

**In Visible Cities: Envisioning the Canadian Prairie City in Literature
and Film**

By

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MASTER OF ARTS

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
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Master of Arts**

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Abstract

In my thesis I examine Robert Kroetsch's novel *The Studhorse Man* (1969), Aritha van Herk's novel *Restlessness* (1998), and Guy Maddin's film *The Saddest Music in the World* (2004) to determine how each work uses non-representational narrative strategies in order to reproduce the pedestrian experience of seeing the prairie city. In a tradition that is predominantly associated with rural landscapes, there is a struggle for artists who work outside of what has come to be known as "authentic" prairie symbols and themes: the empty and barren land, the farmer struggling with his fields, the lonely wife sequestered in her home. Such icons came to be established within the formative years of artistic development in the prairies. In literature, this movement is known as "prairie realism" and featured linear trajectories and narrative continuity. It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that prairie literature began to react against these realist narrative forms and experiment with more fragmented, abstract forms that, instead of being based on linear trajectories, adopted spatial narrative constructions. Such spatialization abandons narrative continuity in order to more closely represent the mechanics of human perception. Instead of producing a mimetic *style* of narrative, which attempts to mirror the surface of the world resulting in a flat, one-dimensional plane, these artists produced a mimesis of *effect*, which attempts to mirror the workings of human consciousness resulting in a fragmented, multi-layered construction. Such a spatialization, I argue, allows artists to more easily enter into the urban prairie landscape because it effectively recreates the "imaginative reconstruction" the city's pedestrian must perform in order to make the "partial visibilities" of the cityscape comprehensible.

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Introduction

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau, writing of the totalizing and God-like view of New York from atop the World Trade Center, asks his reader: “To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong?” The incredible height “transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (92). In his chapter “Walking in the City,” de Certeau breaks down the division that lies between experiencing the city from a removed, distant, and panoptic point and experiencing the city from street level. The pedestrians “whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ [...] write without being able to read it” (93). These two positions of observation are likened by de Certeau to the different ways a city may be narrated in urban literature. The reader is either privy to a totalizing point of authority that observes and narrates from an unconnected distant perspective (a position found in many Victorian texts such as Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House*) or the reader experiences only what a pedestrian would observe (as can be found in many modernist and postmodernist texts such as Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg* and Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*). Hana Wirth-Nesher, in *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, identifies the pedestrian as one who “imaginatively reconstructs” the gaps in knowledge that come from experiencing the city:

Cities promise plenitude, but deliver inaccessibility. As a result, the urbanite, for better or for worse, is faced with a never-ending series of

partial visibilities, of gaps—figures framed in the windows of highrises, crowds observed from those same windows, partly drawn blinds, taxis transporting strangers, noises from the other side of a wall, closed doors and vigilant doormen, streets on maps or around the bend but never traversed, hidden enclaves in adjacent neighborhoods. Faced with these and unable or unwilling to ignore them, the city dweller inevitably reconstructs the inaccessible in his imagination. (8)

Douglas Tallack, in his article “City Sights: Mapping and Representing New York City,” similarly notes that, in the experience of the city, “partial visibilities” are overcome though imaginative reconstruction. He writes specifically of “The Ashcan Group,” a collection of American painters who worked at the turn of the twentieth century. He notes that these urban painters were influenced by “a need to know more than could actually be seen” (29): a need that resulted in the creation of abstract and non-representational images. Tallack notes: “the key factor behind these changes in representation was not an internal transformation within the discipline of painting [...] but, rather, the attempt, and even the need, to know and understand a modern city, with its new spatio-temporal dimensions. The field of visual culture knowledge depends, to some extent at least, upon achieving a point of view” (27). It is this “internal transformation” of form in order to achieve a “point of view” that I propose motivates the various constructions of the prairie city found in Robert Kroetsch’s novel *The Studhorse Man* (1969), Aritha van Herk’s novel *Restlessness* (1998), and Guy Maddin’s film *The Saddest Music in the World* (2004). Each work, to differing extents, assumes the position of the pedestrian in order to reconstruct a vision of the

city. Although Robert Kroetsch's text begins with the seemingly traditional omniscient narrative perspective, this panoptic gaze is soon troubled by the narrator's reliability. Aritha van Herk's narrator, similarly, begins her tale from a position of authority, observing the city from her elevated hotel room. She soon discovers, however, that she too is being observed, and her position of scopic control crumbles. Guy Maddin's filmic vision of the city overtly presents a landscape filled with gaps and uses visual techniques similar to those found in cubism, "in which the modernist proposal that what is not 'normally' visible can only be made so through non-representational techniques [and] is advanced through paintings which include a number of different and literally invisible sides of an object or scene all at once" (Tallack 32). Maddin presents the city through a sometimes blurred and hazy vision, thwarting any attempt at scopic control. My thesis will argue that in the attempt to reproduce the pedestrian experience of seeing the city these artists must turn to non-representational techniques in order to present a mimetically faithful recreation of imaginative vision. Each artist turns to these techniques (usually associated with modernism but, as Erich Auerbach points out, traceable back to the Hebrew scriptures) in order to effectively communicate the *experience* of the prairie city.

There are a number of critics who have, of late, called for a re-examination of prairie literature by taking into account the wealth of works that include the urban prairie landscape. Ian Adam, in his essay "Iconicity, Space and the Place of Sharon Butala's 'The Prize'" (1998), takes on the complicated task of examining how "iconicity, as a challenge to the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the sign," relates to the use of icons in prairie writing and literary criticism (Adam 178). He notes that

“[p]rairie writing contains few icons expressing long-standing human settlement; it is non-monumental and sometimes [...] even anti-monumental. In it, icons of permanence are replaced by those of transience” (Adam 179). The prairie city, as an icon of permanence, challenges this tradition of transient icons. In a literature that so often represents the absence of cultural, historical, and artistic material, both pre- or post-contact, the city challenges the stereotype of the blank slate, or *tabula rasa*, onto which new forms (of narrative, of culture) can be created. By setting the action of a novel or film in an urban setting, the prairie artist creates an icon of permanence that contradicts and challenges any notions of “absence” within the landscape. George Melnyk argues similarly for the use of the prairie city as a mythological symbol of permanence in *New Moon at Batoche: Reflections on the Urban Prairie* (1999). He has “been disappointed to find the limited role that the cities of the West play in the dominant mythology of the region. Compared to the Métis buffalo hunter or the sunburnt farmer on his tractor, images of the Western city are almost an afterthought that expresses some kind of inauthenticity in relation to the region” (87). There is, however, not a total lack of artistic representations of the prairie city. Primarily there has been a lack of criticism regarding how these urban representations affect the understanding of *place* in prairie literature and art. Any sense of the city as “inauthentic” to prairie experience, I argue, results from this lack of dialogue and has led to a false understanding of this region. My thesis in no way comes close to a comprehensive analysis of the vast amount of artistic representations of the city. Rather, I am concentrating this study on a particular aesthetic theme that runs through three unique works. Through this focus, I hope to initiate dialogue and provide a

sliver of insight into how the city affects conceptions of place in the Canadian prairies.

Alison Calder, in "Reassessing Prairie Realism" (1998), writes of the dangers of environmental determinism in prairie realist writing. "Criticism of prairie realism," she notes, "is predicated on a belief in the primacy of the land" (56). Calder suggests that "the belief that the prairie is *only* a wasted earth and burning sun, that there is *no* imaginative possibility here, creates a critical environment in which prairie realism, with its matter-of-fact style, is seen to be a 'natural' mode of representing the prairie, and is therefore granted a privileged position in a canon which itself privileges mimesis" (59). Writing that falls outside of the prairie realist mode, then, may be seen as "unnatural" and therefore less authentic to the place of the prairies. The danger, for Calder, is that realist writing, because it suggests a fidelity to detail deemed realistic, is "invested with truth-value" and considered documentary (59). She rightly notes a failure in criticism of prairie literature to "recognize [...] that these writings present fictionalized, not photographic, landscapes" (55). To invest such fictions with "truth-value" and neglect to acknowledge their position as artistic representations results in a situation where "fiction cannot be fiction: it must be representative of a typical regional ethos" (55). The novels and film studied in this thesis, by turning to non-representative techniques, ensure that their status remains firmly established within the category of artistic representation. This position allows each work to creatively explore the complexities of *place* in the prairies without being tied down to expectations of "truth-value."

In order to better understand the dominant mythical and iconic symbols of the prairies, it is useful to turn to R. Douglas Francis' study *Images of the West: Responses to the Canadian Prairies* (1989), wherein he charts the historical, artistic, and cultural constructions of the prairies from first contact to the present day. He lists six specific yet "fluid and open" (231) categories of reception: "The Western Wasteland, 1650-1850," "The Romantic West, 1845-1885," "The West, Nation, and the Empire, 1845-1885," "The Promised Land: The Utopian West, 1880-1920," "Western Realism, 1880-1940," and "The Mythic West, 1945-1980." These categories of reception serve as mythic archetypes that have shaped and continue to shape the way in which citizens, academics, and artists think about the prairies as a region. Francis' study is intriguing because the survey of texts he uses demonstrates how the West has been written, whether by explorer, missionary, scientist, poet, or novelist, through a combination of subjective and personal responses to the landscape. "Western Realism" is the iconic style of prose and painting that emerged as a direct reaction to the unrealistic belief that the prairies were a "land of opportunity," an Edenic place where fertile land was abundantly available. Literature and art of this period is characterized as "prairie realism," featuring bleak, desperate people barely living on the edge of survival, most certainly a different conception from the optimistic "land of opportunity." Writers such as Frederick Philip Grove, Martha Ostenso, and Sinclair Ross wrote novels that "depicted prairie man as struggling against a harsh and unyielding land that ultimately transformed him into a cold, calculating, and harsh character, like the land itself" (163). Canonical literature of this time also emphasized the move many people were making from rural to urban

settings. “Mechanization of the family farm, which occurred to the greatest extent in the twenties,” writes Francis, “was the chief reason for this revolutionary change. Prairie novelists [...] used the dichotomy of rural and urban as a means to comment on the strengths and limitations of these two lifestyles” (166). This dichotomous relationship primarily demonized the urban prairie centres by associating them with the dominant power structures of both the National and Colonial influences.

Like Francis, Dick Harrison, in his important study of prairie literature *Unnamed County: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1977), writes of the development of Canadian prairie realism in the mid-1920s. “The techniques of this new fiction,” he writes, “encouraged a more thorough representation of the prairie environment and way of life than can be found in any earlier fiction. [...] [T]here is a realization that the means of physical and economic adaptation to the environment, though initially successful, had not automatically effected a cultural or imaginative adaptation” (34-35). Harrison notes that prose and painterly styles diverged in this period because painters began to adopt more abstract and expressionist styles while novelists tended to remain aligned with traditional realist narrative techniques: “When painters move into nonfigurative expression and abandon what can be called the ‘literary’ or ‘narrative’ element of their art,” he writes, “it becomes increasingly difficult to draw useful—or even sane—comparisons with the fiction” (42). Only when writers began to take on similarly abstract and expressionist styles were the traditional limitations of prairie realist style abandoned. Guy Vanderhaeghe, in his article, “‘Brand Name’ vs. ‘No-Name’: A Half-Century of the Representation of Western Canadian Cities in Fiction” (1993), argues along similar lines as Harrison.

His study of four novels, Ralph Connor's *The Foreigner* (1909), Edward McCourt's *The Wooden Sword* (1975), Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* (1956), and John Marlyn's *Under the Ribs of Death* (1984), charts the failure of prairie realist writing to effectively represent the Canadian prairie cities. The four novels structure Vanderhaeghe's argument that, after Connor's novel, prairie novelists shied away from writing about the specific prairie cities, opting instead for vague approximations. Vanderhaeghe theorizes that there was a tendency to create non-specific, "no-name," and faceless urban centres because, first of all, prairie novelists lacked confidence and "had doubts about the material they found to hand" (128). The imperialist and nationalist stereotypes of the cultureless prairies created a self-doubt in the artists located therein about the validity of their own experiences. Secondly, Vanderhaeghe continues, writers shied away from writing about specific prairie cities because there was an absence of literary examples from which the writers could work (128). North American urban literature had, to that point, primarily been written about larger urban centres such as New York, Chicago, and Montreal. These two factors resulted in the creation of urban prairie narratives that lacked identity grounded in the real, tangible place: "The most frequent way of dealing with the problem was the creation of the no-name city, a city that tried to pass muster by refusing to give away what it really was. As a strategy, this was in most cases self-defeating, giving a strange air of unreality to novels which were, by and large, realistic in style" (128). This ironic situation, where the realistic *style* of the prose resulted in unrealistic narratives, could eventually only be overcome when artists

abandoned traditional forms of realism and began experimenting with new forms of representation that were realistic in *effect*.

I will pause here a moment in order to emphasize a distinction that will be crucial in my argument: the separation between realist *style* and realist *effect*. I will be using the term *mimesis* frequently throughout this work. Erich Auerbach's influential study *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953) will also be used throughout. His work traces the pendulum-like evolution of the representation of reality in narrative through the span of Western civilization. Beginning with Homer and the Old Testament, and working through Dante, Goethe, Rabelais, Shakespeare, and Virginia Woolf, just to name a few, the point he stresses continuously and which I will borrow in making my argument is this: in the attempt to make a narrative most accurately reflect the workings of perception, artists have frequently turned to styles that break from linear, "realist" modes and instead create depth through shifting what remains in the background and what is shown in the foreground. Auerbach identifies two distinct forms of narrative mimesis. The first, which he aligns with Homeric style, is characterized by "fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective" (23). The characteristics of the second form of mimesis, which he aligns with the texts of the Hebrew Bible, include "certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of

the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic” (23). Auerbach asserts that these two styles of mimesis “exercised their determining influence upon the representation of reality in European literature” (23). It is my contention that the two different versions of “reality” found in realist narrative and modern/postmodern narrative are representative of these two types of mimesis. The first type of mimesis strives for a realism of *style* and the second for a realism of *effect*. In his discussion of changes in narrative style that occurred between the two wars (a change, as Harrison notes, that was also made by prairie painters of the time but not novelists) these new narratives featured “multipersonal representation of consciousness, time strata, disintegration of the continuity of exterior events, [and] shifting of the narrative viewpoint (all of which are interrelated and difficult to separate)” (546). These self same narrative elements appear throughout the works studied herein and work together to create, in different ways, the “reality” of the prairie city. Just as Douglas Tallack notes that painters turned to “non-representational techniques” in order to express the vision of the pedestrian in the city, Kroetsch, van Herk, and Maddin similarly use these techniques in their presentation of the prairie city in order to recreate a subjective experience of *seeing* the city.

Traditional prairie realism, therefore, had struggled with the construction of the prairie city because authors were either creating cities that seemed anonymous and false-fronted, or, if the cityscapes were historically and geographically specific, they were lacking the detail and perspective necessary to carry out an “imaginative reconstruction” of the landscape. The city became easier to represent as artists began

to work with less realistic forms and began adopting more abstract methods. That is, when artists began to abandon traditional realist forms of mimesis, and instead moved into more impressionistic, abstract, and expressionist forms of representation, thereby creating a different, more subjectively structured type of mimesis, the city, with its complexities and multiplicity, became a less-daunting artistic landscape. Artists most effectively “gazed” at the city by looking away from it: distraction, abstraction, interference, and multiplicity are the tools used to achieve the effect of “imaginative reconstructions” that Hana Wirth-Nesher notes are necessary to overcome the “partial visibilities” of the city landscape. These tools of distraction and abstraction are tools that change the balance between foreground and background, creating through a billowing volume of background, a more subjective experience of the city. As Eduardo Cadava writes of historical photography: “the most faithful photograph, the photograph most faithful to the event of the photograph, is the least faithful one, the least mimetic one – the photograph that remains faithful to its own infidelity” (15). In a similar manner, artistically effective constructions of “the city” are the ones that turn away from a more traditional mimetic realism and instead employ the more subjective, more impressionistic, more surreal techniques of representation that mirror the pedestrian vision of the prairie city.

My first chapter will address Robert Kroetsch’s novel *The Studhorse Man*, which features a character who has embarked upon an epic journey. Hazard Lepage and his stallion Poseidon travel a cyclical path through Alberta in search of a sire to continue the line of horses. Edmonton, in the novel, figures as a stopping point in the journey. This is a city on the cusp of mechanization and modernization; it is uncertain

of how to reconcile its history with the rapidly changing present. This flux is echoed by Kroetsch's narrator who similarly cannot find his place between the roles of archivist, mythologizer, and storyteller. The city has been turned on its head by a blinding snowstorm and a stampede of wild horses. The sense of Bakhtin's "carnival," a "two world condition" where the world and its inverted form co-exist, permeates the city and offers a substantial doubling in the narrative; authority has been inversed and societal rules abandoned. *The Studhorse Man* "imaginatively reconstructs" the fragmented cityscape by effectively "spatializing" the narrative. That is, by abandoning a traditional linear trajectory and instead creating a multi-layered narration that allows for superimposition and simultaneity.

My second chapter will examine Aritha van Herk's novel *Restlessness*, which presents a character at what appears to be the last stop along a cyclical journey. After a life spent traveling throughout the world Dorcas chooses her hometown, Calgary, as her final resting place. Within the borders of Calgary she retells to her self-hired assassin descriptions of the cities she has visited, thereby inscribing them onto the prairie city, investing one landscape with many. Doubling makes an appearance in *Restlessness* first through the doubled narration: as Dorcas narrates her story to Derrick Altman, her assassin, it is doubly related to the reader, creating a doubled audience; there are the many enunciated cities, layering their similarities and differences one over top of the other onto the ironically insinuated mirror city of Calgary; there is the appearance of the doppelgänger, the troubling notion of meeting one's own double within the city, and finally there is the carnivalesque combination of life and death states. *Restlessness* "imaginatively reconstructs" the fragmented

cityscape by creating a “polyphonic” narrative. By invoking a multiplicity of urban landscapes overtop of Calgary, van Herk creates a multi-layered landscape.

My third chapter will study Guy Maddin’s film *The Saddest Music in the World*, a film that presents Winnipeg in the midst of the depression as a host city to a world wide competition to see which nation has the saddest music in the world. Maddin’s visualization of Winnipeg is of a city able to take on a multiplicity of meanings, faces, and identities. The film offers Winnipeg as an all-encompassing performance, the city-as-spectacle. Doubling appears in *The Saddest Music in the World* with the combination of dead and the living existing in the same frame; the doubled nature of identity appropriations; and the ironic blurring of the filmic image, creating through doublings and visual interference a non-mimetic yet effective image. *The Saddest Music in the World* “imaginatively reconstructs” Maddin’s fragmented cityscape through the use of cubist techniques. Through a combination of set design and filmic technique, the images created “include a number of different and literally invisible sides of an object or scene all at once” (Tallack 32).

The three works studied in this project work against the generalization of place, Vanderhaeghe’s “no-name city,” by using the cities and their historical, geographic, and cultural specificities as templates against which the narrative action is built. It is important to clarify, at this time, that although I have been writing of the “prairie city” as a unified concept, the cities of the Canadian Prairies each have a separate and unique identity. I do not wish to present the prairie city as a unified “no-name concept,” but instead as a dynamic interface of places and history. This study will examine three of these cities, Edmonton, Calgary, and Winnipeg. The Edmonton

of *The Studhorse Man* is playful, cacophonous, and is made mythical by its own historical presence. The Calgary of *Restlessness* is capable of assuming many identities and of turning, eventually in on itself as a snake eating its own tail (tale). The Winnipeg of *The Saddest Music in the World* is a patchwork of history, image, voice, and identity. These prairie artists, seeking an alternative to traditional realist representation, have turned to aesthetic developments that occurred in the modernist movement, a movement that was similarly reacting against realist structures. This turn towards non-representational or “spatial” forms resulted in the creation of works that align with Auerbach’s more subjective form of mimesis. Ultimately, each artist is motivated, like Douglas Tallack’s Ashcan painters, by “a need to know more than [can] actually be seen.” Non-representational techniques allow these works to overcome the limits of traditional realism and present unique visions of these prairie cities.

Chapter One: The Riotous City

... Newly arrived and quite ignorant of the languages of the Levant, Marco Polo could express himself only by drawing objects from his baggage – drums, salt fish, necklaces of wart hogs' teeth – and pointing to them with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder or of horror, imitating the bay of the jackal, the hoot of the owl. (Calvino Invisible Cities 38)

Dick Harrison, in *Unnamed County: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1977), notes how a number of prairie writers in the 1970s “seem[ed] more interested in discontinuity in narrative structures, allowing for new collocations of the elements of prairie life.” Citing Kroetsch, he goes on to write: “[Robert] Kroetsch, the most technically adventurous of the group, expresses impatience with ‘certain traditional kinds of realism,’ presumably because he wishes to escape the assumptions implicit in the realistic fiction which shaped an earlier vision of the prairie” (44). The “assumptions implicit in realistic fiction” that Harrison alludes to arose out of a reaction against the stylized romantic writing of the prairies, which envisioned the prairies as an Edenic promised land and cradle of nationalist pride. The realists, writing in the economically devastating depression, streamlined their prose in a way that featured “realistic fidelity to circumstantial detail” (107). The relationship the prairie people had with nature changed from the Edenic and harmonious to post-lapsarian and full of conflict. The failure to harness the land and create an agriculturally prosperous region was reflected, in these novels, by the characters’ creative and imaginative failures. Robert Kroetsch, then, “wished to escape” these templates that featured very linear narratives that presupposed a dichotomous relationship between man and the land, a dichotomy that limited the way in which

novels could interact with the idea of *place*. Kroetsch's play with myth, history, and linearity manipulates the expectations produced by realist prairie writing. *The Studhorse Man* presents a number of narrative techniques that distance the work from traditionally defined boundaries of realism. This chapter will examine two of these techniques and specifically relate them to the construction of the prairie city. The first technique is Kroetsch's appropriation of Bakhtin's notion of "the carnivalesque," specifically the doubling effect and creation of a "two world condition." The carnival, writes Bakhtin, "offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; [the participants] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom" (6). This "second world" existed not separately from but simultaneously with the original world, where the institutions of power remained in control, despite all appearances. This use of doubling, where the world is both itself and its inverted self, fractures the narrative vision in a way that allows the city to take on a multiplicity of identities and meanings. The second narrative technique that will be explored in this chapter is the abandonment of traditional temporal progression in favour of a "spatialization" of the narrative action, where events take place simultaneously, in a moment of time, as opposed to progressing in a linear trajectory *through* time. This spatialization, in turn, allows Kroetsch to abandon historical narrative models, which depend on linear progression, in favour of mythological narrative models, which thrive in multi-layered constructions. These two techniques, and the resultant blurring of narrative boundaries, affect the presentation of the city because of how the narrative then mirrors the multifaceted and fractured structure of

the city. By turning away from prairie realism and relying instead on techniques that allow for fragmentation, diffusion, and abstraction, Kroetsch effectively captures a pedestrian vision of the prairie city.

I. The Carnival

But what enhanced for Kublai every event or piece of news reported by his inarticulate informer was the space that remained around it, a void not filled with words. The descriptions of cities Marco Polo visited had this virtue: you could wander through them in thought, become lost, stop and enjoy the cool air, or run off.

(Calvino Invisible Cities 38)

In his essay "The Carnival of Violence: A Meditation" (1989), Robert Kroetsch discusses Mikhail Bakhtin's work, particularly *Rabelais and His World*, wherein Bakhtin traces the tradition of carnival literature from medieval times through Romanticism. "One might say," writes Kroetsch, "that carnival celebrated liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (Kroetsch "Carnival" 111). This carnival spirit pervades *The Studhorse Man*. Worlds are frequently inverted, playfully leaving the characters to manoeuvre through familiar but changed landscapes. There is also a sense that Kroetsch delights in "suspending" the traditional boundaries of narrative form. Just as a carnival participant mocks figures of authority by assuming their identities and performing in a spectacle, *The Studhorse Man* questions the established

“privileges, norms, and prohibitions” of the contemporary novel by assuming these norms and turning them on their heads. Bakhtin identifies that, in the world of the carnival, “[w]e find a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the ‘inside out’ (*à l’envers*), of the ‘turnabout,’ of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings” (11). It is a world that thrives not only on the usurping of logic and societal rules but also on change and oscillation between the two states. What results from this oscillation during carnival is a state of “betweenness,” where the world is in continual movement and therefore never takes a solid, definable shape. The construction of Edmonton in *The Studhorse Man* is similarly concerned with creating a world that is inverted and in a continual state of change. From the moment of Hazard’s arrival the city is in a state of uproarious chaos, from the blizzard that blinds Hazard, to his release of the wild horses through the streets, to the ease with which Hazard appropriates identities. Bakhtin uses the term “grotesque realism” to define literature that invokes this carnivalesque dependence on reversal and change. “The grotesque image,” he writes, “reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. [...] [I]n this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis” (24). Kroetsch, in a 1970 interview with Margaret Lawrence, notes that Western Canadian writers “are involved in making a new literature out of a new experience. As I explore that experience, trying to make both inward and outward connections, I see new possibilities for the story-teller. In the process I have become somewhat impatient

with certain traditional kinds of realism, because I think there is a more profound kind available to us" (Kroetsch "Conversation" 53). If Kroetsch is reacting against a certain type of realism familiar to fiction of the Canadian prairies, his difficult-to-define novel falls, arguably, into Bakhtin's category of "grotesque realism." The very metamorphosis between genres within the novel (at once historical fiction, biology text, biography, et cetera) aligns the text of *The Studhorse Man* with the characterization of the city as a "grotesque body."

As Hazard arrives in Edmonton there is a definite sense of this suspension of "rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions." After a mad scramble through the rail yard in search of Poseidon, his horse, Hazard spends hours wandering the city trying to find him. This is a city turned on its head by a blizzard; the citizens have been trapped in their offices downtown, the crowds have rioted in the beer halls, and sexual escapades abound. "Bosses, because they couldn't get home, were compelled to spend the night caring for secretaries who could not get home [...] Soldiers proved willing to occupy the cars that had been abandoned; nor did they suffer the darkness alone, what with many typists and housewives transforming fear into merriment" (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 31). The sexual abandon is characteristic of the carnival spirit as Bakhtin defines it. Emphasis on the body and bodily functions are key figures in Bakhtin's carnivalesque. It is important to note that the body, as it is conceived of in folk culture, is not the separate, individual body common to contemporary notions of selfhood, but is in fact the *communal* body intimately interconnected with the surrounding world. Bakhtin writes:

[The] body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. (19)

Kroetsch's over-the-top emphasis on the phallus in the novel further highlights how the body and the outside world are not separate in the novel. Examples of this emphasis include Hazard's dual nicknaming of Poseidon and his penis as "Blue"; naming the woman Hazard has a tryst with in the museum "P. Cockburn"; and the heated exchange of curses in the form of phallic synonyms on the High Level Bridge. The carnivalesque body is described by Bakhtin as "grotesque" in that it "is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (Bakhtin 26). The city in *The Studhorse Man* can be read as another type of grotesque body: it is incomplete and continually outgrowing its borders. Kroetsch's city has abandoned any sense of neatly compartmentalized separation or societal rules of interaction: wild horses tread through department stores and identities shift with a simple change of clothes.

Throughout the Edmonton section of the text Hazard has the opportunity to adopt and shed identities along the way: he dons the uniform of a Mountie, a milkwagon man, and finally a clergyman. The interchangeability of identities is a key component to the carnival spirit: Bakhtin connects "the mask" in carnival culture

“with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and with the merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it rejects conformity to oneself. The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames” (39-40). Hazard is not the only character that enacts this changing of identities. Demeter, the narrator of the text, also adopts and sheds masks through the various narrative “voices” he appropriates. At times he fades into the background, narrating the story from a point of authority; other times he intimately addresses the reader first hand, as a Victorian narrator might do; other times Demeter takes over the narrative outright, hijacking the story of Hazard and narrating, instead, his own story. Brian L. Ross, in his article “The Naked Narrator: *The Studhorse Man* & The Structuralist Imagination” (1985), explores how Demeter’s intrusive presence “can be seen as an allegory of the search of the structuralist imagination for the future of its literature” (65). The text reads as self-conscious because, throughout, “Demeter so distracts himself with laying bare literary devices and conventional techniques of narration, with taking the dressing of the narrator and his relation to his narrative, that he turns what starts out to be a ‘biography of Hazard Lepage’ into a book about the man trying to write the biography” (65).

The city is also capable of changing identities; the landscape of the city is malleable and in a state of continual flux. The blizzard causes blindness and chaos at the outset of Hazard’s adventure: “Darkness had come; the lights were on. And with darkness, there in the false glare of the gaudy lights, came further chaos” (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 30). The next morning, however, the weather changes drastically, and with it changes the city. After his night in the museum: “A reluctant spring had come

overnight to the city. In the east, the sky fanned a small light from the sun's promise. The earth was endlessly white—the roofs, the streets, the parking lots, the snowbent spruce trees—whiteness everywhere” (42). The surface of the city changes with the weather and each change is like a new carnival mask from which a different personality and identity are performed. Finally, the novel itself can be read as playfully changing its own set of masks: sometimes donning the mask of realist narrative, other times that of historical fiction, other times parody. Ultimately, the text is conscious of its own forms: like the carnival and the prairie city, Kroetsch's text is a narrative where “hierarchies [are] collapsing, boundaries disappearing or shifting, opposites uniting or dissolving or changing face. Actor and audience [are] no longer separate. Everything [is] in a state of becoming, not of being” (Kroetsch “Carnival” 104).

Many of Kroetsch's critics (including himself) have stressed the issue of the self-consciousness in his work (see Kroetsch “Exploding” 191; Kroetsch “Interview” 42; Ball 13-14; Kaye and Thacker 179; Ross 65). Over and over critical focus turns to the language, the utterance, and the text as taking place within a set of literary, artistic, historical, and social traditions. The city in *The Studhorse Man* is similarly obsessed with itself, completely turned inward on its own form. The city is inherently a complex structure: it is always-shifting, multiple, derivative, ironic, playful, chaotic, and full of voices. Just as a pedestrian in the city must learn to develop a way of seeing that “imaginatively reconstructs” the “partial visibilities” inherent in the cityscape, the reader of *The Studhorse Man*, “[as] an inheritor of the post-Babel world, [...] must recognize the multiplicity of voices and languages that may speak

through a single voice, and the fuzziness of the boundaries between fictional and factual storytelling” (Ball 14). An example of this many-voiced landscape occurs when Hazard drives a stolen milk wagon across the High Level Bridge. As he interrupts the traffic flow he is verbally accosted by a truck driver and thereafter insults, curses, and swears are bandied about, echoing an outstanding number of phallic synonyms out across the river valley. A brief litany of these curses includes: “peckerhead,” “hangnail pecker,” “pandering redcoat peter,” “tool,” “faltering apparatus,” “whang and rod and pud,” “dong,” “drippy dong,” “Johnny and jock,” “diddly dink,” “d—you d—you you d—you dink. You dick,” “dofunny copper” (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 47). The multiplicity of synonyms highlights language’s ability to slip between meanings. The synonyms are repeated to a point of annulment where they lose their meaning and potency. This concentration on language and utterance is not the only example of the text’s self-consciousness; there is also an emphasis on the different forms of “story” available to the novelist such as history, mythology, and biography. The blending of texts in *The Studhorse Man* mirrors the blend of geographical, cultural, and architectural entities within the city. Each entity, be it a park bench, a library, or a garden, exists alongside the others. This juxtaposition creates dialogic structures that are unique to each city. The city also possesses traces, sometimes physical, sometime only in memory, of what once existed there.

Kroetsch's use of physical landmarks within the city that have since been lost to time highlights both the rich architectural history of Edmonton and the natural process of urban change and renewal. Aritha van Herk, in the introduction to the 2004 re-issue of the novel, writes:

The places where Hazard inquires after Poseidon [...] include the Rialto Theatre, the Palace of Sweets, Mike's Newsstand, the Royal George Hotel, and Woodward's. [...] They are all, virtually, gone, as extinct as studhorse men. These embedded layers of history and pastness decree Hazard's impending erasure, and speak to a place that has virtually forgotten its origins as a remote Hudson's Bay post. (van Herk "Introduction" xv)

In fictionalizing Edmonton, Kroetsch fixes it in a specific point in history. By arresting the city in this way Kroetsch then can freely incorporate mythological and symbolic forms into its structure. Through this fictionalization, the city possesses an eternal quality. Paradoxically, by including historical landmarks that have since disappeared, Kroetsch also highlights the changeability of the urban landscape: the city is in a continual state of renewal and flux. It both exists in the present while memorializing the past. Kroetsch's Edmonton challenges the stereotype of the *place* of the prairie, so often associated with both an absence of history and a stasis in the past.

The city in *The Studhorse Man* has been fabricated out of scraps of history and storytelling, its boundaries blurred as both the reader and Hazard trace their way through the city's borders. These blurred boundaries make it impossible for certain, knowable, and lucid definitions or meaning to be interpreted from the text. An example of this blending is found in the museum section of the chapter. Hazard, knocked unconscious for the second time in the novel, wakes in "an exact replica of the chief factor's bedroom as it existed in the 'Big House,' the main residence of the

Hudson's Bay post that gave the city its name" (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 34). Hazard, who Demeter describes as having a "peculiar little aversion to history" (35), wakes up ensconced in a place of historical significance. P. Cockburn, the curator of the museum, wishes to make a wax model out of Hazard, an act that would place Hazard's physical duplicate firmly within a specific historical record. Hazard rebels against this desire to fix: "in the end finally, that which he wrestled most was the image of himself for which the hands of P. would seek to take measure. He would not be seduced, he was resolved, into that immortality" (36-7). Instead of accepting the artistic fixing of his identity, Hazard flees the museum and steals a Mountie costume off one of the wax figures. That the action of this section takes place within an historical replication, and is narrated by a character whose historical methodology is a combination of rigorous research (which itself is questionable since the narrator is housed in a mental institution) and wild imaginative speculation, the historical "reality" and imaginative fabrication of history blend to a point where it becomes impossible to distinguish the one from the other. In a similar manner as the narrative, Kroetsch's city refuses both Hazard and the reader any one definite "meaning" and instead offers a multiplicity of meanings: overlapping, smashing into one another, but never fixed. This transitory meaning becomes troubled when Kroetsch blends specific historical *place* with Hazard's exuberant romp through the city. The Edmonton of memory and history dance, for awhile, with the Edmonton of the novel, and the resultant city that appears to the reader is a blending of each of these landscapes into a changing, open, and grotesque form.

Examples of the self-conscious stylings of the narrative appear throughout the Edmonton section of the novel. One of the most striking examples is the statue/horse debate outside of the Legislative buildings. The incident takes place just as Hazard has finally located Poseidon, who is “in the act of confronting his bronze replication,” a statue of a horse rearing fiercely on its hind legs. Standing nearby are a collection of “legislators and a number of women” who compare animal with art (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 31-2). One man speaks of the “superiority” of the statue: ““The artist has done it. In bronze. Forever.”” A voice of opposition to this position challenges the first man: “One lady alone was so reckless as to defend the mortal brute stallion against his critics. She praised loudly the fullness of Poseidon’s natural endowment, pointing out that the artist, in casting his bronze model somewhat larger than life, had in fact erred in making its parts ridiculously small” (32). This exchange sets up a meditation in the text between the original, or “real” figure, and the artistic representation. Here, Kroetsch initiates a dialogue regarding art’s effectiveness to faithfully record reality. The section parodies those who place the “artifice” or replica in an aesthetic category above the real. Demeter later sheds light on this section when he writes despairingly: “Why is truth never where it should be? Is the truth of the man in the man or in his biography? Is the truth of the beast in the flesh and confusion or in the few skilfully arranged lines?” (155). Both sculpture and biography are put into question as carriers of meaning when put in conjunction with those they try to represent.

Demeter narrates the novel from a bathtub in a mental institution, watching the world pass inverted through a mirror. As the reader learns of Demeter’s state her

trust in his authority to faithfully narrate Hazard's story begins to crack and dissipate, putting all that was previously told into question. Demeter's narrative authority shifts in the novel from a seemingly exact, clear vision of the archivist to a close, intimate player in the narrative, to a delusional voice, almost too bizarre and mad to be believed by the reader. This gradual inversion of narrative authority is akin to the inversion of authority that occurs during a carnival. John Clement Ball writes that "Demeter has a strong voice but not a consistent one. As a biographer he simultaneously believes himself to be presenting an 'extremely objective account of the life of one good man' (145) and, now and then, 'straying from the mere facts' (12), allowing himself, 'of necessity, [to] be interpretive upon occasion' (18)" (Ball 10). This changing characterization further unsettles the reader from the reality of the text; a veil of self-consciousness both conceals and illuminates the narrative. By writing his narrator as not only untrustworthy but also perhaps insane, Kroetsch troubles the ease with which the story may be received. While the creation of a playfully untrustworthy narrator is a novelistic device used from the birth of the genre (Henry Fielding's *Tristram Shandy* comes to mind, for example), the incorporation of a "mad" narrator into a text that also evokes "the carnivalesque" is striking because of how, like the authority/subject inversion in the time of carnival, such a narrator inverts the narrator/reader relationship. Instead of being able to sit back and passively trust the narration, the reader must become an active participant in the narrative process. Frances W. Kaye and Robert Thacker, in their article "'Gone Back to Alberta': Robert Kroetsch Rewriting the Great Plains" (1994), elaborate on how Demeter's perspective challenges the text:

[Kroetsch's] narrator is a madman, sitting in his bathtub in his asylum – a true ivory tower – and comprehending the world through his mirror, his note cards, and his recollections of the hero. Hazard Lepage is not a character in the conventional sense, but a creature of language and – for all his tall tale/trickster oral characteristics – a creature of written language, as his name suggests: chance on the page, or perhaps even a challenge to the reader to risk taking a chance on the page. (179)

Demeter's voice pierces the narrative in a way that obfuscates an "easy" straightforward reading of the narrative while it simultaneously emphasizes the text as a fabrication, as a work of art. By undermining the authority of the narrative voice the reader must don the clothes of authority and interpret for herself the action of the narrative. This appropriation, however, will always only be a *performance* of authority because, just as the carnival is ordered by the knowledge that the true power of authority remains unchanged, the true author(ity) of *The Studhorse Man* remains in control throughout the text. Although carnivals "offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (Bakhtin 6), this "second world" is always contingent on a return to the first, "official" world. The carnivalesque inversion can only ever be a performance, a cathartic experience of chaos that is nevertheless controlled and officiated by the powers of the "official" order. Similarly, the chaotic narrative voice of Demeter, although challenging to the reader, is nevertheless created and controlled by Kroetsch in order to achieve his desired effect. Demeter's madness, in the end, is

simply another manifestation of the “carnavalesque” world where “madness makes men look at the world with different eyes, not dimmed by ‘normal,’ that is by commonplace ideas and judgments. In folk grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official ‘truth.’ It is a ‘festive’ madness” (Bakhtin 39).

II. Spatial Form

As time went by, words began to replace objects and gestures in Marco's tales: first exclamations, isolated nouns, dry verbs, then phrases, ramified and leafy discourses, metaphors and tropes. The foreigner had learned to speak the emperor's language or the emperor to understand the language of the foreigner. (Calvino Invisible Cities 39)

Joseph Frank, in his influential essay “Spatial Form in Modern Literature” (1945), writes:

Form in the plastic arts [...] is necessarily spatial because the visible aspect of objects can best be presented juxtaposed in an instant of time. Literature, on the other hand, makes use of language, composed of a succession of words proceeding through time; and it follows that literary form, to harmonize with the essential quality of its medium, must be based primarily on some form of narrative sequence. (7-8)

It is this inherent or necessary use of sequence, I argue, that Kroetsch finds himself attempting to overcome in the creation of a text that will effectively conceive and capture the life of the city. Many novelists have sought out ways to overcome this sequentiality. In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for

example, sequentially is abandoned through the adoption of non-representative techniques. Erich Auerbach writes: "In modern novels we frequently observe that it is not one person or a limited number of persons whose experiences are pursued as a continuum; indeed, often there is no strict continuum of events. Sometimes many individuals, or many fragments of events, are loosely joined so that the reader has no definite thread of action which he can always follow" (545). Joseph Frank observes that modernist poets and novelists "ideally intend[ed] the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (Frank 10). Frank uses a scene from Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* in order to demonstrate how the modern novel attempts to take on qualities of visual art in order to construct a spatial, rather than temporal, sequence. Frank's analysis of the "country fair" scene will lead to a similar reading of one of Kroetsch's scenes in *The Studhorse Man* in order to demonstrate how Kroetsch, like many modernist writers, is working with spatial, rather than temporal, narrative forms. Frank writes:

As Flaubert sets the scene, there is action going on simultaneously at three levels. [...] [S]ince language proceeds in time, it is impossible to approach this simultaneity of perception except by breaking up temporal sequence. And this is exactly what Flaubert does. He dissolves sequence by cutting back and forth between the various levels of action in a slowly rising crescendo [...] [...] This scene illustrates, on a small scale, what we mean by the spatialization of form in a novel. For the duration of the scene, at least, the time-flow of the narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of

relationships within the immobilized time-area. These relationships are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative, and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the units of meaning. (17)

Hazard's abduction of the milkwagon and the following chase across the high level bridge, found in chapter nine of *The Studhorse Man*, demonstrate how Kroetsch spatializes his narrative by both "halting the time flow" and fixing attention on "the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area." The particular genius of Kroetsch is that he achieves this spatialization through Demeter, who self-consciously attempts to fulfill the role of an objective, omnipresent observer but ends up placing himself within the action of the narrative. The chapter begins with Demeter discussing himself: "I too get dressed up – by taking off my clothes" (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 43). He goes on to describe his archival and compositional technique of gathering information on index cards. The first of these cards presents the beginning of the chase in condensed and almost poetic form: "Into March morning. Hazard commandeers milkwagon. Bleary-eyed driver voices remorse, disapproval and indignation that now sweep city at sunrise. Philosophically asks of Hazard three traditional questions: Why is wickedness not punished? When? By Whom?" (43). Later in the chapter, still piecing the scene together, Demeter informs the reader: "I have arranged the next three cards so as to suggest an order that was not necessarily present in Hazard's rambling conversation" (44). It is at this point that the notion of sequence is troubled. Because the ordering of the action is now put into question, the reader is forced to either impose her own ordering on the fragments of text or simply

allow each fragment to exist simultaneously, superimposed one upon the other, just as a film would superimpose three separate images, allowing each to occupy the same physical screen space. After Demeter presents these three fragments he reconstructs the scene in a linear, narrative form, as opposed to the fragmented "index card" form. This second narration not only doubles the scene, but also contradicts the first instance of narration. While the first narration began with the philosophical questioning of Hazard by the milkman, the second begins: "As I reconstruct the event, the milkman was in fact absent when Hazard borrowed the wagon" (45). The reader now not only has separate scenes to superimpose in the ordering of the action, but also two versions of the same scene to consider. Just as Flaubert's reader approached the "country fair" scene by reading the action in sequence and reconstructing that action in a simultaneous three-tiered superimposition, thereby overcoming the narrative limits of temporality, Kroetsch's reader must approach the milkwagon scene by first reconstructing a fragmented "first narration" of the action and then superimposing the more traditionally sequential "second narration" onto the first, allowing both to play simultaneously, like a double exposed photograph. The filmic nature of this narrative construction is made explicit as Demeter describes the High Level Bridge that Hazard is chased across: "The bridge is a black iron tunnel in which patterns of parallel lines and acute angles are repeated and repeated until they knock at the senses like a film run too slowly; each picture is both separate from and yet like all the others" (46). Similarly, the two versions of the narrative action are "separate from and yet like" one another. The narrative, in such a scene, like the city, exists in a "two world condition" where the "official" narrative and the "inverted"

narrative blend in a manner that forces the reader to question whether there is *any* official narrative. By constructing a narrative that destabilizes traditional realist sequential form, Kroetsch's city similarly exists in an unstable and spatialized form. This spatialization mirrors the vision of the pedestrian who imaginatively reconstructs "the never-ending series of partial visibilities" simultaneously, in a single field of vision, as opposed to linearly, through time. Instead of presenting a narrative that depicts the *place* of Edmonton in traditional realist mode, *The Studhorse Man* instead undergoes an "internal transformation" of form in order to realize the "point of view" of the pedestrian (Tallack 27).

Before this chapter turns to explorations of Kroetsch's use of "mythology," it is helpful to provide an elaboration on the nature and form of myth as I use it in my argument. Roland Barthes, in his collection of essays *Mythologies*, provides a theoretical grounding in the nature of myth. It is, before anything else, "a type of speech": myth is not simply "an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (109). Once we begin to understand myth as a "semiological system," as a form that has its own set of rules, we can then begin to discuss mythic narrative form alongside other narrative systems, such as that of "historical imagination" (110). Myth, as a form, is directly tied to history because of its dependence on language: "Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" (110). Myth is tied to historical *process*, not to the written history that Kroetsch is reacting against. Barthes goes on to note that the process of mythologization "transforms history into nature. [...] [W]hat causes

mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason" (129). Myth frees history from the tyranny of "begin[ning] from meaning." Kroetsch, by blending classical myths with various myths of the Canadian prairies, is attempting to make natural the "place" of the prairie. By setting a large portion of the action of the novel within the borders of the city, Kroetsch emphasizes, through the visible historical record that exists in the railway tracks, bridges, and buildings, the *permanence* of place. What makes this naturalization of permanence so important is how the myths of the Canadian west usually present the prairies as devoid of history, culture, and memory. The absence of the prairie city in literature and pop culture is a strange erasure; the dominant mythic archetypes that stem from a time before European settlement persist despite the rich history of the prairie cities and the large urban populations in these centres (Adam 183). Kroetsch uses mythic forms of the Canadian prairies to undermine the very stereotypes they have created. This complicated play aligns with Barthes' suggestion to those who desire to revolt against the totalizing and overwhelming weight of myth. "It thus appears," he writes,

that it is extremely difficult to vanquish myth from the inside: for the very effort one makes in order to escape its stranglehold becomes in its turn the prey of myth: myth can always, as a last resort, signify the resistance which is brought to bear against it. Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an artificial myth: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. (Barthes 135)

Kroetsch reacts against the dominant myths of the prairies, not by attacking these myths head on, but by re-mythologizing them. It is possible, then, to read *The Studhorse Man* as an exercise in the creation of an “artificial myth” woven from the combination of classical, “universal” myths and dominant mythic stories of the Canadian prairies that have, in their turn, been informed by specific historical and geographic inheritances. The city, in this novel, provides an ideal backdrop for this new mythologization because of its visible historical trace left by architecture and environment.

Joseph Frank, writing of the abandonment of realistic narrative in Djuna Barnes’s novel *Nightwood*, notes that “Miss Barnes abandons any pretensions to [...] verisimilitude, just as modern painters have abandoned any attempt at naturalistic representation; and the result is a world as strange to the reader, at first sight, as the world of Cubism was to its first spectators” (33). In a similar manner Robert Kroetsch, frustrated by “certain traditional kinds of realism,” abandons “naturalistic representation” in favour of a fragmented, superimposed, and more abstract narrative (Kroetsch “Conversation” 53). Frank concludes his study with the assertion that, in both literature and the plastic arts, “the evolution of aesthetic form in the twentieth century has been absolutely identical. For if the plastic arts from the Renaissance onward attempted to compete with literature by perfecting the means of narrative representation, then contemporary literature is now striving to rival the spatial apprehension of the plastic arts in a moment of time” (Frank 61). In the same way it is my assertion that literature from the prairies, as it began to abandon realist modes, also began a shift towards spatialization that mirrored modernist aesthetics. One of

the results of this spatialization, Frank notes, is a troubling of the notion of history. For if narrative sequentiality is abandoned in favour of the simultaneous experience of events in a single moment of time, “history becomes ahistorical. Time is no longer felt as an objective, causal progression with clearly marked-out differences between periods; now it has become a continuum in which distinctions between past and present are wiped out” (63). Of importance to this study is the realization that, through the techniques of juxtaposition and superimposition, and the resultant ahistoricization of the narrative, “[w]hat has occurred, at least so far as literature is concerned, may be described as the transformation of the historical imagination into myth—an imagination for which historical time does not exist and which sees the actions and event of a particular time only as the bodying forth of eternal prototypes” (63-4). *The Studhorse Man* exemplifies this transformation from a “historical imagination” to the mythologization of narrative. That is, when sequence and linear time are abandoned and replaced with the expansion of a single moment in time (where all events have become superimposed), mythic forms, which are better suited to such “timeless” and “eternal” structures, take hold. What is fascinating about such a change in narrative form is what happens to the *place* of the narrative. How is the place, for example, of Flaubert’s “country fair” affected by being arrested in time? This chapter will conclude by examining what such a “mythologization” of Edmonton does to the *place* of the prairie city.

Kroetsch remarks on his distrust of historical models, favouring, instead, mythical forms: “I don’t trust the narrative of history because it begins from meaning instead of discovering meanings along the way. I think myth dares to discover its

way toward meanings (if you have to have meaning). Myth comes at its stories completely from the other direction” (qtd. in Neuman and Wilson 133). This statement aligns with Barthes’ assertion that myth “prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat” (Barthes 127). Both of these theories, in turn, suggest that myth takes on a carnivalesque or “grotesque” form that is always in a state of change, flux, and fragmentation. The traditional form of historical text values and depends on the unquestioned authority of text. Myth, as a form of knowledge more intimately tied to oral literature, values the moment of telling and allows for improvisation and change through time: history develops through linear accumulation and myth develops through process. Kaye and Thacker suggest that “Kroetsch abuses his myths to diffuse and remake meanings, to flatten his characters and remind us they *are* fictions” (180). While injecting his characters with iconic mythic qualities does flatten them in the sense that they are reduced to types, the characters outgrow these types. Existing in a state of constant change they adopt and shed mythic identities as a carnival participant dons mask after mask, becoming dynamic instead of flat. That is, the characters within the text take on more than one mythic identity. Hazard, for example, does not only embody characteristics of Odysseus, but additionally “is Osiris as trickster, the horny tall tale extension of his stallion’s enormous phallus, the studhorse man’s livelihood and eventually his death” (180). The blending of classical mythology with local First Nations mythology and the mythology of the Canadian west adds further depth to Hazard. Ultimately, Kaye and Thacker conclude that, while using and manipulating mythic archetypes, “Kroetsch [...] is working against the universal. His parodying of

the myths is a project of unnamings, of separating, but not entirely cutting Alberta off from the dominance of the classical stories" (180). The prairie city in *The Studhorse Man*, similarly, "works against the universal" classification of what Guy Vanderhaeghe termed the "no-name city" because it exists both within the specific historical and geographic *place* of the Canadian west and within the universal and homogenizing *place* of the city.

The spatialization of the text through narrative techniques such as fragmentation, juxtaposition, and superimposition causes a restructuring of narrative form in *The Studhorse Man*. Instead of relying solely on a historical progression, which assumes a linear, sequential, and causal form, Kroetsch's abandonment of sequence in favour of a spatialized form abandons linear time and instead superimposes the narrative in a way that creates a progression of *depth* (as if each image, each event, is skewered together by the piercing of one, single moment in time). This spatialization of the text allows for mythological forms because, as Frank notes, and as was noted before, "historical time does not exist" and instead "the actions and event of a particular time [are] only [seen] as the bodying forth of eternal prototypes" (63-4). But what happens to the *place* of Edmonton, through such a mythologization? *The Studhorse Man* in no way completely abandons the structures of historical imagination. Demeter, although mad, nevertheless painstakingly gathers historical, geographical, and biographical information about the city and those who interact with Hazard. Because history is mocked but not disavowed completely, there is no danger of a historical amnesia in Kroetsch's Edmonton. By blending history with myth, however, Kroetsch *doubly* locates the city both within a historical-

geographical (linear) plane, as well as a mythical, timeless (spatial) plane where fiction, mythic stories, historical narratives, and tall tales coexist in a many-layered amorphous blending. By writing an Edmonton that exists both within a specific time and within a timeless/eternal space, Edmonton exists both as a place with unique cultural inheritances as well as place capable of taking on “universal” mythic narrative structures.

Conclusion

*But you would have said communication between them was less happy than in the past: to be sure, words were more useful than objects and gestures in listing the most important things of every province and city – monuments, markets, costumes, fauna and flora – and yet when Polo began to talk about how life must be in those places, day after day, evening after evening, words failed him, and little by little, he went back to relying on gestures, grimaces, glances.
(Calvino Invisible Cities 38-39)*

Throughout this chapter I have tried to show how *The Studhorse Man* presents the prairie city through abandoning traditional realist narrative techniques and taking up, instead, techniques such as doubling, fragmentation, and superimposition in order to successfully relate to the reader the cacophonous, multiple, riotous, and contradictory nature of the *place* of the prairie city. In other words, traditional realism, as an artistic technique, fails to accurately portray the city because the fragmentation of the landscape of the city requires techniques that can mimic the “imaginative reconstruction” of the pedestrian. Artists must turn to “unreal” techniques in order write and film the city in an artistically effective way because

fragmentation, superimposition, and multiplicity more closely mirror the way in which an individual experiences and sees the city. These compositional techniques are the very same techniques taken up by those used by painters, photographers, and sculptors defined by contemporary scholars as “modernist.” Robert Kroetsch’s *The Studhorse Man*, like the other works studied in this thesis, reacts to fractured and changeable landscape by abandoning realist modes of composition and turning, instead, to techniques that properly evoke the vision of a pedestrian in the city. Returning again to Dick Harrison’s comment that Robert Kroetsch was, in the 1970s, at the forefront of a number of artists exploring the “discontinuity in narrative structures [that allowed] for new collocations of the elements of prairie life,” it is clear that Kroetsch’s example influenced an exodus of artists from “prairie realism” towards new forms of composition, an exodus that includes, among many others, Aritha van Herk and Guy Maddin.

Chapter Two: The Echoed City

"You leave there and ride for three days between the northeast and east-by-northeast winds..." Marco resumed saying, enumerating names and customs and wares of a great number of lands. His repertory could be called inexhaustible, but now he was the one who had to give in. Dawn had broken when he said:

"Sire, now I have told you about all the cities I know."

"There is still one of which you never speak."

Marco Polo bowed his head.

"Venice," the Kahn said.

Marco smiled. "What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?"

(Calvino Invisible Cities 86)

Dorcas, the narrator of Aritha van Herk's novel *Restlessness*, spends the length of the narrative describing to her self-hired assassin, Derrick Atman, the cities she has spent her adult life visiting. Like Marco Polo's narrations, Dorcas' narration is an act of exclusion, her narrative restlessness a circling towards home, her place of departure. Her narration is also a reversal of the Scheherazade narrative structure: instead of narrating to stay alive she narrates towards death, erasure. As in *The Studhorse Man*, the narrative has a doubled construction. There is a doubled structure imbedded into the narrative in the form of an echo, with passages repeating in a changed form, creating through this echo an open, ambiguous narrative. This playfulness is, like in Kroetsch's works, a technique that brings the reader into a closer participatory role in the text. Van Herk explains in an interview that this playful interaction between the text and the reader has resulted in the creation of dialogic structures: "I think that now the narrative I'm employing is more like a kind of dialogue. There's a desire to dialogue, to move back and forth within the narration

itself" (Beeler 84). This movement creates a dynamic and "polyphonic" text. In such a construction, "[d]issonance and tension within the text are not resolved, as the integrity of independent discourses remains irreducible to a single, harmonious world-view which, in the monologic text, is imposed by the author" (Paryas 610). In other words, by creating a dialogic structure van Herk loosens authorial control over the presentation of one, single vision and allows, instead, for a dynamic and multiple vision. The pedestrian, who reads or deciphers the city from street level, encountering "partial visibilities" along the way and overcoming the fractured landscape through imaginative reconstruction is, like the reader, similarly engaging in a dialogic conversation with a text: this time, however, it is the text of the city.

Mikhail Bakhtin's use of the term polyphony, "whereby several contesting voices representing a variety of ideological positions can engage equally in dialogue, free from authorial judgment or constraint," has been appropriated and elaborated on by a number of feminist critics including Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray (Paryas 610). This line of criticism believes that "it is the modernist or postmodernist text that is polyphonic; the realist tradition is explicitly rejected by Kristeva, for example, as monologic" (611). *Restlessness* is polyphonic in the sense that our narrator Dorcas has been split: she has been split into many selves in an attempt to escape herself. "Traveling is a conversation" she states, and this conversation between her multiple "selves" structures the novel. *Restlessness* is also polyphonic because Dorcas gives voice to a multiplicity of places, each in turn turning back towards the home place, Calgary, in a dialectical play.

Van Herk has stated that, in order to accurately capture the *place* of the prairies,

the masculine artistic gaze must be abandoned in favour of a feminized gaze, a gaze that is not afraid to enter into the landscape interactively:

The fabric of this living breathing landscape has been masculinised in art, descriptive passages of a land instinctively female perceived by a jaundiced male eye. Description, description, and more description, an over-looking. Prudence, caution. They are afraid to enter the landscape. They describe it instead. To get inside a landscape, one needs to give up vantage, give up the advantage of scene or vision and enter it. To know prairie, one has to stop looking at prairie and dive.

(Clayton 16)

Restlessness enacts this entering into the landscape by creating a web of voices, unified under the narrative voice of Dorcas. The place of the city is captured effectively by giving it a voice and allowing it to speak alongside other voices, each reflecting, in part, a quality of that place. Van Herk notes in another interview that the prairies are “a very male-inscribed landscape.” In reaction to the predominance of male writers she notes: “I think I am one of the few women actually working here and raising questions about them” (Rocard 92). How, then, is van Herk's construction of the urban prairie landscape different from that of her male counterparts? In *Restlessness* van Herk “dives” into the landscape by closely aligning her narrator with that landscape. Unlike Hazard, who simply passes through, touches the surface of the city, Dorcas is deeply connected to Calgary, both through her own upbringing in the city and her love/hate relationship with the history of the place. Dorcas, through her narration to Derrick Atman, transforms Calgary into a “literary city” and in so doing,

inscribes herself into the landscape through story. Her narration is an act of “haunting” the city with story – and it is through story that she “enters” the landscape of Calgary intimately. Hazard, in contrast, refuses to be inscribed into the landscape when P. Cockburn asks to make a wax cast of his likeness. Such an act would historicize him into Edmonton and, as Demeter notes, Hazard has “a peculiar little aversion to history” (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 35). While Dorcas wishes to erase herself by disappearing into the landscape of Calgary, Hazard is railing against erasure, and therefore does not “enter” the city as Dorcas does. It is through Dorcas’ experience of the city, placed in juxtaposition with the other cities of the world, that the polyphonic construction of the landscape is created. Dorcas’ intimate relation with Calgary, her “dive” and “submersion” into that landscape, means that, like Calvino's Marco Polo, every city she describes in *Restlessness* is, in a way, a description of Calgary.

The subject of the city occurs not only in *Restlessness* but in a number of Aritha van Herk’s works. Speaking of *Places far from Ellesmere* she notes that she has, in her writing, frequently worked with the notion that “a place has a character. And of course that’s a very old idea, because we talk frequently about the character of London or the character of Vienna. But we have begun to neglect that recently. It’s become old fashioned to assume that a place has a character or that a place can make a character” (Beeler 87). The various cities described in *Restlessness* take on the qualities of characters, working as foils contrasting the overwhelming character of Calgary. Calgary takes on these reflections and is changed by them. The cities Dorcas describes, through this reflection, change as well, melt into the prairie city

skyline. As Dorcas and Derrick walk the streets of Calgary they come across a similar reflection, a doubled reflection:

We can make out a high-rise that seems to reflect the shadow of a different building. Barely visible in the settling darkness, the outline of an imaginary building etched on the side of a building reminds the city that these are all illusory structures held up by hope or other acts of imagination, possibly nothing more than façades, elaborate gestures of architecture. (82)

This powerful image of the false and shadowed reflection is the mirror-function that I will use to approach the narrative structure in *Restlessness*: a shadowed reflection where one city, or one narrative, is reflected on another like a spectre, forever changing the original which is, nevertheless, still visible behind the illusion of shadow. This structure is visible in three facets: first, in the presence of the “other,” Dorcas’ doppelgänger; second, in the description of a multiplicity of cities; and third, in the narrative play between text and meta-texts. This chapter will argue that these forms of doubling and echo complicate the form of the prairie city by allowing for multiplicity within a unified structure.

I. Echo

Marco smiled. “What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?” The emperor did not turn a hair. “And yet I have never heard you mention that name.”

And Polo said: “Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice.”

“When I ask you about other cities, I want to hear about them. And about Venice, when I ask you about

Venice."

"To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice."

(Calvino Invisible Cities 86)

There is a state of vertigo, of adjustment, for the reader when she first takes on *Restlessness*. The narrative begins aggressively, with Dorcas announcing "I am alone in a room with the man who has agreed to kill me" (7). The intricate, maze-like voice of Dorcas continues by firing off volleys of descriptions of her immediate surroundings, theories about travel, memories, and bold statements that are sometimes immediately contradicted by another. The narrative both accommodates for and further complicates this overwhelming prose by constructing an echo effect, where certain moments are replayed, similarly but with a difference, as if one's memory is repeating an event and changing it with each replay. This process begins on page nine. Dorcas explains: "My chosen assassin tells me I can change my mind right up until he commits the act and finished my briefly executed life for me. [...] So we sit uncomfortably on the edge of the bed and pretend to have a conversation while we wait. He waits for me to nod toward him as a signal to proceed" (9). This scene then repeats itself thirty pages on, this time narrated differently: "He tells me, as he is required to, that I can change my mind right up until he commits the act and finishes what I have initiated. I nod, and he too eases down on the edge of the bed, not close to me, but close to my posture, the two of us caught in uncomfortable pause" (39). It is repeated a third time another thirty pages on: "'Once you give me the signal to proceed, ' he says, 'nothing you say or do will stop me'" (73). This echo structure occurs a second time in the narrative, offset from the previous example by just a few

pages. Dorcas states: "I study him curiously, his somewhat worn face, the sadness around his eyes. 'Wouldn't you rather do this in a park? A hotel room seems so enclosed. Or perhaps a more isolated place, more appropriate, like a graveyard?' I am almost serious" (11). This scene is then repeated thirty pages on: "I have to break the ice, maybe even try a joke. 'Wouldn't you rather do this in a park?' I ask. 'A hotel room seems so enclosed, confined.' I'm almost serious, but find I am enjoying this, the polite boundaries usually in place between people absent. 'Or perhaps a more appropriate setting, like a graveyard?' This is hilarious" (42). In the second occurrence of the scene, her voice has left the more serious and morose tone and adopts a playful lilt: the offhand remark "this is hilarious" directed at the reader is almost jaunty in its sarcasm. These are but two examples of repeated selections of narrative, the effect of which is the creation of a narrative echo. Echoes occur later in the text in shorter sequence, for example, when Derrick Atman asks: "Tell me, what do you do?" Dorcas answers three times: "I run away. I play hide and seek. I practice kinematics"; "I look for innovative ecstasies, ways of coming home, ways of decamping"; and "I travel in order to entertain quiescence" (45).

Patrick O'Donnell, in his study *Echo Chambers: Figuring Voice in Modern Narrative*, explores how voice in the modern novel takes on characteristics of multiplicity. He uses Bakhtin, for whom "the novel is the modern genre par excellence, for it is the generic rubric under which the nomadic, asynchronous nature of modern identity is projected through the polyphonic casting of multiple voices" (4). The narrative voice in *Restlessness* takes on a multiple, or "polyphonic" quality through the structure of the echo. O'Donnell turns to Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* in

his exploration of how modern novels “reject monolithic versions of reality and the epistemologies that attend them in favor of ‘the reflection of multiple consciousnesses’” (7). It is fitting that we return to Auerbach at this time for, in his chapter on Virginia Woolf, he outlines how writers “have invented their own methods [...] of making the reality which they adopt as their subject appear in changing lights and changing strata, or of abandoning the specific angle of observation of either a seemingly objective or purely subjective representation in favor of a more varied perspective” (Auerbach 545). This is precisely the effect of van Herk’s fractured and echoing narrative. Dorcas’ subject position is never settled, leaving the reader in a continual state of equalled restlessness. “[T]he very nature of voice,” O’Donnell continues in his introduction,

can be viewed as something that, rather than issuing forth from a single presence and guaranteeing its integrity, undermines singularity in both speech and writing. Speech is carried on the wind; the words it bears pass away even as they are spoken and are passed from mouth to mouth, ear to ear. The very passability of voice assures its impermanence and boundarilessness. (O’Donnell 9)

Dorcas’ narrative voice in *Restlessness* takes on this “very nature of voice” as it passes through Calgary like a Chinook: erratic, wild, yet always returning, unsettling the dust.

The narrative echoes in *Restlessness* begin to occur shortly after Dorcas spots a woman out of her hotel window, staring in at a window across from her. This woman, throughout the text, is suggested to be Dorcas’ other: her doppelgänger.

Marina Warner, in her study *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self*, writes that in narrative the double can have a number of uses: “as a threat to personality on the one hand, of possession by another, and estrangement from self. But, tugging strongly and contradictorily against this at the same time, the double also solicits hopes and dreams for yourself, of a possible becoming different while remaining the same person, of escaping the bounds of self” (164-5). The play between being “estranged from self” and “becoming different while remaining the same person” is a movement Dorcas narrates through the course of the novel. While she remarks that she began traveling “to compose a private self and give her the space to breathe,” she also notes that “[t]raveling convinces me that I will be lucky enough to stumble over my own feet as I round a corner” (van Herk *Restlessness* 32). Her planned assassination, a final destination, will reunite her different selves; “I have at last,” she notes, “come to the moment when I will be able to apprehend myself elsewhere” (37). That the text takes on the echo-like form after the woman appears in the text suggests that she *too* is a form of echo.

The first spotting of the double takes place as Dorcas is observing the woman from afar, her narrative position of authority apparently in scopic control:

Across the way I can see into another room, the E of the hotel’s Chicago-style wings reflecting windows toward one another. A woman is standing beside the bed in her room, pulling on a pair of tights. She bends from the waist, absorbed in her encasement, stretching the legs as she eases the stockings up. I am certain I see her smile toward her toes, which she inserts into high-heeled pumps before

settling a long skirt over her head and zipping it snug at the waist. (van Herk *Restlessness* 31)

Like the narrative gaze of Demeter Proudfoot, this narrative gaze looks confidently through a window, out into the world; but also like Demeter, this authority is eventually undermined when the woman in question approaches our narrator and confesses that she, too, was observing Dorcas. As in Bakhtin's carnival, the roles of subject and object reverse themselves and our narrator finds herself the subject of a gaze from afar. She is subjected not only to the gaze of her doppelgänger but also to that of the reader. The appearance of the physical, or literal double is problematized by Dorcas' words immediately after she is spotted. Dorcas, in the section following her observation, speaks of the seduction of travel. The "shift to an anonymous world" is "why I traveled," Dorcas notes, "to compose a private self and give her the space to breathe" (32). The positioning of the admission of her fabrication of a private self troubles the appearance of the woman across the way because she may be one of these "private selves" created by Dorcas. On the subject of the doppelgänger Marina Warner writes: "this question of the status of the double – is it real, or is it imagined? [...] returns insistently, and its undecideability, which gives many of its vehicles their narrative grip, finds expression through images of projections and images, artefacts and delusions and tries to decide their status with regard to the real" (167). As the novel progresses Dorcas and the woman become closer in proximity, even briefly uniting in an erotic kiss in a hotel bathroom. Their final moment together in the hotel elevator results in the text's pivoting to a future indicative tense for the remainder of the narrative. The status or "reality" of Dorcas' doppelgänger is never made clear in

the narrative: it is, in fact, made more ambiguous as the novel progresses.

Undermining the existence of the doppelgänger within the confines of a realist narrative is traditionally, as Warner points out, the principle function of “the double” within a text because the stability, trustworthiness, and subjectivity of the narrator then become questionable. Dorcas, remarking on the mirrored building she and Derrick spot on their walk, notes: “I juggle my visibility even though I want to blend into the wallpaper as if I were the hidden wall underneath.” To which Derrick answers: “Like that building, visible and invisible playing together, reflecting a reflection that isn’t there” (van Herk *Restlessness* 91). Dorcas and the mysterious woman, who both watch each other from their facing windows in the hotel, are paralleled with the building and its self-shadowed reflection. The doppelgänger is a reflection that is visible and yet not there.

At points in the text it becomes unclear whether Dorcas is describing herself or her double. As she reminisces about the act of travel she notes: “I have always believed that I will apprehend myself elsewhere, for at home I am as evasive as a veil.” She goes on to observe that “the woman standing there, face tilted slightly away, hair shading her eyes, will be me, finally apprehended, and willing to be found. Eager to recognize herself. At last” (van Herk *Restlessness* 37). This passage returns the structure of the echo as a narrative device. The lack of linearity and echoing of narrative passages throughout the novel opens up the possibility that the doppelgänger is in fact Dorcas’ echo: a version of herself created somewhere along her travels. The fact that Calgary is her final point of departure makes it possible for Dorcas to shed her evasiveness at “home.” She later notes: “I am truly beside myself

now, cannot seem to merge with whomever that self is named, if she is different from who she once was or wanted to be” (41-2). This strengthens the argument that Dorcas’ double is in fact another version of herself, trapped in an echo of time created by years of travel.

The woman appears again as Dorcas and Derrick eat dinner at a restaurant across from the hotel. Dorcas spots the woman up in her hotel suite, pacing the floor and obviously agitated. She later reappears to Dorcas in the washroom of the Palliser hotel. The woman confesses that she, too, has been watching Dorcas: “I followed you –easy.” (van Herk *Restlessness* 172). The woman presses Dorcas to admit there is something wrong and confronts her about her restlessness: “you have a restless light around you, sometimes green, sometimes indigo. [...] There’s no sin to restlessness,’ she says. “We all have it. We learn to live with it” (173). There is a final meeting with the woman in the elevator as Dorcas and Derrick make their way up to the hotel room for her assassination. “The elevator doors stumble open, and there stands my woman, in the corner of that small room, her face flushed with the hour’s remains. ‘Going up?’ she asks” (179). In the process of this meeting the narrative tense changes from present tense to future indicative. The action from this point onward is made ambiguous by this shift. The final sentence in the present tense reads “Derrick Atman is pulling on his gloves,” which is followed, after a break on the page, by the sentence “When we reach five, the elevator bell *will* ping before the doors slide open” (184, my emphasis). The speculative nature of the narrative voice leaves the characters of Dorcas, Derrick, and the woman trapped in the elevator, the door never opening. This point of unity for the three characters seems to enact “what

Paul Smith refers to as the ‘dialectical thickening’ of subjectivity, the sense that identity is a conflation of ‘multifarious and multiform subject-positions,’ that it is ‘formed in and by the contradiction’ of these positions and ‘the conflicts of self-interest and ideology.’” (O’Donnell 5). The temporary fusion of Dorcas with her double breaks her authorial control over her projected “other” and forces her to project instead into conjecture.

II. Mise-en-abime

“To distinguish the other cities’ qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice.”

“You should then begin each tale of your travels from the departure, describing Venice as it is, all of it, not omitting anything you remember of it.”

*The lake’s surface was barely wrinkled; the copper reflection of the ancient palace of the Sung was shattered into sparkling glints like floating leaves.
(Calvino Invisible Cities 86 - 87)*

In his work *The Mirror in the Text*, Lucien Dällenbach explores the literary term *mise-en-abime* by outlining the historical and critical roots as well as the different narrative forms it can take. Dällenbach defines a *mise-en-abime* as “any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it” (8, original emphasis). *Mise-en-abime* is a term used in literary studies that has its roots in heraldry. Occasionally, in a crest of arms, the middle section of the crest contained a miniature replication of the whole crest, which then, contained in its middle, a smaller replication of the crest, receding in this fashion into invisibility. The middle replication of the whole was said to be *mise-en-abime*, “placed in

conjunction with,” the smaller figures in the crest. The concept of the imbedded copy or self-mirror is not confined to visual representation (7). Many works of literature have used the *mise-en-abime* as a structuring device: the “play within a play” in *Hamlet*, for example (12). There is a second use of the term within artistic discourse, this time originating in seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Artists would insert into their highly detailed narrative paintings a mirror, usually hidden within the tableau. The mirror would reflect either a hidden portion of the narrative scene or the artist at his easel, composing the scene (10-12). A third use of the term comes from the “infinite reflexion” model, where two mirrors face each other and reflect off of one another infinitely (15-17). *Restlessness* uses all three of the *mise-en-abime* functions. The first function comes in the form of the “text within the text”: *Dog Sleeps*, a novel by the Albertan writer Monty Reid, appears throughout the text and brings a self-conscious tone to the narrative. The second function of *mise-en-abime* comes from Dorcas’ many descriptions of cities she has visited. Each description acts as a hidden mirror, reflecting a landscape in miniature against the larger tableau of Calgary. The third function occurs, once again, in the multiple uses of the double throughout the text. The implications of the doppelgänger have already been discussed, but there is also the doubled world of the carnivalesque, which, like in *The Studhorse Man*, takes form from the changes in weather and the highly sexualized spirit that comes with this change. There is additionally the theme of the shadow world of spirits coexisting with the corporeal world just as the “high-rise that seems to reflect the shadow of a different building.”

Dog Sleeps first appears as an epigram, beginning a dialogue before the

narrative begins. “*Wish you were here,*” it reads, evoking the stereotypical image of the quickly scrawled note on the back of a gaudy postcard. In a novel that features travel as a major theme, the epigram suggests how the act of reading can be a similar sort of departure. Reid's novel makes its first appearance in the text on page 14:

I have a book with me, a thin strange book by Alberta writer Monty Reid. I don't know how I came to buy it, probably the cover of a woman asleep, holding a pillow, the paws of a black dog next to her.

I've read just enough of *Dog Sleeps* to know its departure, how it calls travel an uninhibited restlessness, a terrible convulsion of some subject searching for a way to inhabit a moment, to declare having been somewhere. This could be my hymnal.

Places become both famous and common, their naming rolls off the tongue – *London, New York, Paris* –making us accomplices, assistants to their renown, their bridges and museums, their *air du plein*, their intricate European fame, their sobriquet needing no identification.

I like *Dog Sleeps*. It suits me, quizzical intelligence in a book to read before dying. (14)

This passage is a complex, dense microcosm of *Restlessness*. From a concentrated point threads of investigations loosen slightly, then blossom outwards. Van Herk evokes the physicality of *Dog Sleeps* by describing the cover. The book begins a double existence in this description: the book exists in the world outside of the book, (i.e. the world of the reader), as well as the world created by the book (i.e., the

fictional world created by van Herk). There is another doubling created by this passage: Dorcas the reader is aligned with the reader of *Restlessness*. Issues of performance and reception come to the front. Dorcas is our principal performer; her critical attention to a second text, one available in the world outside of *Restlessness*, positions her as both performer and observer.

The description of the cover similarly draws the reader's attention to the physicality of the novel. Dorcas explains how she most likely chose the book because of its cover. This creates a ripple effect for the reader, perhaps causing her to ponder her own choice of the text and bringing attention to the photograph that graces the cover of *Restlessness*. The photograph presents a hazy portrait of a woman. All specific details are washed away leaving an angelic profile. The woman's profile appears again, in miniature, just in front of the larger one. This is an assumed reflection in an indecipherable mirror, the face even less detailed. This doubled portrait gives the impression that there is a third profile, and fourth, receding into the infinite mirror-space.

The *Dog Sleeps* passage continues, in its second paragraph, to weave themes of travel, movement, and restlessness into themes of performance and the physicality of the book. "I've read just enough of *Dog Sleeps* to know its departure," it begins, associating narrative with travel, a narrative trajectory with movement of the body through space. The word "departure" is used in an unconventional sense: departure as the starting point of a narrative argument. The key to *Dog Sleeps*, Dorcas tells us, is in "how it calls travel an uninhibited restlessness." Van Herk's novel is motivated by a variation of this theme: *Restlessness* explores how compulsive travel from city to

city arrests movement in a sort of *inhibited* restlessness. The cities shape the movement, give it structure. These moments of “fixing” movement are what cause, for Dorcas, the “terrible convulsion of some subject searching for a way to inhabit a moment, to declare having been somewhere.” That she chooses Calgary, her point of origin, her city-womb, to end this movement is significant because of how Dorcas is thereby captured, finally, in a cyclical movement, like Hazard circling through Alberta on his fertility quest. Each character, through narrativization, has become trapped within the movement of that narrative, retracing their cyclical paths each time someone reads the text.

The third paragraph of this passage calls out the names of the most highly commercialized and literary cities by western standards. “*London, New York, Paris*” are “both famous and common,” exotic and yet completely familiar to the reader because of how their streets and sights have been written, filmed, painted, and sung throughout the last five hundred years of cultural and social development of Western civilization. The city left out of this description is the city from which the narrative originates. *Calgary*, while not rolling off the tongue, nevertheless whispers somewhere in the back of the mind, unfamous and unique. *Restlessness* makes us, as readers, accomplices to both Calgary and Dorcas’ self-extinguishing narrative.

The “text within a text” use of *mise-en-abime* is but one of many different manifestations of the device in *Restlessness*. A different instance of *mise-en-abime* in the novel manifests in Dorcas’ descriptions of the many cities she has visited throughout her travels. *The Mirror in the Text* notes how a number of Dutch painters in the seventeenth century such as Jan van Eyck and Quentin Matzys used the device

of reflection in their compositions by placing a small convex mirror into the scene. These artists “[use] mirrors to compensate for the limits of our field of vision and to show us what usually lies beyond it. [...] what is invisible is made visible” (Dällenbach 10). In some cases these mirrors would reflect an image of the painter’s projection (the figure of the painterly narrator), and thus “[achieve] a reciprocity of contemplation that creates an oscillation between the interior and the exterior” (11). The many cities described in *Restlessness* project the narrative focus out from the streets and buildings of Calgary to rest, for a moment, on a foreign scene, glimpsed as if through “a small dark convex mirror” reflecting something of the foreground in that reflection. Before either Calgary or these cities begin to exist in the text Dorcas reflects on her love of the “literary city”: “I slum most happily with literary cities. Trieste, Vienna, London, Berlin, Paris. I long to visit Bombay, shill with Rushdie. Such eloquently documented streets offer excuses for loitering, [...] their streets and cafés suggesting a momentum that I have missed and that now I have no choice but to resist, without regret” (van Herk *Restlessness* 15). *Restlessness* is in the process of translating Calgary into text, of mapping the city through text, thereby transforming it into a similarly “literary city.” This passage emphasizes the importance of such a mapping, the fictionalization of cities mythologizing them while capturing unique details in a moment of time. The subject of mapping is a familiar one to van Herk in that it plays a crucial role in a number of her previous works. Speaking of the map that appears on the cover of *Places far from Ellesmere* van Herk notes: “the map is an evocation rather than an actual palimpsest of a place. The only way a map can be a real representation is if it is as large as the place that it is mapping. So for me this is a

wonderful complement to the text, because it's talking about the extent to which we cannot take literally the notion of place at all" (Beeler 90). *Restlessness* takes on the notion of *place* by creating a landscape that contains multiple reflections of other landscapes within it. In so doing, van Herk takes the place of Calgary and sets it *en abime*, in conjunction with, the other cities, thereby creating a simultaneous and polyphonic vision.

Comparing the visual map with a textual map once again brings up the issue of mimesis. Because it would take a map "as large as the place that it is mapping" to be an accurate representation of place, maps use a semiological system of signs to stand in for place. Literature, in the expression of the *experience* and *perception* of place, use a similar system of signs that stand in for those experiences. As writers began to move inward, into the heads of their characters in the expression of a more realistic and subjective voice, the city became a useful tool for the writers to ground their character's subjective vision in a specific and locatable place. In the city, "objects of the physical world realize the ideas and serve as points of departure for retreats into inner worlds" (Barta 48). That is, grounding the narrative in a landscape such as a city allows writers to recede into the inner worlds of their characters while maintaining a comprehensible structure. This oscillation between the inner and outer world aligns with Auerbach's description of the use of foreground and background in narrative throughout the span of western literature. In some works, such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, the narrative is "[c]learly outlined, brightly and uniformly illuminated, man and things stand out in a realm where everything is visible; and not less clear—wholly expressed, orderly even in their ardour—are the feelings and thoughts of the

persons involved” (3), in other words, made up completely of foreground. In other works, such as the Old Testament, narratives provide “externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else is left in obscurity [...]; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal (and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and ‘fraught with background’” (11-12). Using the city as a structuring device allows writers to use “urban features [which then] become recurring motifs producing flashes of recognition that shed more light on events” (Barta 15). That is, the city becomes the immediate foreground and the “recurring motifs” act as an anchor for the character to remain tethered to as he falls back into abstraction. These recurring motifs are the literary equivalents of the semiological signs used by mapmakers. *Restlessness* uses the motifs of the wind, of windows, and enclosed rooms; they allow Dorcas to oscillate between inner and outer worlds. She can shift from a detailed description of her surroundings, whether it is her hotel room, the city street, or a restaurant, and then fall back into background, her voice curving into memory or extrapolation. The fragmentariness and looseness of her voice is made possible by the solid foreground of the city and the motifs created by the object world that it contains.

Of the many cities described by Dorcas through the span of the novel, Trieste, Vienna, and Los Vegas have the most resonance in the narrative progression. There is a flux between intense, detailed descriptions of Calgary and the equally detailed descriptions of foreign cities. This oscillation creates a tension and builds the narrative just as a shuttle, shooting back and forth on a loom, weaves cloth. Each

foreign description has a corresponding resonance with a particular description of the immediate city. The descriptions of Trieste are affecting because of how closely Dorcas identifies with the city, and how closely Trieste and Calgary align in this narrative. “Trieste is a restless city,” Dorcas tells us, “moribund now, locked in its own sadness and the inescapable escapes of a retreating future. Trieste felt like my city, slippery of foot, doomed to a many-colored coat.” Dorcas, in fact, first wanted to be assassinated “in the old Grand Hotel in Trieste” (van Herk *Restlessness* 18-19). Calgary is also a “restless city,” the Chinook wind unsettling and changing its face: “Under the ribbon of mist rising along the river, the sky seems to roar, collect the sound of a lost miracle” (23). Trieste, Dorcas notes, is the city “where I was first murdered, where the hands around my throat tightened until I could no longer breathe” (109). Calgary is the home place that Dorcas could never settle in, her stillness a different sort of suffocation. There are two associations made between Trieste and literature in *Restlessness*. The first comes from James Joyce, who wrote *Ulysses* while self-exiled in the city. Dorcas asks us if she can “sigh and repeat James Joyce’s lament, ‘And trieste, ah trieste ate my liver?’” (108). The second literary association appears in the final sections of the novel, when Dorcas’ voice is projecting from the elevator, she admits that she will tell Derrick Atman “the truth”:

‘I wanted to love Trieste and failed. I roamed that city looking for models or prisoners. Like Sir Richard Burton sitting as British consul in Trieste and remembering his own translations. One thousand and one nights he sat up rewriting that endless tale with its endless telling

and all to avoid a death. Scheherazade, you see, did not want to die. I do.' (191-2)

Trieste is aligned, then, even with the narrative structure of *Restlessness*, in the text of *Arabian Nights*, where Scheherazade narrated in order to avoid death, instead of narrating, as Dorcas does, in order to bring death to her.

The second city of importance to *Restlessness* is Vienna, which is described by Dorcas in a lengthy section of dialogue. Vienna is “full of death”: “Viennese streets cherish their lugubriousness, all winding alleys or eccentric passages. [...] You can hardly breathe for the scent of death, the wonderful groan of continual mourning. That’s why the eyelids of the glazed windows seem human, why the façades of the various *palais* seem like faces” (van Herk *Restlessness* 112). Calgary, although physically dissimilar, is similarly presented as ominous, anthropomorphic, and “full of death.” The ominous nature comes from the natural surroundings, which weigh upon those who live there. “If you come from Calgary” Dorcas tells us, “you cannot help but see the world’s terrible dimension. No other eyes have quite the same vision as eyes that have grown up squinting against the light of the foothills, the blue and adamant Rockies cutting the horizon” (22). Vienna and Calgary are both filled with “excess”: “it’s a wonderful relief to accept that excess” Dorcas notes. Vienna is also figured in opposition with Calgary. The “difference between a place like Vienna and Calgary,” Dorcas notes, is that “Vienna was built on salt and music. And look at us, this city was built on oil and cattle and police, no romance in that origin” (117). On their cyclical walk through downtown Derrick and Dorcas pass a building she describes as “a good place to practice necromancy [...] communication with the

dead.” Such a communication is “difficult” in Calgary because “the city’s too recent, too determined to be picturesquely seedy to be seedy when it needs to be” (144-45). Dorcas, however, intends to close the gap between Vienna and Calgary by “becom[ing] a ghost story” (159) to haunt the streets from whence she makes her final departure. That is, she wants to “story” Calgary in a way that Vienna has been storied by history, myth, and literature. Dorcas begins to haunt the city from the first page of the novel because her narrative, as it progresses, transforms Calgary into a literary city. Before Dorcas goes through with her “final departure,” *Restlessness* has already succeeded in what she wanted to accomplish: to haunt the city with story.

Las Vegas is another city where Dorcas attempted to end her life. She wanted a place “without a history, a pastless moment, a set of streets that gathered together the secrets of the future” (van Herk *Restlessness* 128). She tried to die in Las Vegas, “a city that has decided to imitate the past, but on a manageable scale,” (129) but notes that in “[the] cool light, the hyperventilated air, I could imagine I was in a crypt, which made it impossible to kill myself. For I was already entombed, and my gesture would have been redundant” (131). Unhappy in the cities filled to the brim with death and history as well as in a “new” city entombed by its own re-appropriation of history, Dorcas turns to her home-place to be her tomb, coming full circle to haunt the city of her birth. “I wait for a city to seduce me,” Dorcas states at the outset of her narrative (10). The cities that unravel within the text that follows are personified, given souls and personalities, and exist as characters alongside the narrator and her assassin. Their descriptions dialogue with one another, producing a “‘dialectical thickening’ of subjectivity” (O’Donnell 5). Dorcas’ narrative is so deeply interwoven

with place that her subjectivity is inseparable from the various descriptions of her cities. Of the cities in her writing van Herk has noted: “[...] the places within my narrative were themselves the characters” (McCance 6). Each city Dorcas describes is a projection of herself, each cobbled street, darkened window, ominous room, and unsuccessful assassin has become part of her narrative, her *corpus* of story, ingested and reformed through words.

III. Conclusion

The lake's surface was barely wrinkled; the copper reflection of the ancient palace of the Sung was shattered into sparkling glints like floating leaves.

“Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased,” Polo said. “Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little.”

(Calvino Invisible Cities 86 - 87)

Speaking of the building that “seems to reflect the shadow of a different building,” Dorcas notes: “That one reminds me of myself. Wearing its own projection” (83). The same can be said for the narrative vision in *Restlessness*. Calgary, while described in detailed physical and historical detail, nevertheless carries on its visage the reflections of many other cities. The result of which is the creation of a place capable of simultaneously representing a multiplicity of landscapes. Because our narrator is so deeply invested in the landscape, the city is in a constant state of motion, changing with every memory, observance, and experience she has within the novel. Dorcas’ narration closely aligns with the imaginative vision of the city’s pedestrian. By describing the many cities she has visited through her life

Dorcas “imaginatively reconstructs” what she considers as absent or fragmented from the Calgary landscape. By allowing a multiplicity of images to simultaneously appear on the landscape of Calgary van Herk constructs a place that is never fixed into a single vision. This technique of “imaginative reconstruction” similarly occurs throughout Guy Maddin's film *The Saddest Music in the World*, our third and final example of contemporary constructions of the prairie city.

Chapter Three: The Uncanny City

Kublai Khan had noticed that Marco Polo's cities resembled one another, as if the passage from one to another involved not a journey but a change of elements. Now, from each city Marco described to him, the Great Khan's mind set out on its own, and after dismantling the city piece by piece, he reconstructed it in other ways, substituting components, shifting them, inverting them.
(Calvino *Invisible Cities* 43)

Guy Maddin's film *The Saddest Music in the World* (2004) may seem an unusual transition from *The Studhorse Man* and *Restlessness*. I believe, however, that my shift to the filmic form is necessary for this study. Much of the criticism I have employed thus far has come out of artistic and critical discourses that began to emerge just as film and photography were coming to the fore of discussions of perspective, identity, and subjectivity. For example, discussions of "the double" in literature lead one to "a profound correlation between the invention of photography in the nineteenth century and the Romantic preoccupation with projection. Thus in early nineteenth-century fiction one begins to encounter descriptions of persons whose characteristics have impregnated their environment" (Coates 13). This is an example of how advances in technological media began to change the way western society thought about the world. Photography allowed the artist to project a moment in time as well as superimpose one image onto another. This resulted in development of literature that emulated similar phenomena; hence, themes such as the split subject, where a character is able to co-exist simultaneously in two places, began to appear throughout Romantic and Victorian literature. Both Hazard Lepage and Dorcas are characters who are not only deeply affected by their landscapes but who also

“impregnate” those landscapes with their own projections. These “impregnations” occur through story. Although Hazard “would not be seduced, he was resolved, into [the] immortality” of artistic “capturing” when P. Cockburn attempts to fashion a wax statue in his likeness, Demeter’s biography effectively captures Hazard and sends him wandering endlessly through the Albertan landscape (Kroetsch *Studhorse* 37).

Dorcas’ desire to “become a ghost story” and haunt the streets of Calgary is achieved by “storying” the city through her narration (van Herk *Restlessness* 159). As I noted in my introduction, in the artistic creation/re-creation of the prairie city there occurred a division between writerly and painterly styles: while many of the visual artists took up compositional techniques that favored abstraction and expressionism, writers employed compositional techniques that were realist in style. The two novels studied thus far have abandoned the explicitly realist mode of fiction and taken up compositional techniques that use fragmentary, cyclical, and mythical compositional techniques characteristic of early to mid twentieth century painting and photography. These works create the tableau of “the city” by abandoning a unified narrative perspective and fracturing that perspective into multiple subject positions, thereby approaching the city from Bakhtin’s narrative “polyphony.” This polyphony is visual, rather than auditory, and uses multiplicity as a way of approaching the “never-ending series of partial visibilities” that Hana Wirth-Nesher identifies as characteristic to a pedestrian’s vision of the city (8). The tools each author uses to accommodate for this fragmentation and “imaginative reconstruction” include the doubling or splitting of the subject; the creation of a doubled landscape through the “two world condition” of the carnivalesque; the creation of an uncertain narrative perspective;

and the evocation of a multi-identified landscape by the superimposition of many cities onto one. *The Saddest Music in the World* uses similar tools in order to produce a narrative vision that evokes the pedestrian's "imaginative reconstruction" of the city. This chapter will focus on two of the methods used by Maddin to create this reconstruction. First there is, once again, the use of the double: nearly all the characters appropriate identities in order to interact with those around them. These identities have been adopted to mask the characters' various forms of sadness that have been brought on by a traumatic loss. The landscape of the city appears similarly doubled and exists in an uncanny stasis between two states. The second element in the film that emulates the pedestrian's vision is the obfuscation of the image through filmic techniques such as fragmentation, blurring, and superimposition. Just as the pedestrian must accommodate a fractured landscape by "imaginatively reconstructing" what cannot be seen, Maddin's viewer must reconstruct the similarly fragmented and blurred image. Because each viewer will approach such a reconstruction differently, the result is a subjective and individual experience of the film.

I. Double

From the number of imaginable cities we must exclude those whose elements are assembled without a connecting thread, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse. With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear.
(Calvino Invisible Cities 43)

Critics have variously aligned Guy Maddin's work with melodrama, Symbolism, and "Expressionist Weltshmerz" (Losier and Porton 18). Before delving into an in-depth examination of *The Saddest Music in the World*, it is useful to briefly overview a number of the film movements that have influenced Maddin. Maddin's editing style does not follow the Hollywood standard of editing known as "continuity editing." Filmmakers who use this style "[seek] to arrange their shots so as to tell a story coherently and clearly. Thus editing, supported by specific strategies of cinematography and mise-en-scene, was used to ensure *narrative continuity* (Bordwell and Thompson 310, original emphasis). This "narrative continuity" is comparable to realist style in literature, where the authors strive for a seamless presentation of narrative. Just as writers reacted against the realist literary tradition by turning to non-representational techniques, continuity editing has "[become] a central target for the filmmaker who wants to use film style to challenge or change our normal viewing activities (326). The film movements that use these non-representational techniques have noticeably influenced Maddin. The German expressionist film movement (1919 – 1926), for example, is characterized by "extreme stylization" resulting in a film that "[is] indeed like a moving Expressionist painting or woodcut print" (473). In the visual tableau in German expressionist film "[s]hapes are distorted and exaggerated unrealistically for sinuous patterns. Most important, all of the elements of the mise-en-scene interact graphically to create an overall composition" (473). This influence can be spotted throughout *The Saddest Music in the World*. Many of the sets feature the bold, geographic lines characteristic of Expressionist woodcuts and paintings. The streets and outside sets of Winnipeg, in

the film, are “distorted and exaggerated unrealistically.” In the first outside shot of Winnipeg the roofs are steeply slanted, like chalets, almost reaching the ground. Telephone poles are nearly at the heads of the pedestrians, and sit precarious and crooked at the side of the winding, uncertain street. Everything appears to be out of proportion, creating in the viewer a sense of unease. French Impressionist film (1918 – 1930), with “its interest in giving narration considerable psychological depth, revealing the play of a character’s consciousness,” appears to be another filmic influence on *Saddest Music* (475). Impressionist films “manipulate plot time and subjectivity. To depict memories, flashbacks are common; sometimes the bulk of a film will be one flashback or a series of them. Even more striking is the films’ insistence on registering characters’ dreams, fantasies, and mental states” (475). There are a number of instances of dreams, flashbacks, and fantasies in *Saddest Music*, each used in order to establish the inner workings of a character’s consciousness. Also interested in the inner worlds of the characters were the French Surrealist filmmakers, who worked simultaneously with the Impressionists. “Surrealism,” writes André Breton, “[was] based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association, heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought” (qtd. in Bordwell and Thompson 477). Perhaps the most evident influence on Maddin, however, is Soviet Montage (1924 – 1930). This movement “declared that a film does not exist in its individual shots but only in their combination through editing into a whole” (480). It is through the juxtaposition of shots that new forms of narrative emerge. There were a number of differing theories within the movement on the effect of juxtaposition:

Not all of the young theoreticians agreed on exactly what the Montage approach to editing was to be. Pudovkin, for example, believed that shots were like bricks, to be joined together to build a sequence. Eisenstein disagreed, saying that the maximum effect would be gained if the shots did not fit together perfectly, if they created a jolt for the spectator. He also favored juxtaposing shots in order to create a concept [.] [...] Vertov disagreed with both theorists, favoring a cinema-eye approach to recording and shaping documentary reality (480).

It is interesting to note how closely these theories of juxtaposition align with Joseph Frank's writings on the spatialization of narrative. Discussing the manipulation of space and time in Marcel Proust's writing, Frank compares Proust's prose with "impressionist painters [who] juxtaposed pure tones on the canvas, instead of mixing them on the palette, in order to leave the blending of colors to the eye of the spectator" (27). This "blending" in "the eye of the spectator," I argue, aligns with the "imaginative reconstruction" the city's pedestrian undertakes in order to make the cityscape comprehensible. Maddin's editing techniques, owing much, as we shall see, to the techniques of juxtaposition developed in the Soviet Montage movement, create a visual tableau that allows the viewer to re-create the "imaginative vision" of the pedestrian.

Returning to the Expressionist influence on Maddin, it is helpful to turn to Paul Coates' book *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror* in order to explore the "uncanny" in the filmic landscape. Coates

remarks: “The world becomes uncanny when it is perceived as no longer simple substance, but also as shadow, a sign of the existence of a world beyond itself” (1).

The Saddest Music in the World presents a world in which there is the continual haunting possibility of “the presence of another world.” Both the cityscape and characters are uncanny in that they are both “simple substance” (i.e. they exist as straightforward, linear, and in the present tense) and also “shadow” (i.e. they take on a dreamlike, unconscious aura). The blending of the doubled characters and landscape results in a liminal and always-shifting atmosphere. Coates identifies the visual interpretation of the uncanny as present “in the form of the dissolve or superimposition. As one scene emerges through another, it indicates that nothing is substantially itself” (6). The filmic vision of *Saddest Music* relies heavily on dissolves and superimposition as techniques that create an uncertain landscape where “nothing is substantially itself.” For example, as Lady Port-Huntley announces a worldwide competition to determine which country has the saddest music in the world, a rudimentary map of Canada is shown, with Winnipeg as its centre. Superimposed on this map are images of many musicians who make their way to the city. They swarm, specter-like, to the centre of the map. The *place* of Winnipeg is in a state of flux, refusing to solidify into a clear, whole image. Maddin also frequently uses dissolves and superimpositions when characters experience a crisis when their two selves, their conscious and unconscious, momentarily unite.

In the section that follows I will examine three characters and their various forms of identity appropriation. Each appropriated identity acts like the mask in Bakhtin’s “two world condition” of the carnivalesque. This world “is based on a

peculiar interrelation of reality and image [...] [S]uch manifestations as parodies, caricatures, grimaces, eccentric postures, and comic gestures are per se derived from the mask. It reveals the essence of the grotesque” (Bakhtin 39-40). The masks adopted by characters in *Saddest Music* are similarly formed from a combination of reality and image: the reality of their sadness and the image needed in order to cover the pain of that sadness. Each mask is adopted in reaction to the death of a loved one and serves as a door between the conscious and unconscious self. At moments in the film these doors are opened and the mask breaks down. The two selves oscillate and, at certain points between these oscillations, are superimposed on one another, thereby becoming uncanny through this transformative moment. The city, which also exists in a “two world condition,” is similarly composed of a conscious world and an unconscious dream world that co-exist on screen and transform Winnipeg into an uncanny landscape. Maddin’s use of dissolves and superimposition is significant to the artistic presentation of the prairie city because once again we see how, by breaking up a singular vision and making an easy reading of place impossible, the fractured and “imaginatively reconstructed” landscape is effectively represented.

Nearly every character in the film has adopted a new identity. Chester Kent suffered the death of his mother when he was a boy and has coped with this loss by adopting a new identity. The identity he takes on, however, is exaggerated and seems to overtake him. The opening scene of the film depicts the trauma that has forced Chester to cover his pain with an adopted identity. Chester relives the memory of his mother’s death when he visits a fortuneteller who can see into the souls of her customers by looking into a block of ice. In the scene, a close-up shows Chester’s

fingers moving across the block ice. The seer's face is then superimposed overtop of his hands by way of a long dissolve. Another long dissolve leads to the vision/memory of Chester's mother's death. The dream world is infused with blue, the image clearer and sharper than before. In the memory, Chester's musical family is performing "The Song is You," the song that will repeatedly return through the film. A boy (presumably Chester) plays trumpet. The scene cuts to an "iris" shot (where the image is framed by a large amount of black space) of a woman singing. Maddin's use of dark space as a frame in the iris shot concentrates the viewer's attention on a specific image without having to use a zoom or close-up. This method, I argue, mimics the perceptive faculties of vision; that is, when the individual concentrates attention on specific details of the world around her, she ostensibly blocks out or "darkens" what remains in the visual field. As the woman sings she falters, grimaces, and collapses across the piano keys. As this occurs the scene cuts to the boy, framed by a "lazy iris" (similar to the previous iris but not as concentrated or structured). The scene dissolves to the woman's body laid out in a church, her hands across her chest. This cuts to a shot of the boy standing over his mother's body, looking defiantly away from her. After two quick dissolves, first to a closer shot on his face, then to a close-up of his eye, a tear appears on the verge of his eyelid, never falling. The image of a half-melted block of ice is superimposed overtop the boy's eye. The ice then re-constitutes into a cube, as if time had momentarily gone backwards and frozen, leaving Chester's sadness trapped in the hard ice. The vision/memory then dissolves back to the fortuneteller's tent. Chester, grinning, tells the fortuneteller: "as your wise old fingers will tell you, I didn't cry at my mother's

funeral and I don't cry now." The tear that formed into a block of ice in Chester's eye serves as a door, kept permanently closed, between his unconscious, where the pain of his mother's death remains, and his consciousness, where he interacts with the world seemingly without the capacity to feel pain or remorse. This opening scene is paralleled by a scene at the end of the film when the door between Chester's conscious and unconscious mind opens at last and his two "selves" briefly unite. The intense heat of the fire that consumes him causes the ice in his eye to melt and fall as a tear: Chester is able to mourn both the death of his mother and the tragedies his selfish life has caused his family. Maddin uses both superimposition and dissolves to achieve this moment of uncanny realization. Chester's memories wash over each other, blending into a symphonic collage or "montage" of emotional scenes. Once he finally allows his conscious mind to experience the memory and sadness of his mother's death, his two selves, the unconscious and conscious Chester, co-exist without a barrier at last, and through this become uncanny.

Chester's brother Roderick enacts a different form of exaggerated identity appropriation. Unlike Chester, Roderick does not cover his pain with denial but instead becomes immersed in his loss. By adopting the identity of "Gavrillo the Great," named after the Serbian whose assassination of Archduke Ferdinand began the escalation towards the First World War, Roderick transforms himself into the sign of Serbia's grief and mourning. Roderick mourns both for his son, who died at a young age, and his wife, who disappeared after their son's death. By performing as Gavrillo, Roderick becomes, like Chester, an exaggerated character. By acting as the "scapegoat" for Serbia's sadness, he is able to justify his own immense act of

mourning. His private grief is not as deeply hidden as Chester's. Roderick frequently retreats into moments of dream-like memory, where the spectral image of his son appears to him. He also experiences moments when the pain of memory overtakes him to the extent that he swoons into unconsciousness. This occurs, for example, after Roderick observes Narcissa perform Chester's version of "Swing Low." In his dream state he enters his unconsciousness: an inner room of memory, guilt, and regret that is a prison of sadness for Roderick. It is where his personal grief remains, trapped beneath his appropriated identity – shielded, as Roderick shields his sensitive skin, behind cloth and veils. He retreats into this ominous inner world where Narcissa and their son wait for him. In his dream state Roderick passes through two guarded doorways before finally entering the red-infused room where Narcissa and his son wait. Within the room the following exchange occurs between Roderick and Narcissa:

"Why are you so late?"

"I came as quick as I could. I got through all the doors."

"You weren't supposed to come through any of them. You told them what they wanted to know. Now he's dead and I have to close all the doors between us and lock them with this key."

"Please don't leave me here! Who will play at the funeral?"

"You can play, from in here, but not too soft, or he won't hear."

This dream sequence suggests Roderick's grief is tied to a sense of guilt. As he burrows into his personal grief to reach his lost wife and son in order to extract the

proper sadness to play in the competition for Serbia, their memories retreat further and further from him. It is not until the final competition between Roderick and Chester that Roderick sheds his appropriated identity and plays his cello without pretense. He removes his costume and is finally able to mourn his loss properly. As he plays, his heartfelt music causes Narcissa to break out of her amnesiac state.

Roderick's entrapment within his grief is similar to Narcissa's entrapment within her amnesia. Narcissa, the film's primary amnesiac, exists in a doubled world: her conscious and her unconscious. "This is a pro-active amnesiac who, in her own way, is more of a double for Chester than anyone else. She's 'up' for anything in her amnesia-state," notes George Toles, the film's co-writer (*Teardrops*). Narcissa, like Chester, chooses to live in the surface world because to succumb to memory is far too painful. "She's quite happy in her unconscious state, and it's consciousness that brings unhappiness" notes Maria de Mediros, the actress who portrays Narcissa (*Teardrops*). Speaking to Fyodor and Chester of his wife's disappearance, Roderick notes that it was her conscious state that first disappeared: "It was gradual, a ship going down, with all her lights, and barely a sound. She forgot about loving me. She even forgot about our son." There are a number of times in the film when Narcissa nearly experiences a union of her two states. Narcissa's unconscious memories attempt to come to the surface of her conscious mind through a dream state. This occurs at points in the film when the spectral image of her son appears to her through darkened surfaces. For example, as Narcissa draws a bath, the image of her son appears to her through a darkened window. The scene begins with a close-up on Narcissa's face, framed in a "lazy" iris. She looks down and the camera follows her

gaze, pans down to the tub of bathwater. There is a quick dissolve to a wider shot; a darkened window is in the top left hand side of the frame and Narcissa sits just right of the centre of the shot. The image of a young boy appears, superimposed over the black window. As he appears Narcissa begins to look up from the water, her head inclining in his direction. A falsetto voice of a young boy sings along to the music angelically. The scene then cuts to a close-up of the boy's face. He looks in directly at the camera. Snow begins to fall outside. Then there is a cut to the wider shot again. Narcissa looks away from the window seemingly lost in thought, and stares back down into the bathwater. Next, the scene cuts to her reflected face in the darkened surface of water. Chester's face appears over her shoulder, the music changes abruptly from the angelic singing to a raunchy trumpet. Narcissa breaks from her contemplative expression to a grin. The bathwater is disturbed and their faces blend into an indecipherable reflection. The scene ends with a cut to the boy's face in the window. The angelic voice returns and his image slowly backs away from the window, disappearing and fading to black. This scene depicts a moment when Narcissa's unconscious has nearly surfaced and allowed her memory to break her amnesiac trance. It is not until she hears Roderick in the final competition playing "The Song is You" mournfully on his cello that Narcissa experiences a moment of ecstasy, of being "beside herself." Her unconscious and conscious selves unite and she is able to both remember the loss of her son and mourn his departure. Toles notes that Maddin has visited and revisited the theme of amnesia in his films "because he believes that [...] amnesiacs are not who just a couple of people are, it's who everybody is, it's who he is, let's embrace our amnesiac nature. That's what it means

to be a human being" (*Teardrops*). It is not only Chester, Roderick, and Narcissa who find it necessary to subsume, subvert, or otherwise manipulate their painful memories in order to move through the world; it is part of the human condition to oscillate between memory and amnesia. To give in to their pain would cause them to turn inward to a point of erasure, as Roderick nearly does, and make living in the world impossible. To completely repress or subsume this pain and live in the conscious world results, in Chester's case, an inability to feel anything outside of the shallow, immediate recesses of self. In Narcissa's case this repression causes the unconscious to bubble up into her surface life, as if she were living a waking dream. It is not until each character finds a way of allowing the two states of consciousness and unconsciousness, memory and amnesia, to co-exist, that they are finally able to mourn and understand their grief.

The city of Winnipeg, like the characters in this film, exists in a doubled state. Winnipeg appears in this film, not only as a place, but also as a character; and like the other characters in the film Winnipeg has both conscious and unconscious selves. Aside from the surface world of the city there is a city that exists in a dream world, symbolized by the presence of a sleepwalker stumbling and circling through the streets throughout the film. The aesthetic of the Winnipeg sets creates a surreal, uncanny landscape that plays with notions of perspective and perception. Interactions between the conscious and unconscious "selves" of the city occur throughout the film. After the first competition between Siam and Mexico, for example, Chester and Narcissa stumble across the sleepwalker who meanders, eyes open, through the streets in his bathrobe. Narcissa walks up to the sleepwalker, they stand face to face,

and, as if she recognizes something of her lost unconscious, she kisses him on the cheek. “Goodnight mother” the sleepwalker says, as Narcissa stares out into space, lost in thought again. This sleepwalker is the thread of dreams, weaving through the streets and thereby binding the city together. “The moment of the uncanny,” writes Paul Coates, “punctuates a transformation [...] [...] Occurring while the transformation is still incomplete, it forces one to hold one’s breath as one’s wonder over which reality will prevail, the old or the new, gives way to a suspicion of the imminence of negative revelation” (5 – 6). If the city is observed to be capable of existing in both a conscious and unconscious states, then the landscape of the city becomes “uncanny” when there is a dual existence of the two worlds within the same space, or, as the case may be with film, within the same frame. Maddin’s Winnipeg is caught in a transformative moment, just as the characters find themselves caught in a moment that traps them between memory and waking life. It is with the superimposition of images that Chester, Roderick, and Narcissa experience the connective points between unconsciousness and consciousness. The film medium effectively allows for a simultaneous coexistence of two distinct images—a technique used throughout *Saddest Music* to represent the unrepresentable: the intricate workings of consciousness. This simultaneity parallels the act of “imaginative reconstruction” on the part of the pedestrian. Through reconstructing the fragmented world of the cityscape, the pedestrian’s vision allows for many images to superimpose. In the imaginative vision of the pedestrian the world is “uncanny” because these reconstructions are in a continual state of flux and transformation.

Saddest Music constructs a visual narrative that succeeds where literary narratives often falter: the representation of the ways in which consciousness and unconsciousness interact in a dance-like play between linear surface movements, where vision moves along the plane of consciousness, and the voluminous, echoing depths of unconsciousness. Erich Auerbach, writing at a time when filmic narratives were only beginning to be studied alongside literature, notes: "a concentration of space and time such as can be achieved by the film (for example the representation, within a few seconds and by means of a few pictures, of the situation of a widely dispersed group of people, of a great city, an army, a war, an entire country) can never be within the reach of the spoken or written word" (546). Where Aritha van Herk and Robert Kroetsch use film-like techniques in their narratives to express the fractured and multiple nature of the modern city, they are always limited by the fact that the reader can only ever receive information in sequence, as opposed to film, which can present a number of images simultaneously and is better suited to techniques such as fragmentation and superimposition in the artistic presentation of the city. The filmic medium, in some ways, most closely aligns with the imagistic workings of human perception, and is therefore better able to present a vision that can be described as mimetic in the sense that it represents *how people see*. Auerbach goes on to note: "by virtue of the film's existence, the novel has come to be more clearly aware than ever before of the limitations in space and time imposed upon it by its instrument, language. As a result the situation has been reversed: the dramatic technique of the film now has far greater possibilities in the direction of condensing time and space than has the novel itself" (546). This ability to condense time and

space, in terms of narrative perspective and vision, is what allows *Saddest Music* to effectively create an uncanny city where a waking world and a dream world are able to coexist simultaneously within the same frame.

II. Obfuscation

"Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else."

"I have neither desires nor fears," the Kahn declared, "and my dreams are composed either by my mind or by chance."

(Calvino Invisible Cities 43 - 44)

In his visualization of the prairie city in *The Saddest Music in the World*, Guy Maddin creates a world where images rarely exist in clear, whole form. This obfuscation of the image, I argue, is evocative of the pedestrian's vision of the city. Techniques such as fragmentation, blurring, multiplying, and superimposition are used in order to achieve this obfuscation. In his essay "Little History of Photography" (1931), Walter Benjamin traces the technical advances in photography that allowed a progression from hazy, blurred snapshots, which contained an aura of "breathy halo," to later photography, when "advances in optics made instruments available that wholly overcame darkness and recorded appearances as faithfully as any mirror" (517). The films of Guy Maddin, through a combination of archaic machinery and contemporary technology, stylistically recapture the less-mimetic qualities of early photography and film. While the "mirror-like" capabilities of contemporary film allow for a "life like" representation of the image, Maddin

purposefully obscures the image in order to loosen it, open it, and make it malleable. The image, then, becomes capable of accepting a number of meanings because space has been made for “imaginative reconstruction” on the part of the audience.

Benjamin discusses the image in relation to photography and film in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935). He writes:

With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones ‘which, far from looking like retarded rapid movements, give the effect of singularly gliding, floating, supernatural motions.’ Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye – if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for space consciously explored by man. (236)

Here, Benjamin remarks on the ability of film and photography to go beyond what is considered traditional mimetic representation of reality towards a new understanding of vision, a new movement of perception. Through manipulating the surface movements of film, “a different nature opens itself to the camera.” This different nature is “unconsciously penetrated space.” The films of Guy Maddin search out this space, which, in place of the space that makes itself available to the human eye, is filled with the uncanny. Maddin finds this space in his films by taking complete images and obfuscating them. This is done, for example, by rubbing Vaseline on the

camera lens to blur the image as well as the frame. Maddin most often uses this technique in scenes of close ups of faces, parts of the body, and objects, resulting in the simultaneous blurring and illumination of such images: they turn from immediate, present images into specters. “Somewhere along the line I must have seen Reinhardt and Dieterle’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and just thought ‘I’m going to put a little Vaseline on the camera’” Maddin notes in the documentary *Teardrops in the Snow: The Making of The Saddest Music in the World*. He goes on to note: “Vaseline can be used as a sort of framing device, kind of an iris, because it distorts the periphery of the frame, because there’s some shots that just seem to need obfuscating.” Maria de Medeiros observes that, in Maddin’s films, “you can’t see everything, the same way you can’t know everything” (*Teardrops*). The audience’s experience of vision is analogous with the pedestrian’s experience of vision. Like Douglas Tallack’s Ashcan painters, the audience interacts with the film by “imaginatively reconstructing” what remains hidden out of “a need to know more than [can] actually be seen” (29).

It is important to note, at this point, that when writing of the aura of the work of art, Benjamin is not pining for a lost era but is in fact looking forward with hopeful anticipation to the future and possibility of the film medium. He writes that the work of art, before it became highly reproducible, had a “parasitical dependence on ritual” (Benjamin “Work” 224). Benjamin praises the work of art that “instead of being based on ritual [...] begins to be based on another practice – politics” (224). But if the work of art has been liberated from its origins in the cult and ritual, it immediately becomes restrained by another sort of cult – its marketability. The value of the work of art shifts from a ritualistic one to a monetary one. In the notes to this section of his

essay Benjamin writes: “The transition from the first kind of artistic reception to the second characterizes the history of artistic reception in general. [...] a certain oscillation between these two polar modes of reception can be demonstrated for each work of art” (245n). It is my contention that Guy Maddin is shifting the “mode of reception” of the image to a ritualistic value. This shift is achieved through the mythologization of Winnipeg. Like Kroetsch, Maddin mythologizes by combining local, archetypal symbols (such as hockey, snow, beer) with universal mythic structures (such as fairy tales). Maddin remarks on his desire to mythologize his hometown: “I’ve grown more and more obsessed with the idea of mythologizing Winnipeg. It just seems like fun, just to mythologize it. It’s just a way of being autobiographical, just talking about yourself a bit without directly talking about yourself” (*Teardrops*). This mythic presence infuses the visualization of the prairie city and creates a Winnipeg that is part real, part imagined, but ultimately unique. One of the musical scenes in *Saddest Music*, when the whole city breaks into song and dance, incorporates stereotypical prairie icons (the hockey players with makeshift uniforms playing on the bulrush-lined pond) with a surrealist performance of jovial unity. The effect of such a scene is the mythologization of a Winnipeg as a place with a specific historical, geographic, and cultural make-up that is unique and irreproducible. If, as was discussed in my introduction, Guy Vanderhaeghe is correct in asserting that many prairie novelists have felt limited by the prairie city and felt compelled to write such a place as a “no-name city, a city that tried to pass muster by refusing to give away what it really was” (128), Guy Maddin is compelled by an opposite instinct; namely, to embrace and accentuate the unique qualities of Winnipeg

and exaggerate and mythologize those elements to create a landscape that is both unmistakably Winnipeg and complete fiction.

Eduardo Cadava discusses Walter Benjamin in his work *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*. He writes that there is a “kind of contradiction that lies behind Benjamin’s conception of aura, which, in one of its formulations, names the ‘singular phenomenon of a distance however close it may be’” (xxiv). The contradiction of media, according to Cadava, is that the event represented by the image is brought into immediacy, into the private space of the viewer, while it is simultaneously distanced from the viewer because it has been “torn from the context from which it takes its meaning” (xxv). I contend that in the films of Guy Maddin there is a struggle against the elimination of the aura. If the image as it is highly reproduced, made universal, and made clearer through technological advances succeeds in bringing the “event” closer in proximity but further from its context, then Maddin creates a more intimate relationship between the image and the viewer by blurring the clear lines, thereby creating a need for the viewer to actively interact with the image by “imaginatively reconstructing” what has been obscured. This process parallels the vision of the city pedestrian who must “imaginatively reconstruct” the “inaccessible in his imagination” (Wirth-Nesher 8-9).

In “Photography” (1927) Benjamin distinguishes a difference between what he calls “the image-idea” and the “idea.” He notes: “[t]he spatial continuum from the camera’s perspective dominates the spatial appearance of the perceived object; the resemblance between the image and the object effaces the contours of the object’s ‘history’” (qtd. in Cadava xxvii). That is, the mimetic faithfulness between the event

being recorded and the image of that event results in a shedding of the historical context of the original event. Cadava, musing on Benjamin's "Photography," identifies the "image idea" and the "idea" as the *image* and the *event*. He notes: "it is precisely [the] reproducibility [of the image] that prevents us from experiencing and understanding the event" (xxvii). Cadava goes on to explain that the image "[substitutes] for the object and its history": "Although images may help constitute the 'truth' of an event, although they may claim to present a 'real event,' they do not belong to the domain of the truth" (xxvii-xxviii). That is, because of mimetic faithfulness, the viewer may mistake the image for the event. Maddin's image is manipulated to a point where it will never be mistaken for the original event. It can therefore be "experienced and understood" as a representation. It is here that the concept of obfuscation returns. For if the mass-produced image has distanced the audience from "experiencing and understanding" the "truth" of the original event by replacing it with a mimetic representation, then Maddin brings the audience in closer participation with the original event by self-consciously pointing out the artificiality of the image. When the image becomes blurred, fragmented, and superimposed, the audience is forced to acknowledge their participation in the "imaginative reconstruction" of that image. Just as Kroetsch's narrator forced the reader to acknowledge her place in the literary process, Maddin's viewer must consider her place in the filmic process.

There is a scene in *Saddest Music* that that works as a *mise-en-abime* to Maddin's filmic process of obfuscation and resultant "imaginative reconstruction." *Saddest Music* presents a world recently traumatized by the onslaught of the historical

photograph after the First World War. The world is fascinated with death, but seems unable to connect with the *event* of death because the wealth of photographs has overwhelmed and distanced the viewer from the “truth” of the original event. As Roderick competes against Scotland, a painting of the historical beginnings of the First World War looms on the screen behind him. It depicts the assassination of François and Sophie Ferdinand by a Serbian soldier, the act that began the escalation towards the Great War. The painting is in the realist mode, closely aligning it with the very “sheer mass” of images of war that would have inundated Winnipeg at the time. Maddin troubles an easy reading of the painting by placing Roderick, or more specifically Roderick’s performance, between the audience (both within the film and watching the film) and the painting. Just as Roderick’s veil obscures his face, his music obscures an easy, straightforward reading of the painting. The scene begins with a close-up on the audience. A series of quick cuts switch between the Scottish players and the audience. The scene cuts to stagehands rolling down a new painted background. Then, a cut to Roderick’s face, hidden behind his enormous hat and veil, shows him looking daunted, frightened. The scene cuts to an iris shot of the gun held by the assassin in the painting. A puff of smoke emits from a hole in the canvas at the muzzle of the gun. The audience boos and the scene cuts again to Roderick, standing in the middle of the shot, his veil taking up the entire left hand side of the shot while the right hand side of the screen is in darkness. Maddin’s editing becomes frenzied during the musical duel. The cuts become more rapid and the camera angles shift dramatically, showing the scene from all angles. Many iris shots are used. These shots focus on Roderick’s hands, then pan to his face, which contorts in time with the

rhythm of the song. Several shots of Roderick also show his body, cello, and veil blocking certain portions of the painting behind him, revealing more or less of the image, depending on the angle of the shot. The performance ends with a superimposition of Narcissa's image ovetop Roderick's face. He then swoons into unconsciousness for the second time in the film. Despite the hostile and skeptical audience, Roderick's performance moves that audience to tears and applause and his eventual winning of the battle. The painting is transformed from an image that has been made inaccessible through the mass technologization to being part of a moving and emotional performance. The superimposition of music and image evokes Eisenstein's desired effect of montage, where "the maximum effect would be gained if the shots did not fit together perfectly, if they created a jolt for the spectator" (Bordwell and Thompson 480). Instead of two separate shots, Maddin has juxtaposed image and sound, resulting in a performance that opens up the "original event" (the assassination that started the First World War) to contemplation beyond initial reaction and dismissal.

III. Conclusion

"Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours."

"Or the question it asks you, forcing you to answer, like Thebes through the mouth of the Sphinx."
(Calvino Invisible Cities 43 - 44)

Eduardo Cadava expresses what this chapter has argued most concisely and eloquently when he notes that, in photography, “the most faithful photograph, the photograph most faithful to the event of the photograph, is the least faithful one, the least mimetic one—the photograph that remains faithful to its own infidelity” (15). Through obfuscating the image, Maddin creates space for imaginative reconstruction on the part of the audience. In the context of the prairie city, *The Saddest Music in the World* asserts, just as *The Studhorse Man* and *Restlessness* assert, that no easy, definable, or complete presentation of such a landscape is possible. The mess of history, memory, and the polyphony of voices resonating from within the city make a straightforward visualization impossible. *Saddest Music*, like the other works, struggles against the erasure or stereotyping of its particular place, the city of Winnipeg, by combining real, historical and geographical presence with a mythologized essence. The moment of the transformation between states, or the “uncanny,” is the point at which the image and the world is most itself, the moment invested with the most meaning, and capable of the greatest amount of possibility. The moment when the image of the city is least readable, the most obscured, is the most “faithful” to the essence of the reality of the city.

Conclusion

I have come to the end of this study with the hope of tying together the disparate threads of my argument into a concise shape. Because the various scholarly sources from which my thesis has taken form have not developed in seamless harmony with each other there is the danger, in this work, of a clumsy delivery. I do not wish this to be a stumbling argument. I believe that every voice and idea I have interwoven with my own has been necessary in order to tease out a tenuous but important realization: that prairie literature, because of a need to hold on to the formal techniques of realism in its developing state, came to use techniques associated with modernist aesthetics later than other western literature. These aesthetic techniques, loosely categorized by such terms as fragmentation, doubling, multiplicity, superimposition, and obfuscation, developed at a time when literature was beginning an oscillation towards a "spatial" form characteristic with the plastic arts. Visual art, at this time, was grappling with the aesthetic and compositional possibilities of the filmic medium. I have included Guy Maddin's film *The Saddest Music in the World* into a study that began solely concentrated with the novelistic form because of how uncannily similar his construction of the city is to Robert Kroetsch's and Aritha van Herk's. I have, perhaps unfairly, used Maddin's film as an explicatory model. Because the techniques I have been describing are in many ways ineffable, because they are techniques that cause a visual effect in the minds of the readers, it became necessary for me to simply *show* the effects of the techniques. There is a space, I believe, somewhere within the mind of the reader, a space I imagine as dark and limitless. As a narrative is read I imagine this space takes a form, a very architectural

form, where the details of narrative are then inserted and made comprehensible. As the filmic medium began to change the way people looked at the world around them, clarified the structures of perception by technicalizing them, then this imaginative space became capable of supporting similar structures.

My thesis has only looked at a small sampling of the literature, film, and other art works that present a rendering of the Canadian prairie city. There are a number of reasons I selected these particular works. First, each used mythological narrative structures as structuring devices to one extent or another. *The Studhorse Man* plays with Homer's epic *The Odyssey*, which tells the tale of Odysseus's quest to return to his home and his wife Penelope. Both Odysseus and Hazard encounter challenges both pleasant and unpleasant along the way, thereby delaying their homecoming. *Restlessness* uses the structure of the classic Arabic epic *One Thousand and One Nights*. It is most widely known in the western world as *The Arabian Nights*, translated in 1850 by Sir Richard Burton. The tale concerns King Shahryar, who after his wife has been unfaithful to him, has her killed and proceeds to kill each new wife on the first day of their marriage. Scheherazade, daughter to the king's vizar, marries the king and elongates her life through story. She tells a tale each night of their marriage for the duration of one thousand and one nights, and succeeds in saving her life, bearing three children, and winning the love of the king. Dorcas' trajectory is reversed from that of Scheherazade: she narrates to her assassin in order to bring her closer to her desired death. This is not as negative a trajectory as it first seems, however, because it is through filling Calgary with story that she succeeds in her goal of "haunting" the city. *The Saddest Music in the World* uses Hans Christian

Andersen's fairytale *The Snow Queen* (1845) as its structuring narrative. It is the story of a hobgoblin who fashions a mirror "which [has] the power of making everything good or beautiful that was reflected in it almost shrink to nothing." One day the mirror breaks and causes unhappiness because the shards fly around the world, falling into the eyes of unsuspecting people who then "[see] everything through a distorted medium, or [can] see only the worst side of what he look[s] at." Even worse, some shards pierced people's hearts "and this was very terrible, for their hearts became cold like a lump of ice" (Andersen 1). The tale follows the adventures of Kay, a little boy who gets both a shard of glass in his eye and his heart, and Gerda, his close friend, who follows him to the land of the Snow Queen and whose tears eventually melt the ice in his heart and wash away the shard of glass in his eye. *The Snow Queen* influences the structure of the narrative of the film. Chester's mother's death causes both the formation of ice in his eye and the freezing of his heart. It is only when he allows himself to relive the experience of her death that his tears melt the ice in his heart and wash away his cynical vision. The film's visual presentation seems also influenced by the tale, where "everything [appears] through a distorted medium." In a cultural arena that so often dismisses the prairies as a place empty of history and story, turning to these narrative structures allows each artist to explore the unique place of each prairie city in a way that combines the specific and local with the universal. Just as the prairie city is a place that must balance being located both within the specific locale of the Canadian prairies and the universal locale of the city, each work studied in this thesis similarly locates itself doubly within the local and the universal.

Another similarity between these three works is that each connects historical memory with place. In *The Studhorse Man* this is expressed through Demeter's obsession with historiography and archival methods. He fluctuates between paying painstaking attention to historical detail and admittedly conjuring up facts to suit his tale. This, in effect, parodies the act of historiography and suggests that all texts, even those defined as "authentic" or "historical," are fabrications and should not rigidly define a culture. In *Restlessness* Dorcas fluctuates between relating Calgary's history and narrating the history of foreign cities she has visited. It is almost as if she feels the need to compensate for the lack of recorded history in her home place with various other histories. Her desire to "haunt" Calgary with story is a desire to align her city with other landscapes described as "literary." In *The Saddest Music in the World*, Fyodor stands in as a representative for Canada's historical memory. He pins his identity on his love of the country and his service in the First World War and is appalled that his sons reject their Canadian identities to align with other nations. As the Canadian participant in the contest, however, his performance of "Red Maple Leaves" is maudlin and easily-dismissed by the audience in the film. Canadians are not interested in their own performance of identity. Each work, in different ways, questions the validity of closely aligning historical material as an authentic authority of identity.

My thesis has only touched on a portion of the possible research possibilities present in the study of urban prairie literature and film. Within the parameters of this study there are a number of avenues of questioning that continue to interest me. How, for example, did the change from a primarily realist narrative mode to a more

abstract, expressionist mode of writing change the way readers and audiences think about the landscape of the prairies? Has the shift away from texts and visual art that prioritize mimetic fidelity lessened the influence of environmental determinism in these works? And if so, does such a lessening alter the ways in which readers and audiences conceive of their environments? It is my hope that non-representational strategies, in these and other works, results in a broadening of the understanding of what prairie art constitutes and what it *can* constitute. Such a broadening would make the inclusion of a multiplicity of narratives not traditionally considered inherent to the make-up of prairie identity. These include voices from non-European, queer, and differently-abled communities. By broadening representational strategies in Canadian prairie art there is a greater possibility for the inclusion of any number of narratives, and such a broadening only enriches art from this region.

My thesis has argued that, in the city, vision is troubled by what is shown and what remains hidden. The citizen, the pedestrian, always drawn to constructing narratives in her own mind, imaginatively reconstructs what is hidden from view, attempting to form wholes from these fragments. These constructions necessarily result in a vision that has many images superimposed, occurring simultaneously, and always in flux. Traditional realist novelistic techniques did not have the tools with which to recreate this vision of the pedestrian. As a consequence, realist literature either used narrative perspectives of the omniscient narrator, capable of moving god-like through walls and covering great distances, or, if the narrative remained with the pedestrian's gaze, this gaze seemed flat, one dimensional, resulting in the creation of unbelievable landscapes such as those urban narratives deemed "no-name cities" by

Vanderhaeghe. Once prairie writers began to take up techniques characteristic of modernism, the vision of the city moved into the mind, began to emulate the workings of consciousness, and became capable of supporting the imaginative reconstructions of the pedestrian. Robert Kroetsch's use of the carnivalesque, where two worlds are allowed to exist simultaneously, results in the creation of a city that is able to support contradictory and paradoxical images. His abandonment of linearity and his spatialization of the narrative allow historical and mythical structures to co-exist. Aritha van Herk's use of the figure of the *doppelgänger*, along with her superimposition of many cities onto one, results in a many-layered landscape that is capable of taking on a multiplicity of meanings. Her use of *mise-en-abîme*, where an element is placed within the narrative that reflects something outside of the borders, projects the imaginative possibilities of that narrative into new realms, infinite reflections. Guy Maddin's use of the figure of the double creates echoes within his visual construction; these echoes play off one another and result in a multiple and complex narrative. His use of superimposition, obfuscation, and fragmentation creates a visual field similar to that of the city, where gaps appear in the vision of the pedestrian and she then imaginatively reconstructs what cannot be seen.

Italo Calvino translates Gadda's line "*conoscere è inserire alchunchè nel reale; e, quindi deformare il reale*" as such: "to know is to insert something into what is real, and hence to distort reality" (Calvino *Six* 112). I assert that this is exactly what the observer of the city does in order to make such a landscape comprehensible. Consequently, this is how artists have come to approach the recreation of the urban landscape. Each of these constructions of the city evokes the unique cultural,

historical, and geographical place of the Canadian prairies. The city is a universal structure. Each city contains elements that are similar to those found elsewhere. What is unique for each city is the way in which each pedestrian imaginatively reconstructs what cannot be seen. Ultimately, the imaginative material of these reconstructions gives the place of the prairie city its identity. Each imagined landscape interacts and intersects with others, and through this weaving comes the cultural essence of each city. “[In] our own times,” Calvino concludes, “literature is attempting to realize this ancient desire to represent the multiplicity of relationships, both in effect and in potentiality” (112). I believe that the three works studied in this thesis strive to represent this multiplicity, this interwoven web of invisible imagined cities co-existing in the unique landscape of the prairie city.

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