigok's "My Cooking Pot" (1988) which was written first in Inuktitut then translated into English, offers thanks "Grateful am I when it boils something" (285), and William Kalleo's "The Known Mysteries of Seals" (1982) has the repetition of the hunting chant: "Hunting seals / Hunting different seals" (253). Robin McGrath makes a convincing case for satire as the emerging Inuit form in English, and poems such as Alexis Pamiug Utatnaq's "Blood Thirsty

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<sup>6</sup> Robin McGrath argues that the form and content of Inuit poetry may change, but it is still firmly rooted in the oral tradition in her essay "Oral Influences in Contemporary Inuit Literature."

Enemies" (1974) exemplify the satiric impulse of much Inuit writing:

Our Enemy  
 Our enemy  
 They're so many  
 Our blood they spill  
 They make us ill  
 Help us, oh God  
 From their piercing rods  
 Our sworn foes  
 Those mosquitoes. (166)

In this poem, the surprise ending gives pause, reminding readers that, in the Arctic, mosquitoes pose a threat but also that Inuit life has changed. Ivaluartjuk sang of their ever-present threat in "Cold and Mosquitoes" (1929); however, mosquitoes also signify invaders from the south too, the image of bloodsucking pests being a particularly evocative one in times of increased resource exploitation.

Ivaluartjuk is just one poet who is also a storyteller and whose work therefore connects directly to the oral tradition. Mary Carpenter Lyons uses poetry and storytelling to voice contemporary political concerns. In "Nunavut? -Denendeh? = Northwestterritories" (1988), the speaker calls on the land to give its people strength to face the "distant men" who watch them die and "Who sit and build / invisible, governing walls" and concludes with the lament: "O greatland, you are leached by white lies / Lip-

serviced, not loved" (273). Like the poets of the oral tradition, Carpenter uses the "simplicity of tone, language, and subject matter, all of which combine to suggest the depth of importance of brief moments of emotion" (McGrath, Canadian Inuit 45).

Robin McGrath argues that "Inuit poems in English are not just anthropological enigmas, but are works that are accessible to anyone who brings curiosity and a little imagination to their reading of poetry" ("Reassessing" 19).

They may be strongly rooted in oral tradition, but Inuit poems written in English also address a non-Inuit audience.

Unlike the novel, autobiography, and essay, Inuit poetry has not developed primarily through contact with non-Inuit, and it retains strong ties to the oral tradition. As Petrone remarks, "the sacredness of the word has marked all Canadian Inuit literature. And young Inuit writers today continue to believe, as their forefathers before them, that in language will they find the true meaning of their ancient northern homeland" (202).

The reception of Inuit poetry demonstrates the popular appeal of anthropological material that the proliferation of ethnography seems also to confirm. Inuit literature in general, and Inuit poetry in particular, has been received this way because the representation of traditional culture confirms preconceptions of the Inuit as a remnant of the stone age past. These preconceptions include the centrality of hunting in the culture, the cultural significance of

survival, and the domination of women within the division of labour, the very same notions that are challenged by contemporary Inuit writers, poets, and storytellers.

### **Conclusion**

Poetry by individuals who have travelled or lived in the north shows the concern with ethnographic content evident in Inuit poetry. Manliness, racial superiority, and territorial expansion are clearly aligned in the career of Charles Mair, and the popular poetry of Robert Service creates a fraternity of rugged men who can live outside the social relations required of belonging to a nation. The ballad, emerging as an important form in Service's poetry, is also evoked in the poetic drama by Gwendolyn MacEwan. Paulette Jiles and Al Purdy do not pick up the ballad form, but their poetry has a similar narrative dimension, and their similarity to storytellers emphasizes the importance of experience in the poetry focused on the north.

Although D. M. R. Bentley's description of the influence of hinterlandscapes on form is exemplified in Purdy's free verse, the poetry in which the north figures as a theme usually does not belong to more experimental, avant-garde forms. Instead, poetic responses to the north are characterized by narrative content in the contemporary work of Purdy and Jiles, and by conventional metre and figures in the patriotic work of the early twentieth-century versifiers. The use of storytelling and the reception given

to Inuit poetry's anthropological content indicate the importance of experience, which brings the discussion back to the problems of ethnographic authority.



## Chapter 5

### Going North, Going Indian: The Wilderness of the North in Fiction and Travel Writing

Louis-Édmond Hamelin compares the north to "an irresistible itch, which implacably drives the man to mobility" (qtd. in Coates and Morrison, Purposes of Dominion 12), perhaps unconsciously identifying the masculine quest associated with the north. As the preceding chapters have shown, representations of the north often depend on concepts that are defined by masculine-feminine opposition. People go north to escape, to prove themselves, to learn something, and usually to leave again. The quest leads north to a land of the imagination as well as a destination for the adventurous character. In the adventure stories examined in chapter 3, representations of women or of the feminine are formed in opposition to representations of men. Similar opposition can be found in novels and travel writing about the north. Yet, most critics who analyze the north in literature and culture, with the exception of Sherrill Grace and Lisa Bloom, do not confront gender.<sup>1</sup>

To date, Shelagh Grant's "Myths of the North in the Canadian Ethos" remains the most comprehensive catalogue of

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<sup>1</sup> A few critics acknowledge the masculine language used in depictions of the north; for example, in Places on the Margin, Rob Shields recognizes that the north is "masculine-gendered" (163) but does not explore the idea further.

recurring images in representations of the north.<sup>2</sup> Grant's analysis is historical, showing the underlying social and economic motivations behind the romanticization of the northern wilderness as a place of "freedom, adventure and challenge" (21). Contemporary representations of the north, according to Grant, draw on the already existing urban-rural and wilderness-civilization dichotomies in literature developed out of the nineteenth-century Romantic "fascination with the relationship of mankind to the natural environment" (21), fashions that inspired the "sublime" and "picturesque" art explicated in the work of I. S. MacLaren. The representation of the north as a possible alternative to urban experience took literary form as "[t]he British aesthetic myth blended with the American wilderness myth to reinforce a romantic image of north as expressed first in literature and art then incorporated into the environmental movement of the 1970s" (Grant 37).

While vestiges of the Romantic image remain in evidence, Grant argues that the Romantic myth has been gradually overshadowed by the "resource" myth, that is, the north described by Mowat as a "cornucopia of riches" and celebrated by politicians throughout Canadian history ranging from members of the Canada First Movement to the Diefenbaker Conservatives who were inspired by their

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<sup>2</sup> Other critics to describe the diverse images of the north include Peter Buitenhuis, David Heinimann, Aron Senkpiel, Bruce Hodgins, and John Moss.

leader's vision of "a Canada of the North" (qtd. in Hodgson 10). The diversity of images of the north as both the land of the imagination and as geographical location of exploitable resources signals the shifting focus of representations of the north described in the introduction.

Recently, the return to representation which attempts to deal with the north on its own terms, especially in travel writing, shows a concern with the north's intrinsic value and the questions of authenticity such a concern raises.

The shifting discourse of the representation of the north has been described by Rob Shields as a conflation of the "imaginary North" with the "ideological North." The imaginary North, which I have identified as the setting of the quest, is "a frontier, a wilderness, an empty 'space' which, seen from southern Canada is white, blank" while the ideological North is that "empty page onto which can be projected images of the essence of 'Canadian-ness' and also images to define one's urban existence against" (Shields 165). Of course, not all Canadians share the "urban existence" Shields describes and some Canadians have firsthand knowledge of the northern regions, so the importance of the opposition between urban and rural in defining the north may be exaggerated; however, the two definitions offered by Shields describe the symbolic function of the north in Canada as both an empty space waiting for definition and as a repository of images defining the official national identity.

In the fiction examined so far, several of the imaginary and ideological aspects of the representation of the north observed overlap: the foundation of male community, the quest for an individual, gendered identity, the conquest of nature, and the flight from civilization. These elements bear a resemblance to the American frontier or Western novel even if they do not conform perfectly to Leslie Fiedler's description of the "Northern," counterpart of the Western. As T. D. MacLulich notes, the main conflict in a "Northern" does not involve the direct confrontation between the individual and the environment, but the encounter of a sensitive individual and a hostile environment in which "environmental and social oppression reinforce each other" (127). Canadian literature is replete with "Northerns" such as The Mountain and the Valley and As For Me and My House; however, most stories about the far north do not belong to this classification, because, in them, the individual generally "lights out" in order to escape the scenario described in the typical Northern. The individual's separation from society also distinguishes the representation of the north by non-aboriginal people from that of Inuit writers who are in the north and do not escape to it.

Some Canadian writers equate travelling northward with the act of writing: as the individual enters a blank, white world, so the writer fills the blank, white page, or as Robert Kroetsch writes, "[t]o write is, in some metaphoric

sense, to go North. To go North is, in some metaphoric sense, to write. One goes North at that very point on the page where the word is in the process of extending itself onto the blankness of the page" (Likely 14). Like the blank page, the north challenges the writer with a great silence: "The North was a silence that desired as much to be spoken as I desired to speak. It was the very geography of my desire. It was the landscape of my unspeakable narrative intention" (Likely 16). In Kroetsch's use of the blank page as a metaphor for the north, the writer enters the world of the page, and like an ethnographer doing fieldwork, is "made real" by it.

The writer "goes north" in this sense as a means of imaginative self-engendering, and, like the fictional northern-bound individual, society is what he must flee. As a metaphor for writing, going north relies on the specifically defined and gendered quest. If we extend this idea further, it becomes clear why the northern hero must continue to flee further northward by inventing new challenges, and then by surviving them. This figure constantly aspires to a perfect solitude, a perfect separation from social bonds, a rupture with the social contract, which, just like an ideal masculine identity, can never really be. In a quest structured similarly to the fieldwork model of ethnographic research, the individual seeks initiation into an alien world.

As the scene of the quest, the north, provides the setting for a new, frontier literature. It is important, however, not to exaggerate the role of the frontier in Canadian literature. The geographical frontier in Canadian literature does not typically take the outward-moving, expansive shape that Turner's thesis identified in America; rather, according to Frye at least, it creates the inward-turning garrison mentality. Instead of "lighting out," Canadian individuals, posits Northrop Frye, come home, so culture seems to come from the environment (Bush Garden i-ii). As Frank Norris shows in a study of Ernest Thompson Seton and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, when American Klondike stories were gaining popularity as dime novels (54), Canada did not develop a similar genre: America had frontier literature; Canada had animal stories (59). The idea of the frontier as an outward-moving expansive space in Canadian literature can be attributed to the literary influence of America.

The narrative patterns observed in adventure stories set in the Arctic also characterize the representation of Canada as northern wilderness, demonstrating the conflation of the Canadian north and the north as Canada. By briefly tracing a genealogy of wilderness representation in Canadian fiction that contrasts nature and culture in gendered terms, I position the wilderness tale as a kind of representation of the north that becomes exaggerated in the fiction and travel writing that push the geographical limits of their

settings into the Arctic. Here the acts of rugged individualism, the almost mystical vision of landscape, as well as the firmly entrenched nature-culture opposition, seem to dominate. In wilderness tales, the perilous north is not a faraway place; instead, it is everywhere. It is Canada.

### **Wilderness Men**

Howard O'Hagan's Tay John (1939) provides a point from which to orient a discussion of the wilderness tale and its ethnocritical impact for two key reasons: first, in writing the novel, O'Hagan relied on ethnographic sources, especially The Indians of Canada by Diamond Jenness; second, O'Hagan's reception has developed around the authority of his own "field" experience. Moreover, O'Hagan carefully honed what is now the chosen device of ethnography, the storytelling form, as W. J. Keith argues, turning "yarn into serious art" (26). Tay John has been described as "Canada's first serious work of metafiction" (Geddes 84), and critics point to its intertextuality, the way the author "rigs up a new myth out of the pieces of the old one, revealing in the process how it's done" (Fee, Silence 10). This particular vein in the reception of Tay John usually focuses attention on "the untellable" nature of the story, the supposed silences at its core. Robert Kroetsch interprets the tale's "untellability" as an oppositional, revisionist narrative move, one intended to challenge various dominant narratives:

Recognizing as it does, through the fur trade of the western mountains, the meta-narrative of empire, and recognizing through the processes of conversion the meta-narrative of the Christian myth, it goes on to explore an acceptance of the 'hiddenness' of narrative in a manner that we now call, loosely, postmodern. (Lovely 182)

By contrast, Ella Tanner's reading of Platonism in O'Hagan's work suggests that the "reflective narrative voice reveals a corresponding respect for language . . . and ultimately, with the potential of language for disclosing, and perhaps even naming, the indwelling pattern of things" (Tanner 11).

What she suggests, convincingly I think, is that O'Hagan's concerns may be closer than critics have thought to those of a writer such as Alice Munro, a writer interested in what hides beneath the surface of things.

O'Hagan's own attitude towards postmodernism can be inferred from comments he made to Keith Maillard in which he compared Michael Ondaatje's Coming Through Slaughter to modern poetry, which he called a "form of self-indulgence" (Maillard 36). O'Hagan's own scepticism towards the postmodern, or his "lack of patience" as he puts it, suggests that it may be more appropriate to discuss Tay John in terms of its origins in storytelling and the similarities it has with contemporary postmodern ethnography rather than as a precursor to the "Canadian postmodern."



Arnold Davidson's emphasis on the way myths undermine other myths in order to highlight the unavailability of "capital-T truth" in O'Hagan's writing has been challenged by W. J. Keith, who takes exception to Davidson's radical conclusion that, because it challenges the myths at its own core by undermining their narratives, Tay John is "finally grounded in nothing" (Sense 35). Keith analyzes O'Hagan's writing within the tradition of the tall tales told by actual mountain men, and argues that such stories "may be mysterious, even inexplicable, yet the possibility of their being true is almost always present. They are received, at any rate, with something close to Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief" (Keith, Sense 25). For Keith, the real-life secrets of the wilderness men compelled them to tell tales, and it is for this reason that O'Hagan is "less concerned with clarifying the historical record" than with approximating the way the story is handed down (25). By having Denham and Durban reflect on the implications of the tales they tell, O'Hagan "nudges" readers to reflect on "style and meaning" (34) as he "emphasizes the articulateness" of these storytellers (32). Keith concludes that the "word" is not suspect as postmodernist readings assert, rather the meaning of the word is of great importance in the novel (37).

The influence of storytelling on O'Hagan's style and the way he "invariably draws attention to his storytellers and insists on their importance" (Keith, Sense 27) points to

the relationship between his fiction and ethnography, a relationship that the author recognizes in his acknowledgement of anthropologists Diamond Jenness and Charles Hill-Tout at the beginning of the novel (he also mentions his Métis friends, Jonnie Moyé and Joe Sangré). Not only did Jenness's The Indians of Canada (1932) provide the source for the legend of the fair-haired saviour of the Shuswap, but, as Ralph Maud has demonstrated in "Ethnographic Notes on Howard O'Hagan's Tay John," those passages that "deal most conspicuously with Indian culture" relied on ethnographic sources as well (95).

O'Hagan's experiences are often seen to ground his writing, as when Margery Fee asserts that the "choice of a Métis hero was based not so much on a romantic concept of the exotic other as on his own personal experience of discrimination, which came in part from having been treated like a servant by the tourists he guided" (11). Besides references to the kind of ethnography on which his writing was based, the use of ethnographic sources connects the novel to the centrality of storytelling in its style and structure. The framing narrative, told by the omniscient narrator who has been described as the "aloof historical voice, the crisp narrative voice, the mysterious mythic voice" (Keith, Sense 35) demonstrates the profound influence of both ethnography and storytelling on O'Hagan's writing.

The story of Tay John's birth follows Jenness's version of the Tsimshian story "The Dead Woman's Son" which Jenness

includes among those rare tales that, in his judgment "stand out like flowers from a tangle of bushes and deserve the brush of a great artist" (Indians 195). O'Hagan responded to this challenge not only in his rendering of this anecdote but also in his assimilation of the Native storytelling voice in the novel. The framing narrative echoes the narrative voice adopted in ethnography that is meant to convey something of the drama and ritual of oral performance. Jenness gives an account of the particular forms of Native oratory in The Indians of Canada and pauses to dwell on the importance of persuasion and rhetoric: "The Indians spoke slowly and deliberately, as a rule, but not haltingly, being rarely embarrassed for words in which to clothe their thoughts. They could develop an argument logically, and employed repetition, rhetorical questions, and sarcasm with telling effect" (200). O'Hagan would have also read in Jenness's text that "Indian utterances derived their force largely from the manner of their delivery and lost much of their effect when reduced to print" (201). With this in mind, the narrator of Tay John is less mysterious than many critics suggest; from the beginning of the novel, his voice echoes the ethnographic translation of Native speech:

The time of this in its beginning, in  
men's time, is 1880 in the summer, and  
its place is the Athabaska valley, near  
its head in the mountains, and along the

other waters falling into it, and beyond them a bit, over Yellowhead Pass to the westward, where the Fraser, rising in a lake, flows through wilderness and canyon down to the Pacific. (11)

O'Hagan's omniscient narrator seems to approximate the storyteller's inverted, passive syntax, the repetition, slow rhythm, and the "metaphorical speech," as Jenness calls it (200), whereby the subject of an action becomes an object in the sentence. In another passage from the novel, the narrator describes Hanni's rape by Red Rorty:

He came out and seized her, brought her into his house. She did not resist.

His troubled flesh found ease. (27)

The description mirrors the syntax of the Iroquois chief recorded by Jenness as saying: "I see no more trouble; peace has made everything calm; my heart is at rest" (201). These similarities seem to confirm what can be intuitively sensed about the framing narrative in Tay John: that the omniscient narrator's "mysterious mythic voice" mimics the voice of a Native storyteller recorded by an ethnographer.

Many critics have noted how the wilderness novel's "deep strain of misogyny" (Stouck 217) surfaces in Tay John whether in Denham's comparison of "naming to rape" (Fee, Silence 11) or Jay Wiggins's comparison of Ardith to "bad meat" (Granofsky 115). Ronald Granofsky notes that this misogyny is always associated with characters from whom the

author seems to distance himself (124), and, in light of O'Hagan's more sensitive representation of women's experience in The School-Marm Tree (1977), it is especially difficult to label O'Hagan a misogynist.<sup>3</sup> However, Tay John gives an account of a milieu that is characterized by a fear of women, and, as Granofsky also shows, the novel's structure relies on the opposition of masculine and feminine that is so crucial to representations of the north. In the sections he narrates, Denham compares the mystery of the wilderness to the mysterious feminine. Rendering the landscape feminine, he remarks disdainfully that a "new mountain valley leads a man on like that--like a woman he has never touched" (80). The way to respond to the mystery of the wilderness is by surveying, charting, mapping its territory, for the men in the novel believe, as Denham claims: "Put a name to it, put it on a map, and you've got it. The unnamed--it is the darkness unveiled" (80).<sup>4</sup>

The "epic battle: man against the wilderness" by which the feminine will be overpowered reaches the height of its symbolic significance in Tay John's struggle with the female grizzly bear (86). Tay John, a man who emerges from the ground, a man not born of woman, defeats the wilderness represented in the grizzly who stands before him with "laden

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<sup>3</sup> Although it was published much later, O'Hagan wrote The School-Marm Tree in the 1950s, before the impact of the women's liberation movement had been fully felt.

<sup>4</sup> I am reminded here of Graham Huggan's demonstration of mapping and naming as metaphors of colonial domination.

teats," a reminder of her sex and her role as symbol of the feminized wilderness in this struggle. When Tay John emerges from the grizzly's embrace, he has conquered the dark feminine powers that are evoked in vivid birth imagery:

Then the mass quivered. It heaved. A man's head appeared beside it, bloody, muddied, as though he were just being born, as though he were climbing out of the ground. Certainly man had been created anew before my eyes. Like birth itself it was a struggle against the powers of darkness, and Man had won.

(87-88)

This scene recalls Tay John's legendary birth from the earth rather than from his mother's womb, a birth that makes him resemble a "totem transfer" (Fee, "Romantic Nationalism" 21); that is, his birth symbolizes the autochthonous claim to the land that aboriginal people possess. Denham's narrative of the moment Tay John conquers the symbolic feminine, including Tay John's placement of the grizzly's head in a tree as a sign of respect, appropriates the claim to the land, the attribute of Tay John's aboriginal beginnings.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It has been noted by both Margery Fee and Ella Tanner that Tay John plays a role similar to that of Kurtz in Heart of Darkness by facilitating Denham's quest.

The wilderness setting provides Tay John and Denham with a freedom to be masculine individuals through their struggle against the feminized wilderness. Denham, described as "a man of earth and common humanity yet isolated enough from his society to be individual too" (Tanner 96), seeks salvation through solitude, and his triumph is to "stand solitary, self-sustaining, unfathomable" (Tanner 20). The novel's representation of the wilderness has been critically received in light of O'Hagan's "mystic vision"; for example, Ella Tanner concludes that this "attempt to pin things down and through naming, to lay, as the surveyors do, a human map across the wild" (94) by using naming and mapping as metaphors for the uncanny in the novel articulates the mystic side of O'Hagan's vision. As the grizzly's death shows, the terms uncanny and mystic in Tay John are associated with the female, the thing that must be conquered by the masculine surveyors.

In the introduction to Silence Made Visible: Howard O'Hagan and Tay John, Margery Fee observes that Tay John has "more in common with Robert Kroetsch's Gone Indian" (1973) than it does with other books published in 1939. Kroetsch himself seems to concur when, in The Lovely Treachery of Words (1989), he explores Tay John as an example of the "unveiling" he believes to be characteristic of Canadian writing and Canadian reading, supporting his thesis that "Canadian literature, at its most radical, is the

autobiography of a culture that tells its story by telling us repeatedly it has no story to tell" (193). As Robert Lecker remarks, Kroetsch's widely disseminated views on criticism and theory often provide critics with a way of entering his creative writing, and, in his reading of Tay John, his recognition of the "troubled or at least troubling tension between the symbolic and the documentary" (Kroetsch 190)<sup>6</sup> in Canadian writing provides a clue to reading his own wilderness stories.<sup>7</sup>

### **Wilderness Parodies**

Kroetsch's radical postmodernist aesthetic, according to which criticism "is really a version of story" (Likely 30), leads him to attempt to undo the oppositions which he identifies at the heart of Canadian experience. But by obsessively representing these opposition, does Kroetsch remove or "blur" the boundaries of which he speaks, or are those old boundaries simply redrawn?

In Kroetsch's first novel, But We Are Exiles (1965), the masculine-feminine opposition involves a realistic treatment of a fictional community of men in a northern

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<sup>6</sup> T. D. MacLulich makes a similar point in Between Europe and America, identifying the "documentary" and the "literary" as the two dominating impulses in Canadian literature (11-16).

<sup>7</sup> In the interview published in Future Indicative, Kroetsch makes the statement: "In fact, I think I couldn't be a writer without critical theory" (10). Despite Kroetsch's academic background, this is an astonishing claim considering his general suspicion of the very "categories" on which critical theory is based.



setting. In the novel, the crew of the Nahanni Jane is made up of a collection of men who "run" the river in order to run away from something in the south. Although none of the other characters match the masculine virility represented by Hornyak's unfettered sexual energy, the obsessive energy that makes him compare the first grain elevator he and Peter see to "a great damned phallus, like one perpetual hard-on" (135), they each live out a masculine narrative by going into northern exile. "Running" means leaving behind the encumbrances of civilization for a place where, as Peter thinks, "a man is defined free of the terrors of human relationships" (19).

Peter's escape from Kettle, the woman he loves, and Hornyak, the man she betrayed him with, is spoiled when Hornyak's arrival and subsequent death bring her return. Peter looks indefatigably for Hornyak's body, realizing that the search parallels his own unfulfilled quest:

Running and searching. That was it. He  
was searching too; even as he fled.  
Always looking for something. Three  
days of searching. Six years. (21)

Peter is an individual wilfully existing outside society, and Kettle's return causes him to "burst back to life," even though "the birth was a throbbing awareness of his

isolation" (57).<sup>8</sup> Kettle's presence in the north disturbs the community of men, and her father, Fraser, begs Peter to take her back south with him. Fraser epitomizes the northern oldtimer described elsewhere by Brody and Mowat, and in his admonishment of Peter, he expresses the paradox of choosing this life outside civilization:

"You dumb young bastard, Guy. A man is free here. You ever hear the word? He is so free that nothing else in the world is ever as good again. Never. But it's a screwing jail, this place. I can't leave." (46)

Fraser articulates the ambivalence of binary opposition that, like the structuring paradox Robert Lecker identifies as the basis of Kroetsch's fiction, is always held in place, never resolved (Kroetsch 148). What Kroetsch's "ongoing attraction to the 'old dualities' defining his bifocal world" (Lecker, Kroetsch 61) implies is a clearly reactionary form of gender identity defined by mutual opposition.

Kroetsch's preoccupation with the male quest has been accepted as ironic and parodic (Thomas ?; Hutcheon Canadian

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Thomas notes the obvious similarities between the novel and Conrad's Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer, offering Hornyak as a doppelganger figure for Peter Guy and pointing to the images linking the story to that of Narcissus (34). Both Guy and Hornyak are constantly fighting to retain control by running; this, from Guy's point of view, is the allure of piloting (18-19).

Postmodern 161). While Linda Hutcheon identifies Kroetsch's sexual metaphors with the "male gender-defined version of the procreative urge" (Canadian Postmodern 170), suggesting, however subtly, the masculinist dimension to Kroetsch's work, Peter Thomas describes the opposition to the feminine as a necessary defense against the maternal. According to Thomas, But We Are Exiles announces Kroetsch's later work because it "exposes a powerfully obsessive imaginative core: the problems of the narcissistic self; the ambiguous quest for freedom . . . ambivalence towards the past; the central paradox of phallic energy in quest of death" (36). Yet, Thomas does not develop the most valuable part of his argument, that is, the identification of Peter's narcissism as specifically and reductively phallic (37).

Robert Kroetsch's parody of the quest in Gone Indian (1973) revisits the territory covered by Tay John. In it, the hero yields to the wilderness, which is a threatening feminized presence, by disappearing into it, and accomplishes his desire to "go Indian," by impersonating an impersonator: Archie Belaney as Grey Owl. As Margaret Atwood observes in Strange Things (1995), it is the fear of "not being real" that is "the dilemma of all those who long for authenticity by identifying with the wilderness" in this way (57). Thus, the story of Jeremy Sadness puts a curious spin on Kroetsch's famous gloss that "the fiction makes us real," for here, the fiction insists on going Indian, becoming a pretend Indian.

Jeremy's story follows the initiation pattern lived out by other northern heroes. Like a hero of juvenile adventure narrative, he engages in a series of trials in an attempt to heal his intellectual and sexual deficiencies by "going Indian." A graduate student who cannot finish his thesis, a lover who cannot be aroused lying down, he suffers from a surfeit of energy and a lack of discipline. Jeremy's penis and Roger Dorck, the character who will not rise from the position of lying down represent "a parody of the shamanistic 'bridge' or 'Arctic hysteria,'" according to Thomas, "the strange entranced condition, resembling rigor mortis during which the shaman experiences his dream vision" (Thomas 71), and Jeremy discovers that to cross over, "like any questing hero, he must find his way by a series of ordeals" (Thomas 73). As part of his flight from his life and relationships in the East, these ordeals constitute the initiation and characterization Robert Lecker describes as "a typical Kroetschian conflict between a father figure aligned with the East, the rooted past, narrative definition, and institutionalized learning" and a son who "thrives on inventing himself" and who embraces "the primitive and spontaneous forms of knowledge identified with the 'blank page' of Canada's North" (62).

Jeremy's quest for masculine identity, which Professor Madham refers to as Jeremy's "great western quest for manhood" (37) takes the form of accomplishing a series of physical feats in an attempt to regain his intellectual and

sexual potency. Even before he "lights out" for the northern wilderness, Jeremy is given to doing exercises: "his obscene little grip exercises, opening the closet door and squeezing one knob in each hand. Then he did his push-ups and his sit-ups and his running on the spot" (25). Once in the north, he takes on physical tests of endurance such as the snowshoe race, calling each step an "accomplishment" (83), and, at the end of the race, he expresses satisfaction at having overcome the limitations his body set: "My body was totally spent. And thus I was free of my body" (88). By trying to control his body, he tries to assert his identity:

Combat, goddamnit, that's what it is.  
 Trial by strength. Trial by chance.  
 Trial by wager. Trial by drowning in  
 your own sweat. Trial by freezing your  
 balls off. Trial by falling. Trial by  
 flying. (75)

In the north, as he successfully completes each trial, Jeremy articulates the view of the north that Kroetsch's metaphor for writing plays on:

I was totally alone: what surprised me  
 was not the aloneness itself, but the  
 silence that accompanied it. I felt  
 some need to fill it up: yes, I  
 explained to myself, identify the  
 precision of your body, Sadness.

Rejoice in it, an end in itself. And  
 note: beyond morality, beyond the things  
 of the mind, beyond choice itself: the  
 will of the body to go on. (83)

If the body and the self are linked by this quest, so too are the penis and the pen. Sadness describes his creative difficulties as an attempt "to flog [his] limp imagination" (52-53). Since he blames women for his sexual problems, claiming that "[t]hese damned women" have cursed him and cast a spell on his "prick," there is an expectation that he will overcome his problems by shaking off their grasp. He is drawn to the wilderness because it is the opposite of civilization, which is the territory of women, and because there he can be:

Separate and alone, the tragic figure of  
 our unhappy days, embracing the shadow  
 of his imagined self. Dreaming his  
 universe in his own little skull. Lost  
 in his own conniving. (108)

This description of the well-trained professor voiced by Professor Madham is also a description of the autonomous individual who lives outside civilization. In the end, Sadness is paradoxically both "together and alone" with Bea, annihilated by his inability to be an individual in a community and "going Indian" by becoming a dead, disappeared Indian. While critics have read this ending as typical of the challenge Kroetsch poses to "the humanist notion of the

self as coherent, unified, and stable" (Hutcheon, Canadian Postmodern 173), the ending's ambivalence and lack of resolution are in fact witnesses to cynical, postmodern narcissism. Far from creating a "multiform self" that takes the multiple constituents of identity (Boone 188), it leaves no self at all.

Many critics sympathetic to postmodern theories would disagree with me on this point. For example, Peter Thomas considers Jeremy's quest to be a "reconstitution of the self" made possible by the frontier setting (69), because, in the novel's postmodern context, "'reality' exists between a half-acknowledged, half-recollected belief in the possibility of radical reconstruction of selfhood, through the descent to ground, silence, or the leap into chaos, and a tradition of deterministic structures and absolute 'models'" (Thomas 76). In the end, Jeremy "realizes that identity is endlessly afflicted with the wish for a stable structure resistant to time" (Thomas 80). Herein lies the notion of the frontier as a means of crossing to what Boone calls a "multiform self" that waits to be discovered, not "a given authentic self" but one that is "the fullest and most free imaginative act" (Thomas 3), and of Kroetsch as a liminal figure or "a borderman" who shows both sides of every duality and refuses to choose between them (Lecker, Kroetsch 32).

But should the postmodern self be fashioned from the scraps of Indian culture sewn together in the text? Should

Kroetsch parody the "shamanistic" as Thomas says he does, or any other supposed element of Native culture? The danger of such parody is that it can be misunderstood. How can one account for Jürgen Schäfer's endorsement of the novel as "another attempt to integrate the Indian dimension into Canadian consciousness" (85) if not by the utter failure of parody? When Schäfer refers to Jeremy's "indianization" and to the book as a grafting of the "Indian past" onto the Canadian nation, he is not being ironic (88-87). The problem with an account of Jeremy's quest as a parodic, liberating postmodern narrative of selfhood is that it distracts readers from questions of referentiality--which is, of course, a danger of postmodernist writing. Readers should not forget how the fictive possibilities and parodic liberties celebrated in Kroetsch's critical reception are framed through and, to a certain extent represented at the expense of, a representation of Native culture. Once again, by suggesting that there is no such thing as stable subjectivity, or at least not subjectivity that can be trusted, the postmodernist turn silences the "marginalized subjects" articulating themselves in literature. As the feminist critique of postmodern ethnography makes clear, the recuperation of subjectivity in postmodern writing takes place through this kind of marginalization.

If, as Kroetsch has said, "[t]he fiction makes us real" (Thomas 2), then, in Gone Indian at least, it makes us real pretend Indians. As Margaret Atwood reminds readers, a fear



of "not being real" is at the heart of "going Indian" because those who desire it "can only be real, in their own terms, by turning themselves into something they are 'really' not" (57). The goal constantly eludes the white male who wants to be an Indian: like the ideal of masculinity, it is always receding, constantly unattainable.

Like his hero, Grey Owl, Jeremy feels "compelled to play Indian" (Söderlind 124) and does so by racial cross-dressing. Going Indian requires repeated incidents of mistaken identity, such as when someone beats Jeremy up and his Cree friend explains: "They took you for an Indian" (92). But what does Jeremy look like? Professor Madham describes his costume as follows:

Jeremy is unshaven and wears no shirt over his bare chest. He has come in out of the icy sunlight in his levis and moccasins and his buckskin jacket. For your scalp. For your maidenhood. He reaches up with both hands and takes hold of his head, trying to straighten his tangle of black hair, his braids.

(22)

This is Jeremy as Grey Owl, the Indian impersonator and impostor.

Jeremy's performance of racial identity by cross-dressing and impersonation, which is reminiscent of the cross-dressing identity in Kipling's imperial novel Kim,

signals the performative nature of his gender identity. As Robert Lecker indicates, Kroetsch would have us live with the paradox of the hero who finds himself by losing himself, a hero who "acts out the liberating quality of his fictiveness" (64). However, the novel ends not with the affirmation of what Boone calls a new multiform self, but with the suggestion of suicide, a complete negation of self. While the suicide also frustrates the quest narrative, I would argue that Jeremy makes a symbolic claim to the land by disappearing into it at the end of the novel. The north remains a setting in which the hero tries to live out this narrative even if his quest is unfulfilled. Kroetsch's attempt to parody the quest as a narrative of masculine identity retraces that narrative by showing the hero's failure to attain the masculine characteristics required and justifies Lecker's conclusion that Gone Indian "potently celebrates Kroetsch's own failure to do anything but trace the line between two narrative possibilities, neither of which he can accept" (77, emphasis added).

### **Wilderness Women**

For more successful parody, one must look to Aritha van Herk. The initial scene in van Herk's The Tent Peg (1981) signals the association of conquering the northern territory with masculine identity. In it, the heroine J. L. secures her position as a cook in MacKenzie's camp by passing herself off as a boy. This incidence of cross-dressing

suggests that access to the north requires the assumption of masculine identity. Later, J. L. reveals her true sex to MacKenzie before they go north, and after this, her entry into the north requires the approval and protection of MacKenzie whose seeming indifference to her gender makes possible her perilous negotiations in the northern community of men.

In many ways, The Tent Peg resembles Marian Engel's Bear (1976), the story of a woman gone "wild," "gone Indian." For Lou, the heroine, of Bear, the voyage north is an escape, a voyage away from her own life and towards the mysterious life of Colonel Cary. Lou "lights out" at the request of her boss, but also because "things had been going badly for her" (19):

The road went north. She followed it.

There was a Rubicon near the height of land. When she crossed it, she began to feel free. She sped north to the highlands, lightheaded. (17-18)

Lou embraces the wilderness as she falls in love with the bear, who facilitates a kind of "totem transfer" between woman and wilderness in both novels, just as the grizzly bear facilitates Denham's quest in Tay John. As she grows closer to the bear, Lou slowly sheds her civilized femininity until her image in the pierglass startles her:

Her hair and her eyes were wild. Her skin was brown and her body was

different and her face was not the same  
face she had seen before. She was  
frightened of herself. (125)

As she "goes wild," the disintegration or, at least, the instability of her self, brings fear and discomfort, not freedom as suggested by some stories associating the quest with masculinity. When she realizes the impossibility of loving the bear, Lou returns south with a reconstituted, unified, sense of self.

The conventional male quest, as represented in Bear, requires separation, initiation, and return, but this pattern is disrupted in van Herk's novel. At first, J. L., the only female travelling with the crew, submits to the conventional desire for separation, "the promise of aloneness," that going north offers (23). Already living a "remote, secluded" life before she leaves, J. L. wants "only to get away from the telephone, the bed, the growing chain of men who rattle and clink behind me" (113). Going north, she hopes, will allow her to sever these attachments, or as she describes it, to separate "from all my myriad and tedious connections," to head for nowhere and to "look at everything in my narrow world from a detached distance" (23).

The north she wants is the place with "no residue of humans at all" (57), empty, silent. It is the place Hudson sees all around him, the nothingness on the other side of civilization:

I've never felt so far from the world.

It's damn primitive, that's what it is.

I thought the cook would help, be a softening influence, but she's as savage as they are. (103)

Like all the other men, Hudson wants something from J. L., and like the others, he is frustrated. "No civilization, nothing," he remarks of the surroundings, and, in its absence, expects the available woman to provide it. The north does not live up to its promise for Hudson who regrets his decision to be "adventurous" and who realizes:

There's nothing here for anyone. We're in the middle of the bloody wilderness and we could just as easily never get out again. (67-68)

Hudson's point of view enhances the theme of separation in J. L.'s narrative. By telling the stories in the first-person from each character's point of view, van Herk gives greater emphasis to the events narrated. Characters are allowed to speak for themselves in a conversation that gives the impression of a more comprehensive reading. The implication is that all the partial perspectives add up to the truth.

Reingard M. Nischik calls this the "resonance technique": the narration of the same events from different perspectives achieving an overall mosaic effect (108). While J. L. discovers that social connections and gender

roles form and impinge on the individual even when one tries to cast them off, the novel's structure implies that such connections are really subordinate to the interests of the individual. Each character is represented in its own separate sections with no connecting perspective. Yet, the "mosaic model," as Nischik calls it, allows each character a certain amount of self-sufficiency and autonomy, and the form of the novel enacts the values its events seem to question. Other characters are represented in each section through description and dialogue, and the events of the plot bind all the disparate perspectives together; however, the form of the novel remains postmodern in its celebration of different, discrete perspectives.

These formal considerations underline the plot's seemingly subversive quest. J. L. goes north for the silence, the emptiness, the freedom from social constraints, but she soon finds that this north is an illusion. Although when the men ridicule her first attempt at shooting she can comfort herself in the knowledge that "up here there are no rules, no set responses, everything is new and undefined" (86), at other times she knows that this too is an illusion.

Social constraints are present in the demands the crew places on her as a woman. The men all want something from her, she admits to the she-bear, and their demands destroy her escape, and even her belief in the possibility of it:

And me what am I doing here, a woman  
pretending to be a cook, pretending to

have the nutritional welfare of these  
 men foremost in my mind when all I  
 wanted to find was silence, a relief  
 from the cacophony of sound, of  
 confession that surrounded, that always  
 impinged on me. I didn't want their  
 secrets, my ear not receptacle enough  
 for ordinary words, let alone  
 confession. (57)

The north cannot undo the connections she wishes to sever.  
 As MacKenzie's ten-year search for his wife proves, there is  
 nowhere to run, only the comfort that another can bring him  
 "respite, peace," (227). This is the message the she-bear  
 brings to the weary J. L.:

"You thought you'd leave all that  
 behind? There isn't a place in the  
 world without it. You can try to  
 escape, but it's better to face it head  
 on." (111)

J. L. faces her role as focal point in the camp by giving  
 the men what they need: for MacKenzie, insight into his  
 wife's departure; for Thompson, appreciation of his  
 relationship with Katie; for Cap, a watery embrace. One by  
 one, she provides for them until, on the last night, she  
 dances:

And in their faces I see my  
 transfiguration, themselves transformed,

each one with the tent peg through the  
 temple cherishing the knowledge garnered  
 in sleep, in unwitting trust. (226)

The end of the novel revises both the image of the north as a frontier and the narrative of frontier life as a suspension of social contract as J. L. learns that she cannot be completely liberated from her gender identity, even if she has more freedom to perform it than she thought.

### **The Mystic Wilderness**

The writing of Rudy Wiebe, which offers a rich contrast to the ironic, parodying narratives of Kroetsch and van Herk, rounds out my genealogy of wilderness representation and brings it back to the realism of O'Hagan's work. What Wiebe shares with O'Hagan, I would argue, is a notion of language as a way to the truth of things while Kroetsch, and probably van Herk, hold that language partly constitutes reality because we know the world through it. As Wiebe and Kroetsch make manifestly clear in their interview with Shirley Neuman (1980), their differences run very deep. Although they admit to sharing a mistrust of "inherited or given history" (230), one might say "official national history" here, Kroetsch's distrust of meaning leads him to its virtual abandonment, as he complains that "life torments us all the time with the possibility of meaning" (233), while Wiebe's leads him to ever larger or different meanings. Whereas Kroetsch's fractured narratives and



multiple voices suggest an absence of unifying meaning, Wiebe's "novels deal precisely with the problem of ordering the many voices of the self, and they all assert the same hierarchizing principle" (van Toorn 197). Wiebe's earnest desire for the "apprehension of perfection" sends Kroetsch into paroxysms of protest, which in turn leads Wiebe to the witty retort: "Bob, you're always horsing around with language" (Neuman 236). Rudy Wiebe's refusal to "horse around" with language, his insistence on meaning, on the reliability of history, makes his work compelling. In his northern novels, The Mad Trapper (1980) and A Discovery of Strangers (1994), Wiebe is as thorough as possible about historical and ethnographic details, and in Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic (1989), he gives readers an inkling of the breadth of his sources.

The Mad Trapper, discussed in chapter 3, continues the demythologizing of Albert Johnson begun in the short story "The Naming of Albert Johnson" (1974) and thus both creates and destabilizes the rugged individual usually found in the representation of the north. At first his break with society and flight northward seems typical of the wilderness tale, but Wiebe's fictional Johnson demonstrates how separation and loss of community lead to destruction and death rather than glory. Similarly, Johnson's story is not a celebration of masculinity. Physical trials do not liberate him: his toes freeze; he goes hungry; the river betrays him, and he gets lost.

Johnson resembles other victims Atwood identifies in Survival, but he is also a particular kind of masculine figure, the wilderness hero, who leads a solitary existence in the bush, close to nature but also able to master nature in some ways in the style of characters in books by Grey Owl, Ernest Thompson Seton, and later those of Farley Mowat and Fred Bodsworth. In his novel and in this story of Albert Johnson, Wiebe demythologizes the hero as he mythologizes history. In his short history as a fugitive, "the mad trapper" grows from a mysterious character to a legendary figure. At each twist in the plot, the media discovers a new and sensational headline making it impossible to tell where the man ends and the myth begins. Wiebe quotes newspaper accounts and satirizes the newspapermen, but even by his title, he suggests that the myth they create lasts, making Albert Johnson a kind of construction. In fact, Johnson has fascinated other writers because his identity is still disputed and his life story is still a mystery. In telling the story, Wiebe also mythologizes the north, for, in the stories of Albert Johnson what most interests Wiebe is the idea of the north as a hiding place for the fugitive. In Wiebe's story, however, this separation from the community is not heroic; rather, Johnson seems almost less than human, his dead face frozen in a snarl or his hands feeling the throbbing pulse of the whiskeyjack as he kills it (398).

As the comprehensive list of acknowledgements at the end of the novel indicates, A Discovery of Strangers carefully weaves the threads of various texts: transcriptions by George Blondin, Émile Petitot, Jean Morrisset, Rose-Marie Pelletier, and Richard Slobodin; stories belonging to Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, Annie Ned, William Ittza; journals kept by John Franklin, Samuel Hearne, Richard King, and C. Stuart Houston; research and editions by Ian MacLaren, Josef-René Bellot, George Calef, Kerry Abel, June Helm, and Timothy C. Losey. I cite this impressive list to show the diversity of Wiebe's sources. This diversity is evident also in the novel's variety of forms including letters, journal entries, quotations, omniscient narration that verges on stream-of-consciousness, and a cacophony of characters' voices.

Penny van Toorn's assessment that "Wiebe's novels transmit the Word into an unforeseeable variety of discursive, historical, and cultural contexts, where its meaning and authority become open to negotiation" (8-9), though written before A Discovery of Strangers, signals a concern of this novel as it attempts to create a dialogue between cultures in history by drawing on the words of Dene and European speakers, filtering them through Wiebe's imagination into hypothetical historical events. In the novel, Wiebe gives us Greenstockings's reaction to the first white men she sees by retelling the famous incident in which her father reportedly insisted on being represented with her

in the portrait Hood paints, so that "when the big boss across the stinking water sees her picture, he won't try to send for her" (85). The way this anecdote, which comes directly from the journal kept by Hood, is woven into a fictional account of the incident typifies Wiebe's narrative method in the novel.

Because of its elaborate fictionalization of written and oral accounts, A Discovery of Strangers raises the problem of authenticity in representation. In the appendix to the novel, when Wiebe addresses the reader directly and tells how, at the end of their trip tracing Franklin's route, his party "raised a cairn" in "established Arctic traveller fashion" (N. pag.) he suggests that he and his companions mimicked the explorer's assertion of territorial sovereignty as a commemoration of their journey. Perhaps unwittingly, they demonstrate the kind of nationalist claim to the north that Wiebe seems to call for in Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic.

### **Travelling Northward**

The mutual influence of social scientific and literary forms apparent in the representation of the north by a fiction writer such as Wiebe, begs the question: if literature, or literary theory, can make a significant impact on ethnography then can the reverse also be true? In the texts studied, the influence of ethnography can be observed in the use of ethnographies as sources as well as

in the discovery of a self-conscious subject that has become a feature of postmodern ethnography. However, the method of representation, the pattern of the subject's construction shares significant similarities with ethnography as explained in chapter 1. The novels discussed in this dissertation represent northern experience by delineating the masculine narratives observed in the other genres studied to this point. With this final section, the discussion returns to the influence of ethnographic representation, especially the new or postmodern ethnography, which aims to blur boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. In these first-person accounts of northern travels, the individual's role as a storyteller speaking for the silent north by recording experience in an alien environment occupies the foreground, and this role undermines the independence of the reality it supposedly describes.

In order to discuss recent travel writing representing the north, it is necessary to consider the notion of desire, for personal desire infuses such texts. In the rest of this chapter, I demonstrate how recent texts by southern writers view Inuit and Indian people as an extension of an imaginary northern landscape constructed as the object of the author's desire. Rather than developing a scenario for a fictional community of men or an opposition to a feminized landscape or culture, travel writers construct themselves, usually moulding a similar kind of hero figure and encoding the same

kinds of masculine characteristics found in adventure narratives. The choice of personal narrative over fiction by these writers, like the postmodernist turn in ethnography, retreats from problems of othering and voice appropriation, but it creates a new and no less dangerous set of problems by excluding northern people from the account.

Arctic Dreams (1987) by Barry Lopez is a postmodern, first-person travel narrative which recognizes neither its debt to ethnography nor its responsibility to the people described. The text does not make any explicit claim beyond its expression of the narrator's encounter with the northern environment; in effect, its main concern is the construction of his subjectivity. However, it recreates the experience of aboriginal people without acknowledging any debt to their voices. Instead, Lopez tends to ascribe thoughts and feelings to others.<sup>9</sup> Travelling with some Tununiarusirmiut men, Lopez remarks that his companions, "knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, beyond any hesitation, what made them happy, what gave them a sense of satisfaction, of wealth. An abundance of animals" (41). Lopez never reports actually conversing with any of the men, and he admits to not knowing their language, yet he admires these hunters and enjoys

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<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Rudy Wiebe takes on a certain humility when dealing with his Arctic subjects. Inuit spatial and temporal perceptions attract him in his quest for wisdom, and he delineates these concepts with care and sensitivity.

travelling with them in spite of "a loss of intellectual conversation" and "a consistent lack of formal planning" (202). Throughout, he contrasts the civilized man with his tastes in food, conversation, and lifestyle and the simple indigène whose life can only be understood as a grasping survival.<sup>10</sup> With them, he writes, "one feels the constant presence of people who know something about surviving" (202).

While Lopez acknowledges his dependence on the ideas (his word is wisdom) of his own culture when considering other cultures, his epistemic position finds its basis in his appreciation for the native point of view which is just the first of many assumptions he shares with ethnographers.

In more than one instance, he attempts to "imagine" what the hunters are thinking as he has imagined the viewpoint of the various animals who are the true subjects of his Arctic quest. It seems that for him (not the "Eskimo" themselves, as he claims) the aboriginal people are "still not quite separate from the animal world" (39). Of course, the suggestion of a superior understanding of the land (falsely equated with a more immediate contact with animals) has an undeniable political utility for aboriginal groups today, but when evoked by Brody, it also denies the people's voice and fixes them within the romantic ideal of the hunting

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<sup>10</sup> Survival has been the most important structuring assumption in anthropological studies of Inuit culture as Ann Fienup-Riordan points out in her study The Nelson Island Eskimo: Social Structure and Ritual Distribution.

society which occupies the privileged position in this book and fulfils the southern audience's desire for stories of survival.

Although he cautions against viewing aboriginal hunters as natural conservationists, Lopez continues the tradition of viewing hunting societies as male-dominated by ignoring the role, even the existence, of women, and when it comes to understanding the hunters, he imagines them as dream people who differ even in cognitive ways from non-aboriginal people:

The mind we know in dreaming, a  
nonrational, nonlinear comprehension of  
events in which slips in time and space  
are normal, is, I believe, the conscious  
working mind of an aboriginal hunter.

It is a frame of mind that redefines  
patience, endurance, and expectation.

(200)<sup>11</sup>

As hinted by the titles of three texts considered in this thesis, Maps and Dreams, Arctic Dreams, and Enduring Dreams, and brilliantly satirized in Albotook Ipellie's title Arctic Dreams and Nightmares, the importance of dreams to aboriginal cultures has created a great deal of interest.

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold Krupat argues against the common view that native people live in perfect harmony with the environment because it means making the dangerous assumption that native people are inherently more "natural." See Ethnocriticism (14-15).



At the end of the book, Lopez thinks that he has dreamt the landscape that lies before him and provides a metaphorical rendering of the Indian dream hunt experience central to current anthropological research:

The edges of the real landscape became one with the edges of something I had dreamed. But what I had dreamed was only a pattern, some beautiful pattern of light. The continuous work of the imagination, I thought, to bring what is actual together with what is dreamed is an expression of human evolution. (414)

As Arun Mukherjee points out in a discussion of Western cinematic treatments of the Third World, dreams can provide a convenient realm for the racial other since "[o]ne can continue with the business of daily living once one has contained the native in this dream space" (Towards 104). The dream space fulfils the same fixing function as stereotyping, which Homi K. Bhabha defines as a complete disavowal of difference accommodating a mixed image of its subject, because it offers the same "concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" ("Other Question" 18). Through stereotyping, the Inuit can be both simple-minded and wise. When a text concerning aboriginal peoples such as the one by Lopez collapses different societies into a single "Native perspective," a perspective that centers on the spiritual life of Native people and suggests that they

inhabit a mystical or dream-like space, such a text can be read as an attempt to deny individual aboriginal groups access to self-representation. It seems that writers who travel north may be individuals, but members of aboriginal societies are not.

The dream as aspiration and as spiritual event often merge in the author's experience. Even though Lopez claims only a space in his own life for his experience, when he vanishes behind the scenes throughout the text, he undermines the sincerity of his project and becomes a cultural parasite bleeding another culture for inspiration.

His confessional, individualistic tone shatters the notion of empathy by simply erasing the presence of others in the narrative. At the end of the book, the writer stands surveying the northern landscape and confides, "When I stood I thought I glimpsed my own desire" (414). At this moment, the dream of empathy fades, for there is no other here, only an adventurous man enduring his own deprivation and learning from his natural capacity for understanding. This final passage reflects the confessional techniques sustaining the postmodern ethnographic mode while the survival theme places the writer in the context of rugged masculinism attained through the self-denial typical of adventure narratives.

### **The Traveller's Body**

In his book Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape (1994), John Moss praises the "lyric grace" with

which "Lopez writes himself into landscape," and how "the Arctic becomes a flourish on the margin of the chart of the writer's contemplation of himself" (59). Although perhaps intended only as an assessment of the narcissistic element in Lopez's book, the comment is as true for the narratives of other "literary tourists" such as Aritha van Herk, Rudy Wiebe, and Moss himself. At play are the conventions of postmodernism, that "call into question the kind of reality that the text claims to represent, the reality of the text itself" (Wilson 57). These conventions include the self-reflexive stance evident in the opening of Moss's preface:

The reflection of my face is obscured by  
the sloping shadow of my hat, so that  
what I seem is an absence, although I  
can clearly see the boulders and gravel  
of the river bottom within my projected  
shape. (ix)<sup>12</sup>

While the text works to bring the erased self into being, it also highlights the nature of the self as an "imaginative creation" (105) and a perilous construction at that: "The danger, of course, is in believing your own account, confusing your own vision of the world with the world itself" (107). Experience underwrites the account's authority just as it would an ethnographic monograph with the narrator referring to the log he keeps and to taking

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<sup>12</sup> As Robert Lecker has remarked to me, this passage clearly alludes to Archibald Lampman's poem "Heat."

"field notes" (110). Such passages recall the blurred boundaries of postmodern ethnography, and Moss refers to the subjective character of description when he asserts that "every account of the Arctic is also informed by the personal and often confusing desires of each writer to shape history from geography, to attain knowledge or wealth, to escape or discover himself, to be famous" (105), thus acknowledging the centrality of desire to any Arctic adventure.

In the Arctic, memories of physical endurance dominate the narrator's thoughts. As Moss says in an interview with Christine Hamelin, running in the Arctic gave him a sense of belonging because "[y]ou're acutely conscious that you are an extension of the landscape you are running through" (163). In one passage, the narrator remembers the pain endured as he raced the Iron Man, his heroic finish, and the thought of vindication in the eyes of a male high school gym teacher (81-83); in another, he recalls cross-country skiing from Lachute to Gatineau:

You do these things, extend yourself to limits of what the mind and muscles will endure, because there, while there, boundaries bend, borders blur. This is not a question of transcendence through mortification of the flesh. It is an honouring of the body as landscape, for the endurance athlete becomes the thing

being done, becomes the landscape of its  
doing. It is not denial but  
affirmation. (64-65)

Inscribing the body as an instrument of achievement, performance, and sublimation is, according to Victor Seidler and other theorists of masculinity, a characteristic use of the body as means to masculine identity. Enduring Dreams is an Arctic adventure narrative that follows the separation, initiation, and return pattern of the quest, encoding masculinist expectations with each self-imposed trial and illustrating how "the status of manhood is attainment" (Lloyd 86).

The Arctic is a place where the masculine individual pushes himself into being. This is the initiation that the literary tourist goes north to endure: the romance of proving oneself in a rugged setting. When writing the self into being, the writer chooses to make the self a certain way, to mirror certain values that resemble the masculine self. Moss describes his method as "drawing from intellectual discourse and research, adventure and sport, contemplative evasions of language and thought; from many texts and a critical aptitude, from travel, teaching, and especially family, from imagination and a deep desire to know" (x). The goal of the quest is spiritual, a kind of "secular grace" which will be found if "the notion of Arctic narrative as a linear quest will self-destruct; and we, absolved from the structures of grammar and story, might

find among words the power of silence; in the subversion of imminence" (136).

On the jacket cover, Linda Hutcheon describes Enduring Dreams as "[t]he postmodern text we have been waiting for," and Robert Kroetsch praises the book for the way it changes "our sense of what Arctic is; our sense of what we ourselves are," suggesting that the north defines "who we are" as Canadians. For these reviewers, Moss's text contributes to the definition of Canadian identity, and their use of "we" refers to the representation of the north as national heritage. As Moss remarks, the book is "about Canada" (Hamelin 164).

### **Travelling True North**

Although Rudy Wiebe's Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic (1989) is a series of lectures dealing with spiritual and metaphysical concepts, its main project can be described as post-colonial because it rereads Canadian history in order to establish an independent national identity.<sup>13</sup> In this process, Wiebe deploys the conventions of realist ethnography in order to create an alternative version of Arctic history and myth.

Whether describing the events of Franklin's expedition or his own trip north, Wiebe's narrator is an all-seeing presence floating along beside the "great" men of Arctic

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<sup>13</sup> For an extended account of this strategy see chapter 3 of The Empire Writes Back.

exploration or the aboriginal people who were witnesses to "great" events such as the shooting of Albert Johnson. Although Wiebe inserts himself into the narrative, making it a rather personal contemplation, it is as the "mystical teacher-figure" he assumes elsewhere (van Toorn 5), and he does not foreground the methodology constructing his text. He switches to the ethnographic convention of using a warm, inclusive second-person to describe the landscape, for example, when describing a walk alone on the tundra: "It seems you can walk wherever you please; there is not a single scattered erratic or even the lowest brush to decide your track" (112), or looking out at the Peel River: "Your hand vanishes when you touch it; it could be bearing a hundred submerged bodies past you and you would know nothing" (43).

Speaking in the second person is a common ethnographic trope designed to give the reader the feeling of being there partaking of the same wonderful adventures;<sup>14</sup> however, the illusion of accompanying the narrator on this river journey cannot be sustained indefinitely in such a personal narrative, and he must return to his own authoritative experience: "Three ravens on a crossing of driftwood logs tossed up on the muddy river's edge observe me" (44).

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<sup>14</sup> By shifting to the second person, the author insists on his role as a guide able to show the reader around. For a detailed discussion of how ethnographical exposition relies on this role see Paul Atkinson's The Ethnographic Imagination (100).

Unlike the narrator whose personal experiences receive the attention afforded this minute detail, aboriginal people seem to be somehow beyond experience in the text. When a man offers a version of how Albert Johnson, the mad trapper, was shot, a version that Wiebe seems to consider wild and exaggerated, Wiebe comments: "Something beyond mere facts is being told, a truth only words, not facts, can create" (55-56). In another instance, Wiebe appreciates how William Nerysoo, the trapper who first reported Johnson to the RCMP, teases him with little bits of information that eventually amount to the whole story:

What is it about these strong fierce-eyed old men? They are, in Chekhovian terms, "insisting so strongly on preserving someone's personal secret."

It seems they are, for that insistence, the most civilized of people. (65)

When Richardson's account of how the Dogrib annihilated the Yellowknife troubles Wiebe's vision of the Inuit as the most civilized people, he manages to save his illusion by asserting that "no one can now begin to attach blame" (94).

Admitting that it might serve his purpose to forget such incidents, Wiebe makes the pacifist argument that "savagery" is common to all countries who engage in war; as a result, while he considers the accounts of warfare to be gruesome, they do not spoil his image of the civilized native. They



allow him to evoke, if not reconstruct, the dual nature of the noble savage, the uncivilized and the sublime.<sup>15</sup>

Although Wiebe asserts that "when one personally goes to the Mackenzie Delta, Franklin and Richardson are amazingly irrelevant" (43), the narrative is full of the history of these men who, far from being irrelevant, at times seem to be beneath his contempt for wanting "nothing except liquid water," and "a convenient passage to another place altogether" (77). The position of those who do want to stop in the Arctic--the searchers for true north--is far superior because the place and the people have something special to offer, even though the Europeans were unable to realize it. Situated snugly between his own interpretation of history and what he sees as the essential truth of Inuit culture, Wiebe protests: "No, I desire true NORTH, not PASSAGE to anywhere" (114). At this point, he seems to revive these heroes with their big dreams and fragile boats as a ridiculously easy target for superior twentieth-century cultural enlightenment. Wiebe is on a quest: a quest for true north, and he knows that, if he is patient, he will reach his true destination and find the "wisdom" he seeks:

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<sup>15</sup> Significantly, Wiebe's notion of culture is based on linguistic difference, which has been disputed in anthropological study. Julie Cruikshank's "Legend and Landscape: Convergence of Oral and Scientific Traditions in the Yukon Territory" reevaluates what she believes to be the false distinction between "primitive" and "modern" thought. Through an exploration of the cultural dimensions of knowledge and a comparison of Inuit and western knowledge systems, Cruikshank rejects the idea that intrinsic differences separate Western and Inuit thought.

To walk into the true north of my own  
 head between the stones and the ocean.  
 If I do, I will get a new song. If I  
 do, I will sing it for you. (119)

The quest grants Wiebe a "new song" by giving him A Discovery of Strangers. It is as if Wiebe was preparing the reception of the next book by asserting the importance of the north to the national psyche in his address to the University of Toronto audience, and it seems worth noting that in her Clarendon lectures, Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature, Margaret Atwood makes a similar assertion to the Oxford University audience.

Although he has protested strongly against those who simply travel through the Arctic in search of a passage elsewhere, Wiebe really desires something to transplant into what he suggests is the vacuum of Canadian national identity, a passage to a new idea of "Canadian" for which he needs "[w]isdom to understand why Canadians have so little comprehension of our own nordicity, that we are a northern nation" (111). By transforming his north into "our" national destiny, Wiebe crystallizes the goals of Canadian northern policy, tingeing them with evangelistic enthusiasm.

The north becomes "our" heritage, a kind of manifest destiny laced with a moral imperative, or the kind of gospel transformed into written word that Penny van Toorn describes in Wiebe's work (9).

Wiebe's appropriation of an authentic northern experience as the saviour of Canadian national identity shows a profound belief in a national consciousness as the basis of national identity, but the idea that the outsider can easily pick up this "authentic experience" by travelling northward is troubling because it suggests that the traveller's experience and the representation that follows from it are equivalent to those of the northern inhabitant.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Wiebe's vision overlaps dangerously with the nationalist view of the north as a common Canadian heritage, a source of sovereignty and site of development. By stressing the idea of common heritage, Wiebe suggests that the north is the source of a separate and distinct identity for Canadians, but as Thomas Berger's report shows, this position contradicts the goals of the Dene, Inuit, Innu, Métis, Cree, and other cultures who view the north as a homeland and who are fighting so hard for self-determination.<sup>17</sup> Despite the relative "cross-cultural humility" with which Wiebe approaches his writing (Tiffin, "Commonwealth" 30), subsuming the different, the other, within his vision and desire threatens the principles underlying his method.

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<sup>16</sup> Post-colonial critics like Helen Tiffin caution against the narrowness of such a national vision because it can be prone to normalising tendencies which do not serve the articulation of difference ("Commonwealth" 28).

<sup>17</sup> See Franklyn Griffiths for his argument concerning the threat posed to development by native people (9).

Wiebe's analysis suggests an awareness of his role as an interpreter of the history he rereads. Although he frequently writes from a superior position resembling that of the realist ethnographer, that position tends to run counter to his aims; moreover, he never denies the cultural contingency of his own position. Yet, by refusing to "attach blame" as he reviews history, his responsibility seems to melt into the relativist notion that cultures are constituted by the act of viewing them as cultures; that is, cultures are defined by interpretation.<sup>18</sup> Without the independent reality supposed by realism, the author would be free to represent anything and no question of accuracy or fairness need enter the picture. The freedom this position affords the author matches only the danger it presents for the people being represented.

In popular culture, aboriginal peoples, communities, and nations are homogenized within an alternative New Age spirituality that masquerades as respect while effectively revitalizing the romantic notion of the "noble savage" in the form of the equally romantic "mystic savage." This ubiquitous stereotype cuts aboriginal people off from

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<sup>18</sup> In What's Wrong with Ethnography?, Martyn Hammersley summarizes the dilemma succinctly:

Central is the old question of what status we are to give to the claim that all knowledge is culturally relative. If it is true, then it applies to itself; and therefore it is only true relative to a particular culture or framework, and may be false from the perspective of other cultures or frameworks. (49)

individual culture, the source of identity and difference, and freezes them in a static, timeless image written to be read by the dominant culture, a culture so seriously depleted of its own spirituality that it seeks out and mimics others, as did Grey Owl. But, unlike Archie Belaney, Wiebe's career as a whole has demonstrated a serious commitment to the responsible representation of history.

### **Travelling Women**

Aritha van Herk's Places Far from Ellesmere (1990) is a self-reflexive text that pushes the northern frontier myth to its extreme with a contemporary narrator, a heroine, who fits the rugged criteria of adventure literature, and whose subjectivity as in other postmodern texts, is the main concern. On the white, blank page evoked by Places Far from Ellesmere, a common metaphor for north, the voyager sees herself united with the landscape through territorial and erotic desire, and the north becomes an empty page on which to inscribe her own story, "a floating polar desert for all characters to emulate" (78), a place where, according to the narrator, Anna Karenina should have gone:

You are at Ellesmere. You have escaped  
to Ellesmere. Her island, tabula rasa,  
awayness so thoroughly truant you have  
cut all connexion (sic) to all places  
far from Ellesmere. This is what you  
long for. Anna must have too. (77)

The north, represented here in Ellesmere, exists as a body on which the writer can gratify her desire. By describing the island as a woman, the narrator demonstrates how the place, her self, and Anna are all tabula rasa; the void stretching before the writer that fills her with desire. Looking down on the island, she calls it a "languid body below you" (87) and a "clean-swept northern desert of desire" (105). Crossing a river she suddenly feels an urge to sink into the island and emerges feeling an ecstasy like orgasm. Finally, she satisfies the desire to possess Ellesmere by writing her story over the island's stories. The narrator's experience results in a postmodern project that rereads and rewrites Anna Karenina on the new territory of Ellesmere.

Van Herk returns to the wordless, white page metaphor in "In Visible Ink," an essay that inverts the encounter between reader and text, making the page the so-called agent. Feeling obliterated by the awesome experience of another northern trip, van Herk writes: "I am reinvented by a great white page" (8) and "I am its text" (5). She considers the "amulet" to her experience the recognition that "one can be disappeared and re-written in a language beyond one's own" (10), but it can only be accomplished because she is beyond language, "finally freed of words" (2). The paradox does not end there for out of wordlessness, she realizes she has made something transferable: "I am given a different text to carry south

with me, to this oh so visible place full of words shouting everywhere, demanding to be read" (11).

Places Far from Ellesmere highlights some general tendencies in representing the north. First of all, besides the comparison of the north to a blank page made by Kroetsch and others, the northern landscape has been represented in various media as a white space devoid of inhabitants; in fact, Maurice Hodgson argues that the north has always been romanticized as a place rather than a homeland and notes how the Group of Seven never put people in their north.<sup>19</sup> Travelling to Ellesmere seems completely unproblematic for van Herk's narrator because her postmodern project means inhabiting the north with a construction of the self rather than peopling it with those encountered along the way. While van Herk's people are depicted as absent, other ethnographic literature, written by those who wish to describe a culture other than their own, works to bring the other out of such obscurity.

"In Visible Ink" differs from Places Far From Ellesmere in that it represents someone other than the narrator in the northern landscape, namely the guide, Pijamini, who teaches her Inuktitut words. After the attention given to her own attempt to pronounce his words, the narrator refuses to reveal the words' "magic incantations" because, she writes:

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<sup>19</sup> Shelagh Grant and Ramsay Cook note that Tabula rasa has been used to describe the attitude of southerners to the northern landscape.

They are Pijamini's words, not mine, and  
 if I was able to hear them and to mimic  
 them, it was only through his agency. I  
 will not raid them, or repeat them  
 beyond the Arctic sea, beyond the secret  
 worlds of ice. (10)

Pijamini guides the author as she transcends language, and the magical, mystical aura in which he is represented suggests a transcendence of the material world too. So Pijamini, who significantly receives an acknowledgment at the beginning of the book "simply for being Pijamini," that is for being "ontologically given," has been assigned a place outside time, which is not measurable in his world (9), and outside modernity. In this world of magical language and mystical knowledge, the act of writing becomes radically anti-material and ahistoric, and the "North," to use Lorraine York's description of the north in poetry, "becomes a huge, white narcissistic playground passively offering up to us the image of our imposing selves" ("Ivory Thought" 48-49). As a result, historically-situated issues of cultural exchange are displaced from the text, so the problem of voice appropriation appears to be surmounted.

### **Conclusion**

The shift from realist representation in traditional Arctic adventure narratives and novels to postmodern representation in first-person travel narratives resembles



the movement in ethnography from realism to postmodernism, but it has not displaced the position occupied by the masculine characteristics of northern heroes. Instead, the hero's masculine initiation through the quest has been appropriated to ends as diverse as parody and patriotism, or invoked as a way of avoiding the problem of speaking for others. As the pattern of separation, individuation, and return present in the Arctic adventures is replayed in first-person narratives, as in various representations of the north, we read the story of masculinity: the wilderness tale creates an all-male community for the white hero to inhabit by excluding white women and by joining the hero to idealized Native women and the feminized environment. The travel writing of literary tourists tends to avoid representing aboriginal people by focusing on the first-person narrator's personal development of masculine traits such as self-sufficiency.

In wilderness tales and travel writing, two narrative modes dominate representations of the north: one is a strong, almost naturalistic form of realism already observed in the adventure stories discussed in chapter 3; the other is a slightly realist form of postmodernism. The postmodern texts written by such writers as Aritha van Herk and John Moss involve an interesting tension between the writer's stated concern for authenticity in representation, for the true north understood through experience, and the investment in a postmodern narrative style, the former concern

indicating an investment in the sort of mind-independent reality, and the latter suggesting a destabilization of just such a reality.

It is important to note that the writing described here does not justify the claim that the north dominates the Canadian imagination, or even Canadian literature, generally. In fact, the diversity of representations of the north that does exist points to the impossibility of defining a northern "character" or "consciousness" on which to base a unified Canadian identity. Identity remains difficult to determine once and for all. Nevertheless, Canadian writers who equate travelling northward with entering a blank, white world and filling a blank, white page attempt to "make us real" by imagining Canadians as northern. The fiction and travel writing set in the Canadian north retell standard narratives of masculine community, the quest for individual identity, the conquest of nature, and the flight from civilization which are part of the discursive shift from the north as geographical frontier to the north as an ideological concept.

## Conclusion

### Imaginary North, Imagined Nation

"North" is a direction, an orientation, a relative term. Canada is in the northern hemisphere, in North America, north of the United States. It is a northern country with vast northern territory. These are statements of fact. But the notion of "Canada as north" that conflates geography and national identity and that follows from the representation of northern Canada means much more.<sup>1</sup> Representations of the north reveal how the nation is imagined in particular contexts even as they submit to pressures of genre, history, and individual sensibility as well as national and international movements, ideas, and history. In this description of representation of the north, the north acts as an entry point into a discussion of how gender, racial, and national identities interact. The description of that interaction as well as the illumination of the intertextuality of genres used to represent the north constitute the originality of this dissertation.

In the nineteenth century, representations of the north were characterized by ideas of racial superiority; in the twentieth century, they fragment and reflect the diversity of a mosaic. Late nineteenth-century patriotism gives way to twentieth-century self-consciousness. Throughout, the

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<sup>1</sup> As I write this, on July 1, 1996, it seems almost symbolic that I turn on the CBC to find it is broadcasting a concert called "True North" celebrating Canada Day from Inuvik.

definitions of gender fluctuate too: they retain an oppositional structure, but the mastery of other races in the nineteenth century is replaced by the mastery of the body in the twentieth; the restraint and moral virtue of rugged individuals in the Victorian period gives way to the lawlessness of the Goldrush days followed by the gratification of personal desire in the tourism of contemporary writers. Characteristics of gender identity, which can be described at particular moments, change with the times as well as with the pressures asserted by form and genre, but they also retain certain important general attributes which are represented repeatedly.

As the preceding chapters show, stabilizing masculine identity through reiteration of binary opposition or exclusion can lead to misrepresentations; this becomes clear in the case of aboriginal people who become a feminized term in the masculine constructions of various texts. When specific characteristics are attributed to one gender, the opposite characteristics tend to be attributed to the other; thus, whenever masculinity means strength, self-sufficiency, and activity, weakness, dependence, and passivity are attributed to femininity. This definition of masculinity by opposition and exclusion, which must be constantly reiterated, signals its instability.

The historically specific manifestations of gender, racial, and national identities in the representation of the north point to the necessarily contingent definition of

identity as such. As some in the men's movement acknowledge, feminists first brought these issues to light by suggesting that gender identity could be constructed, and the importance of feminist challenges to representational authority is made all the more clear by the efforts to deny them by postmodernist ethnographers. Race, a category of identity whose very existence is now widely disputed, is similarly contingent and often bound up with gender. Recognizing how gender and race inflect representation of the north suggests that the shared consciousness said to emerge from the north is based in a discourse of sexual dominance and racial superiority which is a particularly inappropriate way of defining a plural society in which every race and gender must be equal.

Furthermore, the notion that Canadians inherit a national consciousness from "northern races," an idea that should have vanished along with nineteenth-century notions of racial superiority, cannot speak to Canada's population today. Many of the institutions and traditions that Canadians share are inherited from those who immigrated here, just as literary forms have been imported by all except perhaps aboriginal writers. Individual identities are often formed in relation to traditions imported from elsewhere and preserved from the past. Ideas of gender, race, and nation are imported and adapted; they do not originate from a context-free experience of the environment. While environments, social, natural, economic, affect the

way writers work and the things that they write about, they are also shaped by personal, literary, and national histories. Therefore, topocentric and ecological accounts, which suggest the existence of a collective, national consciousness, must be limited to the impact environment has on the process of adaptation only.

The Canadian national identity emerging teleologically from a national consciousness defined by its relationship to the north is an effect of the way the north is imagined in literature. Writers create characters who earn their individuality through feats of survival in harsh circumstances creating narratives based on mastery. The hero's mastery of internal and external forces signals the correspondence between the body as the site of gender identity formation and the land as site of national identity formation (Butler 128): the hero's quest performs the masculinization and nationalization of the space he seeks to inhabit. In these narratives, the hero's relation to his own body serves as a metaphor for quest and conquest, reflecting the argument made by Victor Seidler and others that masculinity based on a purely instrumental relationship to the body reflects the representation of male sexuality as performance and conquest (Rediscovering 22, 44, 117).

The northern myths identified by Shelagh Grant, including the frontier, the sublime wilderness, the destination of the heroic quest, and the wilderness that needs saving, are all represented in narratives through the

differentiation of gender categories. By representing the north as a setting for the quest, for feats of endurance and survival, writers thematize the development of a traditionally defined masculine identity, thereby constituting what some call "the spirit of the north" as a set of qualities the rugged individual possesses. Rugged, individualistic characters populate Canadian literature set in the north: Horwood's Gillingham, Thériault's Agaguk, Wiebe's Albert Johnson, and van Herk's J. L., just to name a few. The Romantic national consciousness associated with this set of qualities defines the Canadian nation as similarly rugged and individualistic or, negatively, as lacking and needing an understanding of its true nature as rugged and individualistic. However, the mutually dependent definitions of gender, national, and racial traits render them unstable, so like masculine identity, other forms of identity require constant striving for attainment and seem elusive.

The Canadian identity implied in the representation of the north takes on the characteristics of the rugged individual in more than a thematic context. Writers who call on Canadians to grasp their northern heritage enthusiastically conflate the characteristics of the northern hero with those of the theoretical national identity. If we understand nordicity, they tell us, Canada will be the kind of nation it needs to be, in the words of

W. L. Morton, "firm, decisive, and different from the south" (231). Morton's characterization of the nation corresponds to that of the northern hero who enjoys the "situationless freedom" characteristic of the liberal individual (Di Stefano 21). This individual can be identified with Judith Butler's description of the autonomous self who is rootless, homeless, alive in theory only (3). One of the insights of feminist criticism has been in demonstrating that this particular theoretical individual bears signs of masculinity.

While feminist critics and some critics in the men's movement continue to expose the traditional and ubiquitous markers of masculine identity, the destabilization of these markers in North American culture leads to a nostalgic desire for a place where the traditional forms of masculine identity once thrived. I think this desire accounts for the renewed popularity of adventure stories, especially those set in the Arctic, and for the new proliferation of first-person travel writing. One need only look to the making of movies such as White Fang, Iron Will, and In the Shadow of the Wolf to see how the north provides a setting for such narratives of masculine identity. But the engendering of the north goes further than the simple creation of all-male communities, heroic adventures, or epic conflict in northern settings.



### **Thematics and Ethnocriticism**

The role of ethnography in defining how the north is imagined both as an authoritative source and as a method of understanding cultures led me to approach the north using Arnold Krupat's "ethnocritical" method of literary analysis.

Noting how a politics of opposition can lead to scapegoating and "victimist history," Krupat advocates conceptualizing gender, racial, and cultural difference through a dialogical model rather than an oppositional one (Ethnocriticism 20). However, Krupat's dialogical model should not be confused with the postmodernist use of dialogics to promote an ever increasing polyphony of voices.

Although "ethnocriticism," or what he originally called "ethnohistorical literary criticism," can be described as the "interdisciplinary mix of anthropology, history, and critical theory" (4), it does not hold with the implications of postmodernism that any "metadiscourse ruled by reason and logic is always trapped in the prisonhouse of rhetoric and ideology" or that "any would-be explanatory account in the interest of truth or knowledge is inevitably just another occasion-bound story (rhetoric)" (9).

I have drawn on Krupat's ethnocritical approach to provide a descriptive account of genres used to represent the north in the belief that the ethnocritical interdisciplinary method is appropriate in the Canadian context. Canadian literary criticism has always been interdisciplinary, as well as thematic, even ethnocritical,

in Krupat's sense, because Canadian literary criticism has engaged with the many aspects of Canadian history, politics, and culture that bear on literary representation. That is, it has treated Canadian literature as a national literature.

When Northrop Frye wrote that it is the task of the Canadian literary critic "to settle uneasily somewhere between the Canadian historian or social scientist, who has no comparative value-judgments to worry about, and the ordinary literary critic, who has nothing else" (Bush Garden 163), and when he described the Literary History of Canada as a "cultural history" (822), he recognized the necessarily interdisciplinary work required to understand national literatures.

In Canada, it seems that national identity emerges from the need to define the state as a nation for purposes of legitimation rather than from the existence of an organic national consciousness. While the association of attributes such as self-sufficiency, independence, and endurance, the stuff of rugged individualism, with Canadian identity helps to give Canada the characteristics of modern nationhood, this definition arises as an official national identity whose accuracy and authenticity can be disputed on the grounds that it does not account sufficiently for regional differences. It is worth asking whether any single definition of an authentic national identity, especially one whose representation is inflected significantly by unstable categories of gender and race, can ever be defined once and

for all. If national identity cannot be defined once and for all, can it ever be other than an official form imposed on the many by the few?

If not, should nationalism be abandoned altogether? By disputing the notion of a central, unifying national consciousness, I am suggesting that the Romantic nationalism evoked by some of our writers in representations of the north in particular is a weak way of defining Canada. Yet, the representation of the north suggests that there are ways of imagining the nation to be--"Canada as north" is one of them--the problems of the Romantic notion of national consciousness at its core notwithstanding. If we consider Romantic nationalism to be a "metanarrative" in Lyotard's sense, then my incredulity could be called postmodern. As Richard Gwyn argues in Nationalism Without Walls (1995) and as John Ralston Saul implies in The Unconscious Civilization (1995), Canada could be the first postmodern nation: the first nation in which incredulity toward national identity comes to legitimate the state. However, as we see in the manifestations of postmodernism in various genres, incredulity towards "metanarratives" is more often than not a cynical will-to-power and usually a reinscription of the boundaries it is supposed to blur. By saying that identity is complex and contingent, I do not mean to suggest that it cannot be described; rather, I want to caution against limiting national identity to national consciousness based on experiences that all Canadians supposedly share. At the

same time, I also want to caution against an equally limited postmodern version of Canadian identity drawn from the aggregate of narcissistic selves and consumers that Saul describes.

### **The Limits and Potential of Thematics**

The approach I take to bring concerns about gender, racial, and national identity to literary criticism has been deeply influenced by the work of feminist philosopher, Linda Alcoff, especially the expanded definition of identity she provides in "The Problem of Speaking for Others." Her influence has led me to think about the complexity of identity construction in ways that modify the standpoint theory currently dominating feminism and to resist the oppositional and separatist thinking of identity politics. In trying to offer the contextualized analysis that I think her idea of identity construction calls for, I have necessarily considered "images" of men and women and "themes" in literature, and this "method" has produced a thematic study."

The implications that the instability of identity might have for Canadian literature are particularly acute in a work such as this, a document intended both to legitimate the work of a graduate student and to provide the institutional approval and support necessary to continue thinking, writing, and teaching about Canadian literature. It was my interest in teaching Canadian literature that

pointed me toward the possibilities and limitations of thematic study in the first place. I think that there is great potential in teaching national literatures thematically even if thematic studies can also be prone to problems of decontextualization. Indeed, in my survey of the patterns I see in representations of the north, I am aware that the focus on a transhistorical theme has led at times to the unintentional obscuring of literary history or to limiting the textual analysis that a more complete reading of each work would entail. Another limitation of thematic study involves the inclusion and exclusion of texts. In a description of texts representing the north, Robert Service receives more attention than F. R. Scott, James Houston more than Gabrielle Roy, and some of the best Canadian writers are not included at all. Yet, the possibility that thematic study offers is in providing what Russell Brown calls a "cultural thematics," that is, "a reading of cultural themes out of national bodies of literature" (MS 30).

In his essay "On Reading for Themes in Canadian Literature" (1996), Brown describes how cultural thematics "join literary study with other disciplines" in order to understand the relationship between literature and culture (MS 31), a relationship on which national literatures are founded. In so far as the north constitutes a theme that can be traced through Canadian representational history and that can illuminate ideas about the constituents of

identity, providing such a cultural thematics contributes to understanding the various cultural manifestations of Canadian nationalism.

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