Absolutely Fabulous: Fabulation in the Works of David Arnason, Robert Kroetsch, Tomson Highway and Thomas King

By

Brian Ralph Swail

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Abstract

The fable is didactic; its purpose is to memorably illustrate some aspect of human behaviour clearly and unambiguously. The fable is thus widely regarded as a rather harmless literary form intended to instruct children or amuse adults. But the very monologism that makes it uniquely capable of expressing an idea convincingly also helps it to express ideas, as it were, surreptitiously; the reader may recognize that the situation illustrated is unjust before realizing that he or she is implicated in this injustice. Fabulous fiction appears to sacrifice plausibility and stylistic sophistication in favour of unity of effect, and this apparent textual naivety can be used not only to slip a message past the reader's intellectual and political defences but also to call attention to the reader's assumptions about the relationship of literature to the reader and to the world. Magic realism brings fabulous and realist writing into direct contact but does not represent a collision, producing an epistemology that is either relativist or sceptical. In Luis Leal's words, the supernatural in such texts represents "the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances" (122), the mystery lying perhaps in an excess, a surplus in the world for which no one code (linguistic, cultural or philosophical) can account. Like other fabulation, magic realism encourages a suspension of positivist assumptions, a suspension that enables examinations of many sorts.

I examine four Canadian authors who employ fabulation in their work: David Arnason's contemporary fables and postmodern fabulations adopt an air of innocence in order to interrogate the relationship between the reader, the text and the world; Robert Kroetsch's *What The Crow Said* employs magic realism and postmodernism to examine competing Canadian mythologies; Tomson Highway's *The Kiss of the Fur Queen* examines Christian and Native belief systems in order to forge a discourse between the two; and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* turns Western colonialist techniques back on themselves in order to reveal the harm they have done and demonstrate the resiliency and independence of Native culture.

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Chapter One: The History of the Fable to the Twentieth Century

'I always believe stories whilst they are being told,' said the Cockroach.

'You are a wise creature,' said the Old Woman. 'That is what stories are for. And after, we shall see what we shall see.' (Byatt 68)

I began this study with the intention of examining some contemporary fables and offering some explanation of how one might read a fable set, say, in present-day Manitoba. What soon became clear is that I would need to discuss a plethora of related genres and critical approaches, including but not limited to: fairy tales; the fantastic; magic realism; fabulation; mythology; postmodernism; literature which aims to recuperate or appropriate classic narratives[1]; and in general, the relationship between realism and counter-realism.

What I hope to have shown is that the subversive qualities H.J. Blackham and Annabel Patterson find in the fable are available to all fabulous literature and have been employed in ways that are sometimes not adequately recognized; I intend to emphasize the polyphonic nature of this literature, something which has often not been recognized. As an animal fable, contemporary or otherwise, invites us to contemplate two worlds, the everyday, imperfect world which we inhabit, and one in which the limitations and rules we take for granted do not exist, fabulous literature implies two incommensurate worlds, whether to warn of the gap between the ideal and the real, to give voice to silenced, unofficial views, or to suggest the inadequacy of any single worldview. I believe that every text invites the reader to negotiate his or her relationship to the author, the text, and meaning in the text, and I believe that fabulation is particularly well-suited to draw the reader into a contemplation of competing visions of the world, and even to consider the

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[1] What Alan Gopnik has glibly termed "po-mo karaoke" (38).

impoverishment that a single authorized worldview would represent. Against realism's positivism these various fabulations urge a more inclusive vision, a suspended judgement, or at the least a glimpse at the world from a non-dominant worldview. The authors I analyze represent life on the Canadian prairie from a variety of perspectives, and against the tradition of Canadian prairie novels as realist depictions of the rigors of rural life they open up a wide range of narrative and philosophical possibilities. Fabulous writing, of which these authors form a recent part, draws on an oral tradition, on the shifting voices and narrative styles of orality, and magic realism might be characterized as a meeting place between oral and literary cultures, "local" and "official" voices, just as postmodernism tries to recuperate the local and the multi-voiced. David Arnason, by shaping classical narratives to fit local variations and satirize opinions both local and general, Robert Kroetsch by employing uncertainty and by collapsing binaries to destabilize local but more particularly Western presumptions, and Tomson Highway and Thomas King in their efforts to make two cultures speak to one another (and where appropriate, remain silent about one another), all employ the subversive polyvocality of the fabulous. Whether the fabulous emerges through fable, magic realism or postmodernism, it is always, in them, and many other authors, a dialogue rather than a monologue.

The range of literature I observe is broad, indeed it could be said to include all non-realist forms. The critics I cite are not agreed on whether these forms constitute genres, modes, strains, or types of writing. My observations reflect this debate, and in the final analysis I believe that the writing that I refer to collectively as the fabulous or fabulation, and by which I mean to include fables, magic realism, postmodernism and Native fabulation, invites the author and the reader to cross borders at nearly every opportunity. No sooner is the fabulous defined, it seems, than a text challenges the definition. Certainly there are interests and techniques that these texts have in common, and for those who do not agree that genres represent permanent, fixed literary types

reflecting the shape of the human imagination, these categories might be said to share a sufficient number of conventions, codes and expectations to be structurally related, or to share the family resemblances that some ascribe to a looser definition of genre. I choose to look at them as different but related, and in the hands of border-jumpers like Robert Kroetsch, the distinctions become very blurry indeed. What is useful about talking about these categories, I would suggest, is that the codes, the conventions and the familiar themes of these genres create expectations in the reader that are important, even when the author subverts these expectations, indeed **especially** when the author subverts these categories – you cannot surprise a reader who has suspended all expectations

My principles of selection of authors started with the notion that sticking to the Canadian prairie would be wise, in part because it seems to me that the fabulous is particularly good at holding the local up against the general, so that I might be wise to "stay local" in a sense, but also because Canadian literature and culture identify themselves in important ways as being outside the centre of Western culture; the popular image of Canada-U.S. relations as sleeping with an elephant suggests that Canadian authors may be particularly sensitive to the notion of smaller voices that seek to subvert more dominant voices.

In this first chapter my goal is to survey the history of the fable and its critical reception, to briefly do the same for the fairy tale and the fantastic, and to summarize the arguments for a subversive quality to the fable. In the second chapter I will examine magic realism, postmodernism, fabulation, and the relation of these genres to the fable. The succeeding chapters will examine specific works in the light of the claims I will make for these genres.

The fable is often seen as pedagogical, a way for adults to teach the young some fundamental concepts about how we believe the world works, and particularly how certain personality types behave and how power is acquired and lost. As some readers, particularly Annabel Patterson, have observed, the fable has been used in subversive

ways, and indeed its mythical origin (the sketchy yet persistent biography of Aesop[2]) tends to define it as subversive; the fable frees the slave[3] and gives voice to the speechless, and it is a way for the powerless to talk back to the powerful. Both the fairy tale and the fantastic have been seen as wish-fulfillment, and thus as a rich ground for psychoanalytic criticism, but because of its brevity and its apparently transparent didactic purpose, the fable has generally escaped sophisticated critical analysis until recently. I believe that the rise of postmodernism and magic realism have altered the way in which we read fables, alerting us to the possibility of parodic, multi-layered meanings, but in this chapter I will examine the history of the fable only until the early twentieth century, when the fable was the province of children, classicists, and dissidents.

In literature in the West, when one speaks of the literary fable, one is speaking of the Aesopic fable, or of a work that follows the Aesopic form. Aesop is so thoroughly identified as the "father" of the fable that many fables composed after his death are attributed to him, and works that precede him are said to "anticipate" him[4]. As Ben Edwin Perry, the compiler of the most complete collection of Greek and Latin fables, has noted, *Aesop's Fables* is "one of the few genuinely popular books that have come down

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[2]The known facts of Aesop's life are very few, though the brief references to his life come from respectable sources, including Herodotus, Aristophanes, Aristotle and Plato: he was from the Greek island of Samos, he lived in the sixth century B.C., and was born a slave. He was set free by his owner, Xanthus (or Jadmon, or Iadmon), as a reward for his wit. Croesus, the king of Lydia, may have employed him in his court, and it is said that on Court business to Delphi Aesop was killed by the Delphians, who threw him off a cliff, perhaps another reward for his wit. The name Aesop is said to indicate that he was dark-skinned (the Ethiop), and it has also been said that he was fearfully ugly and deformed, with a crooked back, but this idea seems to have originated in the fourteenth century. There is also a story that Aesop stuttered or was mute until Isis rewarded him with wit and eloquence for an act of hospitality to a priest (or priests) of hers. Annabel Patterson convincingly argues that the embellishments to the biography are persistent because they support a sense most readers have of the fable as a voice of the powerless.

[3]Much might be made of the tradition that Aesop was freed not simply for his wit, but because he volunteered to interpret a sign (an eagle had grasped a symbol of the city and then dropped it on a slave) and his interpretation was convincing; Aesop's narrative power is also a hermeneutic power, and when persuasive, it liberates.

[4]H.J. Blackham observes: "in the old Mesopotamian literature, dating back to the eighteenth century BC and earlier, collections have been made of one-sentence fables of the Aesopic type, a clear anticipation" (xix).

from ancient times" (*Studies* 2), but unfortunately, copyists were far less stringent with popular than with "serious" literature:

> Besides the fact that the text of a single fable is sometimes, though perhaps not very frequently, compounded of two or three different sources, there is a tendency among Byzantine copyists to make up each his own collection of fables, drawing some of them from one manuscript collection and others from others, a practice which has likewise become traditional in the popular modern editions and translations of "Aesop's Fables," and which, apart from being easy and natural in the case of such small textual units, is due in the final analysis to the fact that a definitive edition of the *Fables* never existed, at least none that was universally recognized as such and as coming from the pen of Aesop himself. (*Studies* 73)

As we shall see, the authors of subversive fables have frequently taken advantage of the fact that, if the traditional form is followed, any fable may be attributed to Aesop.

The Fable Defined

While "fable" is a term that seems to be applied to virtually any artistic creation with even the vaguest hint of a moral message, a more precise definition of the literary fable may be useful at this point. The problem is that this was originally an oral form, probably derived from the parable, and early collections were too inclusive for later theorists. As Perry has noted,

> A writer like *Phaedrus* or *Babrius* seems to feel that his first duty is to be interesting, and that any story can be given a moral of some kind, if necessary, once the story is finished and the entertainment has been delivered. The result is, as we noted above, that so many different kinds of story have been brought into the fable-books, or otherwise associated with *Aesop*, that they cannot be comprehended under a single definition ("Fable" 69).

Perry goes on to observe that a work may be simultaneously a fable and also "a fairy-tale (*Märchen*), an aetiological nature-myth, a debate between two rivals (*Streitgedicht*), a myth about the gods, a novella, an anecdote, or a jest" ("Fable" 70). I would add that many works of science fiction are called fables, as is practically any film with a discernable message. Gert-Jan van Dijk, after making a comprehensive summary of definitions of the fable, presents his own rather inclusive definition: "a fictitious, metaphorical narrative" (113). The question would seem to be: what literature does not fit this definition?

Most useful definitions of the fable concentrate on the fable's function, and indeed the ancients defined it by its function: "a fictitious story picturing a truth" (Theon of Alexandria, Apthonius , and Nicolaus of Myra, qtd. in "Fable" 74). Perry's definition emphasizes the purpose of the fable, which he says "relates a fictitious event in the past for the obvious purpose of illustrating an ethical truth" ("Fable" 68), though he also substitutes "general truth or principle" for "ethical truth" (68). The distinction is important: G.E. Lessing, the first important modern theorist of the fable, argued that an ethical element was essential, but many critics have disputed this[5]; certainly there are many works commonly accepted as fables which make an observation without apparent ethical comment, or from which various readers (and editors) have drawn quite different, even contradictory morals. It is worth noting that the moral at the end of a fable, or the epimythium, was not always a component of the fable; it is "only an editor's privilege" (Blackham xiii), and many an editor has exercised the privilege of differing wildly from other editors in his or her summation of the meaning of an apparently straightforward fable. Just as the meaning of a particular fable shifts according to its reader, the purpose

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[5]Perry reports that "In his study of *"Sinntypen"* Wienert (p. 86) finds that the majority of the fables do not teach moral truths, but matters of worldly wisdom and shrewdness (*Lebensklugheiten*), and that even the moral lessons are formulated, more often than not, on that basis" ("Fable" 74).

and form of the fable as a genre have shifted over time; it is ethical only when the reader, or, depending on your critical stance, the author, chooses to make it so.

Laura Gibbs proposes a somewhat more restrictive functional definition that does not include an ethical requirement: "a brief and witty exemplum based on the punishment or prevention of a mistake[6]." Pack Carnes offers a sort of recipe for the fable, as follows:

> 1) it is a short narrative, with a fairly standard structural format; 2) it generally contains a single motif or narrative type or a short concatenation of simple motifs; and 3) it is an implicit or explicit general metaphor (generally explicit in its more modern forms, as a "moral" tag line or epimythium), that is instructive, prescriptive, descriptive, and paranaetic[7]. (6-7)

Perhaps a glimpse at the origin of the fable would help to explain the variety of theories surrounding it.

The history of the fable begins with the wisdom literature of virtually every early civilization: short pithy sayings and maxims, often useful to parents in instructing children. Brevity and the memorable illustration of a single point (an observation, ethical or otherwise) are clearly founding qualities in the fable. In India, fables were used to teach political science and in Mesopotamian literature of the 18th century BC, collections were made of one-sentence fables which are regarded as precursors to Aesop (Blackham, see footnote 4). Aesopic fables were used to teach rhetoric in the classical period in Rome, a use of fables which has proven persistent: *Aesop's Fables* remained in grammar

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[6]Gibb points out that Janina Abramowska does for the Aesopic fable what Vladimir Propp did for the Russian fairy tale in her structural analysis of Ignacy Krasicki's Polish fables. Abramowska proposes two primary functions in the fable, "M" and "R", "M" standing for *mylcy si* or "maker of a mistake" and "R" for *rezoner* or the "reasoner." Her system emphasizes the didactic nature of the fable.

[7]Like many terms used by fable scholars, this one is unknown to the OED or to any other physical dictionary I can locate, but this word, more often spelled "paranetic," is defined on various theological web sites as "advisory, exhortatory, hortatorical" and derives from the Greek word paranesis, "which means to 'advise' or give 'counsel'" (Branch). The paranetic work offers advice of a moral, ethical or practical nature. There is a more detailed definition at: http://www.centerce.org/GlossaryLink.html.

schools in England into the eighteenth century, and remain popular as children's literature.

These fables frequently employ animals, most of whom talk, but animals are not an essential element of the fable, and animal tales are distinct from animal fables. Stith Thompson says of animal tales:

> They are designed usually to show the cleverness of one animal and the stupidity of another, and their interest usually lies in the humor of the deception or the absurd predicaments the animal's stupidity leads him into. The American Indian series of stories of coyote and the popular European cycle of the fox and the wolf, best known in America as the tales of Uncle Remus, are outstanding examples of this form. (*The Folktale* 9)

According to Thompson "The moral purpose is the essential quality which distinguishes the fable from the other animal tales" (10). This moral purpose, or at least this didacticism, is well served by animal agents. The fable is frequently "peopled" by animals because they suggest essential qualities rather than shaded, complex individuals: in the fable "the wolf will be always wolfish; the fox will always be foxy" (Chesterton viii).

If one were to set a fable in the present, make it more or less realistic and replace the moral and the didactic purpose of a fable with a comic one (usually low-brow), one would have a *fabliau*, though most often we find that the "present" falls in the halcyon days of the *fabliau*, the thirteenth century[8]. Gibbs suggests that the fable, though not necessarily concerned with ethics, is didactic, and in particular it teaches by the

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[8]In his introduction to *The Canterbury Tales* in *The Riverside Chaucer* Larry Benson says of the fabliau: "the tales of the Miller, the Reeve, the cook, the Friar, the Summoner, the Merchant, the Shipman, and the Manciple, as well as The Wife of Bath's Prologue, all in varying degrees reflect its influence. A fabliau is a brief comic tale in verse, usually scurrilous and often scatological or obscene. The style is simple, vigorous, and straightforward; the time is the present, and the settings real, familiar places; the characters are ordinary sorts . . . . and the plots, convincing though they seem, frequently involve incredible gullibility in the victims and of ingenuity and sexual appetite in the trickster-heroes and -heroines" (7).

representation of an error, ethical or otherwise. Early in her dissertation Gibbs shows how a report of a crow that added stones to a jar of water to raise the water level to within its reach has been reported as natural history by Pliny; as a tale of an exotic creature by Plutarch and Aelian (the crows of far-off Libya are said to do this; in Libya, the exotically talented crows might well be Manitoban); and finally as an Aesopic fable by Avianus, whose crow first mistakenly applies force to the problem, then thinks of the pebbles and chides itself for the mistake of trying force where wit was required. For Gibbs, this illustrates the fundamental quality of the fable: the mistake punished or averted, but always mocked[9]. It is a school of hard knocks that allows its students to observe others receiving, or occasionally avoiding, the hard knocks.

Each of these critics seems to agree that the fable is didactic, and that as such, it is told to illustrate a point and not for its own sake; conflicting interpretations of a story might make it a richer literary work, but for most theorists, this richness would make it a failure as a fable. Perry argues that a fable might be told for its own sake in a "naive and undisciplined or semiliterate society; but rarely in a highly sophisticated environment, such as that of Greece or Rome, where it is normally curtailed and subordinated to other things . . . . No fable is extant in early Greek literature which can be said to have been told for its own sake, or at any considerable length" ("Fable" 72). Fables were useful to public speakers, said Aristotle, and Aristophanes tells us that Aesop used the fable of the eagle and the beetle in an unsuccessful effort to persuade the Delphians not to put him to death. Perhaps Aesop's innovation was to transform the fable from folktale into a rhetorical technique which, except in this last instance, was quite successful. Perry summarizes the Graeco-Roman history of the fable as follows:

> In the first period, previous to the Alexandrian age, the fable appears only in a context, where it is used as an occasional illustration. Naturally, this use of the

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[9]The Aesopic fable is thus "a genre of stultitia [folly] rather than sollertia [cleverness]" (13).

> fable has never been discontinued and was as common in the literature of later antiquity as ever before or since. The second phase, beginning in the Alexandrian age, is that in which the fable is conditioned by its appearing in isolation without a context as one of many consecutive items brought together in a prose collection, the purpose of which primarily was to serve as a repertory for the use of writers and speakers. In the middle ages the counterparts of these ancient collections were the numerous *promptuaria* and collections of exempla and fables which were made for the use of preachers, like the *Summa Praedicantium* of *Bromyard* or the *Narrationes* of *Odo of Cheriton*. The third phase, beginning with *Phaedrus*, is that in which a string of unrelated fables is put into verse and offered to the public as a literary work in its own right. ("Fable" 86)

It is important to remember that the inclusion of a *promythium*, *epimythium* or a moral is "only an editor's privilege; it is exemplary, not restrictive" (Blackham xii). Moreover, I would suggest that the appearance of the ethical element is implicit in this historical scheme. In Perry's second phase, *promythia*, brief descriptions of what the fable is about, would have appeared before the fable; essentially, these were the rhetorician's cheat notes. Later, with Phaedrus's innovation of "a series of fables in verse meant to be read consecutively, each for its own interest and literary value, without a context or a specific application" (*Babrius and Phaedrus* xi) the explanatory notes would appear at the end of the fable, and be called *epimythia*, or morals, and this would indicate a shift from rhetorical device to literature[10], or "books which would be read through for entertainment and moral instruction" ("Fable" 100). According to this scheme, the fable may be seen as a story worth telling in its own right, or one brought up only to illustrate a larger point,

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[10]I do not think it would be fair to infer that the addition of *promythia* or *epimythia* reduce a formerly polyphonous discourse into a monologic one; Abramowitz's schema of M and R (maker of mistakes and reasoner) seems to hold for all early fables. The dialogue always illustrates the foolishness of one course and the wisdom of another, and the maker of the mistake never presents a persuasive defense of his/her/its course of action.

depending on whether the speaker (or author) is a storyteller or a politician, but the stylistic elements would appear to be significant only when the fable is in verse or in a prose collection arranged to be read for its own interest rather than as a speechmaker's promptbook; the public speaker need only get the "facts" right. If the fable were being used rhetorically, conflicting interpretations would mar its usefulness, as indeed they would impair the traditional didactic value of the fable, though if we were to say that a fable is a narrative which appears to illustrate a truth we might leave room for the crafty fabulist to create a fable whose moral only appears to be straightforward. Similarly, brevity is a requirement of the fable only when the fable is serving as a rhetorical device to illustrate a point; the same fable told for its own sake or written in verse might be much longer. According to Blackham, singularity of purpose , or the notion that a fable expresses a single truth, is what distinguishes fable from allegory:

> although both may embody general conceptions in particular forms, with roles in a particular action, fable will do this to focus attention on an illuminated patch exposed to thought, whereas allegory tends to explore labyrinthine manifestations with delight in the description . . . . The image of an Aesopic fable is a single action, in which the elements of meaning derived from the agents are integrated. (xv)

The traditional association of the fable with the proverb may explain why the definitions of the fable are so often proscriptive; observers want to make a clear distinction between the parable and the fable, but they wish to maintain the parallels. It has often been said that the parable and the fable are functionally identical, with the distinction being that the parable could have happened and the fable could not have happened. This may suggest that the fable is an early form of metaphorical thinking, or as G.K. Chesterton observes, the animals in fables are an "alphabet of humanity" used to pass down "some of the first philosophic certainties of men" (x). This may again be too proscriptive, requiring the fable to be too strictly monological and, perhaps, naïve, but it

reflects a very common view of the fable. Blackham distinguishes between the fable and the parable by asserting the fable's ability to stand alone, whereas the parable is always "ancillary, brought in to explain or illustrate a particular point, dependent; not remaining as an independent statement in narrative form for general application, as a fable does" (xiv). A fable may be produced for a particular application or for its general significance, but a parable can only be the former. A fable is a metaphorical narrative written to express a truth graphically, memorably, convincingly, and often amusingly.

One may define more precisely only when one is speaking of a particular fable or a particular fabulist, and at this point I would like to look at the uses to which various authors have put the fable.

Duelling Editors

The history of the various editions of *Aesop's Fables* up to the twentieth century reflects the political history of Europe[11]. Aesopic fables were put into Latin verse by Phaedrus and Greek verse by Babrius, both in the first century AD, Marie de France translated them into French and set them in verse in the late twelfth century, and La Fontaine in the seventeenth century further enshrined them. All three may be said to be producing epideictic[12] writing: they are using the prosaic materials of folk tales and raising them to the level of literature by rendering them in verse. Various editors collected Aesop's fables over this time, and as Perry has noted above, these editors felt free to word these fables as they wished, as well as to mix and match them as they liked. Observers have noted that there was a decline in the popularity of the fable in Europe during the era dominated by the Catholic Church, during which time Aesop's fables were

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[11]The question of European and Asian cross-pollenation in early fables, and in particular the question of similarities between *Aesop's Fables* and the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesa*, Buddhist *Jatakas* and *The Fables of Bidpai*, is a matter I will leave to classical scholars, who have noted similarities but have agreed on little else.

[12]"Adapted for display or show-off; chiefly of set orations" (OED).

used almost solely in schools for teaching Latin and English, while the fable enjoyed some returning popularity in the Renaissance, developing to the point of what Christos Zafiropoulos calls an "'Aesop Craze'" (27) in England in the late seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, a number of English editors had become rather agitated by the possibility that *Aesop's Fables* might produce half-pint Royalists or Republicans (or Catholics or Protestants) depending on the selection of the fables and the morals appended to them. Some collections were created for the education of young aristocrats, and as might be expected the morals reflect the prevalent views of the class and era to which they were being offered. John Dryden (1700) and John Gay (1726) produced collections of Aesopic fables, Gay dedicating his to the young Duke of Cumberland. To edit *Aesop's Fables* was for a time considered a bully pulpit, and thus Samuel Croxall in 1722 published *Aesop's Fables* to counter Sir Roger L'Estrange's 1692 edition, in order to protect the children of England from L'Estrange's presumed popery (L'Estrange had supported the Stuart kings): "Let *L'Estrange* with his slavish doctrine, be banished to the barren deserts of Arabia, to the nurseries of *Turkey*, *Persia*, and *Morocco*" (qtd. in Darton 19). The title of Samuel Richardson's collection of 1753 reveals his high-minded intentions, if also perhaps his naivete: *Aesop's Fables. With Instructive Morals and Reflections. Abstracted from all party Considerations. Adapted to All Capacities; And design'd to promote Religion, Morality, and Universal Benevolence*. Richardson believed Croxall had unfairly demonized L'Estrange, but the passion that inspired Croxall was understandable enough, in an age that believed that "Children are but Blank Paper, ready Indifferently for any Impression, Good or Bad (for they take All upon Credit) and it is much in the Power of the first Comer, to Write Saint, or Devil upon't, which of the two he pleases" (L'Estrange A1).

Whether because of changing theories of child development or because of increasing religious tolerance, translations of *Aesop's Fables* into English have never returned to the level of passion and bitterness reached in the eighteenth century. The

form of the Aesopic fable would still be used for political purposes, but editorial clashes have become much more muted and arcane, scholarly debates hinging, for example, on the rather dicey claims to scholarship made in Olivia and Robert Temple's misleadingly titled *Aesop, The Complete Fables*, as well as such matters as whether the Greek word *gale* means weasel or, as the Temples would have it, "house-ferret" (qtd. in Gibbs' review). I will argue, however, that though creativity and political dissent have fallen into desuetude in the editorial realm, they have been and remain vital amongst those who have used the form of the Aesopic fable.

Variations on Aesop

Lucian of Samosata[13], a Syrian, lived in the second century AD and wrote in Greek, though some works are attributed to him only speculatively. Mennipus was both an influence on Lucian and a character in some of his works; perhaps his use of Mennipus as a persona was a tribute to a fellow satirist. In any event, Lucian was a blender of styles, including Socratic dialogue, Menippean satire, Aristophanic comedy and Aesopic fable, and as such he may have been the first to innovate with the Aesopic fable. Graham Anderson says that in *Lucius, or The Ass*, Lucian "reinterprets Ideal Romance in Aesopic terms, and so forms a hybrid as bizarre as Satiric Dialogue itself" (116). In *The True History* Lucian begins by warning his readers not to believe him, and then launches into an imaginative journey that includes being swallowed by a whale and travelling into space. Lucian proclaims a kind of sovereignty of the imagination, linking comedy and philosophical observation, his philosophy perhaps summarized by Tiresias in Hades in *Mennipus*, who advises Mennipus to "make it always your sole object to put the present to good use and to hasten on your way, laughing a great deal and taking nothing

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[13]Not to be confused with his contemporary, Lucius Apuleius, whose work *The Golden Ass* (called *Metamorphoses* by Apuleius) is similar to Lucian's *Lucius, or the Ass*, both of which are said to be inspired by the *Metamorphoses* of Lucius of Patrae (though Graham Anderson argues that Lucian was in fact the author of the original as well).

seriously" (109 qtd. in Blackham 28). Blackham argues that by lending fable some of the tools of satire, "congenial comic fantasy and irony," Lucian "gave fable its charter: to devise an amusing fantasy focused on something left behind to be thought about, something 'the Muses would not altogether spurn': that is, something memorable" (32).

In the Middle Ages there came into being *Le Roman de Renart*, an animal fable, or rather, epic, composed and added to by a series of writers, some of them anonymous. While it has the talking animals whose behaviour satirizes human folly, this work is much longer than an Aesopic fable, and its style (and arguably its genre) changes from one episode to the next. What is consistent is the title character, Renart, a devious trickster whose misdeeds go unpunished because Renart is the consummate politician, able to talk his way out of the most damning situations. When *Renart* is acting as political allegory it seems most consistently to say that a ruler would be wise to have such villains working for him rather than against him, even at the cost of their corrosive influence. Blackham summarizes the *Roman de Renart* thus: "What does emerge, apart from parody, is at first a playful satire on the behaviour of men and women in the institutions of their time and in domestic scenes: their cupidities, lusts, deceits, revenges, whims, predicaments, frights; their relationships and solidarities, temporary or enduring; above all, their hypocrisies" (43).

Edmund Spenser, best known for the allegorical *Faerie Queene*, created in *Mother Hubberd's Tale* a "sustained fable . . . that recalled the forgotten *Renart* and carried the developed beast fable into the eighteenth century" (Blackham 71). *Mother Hubberd's Tale* might be termed satire or political fable, as his fox was widely recognized as a caricature of Burghley, "while the ape represents the joint persons of Alençon and Simier at a time when the former was pushing his suit in person and there was a danger of him 'stealing the lion's skin'" (Henderson xii). Spencer's *Shepheard's Calendar* is at times fable, and generally its fabling amounts to political criticism in an age when this was quite dangerous. The *Calender* was published by Hugh Singleton, who had

previously printed John Stubbs's *The Gaping Gulf*, a pamphlet opposing the proposed marriage of Queen Elizabeth to the duc d'Alençon, and for which Stubbs lost his right hand. The *Calender* was printed immediately after *The Gaping Gulf*, one month after the mutilation of Stubbs, and it too opposes the match, but with a wise indirection. Indeed, when the shepherd Diggon explains the meaning of his critique of "false shepheards" to Hobbinol, Hobbinol warns him:

> Nowe Diggon, I see thou speakest to plaine:
> Better it were, a little to feyne,
> And cleanly cover, that cannot be cured. (136-38)

As Robert Lane points out, Spenser's "commentator," E.K., who writes the introduction and provides politically harmless explanatory glosses, is now generally thought to be Spenser himself (Edmund Kalenderer according to one observer). Just as the target of *Mother Hubberd's Tale* may be read as general character flaws or as specific individuals, *The Shepherd's Calendar* may be read in these two ways, and this dual possibility is identified by Annabel Patterson as a "dichotomy in the cultural history of the fable, a split between a tradition of moral application that was eminently suitable for pedagogy and a tradition of political functionalism that was not" ("Fables of Power" in *Politics of Discourse* 274). Robert Lane suggests that Spenser used these diverging traditions to invite a double reading: "Spenser's strategy in the *Calender* was . . . to exploit this dichotomy, encouraging his readers to look for the old story of unequal power relations, even as E.K.'s commentary leads them toward a moral and banal solution" (42). The "moral," then, provides a safe, general interpretation, the very banality of which points the canny reader to a more politically trenchant and specific interpretation. Thus the argument to the February eclogue is intended to mean precisely the opposite of what it says: "This Æglogue is rather morall and generall, then bent to any secrete or particular purpose" (17).

Lyric poetry was until this time passed around the court in manuscript form, but by publishing this work Spenser was delivering his message to social classes lower than the court, which for Lane was a political statement in itself: "Advertising its aim to 'goe but a lowly gate emongste the meaner sorte' (101), the text asserts the existence within Elizabethan culture of the lower classes and their participation, through reading, in public affairs" (27). This would hardly appear revolutionary until we consider that at this time silence was a duty of the lower classes second only to unquestioning toil, with unity and peace the most prized ideals, sought by unity of religion and obedience to the hierarchy. Lane also points out that when Spenser defends his efforts to restore archaic words to English, he inverts the top-down theory of linguistic authority, for he says that such words are "fittest for such rustical rudeness of shepherds . . . that they bring great grace, and, as one would say, authority to the verse" (*Shepherd's* 4). *The Shepherd's Calendar* is not precisely fable[14], then, but it uses fable in trying to produce a new, politically potent form:

> It attempts to invent (in both Renaissance senses of "find" and "make") a new place for poetry in both its function and its readers. Achieving some distance from the norms and functions of a poetry implicated in court dynamics, the text envisions an enlarged, public role for poetry, which would reciprocally reconstitute its audience as a "public," the foundation of a politically more inclusive commonwealth. (Lane 55)

Francois Rabelais' works, *Pantagruel* (1532) and *Gargantua* (1534, '46, '52 and '64), are certainly not Aesopic fables, but their inventiveness, absolute renunciation of plausibility and seriousness (none-too-subtly indicated by the subtitle "extracting farts from a dead donkey"), and persistent satire of human folly make them kin to the fable. Rabelais invites us in his prologue to approach the text with the fierce concentration we

[14]Lane points out that even when Spenser reproduces Aesop's fable of the fox and the kid in the May eclogue, the valency has changed to make the specific political reading of the fable clear: Spenser puts more of the blame on the mother goat than does Aesop, and dwells on her exit. Elizabeth being the mistress of the loving-but-authoritarian-mother persona, the commentary could hardly be more plain (Lane 101).

would apply to picking a lock to get at a bottle, or that a dog would apply to a bone, and as David Cohen observes, "no sooner has he made his point about the marrow than he withdraws it" (23), mocking the exegetes of Homer and Ovid. Rabelais attacks the Sorbonne in *Gargantua* after it condemned *Pantagruel* as obscene, only to soften his position once he attaches himself to the French Court. He mocks the Catholic Church while saying that he believes in it, attacks the religious orders for gluttony yet exhorts his readers to feast and drink (drinking knowledge and comradeship as well as wine), and in a dozen ways asserts and then contradicts himself, leaving us to wonder whether to credit the attack or the apology, whether to regard this as a mode of satire which compromises to protect the author, or as a philosophy of contradiction, a sort of negative capability for the bawdy-devout. His visits in Book Four of *Gargantua* to a series of ports where various abuses are taken to their ultimate levels may have served as inspiration for Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, but they do not have the fixed moral stance of Swift. If we consider Rabelais' image of the reader at his book like a dog at a bone, followed immediately by his mockery of the search for a transcendent meaning, we might follow Cohen's lead and call this a picture of "a time when two ages overlapped, the new age of research and individualism, with which he was in intellectual sympathy, and the age of the fixed world-order, to which he owed emotional loyalty" (21), or we might conclude that dogs are not transcendentalists but sensualists, but in the end, they must know who their master is[15].

Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1594) might be called a fable, or more likely, an allegory of love, but it is not consistently about love; it is a writer's exercise, truly epideictic writing, or in Richard Wilbur's words: "a concatenation of virtuoso

[15]We might also consider that when the company finds themselves becalmed by Chaneph, or Hypocrisy Island, they escape the becalming by making themselves jolly. Like the retelling of Aesop's fable of the horse and the ass in Book Five of *Gargantua*, in which the ass ceases to envy the horse upon learning that the horse is allowed no sex, and reconciles himself to his hard (heh heh, this *is* Rabelais) life, Rabelais seems to suggest we reconcile ourselves to the imperfect realm of ideals by recourse to the perfectly satisfying world of joy and physical pleasure.

descriptions, comparisons, apostrophes, essays, pleas, reproaches, digressions, laments, and what have you" (1403). *The Tempest*, with its reliance on magic and preoccupation with the trials that beset the love-at-first-sight of two perfect youths, is more fairy tale than fable, though there have certainly been productions which seek to present it as a fable of colonialism.

Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1605) may be seen as a fable, not least because its characters all have emblematic animal names drawn from the bestiaries popular at this time (Knoll 86), and a plot that recalls both the fable of the fox who feigns death in order to catch carrion birds[16] and a branch of the Reynard stories (Knoll 88). Jonson even does us the favour in his prologue of referring to the fable of the play (l 28), but alas, he is referring to the plot. Still, the characters seem to each symbolize a single human characteristic and are named for animals commonly understood to represent each of these characteristics. Jonson is drawing from the tradition of Aesopic fables, and drawing our attention to his borrowing, but it is one of many classical allusions . Like Reynard, Volpone's craft attracts and repels; he is utterly selfish, yet his wit very nearly justifies his uselessness when he boasts that he "wounds no earth with ploughshares" (1.1.34). Because Celia (from the Latin caelum: sky, heaven) is so ethereal, so purely spirit, she cannot be tempted by his offers of luxury, but the reader (or audience) can hardly help but be entranced by his inventive offers, which revel in delight both of sensual pleasure and of shape-shifting:

> Thy baths shall be the juice of July-flowers,
> Spirit of roses, and of violets,
> The milk of unicorns, and panthers' breath
> Gathered in bags and mixed with Cretan wines.

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[16]See D.A. Scheve, "Jonson's *Volpone* and Traditional Fox Lore," *Review of English Studies* 1 (1950): 242-44; Robert Knoll, *Ben Jonson's Plays*, Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1964; Charles A. Hallett, "The Satanic Nature of Volpone," *Philological Quarterly* 49 (1970): 41-55; R. B. Parker, "*Volpone* and *Reynard the Fox*," *Renaissance Drama* 7 (1976): 3-42.

Our drink shall be preparèd gold and amber,
Which we will take until my roof whirl round
With the vertgo; and my dwarf shall dance,
My eunuch sing, my fool make up the antic.
Whilst we, in changèd shapes, act Ovid's tales,
Thou like Europa now, and I like Jove,
Then I like Mars, and thou like Erycine;
So of the rest, till we have quite run through,
And wearied all the fables of the gods. (3.7.213-225)

His delight in the conspicuous consumption of "panther's breath / gathered in bags" and his verbal nimbleness make him much more appealing than the hopeless Dudley Do-Rightism of Bonario's "forbear, foul ravisher! libidinous swine! / Free the forced lady, or thou diest, impostor" (3.7.267-68), so that we are torn between the virtuous but banal Celia and Bonario and the villainous but fascinating Volpone. The fixed moral vision of Celia and Bonario, virtuous though it may be, appears pallid beside the machinations of the shape-shifting "impostor" whose delight in his own intellectual dexterity is infectious:

I glory
More in the cunning purchase of my wealth
Than in the glad possession, since I gain
No common way: I use no trade, no venture;
I wound no earth with ploughshares . . . . (1.1.30-34)

The Aesopic fable is generally thought not to present its reader (or audience) with such a mixed message, and though Volpone is defeated because he is incapable of understanding individuals who act morally, and thus may provide us with a nominal moral regarding the inscrutability (and perhaps invincibility) of innocence to the

wicked[17], his fascination remains. Still, Jonson has employed elements of the fable to establish, and then challenge, the audience's expectations, and if, as Robert Knoll has it, Jonson uses the beast fable so that we "*observe* more than we participate" (92), perhaps Jonson is mitigating any sympathy we might have for Volpone when he is finally defeated.

In 1705 Bernard de Mandeville wrote *The Grumbling Hive: or Knaves turn'd Honest*, which he expanded into *The Fable of the Bees* in 1725. In the later version the fable, as he points out in the Preface, takes up less than a tenth of the book. Explanations take up the rest, and in the edition I looked at, the accusations leveled at him by the Grand Jury of Wessex and by others are printed, together with his responses. Clearly Mandeville had produced a variation on the fable which was longer than the typical fable, but of no less moral and political import, to judge by the passionate (and potentially dangerous) response it provoked. Nevertheless he was not to provide a definition of his new genre, as he observes in the Preface: "I am in reality puzled what Name to give them; for they are neither Heroic nor Pastoral, Satyr, Burlesque nor Heroi-comick; to be a Tale they want Probability, and the whole is rather too long for a Fable . . . . The Reader shall be welcome to call them what he pleases" (A3). In his work Mandeville mocks those "that desirous of being an opulent and flourishing People, and wonderfully greedy after all the Benefits they can receive as such, are yet always murmuring at and exclaiming against these Vices and Inconveniencies, that from the Beginning of the World to this present Day, have been inseparable from all Kingdoms and States that ever were fam'd for Strength, Riches and Politeness, at the same time" (A4). In other words, if one wishes to enjoy the material benefits of capitalism, one had better not complain about the process, or expressed in verse:

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[17]Or, as Robert Knoll has it, the structure of the fable is used to attack sin and, perhaps, Renaissance humanism: "[Jonson] dramatizes his theme by reference to the beast fable which constantly reminds us that unnatural, sinful, men are bestial; that by striving to measure all our actions by human standards, we ironically cease to be human" (104).

> T'enjoy the World's Conveniencies,
> Be fam'd in War, yet live in Ease
> Without great Vices, is a vain
> Eutopia seated in the Brain. (C4)

The popular response was horror at his cynicism, but Mandeville's pithy response is that "Pride and Vanity have built more Hospitals than all the Virtues together" (294).

The inventiveness and originality of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) has sparked a wide range of interpretation. The fourth Voyage in particular, because of the horse-like houyhnhnms, is often described as a fable or an allegory, but the point of the allegory is elusive. Arguing that the diversity of allegorical interpretations of *Gulliver* "may be not so much a sign of the richness, or obscurity, of Swift's thought as of the fact that these interpreters have been working on a false assumption about his technique," R.S. Crane argues that

> [t]he Voyage can be perfectly well understood as merely what it purports to be; namely, a marvelous or fantastic fable, literally narrated, in which the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos are not metaphors or symbols standing for general ideas, but two species of concrete beings, the one beyond any known human experience, the other all-too-possible anywhere, whom Gulliver has been thrown with in his travels and has come to venerate and abhor respectively. The moral or thesis of the fable, on this assumption, is brought home to the reader directly through the story itself, which is essentially the story of how Gulliver, seeing the virtues of the Houyhnhnms "in opposite view to human corruptions" and realizing the "entire congruity" between men and the Yahoos, undergoes an extreme revolution in his opinions and feelings about "human kind." ("Rationale" 333-34)

Certainly *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire, with each book directed at a different aspect of political philosophy and the attendant theories of human nature, with the fourth voyage

presenting man in thrall to his passions (in the case of the Yahoos) and to Right Reason (in the case of the Houyhnhnms)[18]. Crane argues that Swift cannot resist satirizing even the view that he advocates, and suggests that the laughable aspects of Gulliver's behaviour are analogous to the blundering of one who, having escaped Plato's cave, returns but is temporarily blind in the darkness: "It is not surprising, says Socrates, if those who have caught a glimpse of the absolute form of the Good are unwilling to return to mundane affairs, if they seem to act foolishly when they do return, and if their minds long to remain among higher things" ("Rationale" 337). Many readers have been tempted to identify him with Gulliver, and thus with Gulliver's ultimate misanthropy, but Swift's satire of Gulliver provides us with ample clues (not the least of which Gulliver's denial that he receives secret visitors, followed on the next page by his description of a secret visit!) that we are not to place our trust in Gulliver or his judgements. Gulliver is an Everyman, and as such he is flawed, but never more so than when he begins to despise humanity and venerate the logical but bloodless Houyhnhnms. T.O. Wedel argues that the Houyhnhnms are not an ideal but a satire of the Stoic ideal of rational (and unfallen) man[19], juxtaposed with the Yahoos not to idealize Reason but to show its inadequacy; hence this is a satire intended to present man as fallen and in need of redemption. In this view Swift is satirizing the optimism of humanists like John Locke, but also the pessimism of misanthropes like the Gulliver of the latter parts of Book Four.

In personifying character traits Swift borrows from fable and allegory, in incarnating one of these traits in animal form he borrows from beast fable, in using the

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[18]Crane observes that the choice of horses is probably an inversion of the formulation of the neoplatonist Porphyry of the third century A.D.: "The proportion "rational" is to "irrational" as man is to horse occurs more than once in the *Isagoge*; and the juxtaposition, in the same context, of *homo* and *equus* was a frequently recurring cliché in his seventeenth-century followers" ("Houyhnhnms" 405).

[19]They are a satire of Cartesians and Stoics, according to Samuel Holt Monk: the Cartesians because they attribute too much power to reason; and the Stoics because they underestimate the passions, and about whom Swift observed: "The Stoical Scheme of supplying our Wants, by lopping off our Desires, is like cutting off our Feet when we want Shoes" ("Thoughts on Various Subjects" 277).

action of his narrative to invite the reader to contemplate an observation on the human condition he again borrows from fable, as he does in making a character the embodiment of a mistake, if we regard Gulliver's final mania as a mistake. *Gulliver's Travels* is not brief, though it has been argued (by Allan Bloom, for example) that each book focuses on the merits and demerits of a particular political philosophy, so that in this way each book might be regarded as a single long fable. Finally, as a satire, *Gulliver's Travels* shares with fable and with some fairy tales the capacity to present the familiar in a new, revealing light that allows us to see past our prejudices; in Basil Willey's words, the satirist's "effort is always to strip the object satirized of the film of familiarity which normally reconciles us to it, and to make us see it as in itself it really is" (417).

The Oriental Tale

Antoine Galland's translation, in 1704, of the *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, entitled *Mille et Une Nuit*, encouraged a nascent European interest in the East and in the oriental tale. The near absence of knowledge or experience of the East lent a hint of plausibility to the most fanciful depictions of oriental life, and as Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, this perspective helped to foster and define European (particularly British and French) colonialism in the Orient, such that one definition Said offers of Orientalism is that it is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). While Said's argument might be mercilessly distilled to the observation that one culture's view of another culture is inevitably coloured by its own interests, I would like to make the point that the unknown, whether it is the unconscious, the metaphysical, or another culture, presents the writer and the reader with an open field of possibilities (or, if one prefers, an open field of signifiers).

While noting that "the most substantial study of the subject, Martha Pike Conant's *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century*, viewed the oriental tale primarily as a 'natural reaction' against 'the dominant classicism of Boileau'" (xv), Robert

Mack goes on to note that this is a genre full of *female* story-tellers, dominated by prominent female writers and, to a lesser extent, male homosexual writers, though perhaps predictably Johnson's *Rasselas*, which is morally conservative, is often cited as the greatest achievement in the form. As a new genre the oriental tale offered imaginative freedom by virtue not only of a consensus between writers and readers to accept the mysterious and marvelous as real when situated in the Orient, but also of a relative absence of precedent. To be sure, the oriental tale borrowed from romance and the fairy tale, and the didactic intentions of some tales draw from the fable, but at the very least the genre offered novelty in the mixture of models from which one might choose to draw. When Maria Edgeworth opens "Murad the Unlucky" with the following lines, "It is well known that the Grand Seignior amuses himself by going out at night, in disguise, through the streets of Constantinople; as the Caliph, Haroun Alraschid, used formerly to do in Bagdad" (215), she invites us to read her tale as simultaneously plausible and implausible: as Mack notes, she is alluding to the *Thousand and One Nights*, and also perhaps to "the historical Turkish Sultan Osmin III (1754-6), who enjoyed a reputation for wandering about the streets of Constantinople disguised" (272). We are left wondering if the narrator is winking as she says this or complimenting the reader for an uncommon degree of knowledge of the East. If only briefly, the oriental tale is thus capable of occupying a space between realism and more frankly fictional modes, and offering its writers and readers the marvelous possibilities of uncertainty. The decline of the oriental tale in the nineteenth century may be a result of the East having lost some of its novelty for the West, but this is not simply to say that the "fad" of the East was over, but also that, having become a more real and known place, it was no longer a credible nexus of the real and the fantastic.

The Fairy Tale

Like the fable, the fairy tale was passed on orally before it became literature. Marina Warner summarizes the Greek and Latin roots, and the reception, of the precursors to the fairy tale thus:

> Plato in the *Gorgias* referred disparagingly to the kind of tale--*mythos graos*, the old wives' tale--told by nurses to amuse and frighten children. This is possibly the earliest reference to the genre . . . . In Latin, the phrase Apuleius uses is literally 'an old wives' tale' (*anilis fabula*); the type of comic romance to which 'Cupid and Psyche' belongs was termed 'Milesian', after Aristides of Miletus, who had compiled a collection of such stories in the second century A.D.; these were translated into Latin, but are now known only through later retellings. (309)

The fairy tale is generally seen as feminine, because of its etymology, its subject matter, and the circumstances under which it has traditionally been told[20]. It has also been seen as peasant literature when oral, middle class when collected and edited by the Grimms, and upper class when composed or retold (in very expensive editions) by aristocrats, but Warner cautions us against imposing class affiliations on the fairy tale in a facile manner:

> Another noblewoman, Victorine de Chastenay, also wrote that her own mother alarmed her and dominated her, and that she took refuge with her nurse and her nurse's family. The rapports created in *ancien régime* childhood shape the matter of the stories, and the cultural model which places the literati's texts on the one side of a divide, and popular tales on the other, can and should be redrawn. (316)

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[20]Of the etymology of the word "fairy" Marina Warner observes that "it goes back to a Latin feminine word, *fata*, a rare variant of *fatum* (fate) which refers to a goddess of destiny. The fairies resemble goddesses of this kind, for they too know the course of fate" (309), and Karen Rowe points out that at *veillées*, weekly gatherings of farm families in France, women would spin and tell such tales (307), and that "*Contes de fées* are, therefore, not simply tales told about fairies; implicitly they are tales told by women, descendents of those ancestral Fates, who link once again the craft of spinning with the art of telling fated truths. In these women's hands, literally and metaphorically, rests the power of birthing, dying, and tale-spinning" (307).

Warned as we have been by Derrida not to privilege or assign veracity to the oral over the textual, we may nevertheless remark upon some verifiable changes that the fairy tale has undergone in its development into a literary form. Jack Zipes points out that Giovanni Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile, with, respectively, *Le piacevoli notti* (1550-53) and *Lo Cunto de li Cunti* (better known as *The Pentamerone* 1634-36), brought the fairy tale into a written form, but French writers like Mme D'Aulnoy, Charles Perrault, Mlle L'Héritier, and Mlle de La Force:

> created an institution, that is, the genre of the literary fairy tale was institutionalized as an aesthetic and social means through which questions and issues of *civilité*, proper behavior and demeanor in all types of situations, were mapped out as narrative strategies for literary socialization, and in many cases, as symbolic gestures of subversion to question the ruling standards of taste and behavior. ("Disney" 334)

Zipes argues that oral folk tales were "intended to explain natural occurences" and that "the emphasis in most folk tales was on communal harmony. A narrator or narrators told tales to bring members of a group or tribe closer together and provide them with a sense of mission, a *telos*" (333). The generally solitary nature of reading, says Zipes, "violated the communal aspects of the folk tale, but the very printing of a fairy tale was already a violation since it was based on separation of social classes" (335) because literacy, the ability to pay for such books, and for many decades the formal language in which these books were written, were very nearly the exclusive prerogative of the upper class. While to some this may sound like a logocentric idealization of the oral form of the folk and fairy tale, the audiences for the oral and literary fairy tales were clearly distinct, and the tales were shaped to satisfy their audiences.

According to Zipes, the origin of the literary fairy tale in France was "the conversation and games developed by highly educated aristocratic women in the salons that they formed in the 1630s in Paris" (*Beauties* 2). Folk tales were transformed from

peasant stories in part to appeal to aristocratic and bourgeois audiences, but there was also a strain of utopianism; these fairy tales express both a desire for better social conditions and encoded complaint, in the form of ridiculous compliments to monarchs. It has also been argued that the large amount of adventure in the stories was compensatory for the uneventful lives of seventeenth-century French aristocratic women. It was also a means to express intellectual power: "these women were called *precieuses* and tried to develop a *precieux* manner of thinking, speaking, and writing to reveal and celebrate their innate talents that distinguished them from the vulgar elements of society" (*Beauties* 2). In the salons that were formed the composition and telling of fairy tales was not merely an entertainment but an intellectual competition. Many of their fairy tales implicitly argued for greater independence for women and for women to be treated more seriously as intellectuals. As might be expected, these tales reflect the general concerns of the authors' class (the favourite aristocratic subjects of fidelity and proper social comportment), the authors' gender (forced marriage) and the authors' specific political circumstances (the increasingly rigid, arbitrary and absolutist rule of Louis XIV). The result was predictable: "Almost all of the major fairy-tale writers of the 1690s were on the fringe of Louis XIV's court and were often in trouble with him or with the authorities" (*Beauties* 6).

The fairy tale began to be seen as a form fitted for children only when children were seen as needing a genre of their own; in Zohar Shavit's words, "up to the seventeenth century the child was not perceived as an entity distinct from the adult, and consequently he was not recognized as having special needs" (318). Shavit argues that the fairy tale came to be seen as appropriate for the lower classes and children, so that "members of high society could enjoy them only vicariously through children, but since the child was perceived in any case as a source of amusement, adults could enjoy elements of the child's world while openly or covertly considering them part of the world of children, part of a culture different from that of the upper classes" (323). Charles

Perrault, Shavit argues, violates some of the rules of folk tales (for example, the repetitions of three and the virtual prohibition against tragic endings) in order to distance his work from its lowly origins, and to encourage a double reading, one for the child and one for the parent. What later critics read as repressed sexual content, Shavit seems to imply, was in Perrault's case a quite-conscious second-level reading included for the adult audience.

If sexuality was not repressed in Perrault, it certainly was in the collections of the Grimms. Maria Tatar argues that this was not so much because of prudishness as a response to critics and a desire to tailor the stories to children, beginning in the second edition (372-73). The impetus for the Grimms' collecting fairy tales, according to Donald Haase, was to recover and protect a German folk culture against "the Napoleonic occupation of their beloved Hessian homeland" (355), though ironically the source of most of these tales were women of French Huguenot descent. The urge to declare fairy tales, and especially the Grimms' collection of fairy tales, to be a sort of royal road to the unconscious, or to the collective unconscious of the West[21], inevitably comes into conflict with the view of the fairy tale as product of a national culture or of a single author, and where a critic falls between these two camps will have a great deal to do with whether he or she sees the fairy tale as an oral or a literary form. Bruno Bettelheim would fall squarely in the first camp, but fascinating as his analysis of fairy tales often is, it often seems to be invalidated by the fact that for any tale he analyzes, a variant can be identified which is clearly contrary to his interpretation -- an unfair criticism of a literary analysis, perhaps, but a valid one of any analysis of a putatively universal tale. As Haase observes, "Bettelheim's point of view is problematic because what he believes to be universal truths turn out to be the values of nineteenth-century Europe" (359). In Tatar's words,

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[21]Haase points out that "in 1944 W. H. Auden decreed that Grimm's fairy tales are "among the few indispensable, common-property books upon which Western culture can be founded" (353) next to the Bible. Auden may have been responding to the fact that "the abuse of the Grimms' tales by the culture industry of National Socialism has reinforced prejudice against the Grimms' tales" (355).

"Allegorical readings tend to undermine and discredit each other by their very multiplicity. Their sheer number begins to suggest that the story targeted for interpretation is nothing but nonsense, that it veers off in the direction of the absurd, signifying nothing" (8).

We can, however, make some general observations about the editors and authors of fairy tales. The Grimms often increased the violence over that of their source material in order to drive home the lesson (Tatar 365), but "while the Grimms may boil stepmothers in oil or send them down hills in barrels studded with nails, they rarely allow children to endure torture. Andersen, by contrast, promotes what many readers might perceive as a cult of suffering, death, and transcendence for children rivalled only by what passed for the spiritual edification of children in Puritan cultures" (Tatar 212). Perhaps we read Andersen to feel compassion, but this seems to put Andersen in the business of creating small, frail, female victims incapable of lust (or indeed of any sense of self), who are destined for beautiful, and above all, touching, death. Oscar Wilde's fairy tales are similarly tales of suffering, but while Andersen seems to preach the glory of subservience, in Wilde "Beauty, if not salvation, emerges from passionate self-sacrifice, which often takes the form of mortification of the flesh" (Tatar 248), or in the Happy Prince's words, "more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women" (Wilde 259).

Further Definition of the Fable

The fairy tale can be didactic; the fable must be. While the fairy tale may make a point while illustrating wonders, the fable eschews plausibility while making its point. The fairy tale may be defined by its techniques (especially repetitions of three and frequent recourse to magic and to supernatural beings), but in the fable the technique (most often, the representation of human characters or character traits in animal form) is secondary to the function, which is, in Blackham's words, "to show something of general import and importance not generally or not sufficiently recognized" (175). While the characters in a fairy tale, like those in most literature, may engage our sympathy, this is

not the case in the fable: "a fable is an heuristic fantasy, to quicken understanding. There is little or nothing with which a reader may become sympathetically involved[22]; everything is there to facilitate an active mental response. The narrative devices are narrowly ambitious" (Blackham 208). The characters of the fable are significant intellectually, but not emotionally.

The *conte philosophique*, the most famous example of which is Voltaire's *Candide*, is a tale designed to examine a philosophical perspective, so that, like the fable, it is primarily didactic. Candide's conclusion at the end of his adventures, that one must tend one's garden, reflects Voltaire's satirical view not only of overly optimistic philosophies that assert that we live in the best of all possible worlds, but also of the urge for a simple moral to tag onto a story or onto life. A fable is a metaphor that represents some aspect of human behaviour, but as the variety of epimythia that have been assigned to a single fable attest, the fable is a depiction but not a conclusion. Fables have been used persuasively at least since Aesop, but when abstracted from particular circumstances and collected in a text, the fable becomes an illustration for our consideration. To return once more to Blackham, "the use of promythia and epimythia with Aesopic fables has encouraged the serious mistake of consummating a fable in a proposition, reducing it to illustration. Its main function in more complex fables is exposure . . . . It can be said that the poles of the fable's sphere are memorable illustration of the familiar and exposure of the unrecognized" (176). A fable may be plausible or implausible, it may be enacted by animals, cyborgs or by everyday individuals, but it must distill some aspect of human behaviour for our consideration. The target of an allegory is more specific; that of a fable is general. We may ennumerate a host of correspondences between the Faerie Queen and Elizabeth I, but in a fable the correspondence is between one of the characters and a

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[22]Blackham notes that G.E. Lessing pointed out the unsuitability of sympathy in fables in an essay in 1759 (102).

human trait, and the correspondence is usually single-faceted. This generality may save the dissident, for to prosecute the author of a work against tyranny in general not only identifies one as the tyrant[23], but also implies that the prosecutor is weakened by any criticism of tyranny. Moreover, this generality makes the fable stealthily persuasive; one may be persuaded of the injustice of a behaviour before one recognizes the correspondence between the depicted behaviour and one's own. Fables can be sneaky. In the words of Ernest Rhys, "But, indeed, it is one of the tests of a good fable that it has an air of innocence in all its sleight or subtlety, and belongs to the childhood of the world. It does not seem to depend on any one language or race for its character" (xi).

[23]In observing the efficacy for political dissidents of using Aesop's name as a nom de plume (while folktales are otherwise anonymous), Joseph Jacobs argues that the fable was produced under tyrants, and "The Fable is most effective as a literary or oratorical weapon under despotic governments allowing no free speech. A tyrant cannot take notice of a Fable without putting on a cap that fits" (38).

Chapter Two: Magic Realism

> *A quota system is to be introduced on fiction set in South America. The intention is to curb the spread of package-tour baroque and heavy irony. Ah, the propinquity of cheap life and expensive principles, of religion and banditry, of surprising honour and random cruelty. Ah, the daiquiry bird which incubates its eggs on the wing; ah, the fredonna tree whose roots grow at the tips of its branches, and whose fibres assist the hunchback to impregnate by telepathy the haughty wife of the hacienda owner; ah, the opera house now overgrown by jungle. Permit me to rap on the table and murmur 'Pass!' Novels set in the Arctic and the Antarctic will receive a development grant.* (Barnes 99)

The above epigraph, from Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*, betrays a certain glib disdain for the overwhelmingly South American phenomenon of magic realism[24], revealing a sense that a once unique, revolutionary, even visionary style of writing had become ubiquitous and formulaic: the eccentric made safe, the experiment made reliable genre[25]. Borges himself has expressed a similar reservation:

> I feel that the kind of stories you get in *El Aleph* and in *Ficciones* are becoming rather mechanical, and that people expect that kind of thing from me. So that I feel as if I were a kind of high fidelity, a kind of gadget, no? A kind of factory producing stories about mistaken identity, about mazes, about tigers, about

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[24]Of the various competing terms, including magical realism, *lo real maravilloso americano* (the marvelous American reality) and "the boom", I will refer to this form throughout as magic realism.

[25]It may also betray resentment over the perception that any excursion outside the bounds of realism will be judged according to how well it emulates classic magic realist works; hence novels set in the Arctic and the Antarctic stand as bold rejections of the paradigm.

> mirrors, about people being somebody else, or about all men being the same man or one man being his own mortal foe. (qtd. in Burgin 130)

Every genre has its familiar devices, but the frustration Barnes and Borges express is particularly strong, I believe, because magic realism is relatively new, its promise revolutionary, and its influence widespread, so that its descent to the status of mere genre, limited as are all genres, seems a precipitous fall. Barnes suggests that more than the devices have become predictable: the knowledgeable reader knows the contradictions, the ironies, even the politics to be expected; moreover the reliably South American setting suggests that the reality that magic realism confronts is solely the polarized world of peasants and hacienda-dwellers. Latin Americans are presented with a generally pleasing self-portrait whose very existence constitutes an avowal of cultural vitality and legitimacy, and others are offered a glimpse of a romantic world whose magical quality seems to be underwritten by its foreignness. There is also a problem of identification: as Stephen Slemon has observed, "In none of its applications to literature has the concept of magic realism ever successfully differentiated between itself and neighboring genres such as fabulation, metafiction, the baroque, the fantastic, the uncanny, or the marvelous, and consequently it is not surprising that some critics have chosen to abandon the term altogether" (407).

Yet the potential of magic realism is formidable. By presenting elements of the magical, the marvelous, or the mythical in a narrative which otherwise obeys the conventions of realism, magic realism presents two worldviews widely held to be contradictory and refuses to recognize the contradiction: the ancient and the modern, the scientific and the mythical are both affirmed in a kind of contemporary negative capability. Though all fabulous writing, when it appears in a Western society that is overwhelmingly positivist in outlook, may be said to bring to our attention a gap between the imagined versus the everyday or the ideal versus the real, magic realism brings these two perspectives into particularly close contact. Whether or not magic realism fulfilled

its promise to open up a new field of possibility for literature, its influence on twentieth-century writing became broad on the strength of this promise. In this chapter I will summarize the often-heated debate over the origin, nature and potential of magic realism, its relationship to postmodernism, and the relationship of both these to the fables and fabulation of the twentieth century. I will address magic realism as a geographical/cultural entity, and its relationship to the fantastic, the romantic, counter-realism, postmodernism, postcolonialism and literature of dissent.

The term *magic realism* was first coined by the German art historian Franz Roh to describe a movement in painting after World War I that grew out of a dissatisfaction with Expressionism, but as Irene Guenther observes, Roh's term was appropriated into the literary world in South America:

> Introduction of Roh's Magic Realism to Latin America occurred through the Spanish translation and publication of his book by the *Revista de Occidente* in 1927. Within a year, Magic Realism was being applied to the prose of European authors in the literary circles of Buenos Aires. The unprecedented cultural migration from Europe to the Americas in the 1930s and 1940s, as the muses fled the horrors of the Third Reich, might also have played a role in disseminating the term. (61)

Though they may initially have regarded it as a European form, South Americans made magic realism their own, producing and reading it with such avidity that it became known simply as "the boom"; debates about why the form caught fire in South America, and whether it was in fact uniquely South American, were perhaps inevitable.

Magic Realism as a Geographical/Cultural Mode

Several critics have argued that magic realism is a form uniquely suited to describe a land where several cultures co-exist, interpenetrate, and hybridize within communities and within individuals, many of whom may regularly attend both Catholic

mass and African candomble, refusing to be disturbed by the contradictions between (some would add, within) these theologies. Alejo Carpentier thus rechristens the genre *lo real maravilloso americano* (the marvelous American real) and locates its blending of the traditions of realism and the fabulous in the hybridity of the Americas: "Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [*mestizaje*], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real?" (*Marvelous* 88). According to this perspective, magic realism finds not just a receptive audience in South America, but the very incarnation of its worldview. What we have then is realism, Latin American style.

Despite his celebration of hybridity, Carpentier is at pains to deny any relationship between South American magic realist literature and its European precursors, often drawing upon cultural stereotypes, specifically those of an effete European culture that cannot hope to generate a form so clearly born of rugged and virile South American stock. For Carpentier, magic realism is no intellectual exercise, or cannot be merely that:

> But clearly there is no excuse for poets and artists who preach sadism without practicing it, who admire the supermacho because of their own impotence, invoke ghosts without believing that they answer to incantations, who establish secret societies, literary sects, vaguely philosophical groups with saints and signs and arcane ends that are never reached, without being able to conceive of a valid mysticism or to abandon the most banal habits in order to bet their souls on the terrifying card of faith. (*Marvelous* 86)

As far as Carpentier is concerned, the magic realism of Franz Roh is dry experiment, while "on the other hand, the marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin America. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace" (*Marvelous* 104).

Magic realism is thus realism (in the sense of verisimilitude) Latin American style; it presents the external world as we agree that it is, when *we* are Latin Americans. Another way that Carpentier expresses this is by defining Latin American reality, and magic realism, as both being baroque:

> Because all symbiosis, all *mestizaje*, engenders the baroque. The American baroque develops along with *criollo* culture, with the meaning of *criollo*, with the self-awareness of the American man, be he the son of a white European, the son of a black African or an Indian born on the continent--something admirably noted by Simón Rodríguez: the awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a *criollo*; and the *criollo* spirit is itself a baroque spirit" (*Baroque* 100).

By noting the kinship of magic realism and the baroque, Carpentier may have undermined his own argument; the baroque is not a genre but a mode, and Amaryll Chanady argues that "Magical realism, just like the fantastic, is a literary mode rather than a specific, historically identifiable genre, and can be found in most types of prose fiction. It does not refer to a movement, which is characterized by particular historical and geographical limitations and a coherence which magical realism lacks" (*Magical* 16-17).

Kafka as Forbear

The notion that a literary form and its attendant worldview (and indeed the assumption that this form is tied to a single worldview) is the natural expression and exclusive property of a particular culture or geographical region is certain to meet opposition from several fronts; while few contemporary critics will argue that literature is an 'independent verbal object' unsullied by the circumstances of its production, the diversity and porousness both of cultures and of genres would seem to guarantee that any critic seeking to claim ownership of a genre on behalf of a particular culture would have to qualify such a claim to the point of meaninglessness. Moreover, there are more

particular challenges to the notion that magic realism is the incarnation of reality as Latin America sees it. Amaryll Chanady counters those who would ascribe magic realism by a "naive essentialist argument to the supposed marvelous reality of the continent" by pointing out that this argument ignores, among other things, "the importance of positivism in Latin America" ("Territorialization" 141, 126). Rawdon Wilson refers to Carpentier's "geographical fallacy" (223), but one might also characterize it as a sort of anxiety of cultural influence; certainly Carpentier indulges in cultural essentialism, even if this essence is one of hybridity.

Rather than springing autocthonously from the Latin American soil, Angel Flores suggests that the roots of literary magic realism are European, migrating from Kafka's Prague to Latin America via Jorge Luis Borges. Flores dates the birth of magic realism in Latin America as coming in 1935 with Borges' collection *Historia universel de la infamia* [*A Universal History of Infamy*], and notes that this publication came "at least two years after he had completed a masterly translation into Spanish of Franz Kafka's shorter fiction" (113). Flores points out that Gregor Samsa's transformation into a monstrous vermin "is not a matter of conjecture or discussion: it happened and it was accepted by the other characters as an almost normal event" and goes on to say that "the practitioners of magical realism cling to reality as if to prevent "literature" from getting in their way, as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to supernatural realms" (116). What Kafka and the magic realists have in common, according to this view, is the wish to present the irrational in a way that refuses to be symbolic or otherworldly; the irrational is presented as resolutely of this world.

Countering Flores, Luis Leal argues that Borges' work is not magic realist[26], and further argues that Kafka's work is distinct from magic realism by virtue of a characteristic identified by Borges himself:

> In the prologue to *The Metamorphosis* Borges makes the astute observation that the basic characteristic of Kafka's stories is "the invention of intolerable situations." And we might add: if, as Professor Flores notices, in Kafka's story the characters accept the transformation of a man into a cockroach, their attitude toward reality is not magic; they find the situation intolerable and they don't accept it. In the stories of Borges himself, as in those by other writers of fantastic literature, the principal trait is the creation of infinite hierarchies. Neither of those two tendencies permeates works of magical realism, where the principal thing is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. The existence of the marvelous real is what started magical realist literature, which some critics claim is *the* truly American literature" (121-22).

Leal goes on to say that "in magical realism key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surrounding reality (as the realists did) or to wound it (as the Surrealists did) but to seize the mystery that breathes behind things[27]" (123). Leal's rejection of Kafka as a progenitor of magic realism depends upon a reading of Kafka as psychodrama, a reading convincingly refuted by

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[26]Lois Zamora's claim that the source of Borges' magic realism is "the nineteenth century U.S. romance tradition" (508) is a further suggestion that Borges has been more more cosmopolitan in his influences than has the mainstream of magic realism.

[27]Scott Simpkins identifies what may be the clearest demonstration of the capacity of magic realism to recover the marvelous in the everyday: "Borges's 'The South' presents a character who realizes that the events in *The Thousand and One Nights* are 'marvelous, but not so much more than the morning itself and the mere fact of being'" (Borges 170, qtd in Simkins 152).

Walter Benjamin[28] and later by Deleuze and Guatarri[29]. It seems to me that "to seize the mystery that breathes beneath things" is very much part of what Kafka and Borges seek to do. The exclusionism of Carpentier and Leal may reflect the proprietary inclination of a young culture that knows it has got hold of something good. They seek to legitimize magic realism by virtue of its uniqueness, while Flores seeks to do the same in part by establishing its relationship to European literature. In the end, the debate grows less relevant as magic realism grows more international; the very hybridity that made South America such fertile ground for magic realism also ensures that this form will grow and hybridize in other cultures.

Rather than debate which works deserve inclusion in the canon of magic realism, Wendy Faris observes that some critics prefer to identify two strands of magic realism, noting that they appear to be bounded geographically as well as semantically:

> Jean Weisgerber makes a similar distinction between two types of magical realism: the "scholarly" type, which "loses itself in art and conjecture to illuminate or construct a speculative universe" and which is mainly the province of European writers, and the mythic or folkloric type, mainly found in Latin America. These two strains coincide to some extent with the two types of magical realism that Roberto González Echevarría distinguishes: the epistemological, in which the

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[28]To briefly summarize Benjamin's argument: "There are two ways to miss the point of Kafka's works. One is to interpret them naturally, the other is the supernatural interpretation. Both the psychoanalytic and the theological interpretations equally miss the essential points" (127).

[29]In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* Deleuze and Guattari argue against interpretations of Kafka based on psychology or notions of failure, perspectives which they feel seek to territorialize his literature, whereas "the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (16), "a second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political" (17), and "the third characteristic of minor literature is that in it everything takes on a collective value . . . . But above all else, because collective or national consciousness is 'often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down,' literature finds itself positively charged with the role of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation" (17). Briefly, as the product of a Jew writing in German in Prague, Kafka's writing gives voice to his culture's disposession rather than to psychological struggles unique to himself.

> marvels stem from an observer's vision, and the ontological, in which America is considered to be itself marvelous (Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*). (165)

Scott Simpkins calls these approaches phenomenological and ontological (147), and Jeanne Delbaere calls them intellectual and popular (76), citing Borges and Márquez respectively as the fathers of the two strains. These divisions, scholarly, epistemological, and phenomenological on the one hand and mythic, folkloric, and ontological on the other, might be said to be separated according to Carpentier's criterion of faith; in the mythic strain, the magic is presented through the eyes of believers (in myth, in magic), while in the scholarly strain the magic is an ironic representation of the shortcomings of belief systems[30]. To identify the scholarly and mythic strains as representing, respectively, distinctly European and Latin American (or Native American) worldviews would be naive and could easily descend into ethnocentrism, but sorting these two strains of magic realism according to their degree of faith in belief systems seems logical and justified. The advantage of the approach of observers like Faris is that rather than simply praising the faithful and casting out the unbelievers, they suggest that magic realist texts act less dogmatically, frequently interrogating belief systems. The mythic strain encourages a sort of relativism by alternately seducing the reader into one belief system and then another, while the scholarly strain encourages scepticism toward worldviews in general by undermining one in particular, specifically by emphasizing the shortcomings and logical inconsistencies of the dominant (European) positivist worldview[31].

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[30]Delbaere observes that in the scholarly strain "the magic generally arises from the confusion of the tangible world with purely verbal constructs similar to it but without their conterparts in extra-textual reality: playful, metafictional and experimental it has much in common with the spirit of fabulation" (76).

[31]As will become apparent by their observations, some critics consider only the mythic strain when they speak of magic realism; they may well regard scholarly magic realism as a branch of postmodernism. It may indeed be that when a Latin American author writes postmodernism, he or she is called magic realist. I will reserve most of my comments on the scholarly strain of magic realism for the "magic realism and postmodernism" section of this chapter (45-48).

An Archetypal Perspective

I have suggested that the struggle over "ownership" of magic realism is a matter of cultural prestige, but a post-colonial critic might frame this more specifically in terms of cultural reappropriation, and similarly an archetypal critic, taking the "magic" in magic realism to be the irruption of the mythic or of the collective unconscious, might cast the struggle in terms of cultural identity. Northrop Frye, speaking of a passage in the Egyptian tale of "The Two Brothers" wherein the magical intervenes in an otherwise realistic story, notes that:

> This incident is no more a fictional episode than anything that has preceded it, nor is it less logically related than any other episode to the plot as a whole. But it has given up the external analogy to "life": this, we say, is the kind of thing that happens only in stories. The Egyptian tale has acquired, then, in its mythical episode, an abstractly literary quality; and, as the story-teller could just as easily have solved his little problem in a more "realistic" way, it appears that literature in Egypt, like the other arts, preferred a certain degree of stylization. (135)

From this observation we might conclude that readers and writers of magic realism have a taste for stylization; this meshes nicely with Carpentier's observations on the prominence of the baroque in Latin American art. Magic realism alters the novel to suit a taste for what may be called stylization or the baroque.

Contrary to the common perception of him as defender of the unalterable boundaries between genres, Frye described the themes and perspectives common to particular modes of writing, while noting that crossover is not only possible, but is often subject to market forces: "the forms of prose fiction are mixed, like racial strains in human beings, not separable like the sexes. In fact the popular demand in fiction is always for a mixed form, a romantic novel just romantic enough for the reader to project his libido on the hero and his anima on the heroine, and just novel enough to keep these projections in a familiar world" (305). I would suggest that Frye would regard the

"magic" passages in magic realism as operating in the romance mode, and thus on an archetypal, rather than a social, plane, as his words would indicate:

> The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the conception of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their *personae* or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness. The romancer deals with individuality, with characters *in vacuo* idealized by revery, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages. (304-05)

Paradoxically, then, the romance mode is less social yet more revolutionary, by virtue of the mercurial, ungrounded nature of the individual abstracted from a social setting. The alternation between modes in magic realism may suggest an ambivalence to (or "problematization" of) such binaries as archetype versus stable identity, subjective intensity versus objective diffusion of perspective, and allegory versus social observation. In brief, the techniques of magic realism draw the categories of the social and the individual into question.

The Fantastic

Scholarship on the fantastic can shed light on magic realism, and in turn, on fables and fabulation, so at this point I will briefly review the observations of two theorists of

the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov and Irène Bèssiere, and one theorist of magic realism who synthesizes their arguments. In order to define the fantastic, Todorov describes it as being bordered on the one side by the uncanny and on the other by the marvelous, which he diagrams as follows:

uncanny	*fantastic-uncanny*	*fantastic-marvelous*	*marvelous*

If the fantastic functions as a genre in Todorov's scheme, it can only do so as a frontier between two other genres, a frontier which is by its nature evanescent; the fantastic *is* a hesitation, a moment of doubt. Todorov argues that when unearthly events take place in fiction, the reader experiences uncertainty about whether the explanation will be supernatural or rational. If the agency is supernatural, the genre is 'the marvelous'; if it is rational, the genre is 'the uncanny', and during the period of uncertainty, 'the fantastic' functions as a type of generic instability. Ultimately, the fantastic-uncanny resolves into the rational, and thus the uncanny; while the fantastic-marvelous resolves into the supernatural, and thus the marvelous. The fantastic, then, is short-lived, except in works like "The Turn of the Screw," where the reader is left with lingering uncertainty as to the nature of the events.

Todorov also defines the narrative tense or time period which is appropriate to these genres: the uncanny is allied to the past, because it refers the inexplicable to known facts, and hence to the past (perhaps Freud's suggestion that the origins of the uncanny lie in primal transgression further explains the connection of the uncanny to the past). The marvelous, being concerned with the unknown and the not-yet-seen (or not-yet-understood, even if it took place long ago in a galaxy far, far away), belongs to the future. Only the fantastic, being characterized by hesitation between two possibilities, belongs to the present, and partakes of the ephemeral nature of the present (how long is 'now'?). Clearly these time designations do not refer to the tense in which the story is narrated but

to the direction in which the reader is pointed in order to make sense of the story, so that the uncanny tale derives its resonance from Jungian shadows in the individual or the collective past; the marvelous, by embracing the unknown, calls upon the reader's sense of the uncertainty of the future; and the fantastic directs the reader to a current, immediate struggle to understand what world this story inhabits. What determines or enacts the generic function of each type is the response of the reader.

A chief type of what Todorov calls the "uncanny" appears to be the detective story, which, in the hands of Edgar Allan Poe, marked an effort to draw the ghost story into the realm of the rational. Todorov notes that in the detective story, the solution tends to be derived from the least probable explanation, and in the fantastic narrative, there is a choice between two solutions, "one probable and supernatural, the other improbable and rational" (49). But "in fantastic texts, we tend to prefer the supernatural explanation; the detective story, once it is over, leaves no doubt as to the absence of supernatural events . . . . Further, the emphasis differs in the two genres: in the detective story, the emphasis is placed on the solution to the mystery; in the texts linked to the uncanny (as in the fantastic narrative), the emphasis is on the reactions which this mystery provokes" (Todorov 49-50).

The belief that the detective story arose as an effort to assert the supremacy of the rational over the irrational is allied to the argument that realism, having risen to a kind of literary ascendancy in the eighteenth century, is therefore the approved voice of Enlightenment ideals, complementing science's discovery of rational laws underlying nature with its own set of laws for explaining human behaviour. Several critics have noted the corollary to this view; the fantastic arose as a reaction against the rationalist triumphalism of realism, so that if realism's conventions represent an agreed-upon series of rules that explain human motivation, the fantastic stands in opposition, giving voice to the irrational and the inexplicable. One might shift Freud's observation on the uncanny, that it "consists of emotional impulses repressed, thus producing anxiety" ("The

Uncanny" 363) onto a social scale, prompting the question of whether the fantastic (or other non-realist modes) enacts or resists repression. In other words, when examining the presence of the supernatural in any text, it is worthwhile asking ourselves whether the supernatural is presented as an irruption of psychically or socially repressed material, and whether this presentation constitutes a revolutionary force or a socially acceptable 'pressure-relief valve' that subverts the possibility for change in society or in the reader's attitude.

Bessière argues that, contrary to modes such as the fairy tale, which constantly remind the reader of their own artificiality, the fantastic text is "thetic": it asserts the reality of the irrational or supernatural events it describes (36-38). Rather.than choosing Todorov's "hesitation" Bessière uses the term "antinomy" to describe the simultaneous presence of the rational and the supernatural in the fantastic text, though one might note that the irresolution between these two worldviews amounts to a permanent hesitation. The reader's response to the fantastic, according to Bessière, is unsophisticated: "Le récit fantastique est peut-être le plus artificiel et le plus délibéré, mais que provoque paradoxalement les réactions les plue naïves de la part du lecteur" (34). As readers, the payoff for our suspension of disbelief, Bessière implies, is a childlike frisson of terror, not a radicalized worldview.

Amaryll Chanady draws out attention to the significance of the narrator's stance, identifying "three characteristics we consider essential to the fantastic and magical realism--the presence of the natural and the supernatural, the emphasis on or resolution of antinomy in the fictitious world, and authorial reticence" (*Magical Realism* 161). In both the fantastic and magic realism the Western notion of reason is confronted with a "coherent code of the supernatural . . . . The difference is that the irrational world view in one represents the primitive American mentality, while in the other, it corresponds to

European superstitions[32]" (21). The fantastic exploits the resulting tension, whereas in magic realism the antinomy is "resolved" by refusing to recognize it or be disturbed by it, even though the implied author and implied reader believe in "conventional norms of reason" (51). In both genres (the fantastic and the magic realist), "the reader plays the game of a naive witness" (102), and the primary distinction is in the use of authorial reticence, or the absence of textual evidence indicating which code is to be believed: "While it creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and disorientation in the fantastic, it facilitates acceptance in magical realism" (30). Chanady appears to be addressing the mythic but not the scholarly strain of magic realism, which runs from the fantastic (in the works of such authors as Julio Cortázar) to the postmodern; magic realism doesn't resolve antinomy so much as exploit it, as in the fantastic, or defuse it by deflating both worldviews, as in the postmodern. Magic realism (of the mythic strain) requires a balance between the two antinomious codes, whatever these two codes may be, though most often this mode amounts to the attempt of a Western worldview to present a Native American or African perspective in a balanced way:

> While the implied author is educated according to our conventional norms of reason and logic, and can therefore recognize the supernatural as contrary to the laws of nature, he tries to accept the world view of a culture in order to describe it. He abolishes the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural on the level of textual representation, and the reader, who recognizes the two conflicting logical codes on the semantic level, suspends his judgment of what is rational and what is irrational in the fictitious world. (25-26)

While the fantastic text confronts the reader as violently as possible with the antinomy between the codes of the rational and the supernatural, the (mythic) magic realist text

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[32]Chanady goes on to say that one way surrealism differs from magic realism is that in the surreal, "heterogeneous elements are juxtaposed by free association, without any specific code of the supernatural determining it" (21).

presents the antinomy but refuses to talk about it. This is not to say that the magic realist text is situated precisely between these two codes; Chanady argues that the implied author,

> implicitly presents the irrational world view as different from his own by situating the story in present-day reality, using learned expressions and vocabulary, and showing he is familiar with logical reasoning and empirical knowledge. The term "magic" refers to the fact that the prespective presented by the text in an explicit manner is not accepted according to the implicit world view of the educated implied author (22).

In other words, the term "magic" refers not to the supernatural, but to the capacity, demonstrated by the implied author and encouraged in the implied reader, to accept contradictory beliefs, or at least to reject the unspoken thesis of the fantastic, that the supernatural threatens to topple the rational.

Rather than resolving antinomies, I suggest that by presenting them side-by-side and refusing to address the contradiction, magic realism encourages the reader to interrogate received notions about reason and the supernatural (or the mythic, or the psychological, depending on the attributes of the particular magic realist text or the strategies of the reader). While the fantastic text presents reason and the irrational as contestatory, mythic magic realism presents them as complementary ways of understanding the world and scholarly magic realism presents them both as intriguing but inadequate ways of understanding the world. Magic realism recovers what rationalism has cast aside, so that "the magicalness of magical realism lies in the way it makes explicit (that is, unfolds) what seems always to have been present" (Rawdon Wilson 226). Realism, aligned with reason and dismissive of the irrational, presents any debate between the two as long-since concluded, and for this reason Gabriel García Márquez calls realism "a kind of premeditated literature that offers too static and exclusive a vision of reality. However good or bad they may be, they are books which finish on the last

page" (*Fragrance* 56, qtd. in Simpkins 149). Moreover, García Márquez claims he "was able to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude* simply by looking at reality, our reality, without the limitations which rationalists or Stalinists through the ages have tried to impose on it to make it easier for them to understand" (*Fragrance* 59-60 qtd. in Simpkins 149). This claim might be said to put García Márquez into Carpentier's camp, with the important distinction that "our reality" may not imply that "we" are Latin American so much as "we" feel that rationalism offers a facile or incomplete view of the world. "We" may, for example, be postmodernists.

Magic Realism and Postmodernism

Critics have long recognized a relationship between magic realism and postmodernism; Geert Lernout goes so far as to say that there is a difference in name only, arguing that "what is postmodern in the rest of the world used to be called magic realist in South America and still goes by that name in Canada" (129). Lernout's generalization is sufficiently bold to ensure both that it is frequently quoted, and that it overstates the case. What we can say is that there are a number of similarities between the forms, and that there is a potential parallel between magic realism's contradictory codes and postmodernism's "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv)[33]. Depending on textual clues and the reader's strategy, the authorial reticence of a magic realist text in the face of oscillations between magic (or mythic) and realist (or positivist) metanarratives may be read as relativizing or undermining two incompatible metanarratives, but I suggest that it inevitably suggests that neither metanarrative is adequate in itself.

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[33]Rather than rehearse the definitions of Lyotard and others, I will simply suggest that postmodernism relies on an aesthetic of indeterminacy which employs self-reflexivity; an "ex-centric" privileging of "marginal" people and beliefs; a persistent scepticism toward unities of time, character, and narrative voice; and a variety of techniques that emphasize the notion that language precedes thought.

There are other similarities, too, between the two modes, one of them being a distrust of language, a quality that is constitutive of postmodernism but which Scott Simpkins also notes in magic realism:

> Despite the various critical disagreements over the concept of magic realism, one element which does recur constantly throughout many magic realist texts, and therefore points to a unifying characteristic, is an awareness of the ineluctable *lack* in communication, a condition which prevents the merger of signifier and signified. Perhaps the problem with this type of supplementation is really nothing more than that of a rigorous, but overwhelmingly frustrated, endeavor to increase the likelihood of *complete* signification through magical means, to make the text -- a decidedly unreal construct -- become real through a deceptive seeming. (148)

While Simpkins is referring to a recurring element rather than an inherent quality, his observations suggest we re-examine some assumptions. Many critics regard the imaginative exuberance of magic realism as an invitation to read in a manner variously described as naive, childlike, or primitive; since the text seems to evade the contradictions between the conflicting "magic" and "realist" codes, it is generally felt that the reader is encouraged to accept the codes in a more or less uncritical way, recognizing them as two incomplete but complementary ways of describing the world around us. Could it be that rather than producing a sort of cross-cultural understanding, a perspective enriched by two worldviews, the contrast between these codes highlights the incompleteness of any language or code? Simpkins suggests that this "deceptive seeming" points to its own inadequacy, so that the creative abundance of magic realism invites the reader to contemplate not so much the richness of the imagination, nor the insufficiency of realism, but to reflect on the imperfect nature of language itself. The simultaneous narratives agitate against the possibility of a metanarrative, for what metanarrative can include conflicting codes? Whether the reader views a magic realist text as an invitation to deconstruct the metanarratives underlying realism, or simply to

note the way in which the "magic" and "realist" perspectives change the way the world looks, may finally come down to a question of how critical or "negatively capable" he or she is disposed to be. But Simpkins' observation suggests that we must pay careful attention to the way in which a magic realist text presents its conflicting codes. Reticence is enigmatic.

The frequent occurrence of metafiction in magic realist texts contributes to the argument that they are "a particular strain" (D'haen 221) of postmodernism. For example, in what may be the archetypal magic realist text, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the history of Macondo and of the Buendias has been recorded and prophesied in the text of Melquiades. We learn that we are reading Aureliano Babilonia's transcription of a family history which is also the history of a community from Edenic beginnings to decay and collapse, a history which is both linear and cyclical because it represents a history of a family, but a family whose members repeat the mistakes of their forbears through ignorance of these mistakes. Melquiades' text has the capacity to record and predict, even to fascinate, but it changes nothing. Depending on their bent, readers may regard this as illustrative of human nature, of the history of Columbia, of Latin America, of the human race, of the capacities and limitations of language, or of some combination of these. Certainly the prospect of literature changing or making sense of human behaviour is treated more ironically in this and other magic realist texts than in modernist ones. Nevertheless, as Wendy Faris notes, metafiction in magic realism seems more anodyne than when it appears in other literary forms: "Magical realism is not alone in contemporary literature in foregrounding metafictional concerns; on the contrary, that it does so joins it with other modern and postmodern writing. But it tends to articulate those concerns in a special light, to emphasize the magical capacities of fiction more than its dangers or inadequacies" (176). Perhaps what Bessière calls the "thetic" quality of magic realism makes the reader more disposed to read metafictive passages in magic realist texts as celebrating the imagination rather than producing a *mise en abîme*.

One aspect of what Carpentier terms the baroque in magic realism, Faris calls extravagance, arguing that "a carnivalesque spirit is common in this group of novels. Language is used extravagantly, expending its resources beyond its referential needs" (184). She suggests that, more than expressing a culture's exuberance, linguistic extravagance stakes out an epistemology, arguing that "using Lyotard's terms, we might say that in magical realist texts, 'the answer is' to 'wage a war on totality,' to 'be witnesses to the unpresentable' --and the irreducible; in sum, to affirm the magic of the storyteller's art" (185-86). Certainly it would be hard to argue that magic realism presents a single, totalizing perspective, and I would argue that while magic realism may present the perspectives of two cultures side-by-side, the hybridity it represents cannot be coalesced into a single coherent code (indeed it is the "realist" but not the "magic" perspective that will demand such a unified, contradiction-free code). From a philosophical perspective, the presence of conflicting codes in magic realism may be regarded as an effort to deconstruct a metanarrative, or the idea of metanarrative, and to carnivalize language further undermines any notion of singular truth. On the surface Faris's postmodern approach may seem incompatible with Carpentier and the rest of the geographical/cultural group, who are after all locating the essence of a culture in magic realism, unless we posit that the Latin American culture is, and all hybrid cultures are, postmodern by virtue of their doubleness. Certainly the structure and use of language in magic realism make it effective for representing an unresolved doubleness, a characteristic which has been described as Latin American by those who concentrate on the conditions that brought it to prominence, as post-colonial by those who note its emergence in cultures outside of Latin America, and postmodern by those who regard it from a perspective more philosophical than social[34].

[34]Readers of a less postmodern bent might argue that the conflicting codes amount to a description of the hybridity from which a new american (the small "a" indicating that this refers to the people and culture of all the Americas) reality is emerging, a state which permits contradiction because it is a becoming rather than a completed state. Those who view magic realism as hybrid or creole may take the conflicting codes to be the building blocks of another code, rather than an implicit assault upon (or deconstruction of) the very

Magic Realism and Postcolonialism

The notion that magic realism sets the Western worldview side-by-side with Native South American (or African, or a blend thereof) worldviews would seem to inevitably politicize the text, but the fact that these codes are parallel, and therefore appear never to intersect, suggests that magic realism's structure constitutes a commentary on its own political inefficacy, or on the impossibility of mutual understanding. Magic realism's reticence, its speaking out of both sides of its mouth, its refusal to bring two perspectives into collision and declare a victor or choose a side, may dull its political impact, unless we understand this impact to be the outlining of an attitude of inclusiveness rather than an expression of a single, authorized worldview. If magic realism constitutes a new culture's awareness of itself (*lo real maravilloso americano*) it would appear to enshrine a divided, compartmentalized consciousness, or perhaps a consciousness that is polyphonous. Amaryll Chanady points out that the qualities Bakhtin ascribed to the novel need not be absent in magic realist works:

> Bakhtin establishes a filiation between the modern novel and the Menippean tradition of satirizing dominant figures and systems, in which the narrative is transformed into a polyphonous integration of subversive discourses, as opposed to the epic, which functions as a foundational narrative affirming official values and versions of history . . . . Narratives that emphasize cultural specificity and difference, identity construction and self-affirmation in the context of neocolonialism frequently exhibit a foundational function analogous to that of the epic, and may *also* be highly critical of dominant paradigms. ("Territorialization" 137)

Magic realism may be a postcolonial foundational narrative, an epic that affirms conflicting values and diverging voices. The fact that in the magic realist text neither the

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idea of such a code. Once again, textual evidence, combined with the disposition of the reader, will be more convincing than a blanket statement on the nature or philosophical essence of magic realism.

mythic nor the positivist codes is capable of explaining the other away (or drowning out the other voice) is a sort of affirmation of alterity, of irreducible difference. We might contrast this duality with the archetypically colonial narrative, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, in which the imperial monologue is permitted to resolve all difference, according to Edward Said: "The conflict between Kim's colonial service and loyalty to his Indian companions is unresolved not because Kipling could not face it, but because for Kipling *there was no conflict*; one purpose of the novel is in fact to show the absence of conflict once Kim is cured of his doubts, the lama of his longing for the River, and India of a few upstarts and foreign agents" (*Culture and Imperialism* 146). Like evil in the Western, conflict in the imperialist text is external, and the thrust of the narrative is to expel it, while magic realism refuses to expel the difference.

Readings of the "magic" code of magic realism as archetypal present a challenge to postcolonial readings because such a reading suggests that "magic" passages present human nature in its eternal, unchanging form and thus discount the possibility of reform of any sort. Lois Zamora suggests, on the contrary, that this may enable political commentary in magic realism:

> My argument, then, is that the effectiveness of magical realist political dissent depends upon its prior (unstated, understood) archetypalizing of the subject, and its consequent allegorizing of the human condition. Magical realists recognize both the cost and the appeal of their discourse of universality, and they negotiate the telescopings of generality and particularity, the accordionlike contractions and expansions of perspective, in a number of ways. (504)

These telescopings may consist, for example, of a family history which stands for the history of a nation, and of competing characters who stand for competing interests within a society. This metonymy is hardly unique to magic realism, but the conflicting codes within the form make it well suited to represent the conflicts within a society which, in David Mikics' words, is characterized by doubleness: "magical realism realizes the

conjunction of ordinary and fantastic by focusing on a particular historical moment afflicted or graced by this doubleness. Since magical realism surrounds with its fabulous aura a particular, historically resonant time and place, the theory of magical realism must supply an approach to history, not merely literary genre" (373). Like the fable, magic realism, in its "magic" aspects, may lull the reader into the sense that the text is innocent, naive, or escapist. The reader need not be a tyrannous king or a Latin American despot in order to be implicated by the text after reflection on its message.

S.F.

Science fiction, or speculative fiction as it is also known, is a mixed bag, as the competing terms may imply. Adventure stories, tales of the supernatural, meditations on the implications of social trends, on the impact of scientific advances, on the form societies might take if freed of various biological, economic, or historical contingencies, Jeremiads on the human cost and paens to the promise of technology, fantasies of the pulpiest sort: all of these belong to the inclusive category of science fiction. Much science fiction clings for dear life (and plausibility) to the conventions of realism, but there are many works which attempt to examine not only other possible worlds, but other possible modes of consciousness and of narration. The term is so broad, in fact, as to be useful only to marketers and fans; in the end, science fiction is any sort of writing that has, to a greater or lesser degree, an interest in science, in the future, or in alternate worlds. Walter Meyers locates science fiction tellingly:

> Certainly, science fiction has some relation, either linear or hierarchical, to fantasy and utopias. And it has some relation, though perhaps an illegitimate one, to weather forecasting and city planning. It diverges from reality no more than economic theory, and is more useful. It is more concerned with human happiness than urban renewal is, and is more aesthetically pleasing. If much of science fiction is wretched art, it is precisely in step with modern painting and music and

> architecture, though it has not equalled the excesses of either elitism or mindlessness notable in all these fields. (3-4)

When science fiction operates as a fable, it does so in a way that is indistinct from other fables; the (highly variable) interest in science is a thematic element which is significant in the marketplace, but not in the form of the narrative. I would argue that fables which happen to be science fiction require no critical tools unique to science fiction.

Fabulation

In its strictest sense, to fabulate means "to relate as a fable or myth" (OED). Robert Scholes uses fabulation as a term to describe a modern form of writing which might be described as counter-realism, or perhaps as tales of mystery and imagination. Scholes' personal reading history is the foundation of the category as he defines it in *The Fabulators*: "In my childhood, Mt. Olympus, The Emerald City, and the great world tree Ygdrasil were parts of the same, continuous geography. Older, I turned to historical novels and detective fiction . . . . Now, I recognize in the writers I have called fabulators the proper grown-up fare for such a boy as I was" (5-6). Scholes owes his sense of the word 'fabulator' to the eighth fable of Alfonce, a framed narrative within a framed narrative, the complexity of which betrays "an extraordinary delight in design" (10), and the presence in both frame tales of a fabulator (or master) who "rejoices" his king (or disciple) with a fable suggests the power conferred on one who can divert others with a story, and the pleasure available from (and necessary to) such a story. Thus

> the fabulator is important to the extent that he can rejoice and refresh us. And his ability to produce joy and peace depends on the skill with which he fabulates. Delight in design, and its concurrent emphasis on the art of the designer, will serve in part to distinguish the art of the fabulator from the work of the novelist or the satirist. Of all narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy. (10)

Scholes notes that the didactic aspect of the fable is also present in modern fabulation, "but in ways which will need considerable qualification as we consider specific authors and instances. For the moment, suffice it to say that modern fabulation, like the ancient fabling of Aesop, tends away from the representation of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (11). Besides pleasure and a delight in form, then, we have a sense that human life can be more accurately represented or observed through non-mimetic means, and that there is a didactic, and more particularly an ethical, end in mind in such fabulation.

Scholes categorizes various instances of modern fabulation as revival of romance, as satire, as picaresque, as allegory and as epic[35]. Briefly, fabulation is romance when its primary goal is to demonstrate "the artificiality of the real and the reality of the artificial" (20), satire when it is moral and the picaresque when it is not[36], allegory when, as in all allegory[37], its characters stand for ideas, and epic when its scope is sufficiently large, though fabulative epic does not confirm a nation's mythology. Scholes suggests that fabulation marks a swing of the cultural pendulum initiated by the exhaustion of the previous dominant mode, realism; thus a work of fabulation may be "an anti-novel in the same sense as Cervantes' work was anti-romance" (19). For this reason Scholes sees allegorical fabulation as a revival of allegory in a post-positivist age (101), with psychology replacing religion as the system underlying most allegorical fabulation, "for the deeps of the psyche are an invisible world also, one which modern men accept with

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[35]Scholes explains why he sees examples of fabulation in comic and allegorical modes when he observes that "The vision of fabulation is essentially comic because it is an instrument of reason; and it is frankly allegorical because it has not the naïve faith in the possibility of capturing the actual world on the printed page which realism requires of its practitioners" (136).

[36]"The moral fable is kin to the larger satire; the amoral fable to the picaresque tale" (36-37).

[37]Scholes observes that in allegorical fabulation as in all allegory, "tension between the ideas illustrated by the characters and the human qualities in their characterization makes for a much richer and more powerful kind of meaning" (99).

the same unquestioning faith once reserved for the invisible world of Christianity" (102). Fabulation is not, however, a retreat from irony and uncertainty to the old reliable answers, or from fragmentation to the wholeness implicitly promised by any narrative that purports to illuminate eternal human qualities. Fabulation is distinct from myth because, in an important way, it refuses to be the story of us all: "Myth tells us that we are all part of a great story. But the fabulators, so clearly aware of the difference between fact and fiction, are unwilling to accept the mythic view of life as completely valid. Against this view they balance one which I am calling the philosophical, which tells us that every man is unique, alone, poised over chaos" (172). Again, Scholes defines fabulation against the realistic novel:

> Just as the realistic novel was rooted in the conflict between the individual and society, fabulation springs from the collision between the philosophical and mythic perspectives on the meaning and value of existence, with their opposed dogmas of struggle and acquiescence. If existence *is* mythic, then man may accept his role with equanimity. If not, then he must struggle through part after part trying to create one uniquely his own" (173).

Both the author and the reader of fabulation engage in this struggle. The fabulator seeks the sort of suspended disbelief once reserved for stories that begin "once upon a time", and at the same time draws our attention to the artificiality of the narrative.

In *Fabulation and Metafiction* Scholes revises *The Fabulators* to incorporate the rise of metafiction, which he feels is "one of the special and important features of the fabulative movement" (*Fabulation* 4). Identifying "fallibilism" as the philosophy that underwrites fabulation as positivism underwrites realism, Scholes suggests that fabulation entails a greater sense of humility than does realism:

> Fabulation, then, means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality. Modern fabulation accepts, even emphasizes, its fallibilism, its

> inability to reach all the way to the real, but it continues to look toward reality. It aims at telling such truths as fiction may legitimately tell in ways which are appropriately fictional. (8)

To the previously-noted qualities of joy, delight in design (which reveals the artificiality of the text) and ethical concern, Scholes seems to have added this sense that the artifice in fabulation is self-conscious and humble, confessing through its artificiality that it is incapable of representing objective reality absolutely faithfully, but by virtue of this confession promising a more faithful representation of the ways in which we perceive the world. This phenomenological approach would appear to allow fabulators to have their cake and eat it too, since using "once upon a time" or other fabulous indicators allows a simultaneous suspension and appeasement of disbelief: as readers we are seduced into the narrative, while as critics we are mollified by the more-or-less overt assurance that this is just a story, with only the most modest claims to truth. One might question whether realistic fiction has ever succeeded in telling more than its legitimate allotment of truth to a thoughtful reader, or indeed whether any reminder of the author's artifice is sufficient to conquer our desire to read a narrative and, on some level, to believe it, but Scholes' point, that the inclusion of what I call fabulous indicators reminds the reader of the author's artifice and thus of the limited, partial nature of the narrative's truth, seems to me indisputable. Fictions of all sorts can be persuasive, but the fabulator reminds the reader of the cards up the author's sleeve, or in case of Julio Cortázar, of whence come the protagonist's rabbits.

Scholes uses the term "fabulation" as others use the term "counter-realism," subsuming magic realism, postmodernism, and indeed any non-realist fiction. I would suggest that one must ask what is gained and what is lost by collapsing these distinctions. Perhaps the most obvious loss is the sense of the regional and cultural impulses that lead many authors away from realism; this might alternately be regarded as a liberation from a naive cultural determinist sense of fabulation's rise. Scholes discusses formalism in

Borges and history in García Márquez, but he is not interested in magic realism as a specifically Latin American form. The fact that García Márquez merits only a single sentence of analysis in *Fabulation and Metafiction* might indicate a certain national bias on Scholes' part (the authors he discusses are overwhelmingly American), but Scholes' analysis of aesthetic factors in the rise of fabulation offers an alternative to *lo real maravilloso americano*, and makes a convincing argument for a counter-realist impetus in much fabulation. Scholes' argument that Borges is more fallibilist than formalist makes a strong case for regarding 'scholarly' magic realism as subject to his observations on fabulation in general, though this can not be said for 'mythic' magic realism. When Scholes does address American mythology, it is not framed as a confrontation between European rationalism and Native mysticism, but between founding myths and current American reality, and as American tradition dictates, the result is the Jeremiad:

> In America myth has always been stronger than reality, romanticism stronger than realism. What Barth, Pynchon, and Coover have tried to give us in these books is nothing less than the kind of realism this culture deserves. We have always pretended to be pragmatical--and so we have been, in a sense. We accepted whatever worked and invented myths of all kinds to justify it, including myths of freedom, equality, and justice which we have never succeeded in achieving in fact . . . . *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *The Public Burning* are offered as atonement for the guilt of having created a fabulation and pretended it was real. After his rape by Uncle Sam the narrator of Coover's book says essentially what Winston Smith said of Big Brother in *1984* after his torture and destruction as a person: "*I . . . I love you, Uncle Sam!*" (209)

A cynic might suggest that fabulation collapses distinctions in order to ignore the Latin American influence of magic realism and the European influence of postmodernism, and clearly Scholes' interest is in American authors. As the above quotation attests, Scholes identifies a distinctively American desire to produce a fantasy which acts as an expose of

the fantasy that went before. Scholes' observations on what might be called American "scholarly" magic realism could profitably be applied to the scholarly magic realism and postmodernism of other cultures, but he is identifying something of a national literary trait when he observes that American fabulation of the mythic sort is a guilty pleasure, and a punitive one.

Scholes does not suggest that every fabulator shares a common ('fallibilist' or phenomenological) philosophy, but he does suppose that whether or not they trust in the possibility of objective truth, they share a distrust of plausibility; thus he points out that Robert Coover feels the writer must use "the fabulous to probe beyond the phenomenological, beyond appearances, beyond randomly perceived events, beyond mere history" (*Pricksongs* 78, qtd. in *Fabulation* 120). Scholes suggests that the tone of the fabulation is an index of the fabulator's faith in both the power of language and the existence of objective reality, where a comic tone suggests a loss of all faith, and a tone of desperate intensity suggests a lingering sense that some truth is out there and can be told: "Barthes and Barthelme are the chroniclers of our despair: despair over the exhausted forms of our thought and our existence. No wonder they laugh so much. Coover and Gass are reaching through form and behavior for some ultimate values, some true truth. No wonder they come on so strong" (123).

Historical Fabulation

Scholes notes that several fabulators write historical novels, and that "the North American works, in particular, bristle with facts and smell of research of the most painstaking kind" (206). One might argue that all contemporary fabulation crosses traditional genre boundaries, but with works such as *The Executioner's Song*, which Norman Mailer bills as a "true life novel," the barrier between journalism and fiction was breeched, and a number of ethical questions are raised thereby. The defense that history is a narrative like any other is tendentious; historical evidence may be subject to interpretation, but historians who fabricate evidence cease to be historians. Writers of

fiction have long used historical characters, but in an age of 'edutainment'[38] one must read with particular alertness when authors seem to be filling in the blanks in the historical record. E.L. Doctorow's claim that "my portrait of J.P. Morgan in *Ragtime* is truer to that man's soul and the substance of his life than his authorized biography" (104-05), coupled with his further claim that "everything I made up about Morgan and Ford is true, whether it happened or not" (52) suggest either hubris or a loss of perspective which the reader must take into account. Jonathan Dee, citing the notion that the author of fiction is a sort of deity in the universe of his or her own text, suggests that "for a fiction writer to carry that notion of his own divinity into the real world -- which includes the real world of the historical past -- is profoundly fraudulent; it is, if you like, a matter of creating graven images" (84). Dee is particularly disturbed by fiction which "feed[s] the public's appetite for the denial of the unknowable" (82). Such fiction seeks to provide answers rather than questions, and its techniques are self-effacing rather than exhibiting fabulation's "delight in design" (*Fabulators* 10). Fiction subtly interwoven into history does not qualify as fabulation as Scholes defines it, indeed it is open to Scholes' charge against realism, essentially that it masks ideology under the cover of plausibility.

The Moral of the Fable

Curiously, fabulous texts seem to resist moral categorization; two editors may append antithetical epimythia to the same fable, and for every demonstration of the fable's democratic, peasant roots there is a collection of royalist fables or avant-garde fabulations. Fabulous writing may amount to the demonstration of a proposition in the clearest, most memorable narrative form, or a sophisticated deconstruction of the very possibility of reliable propositions. Texts labelled magic realist have frequently used the

[38]I employ this lamentable term because its glibness reflects its reductive intentions. Hollywood was following market forces when it recast the capturers of the enigma machine as American in *U571*, and added a textual postscript recognizing the actual heroes when British protests added a financial impetus of their own. The fact remains that Hollywood writes history for the popular imagination in a far more effective way, and to very different standards, than do mere historians, and the same might be said of some of the more popular novelists.

form to veil dissent, but scholarly magic realism may just as well reflect "the cultural logic of late capitalism," as Fredric Jameson puts it[39]. Contemporary authors may employ the form of the fable to simultaneously parody and exploit the reader's desire for closure and for a satisfyingly logical and coherent ethical landscape. The contemporary fable, whether it is a new fable or a retelling of an ancient fable, though it may seem in every respect to follow the classic model, cannot hope to be read in an utterly innocent fashion by adult readers; we are simply too attuned to the possibility of ironic readings.

Ambrose Bierce, in the *Aesopus Emendatus* section of his *Fantastic Fables*, retells the fable of the fox and the grapes thus: "a fox, seeing some sour grapes hanging within an inch of his nose, and being unwilling to admit that there was anything he would not eat, solemnly declared that they were out of his reach" (95). Similarly, Bierce observes that "a Spendthrift, seeing a single swallow, pawned his cloak, thinking that Summer was at hand. It was" (100). Citing James Thurber's revision of "The Hare and the Tortoise," in which the erudite tortoise, shocked to be deprived of his literarily-guaranteed victory, learns that "a new broom may sweep clean, but never trust an old saw" (Thurber 84), Pack Carnes suggests that the structure of the modern fable "is more or less exactly the same as the joke" (7). In Thurber "The relatively long fable narrative is followed by a punch-line proverb to form a unit that is identical to the shaggy dog joke" ("The American Face of Aesop" 321). Witty morals have been tagged onto fables since fables were first written, but the humour in modern fables frequently depends on a reversal of the expectations raised by the allusion to a classic fable or fable-animal. Carnes points out that in Hoshi Shinichi's revision of "The Hare and the Tortoise," "Usagi to Kame," the tortoise wins because the hare is pulled over for speeding. We then learn

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[39]Jameson actually applies this term to postmodernism in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultral Logic of Late Capitalism*, but elsewhere Jameson has tendered the "very provisional hypothesis" that "magic realism depends on a content which betrays the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features" ("Magic" 311), implying that magic realism is complicit with the earliest and postmodernism with the latest problems of capitalism.

that the tortoise gave a present to "the recipient" (the police officer) before the race. Such modern fables fulfill the traditional purpose of the fable, the imparting of some practical wisdom, with a sardonic observation on the ways in which we have progressed since ancient times. The revised or contemporary fable produces in the reader a delight at the recognition of both the similarities to and differences from the original, and encourages an alternately naive and sophisticated reading. The author is able to employ intertextuality and even self-referentiality in a text that nevertheless recognizes and reproduces the ancient appeal of the well-told narrative. This, I would suggest, is the promise of all fabulous writing: the text may be elusive, sophisticated, it may even, in manner of a latter-day Mathew Arnold, make us better postmodern citizens, but it does so while celebrating the pleasure of narrative, and of the literary imagination.

Chapter Three: David Arnason

In David Arnason's short stories the treatment of the protagonists, usually men, reflects a persistent stance toward not only men, but the literary tradition. In "The Naiads" the character Becky's assessment of the narrator sums it up nicely: "On the surface you look pretty hopeless, but there's a kind of refreshing naivety about you that gives me hope" (*Happiest* 110). Arnason's men are frequently laughable, vaguely aware that the world has changed and left them a step or two behind, but gamely struggling to maintain the illusion of adequacy while virtually drowning in evidence to the contrary. This is not simply a depiction of men caught off guard by feminism. The male characters' assumptions about the innocence and unworldliness of the women they desire, and about the world they imagine they understand, mirror the longing many readers have for a seductive text whose meaning they may nevertheless fully possess; Arnason plays with these desires while undercutting them, demonstrating that like lovers who wish to regard their beloved as a blank slate, the naive reader is at the mercy of the worldly text.

If these not-entirely-modern males are analogous in their bemusement to the not-entirely-postmodern reader, both are treated with a kind of tolerant affection; in Arnason's words:

> The characters are mostly genial; some of the language I intend to be seductive. My ideal as a writer would be to write every sentence so that the reader would want to read the next one. That's accomplished largely through narrators who are graceful or good-humoured or self-effacing or self-mocking. So I play off these gentle characters, who are sometimes real monsters. I often work them in a kind of confessional mode. There's a way when somebody appears to be confessing his innermost thoughts that you feel you have to be kind to him. But, if you stop and think about it, some confessors are really monsters too. ("Story Forming" 104-05)

This confessional mode, which invites what we might call a tolerant reading, is complemented by structural aspects which appear to offer a kind of tolerant writing; the narrators confess their stumbles not only in life, but in the project of writing, producing a sort of non-threatening postmodernism, as it were.

There are two structural strains here, analogous to the mythic and scholarly strains of magic realism: the postmodern narrative, and what I call the fabulous local. In Arnason's postmodern narratives, self-referentiality takes the form of an admission of the constructedness of the story, not in order to deconstruct the possibility of meaning, but rather to confess the ancient appeal of the old stories, along with the equally ancient desire to make them new. In the fabulous local, the protagonist and the reader find themselves in modernized fables and fairy tales, where the promise of truths both timeless and universal contends with the doubleness implicit in the very fact that these tales have been relocated in present-day Manitoba, and in their frequent refusal to follow the old script. Like scholarly magic realism, Arnason's postmodern narratives deconstruct certain received notions, particularly regarding the relationship between narrator and reader; like mythic or folkloric magic realism, the fabulous local brings primal beliefs and folkloric wisdom into collision with contemporary life.

These categories are neither conflicting nor discontinuous, and some stories straddle them. In both cases the narrator seems to offer the reader a kind of confessional contract; revelations in exchange for withheld judgement. In a postmodern age both the reader and the narrative "look pretty hopeless," but their naive enthusiasm offers hope. The question, of course, is how far we can trust this apparent naivety.

Arnason's Postmodern Narratives

Arnason's narratives are postmodern primarily by virtue of self-referentiality; the *mise-en-abîme* and bleak intimations of the futility of writing characteristic of some

forms of postmodernism are contrary to the playful tone of these works. Using Carl Malmgren's terms, we could say that Arnason's is an inclusive postmodernism:

> The exclusive postmodern text turns hermetically inward, brooding obsessively on its own processes and strategies. For it narrativity is a curse of self-consciousness; the writer, as Barth notes in *Lost in the Funhouse*, is "committed to the pen for life" (103). This fiction sees the separation between Art and Life as irreconcilable. It aspires to the condition of silence, longs for textual suicide, but is forced to go on, spinning out texts for nothing. The inclusive, or "impure," postmodern text, on the other hand, turns itself outward towards Life and gleefully appropriates the discourses in which it finds itself situated. Using techniques of collage, paste-up, and parody, this text undertakes the "murdering" of competing texts. The impure text celebrates, and even adds to, the din created by culture. ("Exhumation" 26)

Arnason's postmodern narrators confess that they are composing a fiction, frequently admitting their difficulties, but this is not in order to demonstrate the impossibility of communication. Instead, in "All the Elements," the narrator implies that he is guilelessly offering the reader a glimpse into the writing of a story, even asking that the reader fill in for him while he is otherwise engaged. The implication is that writing is work of the sort that can be transferred from narrator to reader. It is also implied that this work comes complete with the frustrations that accompany all forms of work; the unrealistic expectations of one's employers (or readers), the demands on one's time, the restrictions and the deadlines. In speaking of "The Boys" Arnason says that "I wasn't telling a truth, I was making a thing" ("Story Forming" 102), and we might be tempted to identify this observation with the fact that the narrator often breaks the fourth wall and addresses the reader, sharing with us his difficulties in getting the story written. Yet, while the narrator's direct addresses heighten the reader's sense of the materiality of the text, they also tend to persuade us of the narrator's innocence and trustworthiness. The same

technique that convinces us that we are sophisticated, postmodern readers invites us to lend the narrator a trusting ear, and the door is thus opened to a subversive kind of writing. Destabilizing the relationship between reader and narrator reminds us how much we want to believe, how much we want to be told stories.

While Arnason's short stories declare their materiality and constructedness, then, they seem to ask for our indulgence of the narrator, who is so good as to admit the occasional difficulty in which he finds himself, so that we need hardly suspect him of harbouring an undeclared subtext. Close reading would almost constitute a breach of faith on our part. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the following passage from "The Happiest Man in the World," from which I will quote at length because of its aptness:

> I suggested we go for a walk instead of having a fight. She agreed, and we walked down the beach as far as the big rock. On the way, I told her a story about an Arab prince who had five hundred wives. He loved them all deeply, and couldn't bear to be out of their presence. They loved him too and were all faithful. He got to thinking about how bad it was for them that they could only spend one night with him every year and a half. Because he was fair minded, he decided he would release all but one of them. He drew lots and kept the one whose number came up. The rest of them he married off to wealthy sultans and other princes. For a while, he was happy, until he discovered that his wife was being unfaithful to him. When he confronted her, she told him she was sick of him and bored with her life. She said she felt suffocated by always being at his beck and call. The next day, she poisoned him. She inherited his entire kingdom, and the first thing she did was marry five hundred husbands.
>
> Sharon wanted to know what the story meant, but I told her that it was just a story and it didn't mean anything. A warm breeze had sprung up as we walked, and small waves splashed at our feet. A full moon glinted yellow off the lake.

> We rolled up our jeans and walked in the little waves all the way back to the cottage. Then we took off all our clothes and went skinny dipping. We decided that a little later we would make love.
>
> Some day it will be winter. The lake will be frozen and the leaves will all have fallen from the trees. A cold wind will sweep in from the north, and we will wake up in the morning to discover our hair has turned white. But just now, it is summer, early August when the warmth of July still lingers. The trees are still lush, and every morning the sun rises like an orange out of the lake.
>
> "Hurry," I told Sharon as we ran out of the lake, naked and dripping, over the beach and into our cottage and bed. "Hurry," I said again. (*Happiest* 141-42)

The allusion to sultans, harems, unfaithfulness and death cannot help but draw comparisons to the story of Scherezade, the archetypal storyteller who must capture her audience's imagination or die, but here the narrator's voice is male. The impetus for this departure into a sort of *1001 Nights* mode seems to be to avoid conflict, and the reader, along with Sharon, may be tempted to doubt the narrator's protestation of thematic innocence. The story of the Arab prince and his wives will almost inevitably be read as an allegorical representation of the circumstances in which the narrator and Sharon find themselves. Marital conflict; the notion that men and women will never understand one another despite, or perhaps because of, similar natures; the difficulty of recognizing contemporary benefits when they are contrasted with imagined future ones; the conflict between the impulses to selfishness and to thoughtfulness - surely the narrator (even if he doesn't realize it) tells this story to Sharon in order to raise these issues, to suggest the impossibility of anyone having everything to his or her satisfaction, and to urge that they both enjoy the moment and recognize how fortunate they are. And surely Sharon, who always finishes books, even if she hates them, arguing that "I'm not going to waste all the time I've already spent" (137), is justified in wanting the story to have a payoff, a meaning. She can hardly be satisfied with the narrator's reply. But if it is "just a story"

and "didn't mean anything" is it therefore deficient? The story has brought two imaginations together, offered respite from the fractious and the everyday, touched on the desires and frustrations that make us human, offered the pleasure of the text, and seduced its audience. If the story does not mean anything, it does something; if it does not express the message *carpe diem*, it describes two people who, if only briefly, live in the moment. In this light, Arnason's observation that "I wasn't telling a truth, I was making a thing" ("Story Forming" 102) is not a deprecation but an assertion; the thing made may not be didactic, but for this very reason it is pleasurable and efficacious; it may make no claim to truthfulness, but for this very reason it is convincing.

The short stories which I identify as Arnason's postmodern narratives cover a continuum from those which are largely realist except in their treatment of the relationship between narrator and reader, to those which present a world distinctly different from the one most of us inhabit, but which, if they draw on the plots or machinery of the fable or fairy tale, do so only in passing. "A Letter to History Teachers," for example, is in many ways conventionally realist, a meditation on the life of one individual in a group photograph, supplemented with historical information, excerpts from contemporaneous texts, even a putative interview with the subject of the meditation. The conclusion, however, is distinctly non-realist, beginning with the first words which follow the interview: "The old woman is wrong, of course" (*50 Stories* 91). The imagination (here of the narrator) trumps all other evidence, because for Arnason the categories of the past and future, and even of the present, are subject to change, revision, uncertainty; only the eye of the imagination sees them clearly: "And yet, it is all there in that photograph, all the events past and future caught in an ever renewing present, a sepia world that goes on and on, while the living Clara makes not a ripple in time" (91). The photograph achieves a kind of permanence, not as an artifact or document, but as an object of contemplation, so that the individual facts of a life, indeed the individual herself, appear transitory by comparison. This is just one of the many ways in which

Arnason's postmodern narratives claim a kind of primacy for the imagination over other, more positivist discourses.

The story "Morning Letter" is a convenient one for demonstrating Arnason's use of postmodern techniques because it is largely about its own writing. The plot is not unfamiliar: the narrator describes a retreat to his home town in order to recover from a failed love affair, finds that the town "is much smaller than I remembered" (*50 Stories* 117), struggles to order his memories and call up the face of his lover, and in the end, is finally able to picture her face again, "her green eyes shining without sorrow" (121). The narrative is called a letter, but it is not addressed to the absent lover, and we are left to speculate about the letter's addressee. More jarringly, this "letter" refers openly to its own fictionality, indeed by the third paragraph we learn that this tale is subject to revision: "Let us begin, say, with me stepping off the bus, or better, perhaps, with me there already, the second day or even the third, so that the strangeness and nostalgia will have worn off" (112). If by this point we have not recognized that this tale acknowledges its own fictionality, the next paragraph makes it absolutely clear: "I warn you that I intend to lie to you, that I am incapable of telling you the truth, even when I know it. Nothing of this is true. I have not returned, have not walked along that beach, have not seen those cartridges on the shore" (112). One might imagine that self-referentiality might be the story's undoing, for the nature of the plot suggests that this story is told in order to secure our understanding of and sympathy for the narrator, yet even if we choose to believe that a love affair has ended, the admission that the events of the story are speculative, an imagined response to this loss (a fictional loss, but not explicitly so), would seem to severely restrict any empathy for this character's loss. The fact that as readers we may still become engaged by the narrator's (imagined) experiences may speak for the power of the narrative to enchant, but it also speaks to the fact that in a sense, we never suspend disbelief; we can be quite conscious, intellectually, of the artificiality of a narrative, but as readers we can bracket this knowledge and respond to narratives, or parts of a narrative, if

they are emotionally credible or if they engage the imagination. Just as allusiveness invites us to identify the community of texts in which the story locates itself, self-referentiality of this sort invites the reader to form a kind of imaginative community with the narrator, negotiating this relationship just as the narrator negotiates an imagined history by contemplating the photograph.

The relationship between feelings and literature is not a simple matter of some works being more and others less capable of convincingly representing known qualities, and the reader's perception of the narrator's (or author's) honesty is not the primary criterion in judging the success of a work. The narrator immediately follows his admission that the narrative is a "fabrication" with the question "But why can I not remember her face?" (112), almost daring the reader to dismiss this longing for the lost lover's face as another fabrication, appending to fragmentary recollections of this lost lover the note "or perhaps that too is a lie" (112). The relationship between truth and fabrication, emotion and literature, is as much the topic of the story as is the representation of a love affair mourned. The narrator continues: "I would tell you that she had laughing eyes, but that is a literary judgement and not a real one. Why, when this means so much to me, am I driven to perceive her in images from the cheapest and trashiest of literature?" (112-13). The realization that one is drawing from Harlequin Romance novels to describe one's own emotional life may be humbling, but it also suggests that literature, even "the cheapest and trashiest of literature," is not merely a mirror; it interpenetrates our lives, shapes the way that we experience the world, helps us to envision our lives.

The notion that mastery of language and literature confers a special insight into the emotions is tempting but dubious, however, and the narrator notes that though he once subscribed to it, he is forced to admit that "I am no longer so sure of myself" (113). On the surface a lament for lost love, the story is as much a lament for lost confidence in the nature of the relationship between the word and the world, and a reimagining of this

relationship. Thus the question "But why can I not remember her face?" immediately follows the admission that the events of the tale are fabricated because the fabrication is meant to invoke the face of the lost lover. The narrative thus examines the ways in which the literary imagination interacts with an individual's emotional life, and the fact that the lover's face is finally seen again in the final line of the story suggests that, on one level, this story is about how stories work, how they succeed in producing an imaginative response.

"Morning Letter" records the events of seven days, or more specifically, seven mornings, for as we learn, "there are only mornings here" (115). The seven days may suggest a single cycle through the week, and the absence of any time except morning might suggest that we are observing a series of awakenings, though the cynical reader might note that, given the narrator's whiskey consumption, mornings might be the only time he is coherent. A cycle, then, a series of awakenings and lapses, a string of moments of coherence each separated by a span of incoherence - the shape of the narrative may reflect the shape of the world as a person in mourning sees it. The landscape also reflects a certain emotional landscape; the beach is a "no-man's land . . . . An old defense against the ancient enemy, the lake" (112) dotted with "bunkers" (112) from which duck hunters fire their shots, and on the other side of the beach lies the marsh, where the narrator may literally stumble over powerful images of the past.

A psychological landscape, then, the topography of mourning, but this is also a geography of world and word, or of the brute presence of the world and the imaginative response to the world. The lake, the ancient enemy, feeds and drowns, and the duck hunters in their bunkers seem to embody the war against the lake and the marsh, the workaday world's war against immersion in fluid yet powerful imaginative responses to the world, a war embodied in the "stone blind" (116) in which the hunters hide. Madeleine D'Arcy and her daughter, who appear "in a vision so powerful it left me damp and shaking" (114), embody a story so resonant that the narrator is overwhelmed by it, so

that his effort to summon the face of his lover by "superimpos[ing] her face on that of Mądeleine's" (115) suggests the difficulty of responding imaginatively to one's own life without invoking other stories. To see again the face of the lost lover, to turn experience in the world into an imaginative vision is the storyteller's goal, and past examples stand as both inspiration and challenge.

I have suggested that the insistently fictional nature of the story invites a metatextual reading, a sense that this story is about its own composition, but the fictionality undergoes a certain shift almost as soon as it has been established. The rain, whose nature is calmly negotiated between narrator and reader early in the story ["let us allow it to have been raining" (112)] soon slips out of the control of the narrator: "This is not the gentle rain I imagined for my first walk, but a cold, sharp rain made bitter by the wind. I move cautiously out of the trench behind the breakwater and begin my assault on the beach" (113). The fact that the rain is not what the narrator had previously imagined suggests a struggle between the narrator's imaginative will and the shape the story wants to take, the influence of literary tradition combined with the facts of the exterior world; the reference to a trench and an assault on the beach suggests the intensity and violence of the struggle. To write a story that is your own demands that your imagination resist conforming to these demands. From pure fictionality we come to the conditional: "All of this might have happened, would likely have happened as I told you" (113). From an effort to answer "this question of what I am doing in this small town on the edge of Lake Winnipeg" (111) we have shifted to the openly fictional and then to the openly speculative, what "would likely have happened" (113), with the question of what conditions have brought about these speculations left unanswered. This conditional plausibility depends, I suggest, on the power of the imagination to assert itself against the literary tradition and the everyday world.

Perhaps the dream, which offers some clarity to the narrator, will do so for the reader as well:

> I awake once more with the grey dawn but this time my head is clear. I have dreamed and I remember my dream. I am in the tower of a castle with a prince. Perhaps I am watching him and his bearded friend, or perhaps I am the bearded friend. We are skinning the prince's mother like a deer, exposing the blue and bloodless flesh. The bearded friend seems troubled, and asks why we are doing this. The prince tells him, "It is all right. These are her instructions to us."
>
> Outside, through a window in the tower I can see a medieval army, dressed in armour, carrying shields and bows. They shoot their arrows. One comes through the window and it kills the prince. The audience objects that the hero may not be killed and so the dream begins again. It is exactly the same, except that this time the dream is speeded up.
>
> Then I am walking down a lane behind my uncle's house. I open the door and enter. A dark-haired girl is sitting on the chesterfield, nursing a baby. She motions to me and I sit down beside her, laying my head on her breast. She strokes my hair. I do not know it then, but I realize now that the girl is Madeleine D'Arcy. (116-17)

As dreams were for Freud "the royal road" to the unconscious, this dream offers us a glimpse of the inner life of storywriting. Clearly the first dream is of transgression; for all that the prince's mother may have given these instructions, the dreamer is seeing what should not be revealed, and he dies for it. According to the logic of the fairytale, whose style this dream adopts, skinning typically reveals a transformation or enchantment that had previously gone unnoticed; in this case, the revelation does not take place, or the prince dies upon receiving it. The perspective is unclear or shifting, with the narrator as observer, prince's friend, and audience; this shifting of roles is typical of dreams, but also of narratives in progress. The objection of the audience in the dream injects a certain humour: even in his dreams the narrator is subject to the whims of the audience, but the persistence of the dream's plot suggests an inescapable logic to it; the dreamer cannot

alter it in any fundamental way, despite his objections. The second dream is also an encounter with a dead mother, though the dreamer does not realize it at the time. The surroundings are familiar, the action comforting if infantilizing, the narrator is clearly "himself" in this dream, and the sense of revelation occurs only in retrospect. I suggest that the dreams indicate two paths, both of them imaginative responses to grief over the loss of an important female figure, and over a sense of lost possibility. In both cases these women are mothers who have died, and in both cases the child dies unexpectedly, before (or upon) receiving his revelation in the first dream, and before living his life at all in the second. The first dream follows the timeless pattern of the fairy tale, set in a castle in no particular land. The second dream is a more personal, local story, for the narrator has conjured the female character from the barest information found in a neglected location that is nevertheless part of the world we currently inhabit. The plot is not inevitable, in fact it has yet to develop. It should be clear that I am suggesting the first dream illustrates a more tradition-bound form of storytelling, and the second a more personal, self-conscious form, one whose direction and capacity for revelation are both uncertain and seductive. The mothers may be the motherlode of the imagination and of the literary tradition: capable of comforting and nourishing, or of killing, depending on whether one is an observer or a slavish follower of her dictates.

The seventh day of this creation dawns full of promise: "I am awake instantly, exhilarated, filled with excitement and joy" (118), but the beach is more ominous than it has been before: a duck hunter "disappears so quickly that I wonder if I have only imagined seeing him" (119), and a portion of the beach is described as "the dangerous open stretch where only scrub willows separate the beach from the marshes beyond" (119). Demarcations are slight, and the hunters are now clearly hostile; the "mystical renewal" (111) the narrator seeks comes at the cost of alienation from his former home and open hostility from the hunters. The narrator is their prey, and his vision comes to him only after he has been wounded and has submerged himself in the lake. The vision

of her face comes, of course, from the marsh, "filling the sky, the water and the land" until "her face comes closer, closer until she is all about me, she enters me, I enter her and drown" (121). The vision is, in a sense, Prufrock in reverse; rather than the everyday disturbing and collapsing the fragile artistic creation, the artist here drowns in his own creation, thereby escaping the mundane world, symbolized by the duck hunters and their stone blinds. The vision of the face of the lover is an imaginative achievement, the liar who lost his lover through his own "cruelty and infidelity" (115) and who is "incapable of telling you the truth" (112) achieves a moment of faithfulness, or of faithful representation. This is as good a lie, he seems to be saying, as the ones we've heard before; this is as good a source of visions as castles in distant, unnamed lands. This is a lying, or storytelling, with fidelity, and the fidelity comes as a result of going home and seeing one's surroundings anew.

"All the Elements" is another story in which Arnason destabilizes the relationship between reader and writer. The title itself satirizes the expectations that we bring as readers to a text, and the first sentence amounts to an extensive itemized list of all the plot elements one could possibly expect in an adventure story, a cross between a literary shopping list and a salesman's pitch, beginning with "a beautiful naked girl in the narrator's bed" and concluding with "a highly proper moral for the reader's edification" (*CPB* 105). And the pitch continues: "It is written in a correct style that is not without the common touch, and is quite suitable for study in the upper grades of the public schools and in colleges and universities" (105). The narrator has set himself a near-impossible task, but he jumps right in, presenting us with his life history and the discovery of a dead body in record time, and expressing confidence that he can tie all of the promised elements together, including the beautiful naked girl, observing that "before long I shall have thought of a perfectly reasonable explanation for her presence" (106). The self-referential (or metafictive) elements pile up, the straightforwardness of their delivery emphasizing their absurdity, or perhaps the absurdity of the pretence that storytelling

requires. We are not altogether surprised, then, when the narrator announces "I'm back. You may not even have noticed that I was gone, but between the last paragraph and this, I carried a cup of tea to the naked girl in my bed," then begins to recount a past erotic humiliation but stops, noting that the reader will have undergone humiliations, "some of them a good deal worse than any I might describe" (106). To remind the reader that this story cannot provoke reactions as powerful as those in the reader's own life would seem a self-defeating strategy, unless we consider that the text will draw meaning from the individual reader's life; the story's illusion is not so much broken by this self-consciousness as it is made overt, so that the reader is being drawn into the tale literally and figuratively. The ontology of the tale is curious; the narrator asserts the fictionality of the text (and draws the reader's life into the text) even while, disingenuously, he asserts a sort of provisional reality and a narrator's prerogative over that reality, worrying over how to explain the presence of the naked girl while rejecting one interpretation (or dodge) as wrong: "I suppose I could regard her as a symbol, but in fact she is quite real and in no way symbolic" (107). We might simply describe this as playful postmodernism, but it is important to note that this is not simply a matter of breaking or of abandonning the narrative conventions of realism, but of highlighting the fact that the narrative's meaning is negotiated between the reader and the text (or narrator); the insistence on the girl being real is less an insistence on the narrator's ownership of the text's meaning than an insistence that, though it is negotiated, this meaning is real. Liberated to the extent that he can address the reader, Arnason's self-referential narrator is nevertheless burdened with responsibilities, as the shopping list of promised elements attests.

The juxtaposition of the everyday and the spy/adventure story seems almost meant to tease readers, virtually daring us not to lend the story our credence. Connections between the lives of Arnason and the narrator (the scholar who produces creative writing on the banks of Lake Winnipeg), combined with such credibility-defying elements as the insistence that a man who says he is running for the local school board is clearly a spy,

emphasize the reader's contribution to the narrative. Rather than an affront to plausibility, the self-consciousness of the narrative underscores the conscious act of will we perform as readers in order to bring text on the page to life. Nadia's intention to read what he has written when the narrator has fallen asleep is suggestive of Pirandello (appropriately for a story involving spies, this character is in search of a plot), and the narrator's discovery that a paragraph has been inserted in order to change the story's outcome creates further ontological chaos (if the narrator becomes a character in the text, he may be as much the subject of the story as the source of it), and our guided tour through the creation of a story has become considerably more complex (and absurd). As in other adventure stories, the tables have been turned, but in this case a plot twist has left the narrator at the mercy of an unreliable text.

At this moment of epistemological/ontological crisis, Arnason shows he has read his Freud, and offers his reader (or at least such readers as will be tempted) a bribe in the form of an important role in the narrative accompanied by the adulation of Nadia, the aforementioned beautiful (formerly naked) girl, who "watches you with worshipful eyes" (111). The reader (at least the reader as constructed – even conscripted – by the narrator) is now fully engaged in the adventure, daring to risk capture to save Nadia, though with a rather limited courage:

> "Did he see you?" I ask.
>
> "No, it was as if he couldn't see me at all," you reply. And that makes sense. How could they have seen you, there in your armchair or on your seat in the bus. (112)

The tale seems to openly flirt with its own undoing, with deconstructing its illusions the moment they are created, and thus with being solely about itself. The reader, however, is not at a remove from the text, watching the author amuse himself, but is in on the joke, or perhaps more accurately, the reader, like the writer, is simultaneously producing and engaged in the adventure:

> "Did any one see you?" I ask.

> "No," you reply, "they couldn't have. And yet all the time we were there I had the uncomfortable feeling we were being watched, like someone reading over your shoulder." (112)

The nature of the bargain that has been struck becomes clear in the final lines of the story:

> I haven't explained about the carpet, but must everything be explained? Surely you can figure that out yourself. You are no fool. As for the spy, he did run for school board, and he won, putting spying behind him forever. For private reasons we are pleased that he is now on the school board, and we support him for chairman. We are happy now, the four of us in our elemental bliss, and the only one that sulks is that other out there, reading over your shoulder, searching for a moral that should be perfectly clear. (113)

The narrator once again offers a bribe, this time a sort of mutual respect agreement whereby the reader will accept some loose ends in the story in exchange for the narrator's assurance that this indicates great sophistication on the reader's part. The promised moral is not made explicit, and indeed "that other out there" is that part of the reader incapable of entering or unwilling to enter the imaginative world of the story, mocked as priggish, sulking and a little dull-witted because he or she is incapable of discerning "a moral that should be perfectly clear." There is a balance of humour and manifesto here; the humour resting on the unspoken implication that the bargain is patently self-serving on both our parts, extricating the narrator from certain self-created difficulties at the same time it eases the reader's intellectual burden, but it also recognizes a kind of necessary psychic split on the part of the readers: we are engaged in the story even while we are "always already" aware of the artifice. Arnason's self-conscious narrator demonstrates that as readers we can be emotionally and critically engaged in a text simultaneously, and the text may recognize this split without disintegrating the illusion, proof of the power of our desire to be told stories.

Self-consciousness spills over from the narrator to the reader in "A Girl's Story." The narrator is once again genially confessional, not only declaring his presence and his difficulties (in this instance a hangover, a tendency to "borrow" plots[40] and a difficulty in creating characters), but also going so far as to enlist the reader as a character. The narrator's declaration that he is going to need a little help carries Arnason's employment of the confessional mode to perhaps its greatest height because it invites the reader to succumb (and thereby admit) to his or her desire to be drawn into a story and to play as another self there: "You've wondered what it would be like to be a character in a story, to sort of slip out of your ordinary self and into some other character" (123). By recruiting us into the text, the narrator makes explicit the (traditionally) unspoken contract between writer and reader, a contract motivated by a mutual desire for engagement with the text. The narrator shares his frustrations and his trade secrets with the reader, apparently guilelessly explaining how narratives work and even generously permitting the reader to choose the ending, though this offer is soon revoked, and the freedom initially offered is replaced by an elimination of all options, a choice that amounts to a denial of an ending for the story; the kiss goes on forever, the romance between reader and writer outlasting time.

Arnason uses techniques other than the self-conscious narrator to highlight the materiality of the text. "Point on a Line" describes a love affair interrupted (or ended) by the brutal intervention of local men offended that the male character, Watson, has "roont" (121 *CPB*) a woman whose maidenhood had been "reserved for local community use" (120). The attack is foreseen by Watson even as he sets off to visit his lover, or alternatively he survives (or imagines surviving) the attack by directing his consciousness away from his attackers and toward his previous encounter with his lover; the author's

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[40]Late in the story the narrator refers to "the story from which I stole the plot" (*CPB* 129); Arnason revealed to me that the source is in fact Kurt Vonnegut's "Long Walk to Forever," originally printed in the *Ladies Home Journal*.

prerogative of molding the story's timeline becomes a character's survival technique, so that a narrative device is represented as partaking of love's power to overcome a hostile environment. Here the narrative voice is not so much self-conscious as self-evident; Watson cannot escape his attackers, but in expressing his life in the form of a story, he may choose the order in which he relates the points on the (time)line, and thus enable himself to resist his surroundings for a while:

> Point on a line, Watson whispered to Angela. She looked at him out of her wide green eyes and stroked his face. Cherubs appeared in the upper left corner of the frame. I know, she sang to him in her lilting voice, every point on a line, every single point. She held him tightly as they ascended up through the branches and out of the frame, taking with them the birds, the cherubs, the breeze and the blossoms. All they left were the roses and a small pool of blood that widened until it covered the grass, the houses and trees, and finally filled the entire frame. (121)

These lines, which conclude the story, mark a shift to an aesthetic assertion and away from psychic or phenomenological realism (presenting events in a way which, when the narrative deviates from the world most of us inhabit when not medicated, does so in order to represent an emotional reaction to that world). Introducing a frame and cherubs to the tale seems at first to be merely an ironic counterpoint to a tenderness that threatened to sentimentalize their love to Hallmark-card proportions, but various aspects, perhaps most obviously the ominous and growing bloodstain, suggests that more is taking place. The cherubs, who as a device are comparable to the chirping birds which circle the heads of cartoon characters, post-anvil, combine with the frame to undermine the notion that Watson transcends his environment through his imagination; this is more compensatory fantasy than a triumph of the imagination over a hostile environment. At the end of the story we are left with the frame, out of which the lovers ascend and over which the bloodstain spreads. Painterly, cinematographic or narrative, the frame is artifice, the

artist's way of directing our vision and suggesting the unrepresentable, which rises out of the frame, and the all-too representable, the blood which fills the frame.

Just as the story's manipulation of time invites a comparison between psychic and narrative strategies, this final image, by emphasizing the constructedness of the story, asserts storymaking's power to impose order and meaning over a random and often violent world, while simultaneously acknowledging its limitations. Presenting (or choosing to experience) one's life as a narrative will not alter the events, only the focus and emphasis, but it suggests that narrative is more than escapism, and more than a pointless and insular game; it is a way of giving life meaning.

To say that for Arnason, literature is more than a game is by no means to suggest that his writing is not playful, but that the play is always meaningful. "Do Astronauts Have Sex Fantasies?", which is composed entirely of apparently random questions, would appear to offer little in the way of plot or character development, but the questions reveal contemporary neuroses, progressing from amusement to anxiety over the oddness and unpredictability of contemporary life, with the final, most anxiety-ridden questions directed squarely at the reader. By this point the reader, at first amused but perhaps also intrigued by the earlier questions, has become implicated, and the fact that the final questions are directed at the reader suggests that the story has succeeded in forging a kind of community of neurosis.

"Sons and Fathers, Fathers and Sons" is similarly interested in narrative's capacity to create community, though in this case perhaps a less neurotic one, beginning as it does with the observation that "There is something about fathers and sons that could do with an explanation a little less mechanical than Freud's" (*CPB* 37). The minefield of the father-son relationship, complicated by the jealousy the narrator feels for the easy friendship between his father and his son, is made safer when the three are able to turn their adventures (and battles) into a shared story:

> I began with my version of events, a carefully embroidered version in which heroism and comic humiliation played a large part. Then my father, taking his cue, added another layer to the evolving myth. My son wound our versions together and opened new possibilities. We sat around that fire until dawn, telling and retelling what had happened, until we had a single version that belonged to us all, carved in the wordless night. To my surprise, I came out at the centre, not at the margins as I thought I would. There was no need to forgive or ask forgiveness. The story did that for us all. (47)

Telling and retelling allows individuals to change their lives from a series of more-or-less random events into a narrative, investing meaning, humour and even heroism into otherwise normal lives. Making shared experiences into a story draws three often fractious individuals together, and demonstrates the fundamental humanity of storytelling. Like "Lady in Waiting," which seamlessly shifts between accounts of a love affair and of the first efforts of Howe and Haliburton to create a Canadian literature, "Sons and Fathers, Fathers and Sons" makes palpable Arnason's sense of the humanity of narrative.

The stories I have looked at thus far use narrative techniques to challenge or change typical perceptions of the world, but the world they present is recognizable as the one we inhabit. "The Drunk Woman is Singing in My Office" moves into a more frankly symbolic mode than the preceding works, but the world it describes remains resolutely, even resignedly normal. It is this world's very resistance to anything out of the ordinary that makes the presence of a singing drunk woman significant: "There are secretaries whose job it is to keep other people out of my office, secretaries who smile and say, 'No, Dr. Arnason is not in,' even though I sit behind my oak door at my oak desk, twisting paper clips and throwing them into the wastebasket" (*CPB* 75). The inexplicability of her appearing in his office, and the narrator's swift rejection of the suggestion that she has been there all along because "I would surely have noticed before now" (75) moves the story beyond symbolism into a kind of absurdism, a mode in which literary conventions

become comic because they are expressed so directly: "The plant ladies are imperfectly beautiful, and so they have been abandoned by their husbands, who recognize the danger of imperfect beauty" (76). Like the (apparently) naive or ingenuous narrator, literary conventions that are so transparent as to proclaim themselves as such have a confessional quality that invites the reader to see it anew.

The narrator, on the other hand, appears to be the embodiment of safety and the rejection of the threateningly new. Recognizing for the first time that the youngest secretary is beautiful, he will have her transferred, and on learning that his favourite whiskey, Old Bushmill's, is made in the north of Ireland, the narrator switches to John Jameson, apparently in order to evade the taint of politics. Pure pleasure is simply too threatening to this character, but the conclusion may not be as straightforward as it seems: "They may even be laying their hands on her to drag her out of my office. I am no fool. I know grace when I see it. I have chosen to sit in this bar drinking John Jameson with ice and water, feeling my joints and muscles relax. I have made my choices" (77). The appearance of the drunk woman might be a touch of grace in the narrator's life, and the seductive gracefulness of the youngest secretary's dance seems to emphasize the grace that he is rejecting, but his assertion that he is no fool, the imperfect pleasure of his solitary afternoon consumption of an almost-good-enough whiskey in a lounge whose very name ("the Downtowner") conjures images of generic adequacy, suggests that this decision made not only in full consciousness of its mediocrity, but with the recognition of a special grace in the comfortable and familiar, a kind of charm, fittingness, and mercy in contentedness. What appears by virtue of its brevity, scant characterization, and singleness of purpose to be a fable of contemporary life, offers a moral more nuanced than it first appears to be ; the tolerance Arnason elicits for his confessional narrators ensures that even while we recognize the limitations of the compromising life, we also see its attractions.

When Arnason's stories depict a world distinctly different from the one most of us inhabit, postmodern narrative techniques are muted; rather than destabilize the relationship between reader and text, these stories adopt an apparent straighforwardness that, as I have already observed, draws upon the tradional seductive techniques of the storyteller to mask any subversive intent. In stories like "The Marriage Inspector" and "Me and Alec Went Fishing With Rimbaud" the only variation from realism is in the concepts alluded to in the titles , so that the unacknowledged incongruity in the story invites the reader to contemplate why and in what ways the world we inhabit is not like the one in the story. In "The Event" we are presented with something like a ghost story, or a dying man's vision of a world beyond the senses, but rather than a world of dim visions and shades, the reunion between Paul (the seventy-eight-year-old protagonist) and his dead son is concurrent with Paul's heightened sensation and the intense experience of discrete details. The story is awash in sensuous detail: when Paul observes an orange on the table, "the rays saturated each section, making it more brilliant than the sun itself" *50 Stories* 77), and his experience of the sounds around him is intense and precise: "Birds of all kinds chirped and whistled and fluted, yet each note was separate and identifiable" (78-79). Paul's memories have also recently been growing stronger, but before he sees Helgi again, Paul observes that "It is forty years since he drowned, and I have forgotten something important about his death. After forty years it is hard for an old man to remember what he should have remembered when he was young" (82). It becomes clear that what Paul should have remembered, and what this gift of heightened lucidity is offering him is the memory not of the "sacrifice without meaning" (82) that his son's death meant to him, but of life lived, both Paul's and Helgi's. The event, of course, is death, but rather than an intimation of a world beyond or a bleak termination of life, death in this story is a concrete event that focuses and gives meaning to life.

Some of Arnason's stories verge on science fiction. "Heart's Desire" describes a heart transplant which results in a rejection, but in this case the recipient rejects his own

life and seeks out the niche left by the donor. With surprising plausibility, "Southern Cross" postulates that Australia is where Canadians go when they die. Reminiscent of Cortázar's "The Distances" or "Axolotl," "In the Garden of the Medicis" plays on the idea that one's consciousness can switch places with another's, trapping one in an unfamiliar body and life. Like "Southern Cross" and "Me and Alec Went Fishing with Rimbaud," "In the Garden of the Medicis" is found in the "Fabulations" section of *If Pigs Could Fly*, and like the other fabulations, the story elicits a certain surprise that such wonders could happen here, in present-day Canada, and not in some distant, timeless land. "In the Garden of the Medicis" depicts a location that embodies these fabulations; in this garden epochs intersect, and the collision of a very ordinary Canadian family with the family that virtually shaped the Renaissance to their will, and simultaneously with the early days of the First World War (said to have defined Canada as a distinct nation) embodies the collision of worlds that is at the heart of all fabulation. The garden, which is in fact a "resort" (*Pigs* 123) is in a sense the avatar of Arnason's fabulations: here wonders and horrors mingle freely with very normal Canadian lives. This collision of the fabulous and the everyday (or the magic and the real) is most fully developed, however, in the stories I have termed the fabulous local.

The Fabulous Local

When Arnason writes in the mode which I have dubbed the fabulous local, he employs the elements, and in some cases the plots of fairy tales and fables to make "once upon a time" here and now. Most often the "here and now" means a more-or-less contemporary Manitoba, but other locations and times (Italy during the Second World War, Russia during the failed revolution of 1905) are also used to bring the general and imaginary into sudden contact with a more specific, recognizable world. Even in "Lamb's Lettuce," which does not change the fairy tale's setting, draws it into unexpected contact with our world by explicitly referring to our responses to the story. The narrative

becomes almost comically immediate, in fact the juxtaposition of the fabulous and the local is regularly used for comic effect, but also for philosophical effect; the safety of distance is removed, and we are invited to test the story by the standards of our own life (and conversely, our life by the standards of the story). When the fabulous and the everyday are brought into such unexpected proximity, a type of cross-contamination takes place whereby the real and the fabulous interrogate one another. The clash between the fabulous and the everyday (or the fictional and the real) is also, as I have suggested, between the notions of universal truth and local variations.

Margaret Sweatman suggests that Arnason emphasizes this conflict in order to underscore the writtenness of the text. Quoting Robert Scholes' distinction between the lexical and paradigmatic qualities of poetry and the structural and syntagmatic qualities of myth, which give myth, Scholes feels, a universality lacking in poetry (*Structuralism* 62), Sweatman suggests that Arnason's writing alternates between these axes:

> For myth, we can substitute fairy tale. And for fairy tale, we can substitute stories dominated by rhythm and repetition, and structure. But I find this strange. The same writer who resists closure, who emphasizes surface play, who opens the narrator and the fictional character to notions of dialogism and discourse, also appeals to a universal structure that yields, maybe not Truth, but at least meaning which might enjoy some freedom from context, in an appeal to universality.
>
> That's not it. By shifting the emphasis to structure and the syntagmatic axis we become aware of the hitherto hidden process of meaning-making. In Arnason's wilful fictions, especially these fairy tales, the language is so obviously artificial, his regular syntax given such a comical foreign accent, we become aware that the fabrication and the discourse determine meaning. And the act of mythography becomes visible. (49-50)

Just as the devices of the fairy tale (dragons, princesses, repetitions of three) constitute a comical foreign accent when they are uttered by a determinedly local writer like Arnason

and placed in the here-and-now (specifically, in present-day Manitoba), in the context of the fairy tale, any localized voice, any allusion to the world you or I inhabit, constitutes a comical foreign accent; the fabulous and the local have a way of making one another strange (Viktor Shklovsky's *ostranenie*) and thus defamiliarizing the familiar. Making the act of mythography visible does more than call attention to the materiality of the narrative, its writtenness; it also suggests a fabulousness (and strangeness) in the everyday. Such tales make the intersection of the fabulous and the local simultaneously ludicrous and conceivable, for while some of the delight depends on the fact that dragons don't belong in the everyday world, part of the instruction resides in the implication that wonders are not entirely foreign to the world we inhabit.

The measure of Arnason's interest in the fable and especially the fairy tale is the fact that they appear even in stories that are manifestly neither fables nor fairy tales. Snow White, clearly Arnason's favourite fairy tale, makes an appearance in "Morning Letter" when the narrator / protagonist's vision of female beauty is brought into being by his discovery of a rose in a glass-topped box (*50 Stories* 114), and repeatedly in "Binary Lovers," where the seven dwarfs appear as seven jockeys, their names somewhat altered (Bashful, for example, is "Ab Flush"), with the eighth jockey, No Boy (riding Binary Lover), standing for the narrator, the latest dwarf to long for Snow White (*50 Stories* 107). "Binary Lovers" both expresses and satirizes Arnason's fascination with Snow White: the narrator, a professor of English named Arnason with an interest in hermeneutics, relates his seduction of a woman whom he cannot help but picture as Snow White:

> A soft wind ruffles through the blackness of her hair. Her watch is silver and her ring is gold. In the brilliance of this setting day, her dress is white as snow. A tiny sun with seven planets dangles from her ears. (This is not true, of course. My professor's mind seeks metaphor and symbol. I would offer her an apple, but

she would not understand. Then I'd explain, and this moment would be gone. Better to stick with reality, however dull. I am no priest.) (106)

The seven planets refer, as Arnason observes while discussing another story, to the myth from which the story of Snow White springs: "I got fascinated with the story of Snow White because it's one of the oldest fairy tales; it goes back to much earlier fertility myths in which Snow White represents spring and the mother represents winter and the seven dwarfs of course, in medieval lore, were the seven planets" ("Story Forming" 108). The observation that "I am no priest" is misleading, because this latter-day dwarf seduces Snow White by initiating her into the cult of hermeneutics: he teaches her (and the reader) to read a racing form and to appreciate the secrets and the religion of breeding hidden therein, and she shows her fidelity to this religion when she turns away from an apostate: "The man beside me says it doesn't matter how they're bred, it's how they run that counts. So there is apostasy even here. She whispers to me, and we leave, out past the parked cars, and I don't know where we're going" (107).

The recurring presence in this story of the Fibonacci Series becomes clear when we consider that "it is a completely arbitrary, artificial sequence, yet for some reason not yet understood, it is useful for describing certain natural processes" (109); the Fibonacci Series represents the conjunction of the rational and the irrational, of the closed system of mathematics and the presumably open, chaotic system of human affairs. The narrator's lecture at the beginning of the story further explains the context for the presence of this mathematical oddity:

> Since the death of God in 1905, I tell my students, the moral universe has collapsed, not into many fragments, but into a multitude of closed systems. I use (always) the metaphor of the Big Bang theory of creation, a cloud of gas congealing into stars, planets, comets. The mind, I say, must have order, and if it cannot find order in a larger universe, then it will create its own universes. The work of art, I say, is always a closed system, a complete universe, both

thermodynamically stable and regressively generable from its own axioms. That is why the artist is always drawn to gambling, where the laws are fixed. (99-100)

The narrator's reliance on the same metaphor, year after year, may undermine the message, but these lines constitute a hermeneutics for this story at least. The fixed rules of gambling, thoroughbred breeding, astronomy and mathematics are closed systems, as too perhaps are individual narratives and human interactions, but they are capable of commenting upon and cross-contaminating one another, as the words "the second law," typographically isolated and directly following the end of a sexual encounter, suggest that the second law of thermodynamics applies to human (sexual) affairs as much as physics, and the final (mathematically inappropriate) number in the Fibonacci Series that concludes the story, "69" (109) is both a (small) sexual joke and an assertion of the human power to break into closed systems and to break them open, crack their code in a way.

In Arnason's story the fertility myth has moved from an age of seven visible planets to one of binary stars, a progression from one closed universe to another and then to the next, the message being one of persistence and adaptation. The story is the same and not the same, and we come to read or to write the story for both these reasons.

No Arnason short story offers a more direct analysis of a fairy tale than "Lamb's Lettuce," which manages to analyze and retell a fairy tale in the space of a page and a half. The title is a translation of the German word *Rapunzel* (*New College German Dictionary*), a title which recovers the fact, ignored in most English translations, that Rapunzel is named after the lettuce that her mother craves and for which she is traded.[41] In Kathleen Rinkes' words, "The wife craves a child; she craves Rapunzel. Rapunzel, her daughter, is the price she pays for the Rapunzel she craves." Rapunzel is both the

[41] With the words "What is the promise of an unborn daughter worth? A handful of lamb's lettuce" (61) Arnason emphasizes Rapunzel's equivalency to the lamb's lettuce in the minds of her parents, thus tying the notion of her innocence to the notion of her being something less than a thinking subject. She is an innocent object, equivalent to a (desirable) vegetable.

innocence that sharpens desire (what food could be more innocent than lamb's lettuce?) and desire sharpened by innocence (what goes through Rapunzel's mind, alone and locked in the tower?). The fact that Rapunzel embodies sexual innocence and longing is driven home by the fact that she is locked in the tower only when she reaches adolesence, her golden hair symbolic, inevitably, of beauty and purity, but here in excess, in sexual profusion, twenty yards long at age twelve (in the Grimms' version).

In his first paragraph Arnason draws our attention to the betrayals that the traditional version of "Rapunzel" glosses over, as well as the surprising (for a genre widely regarded as belonging to children) and rarely acknowledged fact that in this fairy tale the act we are asked to regard as wicked consists in denying sexuality[42]. The character we are asked to see as a villain "wants only to preserve beauty and innocence. The mother's greed, the father's cowardice, these are the roots of the problem" (*Dragon* 61). Rapunzel is locked in the tower literally because of the negotiations her parents made, and symbolically by the greedy and cowardly desire (her parents', the witch's, Rapunzel's, the reader's?) to maintain her eternal innocence of the world, as if remaining forever in the potential will protect one from the disappointments of the actual. Whether we wish to read Rapunzel as a commentary on the cult of virginity, asceticism, Platonism, overprotective parenting, introversion or whatever world-phobia, underlying Arnason's story is a rejection of the notion that if experience and contact with the world tarnishes beauty and youth, avoiding experience will confer immortal youth and beauty. The obvious deconstruction of this liberatory reading is that Rapunzel's emancipation is

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[42]While I would disagree with the notion that sublimation is the very raison d'être of the fairy tale, sex and sexuality are central to many fairy tales, so that denying sexuality became something of a full-time occupation for the Grimms, particularly in the production of their second and later editions, altered in order to placate the middle-class parents who were their primary customers. In the 1857 edition, the Prince's visits are revealed when Rapunzel innocently observes to Mother Gothel that she (Gothel) is much heavier when climbing up than is the Prince. The 1812 edition reveals more about the cost of imposed innocence: "Thus they lived merrily and joyfully for a certain time, and the fairy did not discover anything until one day when Rapunzel began talking to her and said, 'Tell me, Mother Gothel, why do you think my clothes have become too tight for me and no longer fit?'" (*The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* xxvi-xxvii).

accomplished only with the intervention of the prince, but Arnason takes a more complex approach, refusing to condemn the witch out of hand. In saying that "The witch loves beauty and innocence. Who can blame her for wanting to preserve it?" (61) Arnason's narrator adopts the partisan tone that is one of the appeals of the fairy tale to a writer who enjoys directing and misdirecting the reader, and at the same time gives voice to a thought that may occur to many readers of the tale. Later he (the narrator) will go some way to answering this question.

Arnason develops his reversal of the traditional sympathies while maintaining the naive tone appropriate to a fairy tale: "The witch is out. She has gone on a journey. The prince in his slyness has listened from the forest. And what can we watchers do? The witch is too far away for us to call her" (62). Fairy tales generally offer a stark moral world, one which can be inferred from the names of the protagonists alone, but though the conflict between Mrs. Gothel (hence Mrs. Pagan, later simply called the witch) and the lamb reflects the Grimms' fondness for the theme of the struggle between Christianity and paganism (Rinkes), here they seem to have grafted the theme rather awkwardly, as Arnason's reversal implies. Observing that "the witch is too far away for us to call her" identifies two reasons Arnason employs the fairy tale style: the evocation of the heightened receptivity of the fairy tale reader and of the unequivocal moral universe of the fairy tale. Here, of course, the narrator is evoking both of these things in order to undo them: while his readers are as unlikely to cry out for the witch as they are to clap their hands in order to save Tinkerbell, we will surely be reminded of the receptive state in which we read fairy tales, and thus more conscious of just how uncritically we have absorbed this genre, and perhaps other forms of literature. In this particular instance, we cannot help but be aware that a moral universe that asks us to regard as a hero a man who creeps unbidden into a young woman's room may not be as simple or comforting as we thought.

Arnason's first substantial addition to the traditional plot develops the notion of sympathy for the witch further: "the witch weeps for lost innocence, her black heart breaking for the beauty that has been tarnished, for the death that has entered the world. She is weeping still" (62). Despite her black heart, we may empathize with the witch; perfect and timeless beauty has entered the world of time and death, and the witch mourns eternally for this fall into the mortal world. It may well be that the Prince is blinded because by seeing Rapunzel, he has brought her into the world (and thus death). The fact that his blinding is immediately followed by the witch's tears for Rapunzel directs our sympathy to the witch rather than the prince.

As fairy tales should, "Rapunzel" traditionally ends with the beautiful young woman and her prince living happily ever after, but Arnason's second departure from the traditional plot carries the story just a little further than fairy tales are expected to go: "They return to his kingdom where they grow fat in a period of slow peace. The daughter is sold for a handful of lamb's lettuce. The son becomes a famous ravisher of innocent maidens" (62). Fairy tales end in marriage and "happily ever after" because in them primary focus is on youthful exploits, not age, decline, and death. They reflect Freud's notion of literature as the story of that most invulnerable of heroes, "His Majesty the Ego" ("Creative" 425), and so they do not contemplate the heroes growing fat and being superceded by another generation, much less repeating the mistakes of their parents. Arnason's departures from the traditional plot, the witch's eternal weeping and the suggestion that this story will eternally recur, amount to a clarification or concretization of the competing impulses that animate the story. The witch's doomed efforts and her endless weeping embody the urge to protect innocence from experience, disappointment (what experience can match expectations?), and the inevitable outcome of living in the world, death. To "grow fat in a period of slow peace" may be a more realistic (if less inspiring) vision of living happily ever after, but this vision emphasizes that what goes on ever after is not the individuals but the narrative, a story acted out by succeeding

generations whose youthful innocence, yearning and potential inevitably fall victim to age, (imperfect) experience, and a repetition of the cycle of excessively cherished (female) innocence that makes daughters into naive innocents and sons into ravishers. Rather than closing with the tears that restore sight and with the promise of the two young lives, we are confronted with the compromises that these two will make with greed and cowardice, with the cherishing of innocence that inspires the betrayal of innocents.

Arnason does not make "Rapunzel" modern or local, but he alters the story just enough to lay bare the longing for innocence which underlies so many fairy tales, a longing to deny the inevitable imperfection of any life, the compromises we seek to obscure with the words "happily ever after." In analyzing and retelling the story of Rapunzel Arnason demonstrates that the fairy tale offers him the opportunity not only to reveal themes beneath the surface of the tale, but also to confront the reader with the fact that when you read fairy tales, you are reading about yourself, your culture, and perspectives passed from one generation to another, often without examination. Rather than simply reversing or modernizing the traditional views implicit in fairy tales, Arnason advocates them and then counters them, so that the reader is engaged in the issues that underlie the individual fairy tale.

As I have already noted, Snow White makes an appearance in "Morning Letter" and "Binary Lovers," but "The Committee," "The Circus Performers' Bar" and "The Girl of Milk and Blood" are more thorough retellings of the story, each of them recasting Snow White into a more specific time and place than in traditional versions. "Snow White" has in fact attracted numerous psychoanalytic and feminist critics, notably Gilbert and Gubar, who provide a persuasive reading of Snow White as ideal woman because she is inexperienced and catatonic, the Queen as wicked because she "insists on telling and living her own lively stories" (166), and the mirror as the voice of the absent father because it is the voice that judges women by their beauty. There have also been many adaptations, of which perhaps the most unusual is Donald Barthelme's, in which Snow

White, tired of being a "horsewife" to the seven dwarfs (who, she notes, "only add up to two *real men*, as we know them from the films of our childhood" (316)) longs for Prince Paul, a "sublimely poor painter" who tragically drinks Snow White's vodka -- which has been poisoned by the witch, Jane, because Snow White has alienated the affections of Hogo the vile -- leading Prince Paul to utter his final, touching lines: "It is a good thing I have taken it away from you, Snow White. It is too exciting for you . . . . But because I am a man, and because men have strong stomachs for the business of life, and the pleasures of life too, nothing will happen to me" (336), after which he, of course, drops dead. Arnason's variations on "Snow White" play with the psychoanalytic, feminist, and absurdist possibilities of "Snow White," but it seems to me that Arnason's primary interest is in the persistence of this fertility myth's masculine and feminine archetypes in the minds of contemporary men who, confronted by women who are writing new stories for themselves, find that rather than assuming the role of the prince, they have been cast as dwarfs, amounting to one seventh (or in Barthelme's generous reckoning, two sevenths) of the man their beloved seeks.

"The Committee" describes a committee of seven men devoted to nothing so much as carrying on an endless series of meetings. There was once a woman on the committee, but "she kept calling for the question, and wanting to move on to other topics" (*Circus* 11), and the men are devoted to the pursuit of a single question which they appear incapable of ever answering. It seems that in this story urban life has made men officious dwarfs, incapable of rousing Snow White from her glass coffin, but their inexpediency is almost redeemed by the degree of their devotion, if only to the vague notion that they should do something, and that above all, in doing something they must follow a code. The problem is that in this case the code is *Robert's Rules of Order*, and the code has, in fact, superceded all else. To deliberate is all that they have, so they make much of it, investing all of their energy and creativity into it, so that unlike committee meetings in which members state positions from which they will not budge, here fluidity is all:

> Each meeting is born afresh. Nobody sits in the same chair he sat in last meeting. Nobody ever takes the same stand on the question for two meetings in a row. I have personally spoken eloquently on the subject for as many as two hours, then so passionately rebutted my own position that even my opposition cheered and shouted, "Hear, hear." We operate in an ever-shifting mosaic of alliances and oppositions. It is clear that one day we will suddenly find ourselves in unanimous agreement, a vote will be taken and our work will be over. Then there will be shaking of hands, self-congratulation and perhaps a glass of champagne. We look forward to and fear that day. (12)

Of course, just as the story may be said to update "Snow White," it also makes the contemporary mythical, unexpectedly adding mythic resonance to that least fabulous facet of modern life, the committee meeting. The apple which sits at the centre of the table, the white flesh where Snow White bit into it now brown and shrunken, is not only "a constant reminder of our heavy responsibility" (12) but also of the fact that the committee meeting, being a peculiarly modern method whereby heavy responsibility is shared, diluted, and all too often evaded, is something of an invitation to contemporary dwarfism. In medieval lore the seven known planets were thought capable of bringing about circumstances favourable to the appearance of spring, but not of effecting this themselves, and Arnason intimates that the condition of an individual being significant but not in him- or herself sufficient applies to much of contemporary life. The satire is more amusing than devastating, and after all, the dwarfs help to get something done, and as we learn, even our inadequacy can have a mythic resonance.

The notion of the interpenetrability of genres and historical periods is further developed in "The Circus Performers' Bar," essentially *Crime and Punishment* from a dwarf's-eye view, set during the failed Russian revolution of 1905. This setting allows a suggestion of the frailty of individuals against historical forces, and a Russian sense of melancholy and resignation, so that the sight of Snow White, here *Crime and*

Punishment's Sonia, brings the narrator to observe that "this girl of blood and milk with her black hair, black eyes, white skin and red lips will teach us what we are: stunted inadequate parodies of men leaping up to try to touch the moon" (*Circus* 141). While the Sonia of *Crime and Punishment*, intensely conscious of the degradation of prostitution yet willingly embracing it to save her family, may make Snow White's purity insipid by comparison, Arnason's story emphasizes homologies. The characters in this story cannot hope to influence historical events, but the hopes the revolution raises and dashes, like the adoration and despair Sonia inspires, show that in every era, genre, and social stratum, what unites humans is the power to respond to the world intensely.

"The Girl of Milk and Blood" is the Italian name for the story we know in English as "Snow White," and clearly the Italian name emphasizes the fact that the origin of the fertility myth is not only in the fear that winter will never end, but also in notions of a female fertility capable of reviving a world trapped in winter. Arnason's story is set in the dying days of the Second World War in a part of Italy so remote that "Italian is a foreign language" (*Circus* 144) -- the setting is real, yet almost off the map. The seven sections of the story are each narrated by a different dwarf, the last being Gian Petro, their leader because he possesses a knowledge that precisely matches the limitation of the planets in the fertility myth: "even he knows only the signs that will release us to our acts" (146). The effect of the war is to reanimate the ancient fear that brought fertility myths and rites into existence: "once again, the spring has failed" (146), and the dwarfs fear it will never return. The death of the land that winter represents has been extended into apparent permanence because war has brought about a kind of dominion of death. Marshall Badoglio's declaration of war on Germany turns the Germans in the castle from friends into an occupying force, and it is after this that Georgio sees that they have captured "a woman in a white dress" (146), as if the Germans have taken Snow White hostage.

Snow White is marked by three drops of blood: prenatally in the Grimms' version (three drops of blood on the snow inspire her mother to envision Snow White), on her breast in Arnason's version, both when the dwarfs first see her and later in their home when Snow White repeats her mother's sewing wound several times. In the traditional story the blood suggests vitality (though in some readings, a dangerous vitality), fertility (her mother seeing blood and imagining the child she would like to have could hardly be clearer menstrual imagery, so that this blood represents fertility *in potential*), vivid beauty and life, but in wartime the blood cannot help but stand for death and bloodshed, and in particular it stands for the Nazis because it reminds Snow White of her captivity in the castle: "she fainted, and when she awoke, she could remember nothing, only that she is terrified of the castle" (150). The drops of blood on her breast seem to frame the titular milk and blood in terms of nourishment and wound. That a twentieth-century Snow White might regard this domestic wound as symbolic not of beauty, as her mother does[43], but of captivity may reflect a more contemporary Snow White, but her horror also reflects the wartime setting. The associations of the colour red in "Snow White" reflect the dichotomous associations that the colour red and blood raise in other literature, but with a local bias. Blood and the colour red will connote vitality and life or death and carnage depending on context and, of course, superfluity, but in both Arnason's and the traditional versions, even a little is too much. Snow White is poisoned by the red of the apple, and the Queen dances herself to death in red-hot shoes, two facts which have widely been read as a proscription against vitality in women by a regime which defines feminine beauty as pale, frail, and ideally catatonic when not doing housework. The setting diminishes such readings, however, for in wartime even three drops cannot help but evoke the much greater bloodshed that surrounds them.

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[43]In the Grimms' version: "And as she was sewing and looking out the window, she pricked her finger with the needle, and three drops of blood fell on the snow. The red looked so beautiful on the white snow that she thought to herself, If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window frame!" (196) -- the red, white and black of the Nazi flag might be seen as a dark reflection of this dream of a perfect child.

The latter days of the Second World War come about as close to a struggle between good and evil as contemporary thought will allow to have taken place in the real world, and in placing the girl of milk and blood, "so good that thinking of her goodness can bring any of us to tears" (150) in this time, Arnason draws the realm of starkly good and evil characters closer to the world we inhabit. Letting Von Ribbentrop in particular and the Nazis in general stand in the place of the Wicked Queen further emphasizes the struggle between good and evil, or perhaps between regenerative vitality and murderously controlled reproduction, rather than focussing on questions of gender. The proximity between the primal / timeless / fairy tale and the contemporary (relatively) / localized / real world is further suggested just after the poisoned apple is eaten: "Sandro and Mario, from their position on the roof, saw a flapping of black rags in the street, like a giant crow, but thought it was only one of the crones of the village passing" (153). The colour symbolism suggests a tie between the Wicked Queen and the SS, but the notion of the fleeting glimpse that reveals more than we are willing to believe is also a neat way of suggesting the insight that this little-regarded genre can offer into the world we inhabit. The crow/crone transformation here is also a way of acknowledging that terrors confronted in fairy tales are often adult fears transformed into something frightening to children; a fairy tale can be a way of passing on and passing off a fear.

"The Girl of Milk and Blood" does more than make a persistent-yet-malleable fertility myth modern and relevant, it suggests that mythology can be perverted, as Mario's reflections indicate:

> In the darkness of this dungeon we replay a medieval battle of light against darkness, good against evil. Throughout history, this castle has been the head of the valley, the centre from which wisdom and morality spread to the sprawling body of the community, but now there is a cancer working here, a foreign body that has seized control and whose evil seeps outward, infecting the whole. (153)

The castle that disseminates wisdom and morality, I am suggesting, is mythology and story-telling, and the foreign body is Naziism in particular and the mythologies that produce "so many glorious countries, so much fighting to preserve civilization from the maddened hordes outside" (147) in general.

I have argued that to update a fairy tale or fable is to test the general (or axiomatic) by the local (or syntagmatic), and it seems to me that unless the original tale is substantially deconstructed and countered by the local variation, the axioms underlying the original tale will tend to be confirmed simply by the fact that the plot is being reiterated. This iteration of the Snow White story does not simply demonstrate the aptness of a story about the fear that winter will never end for describing the latter portion of the Second World War, it also suggests that the intolerance embodied here in the Nazis is a more general human trait than we might wish to admit. Nazi notions of racial purity are not a necessary precondition of cruelty, as Mario observes: "See us for what we were, what we are. Our bodies stunted and deformed, half men always on the lookout for the kick, the beating that the others must give because we affront them by wrapping desire in such awkward flesh. We are comic at a distance, terrifying when we're near, conjuring in every man the dwarf within" (154). Where in "The Committee" the dwarf is an amusing representation of general modern inadequacy, Mario's observation suggests that proximity with the dwarfs revokes the distance that allows their tragedy to be our comedy[44], and this confrontation with how far we fall short of our desires inspires in us a revulsion and desire to distance and "other" the dwarfs. To give a local habitation to a fairy tale is also to confront the reader personally with the fairy tale's import. Picturesque or amusing though they may be in illustrated children's books and Disney versions, the dwarfs are not

[44]Angela Carter's observation that "comedy is tragedy that happens to *other* people" (213) and Chaplin's that "life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot" (qtd. in his obituary, *Guardian* 28 December 1977) are two of the more memorable articulations of the sense that comedy requires distance; a distance restored, in this case, by what Kristeva would call abjecting the dwarfs.

simply a mirror of the fairy tale's traditional child reader, they are a mirror of every reader: yearning and yet too small to affect elemental forces.

The identification of the girl of milk and blood with an elemental force is suggested by the profusion of plant growth that follows her arrival at the dwarfs' house, "as if it were already spring" (152) and by the equation of her death with "the death of innocence and goodness in the world" (154). The dwarfs are only capable of completing their mission when a bomb frees them from the "cocoon of [their] cell" (155) and also obliterates their individual selves, fusing the seven into one man who is now the proprietor and embodiment of the castle:

> The accidental electricity of that explosion had charged that body with life and filled each neuron and synapse of the brain with seven memories. It had concentrated all the ghosts of the castle, all thoughts that had been thought there, all the passions that had seeped into the stone walls of the castle and delivered them to us, to me. I realized that I had been born that second, and so I named myself. Gian Petro. (155-56)

This new-born man is fit lover for the "new-born woman" (151) because he has undergone the destruction necessary to creation, and this fusion has brought the disparate specializations of the dwarfs[45] into a whole that also includes the thoughts and passions that the castle has contained; the source of mythology has been incorporated, and the myth can be renewed and written anew. Gian Petro (or the Baron, as the villagers who recognize him as the ruler of the castle call him) first fishes out the drowned soldier and then Old Snapper, "the evil one" who can be caught with "a lure made from a piece of white cloth with three drops of blood" (151), and the association between a modern and a mythical evil is illustrated by the fact that "from a small distance, it was impossible to tell them apart" (157). The creative renewal that the fertility myth celebrates is always sexual

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[45]Antonio, for example, muses "I have listened for so long now that I hardly need my other senses" (148).

and seasonal, and reiterations of the myth may also celebrate literary renewal: "He spoke to her of his love in his seven voices, and as they loved, the discreet sun hid his face behind a cloud. Every living thing reached up eagerly to the gentle rain that followed" (157). Clearly the union of the primal yet eternally-youthful avatar of the fertility myth with the seven-voiced Gian Petro/Baron suggests the regenerative possibilities of linking traditional tales with intertextuality and postmodern writing[46].

While I have downplayed gender issues in "The Girl of Milk and Blood," they are prominent in many of Arnason's other works, and as I have suggested, frequently consist of examinations of men who have not adapted as quickly as women to shifting gender roles in contemporary society. In "Girl and Wolf," for example, Little Red Riding Hood tames the wolf, and she does so metatextually; while the wolf tries "to make his answers part of a ritual that will complete itself out of its inner necessity" (133), she recognizes the script and , at the climactic moment, changes it: "He hesitates a moment, but there is really no option. There is only one answer, and there has never really been a choice. He says it reluctantly. 'The better to eat you with.' 'Nonsense,' the girl replies, sliding under the wolf and pulling him on top of her" (134). In a very perceptive essay on "Girl and Wolf" Simone Vauthier observes that "the wolf, who is allowed no spontaneous speech of his own, is trapped in the familiar, the already-told. Not so the girl who exposes the exchange for what it is--a verbal game which does not make sense in the 'real' world (of the fiction)--and thereby refuses Red Riding Hood's fate" (140). The thinly-veiled warning to young women about the metaphorical wolves that seek to consume them becomes, in Arnason's hands, almost the reverse; the predator becomes the prey, and the wolf for whom possibilities were endless at the beginning of the story realizes that "the forest trails, though they wind and cross, are searching for somebody else's meetings"

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[46]Sandro's declaration that "I have waited twenty years in this place, knowing only my own part of the mission and sworn not to tell or ask of the others' parts" (146) could, in this reading, be seen as a swipe at the aridity of monological texts or readings.

(135). As Vauthier points out, gender roles in "Girl and Wolf" are destabilized in a number of comic ways, but in the end,

> The bad fairy of stereotyping has changed the fresh young creature, who could blithely reinvent her story with a ringing "nonsense," into a cliché. Girl is the domineering female of Mark Twain or James Thurber, and countless less amusing authors. She is the civilizer who prevents Huck Wolf from lighting out for the territory. After so much estrangement, how familiar this view that the male is essential motion, the female basic stasis, in spite of her little excursus, and that she will tame him at the cost of his vitality and freedom. (153-54)

Vauthier does go on to note that the self-parody in this story "undercuts all its 'lessons'" (154) and goes some way to undermining the notion that as a fairy tale it is inescapably "naturalizing [. . .] a discourse of order" (Pierre Rodriguez, qtd. in Vauthier 154). "Girl and Wolf" inverts and mocks traditional views and plays with the reader's expectations regarding plot, characterization and genre, so that the various narrative levels and competing expectations mitigate against a single authorized meaning or moral. The female as domesticator of "Huck Wolf" may be a disturbingly familiar literary character, but an improving moral about gender equality would be more disturbing still by virtue of its inviolability and univocality. If "Girl and Wolf" has an underlying message, it is that power goes to those who can not only read their circumstances but rescript when necessary.

Readers offended by the ending of "Girl and Wolf" will be apopleptic over "The Hoag Brothers and Their Adventures in Real Estate," in which the Big Bad Wolf is reincarnated as Bibi Wolff, who charms the two younger Hoag brothers out of the deeds to their Winnipeg Beach cottages and has designs on the third. I would suggest that the question of whether feminizing the Big Bad Wolf empowers or stereotypes is one this story does not particularly address; Bibi is female and a predator, but the more striking aspect of this story is its local quality. Arnason's updated versions of "The Frog Prince"

and "Hansel and Gretel" are, on the surface, more politically correct, for in "Return of the Frogs" the greatest wish of the Princess is not for a Prince but for a chance to become an NHL goalie, and "The Evil Stepchildren" offers the stepmother's perspective on familial discord, but the fact that the frog appears to be transformed into Jean-Claude Grenwill (grenouille) is yet another example of Arnason thumbing his nose at contemporary propriety. What would otherwise amount to local stories or gossip rises (or sinks) to the level of fairy tale, so that characters are flattened but also universalized. Yes, Bibi is a big bad femme fatale, and the Hoag brothers are lonely bachelors who understand business better than people, but they are also local characters whose story can enter the world of fabulous literature. Altering the traditional story, certain to be altered by its inheritors, "The Hoag Brothers" nevertheless stands as an assertion of the presence of the fabulous in the local.

Arnason's new fairy tales, those which employ the tropes and characters of the fairy tale but which are not retellings of a particular fairy tale, offer greater narrative freedom, but the absence of an originary tale eliminates the capacity to surprise or raise questions by deviating from the traditional version. In these tales alterations of character rather than plot are Arnason's focus, as for example in the cases of princes and princesses. For Arnason the archetype of the ill-mannered prince finds its contemporary embodiment in the figure of the male doctor, whose self-contented nature makes him a source of seducable wives in "Binary Lovers" and ironically makes him a quester in "Eye, Ear, Nose & Throat." A year's suspension and a hefty fine for creative billing practices leave the eye, ear, nose and throat specialist with some time on his hands and the realization that in his life thus far he had "failed to discover how courtship was accomplished" (*Dragon* 55) and so he begins his quest for a wife. He is assisted in this quest by the modern version of elves, trolls, witches and other possessors of arcane knowledge: unionized trade workers, three of whom help him because he does each of them a good deed, so that each is permitted, despite a "mighty oath of secrecy" (55), to tell him one

secret regarding where to find the best wife. His search culminates in the discovery of three princesses in glass coffins, his marriage to the third, and happiness ever after embodied in the arrival of three gold-medalist-to-be daughters. There is a special delight in seeing a doctor cast in the role of the quester who realizes through his good deeds that his modest knowledge is actually useful, but the gold medals that his daughters promise suggest a contemporary sense of royalty that is, in the end, no great improvement on the original.

In "The Hardware Dealer's Daughter" the modern princess is daughter not to a king but to another kind of modern royalty, the wealthy merchant. Wishing to marry off his daughter, the hardware dealer gathers a series of unsuitable suitors, and by her harsh judgement of them he learns "that his daughter's long study of English literature had hardened her heart" (65). She composes a riddle for her suitors and a fearful punishment for those who cannot solve it, and though the good looks of the first two almost soften her heart, her literary training steels her will. To her chagrin, however, the unprepossessing third suitor succeeds, likely because the punishment for failing to solve the riddle is to become an accountant in Guelph. Since he already is an accountant from Guelph "it was clear that this suitor had nothing to lose" (68). In most variations on the story of the three caskets the third suitor is a low-born but good-hearted waif, the dark horse who has the princess's heart and the reader's sympathy. This princess, however, is more intrigued by the Turk and the Swede than by the lowly accountant from Guelph, but her distaste for, and disposal of, him amounts to more than a modern rejection of traditional expectations (marriage to the very apotheosis of dull reliability, the Canadian accountant). She employs her literary-theoretical training to make the question more difficult, and when her alterations are overruled by the judges she recognizes that she cannot rewrite this discourse. Instead she steps outside of it by having three daughters who do not resemble the accountant – "One was tall and dark and looked Turkish. The other was blue-eyed and golden-haired and looked Swedish. The third looked exactly as Kimberly herself had

as a young child" (68) – and by luring the accountant out into a world where he cannot survive, a ski resort in the Rocky Mountains, where he dies instantly on the bunny hill. Though she may have been named into the world of consumer goods when her father chooses her name (Kimberly Clark) from a carton of paper towels, she most definitely is not a consumable good. Kimberly goes on to found "a feminist collective in the Queen Charlotte Islands where she lived happily ever after" (69) and leaves her daughters a new twist on the Austenian entailed will: "She passed on her untold wealth to her daughters, but only on the condition that they never marry. And they lived happily ever after too" (69). The modern echoes of traditional characters demonstrate changes that have taken place in society, but it is when the traditional plot is echoed that we see that these changes were brought about by characters who recognize their given stories and rewrote them.

"The Sunfish" draws on Icelandic tradition, the Norse and Teutonic tradition of carting the god Freyr into town in a wagon[47], and a tradition common to a great number of cultures of the fish that can talk and therefore reveal the secrets of the deep. The fish, however, becomes peripheral to the story, and in the final pages we learn that this fabulous tale is the narrator's family history, and his investigations suggest that "the whole thing about the fish is just made up so people will think it is only a fairy tale and not enquire any further. After all, our uncle is the mayor, and any scandal might go bad for him in the next election" (*50 Stories* 75). We move from a fairy tale to a shadowy family history that invites a series of speculations to a conclusion that begins with the narrator's rather comical words: "if I were making up this story" (75), our signal to be alert to the ontological levels of the story as well as the ways in which the traditional and the new affect one another. The story begins in a fairy tale style, then moves into the realist mode, but near its conclusion it becomes, retroactively, a myth of origins, an effort

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47 This was a propitious time for marriage, and as James George Frazer observes, variations of this tradition were common in northern Europe: "in Sweden every year a life-size image of Frey, the god of fertility, both animal and vegetable, was drawn about the country in a waggon attended by a beautiful girl who was called the god's wife" (166).

to explain the narrator's literal and literary genealogy. The narrator's subjunctive voice in the final paragraphs indicates a recognition not only of the uncertainty of the project, but of the narrator's, and author's, limited ownership of this or any narrative. Like other modes, family history is shared -- and often disputed -- property, and the explanation that the fabulous is introduced as a way of remembering and simultaneously disguising the truth has a larger significance than the pertinence to this narrator's family. The political ramifications of this particular fairy tale are small on the world stage, but powerful on a personal level, and this too speaks of the potential of the fairy tale in general: its power operates on a personal rather than a grand political level.

"The Dragon and the Dry Goods Princess" is another of Arnason's fabulous local tales that examines a peculiarly male disinclination to adapt and change. The stories of the Princess and the Pea, and Beauty and the Beast are woven into "Dragon," but this princess is in danger of little more than boredom, from which she is ironically saved by an accountant. The practicality and cautiousness of the accountant might be seen as devastating to the dragon, whose existence depends on a certain amount of imagination, but their meeting is less than cataclysmic; pointing out that his castle is falling into ruin, Arnold the accountant shows the dragon how wise investments would cover any repair costs: "And he pulled a brochure from his pocket and began to annotate figures with his ball-point pen. The dragon didn't have a chance" (*Dragon* 7). The dragon nevertheless lives happily ever after; by making some accomodation with the present, the fabulous creature carries on.

The section of *If Pigs Could Fly* entitled "Political Fables" consists of new fables; they are not reworkings of classic fables but representations of contemporary political issues using animals to represent politicians or ideologies. "Badger and Fox" addresses the problem of balancing the budget in Farmer Gary's (Filmon then, Doer now) meadow, and it demonstrates that such exercises allow one the opportunity to be self-righteous and self-serving at the same time. Badger, for example, urges restraint for others, and when

he is taken to task for his own greed, replies that "The small animals may eat as many badgers as they like. That they do not eat badgers is simply a lack of initiative on their parts and not my fault" (3). The fable form allows Arnason to illustrate such issues as creative accounting and funding the government through legalized gambling with great clarity:

> "First, you will remember that I ran a substantial deficit last year."
>
> "Yes indeed," Badger replied. "It was in all the papers."
>
> "Well, I simply took half of this year's deficit and assigned it to last year. Last year's deficit is now much larger than it was, but since last year has passed, it causes no problem to anyone."
>
> "Brilliant!" said Badger.
>
> "And you remember my brother the gambler? Well, he contributed the rest of the money needed to entirely wipe out the deficit. And so my budget is balanced."
>
> "As I remember," Badger said, "your gambling brother had no money."
>
> "You are right," said Fox. "He had to borrow it. But now it is he that has the deficit and not me." (5)

One criticism of the fable, that by presenting classes and personality types as animals it naturalizes them and suggests that they are permanent and unchangeable, is in some way addressed and countered by putting this view in Badger's mouth when he advocates a balanced budget: "taking into account that some of us are hard-working badgers and some of us are merely lazy and unemployed mice without initiative" (4). The clarity that the political fable offers can also limit it, as Badger's tendentious speech shows, but as even this speech shows, it is a powerful way of setting out the perspective that underlies more obscure political rhetoric.

"The Land of Plenty," though it describes "Frontario" (*If Pigs Could Fly* 40), is a more general fable on the power of politicians who tap into the greed and mean-

spiritedness of the electorate, turning loose misery and want in a land of plenty with the words "'perhaps we need only to dare to dream'" (42), which soon enough becomes "'Dream your darkest dreams'" (44). Here greed and destruction are unleashed by the very power to represent diverse groups as mice, frogs, eagles and so forth, combined with the fearful ease with which unscrupulous ogre-politicians appeal to the narrow and selfish interests of individuals who strongly identify with their own group and no other, and whose well-intentioned platitudes yield, when it comes time to vote, to pure self-interest when they are convinced that times are tough. The ogres appeal to the desire of the mice to drain the ponds, of the frogs to flood the grassland, and of the eagles to eliminate animals that are not food for eagles, and thereby show the dangerous power of identification when it is narrowly and selfishly applied. In general, the fable may be judged harmless either because the form is understood to be addressed to children or because it paints in broad strokes, but the conclusion of this fable makes a powerful comment about those who gain power by sowing division:

> But the ogre did not give them roads. He closed the hospitals and he shut down the schools. He flooded the grasslands and he drained the ponds. He put an end to the creatures who only fed and mated and did nothing for the good of the eagles. And when some of the animals came to him to complain, he merely said, "Dream your darkest dreams." And they voted for him again. And they dreamt dark dreams. And as far as anyone knows, they are dreaming them still. (44)

Few readers may identify themselves with Arnason's ogres, but those who recognize (and, no doubt, resent) their portrait will nevertheless need to contemplate the possibility (if only to dismiss it out of hand) that their views depend on the desire to dream one's darkest dreams. Few or none may be converted, but readers are left with the question of whether their convictions encourage their best or their worst instincts. Any change effected would be subtle, but it go deep. To borrow one of Arnason's conclusions: "So there you are" (*50 Stories* 75).

Chapter Four: *What the Crow Said*

Arguably the seminal Canadian magic realist text, Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* examines in simultaneously sophisticated and playful ways the relationship between the individual and the environment (constituted as nature, the community, or the brute facts of existence) with a particular interest in the differing ways that men and women negotiate this relationship through language. If two distinct worldviews are being presented simultaneously, the division is between those who assign primacy to the individual, ordering mind, and those who assign it to nature. This conflict does not fall so much along Native / Western cultural lines as along lines of gender in the novel, though the Joe Lightning character adds a Native perspective that is closer to the women's than to the men's view. The other men in the novel, particularly the hero, Gus Liebhaber, seek to impose an order and meaning upon the world, and they resist the notion that they are interchangeable members of a community (or hive, or set of type), while the women are more pragmatic, less disturbed by paradox and less given to individualistic fantasy. Kroetsch portrays women as more attuned to sexual generation, and thus to the notion of the continuity of generations and a corresponding diachronic view of time, so that they are less troubled by the prospect of their own individuality being effaced by their given role and eventually by their death. Similarly, the women in the novel are less concerned than the men with making the world fit human, linear conceptions of how it ought to operate. This is not simply a restatement of Kroetsch's familiar association of men with the horse and women with the house, and thus men with individual ego and women with communal responsibility; Kroetsch is not simply examining gender roles on the prairies in the decades following the depression, instead he is using this as a background to a debate on the relationship between the individual and the world.

What the Crow Said announces these interests at the outset: "people, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started

everything" (*Crow* 1). This impossible seduction of Vera Lang -- "true language[48]," as W.F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence point out (172) -- is related in a communal narrative voice that does not question the event; as in most magic realism, the community represented in the text accepts the event as real, and thereby encourages the wider textual community to do the same, asking ourselves what is true rather than what is real. Bolstering the notion that *What the Crow Said* is at least inspired by magic realism, this opening sentence echoes that of Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as Luca Biagiotti has observed (108). Kroetsch's sensuous description makes tactile, physical, and erotic this congress between humanity and nature[49], or language and the world; the "trickle of gold along her bare thighs" (2), the "kiss of wing and leg" (4), the "push and rub of her myriad unthinking lovers" draw Vera, and Vera's movements draw the natural world into this inconceivable yet fertile union:

> Her body was not hers now, it moved with the surge of grass in the wind, a field of green oats, a flowering of clover. Her moving crushed the blue-purple petals of the crocus bed, broke the hairy stalks, the blossoms, into the dizzying sweetness of her own desire. The hum of wings melded earth and sky into the thickness of her skin. She had no mind left for thinking, no fear, no dream, no memory. (4)

Earth and sky, archetypes of the feminine and masculine are melded into flesh, briefly extinguishing the very borders upon which notions such as identity -- indeed all rational thoughts -- are predicated. Kroetsch's persistent interest in the "indeterminacy of boundaries" (Robert Wilson viii) is unmistakable: Vera hovers between girl and woman, terror and pleasure, thought and instinct, the bees between homelessness and hiving, a

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[48]Not only does "Vera believe that everything should be given its right name" (133), she is (unlike her sisters, each of whom goes by her first name) almost always "Vera Lang," just as Gus Liebhaber (love-haver, lover) is referred to overwhelmingly as "Liebhaber," rather than "Gus."

[49]The seduction takes place on prairie where "the sod was never broken" (1); both nature and Vera are untouched by man, and men in the novel being the proponents of boundaries, nature and Vera are figured as free from structure, mediation and boundary.

"broken cluster" (2) between "swarming into a new nest" and "mating flight" (3). At the same moment in the town of Big Indian, the men expect to hear a male sound; the train must blow its whistle because "every driver, even the engineer of a train, must announce his coming" (5) to the bridge, but Vera announces her coming (both orgasm and becoming[50]) with an "almost human" cry that is "despairing and ecstatic" (5). The women understand Vera's cry better than do the men, recognizing "a woman's outcry, lament and song," while the boys are already able to guess that "they were confronting a mystery greater than any they were expected to or ever would learn" (5). Clearly, Kroetsch is open to charges of essentialism on gender: men are bumbling (and lazy) rationalists associated with machines and wisest when they recognize that they will never understand a woman's wisdom, while women are wise through instinct and proximity (because they embrace or submit) to nature. Whether we regard these characteristics as timeless essences or individual responses to traditional roles, Kroetsch is most interested in how they shape an individual's perspective on the world and language, or in Richard Rorty's terms, "lumps" and "texts".

For the men, Vera's cry means that "no man would satisfy her. Not one. No mortal man would satisfy her" (6). This double repetition suggests not only that the men of Big Indian are rather single-minded (not to mention selfish) in each man's concentration on his own sexual prospects and position in the sexual pecking order, but also that on some level they grudgingly recognize that Vera Lang, true language in authentic union with nature, is unattainable to them. This is an understanding that they strive mightily to put out of their minds. They are, in other words, not only phallocentric but phallogocentric, all the while aware on some level that their position is untenable. Vera is, of course, impossibly beautiful; men seek her, even go mad for her, despite (or because of) the fact that they cannot have her.

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[50]Peter Thomas points out "a typical Kroetschian pun on Bee-ing and Bee-coming" (103).

Women in the novel are considerably more pragmatic than the men. For example when Tiddy Lang learns that her daughter Vera is pregnant (by bees), she looks out the window, notes that it is snowing (it is June), and reaches for her coat; in an environment as perverse as the Canadian prairie, her action suggests, we must accept and adapt to absurdities. Tiddy reads the signs of nature, but her husband Martin reads the calendar, and dies for it, freezing to death because he goes out "dressed in June clothing because it was June" (10). The men struggle against an environment that confounds logic, and the reader cannot help but see this as a metonym for his or her reading of *What the Crow Said* and indeed for all efforts to make sense of a text.

This magic realism is allied to the tall tale, which on the prairies takes the form of the story told to turn survival in a hostile environment into mock heroism, a simultaneous aggrandizement and deflation. It is also postmodernist and linguistic: Martin dies, and the men of Big Indian are all wounded and degraded because they insist that the world fit itself to a given, proscriptive language, while the women's language is more provisional and attuned to the world around them, more metaphoric, too, perhaps, so that when one of the Lang women utters the phrase "it's snowing" we come to realize that she is indicating that she is pregnant (8, 61, 65, 167) or that she is ready to become so (31, 31, 32, 33).

That the opposition in *What the Crow Said* between fixity and fluidity, which many critics quite reasonably read as a struggle between modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, frequently takes the form of a difference between men and women may reflect the claim by many postmodernists that postmodernism is inclusive of women while modernism inevitably figures the artist as male (and educated in a particular tradition, and in many ways superior to his society), but I suggest that underlying the aesthetic question is a philosophical one which is most plainly illustrated by two rather minor characters, Isador Heck and John Skandl. Heck is a sceptic *par excellence*, able to heal his toe (which he breaks by dropping a post maul on it) by "disallowing the theory of gravity" (66-67), indeed his doubts extend to the point that "sometimes, when he'd had a few

beers, he argued against the existence of a world beyond the municipality. Why pay taxes to build roads, he argued, when there's nowhere to go?" (70). As the builder of a lighthouse of ice, Skandl attempts to build "a center. A beacon. A guide. A warning sign" (33), and for this reason he is frequently characterized as a modernist[51], or in Kathleen Wall's view, a "pre-deconstructionalist man, [who] believes his phallic signifier is transparent, its meaning utterly clear" (92). Both Heck and Skandl come to reasses their beliefs and to alter their perspectives; Heck learns that rather than nothing, "everything existed" (126), while Skandl eventually seeks to turn the indeterminate status of the municipality of Bigknife to profit (though admittedly he is also seeking to "anchor himself to the earth" (53)). Lying "ambiguously on the border between the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan" (28) and claimed by neither, Big Knife "fade[s]" into a Hutterite colony to the south and "vanishe[s]" into an Indian reserve to the north[52]. Skandl goes to "the capital" (55) to demand recognition in return for allegiance, though we never learn which capital. The transformation of Skandl and Heck may turn them from parodic to fully-fleshed symbols of the modernist and the postmodernist, with Skandl's ideal developing from the illusion of a transparent symbol to a useful uncertainty (perhaps moving from *The Well-Wrought Urn* to "Irony as a Principle of Structure"); and Heck is developing his understanding from nihilism to infinite possibility. Nevertheless, the differences between Heck and Skandl may be regarded on a plane other than that of the debate between modernism and postmodernism; considering

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[51]For example, Garrett-Petts and Lawrence argue that Skandl's response "to the apparent chaos and unending winter of his world is like that of modernists who are tempted to impose meaning prematurely, to fix reality in familiar and ostensibly static forms" (172).

[52]Luca Biagiotti argues that "Kroetsch very carefully locates his fictitious town between two 'conflicting' toponyms, one imperial (Alberta), the other indigenous (Saskatchewan)" (105), concluding that rather than a link between or synthesis of cultures, Bigknife becomes "a moment of spatial and cultural 'folding,' where different languages decide to listen to, rather than silence, each other" (106).

Kroetsch's interest in Heidegger[53], Skandl's name brings to mind Heidegger's sense of the "scandal of philosophy," perhaps best summarized by M.J. Inwood:

> The problem of the reality of an external world, like that of the existence of other minds, is a pseudo-problem: for Kant, the "scandal of philosophy" is that no proof has yet been given of the "existence of things outside of us", but for Heidegger the scandal is "not that this proof has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*." (239)

While the men in *What the Crow Said* are not all as sceptical as Heck, they have their doubts about the world outside their district, indeed their epic card game may be characterized as another example of the repeated (and, to Heidegger, scandalous) efforts to prove the existence of the world -- ironically, by withdrawing from the world. The women in the novel, better able than the men to see themselves as part of the world, end up "running the world better than the men" (74) because they are not perturbed by indeterminacy. To put it in more traditional literary terms, they possess negative capability.

Vera Lang's seduction by the bees inaugurates the "year the snow didn't melt" (7), and as a result Skandl's lighthouse is a failed effort to provide a landmark in a location where snow has erased spatial and temporal boundaries. The snow and bees are further linked in a series of images, beginning with Liebhaber's first step outside of temporal order: "watching the buzz of snowflakes, like myriad white bees, against the glass. That was the first time he remembered the future" (9). When we consider that the bees "are also 'letters' ('B's), a kind of naturalist's answer to Gutenberg's moveable type" (Garrett-Petts and Lawrence 173), the snow may be read as symbolic of the chaos, randomness and loss of memory that Liebhaber ascribes to Gutenberg and moveable type. We learn

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[53]For analysis of Heidegger in Kroetsch, see Douglas Reimer: "Heideggerian Elements in Robert Kroetsch's 'Seed Catalogue,'" David Clark: "Forget Heidegger, or Why I am Such a Clever Postmodernist," and Isaias Naranjo: "Visions of Heidegger in Dennis Lee and Robert Kroetsch."

that "time was something of a mystery to Liebhaber[54]" (9), and "everyone was losing track of time" (30), indeed the image of a clock that is "set to bar time" (11) suggests that efforts to organize time may be illusory, but a sexual image late in the novel which represents a sexual position as typesetting may explain Liebhaber's apparent precognition: "Liebhaber, turned end for end in the old bed, his head to the foot, like printers of old, always, reading backwards, reading upside down" (194). Liebhaber does not foresee but "remembers" the future, reading it as a typesetter and forgetting to read the reversed text backwards. Constants as reliable as time and the seasons are not subject to human ordering, Kroetsch suggests; the vagaries of weather on the prairies becomes a lump that resists traditional texts. Playing on Plato's (and Marshall McLuhan's) notion that writing erodes memory[55], Kroetsch also frequently depicts Liebhaber confronted like a Saussure of the prairies with the random dispersability of type, so that type (e.g. b's) is like bees by virtue of the qualities of incipient randomness and of meaning produced by difference. When Tiddy marries Skandl, for example, Liebhaber substitutes letters to change the last sentence of his assertion "I'm not alone. Really. I'm not" into "I'm glot" (47), turning an unconvincing denial of his loneliness into an affirmation of language. The frequent references to bees suggest another structure wherein randomness and difference are useful; the apparent chaos of a hive is in fact strictly organized according to the different functions of queen, worker and drone. This latter quality amounts to a functionality that

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[54]Liebhaber nevertheless attempts to tell Martin Lang to "suspend himself . . . out of time's way" (14); Liebhaber is liminal, able occasionally to enter the women's diachronic time frame.

[55]In Plato's Phaedrus, Socrates approvingly quotes the myth of King Thamus of Egypt's address to Theuth, the god who invents "number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing" (156 274c-d) to this effect: "If men learn this [writing], it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks" (157 275-a). Marshall McLuhan suggests that the shift from script to typography exacerbates this: "Print provided a vast new memory for past writings that made a personal memory inadequate" (*Understanding Media* 174).

comes by virtue of replaceability, and the men in the novel are deeply uncomfortable with their resemblance to the drones in a hive[56].

The division in the novel between the ordered and the random might be characterized as a split between perception via the mind or the body, or through theory or erotics. Thus while Skandl searches for the body of Martin Lang, the brute fact that will confirm his death and Tiddy's availability for courting[57], Tiddy "hauled him [Liebhaber] into need, Tiddy, searching for the missing body there in her own bed, while the searchers prowled the world" (32); Tiddy's notion of the body is grounded in sensation rather than in a dead fact. Similarly the presence of the bees and the snow stand not only for blurred boundaries but for sensuality, and the rise of the erotic and decline of the reign of the intellect in the novel is presaged by the bees and by a loss of memory. When Liebhaber tries (unsuccessfully and perhaps half-heartedly) to save Martin Lang from the death Liebhaber has "remembered" he will face, Lang ends up frozen on a plow and Liebhaber is himself nearly frozen to death, hearing "the bees, distant" (20) when he is nearest death, but also ushered back to life by snow and bees:

> Years later, Liebhaber would insist it was somewhere in that night that his memory of the past began to fail. Everything was erased, blanked into nothing by snow . . . . She, with her long, certain fingers, scooped snow from the blue enamelware basin; she sprinkled it down onto Liebhaber's private parts. What he remembered, if he remembered anything, was the bee-like swarming of the flakes of snow, out of her hand, down onto his parted legs." (21)

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[56]The men are first tied to the bees when we learn that "there were surely as many of them [the men], that day, in Big Indian, as there were drones in the swarm of bees" (5).

[57]The loss of Martin Lang's body also means that "Death was loose" (29), and perhaps because of this, Lang's ghost makes some appearances. We learn that "the digging of a grave, attendance at at wake, the ceremony of burial, any one of those events might have made things normal again. The bees were to blame" (36); the absence of the body and the attendant ceremonies means that the world refuses to behave according to our expectations.

Liebhaber's immersion in snow is analogous to his immersion in typography; snow, bees and b's are in this image tied to an erotics that values randomness and simultanaeity over discrete order and memory. Ironically, Liebhaber's repeated observation that "it was Gutenberg who'd made all memory of the past irrelevant" (59, 102) ties Gutenberg and the technology of the medium of print to the decline of linearity and the ordering intellect and the rise of a more chaotic erotics of simultanaeity.

Men's efforts to make meaning out of the random are plentiful in the novel, as are the frustrations of those efforts. As Kathleen Wall observes, the first sentence of the novel is itself a ludicrous effort to make sense of the inexplicable: "people, years later, blamed everything on the bees" (1). When Liebhaber flips a coin, perhaps deciding whether to warn Martin Lang of his impending death, Tiddy Lang says "the bees did it" (12) and John Skandl snatches the coin out of the air. Her *non sequitur* is devastating; Liebhaber is interrupted so effectively because of the very unexpectedness and implausibility of her statement. Blaming the bees, and by extension, nature, existence (bee-ing) and language (b's) makes suspect the very project of assigning meaning. Similarly, Tiddy Lang's "awkward, pontificating, fatal, afterthought" statement that "someone must take a wife" is so powerful that it "slammed through Liebhaber's mind like an exploding rock" (12) largely because it is so arbitrary as virtually to deconstruct itself; the explosive power resides not in the social convention (that pregnancy must be made legitimate by a marriage in which a man *takes* and a woman *is taken*) but in the biological imperative that dwarfs and renders hollow the convention. Tiddy's statement "had all the excitement of theft about it, a vast and terrible conspiring to unhinge the world's illusions" (12) not because it declares the sovereignty of a stilted social regulation but because it utterly undermines it.

The intensity of the men's struggle for meaning may come from their fear that Vera Lang is correct when she repeatedly observes that "*Men are a bunch of useless bastards*" (7, 13, 108, 169). Vera's view reflects not only the fact that her father and most

of the men of Big Indian are more given to drinking, talking, and playing cards than to working, but also her sense that it is only illusions that separate human society from the organization of the beehive, where only a small number of males (drones) are allowed to live, on the chance that they may fulfil their only useful purpose, fertilizing a new queen. Vera, gazing at her baby boy, similarly observes that "after the nuptials . . . the males are useless" (50), and on the next page we learn that she literally throws her child to the wolves. Small wonder that the local men who know about Vera fear her as much as long for her; indeed they appear to exert all their energies into ignoring her insights into the world or, failing that, into despising the world, as evidenced by Liebhaber's repeated and extended comparisons of the world with such things as "a double hernia . . . . A cracked pot. A boiled lemon. A scab and a carbuncle. A mole on a mole's ear. A mouthful of maggots" (13).

Liebhaber's notion that beauty promises immortality – revealed in such moments as when he looks at Tiddy Lang and notes "her hair, the perfect texture of her skin. 'I'm not going to die,' he told her" (14) – might identify him as a modernist, ascribing to perfect beauty the power to defeat mortality, but he follows a more traditional path to achieving immortality than through the production of art. If Tiddy is his muse, the product of their collaboration is a child, but one of uncertain provenance; Skandl is Liebhaber's "rival" (31) not only in the matter of Tiddy's love but in the paternity of the "strange child" (33), JG (John Gustav, combining the first names of Skandl and Liebhaber). JG cannot speak and can only walk in figure eights, a shape suggesting the mathematical symbol for infinity and thus eternity. His nature is an implicit commentary on all efforts to defeat time: JG's face is "untouched by time" (129) and he is "innocent" (54) of language and "not guilty of thought" (130), so that, because "he had seen his only friend, the black crow, leap from an open window, into that same blue air," he sees a tree as a path into the sky, a fatal misapprehension. JG's muteness and his lack of bowel control are, I think, a satire on the modernist ideals of the work of art that achieves perfect

intelligibility and ideal beauty[58], but his friendship with the crow may identify him as a pure product of nature, unshaped by society; indeed his death is marked by nature: a wind storm begins on the day of his funeral, and this is followed, inexplicably, by a plague of salamanders. JG communes with nature to a degree the romantics could only have dreamed of, but his communion is mute; JG stops singing at birth (139), presumably because there is no way of expressing this continuity with nature in a manner that is unfiltered by social institutions and language.

Liebhaber also seeks to achieve immortality through writing. In *What the Crow Said* writing, particularly the technology of the printing press, embodies not only reason and the effort to make sense of the world, but also the urge to fix the world in a perfect phrase or image, and thus to overcome the world's flux. The urge to reproduce is also an immortal longing, as we see in Skandl's tower, which is both phallic and linguistic, something by which Skandl hopes to "destroy all his rivals" and "imagine himself a lover" (37). But when its apparent transparency devolves into a tower of Babel, a "babble of chaos and voices" wherein the men "were trying to get to heaven" (41), Liebhaber's efforts are frustrated by the inseparable connection between utterance and sex, the rational and the erotic. The materials with which he seeks to build permanence are mutable, just as Skandl's ice is transparent but slippery.

Kroetsch treats this urge for permanence with both sympathy and mockery, just as Liebhaber himself seems to both urge and oppose it. Liebhaber seeks to "evade death" by producing "absolutely true accounts of events" (58) on his printing press, but his effort is as doomed as his motivation is understandable, and he achieves the opposite of his goal, reducing himself to a kind of chaos, "hardly more than a mere tray of alphabet, awaiting the insistence of an ordering hand" (59). As physical objects which may be ordered into

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58 These ideals are shared with the Romantics, indeed we might read J.G.'s incontinence as another "spontaneous overflow".

the form of thoughts and may just as easily be scattered chaotically, Liebhaber regards his collection of type as metonymic both of human striving for meaning and of the world that is indifferent to and outlasts these strivings. Liebhaber resists Tiddy's alphabetization of his letters and employs a fluid twenty-six, a "twenty-six of rye" to "disentangle himself from the tyranny of rote" (60), the tyranny of ordering the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, which he sees as "the domestication of those free, beautiful letters" (60). At this point, Liebhaber is taking the traditional view of women as proponents of domestic order (the house) and men as eager to escape that order (the horse). He resists that order when he avoids the Lang farm and disperses his type around his room, but he seeks the same order when he courts Tiddy and composes his true records of events. Because Liebhaber conflates the arbitrary order of the alphabet with the arbitrary social conventions that seek to order human reproduction, his grasp of both the alphabet and his own independence falters:

> The U, he argued aloud to himself, in the Middle Ages, was the final letter, held by the wisest of men to be only a rounded version of V. He tried to resay the alphabet and failed. I and J, he remembered, were once deemed the same: he tried to disregard one in his recitation and lost both. He tried again, the simplest changing of the alphabet -- and heard himself making sounds for which he had no signs at all.
>
> At ten-thirty that morning, Liebhaber passed out in the can. He was convinced that Tiddy, in her merciless search for husbands, had persuaded the alphabet itself to become as inflexible as her original wish and command: Someone must take a wife. (60)

Liebhaber seems to have realized that subjecting a mutually-agreed-upon sign system to scrutiny and change threatens to topple it into incoherence, but his conflation of the order of the alphabet with Tiddy's "original wish and command" does not lead him to shun the command; that evening he visits the Lang farm to renew his courtship of Tiddy.

Liebhaber's attitude towards letters is similarly double; on one hand he feels a bitterness founded on a printer's familiarity with the fragile, temporary nature of our utterances, our ideas, and ultimately of ourselves: "he hated most the large capital letters, cut from rock maple, mounted on blocks of wood for the convenience of some printer who had long ago been distributed back into the neat chaos" (46) and he tries to "mock out of meaning" (47) the letters in his type collection, but on the other hand he takes "immense satisfaction" in the fact that his cattle-breeding efforts are called "AI-ing" (61), an inept blending of the sexual and the alphabetical that manages only to perfect the three-titted cow. Liebhaber, ambivalent to the core, loves and hates the fixity and flux, the capacity to be ordered and disordered, that is inherent in language, in type, indeed in all things human. He seeks precision and oblivion, perfectly true utterances and perfect intoxication: by chapter eleven he has "vague recollections of passing out, somewhere, in a can, on thirty-two different occasions" (46).

Liebhaber decides to "embrace mankind," but in a rather superior way. As a referee, he gets a taste of what it is to be "The civilizing man: at the center, and yet uninvolved. The dispassionate man at the passionate core" (62). As a result he feels able to begin a narrative and a family:

> He was quite simply the patriarch: a man who deserved to have a large family, friends, visitors, admirers. He began to feel a condescending pity for poor Gutenberg, crazy as a bat in a curious way, obsessed to the point of self-destruction; old Gutenberg, dying childless, penniless, friendless, anonymous, almost not invented into his own story . . . . Late one night, sitting at the Linotype machine that Mr. Wills had acquired second-hand from a newspaper in the city, Liebhaber hit on the notion that he might avoid Gutenberg's fate by making a few autobiographical notes. *I am become my own legend*, he typed on the big machine; he was secure, there in the night, the matrices falling into place at his command. *I perish. But only in a dream* . . . (63)

That Liebhaber has the matrices at his command becomes more significant when we consider that the origin of matrix is the Latin for womb; he senses that he has mastery over the reproduction of ideas and of Liebhabers. Of course, as soon as he decides to marry Tiddy, a veritable torrent of pregnancies gets in his way; other narratives drown out his. Rose is impregnated by O'Holleran's phantom privates (57), Anna Marie by Droniuk (via Liebhaber's AI scheme) (61), Gladys by "everybody" (65) at the hockey fight, and Theresa by the ghost of her father (167). The prodigious fertility of the Lang women overwrites the script Liebhaber has written for himself, with the result that, after Gladys's announcement, he retreats. Gladys's pregnancy, brought about somehow on the ice during a hockey fight, the father "everybody" (65), is yet another obstacle to Liebhaber's goal of marrying Tiddy and becoming a patriarch, another instance of the world ignoring the rules humans make to explain it and the plot Liebhaber has had set for it. To those who expect a rational, well-ordered world (and plot) this turn of events is infuriating. It is particularly vexing to Liebhaber and the other men of Big Indian, who effectively retreat from this world in a manner appropriate to "a bunch of useless bastards"(7, 13, 108, 169); they begin an epic card game: "that was the cause of the schmier game -- the inadequacy of truth" (66). Whether "truth" is understood to be the world as it is or the system we employ to explain and predict its behaviour (Rorty's “lumps” and “texts”) is not immediately clear. The card game is a microcosm of the struggle between the individual and the world, a demonstration of chaos and order, the card players employing (at varying levels of awareness) rules of statistical probability to assert their will over the randomly distributed cards.

Isador Heck, the confirmed sceptic, joins the game "in spite of his principles" (67), presumably because his scepticism makes him suspicious of all rule-governed actions. As a result of his failed battle against crows, Heck has refused to believe in them, yet in the card game which he so reluctantly joins, the crow's first words are insults for Heck when he misplays his hand. Nature mocks men, it appears, no matter how they

wilfully blind themselves to the fact. The oppositions continue; though at first Tiddy is not bothered by the schmier game, the black crow is increasingly offended by the men's game:

> Even on the third day it was not she who complained, but the black crow. It was becoming indignant, jealous. Tiddy realized that the women were running the world better than the men; she was content to let them go on with their game of schmier. It was the black crow who began to sense the desperate nature of the playing. Some awful pressure that the men themselves did not understand was holding them in thrall. The black crow took to flying over the table, flapping up awkwardly into the air, then landing on a player's shoulder, then kibbitzing, mocking: "Scared? Scared shitless?" (74)

The crow is mocking the men's efforts to bluff their way to victory in the card game and in life: "'Win?' the crow seemed to be saying. It cocked its head, looked brightly at Liebhaber. 'Win? Win? Somebody's going to win?'" (76). The men respond by returning its insults, first with Leo Weller's "'Why don't you learn to caw?" (74), eventually by breaking into a carnivalesque riot of laughter and cawing at the crow: "'*Caw*,' they were shouting. '*Caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw caw*'" (76). The crow, giving appropriately unpleasant voice to the unpleasant message that their illusions are vain and insignificant, embodies in its proverbially clever and raw voice Nature's contempt for the aspirations and pretensions of men. The men's cawing is carnivalesque in that it completes the reversal implied by the talking crow. For a moment Nature speaks eloquently and men are unintelligible – yet, by reversing the traditional privileging of eloquence over meaninglessness, the men avoid confronting the fact that in life as in cards, the odds are against them[59]. This cawing episode confirms the

[59]One might go so far as to say the house (read as the domestication the men resist or as the homeland they wish to tame) always wins. Certainly, as Bakhtin's critics note, once the carnivalesque is over, the previous order is restored, stronger than ever.

schmier game as something more than a simple game of cards; the men are playing against the inadequacy of truth, which I suggest means the inadequacy of plans, schemes, and theories to explain the brute facts of the maddeningly capricious world the men face, and their cawing marks a kind of flight from reason. The crow is also, of course, Kroetsch, trickster, observer and chronicler of men's follies, writer and satirist, located in-between the natural and human worlds.

Immediately following the men's cawing Rita Lang responds when she "swung all her allegiance to the side of the crow, against the players" (76); she sides with the crow, the acquirer of language in a voice of nature mocking men, because the men are using the dining room table on which she writes her erotic letters to men in prison:

> When she read in the *Big Indian Signal*, in the farm weeklies, of a man being sent to prison, for any crime whatsoever, she sent him a letter. She wrote erotic letters to those imprisoned men, spoke of her longing, of her dream of their thin, suffering bodies, of their pale hands. She caressed their thighs with words, she kissed the hairs of their bellies. She had no other admirers, no lovers, only those men whose names she found in the newspapers. And she never opened the letters she received. (76)

In this passage we learn that Rita Lang, like her sister, Vera, is an avatar of language. Rita embodies language's capacity to touch, to be bawdy and body; specifically, she is a source of letters which touch the body (later, while writing to her "prisoners" Rita chews her pen and "mark[s] her lips blue" (172), further tying writing with the body). If Rita embodies the reader's[60] relationship to language, it is through her paradoxical power to touch but not be touched, like written words that are eternal and immutable but in contact with the mutable world. Liebhaber, lover, journalist and typesetter,

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[60]Though one might say her name "read-a" (reader), a perverse pronunciation of her name might render it "rite-ah" (writer), further linking her with reading and writing.

> hated her for those unread letters, those secret, unopened letters. They tempted him to imagine what desperate pleadings they might contain, what longing, what despair. Liebhaber too, with the other players, was lifting up his head, making himself hoarse with the single cry "*Caw caw caw*." (77)

By writing and refusing to read, Rita turns the imprisonment of her men specifically into the imprisonment of the reader; Rita dramatically brings the predicament of the reader[61] to life by creating text that touches but cannot be touched. Liebhaber, the typographer disturbed by the arbitrary nature of letters and the "having lover" (193) for whom love seems to be endlessly denied, is an enthusiastic participant in the cawing. The epic schmier game is thus not merely an effort by the men to impose their will upon a random world; like the cawing it is an irrational utterance meant to drown out the crow's perfectly reasonable message that they are deluding themselves, an expression of longing and despair by men imprisoned in the hostile environment not only of the Canadian prairie, but of language itself.

The motivation for the prank Rita plays on Alphonse Martz is explained by what we learn of Alphonse as she is playing it. Having fallen into a well as a boy, Alphonse "in a single night of darkness, up to his neck in water, down in the well, learned silence. A doctor told him he had willed his not hearing and therefore couldn't be helped by medicine" (77). Alphonse's wilful retreat from sound, and thus from speech makes him an easy and appropriate target for Rita Lang, who seems to embody the anger of language and writing scorned by quietly approaching him, "pen and tablet in hand," and "touch[ing] her fingernails to his neck, like the claws of a black crow" (77). In a classic example of comic deflation, the men are (briefly) thrown into a state of terror through the sudden appearance of the very thing they have been mocking -- indeed its mere shadow; the fact

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[61] Rita may also be identifying the plight of the writer in the face of great works of the past, or any speaker in the face of language; one cannot reply to a text, a language, or a philosophy with any hope that they will acknowledge or answer back.

that the crow's appearance is merely imagined underscores the frailty of the men's apparent confidence. The crow mocks the men by virtue of its acquisition of the power of speech (thought since Aristotle to be not only restricted to, but also the defining characteristic of, men[62]) – more directly through the crow's mockery of their aspirations in the card game (so that the crow embodies the nature that mocks their every expectation of it and thus all their worldly plans), and more indirectly in the sense that the crow is a surrogate Kroetsch[63], the author whose writing mocks all expectations.

Just as Rita pleases and torments her readers, Kroetsch tempts his readers to tease meaning out of the novel even as he teases the reader who earnestly endeavours to do so. Images in *What The Crow Said* encompass apparent contraries: Skandl's tower of ice embodies fixity and flux (frozen water), clarity and chaos (a piling up of transparency that results in confusion and babble), erotic desire and icy cold. The frequently recurring image of a frozen Martin Lang "plowing the snow" (23, 23, 36, 79, 113, 193) suggests both the desire to order and the menace inherent in this desire; in Martin Lang's apparent urge to order and turn the land (even a shifting landscape of snow) to account, Kroetsch suggests the powerful yet dangerous temptation of seeking fixed meaning, or frozen

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[62]Though the Judeo-Christian belief that Adam named the animals is frequently cited as the origin of the Western notion of man's (and thus reason's) dominion over nature, one wonders if Kroetsch had the following passage from Aristotle in mind while he wrote the novel:

> And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech . . . . speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and other moral qualities (11) (Becker 1253a7)

Kroetsch's bees and gregarious-if-caustic crow ridicule the notion that humans are separate from and superior to nature by virtue of our supposed sole possession of the powers of speech and reason.

[63]"People, years later, insisted that it learned to talk from listening to Liebhaber piss and moan about the world . . . . But there were those who insisted that the black crow sometimes spoke on behalf of JG" (56); if the crow speaks both for Liebhaber and for JG, its voice speaks both for the mediated and unmediated, the journalist troubled by the fixity of his medium and the pure product of nature unconscious of language itself; in this sense the crow embodies the conflict at the heart of the novel.

Lang(uage)[64]. It is a temptation with which Liebhaber struggles when he raves against the tower and against Gutenberg and when he cannot "lock up the form" (10, 183) of his narratives. As McLuhan has observed, in inventing moveable type Gutenberg not only made print (and thus the notion of language as solid and permanent) ubiquitous, he regularized language – "Print . . . made bad grammar possible" (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* 277) – and it is this frozen language that the reader of conventional literature expects and against which Liebhaber rails.

Invoking what Linda Hutcheon calls Kroetsch's "refusal to pick sides, the desire to be on both sides of any border, deriving energy from the continual crossing" (*The Canadian Postmodern* 162, qtd. in Garrett-Petts and Lawrence 145), Garrett-Petts and Lawrence argue that Kroetsch (and some other postmodern artists) employ the image of frozen words with a kind of passionate ambivalence: "unlike the arrested moment's focus on visual stasis, the frozen word *embodies* the visual, the literate, and the oral in a form where meaning is located not in the moment but in the moment's release. If words can freeze like water, then under the right conditions they can also flow like water" (Garrett-Petts and Lawrence 144). Without diminishing the appeal of transparency, Kroetsch's images of a land "dumbfounded into an unending winter" (13) suggest the peril of a fixity that would presumably accompany a transparent, frozen language. One way in which he avoids creating transparent and timeless images is by requiring more of the reader, creating images that rely on the individual reader for their completion. Where other writers might describe a character through details, similes or metaphors, Kroetsch frequently composes short sentences, abrupt phrases that might be mistaken for the titles of paintings: "Liebhaber, unable to argue" (13); "Aardt, almost pouting . . . " (27); "Skandl's hands, smelling of horses" (31); "Liebhaber, simply in pain" (46); "Liebhaber,

[64]W.F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence observe that the image of Martin Lang plowing the snow is one of many that suggest that, like water, language can be frozen but also thaw: "Ironically, before his frozen corpse can be thawed for burial, Lang(uage) is lost, only to return as a spirit haunting the other characters during periods of spring thaw" (173).

in love" (64). Literary imagery will by most definitions invite the reader to envision the image that the author has created. But supplied only with a context and a title, the reader must produce the image to accompany the title. As a result the fixed image becomes more fluid, personal, and vernacular.

I have suggested that the card game becomes the men's struggle to impose order in a chaotic world, and in this regard they are seeking the sort of fixity that Skandl's lighthouse promised. The men do not come to realize this until Old Lady Lang forecasts Liebhaber's death: "That was the first time, really, that he recognized the seriousness of their game" (81). Once she reads the cards of the other men they become more aware of their situation: "they knew, those men, studying their cards in the presence of Old Lady Lang, they knew there was no meaning anywhere in the world" (82). Old Lady Lang is something of a seer, associated with blindness because she is forever removing the eyes from potatoes (4, 194), and with a more general sense of the inadequacy of human vision (and understanding, and expression). Her perennial comment "it's too sad, I don't want to talk about it" (4, 30, 39, 42, 81, 118) reflects a "mourning not at any particular death but at the inevitable absence" (4); she embodies an understanding that logocentrism shuns in wanting a presence that promises epistemological and linguistic wholeness. The result is that "that same night the schmier players moved their game to Isador Heck's tarpaper shack" (84). The conditions there are appalling. Indeed, when they finally venture out of the shack a magpie follows them -- apparently because they appear to be easier pickings than the dead rabbit with which it has been occupied -- but they are driven to continue: "they could barely bring themselves to eat, the players. And yet they knew they must not only go on playing; they must win. Old Lady Lang had seen that about them. The black crow had seen it; the consequences of not winning were too terrible to contemplate" (86). These consequences may include accepting that their lives are devoid of meaning, or surrendering to the women (88-89), whom they have sought to exclude "from the misery

of their loss and their terror and their loneliness" (14) and for whom they would be no more than drones.

Indeed they are on the point of surrendering when they see Eli Wurtz, a young Hutterite man who, they realize, joined the game only temporarily and only in order to court Gladys Lang. Seeing him with Gladys Lang makes the men realize that Eli "had not been playing schmier to win. Eli, obviously, had believed for so long in the communal good, he was almost useless in a card game" (90). The players, "rebuffed by his merciless smile" (90), retreat to the basement and continue the game, but are so unnerved they remain "on the verge of relenting" (91). Eli was playing to win Gladys, not the card game, a motivation which the other men see as a surrender to the women (and, because the women will domesticate them, to the common good). Eli's game engages with the phenomenal world, while the men's game gives their theories precedence. The card game is the game men play of being outside of society and the house, but this illusion of independence (not only from society but from the exigencies of the material world) is rendered absurd by the squalor into which it plunges the men. In any event, the game implodes on itself. No man seems to be winning, indeed they gamble away the very fenceposts and roofs that enclose them (80), but they struggle on, as men will do, to convince themselves that they are not useless and expendable drones.

The arrival of Marvin Straw helps to sharpen their purpose. The "official hangman for your government" (92) is the perfect foil for men who strenuously resist being governed, and the goal of their game shifts in focus but not intent; by intentionally losing they seek to save the life of Jerry Lapanne, whom Straw is scheduled to hang in three days. One of Rita Lang's prisoners, Lapanne has escaped four times, "and each of those four times he'd made a beeline for Big Indian and the Lang farm" (92). Desire turns Lapanne into an easily recaptured drone, and as the sermon that "God is our jailer" (93) begins, the men see in the game a way of freeing one fellow prisoner, or at least cheating the fate that awaits drones who fulfil their desire. Straw is not an unkind man, in fact he

has undertaken the visit to Big Indian because he "wanted the man to die, if not happy, at least relieved of his passion" (93). For the men who are "ignoring everything but their one passion" (78), relief of passion would constitute an end of passion and surrender to domestication. In a literal sense, "a man's life [is] at stake" (93), and the card players must defeat Straw by losing to him. While this card game may seem rather remote from notions of fixity and fluidity, or language and the world, it is language, and in particular letters, that provide the impetus: "It was Rita Lang who inspired his exploits. A single letter from her was enough to make him leap a twelve-foot wall, cut his way through barbed wire, dig a tunnel. Those same letters, now, in their distant way, had set a tableful of men to cheating desperately at cards" (96). The object of the game, then, is in more than one sense to "save the Jack" (92, 106): they wish to save the life of an individual man, but they are also seeking to make their lives meaningful even while protecting the illusion of masculine freedom.

The card game very nearly comes to an end at the moment of the novel's second surprise sound, this time a sound of male origin. This second cthonic utterance comes about, like the first, when something else is expected: at the very moment when Jerry Lapanne is supposed to be executed (and thus the moment when the men believe their card game has saved his life) the ghost of Martin Lang appears and the men let out "so perverse an ululation that not one single sleeper rose from his bed to go to a window . . . . The roar was an animal roar. Some remembered it, after, as a bull sound, ferocious, out of the dark earth itself, the sound of the darkness itself" (98). The men may see Lang as the specter of their futility both because of his plowing the snow and the fact that death has made an appearance at the moment they believe they have defeated it, but the result is that "the card players were men without hope. Their condition was infectious: by eight o'clock in the evening, every white adult male in the municipality was hell-bent on getting blind drunk" (100). Liebhaber, "in a state of total collapse," believes that "Gutenberg did this to me" (101): "Liebhaber knew it was Gutenberg who'd made all memory of the past

irrelevant . . . . he understood: only the future, and that just barely, was free of Gutenberg's vast design" (102). Liebhaber seeks to resist Gutenberg (and the tyranny of print) by scripting a future, startling himself with the announcement that John Skandl will return "to the assistance of his beleaguered people" (102).

Liebhaber gives the men hope, a hope that gives them the strength to resist authority (the RCMP), and the result is that the dominant order of this society is reversed: "the Indian males over twenty were now the only people in the Municipal District of Bigknife who were allowed to purchase alcoholic beverages" (105) while white men such as Liebhaber are on the "Indian list" (105). Moreover, Joe Lightning declines the players' invitation to join the game: "It was the first time ever that a sane, adult male had refused to join the game" (105). In keeping with a reading of the game as an effort to preserve the illusion of masculine freedom, women are not invited to join the game, and they do not particularly benefit from the reversal of the social order that the game brings about, though Kroetsch suggests that the women would have little interest in the imagined benefits of the game.

Liebhaber has pinned the men's hopes on Skandl and thus, I suggest, on the effort to prove the existence (and susceptibility to logic) of the outside world, and so ironically when he fails to return Isador Heck is sent to find Skandl and encourage him to secede, despite the fact that Heck is convinced that "the place he was bound for could only be an illusion" (106). When Vera Lang tells the men that Skandl is missing, Liebhaber takes this to be "a trap to make us surrender" (108), and in response to Vera Lang's "Surrender *what*?" Liebhaber replies: "'The world,' Liebhaber shouted. 'The world . . . ' He was confused. He scratched at himself with both hands. 'It's a scab and a carbuncle. A bucket of medicated puke. A horse turd everlastingly falling . . . '" (108). It is not clear to him what is at stake in the card game: the world or their contempt for it[65], but I would

[65]Perhaps this is why he has quit 128 times (107) at this point!

suggest that they resist surrendering to the world as it is constituted, surrendering to work, the command to take a wife, to being a drone, a letter, a cypher: to being ordered by, rather than ordering, the world. Their refusal of the world's dominion almost causes them to be ushered out of it: "the eleven remaining players were more corpses than men" (111), consuming skunks, dogs, cats, diseased rabbits, a magpie, garbage, even trying to cook an old set of harness; the measure of their delusion is that when they are successful in the game they face the prospect of winning "a few nails and some pieces of broken glass and a pile of round stones they'd dug up from the frozen riverbed with their bare hands" (111). Even returning to the protection of the women cannot save the men's game from the news that Skandl has been found dead by the son Vera threw to the wolves; the game that began because of "the inadequacy of truth" (66) ends for the same reason. The discovery of Skandl, (killed in what is later understood to be the first outbreak of the war between the sky and the earth) by a boy thrown to wolves, raised by coyotes and fluent in weather prediction and pig latin (perhaps in mockery of the notion of an original ur-language in perfect contact with the world), destroys the men's dreams of an adequate truth -- the world simply will not bend to fit it. Liebhaber "at that exact moment" decides to become a philosopher of nihilism, of being "sick of everything" (115).

Perhaps to confirm the men's disillusionment, Nick Droniuk dies like a drone, falling into a threshing machine: "his testicles were blown into the granary, the rest of his body into the strawpile" (124), just as a drone, upon fertilizing a new queen, departs from the queen while leaving his endophallus still in the queen[66]; Vera Lang's notions that "men are a bunch of useless bastards" (7, 13, 108, 169) and that "after the nuptials, the males are useless" (50) seem to be confirmed by the fact that when a man's proverbial wheat is separated from his chaff, only his testicles end up in the granary. "His widow,

[66]The drone will die of the wound, while other drones will remove his endophallus from the queen only to meet the same fate.

Anna Marie, added the precious remains to the collection of aphrodisiacs she kept in her hope chest" (124). Other card players also fare badly: Marvin Straw becomes an "insane suitor" (125) to Vera Lang, and Eli Wurtz and Mick O'Holleran are both killed (separately) when they look up at the sky.

After O'Holleran's death Tiddy decides to "mourn until there's a cloudburst" (128) and this final putting-off causes Liebhaber to remember the future for the third time: "We're going to have one godawful nut-buster of a flood" (128). The "war against the sky[67]" (134) begins with the "Battle of Heck's Slough"(134) and then the "Battle of Twelve-Mile Coulee" (135). Father Basil puts the rationale for war in his own terms: "'We've got to bust her loose,' he shouted, raising his old fists over the altar railing. Men and women wept at the old priest's eloquence" (136). The long winter over, a dry spell begun, the people long not just for rain but for the rebirth and change that it suggests. Even the priest of the Church of the Final Virgin, who "looked forward to the ideal condition of total inanimateness for the entire universe" (121), and who advocates mourning as a form of birth control, because "the only way to keep men from dying was to keep them from being born" (126), voices resistance to orthodoxy and the "true ethic" (190).

The adversarial perspective is not universal, however. Isador Heck, having left the game and seen the world, returns with a new (and happier) perspective born of viewing the earth from the sky. Having "toured the continent as a man being shot from a cannon" Heck returns with the news that, rather than nothing, "everything existed," and his description of this world inevitably causes him to "burst into uncontrollable laughter" (126). Heck returns from his travels with stories "of airplanes that flew without propellers, of highways that were made of solid cement but soared through the air" (126),

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[67]It may be worth noting that in the late stages of this war the federal government employs the F104 (170), commonly (and, Kroetsch may be suggesting, absurdly) known as the "starfighter".

so that rather than the nihilist he once was, he is now a man who is amused by the apparently endless possibilities and variations in the world and who argues that "anything that can be imagined exists" (162). Laughter is Heck's response not only to the world's superfluity but also to "the ignorance around him" (126), a view that is shared by Joe Lightning, another great laugher who ventures into the sky, though he does so because he "was opposed to the war against the sky; he believed in the union of the elements" (138). Rather than prosecute a war Joe seeks to "communicate with the eagle, as JG had communicated with the black crow. He would learn about the sky. That was his intention" (139-140). When the eagle pulls him into the air, this man who "had spent his life in the horizontal world of shuffleboards and pool tables and prairie" (140) is confronted with the vertical world and tries to communicate in the "language of the beer parlour" (140) and the shuffleboard; it doesn't work, and he is dropped from a great height. Falling, Joe Lightning utters the novel's third cthonic cry: "It was more a laugh than anything like a cry of terror. And yet it maddened a horse in a nearby field . . . . It was a simple laugh of pleasure and yet it was a kind of scream too, a scream of release" (141). "Some people, years later, believed they heard from the sky a version of prayer, a kind of holy laugh. Others, when insanely drunk, or on their deathbeds, admitted to hearing a laugh of such absolute obscenity they'd refused, for a whole lifetime, to acknowledge it" (142). When Joe hits the ladies' outhouse pit at the Church of the Final Virgin, not a bone is broken, but he is not rescued, which is to say not saved, because "the churchgoers, at the time of the fall, had on their Sunday clothes" (143). The churchgoers prefer their revelations scrubbed clean of some elements. Like Vera's cry, which is "despairing and ecstatic" (5), Joe's cry is "holy" and "obscene" (141), while the men's "animal roar" (98) is "third" (98) to these two cries, perhaps because it lacks the duality of the other cries. All three of the cries signal a heightened understanding of, and contact with, the world, but Joe's will not, except in the most extreme circumstances, be acknowledged. The refusal of the churchgoers to help him suggests that racism (an

aversion to difference that, at its most extreme, adopts a rhetoric of purity and pollution that betrays its monologism) is at the heart of their acquired deafness. The churchgoers' aversion to dirtying their hands by helping Joe Lightning presages their later aversion to recalling his cry that muddies categories.

Liebhaber, trapped underneath his overturned hull and believing (absurdly, as it turns out) that he is facing death, experiences an odd epiphany:

> Liebhaber, trapped in the absolute darkness under the boat, trapped into death, hit on the realization that he had escaped. He hung onto a rib, in the cold water, trying to remember a life he hadn't lived. Without Gutenberg's curse; yes, that was it; without Gutenberg and movable type, he would have lived another life. And finally he was free of Gutenberg. *I perish*, he imagined, *but only in a dream.* No, that wouldn't do for an opening. Yes, he was writing his own story, at last . . . . He could account for events, announce the presence of design, under the apparent chaos . . . . All night he would set type; everything set, everything forgotten. But now he had escaped; he had recovered the night, and dream, and memory. (146)

Darkness and death threaten to sever Liebhaber's ties with his life, and this prospect frees him to "remember" a life lived differently. Imagination, Kroetsch implies, cannot be exercised without memory, so that by usurping memory, printed text usurps imagination. Paradoxically, Liebhaber is freed from text so that he can compose his own story, one that will escape the tyranny of text by being "a novel one sentence long, a novel that anyone could memorize" (146); print will be an unnecessary intermediary. As a journalist and typesetter, Liebhaber's job has been to work with letters in their most material form, organizing type into a coherent message, set it inside a frame, and then returning it to its storage boxes, his overriding concern being to take others' stories and "make them fit" (12, 183). Liebhaber believes that authorship will free him to "account for events"; writing (or perhaps the moment of composition) will grant him the sense of agency that

comes of making sense of the world for oneself. The night and dream that Liebhaber has recovered along with memory carry indeterminacy's promise of interpretive freedom, but also illusion. In a variation on the anxiety of influence, Liebhaber will free himself from Gutenberg by relying on the memory that writing and print threaten (according to thinkers such as Plato and McLuhan). From his memory and imagination to a reader's, his novel will exist independently, immaterially. This is Liebhaber's fantasy, one that makes perfect sense to him in the darkness of an overturned hull, running low on oxygen. The fact that Liebhaber prays for "the plop of the crow's shit onto the wood above his upraised head" (146-47), and fills his pants when his foot touches the river bottom, suggests that he is full of more than imagination. Moreover, Liebhaber's "everything set, everything forgotten" is not merely an echo of the notion that writing erodes memory, but an intimation that the very order and perfect communication that he seeks enervates; his striving may be productive but it cannot put an end to the temptation to fix the meaning of texts.

Joe Lightning's cry is not entirely without consequences: Vera Lang decides to "take a husband" because of Joe Lightning's "laugh of death" and "lyric entertainment of the empty sky" (149); the moment of his impact is also the moment she is stung by a bee "for the first and only time in her life" (149). The sting engenders a sexual itch so potent that each of her husbands, selected from the few men not rendered impotent by the thought of her apiary lovers or by her "exquisite and inhuman beauty" (150), one after another kills himself. The fate of one of them, a chicken thief named Adams, makes literal the notion that men hopelessly resist their destined status as drones, cyphers, or pieces of moveable type: frozen and then accidentally cut in four, his body reveals that "the curious thing was quite simply that the drowned man, allowing for errors in the reassembling, had apparently been swimming away from the hole through which he'd fallen" (154).

Perhaps oddly, the death of Vera's third husband, who is pasted to a windmill by

the incessant wind, "gave Gus Liebhaber his finest idea" (157): to fertilize the sky and free himself to marry Tiddy by creating the cloudburst that will end her period of mourning. Realizing that "every male over the age of sixteen in the Municipality of Bigknife had been injured or maimed or had suffered a related illness, in the War Against the Sky" (160) Liebhaber "hit[s] on a way to win immortality" (161) by winning the war and "gaining a victory over death itself" (163). Liebhaber alters warlike contention to sexual generation by firing a cannon loaded with Vera's bees at the sky. In case we miss the sexual imagery, the description makes it clear: "Liebhaber, in the sweat of his need, stooping and rising, stooping and rising, would fertilize the barren sky" (163). Liebhaber ends the war by performing an act "in love . . . in the long, blind fury of his love, stooping and rising; in the passion of his greatest scheme, in his night-long and greatest fury against the death of the world" (163), and the result is that "the myriad stars, they multiplied, as if his gun was setting them there" (163). In one of Kroetsch's portrait-title images we see "Liebhaber, aiming to crack the intricate knot of all his undoing" (163), an act that is not only one of sexual generation but a statement of self-definition, "the clash of his own sounding, onto heaven's rim" (163). It is also an act that brings about his consummation and fulfilment, and therefore Liebhaber's death; this is the price a drone pays for reproduction.

Liebhaber has seeded the cloudburst that fulfills the final condition for marrying Tiddy Lang: "a drop of rain hit him and he knew it would be a flood. At last, his marriage time had come. He had remembered the future correctly: there would be a flood, a joy of rain, his battle won, his ark floating[68]" (165). When he causes the rain the women "invited Liebhaber into the house, insisted he enter" (166), and this entry into the women's realm is another step toward his end. The flood brings about something of an orgy of consummations that precede Liebhaber's own climax: Jerry Lapanne in a flying

[68] I regretfully submit that Kroetsch is playing on the phrase "whatever floats your boat."

machine, "flying in the air, like a lost bee" (167); Vera's Boy in Liebhaber's ark; Marvin Straw upon a galloping black horse; Vera Lang naked on a floating granary, "the seedhouse of all Marvin Straw's dark need, the world's vulva and fulfilment in one" (179); and thousands of bees: all of them are headed for the bridge, but only Jerry Lapanne realizes that "the bridge was no longer a bridge" (180, 181) and he believes that out of that knowledge "they could all survive" (180). It is Vera and not Jerry who is conducting events, however, and she does so irresistibly: "Her long arms motioned the world, stirred the world into her waiting. She motioned now to the gathering bees, directed the dance and the hum of their coming. She motioned now to the man, her final lover, flogging the black horse through the mud" (179). In fact, Marvin Straw and Vera Lang meet and pass through, while Jerry Lapanne in his "machine that flew" and Vera's Boy in Liebhaber's paddleboat, blinded by a bee, collide with the center piling ("stiff and tall like a lighthouse, in the middle of the swollen river") of the bridge at the same instant and "become one" – not sexually, but in death (181). Clearly the allusion to the lighthouse in the swollen river where the three become one raises associations of fixity amidst fluidity, or in linguistic terms, thoughts of transparent, unitary signifiers amidst shifting circumstances (as well as an erotics of language in which consummation is fixity and therefore death). The fact that both Jerry Lapanne and Vera's boy die trying to save Vera Lang, while Marvin Straw and Vera Lang presumably achieve their consummation off the page and at a moment when contraries meet but are not bridged suggests that Vera Lang is not attainable in any way that can be fixed on the page, and that efforts to save Vera Lang (or "fix" true language) are doomed to failure. Linking linguistic and sexual fertility, Vera Lang passes through a bridge that is not a bridge at a point where the male and female, solid and fluid principles (the lighthouse-like piling in the swollen river) seem to mirror Vera and Marvin's meeting. But the bridge is not a bridge, the promised

consummation is not on the page; the erotic promise[69] of language uniting with the world tantalizes but does not materialize on the page.

Witnessing these events, Tiddy Lang decides to "live for the moment" (182, 190, 191, 192) and let Liebhaber into her life. Unwilling to listen to a sermon, Tiddy Lang and Liebhaber do not attend their own wedding, which is just as well, as Father Basil apparently shares the view that consummation means death; he preaches "a burial sermon rather than a marriage sermon; for him the two were sometimes interchangeable" (190). In keeping with the notion of consummation as a momentary blending of opposites, we might think of Liebhaber's end-time as also an end of time as discrete and linear. In bed with Tiddy, Liebhaber's memory has grown still worse; he cannot remember a thing from his past further back than his "crossing of the CN bridge, on the black horse. With Martin Lang on his back" (190). This crossing that has just been repeated, with a different objective, by Marvin Straw. Time is now represented as cyclical: past and present and various locations blend into one experience, beginning with the pounding of the horse's hoofs on the bridge, the knock of cards on the kitchen table and the bouncing of a ball young Theodora is throwing against the bedroom wall, as her mother, Gladys, used to do. Each generation plays out the same games, riding to mortal or sexual consummation, playing with chance or fate. In an image I have referred to earlier, Liebhaber, "turned end for end in the old bed" finds himself "like printers of old, always, reading backwards, reading upside down" (194). Tiddy, making love to Liebhaber, and in so doing "taking every man who had ever loved her" (193), is living for the moment and living simultaneously. Gutenberg seems to be responsible for Liebhaber's loss of memory not

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[69]This erotic promise is emphasized by the fact that the rain brings about a veritable downpour of sex: "Vera's desire was more than she could contain" (171) when she gathers the bees that rain down; Anna Marie responds by "unwrapp[ing] the rabbit skin from her husband's testicles" (172); Rita continues her "caressing with words her faithful men" (172); even the soldiers are "the color of spring, green and brown, as if they too had, unwillingly, sprouted and grown in response to the insistent rain" (172-173); and the rain brings Darryl Dish, the storm-chaser, for Theresa O'Holleran (175), whose desire for him may mitigate the belief, inherited from her mother, that "men were a bunch of useless bastards" (169).

only because written records make for less exercise of the memory, but because text encourages a material, linear view of time. Tiddy, having avoided writing, has a faculty of memory that is both strong and diachronic, barely separating present from past, and deflecting her from acts of inscription: "Tiddy remembered everything. She could hardly tell her memory from the moment; all her life, she'd meant to write something down. She'd meant to make a few notes, but hadn't" (192).

Tiddy's daughter Rita has written innumerable erotic notes, "driving her imprisoned lovers to the edge of a terrible dream, a terrible flying" (191). Terrible because lethal, Rita's writing seeks to bridge language and the body, and the body cannot survive such fixing. Drawn by her letters, Jerry Lapanne makes a "beeline" (92, 95) for Rita only to be reduced into a drone bee and a letter, "b," colliding into writing as much as into a piling. Liebhaber's firing of the cannon similarly brings opposing principles (the vital body and the fixed letter, feminine and masculine, earth and sky) into temporary accord:

> And people, years later; years later they will say: against all knowledge, he fired the cannon. He fired the cannon, after all; it was he who dared. He took the bees. He pumped them into the sky itself, rammed them into the sky's night, into the sky's blue breaking. At the mere command of the merest need. He knocked them high, shot them into the one androgynous moment of heaven and earth. He spent the queens into their myriad selves; he, the first and final male, horny to die. The rainmaker, burning the night with the bees' making. (193)

Liebhaber brings opposites together in a moment of erotic union, but he pays with his life. Liebhaber fires the cannon "against all knowledge," as if the random scattering of bees (and thus "b"s) by a framer of narratives is an act against knowledge as fixity. Liebhaber's act of self-definition causes him to fully enter the story of his life, but this act of self-definition is a fatal fulfillment because it renders his life a closed book. Like a drone, Liebhaber dies making love; the bees (the insect, the letter, the "to be or not to be") come

into the house and suffocate him, reducing him into text, though he, "with the slow brushing of his tongue, resists the bees" and with "his tongue on the back of a bee" (194), he initially resists being silenced; he may be succumbing, but he is also uttering.

In entering the world of narrative, he becomes subject to writing: playing the same letter-substitution game that has fascinated Liebhaber, Rita composes his death as he experiences it: "She flings the words across the page: he is dying, she writes. He is dying in the next room. He is always dying in the next room. She, bent to her tablet, her fingers tight on the ball-point pen; alone. Alone. All one. A lone . . . " (194). Her words suggest that his end (both the end of his life and the end -- the purpose -- of his writing), and perhaps everyone's end, is both solitary and universal. Liebhaber dies (both literally and in the time-worn metaphor for orgasm) with Tiddy and also alone; his fertilizing of the sky is an individual act that contributes to the community who are all one in their desire to "bust her loose" (45, 136). His desire to express himself (and break free of the limitations he blames on Gutenberg but which are endemic to language itself) is both profoundly individual and at the same time arguably communal –the characteristic that unites us as humans.

Liebhaber hears the crow "talking, not listening, croaking endlessly on" (195), and though he taught the crow to speak, Liebhaber is unperturbed by this unflattering reflection:

> Liebhaber is happy. He cannot remember anything. He rests one side of his head on the towel. He tastes his own semen on Tiddy's belly. He tries to remember the future. Perhaps the crow is telling him that morning has come. He doesn't call out, for fear of waking Tiddy. Liebhaber is happy. After all, he is only dying. (195)

What might be seen as Liebhaber's simultaneous orgasm, entry into diachronic time, acceptance of mortality, and death suggest that he has entered a fluid linguistic world even as he departs the vital world in which he sought to express himself in writing.

Liebhaber's tasting his own semen[70], in the context of a persistent linking of sexual and linguistic reproduction in the book, may reflect the view that literary dissemination is circular and closed, and the fact that he remains silent may reinforce this, but I suggest that he does not speak because, despite other climaxes in this scene, this is the denouement[71]; fertilizing the sky was his act of dissemination and self-definition: having said his piece he becomes the having lover; as a man and as a symbol, he achieves completion and dies. Liebhaber is the having lover only briefly because expression is momentary; meaning is made but not "had," its shifting nature means language will not allow a symbol (or sign, or signifier) to be complete and permanent, because as soon as it is expressed it enters the shifting world of context, meaning and interpretation, and as soon as it is fixed and understood, it is dead. Employing magic realism and postmodernism to suspend and critique orthodox notions about the relationship of narrative to the world, *What the Crow Said* entices its readers in much the same way that Rita Lang entices hers; Kroetsch does not withhold the pleasure of meaning from his readers, but suggests that the very nature of understanding, language and time means that meaning can never be fully present; it tantalizes, but dies when it is grasped, to spring up elsewhere, just out of reach.

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[70]In a book that is virtually Stalinist in its rejection of Kroetsch for daring to stray from the one true (Derridean) path, Dianne Tiefensee argues that tasting his own semen is "a gesture of appropriation and exclusion of the other" that makes Liebhaber "the phallogocentric image of woman in man," reflecting a philosophy in the book that is "intensely and irrevocably misogynistic" (123, 124). I do not agree.

[71]Recalling that when he fertilizes the sky we see "Liebhaber, aiming to crack the intricate knot of all his undoing" (163) we may consider that the rest of the novel completes the unknotting (denouement) that Liebhaber has begun. His meaning as a symbol is explained (and dissipated) as the knot of his meaning -- and being -- is loosed.

Chapter Five: Native Fabulation -- Tomson Highway and Thomas King

Fabulative fiction in English that draws upon traditional Native North American[72] characters or stories is still so new, and the relationship between European literature and Native narrative traditions so contentious and uncertain, that each work in this emerging genre will inevitably address the question of its relationship to these traditions; even the most cautious of authors and readers will have no familiar generic expectations upon which to rely. Certainly writing that adopts such Native narrative traditions as the free interaction of human and superhuman entities will, when it is not a retelling of religious/mythical narratives, be read as fabulative. Moreover, when the author is Native, such fiction will satisfy Delueze and Guattari's conditions for minor literature[73], with all of the politicization and authorial alienation that accompanies this mode. Paula Gunn Allen asserts that "Yes, Indians do novels[74]. And nowadays some of us write them. Writing them in the phonetic alphabet is the new part, that and the name. The rest of it, however, is as old as the hills, from which we take our sense of who we are" (4). But in fact any Native writer who draws Native traditions into the novel is inescapably engaged

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[72]Such terms as Indian, Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous and Native are used more-or-less interchangeably by the authors and critics of Native North American literature, so for the sake of simplicity I will use the term "Native" throughout, capitalizing to indicate the distinction from the more general sense of the word.

[73]Deleuze and Guattari use this term to describe the work of Franz Kafka, a Jewish author writing in German in Prague, and they define minor literature thus:

> A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization . . . . The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political . . . . The third characteristic of minor literature is that in it everything takes on a collective value. (16-17)

Douglas Reimer observes that here "'Minor' means uncontrolled by the conventions of the major language in which minor literature writes. 'Deterritorialization' means a group's loss of territory. This territory is not so much an actual space as a set of codes and rules that regulate behaviour" (3). Minor literature is thus extremely well-located to examine and even to alter the codes that define a culture.

[74]Louis Owens demurs, arguing that "The Native American novelist works in a medium for which no close Indian prototype exists. The novelist must therefore rely upon story and myth but graft the thematic and structural principles found therein upon the "foreign" (though infinitely flexible) and intensely egocentric genre of the written prose narrative, or novel" (10).

in a cross-cultural activity; oral traditions cannot possibly be transferred inviolate into text, much less into English text in the form of a novel. Many Native authors, aware of this dilemma, employ the contrasting cultural expectations implicit in the notion of a Native novel to great effect. In this chapter I will examine Thomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, to show some of the subversive ways that they use fabulation.

For a Native author to write fiction in English is inevitably to raise questions about language, history, and audience, and to write in the fabulous mode is to address fundamental cultural assumptions in the Western world[75]. Writing in English invites both a non-Native and a pan-Native audience, though the author may choose to address a more narrowly defined implied reader. To negotiate between cultures is to negotiate between languages[76], and an author may say a great deal about a culture by the way he or she chooses to treat questions of language. Whether or not it is an accurate index, the comparative felicity with which a topic may be treated in a given language is a handy metaphor for the capacity -- or inclination -- of a culture to discuss that topic, and this is something of an invitation to contemplate a culture's blind spots.

The trickster, common enough in the traditional narratives of most Native North American cultures, is virtually the guiding spirit of the Native novel, for there could hardly be more fertile terrain for sowing the confusion and chaos in which the trickster delights[77], nor a surer negotiator of this terrain. Such writing may simultaneously draw

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[75]As with the term "Native," words such as European, Western, and white are loaded terms, and in many cases are used as a synechdoche for modernity, effacing national and cultural difference as well as non-European, non-Western contributions to the homogeneous global culture some theorists tell us we inhabit. While I am wary of these implications, I will endeavour to use the term "Western" throughout, except in cases which refer to specific European sources, traditions, or authors.

[76]I would suggest that if two cultures are truly distinct, they may share the same tongue, but they are not speaking the same language.

[77]The Trickster in Native narratives is comic, but not for that reason insignificant. In Highway's words, "Essentially a comic, clownish sort of character, his role is to teach us about the nature and the meaning of existence on the planet Earth; he straddles the consciousness of man and that of God, the Great Spirit . . . .

upon and interrogate Western traditions of fabulous writing and traditional Native narratives, and indeed Highway and King frequently employ the reader's confusion at this blending of modes to suggest we could shake off complacent, orthodox views. Readers coming from a tradition that regards fabulous fiction as light literature and fabulous passages in a text as departures from the realist norm may read as fantasy or epistemological challenge what other (Native) readers would see as spiritual truth, opportunity for satire or simply the way stories are told, and I suspect that for Highway and King, the answer is that all these views are correct. When it is unclear whether we are meant to read a narrative as lightly as we do most fables, as suspiciously as we do postmodern texts, or with as much respect and seriousness as would be appropriate to the revelation of a deeply-held spiritual belief, we are encouraged to consider not only by what criteria we judge the relative importance of ideas, but also whether some of our more cherished beliefs may appear rather light and fanciful to other eyes.

To the author seeking to incorporate (or satirize) Native and Western narrative traditions in his or her work, the fable, fabulation, magic realism and postmodernism would seem to be Western forms as congenial as I have suggested the Trickster narrative is as a Native one: the fable offers the opportunity for playful subversion, fabulous literature the opportunity to examine in what ways different cultures share or do not share a "continuous geography" of wonder, magic realism the opportunity to build cross-cultural understanding and a hybrid culture, and postmodernism the opportunity to operate under an aesthetic of play and freedom from fixed meanings and metanarratives. Clearly an author whose interest is in developing a further articulation of -- rather than a hybridization of -- Native culture will be less interested in (perhaps even hostile to) magic realist and postmodern techniques. Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* represent two approaches to the Native

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Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever" ("A Note on the Trickster" *Kiss*).

novel, with Highway's the more open to magic realist and postmodern techniques of the two. King's novel is by far the more taught and critiqued of the two[78], partly because Highway is better known as a playwright than a novelist, but largely for the same reason that *Green Grass, Running Water* receives greater critical attention than King's other works: the novel is richly allusive, drawing widely from both Native and Western cultures, inviting analysis from a plethora of perspectives and also acting as something of a Rosetta Stone, translating both cultures to one another.

Kiss of the Fur Queen

Kiss of the Fur Queen might be called a *Künstlerroman* with two protagonists, one who becomes a dancer and choreographer, and one who becomes a concert pianist and later a dramatist. The lives of these characters closely match the lives of Tomson Highway (a concert pianist before he became a dramatist and novelist) and his brother Rene, a dancer and choreographer who died of AIDS in 1990. The fictional brothers are shaped first by Native and then by Western culture, and their art is profoundly shaped by their responses to these cultures. The novel is thus an examination of these cultures as well as an depiction of the brutality, degradation and conflicted loyalties that faced the generation of Natives subjected to the horrors of Canada's residential schools. This is an angry book, and, for Highway, a cathartic one: "'I think some part of the healing process is striking out,' he says. 'All the violence that I felt in my heart was like an infection, so I took that pus and I put it on a piece of paper and I crumpled it up. And once all of the rage and the poison was out there, it was no longer in my heart" (Interview R1). For all of the anger, however, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* does not simply invert Western culture's historical devaluation of Native culture, but demonstrates that the two may converse, and that a cultural legacy can not only heal but invite individuals to add to cultures.

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[78]Petzold notes that "in the United States and Canada . . . in 1999 the novel was required reading for at least 50 courses" (243).

Categories that Western thought prefers to treat as discrete are insistently interpenetrative throughout the novel, the first example of this being the manner in which we learn of the victory of Abraham Okimasis in the dog-sled race at the 1951 Trapper's Festival in Oopaskooyak, Manitoba. Abraham's recollection of the event seems to straddle history and myth at the same time that it straddles cultures and states of mind; Abraham's consciousness and the narrative voice do not so much shift between levels as exist simultaneously on planes that Western readers tend to consider mutually contradictory:

> The screams of children, of women, of men, the barking of dogs, the blare of loudspeakers crashed over the hunter, submerging him, drowning him. A sudden darkness knocked the breath clean of his lungs, the vision from his eyes. And in his blindness, all he could sense was a small white flame, as if perceived through a long, dark tunnel, fluttering and waving like a child's hand, beckoning him. All he knew was that he wanted to lie down and sleep forever, and only the waving flame was preventing him.
>
> When Abraham Okimasis surfaced, he found hands reaching for him, other hands clutching at his arms, his shoulders, his back, manoeuvring him through a mass of human flesh. (5-6)

Abraham's exhaustion presses him to a point of extreme liminality; he straddles the borders not only between victory and defeat, but also between life and death, spiritual quintessence and fleshy excess. The announcement of his victory, as we hear it through Abraham's ears, indicates that this exhaustion is cultural as well as physical:

> "Boom," the voice went, "boom, boom." Something about "Abraham Okimasis, forty-three years old, caribou hunter, fur trapper, fisherman, boom, boom." Something about "Abraham Okimasis, musher, from the Eemanapiteepitat Indian reserve, northwestern Manitoba, boom." Something having to do with "Abraham Okimasis, winner of the 1951 Millington Cup World Championship Dog Derby,

> boom, boom." Something about "Mr. Okimasis, first Indian to win this gruelling race in its twenty-eight-year history . . . " The syllables became one vast, roiling rumble. (6)

The repeated phrase "something about," the recurrent booms, the final roiling rumble of syllables indicate more than a linguistic or cultural challenge: as the story becomes the common (and alterable) property of those touched by it, they suggest spaces in which Abraham -- and the community -- can create meaning.

We may see Abraham's story as a Native perspective on events otherwise familiar to Western readers, but as a Cree and a Catholic, as well as a hunter/trapper/fisherman in an industrial age, Abraham is a liminal character, and his liminality is paradigmatic for North American Natives who must negotiate between their traditional culture and the dominant Western culture. This can be a productive liminality; Abraham's unfamiliarity with the accepted (Western) meaning of certain phrases and events may allow him to see -- or to generate -- a significance beyond the familiar. His vision elevates a small-town beauty pageant into a moment of transcendent beauty and mythological resonance in part by making the metaphoric literal: the Fur Queen's crown not only sparkles like stars, in this narrative it is literally made of stars, and after she kisses Abraham she ascends into the heavens from where she sends the central character of the story gently earthwards to be born:

> The next thing Abraham knew, or so he would relate to his two youngest sons years later, the goddess floated up to a sky fast fading from pink-and-purple dusk to the great blackness of night, then became one with the northern sky, became a shifting, nebulous pulsation, the seven stars of the Great Bear ornamenting her crown. And when she extended one hand down towards the hunter on Earth, a silver wand appeared in it, as simple as magic. Now a fairy-tale godmother glimmering in the vastness of the universe, the Fur Queen waved the wand. Her white fur cape spread in a huge shimmering arc, becoming the aurora borealis. As

> its galaxies of stars and suns and moons and planets hummed their way across the sky and back, the Fur Queen smiled enigmatically, and from the seven stars on her tiara burst a human foetus, fully formed, opalescent, ghostly. (12)

Abraham does not simply translate the events from one cultural context to another, instead he makes the story his own, and as a result the text shifts from an impersonal and apparently objective narration to one which depends on Abraham's perceptions, and on his sense -- informed by two cultures -- of what makes a good story: "the next thing Abraham knew, or so he would relate." Reading the novel in the realist tradition we might have identified a connection through colour imagery between the small white flame of Abraham's initial vision, the Fur Queen's white roses, sash, and (arctic fox) fur coat, and the white light of the stars in the northern sky, but this passage presents the connections as literal rather than merely metaphoric. This is not to say that the magic in the story is meant to be read uncritically by the reader, indeed the words "or so he would relate" and the fusion of Native and Western, fox and fairy godmother, strongly suggest that the story's authority is provisional rather than immutable, and in this respect its model is hyperbolically oral rather than restrainedly literary. Further, as an oral narrative, Abraham's story is malleable, its meaning and emphasis dependent on the particular storyteller who is relating it, its shape altered by those who are qualified, and its allusions to Western fairy tales as well as Native narratives[79] suggestive of its openness. The spirit of the story is inventive and playful rather than strictly adhering to a particular tradition, so that we learn later that this "spirit baby" (20) meets a cantankerous bear and is assisted by a rabbit who is "a writer of lyric rabbit poetry" (21), and later still that this story is not only a family tradition, but one that is subject to change under certain conditions: "the midwife embellished the ancient yarn as only her very advanced age earned her the right

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[79]The traditional Cree source is alluded to when Jeremiah's mother, Mariesis, hears the voices of her female ancestors while she is conceiving Jeremiah: "the women's voices said to her: 'And *K'si mantou*, the Great Spirit, held the baby boy by his big toe and dropped him from the stars . . . '" (19).

to do" (32). The "ancient yarn" blends traditional narrative with family history, making the story of the birth of Champion (later Jeremiah) Okimasis an inheritance, both as a tale of his origins and as a strategy of fluid negotiation between cultures.

The story of the Fur Queen is central to the novel, and she reappears repeatedly. Beginning as a symbol of victory in white culture (or rather, a small white community), she is also the incarnation of the trickster figure from a variety of Native cultures. From a Todorovian perspective, she is one of the faces the fantastic wears when it enters the narrative. The fantastic episodes in the novel frequently resolve into what he calls the uncanny[80], but in some cases we seem to enter the marvelous. While her appearances remain in the fantastic mode (understood as the reader's hesitation between uncanny and marvelous explanations for a departure from realism), the explanation hovers between the psycho-cultural (when we read the episode as uncanny) and the spiritual (when we read it as marvelous). The Fur Queen, or Maggie Sees, comes to represent not only the persistence of Native culture and spirituality despite powerful assimilative forces, but also a sense that this is the only genuine spirituality available to the brothers because it is the only one that includes them. The fantastic passages in the novel that are governed by Catholic symbols resolve inevitably into the uncanny and the psycho-cultural (where the irruption of the fantastic generally is explained as a manifestation of shame and guilt used to berate oneself over -- or to spice up -- homosexual experiences), while some of the fantastic passages governed by Native symbols may resolve into the marvelous. Even so, the apparition of Maggie Sees may be attributed to a near-death experience, which would be another indication of the association of the fantastic and cultural crossover that can happen when one is in an extreme state of mind.

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[80]In the preceding quotation, the words "the next thing Abraham knew, or so he would relate to his two youngest sons years later" do not so much resolve the passage's ontology as offer the possibility that Abraham has embroidered on his experience; if we accept this explanation the passage is uncanny, but if not, it may be marvelous.

The arrival of Jeremiah's younger brother is described with a variation of the story of the "ghost" (12) or "spirit" (20) baby, followed some time later by an account of how his Cree identity is overwritten by a Catholic one, so that this uncertain identity is inaugurated in the conflict and confusion between the local priest and the one-toothed Annie Moostoos:

> Then his full lips parted, his white teeth glinted, and his tongue formed the words, "*Abrenuntias satanae*?" The words, meaningless to Cree ears, pierced the infant's fragile bones and stayed there.
>
> "But he already has a name," squawked Annie Moostoos. The strapping priest turned with airy contempt to the tiny widow, confident that one arched eyebrow would render the source of this rash remark immobile.
>
> Like a bullmoose ramming its antlers into those of some fearsome, lust-filled rival, Annie Moostoos charged ahead. "His name," she stated, "is Ooneemeetoo. Ooneemeetoo Okimasis. Not Satanae Okimasis."
>
> "Annie Moostoos," the voice sliced through the smoky air as through a bleeding thigh of caribou, "women are not to speak their minds inside the church." The blast was so potent that the tooth, yellowed by age and the smoke of two million cigarettes, yet so celebrated for its stubborn solitariness, hung in its airless void like an abandoned oracle. (37)

The violence implicit in the notion of words piercing an infant's "fragile bones" and slicing the air "as through a bleeding thigh of caribou," the struggle to shape an identity implicit in the skirmish over his name[81], and the priest's arrogance and misogyny are the most obvious symbolic elements in this scene, but there are other, more subtle ones. The comic aspect of describing Annie Moostoos as a bullmoose initially obscures the fact that

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[81]In adult life the young men go by their Christian names, but each of them lives a life that reflects his Native name: Champion becomes a champion pianist, and Ooneemeetoo ("dancer" 35, 309) a dancer, and himself "the champion of the world" (157).

this image conveys both her hidden strength and the disturbing implications of describing the priest as a "lust-filled rival," just as the rather absurd image of Annie's tooth as an "abandoned oracle" that is "celebrated for its stubborn solitariness" at first disguises the pathos in the fact that the silencing of this woman is a metonym for the silencing of Native culture, as the required renunciation of Satan is an implicit demonization of this culture. Highway frequently couches important observations in humour, as both traditional Native storytellers and Western fabulists and satirists frequently do, not to soften the message but to avoid pontificating, instead presenting it in such a way that, as I have earlier observed, the message is conveyed before the reader's philosophical defences have identified its revolutionary potential. A priest who declares that "women are not to speak their minds in the church" may be a rather easy target, but the image of the stubborn, yellowed tooth as an abandoned oracle demonstrates an originality and playfulness that draws the reader into Highway's story.

The story of Ooneemeetoo/Gabriel's christening is narrated by the same self-effacing narrator whose voice lends the appearance of objectivity to the entire novel, but after the events of the baptism have been related their source becomes more visible and less reliable:

> Gabriel Okimasis, for as long as he was to live, would insist that he remembered his entire baptismal ceremony. Champion Okimasis would accuse him of lying; it was he, he would point out, who had told Gabriel the story. In truth, it was Kookoos Cook, sitting on the pew with Champion on his lap, who would never tire of telling his nephews the yarn, which, as the years progressed, became ever more outrageous, exaggerated, as is the Cree way of telling stories, of making myth. (38)

The words "in truth" suggest, if only ironically, that the narrator claims complete authority and reliability; the narrator appears to stand outside of and comment objectively on the progressive exaggeration that turns family history into myth. Like any family

history, it is both communally owned and contested, but the narrator appears to be above the fray. The nature of the narrator's authority is indicated in another way: while Champion becomes Jeremiah at residential school, Ooneemeetoo is already Gabriel; his name is changed not only by the ceremony but by the fact that the ceremony is incorporated into story.

As we follow Champion/Jeremiah Okimasis and his brother Ooneemeetoo/Gabriel through their lives, their perceptions seem to oscillate between cultures, presenting the reader with some sense of how these cultures understand the world and one another, particularly in regard to religion, language and music. Their experiences are largely represented in a realist fashion. Sent off to a residential school, Champion Okimasis becomes Jeremiah Okimasis, and is immersed in another language, another musical tradition (he is a born musician), a religion which, though his parents accept it, is nevertheless foreign to his traditional culture, and he is sexually abused. His loyalties are divided; he does not share his parents' Christian faith, but he cannot reject a culture that produced Chopin. Gabriel, too, is sexually abused by the priests, and Jeremiah is appalled when he learns that his brother willingly engages in the same sexual acts forced upon them by the priests, and would be further scandalized were he to learn that Christian imagery, particularly crucifixion, lend spice to Gabriel's love life. In this regard Jeremiah may be the more colonialized of the brothers, while Gabriel is more able to take what he likes from the Native and Western cultures. Though Gabriel knows a Native story that might lend itself to his sexual fantasies -- witness his response to the story of the weasel crawling up Weetigo's "bumhole": "'Yuck!" feigned Gabriel" (120) -- his preference for Christianity in this respect may arise from an identification with persecution; for example, he is not punished for playing Jesus, but for singing "*Kimoosoom Chimasoo*" ("Grandpa gets a hard-on, grandma runs away" (308)) while on the cross (85). Religious and linguistic proscriptions have given both of the brothers a strong sense of guilt and shame over their culture and even over the abuse they suffer, as

for example the repetition of "mea culpa" has convinced the boys that "it *was* their most grievous fault" (81) that the priests abused them. Because the Cree word *machipoowamoowin* (bad dream power) is not explained to the boys, Gabriel links it to another unspoken, and thus shameful, act, wondering if it means "what Father Lafleur do to the boys at school" (91). Perhaps because he accepts his homosexuality and refuses to be ashamed, Gabriel rejects Catholicism except insofar as its symbols lend spice and its priests lend partners to his sex life. The crucifix worn by the molesting priest becomes for Gabriel a talisman of sexual pleasure, of being pleasurably punctured "as with nails" (169), moreover sex is for him a form of communion: "the body of the caribou hunter's son was eaten" (168).

Gabriel is more open to Amanda's proselytizing for "North American Indian Religion" (183) than is Jeremiah because his homosexuality forces him to face the fact that he is damned by the same Catholic priests with whom he has sex. While Jeremiah fears that the priests have shaped Gabriel's sexuality for their own purposes, Gabriel seems to have reshaped their religion to his own sexual purposes (or, Highway may be suggesting[82], identified and celebrated a sexuality implicit in a religion that seems to put so little value in the feminine). A sense of isolation because of his homosexuality has given Gabriel a sense of cultural independence, as well as a greater affinity for Native culture, which Highway represents as less restrictive on matters of gender and sexuality. In both "A Note on the Trickster" and "General Notes on the Cree Language" (310), for example, Highway suggests that the absence of gender in pronouns in Cree means that from a native perspective, God could be male or female, or both, because gender roles and sexuality in native culture are less ideologically fixed than in White (or Western, or European) and particularly in Catholic thinking.

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[82]In his address to the 2002 Conference on the Social Sciences and Humanities, Highway noted his concern with the absence of the feminine in Christianity, as well as a lack of reverence for the land, the air, and our bodies, and his critique of Christianity in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* reflects his concern for these absences.

Highway provides a glossary of Cree words used in the novel, and referring to it will enlighten the non-Cree-speaking reader in a variety of ways, producing a sense that we are being let in on jokes, perspectives, and a worldview. We learn, for example, that the home town of the second runner-up in the Fur Queen contest, "Eematat, Manitoba" (9), takes its name from the Cree for "he / she's fucking her / him" (307). This is not only an example of Cree's ungendered nature, but also of Highway's sense that it outshines English in its capacity for raunchy humour. Thus after a brief recitation of the story of how "the weasel crawls up the Weetigo's bumhole" (118) we learn, somewhat paradoxically, that "you could never get away with a story like that in English" (118). The explanation for this shortcoming of the English language is less linguistic than theological, however, for we learn from Gabriel that "'bumhole' is a mortal sin in English. Father Lafleur told me in confession one time" (118). Similarly, Abraham makes a doomed effort at bawdy humour while addressing Father Bouchard: "'Ho-ho!' Abraham sang out, 'I'll buy the church a new piano, throw out your tired old *organ* smack in the lake.' Their father's joke plummeted, for on matters sensual, sexual, and therefore fun, a chasm as unbridgeable as hell separates Cree from English, the brothers were sadly learning" (190). For the Okimasis family English is the language taught by the priests, and as such it is the language in which some words are mortal sins; Hell is precisely the chasm that separates the languages. Even when he has abandoned Catholicism, Jeremiah's sense of his language remains, so that while trying to write a play in English he bemoans "English, that humourless tongue" (273). It is understandable, therefore, that Jeremiah's distance from his parents and Native culture is greatest when his own dream is untranslatable: "How, for God's sake, did one say 'concert pianist' in Cree?" (189).

In learning the English language the brothers learn about a culture that appears to value form above all else. After a year of residential school, Jeremiah is able to teach Gabriel the elements of English "'yes,' 'no,' 'yes-no,' and 'hello, merry'" (67). "Hello, merry" is, we eventually realize, Jeremiah's version of Hail Mary: "Hello, merry, mutter

of cod, play for ussinees, now anat tee ower of ower beth, aw, men" (71). Jeremiah is required to go through the motions, but his only clue as to the significance of these words is an unreliable one: "he couldn't help but wonder why the prayer included the Cree word '*ussinees*.' What need did this mutter of cod have of a pebble?" (71). The boys learn to exploit the linguistic gap, turning domine into dominoes (93) and guilt into play: "'Me a cowboy, me a cowboy, me a Mexican cowboy,' he chanted" (94). This exercise is interrupted by another language problem when Kiputz, "as Cree a dog as ever there was" (94) chases a squirrel whose "chiga-chiga-chiga" it takes to mean "Come-and-get-me, come-and-get-me, come-and-get-me, you ugly little creep," leading the narrator to observe that "wars start when two parties haven't taken the time to learn each others' tongues" (95). Gabriel chases Kiputz, stumbles, and is briefly knocked senseless, and his vision is half-mythic, half-Disney: "All he saw was tiny bluebirds chirping merrily, tying pink silk ribbons in the Fur Queen's silver crown" (96). The light tone of these passages is deceptive; Highway suggests not only the capacity for cultures to misunderstand one another, but also the creative possibilities opened up when one operates across or between cultures and languages.

Though it may be a truism to observe that music is a language, the centrality of music to Jeremiah's life and the naming of each section of the novel with a musical notation (*Allegro ma non troppo*, *Andante cantabile*, etc.) suggests that it will help Jeremiah to express himself, and that it may be a way to understand him. Certainly when Jeremiah meets "another woman in white fur" (96), the amusingly-named "Lola van Beethoven, piano teacher nonpareil, grande dame of the Winnipeg classical music scene, aged sixty-five" (99) we see another Fur Queen and thus a point of comparison (and perhaps understanding) between two cultures. Jeremiah puts all of his energy and passion into music, and though his ardent study of Western music at first distances him from his roots, as he achieves musical fluency his music allows him to cross cultures, allowing Jeremiah to both express and relieve his nostalgia:

> all the overanimated guests at those steamy wedding bacchanals bounced through his imagination, tugged at his heart -- "Come home, Jeremiah, come home; you don't belong there, you don't belong there" -- the rhythm of his native tongue came bleeding through the music.
>
> As though tripping on the lump in his throat, he lost his concentration. Lola van Beethoven was about to pounce when, like a trout caught in a net, he resurfaced, flailing, grappling. Effortlessly, he slid into the coda -- the largo a hymn to the heavens -- and thereby came back home to the tonic. (101).

Music has become his home, but it does not provide a universal language; in his high school years Jeremiah rejects the "terrible yowling" (171) of Native singing for Chopin, and he later abandons his dream of being a concert pianist when he feels Gabriel has abandoned him, becoming a social worker for the Winnipeg Indian Friendship Centre and entering a "purgatory" (221) of isolation from his family and from his music.

His affection for classical music has become in Jeremiah's mind a betrayal, since it is affection for a culture that has done his own so much harm. This harm is depicted by the assimilation and abuse in the residential school, by the divisions created in Eemanapiteepitat, where Abraham refuses to speak to his sister who has left an abusive husband and moved in with another man, and most disturbingly through misogynistic violence. Domestic violence takes place in Eemanapiteepitat, to be sure, but both Jeremiah and Gabriel are also partial witnesses to horrific assaults by gangs of white men against Native women in Winnipeg. In both cases the assailants are white by default or association. In one, the identification is automotive: "a car came by that would have looked at home framed by the Californian surf and sunset: open convertible, white, chrome gleaming" (106). In the other, the baseball caps of the assailants tie them to the group of "young non-Indian men in baseball caps" (130) amongst whom Gabriel insinuates himself. The indirectness of the associations may be intended to reduce the sense that one race is exclusively victim, the other solely predator, but the fact that

Gabriel "insinuated himself into their mass" and that before the attack Jeremiah sees the victim reflected in "the propped-up piano top" of a display for a piano concert suggests that both boys are inescapably guilty by association with Western culture, Jeremiah in particular because his dreams of being a concert pianist seem to implicate him in the crime. To be simply a concert pianist would be to ignore the reflection (the woman in the reflection, and the reflection of Native culture in Western culture); he will need to learn to reflect Native culture in his work.

The fact that the most direct, vicious attacks on Natives is against women reflects Highway's sense that Western culture is more patriarchal than Native culture. Father Thibodeau's persecution of Chachagathoo, about whom the boys know only that they are "never to mention" (90) her name inside the house, is motivated not only by the fact that as a shaman, she represents a different religion, but that within her own culture she is a woman in a position of religious authority. Against Highway's illustrations that Native beliefs accept the notion of spiritual entities interacting with human ones, and the notion that "we are all he / shes, as is God, one would think . . . " (310), he depicts a Christianity that is extremely hierarchical, one which has little room for him. Thus the young Jeremiah, shown an illustration of heaven, "tried to spot one Indian person but could not" (59), and in the illustration of hell he learns that "there appeared to be no end to the imagination with which these brown people took their pleasure; and this, Father Lafleur explained earnestly to his captive audience, was permanent punishment" (61). Pleasure, except for the rather pallid pleasure of self-denial, seems absent in this religion, and Jeremiah seems to react almost instinctively against this, so that when he hears the word lust, "the word burst forth like a succulent, canned plum" (62).

Gabriel first incorporates Christianity in his life as an opportunity for theater, enacting "'The Stations of the Cross,' with a scene from 'The Wedding at Cana' thrown in" (86), and enjoying a sexual pleasure from the lashings he receives. The first lines of the chapter, "Kill him! Kill him! Nail the savage to the cross" (83) suggest that Gabriel

identifies with Jesus because of his own persecution, but Gabriel's masochistic pleasure is, to say the least, unorthodox. This is the same pleasure he receives when the priests lash his buttocks with a belt, in this case, a religious experience: "He wasn't going to cry. No sir! If anything, he was going to fall down on his knees before this man and tell him that he had come face to face with God, so pleasurable were the blows" (85). His mother's faith is more conventional, even when she is drunk:

> And who should he run into but his mother, swathed in della robbia blue and laughing giddily, her hair a blizzard of confetti. Jane Kaka McCrae's last born, Big Dick, had finally married the lovely Asscrack Magipom -- Mariesis Okimasis was so drunk she could barely stand.
>
> "Jane Kaka ran out of wine!" she ululated, then paused to suck dry a Javex jug; like excess milk, red wine streaked her breasts. "At the dance! Can you believe it?" She reeled, her knees buckled, and she collapsed in a heap.
>
> "Not now, Mother, can't you see I'm busy?" said Jesus.
>
> "And Jane Kaka was so upset she fainted --" Mariesis burped, "right there in the church-hall kitchen. Banged her head against the statue of you, and *poof*! the water in Father Bouchard's tank turned into Baby Duck, can you believe it?" She fell again. "One week later, and the party's still raging!" (84)

The ontology of the passage is confusing. Up to this point, Jesus has not been identified as Gabriel, though Gabriel is climbing up Eemanapiteepitat hill. Mariesis, "swathed in della robbia blue," is in the context the Madonna, terra cotta figures for which Luca Della Robbia is famed. The Javex jug filled with wine seems a paradoxical linking of realism and the miraculous, and the chapter alternates between two of Gabriel's enactments of the Stations of the Cross, one in Eemanapiteepitat and the other at the residential school, concluding at the residential school but with Mariesis inexplicably present. The miracle of the wine might be explained by faith or intoxication, and Highway may be linking the two here. The lines "'Not now, Mother, can't you see I'm busy?' said Jesus" seem to

humanize the historical Jesus even as they illustrate Gabriel's effort to stay in character; they simultaneously support and undermine the plausibility of the passage, suggesting that Gabriel is able not only to act but to make the events real in some meaningful way. The presence of his mother at the residential school enactment may be assigned to faulty memory, to a child's wish-fulfilment, or to the power of Gabriel's performances to speak to his audience in impossible ways.

Many apparently marvelous events in the novel resolve into the uncanny, for example Jeremiah's belief that he is addressed by Jesus is explained when he looks up from the "thrice-punctured man" (57) to see that it is Father Lafleur speaking, and when the Fur Queen winks at Father Lafleur from a photo, thanks to the moon "playing her usual tricks on glassy surfaces" (74). In both of these cases the event appears marvelous to an individual out of his element – Jeremiah when he has just arrived at residential school, and Father Lafleur when he sees for the first time a photo of the Fur Queen while the room is under "the moon's silvery spell" (74). Similarly, shopping while new to such notions as Muzak, the boys observe that "the nearby rack of neckties launched into 'O Sole Mio'" (119). Virtually the same experience seems more marvelous than uncanny when Abraham and Mariesis experience it, however: "in the most mystical way peculiar only to those who dream in Cree, the paper angels on the Christmas tree began to sing: 'Should old acquaintance be forgot . . . '" (136). The paper angels start singing under particularly chaotic circumstances, with bullets flying and "twenty-seven New Year's Eve parties then raging across this ebullient reserve" (136), but Abraham and Mariesis are Cree enough to placidly accept that the supernatural enters their lives, and Catholic enough to find that it takes the form of singing angels. The reader may attribute a conventional (Western) explanation to the event, but the text offers none, refusing to reduce the experience, simple as it is, to a level that is understandable in a positivist sense.

The wedding miracle of turning water into wine, presented indirectly through the words of the very drunk Mariesis, seems less convincing than the appearances of the Fur Queen, suggesting that the Fur Queen, and Native spirituality, have more to say to the brothers than does Christianity. The Fur Queen makes her first, brief appearance to the brothers when they are out of their element, still new to Winnipeg and shopping in a "church for titans" (115), the Polo Park Shopping Mall:

> They mistook the *t* of "Eaton's" for a crucifix, missed their elevator stop, and ended up scrumming through racks of shift dresses waiting for nuns divorced from God. But for the mannequin in white fox fur who whispered "*ooteesi*" -- "this way" -- the brothers would have been suspected of transvestite tendencies. (117)

The beast, of course, is consumerism, whose belly the boys find in the food court and from whose "rear end" they, having been "gorged" (121) upon, are expelled. That this is the true Western religion may be inferred by the references to the crucifix and to nuns. It also seems clear that the Fur Queen offers them some protection from the dangerous beast being worshipped. The Fur Queen's appearance is not explained away, and interestingly, Jeremiah seeks to calm himself after her words by telling the traditional story in which "the weasel crawls up the Weetigo's bumhole," (118) reasoning that "a sudden swerve to Cree mythology might disarm such occult phenomena" (118). It may be that for Jeremiah this mythology is comforting because to him it is safely mythical, so that he does not expect to interact with its characters; his father's tale of the Fur Queen is to Jeremiah a tall tale rather than an objective truth. Alternately, we may see this as a transition to a worldview in which such occurrences are not occult but widely accepted and perfectly natural. The Native notion of all beings existing on the same plane, regardless of gender, sexuality, or status as mortal or supernatural, is suggested by the occasions on which the Fur Queen chooses to appear, such as when a white fox winks after Jeremiah learns that Gabriel is taking ballet (196), and when Jeremiah broaches the subject of Gabriel's

homosexuality and the brothers fight, "atop the Yamaha upright, the Fur Queen smiled" (208). The Fur Queen's presence at such moments suggest that s/he does not turn away from characters who cross traditional lines of gender.

Achak and Peesim, two eagles which are the brothers' "summer pets" astride whom they fly during a sermon condemning Chachagathoo, a woman sent away and imprisoned for being a shaman, suggest the persistence of Native culture in the face of such sermonizing. When Jeremiah reaches the zenith of his musical career, Achak's incarnation through his music suggests Jeremiah's cultural and musical fluency. Gabriel is leaving without seeing Jeremiah's musical culmination, and Jeremiah expresses this loss in his music:

> Decibel by decibel, he built his crescendo on the runway of Winnipeg International Airport . . . .
>
> The Air Canada DC-10 sank its talons into the pianist's heart, its wing-lights twinkling, its wheel-spin accelerating, the rubber losing contact with the tarmac.
>
> Jeremiah played a northern Manitoba shorn of its Gabriel Okimasis, he played the loon cry, the wolves at nightfall, the aurora borealis in Mistik Lake; he played the wind through the pines, the purple of sunsets, the zigzag flight of a thousand white arctic terns, the fields of mauve-hued fireweed rising and falling like an exposed heart.
>
> Straddling the back of Achak, his pet brown eagle, Gabriel curved sadly over the office towers of Winnipeg, the Jubilee Concert Hall a candle-lit basilica, his brother's octaves the hooves of a thousand caribou surrounding, enveloping him, crying "Gabriel, please, please, don't leave me!" (213)

Just as a beauty pageant, or a fart, for that matter (189), can become mythic in the hands of a Cree storyteller, Jeremiah has turned two brothers' summer imaginings into art and into myth. Western and Native perspectives merge in the image of the DC-10's talons, as

Gabriel's and Jeremiah's consciousness merge in the image of Gabriel over the office towers, an image which may represent either Gabriel's or Jeremiah's perceptions, but which, through the music, represents both. Through his art, Jeremiah is able to picture his landscape, physical and emotional, crossing cultures and contributing to both. The isolation that comes from his brother's departure, however, brings this to an end, and leads Jeremiah to his purgatory.

Jeremiah's experience of winning is like his father's, full of "something about"s (214), though Jeremiah does not see the gaps as invitations to give the event his own meaning, but as echoes to mark the emptiness of his life. Horrific visions of violence visit him, as if in revenge for his affinity for a culture that has done so much harm to his own. Jeremiah has a drunken vision in which "Evelyn Rose McCrae smiled her gap-toothed smile; long-lost daughter of Mistik Lake, her womb crammed with broken beer bottles" (215), and she becomes "Madeline Jeanette Lavoix, erstwhile daughter of Mistik Lake, skewered in the sex by fifty-six thrusts of a red-handled Phillips screwdriver, a rose of legend" (216). She then turns into "the Madonna of North Main [who] stood before him, the sad blue plastic rose in her hair, peeking through the star tiara. Twenty-seven months' pregnant now, her belly protruded ten feet, translucent, something inside stabbing, slashing, only the skull vaguely human" (216). She says, startlingly, "'You make me so proud to be a fuckin' Indian, you know that?'" (216). The passage describes hideous violence to women, but the violated womb and the grotesque pregnancy also chillingly illustrate a violation of cultural fertility in which Jeremiah feels implicated.

Gabriel's art is more sustained, and sustaining. In entering ballet, Gabriel chooses a Western art, but the choice is in some respects a more dangerous one than Jeremiah's choice of music, since in high school it is liable to label Gabriel "a poof, a sissy, a girlie-boy" (196). Perhaps for this reason, Gabriel is more daring in his art. Tellingly, dance is linked in Gabriel's mind with the caribou stampede that threatened his life as a child and

then left him more passionately alive and connected with the land, so that seeing his first ballet takes him back to that moment:

> The arms were a sea of moving antlers. And Gabriel Okimasis, three years old, was perched on a moss-covered rock, the warm breath of a thousand beasts rushing, pummelling, the zigzaging of their horns a cloud of spirit matter, nudging him, licking him as with a lover's tongue. And whispering: "Come with us, Gabriel Okimasis, come with us . . . " (145)

The invitation both from the caribou and the dancers, to "come with us," is so seductive and dangerous that in accepting the invitation, Gabriel chooses a life of risk. He is willing to risk crossing back and forth between cultures in his work, but the risks he takes are also sexual, so that he is eventually claimed by AIDS, frequently portrayed as an incarnation of the Weetigo: "The cities of the world twinkled at his feet -- Toronto, New York, London, Paris: the maw of the Weetigo, Jeremiah dreamt, insatiable man-eater, flesh-devourer, following his brother in his dance" (214).

The powerful pull of Native culture on the Okimasis family is indicated by what we might call Abraham's deathbed reconversion, a conversion to a state of mind that permits him to tell a traditional Native story even while he is taking communion. When their father dies, the boys are "shocked that this most Catholic of men should resort to pagan tales for the third time that his sons could recall" (227). Perhaps because of this evocation of his "pagan" roots, as well as his acceptance of conflicting views, the Fur Queen reappears at the moment of his death: "the Fur Queen raised her lips from the world champion's cheek, exhaling a jet of pure white vapour" (228). The Fur Queen represents a merging of family story and the fantastic, indeed fusion or hybridity is her defining quality; she is a merging of genders, of traditions, of absurd and sacred, ephemeral and eternal.

Jeremiah's first conversation with the Fur Queen is under appropriately mixed circumstances: drinking for three days straight after his father's death, having wandered

on the frozen surface of Mistik Lake, and having fallen face-first and immobile into the snow, Jeremiah's experience is hallucinatory, near-death, or both. His vision's name, she says, is "Maggie Sees. It used to be Fred but it bored the hell outta me so I changed" (231). She is "a torch-singing fox with fur so white it hurt the eyes" (231), a Vegas showgirl who is "far too spectacular: missile-like tits, ice-blond meringue hair" (231), yet her name, Maggie Sees suggests, in English, her special sight, and in Cree – the word maggeesees is Cree for fox -- her status as a shape-shifting observer of human folly whose Northern roots go so far back that "I have ancestors in these parts that go back to when the moon was a zit-faced teenager" (232). Above all she is an entertainer, and her philosophy is that "without entertainment, honeypot, without distraction, without dreams, life's a drag. No?" (233). She is also an amalgam of Native tricksters, or rather, a single spirit called by many names:

> "'Honeypot, if I were you, I'd watch my tongue. Cuz you're talkin' to Miss Maggie Sees. Miss Maggie-Weesageechak-Nanabush-Coyote-Raven-Glooscap-oh-you-should-hear-the-things-they-call-me-honeypot-Sees, weaver of dreams, sparker of magic, showgirl from hell. And this is what turns her crank." Her breath redolent of soil after rain, she hissed into Jeremiah's ear: "show me the bastard who come up with this notion that who's running the goddamn show is some grumpy, embittered, sexually frustrated old fart with a long white beard hiding like a gutless coward behind some puffed-up cloud and I'll slice his goddamn balls off." (233-34)

Until the final moments of his life, the Fur Queen has been for Abraham and his family a symbol of a victory that required him to transcend human limits; through repetition in story she enters familial mythology, and in a final relaxation from his Catholicism (into a more catholic view) she is revealed as a manifestation of the family's link to traditional Native culture.

In his final moment of life, Abraham is kissed by the Fur Queen, so the narrator tells us (228). Abraham's first moments after death are also presented, apparently a further progression into the fantastic until we then learn that what we are seeing is not Abraham's experience of the afterlife but Gabriel's art (236), a dance piece conceived and performed by Gabriel and choreographed by his lover, Gregory Newman, Gabriel's effort to give meaning to his father's death. Jeremiah's vision of the Fur Queen is preceded by three days of drinking and his potentially-fatal collapse into the snow, but other than these facts, the vision, however parodic and free-wheeling, is not undercut by the narrator. Gabriel's vision is presented without overt suggestions as to its ontology, so that it is something of a surprise when we learn that it is a dance piece. Even so there is a lingering credibility to Gabriel's active response to the loss of his father. Jeremiah's vision of the Fur Queen, whether we are to regard it as objectively real within the world of the novel or only within his unconscious, suggests what he has lost by abandoning Native culture. The recognition of this loss leaves him lost and diminished: "like a ghost, Jeremiah floated into the mirror, into the reflection of this flawless baby brother who had journeyed past the sun" (238). Gabriel, by reclaiming traditional culture and working it into his art, has "journeyed past the sun"; Jeremiah, having lost both his culture and his art, is insubstantial as a ghost, and desperately needs Gabriel's help, begging "*Weechee-in.* Help me" (238).

Gabriel begins his reclamation effort by taking Jeremiah camping, thought the distance between them is made immediately evident. When they accidentally end up at a pow wow their very different responses to Native culture emerge:

> Gabriel was beside himself. Having been to three, maybe four, such events inspired him with visions, one of which was to plaster himself with feathers and take to the stage in a glitter-crusted Las Vegas-cum-pow wow dance revue. Jeremiah merely scratched his balls, for, after ten years of southern Manitoba pow

> wows -- scraping drunks off the street and taking them there by the van load -- they still made him feel like a German tourist. (241-42)

Though his own (piano) championship marks the end of his struggle to answer the question "how, for God's sake, did one say 'concert pianist' in Cree?" (189), Jeremiah's decision to become a social worker simply buries his love of Western music, without overcoming his fear of Native culture and music: "Against all reason, Jeremiah was still frightened of this dance, this song, this drum, 'the heartbeat of our Mother, the Earth,' as he had heard it said on more than one occasion. Like the door to a room off-limits to children, it still made his blood run cold" (243). Gabriel may be more of a tourist at the pow wow than Jeremiah, and his vision of a "glitter-crusted Las Vegas-cum-pow wow dance revue" is not safe from "spineless fag-bashers" (265), but he learns to face and to overcome his shame and incorporate his roots into his present life. Jeremiah's shame over his culture, like his shame over his brother, "a man who fucked other men" (250), brings him to betrayal, signified most strongly when Jeremiah abandons his brother to a group of homophobic louts.

- After abandoning his brother Jeremiah is literally confronted by the ghosts of the past when he sees a vision of the monster that haunted his Catholic childhood, Chachagathoo (a creature his parents warned him about but in fact "the last shaman in that part of the world, the last medicine woman, the last woman priest" (247)). Though he is terrified, he realizes that "it was the monster gnawing at his innards, devouring him live, that Chachagathoo had come to get, not him" (252). The monster gnawing at his innards is Jeremiah's shame, particularly the shame arising from being molested by Father Lafleur, but also a shame he has been taught to feel for his culture and his people.

Recovering from his trance and from a fall, Jeremiah sees Chachagathoo's face resolve into that of Amanda Clear Sky, now the star of *Tender is My Heart*, a Cree-Ojibway soap opera. Sex with Amanda revives memories of molestation at the hands of the priests, striking him with an impotence that is relieved through thoughts of

"misogynistic violence" (260). That this is a general response to abuse in the residential schools (and, more generally, to the shame of being colonialized) is implied by the Native soap opera that Amanda stars in and that they are watching at the time. The cry "Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeha-ha-ha!" (252, 253, 259) that Jeremiah hears in his nightmare/vision, that he causes by knocking down a garbage can lid, and that Amanda's television character cries out, ties horror together with slapstick, nightmare and mythic vision together with entertainment. And so Jeremiah comes to learn that he can draw upon his terrors and his laughter, his past and his present, his Native and his Western experience to produce something healing and powerful.

The realization that art is the cure, in dance, music, and literature, allows Jeremiah to come to terms with himself, and with the fact that he will lose his brother to AIDS. Gabriel's dance piece, set to Jermiah's music, has already shown how to achieve some reconciliation in its bridging cultures:

> The quintet of circling dancers launched into a pentatonic chant, "*Ateek, ateek, astum, astum, yoah, ho-ho!*" And, suddenly, the piano was a pow wow drum propelling a Cree Round Dance with the clangour and dissonance of the twentieth century.
>
> Gabriel knew that his magic had worked, for the audience was speaking to some space inside themselves, some void that needed filling, some depthless sky; and this sky was responding. Through the brothers, as one, and through a chamber as vast as the north, an old man's voice passed. "My son," it sighed, "with these magic weapons, make a new world . . . " (267)

Gabriel conjures a meeting place of cultures, or perhaps tells a Cree story in a new way to a new audience. Jeremiah's play, "Ulysses Thunderchild," borrows from Joyce[83] to create

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[83]As Gabriel's "Hello merry, mutter of cod" (71) may borrow from the Anna Livia episode of *Finnegan's Wake*: "Lord help you, Maria, full of grease, the load is with me!" (214).

"one day in the life of a Cree man in Toronto, 1984" (277), but as Amanda observes, "you're trying to write a realistic play from a story that's just not realistic" (279). Jeremiah learns that the solution lies in experiencing the passion (in this case, anger) that permits him to escape a purely intellectual realism, and in embracing hybridity:

> "Stick to that goddamn piano" -- Amanda lunged at him with teeth bared, spit flying -- "where you belong!"
>
> Who the hell did the bitch think she was? Jeremiah clawed at the keyboard, tidal waves of red smashing at his eyeballs. "*Aiaiaiaiaiaiaiaiaiyash oogoosisa, oogoosisa . . .* " Shooting to the ceiling, the wail dove, resurfaced as samba-metered hisses. And one by one, the company fell in with the chant, a dance, a Cree rite of sacrifice, swirling like blood around the altar and bouncing off the piano like, yes, magic. (280)

Passion drives and hybridity invigorates the samba-metered Cree rite in which art and magic are one. The Fur Queen appears to oversee Jeremiah's second work, "Chachagathoo, the Shaman" (295), which turns the history of Eemanapiteepitat, particularly its colonialization, into art: "In the faded picture on the shelf across from Jeremiah, the Fur Queen kissed world champion Abraham Okimasis. And winked. On his pad, Jeremiah carved a line under the words: "Scene Four: 1860. The first missionary arrives on Mistik Lake" (291). Jeremiah continues to work at a kind of spiritual rebirth by turning the story of his life and the life of his community into a healing art. For the Fur Queen the mythic, dreams, magic, art (high and low), entertainment and the afterlife are all one, so that the reward for a race, a work of art, and a life well lived is the same, and is awarded by the Fur Queen. Eventually AIDS claims Gabriel, and the Fur Queen carries him off, but "the little white fox on the collar of the cape turned to Jeremiah. And winked" (306). The novel ends on this note, rather a bleak one were it not for the sense of play, absurdity, and imaginative possibility that the trickster fox infuses into life, and into death.

Green Grass, Running Water

Thomas King is less open to the idea of hybridity than is Tomson Highway, regarding it, I believe, in the same light as he regards postcolonialism, that is, as defined by, and thus in some sense complicit with colonialism[84]. Similarly, if *Green Grass, Running Water* is magic realist, it is not so much scholarly as mythic, and not so much mythic as corrective. *Green Grass, Running Water* deals more extensively than *Kiss of the Fur Queen* with creation stories, treating them as important, but not utterly fixed, indeed open to wild and inventive and endless parody[85]. In *Green Grass, Running Water* King plays Christian and Native creation stories into and against one another, partly in order to show how Native beliefs and culture have been appropriated, represented and misrepresented by Western culture, not only in "high" literature but also in the mass media[86]. King describes the organizing principle of *Green Grass, Running Water* thus:

> one day I thought, my god, why don't I just recreate the world along more Native lines, and use Native oral stories--oral Creation stories--rather than the story that you find in Genesis. So I went back, and I began to use that as my basis for the fiction, and then all I had to, well, not *all* I had to do, but one of the things I wanted to do, was to sort of drag that myth through Christianity, through Western literature and Western history, and see what I came up with --sort of push it

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[84]King argues in an essay entitled "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial" that the term post-colonial naturalizes colonialism, puts the struggle against colonialism (and thus, ironically, colonialism) at the centre of all Native writing and "cuts us off from our traditions" (12), and concludes that "it is an act of imagination and an act of imperialism that demands that I imagine myself as something I did not choose to be, as something I would not choose to become" (16).

[85]As we will see, some beliefs are more sacred than others: Christianity is parodied in its very essence, while Native beliefs are not; the characters in specific stories may be gently mocked and tribal variations encouraged, but in *Green Grass, Running Water* Native beliefs are true because dialogical. As the repeated concern with getting the story right shows, this dialogism consists of tribal variation, while Coyote's mishaps suggest the seductive dangers of individual improvization.

[86]King's affinity for what we might call dueling creation stories is suggested by the recurrence of this technique in such short stories as "One Good Story, That One," in which, as Margaret Atwood observes "we are forced to experience first hand how it must feel to have your religious stories retold, in a version that neither 'understands' nor particularly reverences them" (250).

> through that, that *grinder*, if you will, as Native culture's been pushed through that sort of North American grinder. And so that's partly what happens, is that you get this movement in each one of the sections, you get this movement through an oral Creation story, through a biblical story, through a literary story, through a historical story, and that repeats itself each of the times in the four sections" ("Interview" 70-71).

I suggest that the goal is to produce a corrective text, first by providing a fairer representation of Native spirituality and culture and illustrating the ways in which Western culture has distorted Native culture; and second by subjecting Christianity (understood as the worldview and justification of the colonizers and thus as the belief that underwrites their notion of the real) to similar distortions in order to underscore (and exact revenge for) its distortions of Native culture. In Todorov's terms, the novel is thoroughly marvelous; King represents supernatural events in the novel as manifestations of a truth that makes positivism (and thus literary realism) appear impoverished, banal, and capable of understanding individuals only as the powerless subjects of commerce and power politics.

In *Green Grass, Running Water* the Native characters whom we might term traditional, mythic, or literary (Coyote, the four old Indians, and possibly the narrator) reflect the Native perspective that natural and supernatural entities interact on the same plane, and they therefore make frequent and unstilted contact with the novel's flesh-and-blood characters, while the character who stands for Western notions of religious and literary-critical authority (in the form of a character who resembles both the Christian God and Northrop Frye) tries desperately (and often comically) to maintain authority and a hierarchical distance that is simply ignored by those who choose not to believe in it. Rather than reproduce mythic magic realism's negative capability when faced with two incompatible philosophies or scholarly magic realism's more sceptical deconstruction of both, King confirms Native culture at the expense of Western culture, particularly

Christianity, and thus undermines realism, at least when it is understood as the avatar of Western consciousness. In this novel King presents a critique of the differing Native and Western ideas of and attitudes to story, religion, and culture in general, a critique that is startling in its breadth.

The novel's hardest hits are reserved for Christianity and the arrogance and imperialism that seem concomitant with a faith that teaches men that they have been given "dominion over the beasts and the whole earth" (Gen. 1:26). Dr. Joe Hovaugh (Jehovah) presides over an insane asylum and pays particular attention to its garden (whose vegetation is withering) and to four inmates who keep escaping and whom he is utterly incapable of understanding. Dr. Hovaugh is also Northrop Frye, who after all suggests that the Bible is the great code that unlocks Western literature. An inveterate schematizer, Dr. Joe Hovaugh seeks patterns by identifying "occurrences, probabilities, directions, deviations," noting that "they're all in the book" (39). He uses his analysis of "the book" to connect disasters with the occasions on which the four old Indians have escaped, and to track them: "all the while, he plotted occurrences and probabilities and directions and deviations on a pad of graph paper, turning the chart as he went, literal, allegorical, tropological, anagogic" (324). Readers familiar with Frye will hear echoes of his effort in *The Anatomy of Criticism* to render scientific the study of literature in the face of its polysemous nature, a nature which "has seldom . . . been squarely faced in criticism since the Middle Ages, when a precise scheme of literal, allegorical, moral[87] and anagogic meanings was taken over from theology and applied to literature" (72). Identifying occasions when the four old Indians (and the traditional Native culture for which they stand) are free as disastrous, and attempting to trap them by affixing their actions by graph and map, brings to life the notion that European efforts to schematize or map Native culture seem inevitably to have been efforts to demonize and imprison it, just

[87]Frye later describes this third level as "moral and tropological" (116).

as the fact that the four old Indians constantly escape J. Hovaugh's asylum suggests the vitality of a culture that cannot be contained.

Green Grass, Running Water is a complex text: it is rich with allusions, puns, wordplay of all sorts; the characters who tell the story, apparently from outside of it, get involved in it; characters from the Bible and from the works of Cooper, Defoe, Melville[88] and various elements of popular culture interact with traditional Pueblo, Navaho, Blackfoot and pan-Native characters[89] and with "flesh and blood" characters in a way that might be regarded as intertextual and postmodern, but which in fact is underwritten by the belief in most Native cultures "that sacred beings inhabit the same space as humans and that frequent interchanges with them form a necessary part of both individual and tribal experience" (Donaldson 31-32). The iconic characters from the Western tradition are treated with very little reverence, as are the narratives which they inhabit, and while traditional Native narratives are spared, their characters are not, particularly the trickster, Coyote. What makes Native creation stories in particular and culture in general worth respecting, King suggests, is a quality closely linked to their orality: they are constantly being told and retold, and as such are true without being utterly fixed, and the audience can speak up, raise questions, and nudge the story along tangents. These stories have a built-in capacity for change and intertextuality, and no character is quite as intertextual as Coyote, perhaps because s/he respects no borders. In fact, unlike the traditional character, King's Coyote is something of a sucker for Western culture, and frequently needs to be set straight by the four old Indians and the narrator. As Armand Ruffo observes:

> Under King's gaze, Coyote loses his/her mythic status to become something new, no longer the Trickster of the oral tradition. On the contrary, the Coyote created by King, along with his other "cast of characters," owes much to the influence of

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[88]Particularly *The Leatherstocking Saga*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Moby Dick*.

[89]Thought Woman, First Woman, Old Woman and Coyote, respectively.

> contemporary western culture, particularly to the phenomenon of Saturday morning cartoons. If we consider what happens to Coyote, the television images from "The Road Runner Show" immediately spring to mind. (150)

King is not simply reproducing traditional oral narratives in a written form, then, but drawing from them in order to demonstrate that they are a viable source of literary inspiration and worldly knowledge. The palpable orality of the text -- the narrator's colloquial speech, peppered with "I says" and "I says that too," the debates on whose turn it is to tell the story and where the various characters have left off in its telling or its enacting, even the frequent occurrence of crosstalk in conversations -- are both an acknowledgement of King's debt to the Native oral tradition (and particularly to Okanagan storyteller Harry Robinson) and an assertion of a certain democracy in this tradition. Coyote gleefully mixes things up without considering the consequences, and King uses this aspect of the traditional Coyote to show both the appeal and the danger of promiscuously blending in cultures; Coyote is amusing, but also untrustworthy, and King seems to suggest through his Coyote that dialogism musn't be confused with complete relativism.

Green Grass, Running Water is in large part a satire of Western culture, not with the intention of universal carnivalization, but of correction in attitude. King observes:

> There's a great danger to humour. In general, people think of comedy as being not serious. I don't think this was true two hundred years ago. I'm thinking of Restoration comedy, Shakespeare, the European models, without even getting into the Native models.
>
> If you write humorous material, or if you write comedy, the great danger is that they will not take you seriously. I think of myself as a dead serious writer. Comedy is simply my strategy. I don't want to whack somebody over the head, because I don't think that accomplishes much at all.

> There's a fine line to comedy. You have to be funny enough to get them laughing so they really don't feel how hard you hit them. And the best kind of comedy is where you start off laughing and end up crying, because you realize just what is happening halfway through the emotion. If I can accomplish that, then I succeed as a storyteller. ("Coyote Lives" 96-97)

King draws upon, compares and satirizes the European and Native models of narrative, religion and culture in the novel, and I will examine it primarily according to these categories. The categories frequently -- indeed, necessarily -- overlap, as indeed do the invitations to laughter and to tears. As King's comments above imply, the most humourous passages may contain the most caustic observations, a technique that borrows from Western and Native narrative traditions.

Structurally, *Green Grass, Running Water* is circular: it consists of 360 pages divided into four sections, each of which contains roughly ninety pages, beginning with a title page written in the Cherokee syllabary. The titles of these sections are not glossed, nor are the characters identified as belonging to the Cherokee syllabary. King explains his decision not to gloss the words (or identify the language and character set) in terms of inclusion, exclusion and the implied reader:

> In a number of my books editors have asked me to gloss terms or events so the reader understands what's happening. I've refused to do that. Because what it does is it "others" that text, like the language, that Cherokee language in *Green Grass*. In *Truth and Bright Water* the editors kept saying, couldn't we asterisk it? Put it down at the bottom? I said no. If they want to know they can ask me and I'll tell them. It's not a secret. And if readers want to look it up they can look it up. If they want to find a Chero-kee [King's spelling] speaker they can do that too. Nobody glosses French in Canadian novels. ("Border Trickery" 180-81)

King's suggestion that readers ask him or, if they intuit that the words are Cherokee, a Cherokee speaker, seems flip, even hostile, but the choice to "other" readers unfamiliar

with Cherokee rather than the Cherokee reader is consistent with King's strategy of placing Native culture at the centre and Western culture at the margins of his text, and indeed to indicate to non-Native readers that there are places in Native culture where they are not readily welcome[90]. King's reference to the absence of glosses for French in Canadian novels is somewhat disingenuous, however, as King is not addressing, nor attempting to create, a bilingual or polylingual, nor a bi- or poly-cultural audience; as we will see, his intention in such moments is to protect, rather than break down, certain cultural barriers.

The titles of the sections are neither linear nor descriptive, at least in Western terms. Instead, as Jane Flick observes, they follow a more traditional Native pattern:

> Each volume begins with a direction and a colour, in the Cherokee syllabary. Volume I: East/red; Volume II: South/white; Volume III: West/black Volume IV: North/blue. Perhaps the following is helpful: "In the Medicine Lodge, each direction has a ceremonial meaning. The East represents the new generation, still green, and just beginning to grow. The South represents further growth. The West represents ripeness. Finally, the north [sic] represents old age--the complete generation of a man or being" (Powell 2:852). (Flick 143)

The four directions and four stages of life suggest that the novel is in a sense a map of the cycle of life from a Native perspective. Marlene Goldman suggests that King uses this perspective to counterbalance a more acquisitive form of mapping: "in King's novel, writing and mapping are conceived of as complicitous activities that often serve to secure a Western world view" (20), and she further argues that, contrary to the linear progression suggested by numbering sections or chapters, the four directions suggest a circle, as does

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[90]Patricia Linton says of such texts: "They require a readerly tact that recognizes boundaries and respects them . . . . Good reading -- skilful, ethical reading -- is restrained by the recognition that culturally specific experience may have no equivalent outside its own context" ("Ethical" 43).

the fact that each of the old Indians gets a turn: "viewed cartographically, the sum of the turns by each of the elderly Indians comprises a circle" (36).

The preface is a creation story told by a narrator whose authority, we soon learn, exceeds that of both Coyote and the Christian God. Coyote has a dream, the dream "gets loose and runs around. Makes a lot of noise" (1), and Coyote tells it that it can't be Coyote, but it can be a dog. Obnoxious, loud and stupid, the "Dog Dream" (2) insists that it is "god," and then "GOD," and thus begins all the trouble (and monotheism). Since the world in King's book begins in water rather than nothingness, following the Native rather than the Judeo-Christian script for creation, GOD (evidently the Old Testament God) is upset:

> Where did all that water come from? shouts that GOD.
>
> "Take it easy," says Coyote. "Sit down. Relax. Watch some television."
>
> But there is water everywhere, says that GOD.
>
> "Hmmmm," says Coyote. "So there is."
>
> "That's true,".I says. "And here's how it happened." (2)

The narrator is more reliable than Coyote or GOD, adopts an informal, conversational tone, and is little concerned by anachronism, presumably existing in mythic time rather than linear time. We are in the world of oral narrative, and as we learn from the care taken to get the story right (a care which partly consists of giving everyone a turn at telling the story), the story shapes the world. The four old Indians each tell their variation of the creation story while they are in the mythic mode, and this complements their mission in the here-and-now mode, a mission which both succeeds and fails by the end of the novel; as Hawkeye observes, "we fixed up part of the world" (357), but Ishmael points out that "part of it got messed up, too" (357), so that the narrator concludes that "it looks like we got to do this all over again" (358). The end of the novel mirrors the beginning, so that the notion of progress is dubious; the way we tell stories may make the world

better, but it may also mess things up; the moral seems to be that the best we can do is to tell stories carefully, give everyone a turn, and be prepared to revise. Oral narrative makes the world and its rules, but telling the story and making the world is a shared responsibility, as is the case, largely, in oral worlds.

In demonstrating how "Native culture's been pushed through that sort of North American grinder" King is committed to identifying Western deformations of Native culture. One of his techniques is to adopt a Native narrative structure wherein divigations into Western narrative modes will be experienced as artificial and inappropriate. An example is when Coyote wants to tell the story and gets it wrong, throwing into one explanatory narrative a manger, a fiery furnace, a golden calf, a pillar of salt, a burning bush:

> "Where do you get these things?" I says.
>
> "I read a book," says Coyote.
>
> "Forget the book," I says. "We've got a story to tell. And here's how it goes." (291)

Referring to the Bible simply as "a book" comically disarms it through its unspecificity, its anonymity. The model is oral rather than literary, the plot is circular rather than linear, the traditional (Western) cast of heroes, villains, and a number of extras is replaced by a cast in which all of them get to tell their story, female characters perform many of the feats that traditional Western narratives would reserve for male characters, Native culture is represented as revering the land and everything in it while Western culture is identified with consumerism and greed. In "Godzilla vs. Postcolonial" King says that he "lean(s) toward terms such as tribal, interfusional, polemical, and associational to describe the range of Native writing" (12), and his description of associational literature clearly applies to his own writing:

> Associational literature, most often, describes a Native community. While it may also describe a non-Native community, it avoids centering the story on the non-

> Native community or on a conflict between the two cultures, concentrating instead on the daily activities and intracacies of Native life and organizing the elements of plot along a rather flat narrative line that ignores the ubiquitous climaxes and resolutions that are so valued in non-Native literature. In addition to this flat narrative line, associational literature leans toward the group rather than the single, isolated character, creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of the members of a community, a fiction which eschews judgements and conclusions.
>
> For a non-Native reader, this literature provides a limited and particular access to a Native world, allowing the reader to associate with that world without being encouraged to feel part of it. (14)

King preserves difference via exclusion, resisting "literary tourism" (14) by refusing, for example, to describe the Sun Dance, which figures prominently in the novel, and portraying characters who would photograph the event in extremely unflattering terms. Literary tourism presumably satisfies readers that a few hours of reading has provided them with a sufficient understanding of an entire culture, but King is not simply opposed to facile understanding; he is at pains to let non-Native readers know that there are aspects of Native life where their company is not desired.

The four old Indians, who have survived for hundreds of years in part because they have taken (or had imposed upon them) the rather inappropriate names Ishmael, Hawkeye, Robinson Crusoe, and the Lone Ranger, are setting out to save the world. Though they are women, the authorities believe they are men because the files say so, and this trust in written documents rather than in the (spoken) word of the individuals, or of the black woman who works in the hospital, or indeed the evidence of the senses, is one

of the ways King parodies a Western obsession with written, rather than oral authority[91]. They are "four, five hundred years" (43) old, according to Babo Jones, whose marginality (she is female, black, and a descendent of slaves) coupled with her capacity for self-liberation[92] and familiarity with Native creation stories (75) make her more trustworthy (and more appreciative of the old Indians) than authority figures like Dr. Hovaugh or the police, who premise all of their thinking on the notion of their own superiority and centrality, so that their (generally wrong) assumptions are impervious to the facts. The old Indians, however, freely cross between creation stories and events in the everyday world, both historical and current; when they are talking amongst themselves, they are more-or-less mythic figures, but when they walk amongst historical and contemporary characters, they are old Indians who are irrelevant to the white characters and a bit of an embarassment to Lionel, a character who is not yet reintegrated into Native culture. Indeed part of their mission is to achieve this integration.

As I have said, each of the sections begins with one of the four old Indians narrating a creation story, and in each case the old Indian whose turn it is to speak turns out to be the primary participant in her tribe's creation story. Each one meets with, is misnamed by, and through a kind of fluid persistence, survives and occasionally breaks free of Western culture. In the first section, the Lone Ranger tells the story of First Woman (31), though in this version she finds herself in a garden with Ahdamn, and deciding that there is "no point in having a grouchy GOD for a neighbor" (57), begins travelling. Happening upon "a bunch of dead rangers" (57) at the bottom of a canyon and a bunch of live ones who suspect her and Ahdamn of the murders, First Woman thinks

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[91]Perhaps because he has been so thoroughly drawn into Western culture that even at forty he wishes to do "what John Wayne would do" (204), Lionel is the character most vulnerable to bureaucratic (written) errors that he can't talk his way out of, as the three mistakes that have shaped his life demonstrate.

[92]Flick points out that "in Melville's story 'Benito Cereno' in *Piazza Tales* (1856), Babo is the black slave who is the barber and the leader of the slave revolt on board the *San Dominick*" (145).

fast, puts on a mask, and identifies herself as the Lone Ranger and Ahdamn as Tonto. Shortly after, however, she and Ahdamn are captured and imprisoned at Fort Marion, under the charge of "being Indian" (59). In the second section Ishmael relates the story of Changing Woman, whose creation story also takes a novel turn when she meets (and escapes) Noah (88), happens upon a hunt for a white whale and is offered the name of Queequeg, prefers (and takes) the name Ishmael (163), and is imprisoned, despite her name, in Fort Marion (188). The third section begins with Robinson Crusoe's narration of the story of Thought Woman (193), whose watery beginnings are interrupted by a certain A.A. Gabriel, Heavenly Host (225), who wants her to be Mary, and then by Robinson Crusoe, who wants her to be Friday. She chooses to be Robinson Crusoe herself (246), but she too ends up in Fort Marion (270). The fourth section contains Hawkeye's story of Old Woman (274), who meets first an arrogant saviour by the name of "Young Man Walking on Water" (291) and next a certain "Nasty Bumppo" (327) who calls her Hawkeye (329). For the crime of "trying to impersonate a white man" (330) she too is imprisoned in Fort Marion.

Simultaneously natural and supernatural (and perhaps female and male), the four old Indians are subject to capture and imprisonment at Fort Marion and at Dr. Hovaugh's asylum as living Natives would be -- "that's what always happens" (330) says the narrator -- but are also able to escape such imprisonment at will, as members of a living culture will do. The differences in their stories reflect tribal differences, but the similarities (the world beginning with water, for example, and the female progenitor), combined with the determination to resist misrepresentation despite the imposition of misleading names, reflect pan-Native concerns. The repetition, circularity, patterns of four, and ubiquity of water ("All this floating imagery must mean something" (293) Coyote says twice) reflect King's notion of associational literature, unlike writing in the Western tradition, which h characterizes as authoritarian and carceral; each of the four old Indians must take a (false)

identity from Western literature in order to survive, but regardless of the name chosen, they end up imprisoned shortly after assuming their identities.

The absurdity of the literary identities that the four old Indians have foisted upon them mocks the representation of the Native in Western high and low culture, as Dr. Hovaugh's efforts to imprison and to track them identifies not only Christianity but, through his association with Northrop Frye, Western literary-critical approaches as excessively schematic and monological, and thus incapable of representing (and, indeed, inferior to) a culture whose dialogism King emphasizes by having each of the four old Indians begin a section with her version of the creation story. In each case history intrudes in the unwelcome form of colonialism, and in each case the old Indian who is narrating must incorporate herself into the Western narrative in order to survive. Though each resists by choosing to take the name of the (male) white hero rather than the Native sidekick, King seems to imply that once the old Indians enter into such a relationship (and such a narrative), they are as good as locked up. The exchange between Old Woman and Nasty Bummpo is typical: "Indians have Indian gifts, says Nasty Bumppo. And Whites have white gifts" (327). Old Woman recognizes the thinking underlying the "gifts" assigned to Whites and Indians: " So, says Old Woman. Whites are superior, and Indians are inferior. Exactly right, says Nasty Bummpo. Any questions? (328)."

Few would argue that demeaning stereotypes are beneficial or promote understanding, but by alluding to their presence in a wide range of high and low art King suggests that the ubiquity of these stereotypes represents not only a formidable challenge but a common ideology which employs these stereotypes in order to naturalize colonialism. Stuart Christie's comment may be the most explicit articulation of this notion that a colonialist ideology is endemic to American realism: "the literary mode of American realism--from tragic romance to dismissive essentialisms about what tribal identities are 'really' like--has been nothing less than the discursive strongman of Anglo-European colonization" (52-53). The four old Indians, who not only relate but are the

primary participants in Native creation stories (thus suggesting the power of narrative by conflating "telling" with "being"), resist the apparent tendentiousness of linear narratives by following a cyclical, communal (shared) narrative strategy. King's Coyote is too unreliable to be given a turn at telling the story, however, because s/he is susceptible to a less communal strategy:

> "I got back as soon as I could," says Coyote. "I was busy being a hero."
>
> "That's unlikely," I says.
>
> "No, no," says Coyote. "It's the truth."
>
> "There are no truths, Coyote," I says. "Only stories." (326)

If we are to take the narrator's word (and as I have noted, this narrator is very authoritative indeed), then ironically we must be very careful about the narrators and the stories we listen to, since they "make" reality. One might read this as analogous to postmodernism, particularly the notion that all perspectives depend upon an ideology, whether that ideology is acknowledged or not, but King is at pains to avoid subsuming Native notions to Western categories[93], so I will simply note the congruence and suggest that if King is to be understood in postmodern or magic realist terms, that understanding cannot be divorced from Native narrative traditions.

The most prominent Western pop-cultural representation of Natives in *Green Grass, Running Water* is a novel Karen gives to Eli entitled *The Mysterious Warrior* and which almost every character in the novel reads or views in the film on which the novel is based (135). It is one of "those sleazy little cowboy and Indian shoot-'em-ups" (140), a captivity narrative in which the white heroine falls in love with the eponymous

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[93]In "Border Trickery and Dog Bones: A Conversation with Thomas King" King expresses a wariness of the "cookie cutter" approach and suggests that a Native literary theory may be on the horizon:

> I don't know if Native scholars or non-Native scholars are going to try to develop some kind of a Native-based critical process to look at Native novels, or if we're simply going to take things like postcolonial and poststructuralist criticism and just use that to evaluate everything under the sun. That kind of cookie cutter approach. I'd like to think that a Native-based process could happen but I don't know who's going to do it. We'll see. (185)

mysterious warrior who has captured her. Karen being white and Eli Native, Karen sees the novel as a sexually exciting reflection of their relationship, but *The Mysterious Warrior* also constitutes an index of the unbridgeability of the cultural gap that separates her and Eli: "'You know what you are?' she said, moving against him slowly. 'You're my Mystic Warrior.' And she pushed down hard as she said it" (138). Before Karen says these words she "straddled him, and held his arms down by the wrists," indicating that she is not the captive in this story. At home in high culture, Karen will not take seriously the Westerns that Eli reads avidly, but perhaps for this reason she gets it wrong, mistaking "mysterious" for "mystic," but also mistaking "popular" for "unimportant". She does not appreciate, as King does, that popular culture both reflects and shapes attitudes, and in seeking to achieve popularity, even ubiquity, it seeks to homogenize culture[94]. Eli is more threatened -- and perhaps for this reason fascinated -- by the book. The exchange takes place very early in a relationship that lasts until Karen's death and survives her bout with cancer, But it seems closely tied to the fact that he will not take her to the Sun Dance for a second time. He apparently realizes that, much as she enjoys the Sun Dance, she can only be a tourist there, unable to understand the cultural bind in which Eli finds himself as a professor at the University of Toronto and a sometime participant in the Sun Dance.

The relevance of *The Mysterious Warrior* and thus of popular culture is indicated by its near-omnipresence as *Green Grass, Running Water* approaches its climax. A chapter in which Eli is reading the novel ends with the words "Chapter twenty-six" (171), and the following chapter begins with the words "channel twenty-six" (172) as we learn that the Native characters Charlie, Alberta, and Lionel, and the white Bill Bursum are simultaneously watching the film on television. In fact, the four old Indians have escaped

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[94]High culture in King's novel seems to have the same effect. Earlier in the same passage, Karen shows Eli prints by A.Y. Jackson and Tom Thomson, explaining to Eli why they are appealing: "It's the light. It makes the land look . . . mystical" (138).

in part to "fix" the film, allowing Charlie to cheer on his father Portland (who appears in the film) with a "get 'em, Dad" (267) while Bill Bursum, the white businessman, watches in horror as John Wayne and Richard Widmark are, contrary to the original script, massacred by Indians. "Buffalo Bill Bursum" (36) runs the Home Entertainment Barn, as Buffalo Bill Cody provided the Wild West Shows of the past and P.T. Barnum created the early pop-cultural institution of the circus (suggesting the continuity of popular culture), and the fact that he organizes his televisions into a map of North America so that "it's like being in church. Or at the movies" (109), espouses Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and feels that "power and control -- the essences of effective advertising -- were . . . outside the range of the Indian imagination[95] (109) make him, as a literary symbol, not unlike his Map: "its advertising value compensates for its lack of subtlety" (109). Bursum embodies Western popular culture in all of its acquisitive glory, using mapping, entertainment, religion and advertising to exert power and homogenize culture (in postcolonial terms, to erase difference). The old Indians, therefore, are not only restoring Charlie's pride in his father by "fixing" the film, they are striking a blow at all that Bursum stands for by colourizing[96] a film that "was supposed to be in black and white" (268). Bursum himself is also a stereotype, but in Herb Wyile's judgement, one with a moral purpose:

> Along with King's normalizing of representations of Native people, such satiric and intertextual representations of whites, and indeed King's characterization of whites in general, function as a kind of counter-discourse to traditional white

[95]Bursum does allow that "Charlie had made great strides in trying to master this fundamental cultural tenet" (109), and Lionel and Alberta seem to support this assessment, as they both think of Charlie as "sleazy" (104, 173).

[96]Further intertextual references may include the fact that the old Indians are from F Wing: "F Wing? The Indians?" (355), a possible echo of "F Troop" (a cowboys and Indians sitcom that ran from 1965 to 1967), and the fact that the "fixed" portion is in colour suggests the recurring "In Living Color" (television comedy 1990-94) sketch "Ted Turner's Very Colorized Classics," in which white actors are replaced by African-Americans. In colourizing King is clearly playing on the idea of adding a Native (and nuanced) perspective to counter a Western view that, being black and white, is monological.

imaginings of the Indigene, depictions of Native people as one-dimensional, stylized caricatures. If anybody's "wooden" here, it's not the Indians. (Wyile 121)

Interestingly, King's most "wooden" white man is something of a recycled stereotype, the shifty salesman, the slick huckster, so that some readers may accept the stereotype before realizing its subversive intent.

Pulp romances may be said to apply the logic of the mass market to the most intimate human relations, and thus demonstrate the ubiquity (one might almost say the inescapability) and the insidiously homogenizing effect of mass (Western) culture. King plays on this notion by using the language of treaties in a particularly cliched passage of *The Mysterious Warrior*:

> "My darling," the woman on the television was saying, "I don't ever want to leave your side."
>
> "As long as the grass is green and the water runs" said the chief, holding her in his arms. (173)

As Patricia Linton observes, "This scene, fraught with inversions and contradictions, may represent a scriptwriter's facile expression of an Indian's heartfelt 'forever,' which to a Native would actually mean 'as long as it suits me,' which in the context of gender relations hints at yet another stereotypical betrayal" ("Trickster Discourse" 218). Presumably the "stereotypical betrayal" of women by men is inverted because the betrayer here is Native and employing the language of treaties. Betrayal is a concomitant not of race or gender, King elsewhere suggests, but of privilege: "It's not so much that the women are smarter than the men . . . . My sense is that within society as a whole, men are simply more privileged and with that privilege comes a certain laziness" ("Coyote Lives" 93). King's use of stereotypes and hackneyed forms, like his emphasis on dialogism, seeks to undermine privilege and the complacency that comes with it.

King represents dialogism not just through the four old Indians who take turns telling their stories, but in other ways, such as Babo Jones' persistence in subverting

orthodox narratives. Babo is African-American, but as a descendant of slaves she has reason to be suspicious of Western culture's official story. When she is questioned by a police officer about the disappearance of the four old Indians, then, she is not so much evasive as determined to tell the story on her own terms, and the result is enough crosstalk to evoke theatre of the absurd:

> "You can call me Babo."
>
> Sergeant Cereno leaned back in the chair, pressed his hands together under his nose as if he were smelling the tips of his fingers. "So, you've been working here sixteen years."
>
> "Some people think that Babo is a man's name."
>
> "Working here must get dull sometimes."
>
> "But it's not. It's tradition."
>
> "I mean, getting up every morning, eating breakfast, driving across town, punching in."
>
> "Firstborn gets named Babo." (20)

As I have noted, the allusion to "Benito Cereno" recalls a slave, "Babo," who enslaves his would-be master. King's Babo parallels that character when she reverses the questioner's authority by asserting her own storytelling authority. In the process, she also undermines the assumption that the self-liberating slave will be male, allowing us to see that the name and the emancipatory tradition is a birthright regardless of gender.

Blanca Chester observes that the reader is drawn into the dialogue, and hence into the Native mode of understanding, a complex interweaving of stories. In King's *Green Grass Running Water*:

> Native reality consistently intrudes on the carefully constructed realities of the Western tradition. By drawing on his or her knowledge of different characters, events, and discourses, the reader is drawn into apparent chaos and confusion to become part of the performance. By playing on the interconnectedness of a wide

> range of stories, King shows how meaning is always process-driven and consensual--how it is inherently dialogic. (86)

Whether or not it is true that "meaning is always process-driven and consensual" and "inherently dialogic," King presents it as such in *Green Grass, Running Water*, while characterizing Western perspectives as monological, authoritarian, and incapable of encompassing or understanding Native experience. But more: police, doctors, and white authorities of every description routinely get even the basic facts wrong because of their single-minded determination to get the (single, definitive) story or make the facts fit the story, unaware that there is always another story and there are always other facts. King suggests that the Native approach is more sufficient because it is more adaptive and consensual, and because it requires that everyone take a turn at being quiet and listening.

Religion may be the most contested terrain in the novel, particularly in its concern with creation stories. King persistently uses religion to represent Western culture as monologic and Native culture as dialogic. As I have already observed, Jesus, Jehovah and Noah are all represented in the novel as extremely unpleasant individuals, largely because their views do not allow for discussion; the four old Indians are presented as a preferable -- because dialogical -- alternative to Christianity. In Dieter Petzold's words: "in each part, the book's master myth is retold. Like the four Evangelists, each Old Indian presents his/her own version of it. (The formula 'This according to . . . ' at the beginning of each section indicates that the parallel to the New Testament is intentional)" (249). Even Coyote can tell that "All this floating imagery must mean something" (293), and one thing that it "means" is fluidity, as opposed to the more fixed and grounded perspective of J. Hoyaugh, who unwittingly utters a version of the creation: "I suppose I should begin by saying that in the beginning all this was land. Empty land" (78). His dismissal of creation stories that begin with water amounts, through his assertion that the land was empty, to a dismissal of Native religion and Natives themselves.

In *Green Grass, Running Water* King associates Christianity with most modern

ills. Christianity appears to be a religion of commerce and surveillance when we learn that some angels have a sideline:

> Allow me to introduce myself, says the man with the big briefcase. And that one hands Thought Woman a card. That card says A. A. Gabriel, Canadian Security and Intelligence Service.
>
> Insurance? says Thought Woman. Burglar alarms?
>
> Oops, says A. A. Gabriel. Wrong side. And he turns that card over. The other side says A. A. Gabriel, Heavenly Host. (225)

The card then sings Hosanna da (Oh Canada) (226), suggesting not only that spying is the flip side of Christianity but that so too is nationalism, with Christianity appearing as an unacknowledged state religion. King also ties Christianity with capitalism: "So that GOD jumps into the garden and that GOD runs around yelling, Bad business! Bad business! That's what he yells" (56). Similarly, Bill Bursum's activities suggest that capitalism, environmental arrogance, and popular culture, are all closely tied to Christianity when he contemplates the changes the dam will bring about: "Bursum sat in his chair behind his desk and looked out at The Map and dreamed about the lake and the cabin, the trees and the bushes, and he was pleased" (224). Sexism is also part of the Christian perspective, if we are to take Noah's word: "The first rule is Thou Shalt Have Big Breasts" (125). To say the least, Christianity suffers some chastisement at King's hands, though this may be somewhat abated by the following words that King has Noah speak: "This is a Christian ship, he shouts. I am a Christian man. This is a Christian journey. And if you can't follow our Christian rules, then you're not wanted on the voyage" (125). King is not simply nodding to Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, he is presenting a *Mysterious Warrior* version of Christianity by making Noah Christian. King may be suggesting that he is once again fighting stereotypes with stereotypes.

The novel is nevertheless quite scathing in its presentation of Christianity, and perhaps for this reason King nods to his precursors in this project; just as he alludes to

Timothy Findley when parodying Noah, King invokes Salman Rushdie when Coyote is told to apologize rather than risk getting into the sort of trouble Rushdie did: "Remember what happened the last time you rushed through a story and didn't apologize" (359). Indeed, King is more critical of Christianity than Rushdie has ever been of Islam. King makes some angry statements; ignoring the anger that underlies them ignores the social and historical origins of this message. I think King's interview with Peter Gzowski is instructive:

> I *was* worried about that, and *remain* a little bit worried about that, because I don't know just how much offence you give--in fiction--I mean, obviously you can give *great* offence in fiction--I mean Rushdie's proved that. And it is bothersome, and maybe it's because of the power of fiction--that it can have that effect on people--drive them to the heights of ecstasy, I suppose, and drive them to do all sorts of terrible things.
>
> PG Surely not here. I mean, surely no offence from this book--
>
> TK Well, I would hope not, but I would--
>
> PG Bigots might--
>
> TK Well, yes (laughs) there are enough of those in the world, too. (73)

Though King is open to the idea that his work might offend, few critics discuss this for fear of being labelled bigots. I thought I might take the risk and jump in; not that I'm offended, I hasten desperately to add, but that I think avoiding questions of tone means ignoring much of the power of the novel. King demonstrates how a hostile representation of Native culture distorts and demonizes it in part by turning the tables, so that critics' persistent (and, I suggest, nervous) references to this activity only as playful undermine King's effort to demonstrate the hurtful nature of this distortion. The representation of Noah as a tyrannous and lecherous hypocrite, Jesus as an arrogant fraud, the Christian God as a mistaken (and obnoxious) thought that Coyote allowed out of his head, and Christianity as one of Coyote's mistakes that he hasn't yet fixed, all suggest more than a

little anger. The depiction of Jesus as the product not of virgin birth but of the union of Mary and Coyote is allied less with syncretism than with statements that begin "Your mother sleeps with . . . (non-human partners[97])." Clearly, though the writing is sometimes playful, it is also very angry.

It is also, in critics varying claims, indeterminate in mode or genre. King has observed that neither his writing nor traditional Native stories are "tied into realism," arguing that when a realist work is over, no questions are left. In works such as Gabriel García Márquez's "The Very Old Man with Enormous Wings," King notes, leave the reader with questions of the sort he finds "fascinating," "because I'll come up with different answers, and I love that sort of stuff" ("Border Trickery" 184). The parallels between King's work and postmodernism have lead to debates on the question of genre. Dieter Petzold's comments are perhaps typical of those who regard King's work as essentially Western in its premises: "The book revels in discontinuous narration, multiple discourse, 'magic realist' fantasy, intertextual allusion, and metafictional self-referentiality, thus placing itself unmistakably within the postmodern tradition" (243). In contrast, Robin Ridington declares that "episodic interrelated vignettes performed by a knowledgeable narrator are typical of traditional Indian oral literatures. Tom King's work is neo-premodern, not postmodern" (35), while Blanca Chester is at pains to rule out magic realism as a generic description because "the term implies the distinction between real and unreal in ways that are constructed by white cultures" (244). Chester makes the intriguing suggestion that the novel is subject to generic confusion because it is in disguise, arguing that the novel is analogous to the four old Indians who survive by disguising themselves as white: "But, while they all disguised their identities, they did not become white, although they are good at acting white. Likewise, *Green Grass, Running*

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[97]I would suggest that King wants to be both fiercely critical and playful, so that the passage in which we learn that Coyote is responsible for Jesus' birth concludes thus: "'We haven't straightened out *that* mess yet,' said Hawkeye. 'Hee-hee' says Coyote. 'Hee-hee'" (348).

Water may replicate Western, postmodern, metafictional writing, but the narrative itself suggests that it is not Western, it is not a white story" (96). This of course raises the question of whether a work of literature can employ the defining techniques of a particular genre with the intention that they be understood differently[98], but King might argue that he simply employs in writing the traditional techniques of Native oral narrative, so that any parallels to other genres are coincidental and not his concern. This certainly seems to be King's perspective when he says that: "I really don't care about the white audiences. They don't have an understanding of the intricacies of Native life, and I don't think they're much interested in it, quite frankly" (King, cited in Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* 174). Nevertheless the extensive allusions to- and parodies of Western culture seem to belie this. Still, Patricia Linton would seem to affirm King's point, at least in part, when she identifies one of the dangers of reading King from a purely Western perspective:

> Metaphor offers the Euro-American reader a comfortable 'literary' account of an otherwise unaccountable event: it permits perplexed readers to acknowledge and deny at the same time. In other words, if Native American spiritual concepts are alien, it may be easier for readers enculturated in a different worldview to read 'as if' when the text says 'is'. ("Ethical" 32)

Linton goes on to argue that "certain kinds of social difference are irreducible -- precisely the point made in many ethnic and post-colonial texts" ("Ethical" 33). Carried to an extreme, Linton's perspective would forbid all literature except for certain extremely introspective forms of autobiography (which could only be read by its author) and risk essentialism, but her aversion to easy universalizing seems to be not only valid in general but supported by evidence in the novel.

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[98]This is a defining characteristic of parody, but though King is clearly satirizing a number of attitudes, it would be hard to argue that he is parodying postmodernism or magic realism.

Avenues Opened

Though *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and *Green Grass, Running Water* both express anger at injustices committed against Native people and culture, they also represent Native narrative traditions as a resilient source to draw upon and to add to. Highway opts to describe music, dance and drama that fuse Western and Native traditions, whereas King chooses to demonstrate the survival of Native culture despite the ubiquity (and hostility) of Western culture. Because Highway represents supernatural events in his work in such a way that they may represent a truth that has more psychological than objective validity, his novel leans more to the uncanny than does King's, which is frankly fabulous. In King's words:

> In *Green Grass* the real, as it were, and the fantastic are so intertwined so as to dovetail into one another that it's hard to draw a line between where one ends and the other begins. I think that's one of the tricks I try to accomplish, is to say that there is no line between what we can imagine and what we understand or what we see. If that makes me a magic realist then so be it. But I really am concerned about breaking borders down between reality and fantasy. ("Border Trickery" 179)

King is less concerned with questions of genre, then, than with integrating the fantastic into our notion of the real.

Writing in 1972, Margaret Atwood observes that "until very recently, Indians and Eskimoes made their only appearance in Canadian literature in books written by white writers" (91), and then primarily in the form of one of two symbols: "as instruments of Nature the Monster, torturing and killing white victims; and as variants themselves of the victim motif" (102). Atwood does go on to observe that in some works "they are also a potential source of magic, of a knowledge about the natural-supernatural world which the white man renounced when he became 'civilized'" (103), and this view is "paralleled by attempts to find in Indian legends mythological material which would function for

Canadian writers much as the Greek myths and the Bible long functioned for Europeans" (103). As Native authors who write English texts which employ both Native and European (or Western) narrative techniques and traditions, Tomson Highway and Thomas King create a Canadian literature[99] that responds to these symbolic representations of Native people and culture not simply to provide a more accurate representation but to demonstrate that both the people and the culture have a vitality that is more than symbolic. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* and *Green Grass, Running Water* contribute to Canadian and to Native literature by interrogating them both from the inside. Both works are intensely critical of injustices committed against Native people and their culture, but they represent the possibility of cultural fusion quite differently. Highway is able to imagine art that draws from both Western and Native traditions, whether it be as camp as the performance of Maggie Sees, his torch-singing trickster, or as serious as "Ulysses Thunderchild," the art he envisions and the art he creates is all-embracing in its sources[100]. Maggie's presence at Abraham's death suggests that Highway sees traditional (or mythic) Native figures as vital, healing embodiments of spiritual truth even as they are characters available to the artist in order to create the entertainment, distraction and dreams without which "life's a drag" (*Kiss* 233). Highway's talking fox is more three-

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[99]Born in Sacramento, California, King is claimed by both Americans and Canadians as their own. Of *Green Grass, Running Water* King says "well, since I am a Canadian citizen and it was written in Canada, and it was written about places in Canada and characters who are, by and large, Native and Canadian -- for all of those reasons it's a Canadian novel" ("Border Trickery" 161). King also observes that:

> It may be that what I'm dealing with is not so much a Canadian sensibility in the novel as a Western sensibility. I can defend that more easily because, in part, that's created by the landscape, and even more than my being Canadian or American I'm a Westerner . . . . Even though I had written before I came to Canada, I had not written seriously. I had no kind of stimulus to really get me going, and even though Helen (Helen Hoy, King's wife) was in large part the stimulus for me, in the end, it was the landscape that gave me the setting for my fiction. The landscape still haunts me. I haven't written anything of major weight other than that kind of prairie landscape. (162)

[100]Highway may draw on everything from Las Vegas reviews to James Joyce, but it seems unlikely he would pair Maggie with "some grumpy, embittered, sexually frustrated old fart with a long white beard hiding like a gutless coward behind some puffed-up cloud" (234); beyond its employment for cultural imperialism (particularly in the residential schools), Christian imagery is anathema to Highway because he regards it as monovocal and not amenable to play and revision.

dimensional and spiritually significant than Aesop's, but she is similar in her capacity to evoke a sense of the fabulous and to illustrate a moral truth; like the supernatural characters in mythic magic realism, her presence suggests that there is more to the world than materialism can explain. King employs a wide array of Western cultural elements in order to parody Western culture in general and its representation of Natives and Native culture in particular. Whereas King takes liberties with his characterization of Coyote, First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman and Old Woman, he too presents them as the personification of spiritual truths; the liberties are permissable, King's approach implies, when the truth is respected. King seeks to preserve the orality and polyvocal quality of traditional Native oral narratives in his own work, in such a way that his work is less invested in the Western tradition of the solitary authorial voice than is Highway's, but King's allusiveness, multiple narrative levels and self-referentiality have persuaded many critics that *Green Grass, Running Water* participates in many contemporary literary trends. Although King has discouraged efforts to view his work from non-Native critical perspectives, the novel demonstrates that Native traditions and postmodernism share many features and may profitably be brought together. King is less inclined than Highway to regard his work as a fusion of cultures, but both of them open up avenues of cultural contact. Non-Native readers may not be welcome to make blithe generalizations about, nor are Non-Native authors invited to borrow freely from, traditional Native culture, but in these two recent novels new worlds are opened up, and this is the task of fabulation.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

All of the works I have examined draw the fabulous into unaccustomed territory: the Canadian prairie, home since the 1920s to a form of realism whose "preference for the stark and threatening aspect of the plains" (Harrison xi) presents a people who seem to seek order and immersion in the everyday as a defence against the chaos that the land and any imaginative response to its immensity seems to threaten. While these works may not explicitly respond to this tradition, they frequently play with the notion that the fabulous is somehow foreign to this land and to its readers, and with the allied notion that the freedom fabulation offers is imaginary rather than imaginative. While it is finally up to the reader to respond to fabulation as a challenge to his or her imaginative understanding of the world or as a pleasant diversion, these works are particularly concerned to set up roadblocks to straightforward fantasy.

In varying degrees, all of the authors I have looked at take advantage of the fact that readers expect a certain unambiguous quality in fabulous narratives; we tend to expect a simply-told story with a straightforward message or moral, and indeed when reading fabulous narratives we may be especially receptive to such messages, and surprised when the narrative develops multiple levels, some of which undercut what we first assumed was the moral of the story. Fables and fairy tales shape the expectations of those readers of fabulous literature raised in the Western literary tradition, so that fabulous literature in general and contemporary fables and fairy tales in particular carry the promise, implicit in their origins in wisdom literature, of a clear message supporting a piece of conventional wisdom. True to contemporary conventional wisdom, however, they undermine the very notion of universal truths. Jack Zipes suggests that oral folk tales emphasized "communal harmony" and brought members of a community together by providing them with a common "sense of mission, a *telos*" ("Disney" 333). Contemporary fables and fairy tales would seem to offer the same sense of community,

but this is a community of individuals who recognize that a *telos* is not as permanent as it once appeared, so that the perspective this community has in common is a distrust of perspectives held in common. The reader is invited to be simultaneously trusting and suspicious, adopting the naivety that Irène Bessière argues is a paradoxical response to the artificiality of the fantastic (and presumably to any stylized form that draws upon the appeal of a classic narrative style), while he or she is simultaneously reminded -- through multiple semantic levels and elements of textual self-deconstruction -- to read sceptically. Readers may nevertheless recognize an unflattering reflection of themselves only after the fable or fairy tale's point has been made, so that apparent naivety may be the most sophisticated tool of the contemporary fable and fairy tale.

Fabulous literature's invitation to the reader to be simultaneously trusting and suspicious produces an effect that can be profitably examined using Tzvetan Todorov's notion of hesitation. Todorov tells that in a fantastic text the reader hesitates between rational and irrational explanations for supernatural events because the narrative exploits the tension between these possibilities, or in Bessière's term, between these antinomies. Various critics have suggested that the fantastic genre arose as a reaction against what might be called the intellectual hegemony of positivism in Western thinking and of realism in Western literature. A fantastic text is most successful, then, when it seduces its readers into believing they are reading a story whose underpinnings are straightforwardly scientific or supernatural, and then takes away those assumptions. Not all fabulous literature seeks to maximize the duration and anxiety of the reader's hesitation, but this hesitation always serves to underscore a gulf, frequently one that is unacknowledged. While contemporary fables and fairy tales play on a gap between contemporary and ancient wisdom, the fantastic pits Western notions of reason against "European superstitions" (Chanady 21); magic realist texts balance Western positivism with Native North American (and sometimes African) worldviews; and postmodern fabulations set against fabulation's implicit promise to impart wisdom a sense that all worldviews are

illusions based on the acceptance of unstated (and dubious) assumptions. Fabulative fiction by Native authors who write in English and draw upon traditional Native North American characters and stories take Todorov's notion of hesitation to new lengths; we hesitate not only between the worldviews that might explain the events in the text, but between theories that would explain the relationship between the author, the text, and the reader. The result is fabulation with an extraordinary scope for the interrogation of culture and worldviews, a (mythic) magic realism made dangerous because it may well bet on "the terrifying card of faith" (Carpentier, *Marvelous* 86) as no genre that produces hybridity can; as readers we realize that in this as perhaps in no other magic realism the text may genuinely reject realism and the positivist worldview that underwrites it.[101] Paradoxically, this writing may renew the promise of magic realism because it may choose to remain outside of Western literature.

Just as we may analyze fabulation according to the way that it treats the reader's hesitation (how pointedly we are confronted with different perspectives and what those perspectives are), we may consider the narrative's relationship to the competing worldviews it contains: does it advocate one of them, relativize the two, seek to hybridize them or deconstruct them? Contemporary fables and fairy tales may by their nature seem to confirm Thurber's observation that "a new broom may sweep clean, but never trust an old saw" (84), but I suggest that their updated morals do not radically undermine the reader's nostalgia for a moral to the tale and thus a stable meaning in the text; the reader may hesitate between old and new messages, between ingenuous and ironic modes, but the tale remains clearly didactic. One might characterize mythic and scholarly magic realism as occupying the poles of belief and doubt, tending to promote,

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[101] I am suggesting that Carpentier's claims for (mythic) magic realism become possible not when, as Carpentier claims, the author can "conceive of a valid mysticism" (*Marvelous* 86) but when the text may be seen to operate outside -- rather than merely expand -- the Western canon; when it does not merely relativize or hybridize Western cultural assumptions, but offers at least the possibility that the text will situate itself in another culture.

respectively, suspended or increased disbelief. The presence of contradictory worldviews in all of these fabulations allows for a certain affirmation of alterity, since neither code is able to explain the other satisfactorily, though because they suggest the inadequacy of these (or indeed any) codes scholarly magic realism and postmodern fabulation might be read as affirming a kind of universal scepticism rather than alterity. Whether it is by their use of classic narrative styles or simply because they eschew the self-effacement and rigorous plausibility of realist literature, all of these fabulations share the "extraordinary delight in design" (*Fabulators* 10) and "fallibilism" (*Fabulation* 8) that Robert Scholes attributes to fabulation. They betray an awareness both of the pleasure and of the limitations of the text.

In his fables and fairy tales David Arnason uses surprise to undermine assumptions about truths we may take to be universal or eternal. I have suggested that he employs fabulation to evoke, and the romantic longings of his male characters to parody, the reader's desire for a seductive text that can nevertheless be fully comprehended. Arnason's most postmodern narratives are not written in the form of a fable or fairy tale, though they may employ the characters and machinery of fables and fairy tales; the form is simply too strongly associated with a moral to lend itself to a truly postmodern perspective. Arnason's fabulous local enacts a hesitation between a timeless truth and contemporary alterations to that truth, and the distance between the two is often used for comic effect. Like his "genial" and "confessional" ("Story Forming" 104, 105) narrators, the effect is one of gentle enticement, seducing us into the pleasure of the text even as it emphasizes the materiality of the text and invites us to consider the relationship of the literary world to the world we inhabit. Arnason demonstrates the persistent appeal of the fable's form, which survives despite the fact that updating (and occasionally confounding) traditional morals serves to undermine the humanist notion that human qualities are timeless and universal, a notion that is, I suggest, fundamental to the fable.

Local details may jar the reader who believes that fables take place in (and are relevant only to) an indeterminate location in an unspecific past; the relationship of the fabulous (and more generally, of literature) to the everyday is destabilized. We are reminded of the materiality of the text and also of the fact that just as the fable reflects the circumstances of its production (its locale), this locale also reflects the fable: fables come from the world (in this case, present-day Manitoba) because the fabulous is inherent in the world. If we are willing to accept the appeal of fabulous creatures and events in a story, Arnason's work suggests, why can't we accept the mythologizing of our own locale, and the relevance of literature (and reading strategies) to our own lives?

Arnason takes advantage of the fact that a fairy tale can be partisan and clearly identify its characters as good and bad. The clarity of an unequivocal moral universe is often made appealing, only to be undercut and shown to be inadequate for describing the world we inhabit, and Arnason frequently takes the opportunity to direct and misdirect the reader. Employing the theme of the three caskets in "The Hardware Dealer's Daughter" raises and then parodies the (literary) expectations we have internalized about what a woman (at least a woman in such a story) wants in a man, as the words of the Badger from "Badger and Fox" remind us that a fable can simplify an argument to the point of erasing debate, "taking into account that some of us are hard-working badgers and some of us are merely lazy and unemployed mice without initiative" (*If Pigs Could Fly* 4). Since contemporary fables and fairy tales test the general (or axiomatic) by the local (or syntagmatic), the persistence of the story's form tends to support the axiom underlying it unless the contemporary version deconstructs it in substantial ways. For this reason Arnason's local variations offer a variety of spirited dissentions from, and examinations of, perspectives too often assumed to be general truths.

I have described Arnason's postmodernism as non-threatening, primarily a self-referentiality that highlights the constructedness of the story and, paradoxically, our desire to ignore that constructedness and enter into the imaginative world of the story. The

longing to see (and create) illusion survives our awareness of how the rabbit gets in the hat. Arnason's narrators suggest that they are inviting us into the process of writing the story, so that even as we knowingly examine the apparatus of the narrative, we fall under its spell. Postmodernism for Arnason implies a self-awareness and a distrust of metanarratives that is nevertheless compatible with the assertion of the authority of the imagination over mere artifacts and memory, as in "A Letter to History Teachers." As the narrator's recourse (in "Morning Letter") to "images from the cheapest and trashiest of literature" (*50 Stories* 113) and to the envisioned face of Madeleine Darcy in order to conjure the memory of his former lover attests, knowledge of the mechanics of literature and of dreams does not negate their power over the imagination, nor does it negate the imagination's drive to make meaning. Arnason's narrator is generally freed from the constraints of self-effacement and indeed of authority over the narrative, but he is nevertheless frequently overwhelmed by his responsibilities; narrative conventions may be flouted or parodied, but what underlies them persists. These constraints are implied in the narrator's often-comic difficulties in providing the narrative with a certain self-consistency and appeal to readers, as the laundry list that begins "All the Elements" and the narrator's anxiety over filling the list in what we might guardedly call a believable way suggest. Having satisfied the reader to this extent, the narrator and reader can together mock "that other out there, reading over your shoulder, searching for a moral that should be perfectly clear" (*CPB* 113). The moral is that we should seek no moral beyond wit, amusement, and perhaps a tentative observation about human behaviour - an observation that may be contradicted as soon as it is formulated.

In *What The Crow Said* Robert Kroetsch examines the relationship between language and the world and portrays a collision between men who assign primacy to language and women who assign primacy to the world. There is a passage of the novel told from the perspective of Joe Lightning, who like the women shows a humility before nature, but the passage is brief, perhaps because it suggests a Native metanarrative

Kroetsch is reluctant to undermine. *What the Crow Said* contains magic realism's collision of the realist mode with the matter-of-fact representation of supernatural or inexplicable events related by a communal voice untroubled by their apparent implausibility (in sentences that begin, for example, "People, years later, blamed everything on the bees"), and Kroetsch figures this magic as a collision between human efforts to explain the world and the refusal of the world to accomodate itself to human (and particularly European and textual) notions. The novel reflects mythic magic realism and in particular, the conviction in *lo real maravilloso americano* that the miraculous and the untameable are inherent in the land, and especially, in this novel, in prairie weather. The concern in *What the Crow Said* with the relationship between language (particularly writing and typography) and the world is postmodern, so that in this regard it is analogous to scholarly magic realism. The men's individualistic (and deluded) efforts to impose order on the world is the result of a synchronic perspective, while the women are more adaptive; their understanding of the world reflects a communitarian, multi-generational (diachronic) view. Liebhaber with his sets of type and Rita Lang with her inkstained lips and letters that arouse so much passion reflect the urges to use language on the one hand to record, preserve and order and on the other to touch the body. Both are urges to reproduce and, in different ways, to control; both reflect human urges that are outside of control and not reducible to any metanarrative.

Nature, particularly in the form of harsh prairie weather, is the primary source of the magic in the story, which suggests that we are not far from the tall tale, but there is also the matter of time being somewhat elastic in *What the Crow Said.* Liebhaber's ability to predict the future comes from the fact that he reads the world like a typesetter (that is, backwards and upside-down), and this fact both opens up and mocks the possibilities for narratives that seek to describe the world; the narrative is freed from a strictly linear chronology even as we are reminded of the possibility of the narrative getting things backwards. Images such as the "bee-like swarming of the flakes of snow"

Tiddy sprinkles on Liebhaber suggest an erotics of randomness and excess, a kind of pleasure in the innumerable (and a pleasant touch that is also a numbness). The fact that Liebhaber dates his loss of any memory of the past to this moment suggests that the discrete, the ordered, and the recordable -- perhaps even the sensible -- cannot coexist with this erotics. In this same spirit the notions that beauty and that writing can produce immortality are parodied through Liebhaber's rather laughable idea of his own immortality (inspired by Tiddy's beauty and by his dream of a novel one sentence long) and through the character of JG, Liebhaber's mute and incontinent issue. The debate over JG's provenance also suggests that anxiety of influence applies to paternity as much as authorship. Liebhaber's hostility to his sets of type flows from his sense that the letters suggest a permanence and universality that do not stand up to scrutiny; the historical changes in the alphabet intimate for him a certain unreliability, so that, solid as the individual pieces of type are, the sense that they make ideas material and permanent is an illusion; they are a shifting foundation on which to build an intellectual edifice that, permanent though we may wish it to be, is contingent on the circumstances of its production.

The men want language and the world to be reliable, ordered, and subject to their will, and their flight from the house, the women, and all forms of work is, ironically, a flight from the world, or from its magic, if we understand this magic, or "the inadequacy of truth" (66), to be the world's intractability to our theories. The men fancy themselves to be realists, but they don't appreciate nature talking back to them, whether through the scolding crow or unreasonable pregnancies and the irrepressible fecundity they suggest. Women, the world, and particularly Rita's letters inspire longing and despair in the men, because all of them tempt but refuse to accomodate the men. Thus Vera's "irrelevant" observation in her column that "men are a bunch of useless bastards" is always followed by the observation that the wheatfields "aren't quite workable" (7). The men being useless and the fields not being workable are linked: the men are not working because the

fields are literally and philosophically not workable, not amenable to the men's beliefs.

We might say that for Kroetsch, the magic and the real are thought and matter, and writing -- particularly in print -- marks a meeting place of the two. The notion that language (the form into which we put thoughts) or the world can be frozen or fixed is to Kroetsch amusing hubris; Skandl's tower of ice, the frozen Martin Lang plowing the snow, and Adams the chicken thief frozen, cubed, quartered and incorrectly reassembled are some of the metonyms of a "world dumbfounded into an unending winter" (13) by the brief union of Vera Lang with nature and thus of language with the world. Liebhaber dies because he has become a love-haver; as a man and as an image he is complete and therefore dead; like a drone and like an image he is a seed, a possibility that extinguishes itself in fulfilling itself, to be succeeded by other possibilities. In this novel winter and fixity, geographic and linguistic freezing are linked, but they also carry the promise of a spring thaw. The flood that finally hits Big Indian brings a surfeit of flow and of possibility, and for Vera Lang and Marvin Straw, for Tiddy Lang and Gus Liebhaber, and for Theresa Lang and Darryl Dish, the creative possibilities opened up are sexual. For Rita Lang with her letters "alone. Alone. All one. A lone . . . " (194), and for Liebhaber in his whispers "Helm" "Help" "Hell" (192), it also releases a flood of possibilities (through difference, variation and substitution) for language that touches the body and the world.

What I have called Kroetsch's portrait-title images invite the reader's participation as a way to overcome the fact that consummation and fulfilment constitute death; rather than an image that acts like a grecian urn, forever capturing perfectly a moment that is forever static, this technique requires that the reader complete the image. Though the images are thus reborn (and changed) with each reading, the novel itself must end, somewhere, somehow. Appropriately it concludes with an orgy of consummations, both sexual and mortal. The bridge of language is not a bridge between thought and the world but an evanescent moment of contact, at once a marriage and burial sermon. Liebhaber's

firing of the cannon full of bees at "the one androgynous moment of heaven and earth" (193) marks a moment of possibility at a point that is not a bridge but a simultaneous being, an undifferentiated moment of space (heaven and earth) time (night and day) and gender, an instant of infinite possibility that dies in the next moment, whichever of the possibilities is generated or not generated. This is the moment of writing and also the moment of sexual climax, and the writerly and the sexual end in a little death, a moment of freedom from memory that will end as only a memory. By relating the magic in a communal voice that speaks in the past tense and with no sense of doubt, Kroetsch encourages his readers to accept these events without hesitation. We are encouraged, in other words, to read naively, yet the novel undermines metanarratives left and right and celebrates a flow and a crossing of boundaries that, it suggests, is immensely productive, but whose products, like living things, wilt when they are preserved.

I have suggested that Native fabulation offers its readers no clear generic expectations; the author who draws characters or plot elements from traditional Native oral narratives and sets the events in the present (and writes in English) may intend that the reader view the story as straightforward and unambiguous wisdom literature, but the departures from traditional oral narrative mean that no reader is in completely familiar territory. While one might choose to read Native fabulation as magic realism, tending to follow the conventions of realism but incorporating supernatural events without acknowledging a contradiction, magic realism is a literary movement that traditionally draws from European, Native South American and African sources and produces (or reflects) a hybrid culture; Native fabulation may be read as having literary or oral roots, as drawing from exclusively Native or from Native and other (perhaps European) sources, and thus as producing hybridity or as preserving (and adding to) a traditional Native culture in which only "the phonetic alphabet is the new part" (Allen 4). The authors I am identifying as Native fabulists identify themselves as Native and populate their works primarily with Native characters and communities. Though written in English, these

works reflect Native life and culture, and it is not immediately clear whether or to what degree the reader may usefully apply Western literary concepts to understand them. The "high coefficient of deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 16) means that the reader is likely to hesitate between possible readings, between attitudes, for example, of naivety and scepticism, and be particularly alert for cues within the work. Though at times playful, Native fabulation demands a careful reading.

Of the two works which I examine, Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is the more open to cultural hybridization. This hybridization is nevertheless the product of a liminality that comes at great cost: Abraham Okimasis's experience of the booming, partially-comprehensible announcement at the end of the dogsled race is the first indication of the price -- in this case utter exhaustion -- associated with the crossing of cultures, but also of the creative space opened up in the effort. Abraham's composition of his story is at once traditional and new, a sighting of the trickster figure in a new guise that draws a dogsled race and small-town beauty pageant into the realm of the mythic. Though we learn that "only her very advanced age" (32) earns the midwife the right to embellish Abraham's tale and that it has thus entered the oral tradition, the story of the Fur Queen does not simply express contemporary events (events organized by a white community) from a traditional Native perspective, it provides the Okimasis brothers with a strategy for maintaining a Native perspective in a white culture and drawing from the figures -- such as the Fur Queen -- that can become the foundation of an understanding that crosses cultures. The Fur Queen is of course an avatar of the Native trickster, and thus male and female, comic and serious, but s/he is also a Vegas showgirl, crossing cultures and notions of taste to express him- or her- self, taking material no matter how tacky and making something beautiful that speaks to others because "without entertainment, honeypot, without distraction, without dreams, life's a drag. No?" (233). Examples such as Amanda Clear Sky's starring in *Tender is My Heart*, the Cree-Ojibway soap opera, and the combined efforts of Gabriel, Jeremiah and Amanda to produce

"Ulysses Thunderchild" suggest not only a capacity but an urgent drive to produce art that makes cultures speak to one another.

Part of the hybridity of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* lies in its presentation of supernatural events; there is always a natural explanation available, but the text never verifies this explanation. With it, we are in the uncanny, the fantastic, or the marvelous, depending on our reading. Champion/Jeremiah's birth, assisted by a Fur Queen who is "fairy-tale godmother" (12) and "*K'si mantou*, the Great Spirit" (19) and by a rabbit who is "a writer of lyric rabbit poetry" (21) is a birth in-between cultures, or perhaps a birth into a Native culture that is able to absorb other cultures and thereby renew itself. As readers we may hesitate between uncanny and marvelous explanations and between naive and sceptical readings of supernatural episodes in the novel, but the hesitation is not a tortured hesitation employed to undermine positivism so much as an invitation to read events as we will; Western and Native perspectives will both produce satisfactory readings, but the richest reading recognizes both possibilities.

Jeremiah and Gabriel can be seen as embodying two strategies; Gabriel adopts what is useful to him, employing Catholic priests and Christian symbols for his own (sexual) purposes and drawing from ballet and pow wows to create his own art, but Jeremiah's love of Chopin leads him to reject the "terrible yowling" (171) of Native singing, and pow wows make him feel like a "German tourist" (242). Marginalized by both cultures, Gabriel quickly resolves his hesitation in choosing between cultures and selects what works for him. Less marginalized, Jeremiah seeks a single correct path rather than an opportunistic or conditional one with the result that his hesitation is anxiety-filled and lasts for years. The division here is not so much between two cultures as between contingency and rationalism. If the two brothers read life differently, the price Jeremiah pays in his strivings for a single view to which he can be loyal suggests that Highway is advocating a certain free agency in reading texts and life. Though the metanarrative of Christianity is certainly undermined more energetically than is Native

culture, what emerges from traditional Native culture is not a series of laws but a philosophy of adaptivity.

The persistent concern with language and music in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* reflects the notion that "wars start when two parties haven't taken the time to learn each others' tongues" (95). It is fitting, therefore, that Highway's appending of musical notations to each section of the novel invites the reader to think outside boundaries. Jeremiah's musical fluency allows him to cross cultures, so that he can play "the loon cry, the wolves at nightfall, the aurora borealis in Mistik Lake" (213), as Gabriel can see a caribou stampede in a ballet (145); art crosses cultures, it crosses mortal boundaries (in the presentation of Abraham's afterlife), and as Jeremiah learns at the pow wow, it can cure. Art is able to do these things not when it is a series of codes but when it is a communication across barriers, Highway suggests, and as readers we are encouraged to make what connections we can. The fabulous in his work may represent the world we all inhabit in a literal sense, but I believe it does so most in its representation of the world as unlimited in its interpretive and creative possibilities.

Thomas King employs the fabulous to suggest the numerous creative possibilities inherent in the world, but the fabulous emerges in his work as a corrective, bursting forth to give the lie to convenient fictions and motivating his characters to "get it right." While for King absolute truth may be unattainable, he presents the motivation to tell stories as either an urge to make oneself a hero or to fix the world, as egotistical or generous. He seems to suggest that it is important that more than one character be allowed to tell the story, and that the characters should not all be human. The duelling creation stories in *Green Grass, Running Water* invoke the fabulations that cultures use to define themselves and their relation to the world and to other cultures; King thereby employs the most trusted and foundational of fabulations to suggest to the reader not only the origin of many unconscious assumptions but the dubious and self-serving nature of many of these assumptions. King suggests the dangerously seductive nature of creation stories even as

he draws us into them over and over again. His work also suggests that beliefs which many postmodern readers may consider discredited and virtually forgotten are in fact ubiquitous and uncritically accepted; cowboy novels and films are in fact repetitions of certain stories that we like to tell and be told. By highlighting the dialogical nature of traditional Native stories King demonstrates the importance of recognizing different voices and different stories, and by emphasizing the orality of Native storytelling he suggests that this is an ongoing conversation, one that changes shape even as it recounts (and invites its audience to interrogate) its fundamental aspects.

Green Grass, Running Water's four sections begin with different versions of the same story in part to remind the reader that misrepresentation is extremely dangerous. The Christian creation story is put through a grinder to demonstrate the harm that can be done when appropriating a story one doesn't respect and the potentially destructive power (implicit in King's characterization of Coyote) of fabulous stories that are accepted uncritically or simply ignored. At the same time the novel is marvelous; the characters who refuse to recognize marvels have to put them down to technical difficulties (in the case of the film that has been fixed) or to the disturbing capacity of some characters (the four old Indians) to show up where they haven't been invited. Dr. J. Hovaugh's perturbation at the escape of the four old Indians is both a Christian surprise at the tenacity of Native culture and a literary-critical annoyance at narratives that refuse to remain in their appointed categories. By tying the Christian God to Northrop Frye through the character of Dr. Joe Hovaugh, King suggests the complicity of the religious and critical establishments in propogating the notion of a single, universal and unchallenged system that explains everything -- "they're all in the book" (39) -- a metanarrative that need never change or be questioned. King champions Native culture and particularly the fact that it provides space for multiple voices, though his Coyote demonstrates that some voices (particularly the voices of those who consume Western culture uncritically) must not be allowed to run away with the story.

King's use of comedy to win over readers gently rather than "whack them over the head" ("Coyote Lives" 96) is the same technique employed in other fables and satire, but he also employs techniques (such as the section titles written in the Cherokee syllabary) to remind readers that an understanding of the Western literary tradition is not sufficient to explain *Green Grass, Running Water*. This novel supports a metanarrative (in the sense that there is a story that must be got right), but a fluid one that is dialogical rather than monological, allowing everyone a voice and a responsibility. This novel does the same things that postmodernism and magic realism do, but it sympathizes more with a Native rather than a Western tradition; it is aware of these movements, but not willing to identify itself with them, as it is very aware of Western high and popular culture but clearly identifies itself as part of Native culture. The "discontinuous narration, multiple discourse, 'magic realist' fantasy, intertextual allusion, and metafictional self-referentiality" (243) that Dieter Petzold identifies operate in the same way as they would in more traditionally Western literature, but *Green Grass, Running Water* resists being subsumed into Western categories as the four old Indians resist imprisonment by Dr. J. Hovaugh; they are willing to reside in his asylum, but they depart at will. When we consider that Dr. Hovaugh is virtually a stand-in for positivism and literary realism, this textual resistance is the resistance of all fabulous literature to the tyranny of the real. In different ways, all fabulous literature struggles to impress upon its readers that there is more to the world than we can find in any one story.

The simultaneous trust and suspicion that I suggest accompany fabulous writing reflect the fact that a form that draws attention to its simplicity and apparent ingenuousness is particularly well-suited to remind us of the conventions (literary, social or intellectual) to which we may have grown inured and therefore blind. In the contemporary Western world the enemy of dissent is no longer tyrannical monarchs but habit and complacency; we do not lack critical capacities so much as the inclination to apply them to our own lives. Postmodernism makes us more suspicious of the motives of

the people and institutions around us, and perhaps of the assumptions that underlie our own beliefs, but fabulous writing is capable of making its readers, if only briefly, accept unfamiliar beliefs. Fabulous writing can seduce the reader into a perspective from which he or she may suddenly recognize an unflattering self-image, as indeed it can misdirect the reader and later reveal the misdirection in order to illustrate not only the flaws but also the appeal of a particular belief. Fabulation takes account of the appeal as well as the dangers in various forms of "communal harmony" and "*telos*" (Zipes "Disney" 333). At the same time, as has been observed many times before, fabulous writing also evokes wonder and surprise; in different ways Arnason, Kroetsch, Highway and King inspire us to wonder and surprise both at what we have habitually believed and not believed.

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