THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE UNGRAMMATICALITY OF GENRE:

THE CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN LONG POEM

by

SMARO KAMBOURELI

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

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TITLE: The Ungrammaticality of Genre:

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for Robert

I often lose the thread
and would lose heart as well
if it didn't leap into my mouth

    Lola Lemire Tostevin, <u>Double Standards</u>

sometimes when she writes
she thinks   I must be mad

    Lola Lemire Tostevin, Double Standards

CONTENTS

Preamble : Promises

The long poem is a major literary form in contemporary Canada. Many critics would agree with this gnomic statement; few, however, would be willing to declare what exactly makes the contemporary long poem the distinct poetic form that it is. I take it to be a "new" genre -- new in quotation marks, for newness or originality is a relative and suspect term in contemporary literary theory.

The long poem cannot be read as if it were an extended lyric, a strange epic -- strange because of our unheroic times -- or as if it were simply a narrative poem. For the long poem may share the emotive tonalities of the lyric, but it doesn't sanction the lyric's brevity; it may also share the epic's intent to "sing" of national matters and anxieties -- "O Canada" -- but it does so in ways that parody the epic ethos; and when it tries to tell a story, it gets sidetracked and tells instead a story about the telling of the promised story.

These contradictions, this breach of promise, is what I intend to focus on. Like M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M.

Gall, who co-authored the first comprehensive study of the modern long poem, The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius in Modern Poetry (1983), I will consider the long poem as a poetic form that invites the reader to see it as a "new" genre. But unlike Rosenthal and Gall, who tie the long poem's peculiarities exclusively to the lyrical mode, I will follow a different route, one that will allow me to speak of the main and mixed generic elements at play in its disparate form. I will argue, in effect, that the long poem registers its contradictions both as a complication and as a simplification.

The main characteristic of the contemporary Canadian long poem as a "new" genre is that, while it contains other literary kinds, it resists all attempts at precise generic definition. It subordinates itself to other genres, but at the same time it breaks free from their generic specifications. A number of critics (i.e. Joseph Riddel, Eli Mandel, Frank Davey, and Robert Kroetsch) have addressed the difficulty of describing the long poem from a generic point of view, but no critic to my knowledge has so far argued that it is precisely this difficulty that both defines the contemporary long poem as a "new" genre, and directs our reading of it.

In fact, it is the reading of Canadian long poems, individually and as a group, that reveals the long poem's complicitous position as a genre in the poetic tradition. "Reading," as Maurice Blanchot says, "is not writing the

book again but causing the book to write itself or be written."[1] My reading of the long poem marks a double activity, for before I can make the long poem "write itself" I have to read its trajectory as a "new" genre.

But where is the law of the long poem as a new genre?

My answer to this question is to be found in the structure of this study. The first three chapters explore established theories of genre and help me to construct my own theory of the long poem. The remaining three chapters are applications of this theory to specific long poems. This double dealing -- the repeated shifts from theory to text -- characterizes my reading method in this study. It is a method necessary for all generic approaches. For to be able to recognize a genre, or the extent to which a text simulates a series of other texts, it is important not to lose sight (theoria) of the forces (whether inside or outside a text) that have constructed that genre.

I begin my exploration of the long poem then with a brief consideration of the context of several of the early long poems in nineteenth-century Canada and the responses they generated. More specifically, the first chapter looks at the forces (cultural and literary) that prompted a number of nineteenth-century Canadian poets to think of the long poem as a form appropriate to their subject matter at a time when the lyric was the presiding form and when the Canadian writer operated almost exclusively from a colonial perspective. The example I use here is Oliver

Goldsmith's The Rising Village. The long poem in that
early context is not only an appropriate form, but also a
form that the Canadian writer (the writer in the New
World) has to appropriate.

The question of the appropriateness and the
appropriation of the long poem as a genre raises further
questions about the "purity" and "impurity" of genre as a
whole. I deal with these matters in my second chapter,
where I first examine some of the approaches to genre
theory (i.e. those of Aristotle and Northrop Frye) and
then consider the extent to which recent literary theories
about the literary tradition and literary works (i.e.
those of Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques
Derrida, Paul de Man) have changed our notions about the
meaning and function of genre.

In my third chapter, I focus on a number of critics
(i.e. Michael Bernstein, Rosenthal and Gall, Joseph
Riddel) who have attempted to look at the long poem from a
generic perspective. I ground my discussion of these
critics' concerns about the epic and lyric elements of the
long poem by briefly focusing on two long poems, Lionel
Kearns' Convergences and David Jones's The Anathemata. My
findings from reading these critics and poets lead me to
my own theory of the contemporary long poem. My
theoretical exploration of the long poem as a "new" genre
reveals that the long poem's major concern is at once to
thematize its formal elements, and to treat as formal

elements its major themes, namely locality, the self and the idea of discourse.

In the fourth chapter I study the treatment of locality in the long poem by focusing on Robert Kroetsch's _Field Notes_ and _Advice to My Friends,_ Daphne Marlatt's _Steveston,_ and Eli Mandel's _Out of Place._ Each of these poets displays a different way in which locality in the long poem reflects both a concern with place and with the "field" of writing.

The fifth chapter deals with the non-Cartesian concept of the self that I see operating in the long poem. By studing George Bowering's _Kerrisdale Elegies_ and bpNichol's _The Martyrology,_ I show how the self in the long poem is always elliptical, realized only through the act of writing.

In the sixth, and last, chapter, through a close reading of Michael Ondaatje's _The Collected Works of Billy the Kid,_ I examine the extent to which discourse replaces narrative in the long poem.

What explains and sustains the ungrammaticality of all these long poems is the use of present tense. By writing about locality, the self and the idea of discourse in the present tense, the writers of these contemporary Canadian long poems establish a literary form that, paradoxically, defines itself by resisting definition.

<u>In Theory</u>

Xiv

Chapter One

Toward an Archaeology of

the Canadian Long Poem

I: Recognition

In his 1946 essay "The Narrative Tradition in
English-Canadian Poetry," Northrop Frye observes that
"[i]n looking over the best poems of our best poets, while
of course the great majority are lyrical, we are surprised
to find how often the narrative poem has been attempted,
and attempted with uneven but frequently remarkable
success."[1] Frye refers, among others, to Oliver
Goldsmith's The Rising Village (1834), Charles
Heavysege's The Revolt of Tartarus (1855), Charles
Sangster's The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay (1856),
Joseph Howe's Acadia (1874), Isabella Valancy Crawford's
Malcolm's Katie (1884), and E.J. Pratt's The Titanic
(1935) and Brebeuf and His Brethren (1940). Frye's
observation brings into focus a popular poetic form in
nineteenth-century Canadian poetry. But beyond this, it

stresses an impulse that readers of Canadian poetry have always felt to some degree, the impulse of the Canadian poet to choose the long poetic form.[2] More narrative poems appeared soon after Frye remarked the significance of the frequency of the long poem: Pratt's Towards the Last Spike (1952), Louis Dudek's Europe (1954), Earle Birney's The Damnation of Vancouver (1957), James Reaney's A Suit of Nettles (1958), Dorothy Livesay's The Documentaries (1968). In spite of their disparity, the length of these later poems affirms that the long poem of the period Frye examines was far from being an isolated or a dying form. And he is not alone in noticing the import of this phenomenon.

In 1959, Milton Wilson wrote that "the discontinuous long poem, the cyclical short poem and the cycle of lyrics have always been the most fruitful cluster of genres in our poetic history."[3] But Wilson was not merely documenting this phenomenon. "The point at which Pratt's genres meet," he said, "is worth calling the center of Canadian poetry."[4] His statement is an assessment not only of the aesthetics of the long poetic form but also of its contribution to the development of Canadian poetry. A year later, Paul West remarked that "[t]he whole process tends toward an attempt at modern epic."[5] By limiting Wilson's large categories of poetic genres to the epic, West relates the long poem to the ethos encoded in the epic, an important distinction, as we will see later. In

1969, Dorothy Livesay, while confirming the Canadian
poetic tendency toward the long form, argued that
"[a]lthough this tradition has been somewhat loosely
termed 'narrative,' I propose to show that in our literary
context it is more than that: it is a <u>new genre</u> [my
emphasis], neither epic nor narrative, but <u>documentary."</u>
[6] What is interesting about Livesay's statement is
not her affirmation of the importance of the long poem,
but rather her recognition that the long poem ought to be
viewed as a "new genre" and her readiness to define it.

Frye, Wilson, West and Livesay are concerned with the
emergence and the recurrence of the long poetic form and
with the place it claims within, and the ways it shapes,
Canadian poetry. Their diverse use of literary terms
illustrates the generic nature of their concerns while,
ironically, at the same time observing the discursiveness
of the long poem. They attempt to define the Canadian
long poem not only from a structural perspective, but also
from a perspective revealing their awareness that they
deal with a "new" literary kind which is intricately
engaged with Canadian literary experience, a kind which
takes its shape responsively. These critics see genre as a
system of aesthetic codes prior to the production of a
text and operating within a text, a system which guides
our response to it. That system, they seem to imply, is
not without cultural relevance. Culture permeates and in
part determines a text's genre.

More recently, Eli Mandel, in his provocatively

entitled essay "The Death of the Long Poem," rehearses

these first attempts to trace the origins of the long

poem. He reaches the conclusion that

> [g]enre ... provides a metaphysics of beginnings.
> It sustains the long poem in the form of the epic,
> those encyclopaedic narratives at the fountainhead
> of western culture. As narrative poem of heroic,
> action, the epic was intended as well to encompass,
> to give shape and purpose to all learning, striving
> to become the definitive poem of its age. When the
> containing form collapsed, shortly after but not
> because of Milton, it broke into its two component
> parts, narrative and encyclopaedic poem, the long
> poem. [7]

So far, there seems to be complete agreement among critics

as to the epic origins of the long poem vis a vis its

length. Mandel, however, is the first critic mentioned

here to acknowledge that such a beginning bears a

metaphysical taint. He qualifies this characterization

when, later on in his essay, he refers more specifically

to the contemporary Canadian long poem. "The long poem,"

he says, "takes its definition in a period [modern and

contemporary] that, as we have just seen, resists

definition, as it resists system, grid, cosmology, belief.

Perhaps for that reason it presents itself in a series of

paradoxes and remains, in one sense, an unsatisfactory

notion."[8] Mandel's critique of genre theory evidently

follows the postmodern distrust of hierarchy and unity --

which we certainly encounter in most contemporary Canadian

long poems -- but he takes that distrust a step beyond as

he considers suspect any rigorous attempt to identify elements particular to the long poem.

Mandel has in mind specifically Robert Kroetsch's essay "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem" (1980), and Frank Davey's "The Language of the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem" (1981).[9] Although Kroetsch and Davey do not dwell that much on the origins of the long poem, and although they differ considerably in their views, they have certainly approached the long poem as a distinct form. Responding to their attempts to "fix" the long poem, Mandel "begin[s] to see why the long poem cannot be a form--its endless process resists the very definition of structure, centre, foundation we want to put upon it." Even though he is quick to admit that "the temptation to fix is powerful," he nevertheless insists that the long "poem as we know it is no longer there."[10] Hence the title of his essay, "The Death of the Long Poem."

But Mandel's argument brilliantly deconstructs itself, for his emphasis on the long poem's resistance to definition and its close kinship with paradox provides the key to our appreciation of the long poem as a "new" genre. The shortcoming of his argument lies in his -- admittedly ironic -- unwillingness to admit that the long poem does indeed have features which are distinctly its own. Like many other critics, Mandel does not account satisfactorily for the origins of the Canadian long poem, but he -- like

Frye, Livesay, Kroetsch, and Davey -- makes an effort to define it in Canadian terms. Thus, in the context of the Canadian literary tradition and Canadian criticism, we find, besides the traditional aesthetic codes of genre, yet another system of codes -- this time specifically referring to the Canadian literary experience, and operating outside the long poem yet permeating and in part determining the long poem as genre.

II: Anxiety

The large number of long poems and the nature of the critical statements about them raise the question of the appropriateness of the long poetic form in Canadian literature. Here is what Frye has to say about this:

> [I]t is at least possible that some of the poetic forms employed in the earlier centuries of English literature would have been more appropriate for the expression of Canadian themes and moods than the nineteenth-century romantic lyric or its twentieth-century metaphysical successor. It is inevitable that Canadian poetry should have been cast in the conventional forms of our own day; but though the bulk of it is lyrical in form, a great deal of it is not lyrical in spirit, and when a Canadian poem has failed to achieve adequate expression, this may often be the reason.... [I]t occasionally happens that a successful Canadian poem has owed its success to its coincidence, deliberate or otherwise, with one of the forms of pre-Chaucerian literature.[11]

Whereas Frye acknowledges the inevitability that Canadian poetry would develop synchronically within the lyric

tradition, his primary interest is in the diachronic movement of this poetry. Frye's observation is not an instance of generic anachronism. On the contrary, he chooses to focus on the significance of this "anachronism" and views the use of older poetic kinds appropriate within the Canadian literary context of the nineteenth and even into the twentieth centuries. Diachrony, in this case, marks the extent to which genre and culture correspond to each other.

Frye's role is not so much that of a theorist or of a practical critic; he plays the role of a cultural historian by tracing the correspondences between literary kinds and cultural traits. He shares Rosalie L. Colie's notion that literary kinds function as metaphors of certain cultural dispositions.[12] Old genres certainly bear the marks of their age as well as the marks of their cultural and physical geography. For example, the epic hero's many stops at places, including an obligatory visit to the underworld, where he tests his prowess and virtue, are an imperative to the epic genre, but owe a great deal to the seascape of clustered islands and to the cultural mythology of Odysseus' Greece. Similarly, Frye emphasizes Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse -- set in a ragged northern landscape and stressing the need for physical strength and personal courage -- for pioneering Canada. One of the reasons that the literary kinds cited by Frye were appropriate for the nineteenth-century

Canadian poet was that they, at a time when there was an absence of literary tradition, could name Canadian experience in a manner that gave it literary credibility, and also a primal place.

Although there are many differences between Frye's complex argument and the other early approaches to the long poem, one cannot help noticing a recurring critical anxiety about the uncertain direction of Canadian literature in the nineteenth century. Archibald Lampman, in his essay on the poetry of Sir Charles G.D. Roberts and George Frederick Cameron, both articulates and exposes this anxiety. "A good deal is being said about Canadian literature," he writes, "and most of it takes the form of question and answer as to whether a Canadian literature exists. Of course it does not. It will probably be a full generation or two before we can present a body of work of sufficient excellence as measured by the severest standards, and sufficiently marked with local colour, to enable us to call it a Canadian literature."[13] Lampman provides a number of answers to his question, but the one pertinent here is that unless poets develop certain "peculiarities of mind and character" that will affect "literary expression," there will be no Canadian literature.[14] His study of Roberts and Cameron reveals in part the predominant literary reason that delays the shaping of an autochthonous Canadian literature. His constant points of reference are literary

models outside Canada: the poetry of Tennyson, Byron,
Shelley, Arnold, Rossetti, characterizes the tradition
within which he locates and studies the work of Roberts
and Cameron. These British predecessors function not only
as models but as authorities which author (authorize) a
beginning for the nineteenth-century Canadian poet. Such a
start is, however, a pseudo-beginning, for we can trace
its origins to a past which, although culturally familiar,
is not indigenous but foreign.

The poetry of Roberts and Cameron and their
contemporaries might seem to reflect a progression of
British literature, but a progression under erasure
because their writing is merely chronological within
British practice. For, although these poets employ genres
appropriate to their work, they fail to recontextualize
them in the light of their Canadian material. By
establishing a narrative history of Canadian literature
through the linear tradition and the generic imitation of
British models, they create a contradiction of origins.
They practise a writing that attempts _not_ to cause a
disunity between the beginning of their literature and the
already established British tradition.

As Homi Bhabha argues, the "reality that an authentic
literary tradition must ideally reveal -- the mark of its
originality --...can hardly be written in a language and
literature of colonial imposition."[15] The work of the
nineteenth-century Canadian poets marks the beginning of a

literature which is, paradoxically, linear, because it transfers the European tradition without recontextualizing it in the colonial country. As a result, their works express an aesthetic and an ideology foreign to Canadian experience. This ideology -- primarily informed by the memory of an abandoned reality -- articulates a Canadian cultural vision by reducing its complexity. The dialogue of presence and absence is weighted in favor of the absent colonizing source.

Oliver Goldsmith's The Rising Village: A Poem (1825), which was written in response to his great-uncle's The Deserted Village (1770), provides an example of that dialogue. Goldsmith opens his poem with an apostrophe to his brother Henry, which formally dramatizes the dialogue between the Canadian and British traditions. In a cheerful and hopeful manner, the poet proceeds to suggest that "happier prospects rise, / Beneath the sternness of Acadian skies" -- happier that is than those his great-uncle describes in The Deserted Village. [16] But the alternate society that Goldsmith envisions is not entirely free from the problems and anxieties that plagued the "deserted village" of the mother country. What accounts for this irony, in a telling way, is Goldsmith's own family and literary tradition. Early in his poem he acknowledges his debt to the "genius [that] formed the glory of our name," namely the elder Oliver Goldsmith, as well as his efforts to "emulate his fame" (p. 42, ll.

5-6). But although the young poet intends to set his great-uncle straight -- in his Autobiography he accuses the poet of The Deserted Village of having "pathetically displayed the Anguish of his Countrymen"[17] --, the elder Goldsmith's literary influence on the younger poet is apparent and includes the latter's choice of genre.[18]

That same influence of genre, which we should extend to encompass the elder Goldsmith's own British literary milieu, prescibes the culturally accommodating vision of The Rising Village. The "blessings" of Goldsmith's Scotia are far from being entirely her own.

> These are thy blessings, Scotia, and for these,
> For wealth, for freedom, happiness, and ease,
> Thy grateful thanks to Britain's care are due,
> Her power protects, her smiles past hopes renew,
> Her valour guards thee, and her councils guide,
> Then, may thy parent ever be thy pride!
>   Happy Britannia! though thy history's page
> In darkest ignorance shrouds thine infant age ...
> Matur'd and strong, thou shin'st in manhood's prime,
> The first and brightest star of Europe's clime.
> The nurse of science, and the seat of arts,
> The home of fairest forms and gentlest hearts;
> The land of heroes, generous, free, and brave,
> The noblest conquerors of the field and wave;
> Thy flag, on every sea and shore unfurled,
> Has spread thy glory, and thy thunder hurled....
>   Then blest Acadia! ever may thy name,
> Like hers, be graven on the rolls of fame;
> May all thy sons, like hers, be brave and free,
> Possessors of her laws and liberty;
> Heirs of her splendour, science, power, and skill,
> And through succeeding years her childern still.
>   (p. 53, ll. 523-52; my emphasis)

Such a vision delineates the extent to which the genre of colonial poetry functions according to the same

imperatives that subordinate the colony to the colonizing country. Goldsmith's discourse and genre enunciate more than he intends to say. The inception of his vision in <u>The Rising Village</u> reveals that for him, as for many of his contemporary poets, a prosperous life in the New World is unimaginable and inoperative if envisioned outside the authority of the immigrant's past. Nineteenth-century Canadian poetry, more conscious of what its subject matter lacks than of what establishes its difference, cannot afford to be sub-versive.[19]

Choice of genre, the long narrative accounts of nature, whether pastoral or not, idylls such as those of Albert and Flora or Malcolm and Katie,[20] inscribe the signature of the literary "empire" by prescription. Presence and absence are the metonymic rendering of the tensions between the Old and the New Worlds, between an established literary tradition and a new literature which, while seeking its content and form, wants to be seen both as a continuation of the European tradition and as an independent literature.

It is this apparent absence of a Canadian literary signature that generates the conditions necessary for the beginning of another tradition, this time an indigenous one. In the colonial condition that characterizes a poet's perception and her/his work, as Bhabha says, "[t]here are intimations...of the <u>construction</u> of the unity of the sign (as opposed to its primordial

'givenness'), and the resulting stability of the signified which, paradoxically, suggests the possibility of its arbitrariness, that is, the irony of its repression of discontinuity and difference in the construction of 'sense', those modes of meaning that we call realism and historicism."[21] In other words, although we recognize the landscape described in The Rising Village as Acadian, we notice that yet another level of referentiality is encoded in its representation, one that affirms the unity of Britain as a sign authorizing Goldsmith's "local pride."[22] The pervasive power and presence of this sign grants the poem its stability and perpetuates the generic conventions that celebrate British presence.

> Happy Acadia! though around thy shore
> Is heard the stormy wind's terrific roar;
> Though round thee Winter binds his icy chain,
> And his rude tempests sweep along thy plain,
> Still Summer comes, and decorates thy land
> With fruits and flowers from her luxuriant hand;
> Still Autumn's gifts repay the labourer's toil
> With richest products from thy fertile soil;
> With bounteous store his varied wants supply,
> And scarce the plants of other suns deny.
> How pleasing, and how glowing with delight
> Are now thy budding hopes! How sweetly bright
> They rise to view! How full of joy appear
> The expectations of each future year!
> (p. 52, ll. 485-98)

These lines, although meant to sing Acadia's virtues, can claim no Acadian signature whatsoever. We might, in fact, read them as minuscule condensations of another very British narrative poem, James Thomson's The Seasons (1726-30), or as the seasonal pattern we so often find in

literature. The use of convention, instead of speaking of things Acadian, speaks of what stabilizes the signified, the signified here being not only beholden to the generic conventions established in Britain, but ultimately Britain itself. The lack of any qualities that might differentiate Acadia from what Goldsmith presents as her "matur'd and strong" origins contradicts the poet's intentions.

The contradictions inherent in the work of such colonial poetry rupture the unity of the literary work as a sign and expose its arbitrariness. The aesthetic uniformity that ensues from the colonial Canadian signature is deceptive. The form and sensibility of the nineteenth-century long poem illustrate the extent to which colonialism is the signature of early Canadian literature. The relation between Canadian poetry as a signifier and British poetry as a signified is obviously an arbitrary and a crippling one with regard to the discourse of Canadian experience. Though there are clearly many channels of communication between the nineteenth-century Canadian colony and its imperial country, Canadian poetry in deferring to that given tradition loses sight of its immediate world. It expresses, instead, a reality that does not intend to enunciate, in fact refuses to acknowledge, an indigenous Canadian aesthetic. Thus the semiotics of early Canadian poetry spells out a passive difference.

Unwittingly, the colonial poet creates a body of work

whose reality resists and even distorts the experience of the writing subject. From a generic perspective, this work functions in a linear fashion, continuing, that is, the Western tradition. From an ideological and pragmatic perspective, the spatial and temporal context within which the work is physically located questions the appropriateness of the imported genre to which the work answers. It is a work produced by a past ideology that contradicts present experience, articulated in a discourse spoken elsewhere and in another time. Such a discourse neutralizes the problems and concepts generated by the Canadian context. It fakes an innocence that refuses to acknowledge the close rapport that tradition tells us ought to exist between genre and culture. Genre as a historical determinant, or genre as something elastic and constantly redefined, influences the construction of a literature that expresses the reality of its culture. It also brings about the deconstruction of those models whose discourse belies the experience of that emerging culture. The deployment of genres appropriate to a recipient culture often results in unitary works which feed, and in some cases even inflate, the colonial imagination. In other words, the appropriateness of genre might be suspect when there are no signs of authentic appropriation.

It becomes clear that we can answer the question of the appropriateness of literary kinds only through the degree of their appropriation. Frye's treatment of this

question is to be found in the "mythopoeic imagination in Canadian poetry." He talks about the martyrdom of the Jesuit missionaries, the Riel rebellion, the "forlorn hope at Dieppe." These and similar themes we encounter, for instance, in Pratt's poetry.[23] Frye remarks that "there is a certain family resemblance among all these events which makes each one somehow typical of Canadian history. Is there not something in the character of such themes that recalls the earliest poetry of our mother countries, of the lost battle of Maldon where courage grew greater as the strength ebbed away, or of the reckless heroism at Roncesvalles which laid the cornerstone of French literature?"[24] For Frye, the mythopoeic imagination of Canadian poetry, besides bearing signs of nationalism, marks primarily a movement inspired by anxiety as well as by nostalgia. Canadian literature accomplishes this recollection backward through the deployment of genres which took ages to develop in the "mother countries." What we have, in effect, at the beginning of the long poem tradition in Canada, Frye leads us to understand, is a compression of genres. The traces of medieval and Renaissance romances, Chaucer's narratives, and the Anglo-Saxon epics that we can detect in the poetry of that period, are all part of the movement backward that has shaped the generic route of poetry in Canada. Whether one intends to interpret Pratt's The Cachalot (1926), The Titanic (1935), and Brebeuf and His

Brethren (1940) allegorically or otherwise, Pratt
certainly echoes a similar reverence for the past.

But these diverse choices of long poetic forms, in
addition to being appropriate as Frye observes, are also
heteroclite. We find in their examples a lack of common
generic locus. Generic features that characterize the
classic epic, the medieval romance, the narrative poem,
and the cycles of lyric poems -- genres that developed
through a great span of time -- are in Canada collapsed
within the literature of one century. This simultaneity
of diverse genres challenges the grammar of genre
development in Europe. It provides further proof that in
order to trace the archaeology of the long poem in Canada,
and specifically its generic formulation, one has to
proceed both synchronically and diachronically.

If the "mother country" is the geographical and
psychological locus -- as well as the locus of the
imaginary -- where the Western literary tradition has
originated, and if it still fosters the imagination of its
"offspring" who have gone away from it, then a return to
its spatial and temporal boundaries could be seen in
Freudian terms as a regression to the oneiric chora of the
mother.[25] Mandel speaks too of the Freudian journey
backwards, only the itinerary he maps out takes him to a
different, in fact opposite, destination.

Mandel chooses to follow the Bloomian line of "strong
poets" and their "revisionary movement."[26] "In Harold

Bloom's paradox," he says, "the poet begins by rebelling against death, and his acute anxiety emerges from the fear of two deaths, physical death and poetic death. The threat to the absolute freedom and priority of the self (priority over nature) and the struggle with one's precursors. The poet's desire is to be not only his own father and to displace his 'real' father, but to be the parent of those who gave birth to him in what Bloom, echoing Freud, calls the Primal Scene of Instruction, the moment of election-love when the poet is called and answers."[27]
In adopting Bloom's theory of "anxiety influence," Mandel fitfully "misreads" the forces at work in the Canadian context, especially that of the nineteenth century: there are virtually no "strong poets" in the nineteenth century, and we have yet to discover evidence that those Canadian poets "transform[ed] their blindness towards their precursors into the revisionary insights of their own work" -- the process at the heart of Bloom's theory.[28] Mandel, in a deliberate gesture of erasure, does not even mention the complex "case" of the "colonial poet" when he discusses the origins of the long poem. His Freudian/Bloomian recourse leads him to the colonial poet's literary fathers without acknowledging the role that the "mother" country played in this "family romance."[29]

When talking about theories of genre and origins, we cannot afford to ignore the colonial poet's regression

into the oneiric chora of the "mother." Such a regression
functions as a double signifier: it points to the
unsatisfying reality of the colonial poet caught at the
crossroads of the present (new) and the absent (past, old)
worlds; and it reveals one of the regressive but dynamic
qualities of the poetic imagination, that of nostalgia.
The fantasy of a beginning -- which is, paradoxically,
always in process -- is carried, according to Paul
Ricoeur's interpretation of Freud, by two opposed vectors:
"a regressive vector which subjects the fantasy to the
past, and a progressive vector which makes it an indicator
of meaning."[30] The colonial poet's creativity or
initial literary production is activated by this nostalgic
regression. S/he at first works with the symbolism
ingrained in the "mother country" while ignoring the
semiosis of the new country.[31] The symbolism of "the
mother country" refers to the overdetermination of meaning
which culturally fixed codes inscribe on literary
tradition. That meaning owes its success of continuity to
the homogeneity it attributes to its referential
relations. It is precisely this correlation of continuity
and homogeneity that necessitates a gaze fixed on the past
in order to authenticate, and authorize, the codes of the
present. In contrast, the semiosis of the new country,
lacking as it does any fixed codes, offers the potential
to produce a writing that occurs exactly within the gaps
marking signification; such a writing would dislodge the

totalizing codes and images of the "mother country," thus enunciating the colonial poet's dislocation.

As a result, the colonial subject loses itself in the archaeology of its consciousness, reverses its course, and relocates its present in the past. In the process of unravelling the narrative of its experiences, the colonial subject displaces, to use Ricoeur's words, "the birthplace of meaning" -- especially the preconstituted meanings of the old world -- thus unlocking its silence and releasing its desire.[32] Desire inspires the immigrant or colonial poet's nostalgic movement, but this same desire and the discourse it entails, as we will see in the chapters to follow, are part of the ethos of the long poem. Desire is indeed what enables the poet to deconstruct the preconstituted meanings s/he encounters in the "mother country" by ceasing to see the new country in colonial terms and consciously participating in its literary signifying process.

The colonial poet's nostalgia accounts in part for the frequent preference for the epic form in early Canadian literature, although there are many long poems in the nineteenth century that strictly speaking are not epic. Their intent, however, is. Their emphasis lies not so much in imitating the features of the classic, medieval and Renaissance forms of epic as in emulating the epic ethos. It is at this point that we move from considering what makes certain forms appropriate in the Canadian

literary context to seeing how they are appropriated. The epic ethos manifests itself in accordance with the ecological and cultural milieu of nineteenth-century Canada.

One of the earliest instances of this nostalgic ethos occurs in W.D. Lighthall's "Introduction" to <u>Songs of the Great Dominion</u> (1889). "Existing English Canada," he writes, "is the result of simply the noblest epic migration the world has ever seen -- more loftily epic than the retirement of Pius Aeneas from Ilion -- the withdrawal, namely, out of the rebel Colonies, of the thirty-five thousand United Empire Loyalists after the War of the Revolution."[33] Lighthall's language of superlatives bears the marks of his anxiety and of his urgent desire to establish a lofty ground for the beginning of Canadian literature. A.J.M. Smith is partly right when he says that "Lighthall's introduction is a kind of Canadian echo of Whitman's Preface to <u>Leaves of Grass</u>."[34] But Whitman's vision does not get blinded by the epic ethos. Quite the contrary. It is specifically against this ethos, deeply and anciently European, that he directs his readers' attention, for he is aware of the dangers involved in the (almost intuitively) mimetic act of colonialism:

> [T]he expression of the American poet is to be transcendant and new. It is to be <u>indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic.</u> <u>Its quality goes through these to much more.</u> Let the age

and wars of other nations be chanted and their
eras and characters be illustrated and that
finish the verse. Not so the great psalm of
the republic. Here the theme is creative and
has vista. Here comes one among the wellbeloved
stonecutters and plans with decision and
science and sees the solid and beautiful forms
of the future where there are now no solid
forms.[35]

Whitman is not concerned about lofty origins outside his

own culture, and yet he creates a poem epic in its

proportions. His vision is grounded in the reality that

surrounds him and in its differences from other countries,

not in models inspired in another place and time, by

another tradition. He is concerned with the process of

American poetry, its future. He delights in the plurality

of the American identity and in the immense possibilities

of literary form that the American material may create.

Whatever Whitman's practice, the epic as genre,

according to Paul Merchant, goes beyond realism and might

have originated in the need for established and continuous

history.[36] And it is surely telling that Lighthall's

statement is informed exactly by this need. As if in

confirmation of the organic correlation that one might be

tempted to make between the physical size of Canada and

the length of the epic poem, Lighthall's imagination is

captured by the epic ethos in its entirety. He finds a

myth appropriate in his mind for the expression of the

Canadian experience but he also appropriates this myth to

the extent of denying its mythic origins and universality:

"existing English Canada is the result of simply the noblest epic migration the world has ever seen -- more loftily epic than the retirement of Pius Aeneas from Ilion." He measures reality by myth, and in doing so he goes so far as to implicitly deny it is his nostalgic desire that shapes his vision of Canadian literature. The rhetoric and the historical facts that inspire him relocate his desire on a seemingly realistic ground, that of his present world, a world, however, informed by a heroic past. It is also a world which, constructed as it is out of rhetoric, idealism, a need for a tradition of cohesiveness and the foregrounding of epic mythos, deconstructs Lighthall's mimetic assumptions as soon as he states them.

But Lighthall's self-deluding rhetoric should not be taken as the rule designating all appropriations of the epic genre. The diverse deployment of genre in the early Canadian long poems marks the cultural code of Canada while, at the same time, it anticipates the heterogeneous form of the contemporary long poem. The simultaneous presence of diverse genres -- such as the narrative or epic poem and cycles of lyrics -- whether they appear faithfully reproduced or not, becomes a means of ordering Canadian experience. As a result, a grid of familiar generic codes is superimposed on the sense of estrangement that the Canadian poet feels in her/his new physical environment and previously uninscribed literary milieu.

III: Appropriation

The appropriation of formerly developed genres marks
the degree to which Canadian literature establishes the
tabula for its inscription. The literary kinds the
colonial poet considers to be appropriate are not
necessarily, or always, those s/he appropriates in
practice. It does not suffice that a literary kind is
appropriate as vehicle of cultural expression; it has to
be appropriated. Active appropriation liberates
established literary kinds from the aesthetic and
linguistic grids that have shaped them as genres within a
particular cultural context.[37] It recontextualizes
them, and during this process literary kinds reclaim their
textual materiality so that they might be assigned, by the
writer and her/his culture, a new pragmatic
function.[38] This pragmatic function relocates the
appropriated genres within the context of a new culture.
Thus the appropriation of literary kinds, and the
complexities that entails, takes the Canadian writer a
step away from literary anxiety and brings her/him a step
closer to the creation of a national literature.

Appropriation of literary kinds is characterized both
by repetition and difference. The repetition of
established genres recalls the already foreign past within
the context of a "foreign" present. The element of

difference that enters this process is accomplished through a double gaze -- what we might see in Kierkegaard's terms as a looking backward and a looking forward. The gaze backward is one that fosters the emulation that directs generic continuity, one that perpetuates the symbolic ties with the "mother country." The second direction of the gaze of recollection will come gradually to signify the difference between the symbolism (the signified) of the "mother country" and the semiosis (the signifier, the inscribed) of the new country. It is engendered by looking forward, by gazing at the gaps in inherited patterns of meaning. This second gaze of recollection is what will come to constitute a Canadian literature of the twentieth century. The gaze forward, the recollection of the present and the future, will gradually displace the imported cultural features ingrained in genre without discontinuing the literary tradition.

This displacement marks the stage where Canadian poetry encounters its other. The other is an entity without precise origin, a chora without clearly demarcated boundaries. Openness of form and structure features as its most semiotic characteristic. It speaks of origins without origins, of unlimited possibilities and potential, of the long poem's continuous stage of becoming. Thus the Canadian literary landscape -- originally a textual field marked by anxiety about its foreign past, and by the emptiness and namelessness of its present -- gradually

becomes a text inscribed by new names and characterized by
a more acute sense of which genres better reflect the
Canadian literary sensibility.

Frye observes this process, but he also becomes
prescriptive about it.

> That this development [from Canada as a pioneer
> country to Canada as a civilized country, part
> of an international order] is now taking place
> and will greatly increase in future needs no
> detailed proof: but it is to be hoped that the
> poets who do deal with it will maintain an
> interest in the traditional narrative form. For
> the lyric, if cultivated too exclusively, tends
> to become too entangled with the printed page:
> in an age when new contacts between a poet and
> his public are opening up through radio, the
> narrative, as a form peculiarly well adapted for
> public reading, may play an important role in
> reawakening a public respect for and response to
> poetry. There are values in both tradition and
> experiment, and in both the narrative has
> important claims as Canadian poetry hesitates on
> the threshold of a new era.[39]

Frye, obviously, does not merely describe the development
of Canadian poetry; he discusses the direction of its
evolution, a direction he recognizes in the selection of
genre. At this stage, Frye argues, the Canadian poet is
no longer plagued by anxiety about the lack of
appropriate, or lofty, subject matter or about the
uncertain direction of Canadian poetry; her/his concern is
now formal in nature. Even so, Frye's statement is
informed by his assumption that the poet writes _for_ the
public, that the public in effect dictates or, if this
seems too strong a term, guides the poet's "experiments."
The same sentiment is echoed in Anatomy of Criticism where

Frye states that "[t]he basis of generic criticism in any
case is rhetorical, in the sense that the genre is
determined by the conditions established between the poet
and his public."[40] His reference to radio, although
seemingly incidental, is indeed a telling example.[41]

Margaret Dickie's recent study, On the Modernist Long
Poem, throws some light on the reason why Frye rejects the
lyric as inappropriate to the poet's dialogue with the
public and focuses instead on the long narrative poem as a
more proper vehicle for this exchange. Dickie, like Frye
and, as we will see, most other critics writing on the
long poem, proceeds to talk about its function by
juxtaposing it to the lyric: "[t]he shift," she writes,
"from the lyric to the long poem was not made swiftly or
easily."[42] No matter what these difficulties were,
that shift, according to Dickie, illustrated "the
inadequacy of [the lyric's] private and purified language
to shape the public themes which they [the modernist
poets] aspired to address."[43] The movement is from the
short lyric to what Dickie calls the "long public poem,"
the long poem as mirror reflecting the public domain.

But the epic ethos informing this dialogue between
poet, or more precisely poem, and public prescribes to the
long poem a strict referential function which translates
in effect into a one-way dialogue, a monologic genre.
Although Dickie traces the beginnings of the long poem in
the "radical experimentation" of the Modernist movement --

she has in mind Eliot's The Waste Land, Pound's Cantos,
Crane's The Bridge and Williams's Paterson -- she finally
has to admit that "Modernism" vis a vis the long public
poem "became in the end a conservative or conserving
movement, quite different from its revolutionary
beginnings."[44] Dickie's argument, like Frye's, implies
a definition of the long poem as a genre whose main intent
is to represent the public, that is collective, experience
of the society within which it is produced. The poet, in
other words, doesn't even have to look for inspiration;
s/he is assigned a muse.

In spite of the various manifestations of genre in
Canadian poetry, the long poem has always been there as a
specific field,[45] whether "in the traditional
narrative form" that Frye hoped would be maintained or in
the form of epic and extended lyric sequences. Genre, when
seen as the grammar designating the development of
literature, as Tzvetan Todorov sees it, "is a
sociohistorical as well as a formal entity" providing the
reader with an indispensible means by which to establish
the parameters of an evolving poetry.[46] Frye's
isolation of the narrative form affirms the fact that the
long poem has always been one of the most fertile genres
in Canadian poetry, but it also displays a somewhat
anthropological, almost structuralist, intent which
subordinates the long poem as literary text to
"sociohistorical" referentiality.

The function of genre, as Todorov says in explicating Mikhail Bakhtin, is to posit the "relation between the text and the world" so that the reader might study "the model of the world put forward by the text."[47] Clearly mimetic in its orientation, this approach thus far has proven to be useful when applied to an "emerging" literature overtly conscious of its formal and cultural derivations by critics equally conscious of discussing a body of work that has not yet found its niche in the canon. But when we move to the twentieth century, and especially to the long poems of the seventies and eighties, we no longer see genre as the ground where sociohistorical anxieties are enacted; rather, these poems invite us to see genre as a field of textual experimentation, a field reflexively constructed by language. It is exactly this shift, in all its aesthetic and semantic ramifications, that delineates the long poem's archaeological field in Canada. The archaeology of the Canadian long poem maps out the differences that unfold within the field of generic appropriation. The contemporary long poem as genre posits itself as the discursive formation which, having a strong hold on the present, can both recede into the past and unfold into the future. Its combination of length, diversity of structural principles, and emphasis on the materiality of language makes the recent long poem a productive genre in Canada.

Chapter Two

In the Web of Genre

The consideration of genre as a construct with mimetic intent, as I have intimated in the previous chapter, provides only a preamble to any discussion of the contemporary long poem. In fact, the genre of the long poem, to look forward for a moment, will prove to be a non-construct, not a genre, just the trace of that idea.

Idea; eidos; eidenai. ...

(Still looking forward.) This is what the long poem likes to be: that which is what it is not, that which speaks what it writes. The play of paradox. The real "presence" of the word. The present tense announcing the pastness that befalls unto itself.

Or the long poem moving as the matter of language. Making a fluid sign out of genre. Murdering, that is, its own father, or mother for that matter. (The genre of the long poem, since it has no gender, fittingly acknowledges no precise origins.)[1] It locates its identity in the gaps that unname definitions; it initiates its own dispersion. It makes a system out of that dispersion, a system that requires the reader's constant vigil. The long

poem knows that its _eidenai_ (eidos, knowing) is nothing other than the acting out of, the act of, desire.

Maurice Blanchot: "Desire of writing, writing of desire. Desire of knowledge, knowledge of desire. Let us not believe that we have said anything at all with these reversals. Desire, writing, do not remain in place, but pass one over the other: these are not plays on words, for desire is always the desire of dying, not a wish. And yet, desire is related to _Wunsch_ [wish, desire], and is a nondesire too -- the powerless power that traverses writing -- just as writing is the desired, undesired torment which endures everything, even impatience. Dying desire, desire to die, we live these together -- not that they coincide -- in the obscurity of the interim."[2]

This chapter will be such an interim, an interval in the narrative of this study. It will be a return to its beginnings but at the same time also a step forward from its preamble. For I owe my readers an account: having begun my discussion of the contemporary long poem by tracing its beginnings, beginnings which I have already renounced, and by stating that the focus of my study is on genre while paradoxically intimating that the long poem of the seventies and eighties is no more than a trace of the idea of genre, I run the risk of being in contradiction, of giving the impression that I am engaging in an outdated

or, even worse, dead-end activity. In the face of such
objections, I nevertheless intend to proceed as I have
promised for two reasons. 1) The advent of recent literary
and linguistic theories has explained why genre, or at
least fixed and simple definitions of genre, has lost its
impact in determining the course of literature. 2) The
contemporary long poem resists any deliberate attempt at
precise generic definition while inviting its readers to
see it, to use Livesay's words, as a "new genre." Before,
then, I proceed to examine what constitutes the generic
paradox of the long poem, I think it is necessary to
reconsider the notion of genre. This will clarify not only
my own approach, but, more importantly, the long poem's
wobbling within and against generic definition.

I: Genre: Pure or Impure

    As Todorov says in the opening of his essay "The
Origin of Genre," "[t]o persist in discussing genres today
might seem like an idle if not obviously anachronistic
pastime. Everyone knows that they existed in the good old
days of the classics -- ballads, odes, sonnets, tragedies,
and comedies -- but today? Even the genres of the
nineteenth century (although not altogether genres to our
way of thinking) -- poetry, the novel -- seem to be
disintegrating in our era...."[3] According to Todorov's

understanding (a very traditional one), genre as a name that defines and prescribes the frames of literary categories belongs to "the good old days," which extend beyond the classic period. In this usage, the Aristotelian notion of genre as an imitation of reality is extended to mean a mimetic repetition of form and thematic patterns, namely what is known as "classical theory" of genre.[4] This theory argues for the "purity of genre" on the assumption that genres ought to be kept apart and immutable.[5] That was the case, for example, when Cicero and later Petrarch insisted that literary kinds ought to be restored to their purity. They opposed the crossovers of genres and posited instead the principle that genres already known ought not to be mixed or altered.[6]

It is this kind of argument, one that has continued on and off till our own days of literary indeterminacy, which Todorov is calling anachronistic. It is indeed an idle enterprise to insist on discovering the classical generic codes in modern and contemporary literature. The best informed criticism has always approached genre both synchronically and diachronically. Yet even such an encompassing temporal approach fails to take fully into account the scope of contemporary literature if we attempt to define and understand it by using the old genres as our parameters.

Thus when I state that my study of the contemporary

long poem is going to be generic in perspective, I do not
mean that I will be employing the established genres in
their classical sense. My generic approach will focus on
the dissemination of genres and will attempt to discuss
the dynamics of interaction among the literary kinds that
appear in the contemporary long poem. I propose, using for
heuristic purposes long-standing definitions of genre, to
see the long poem as an "impure" genre.

II: In Support of Impurity

An impure genre, although it violates the classical
dictum about the separation of genres, does not challenge
the status of a particular literary kind. Antonio
Sebastiano Minturno, for instance, saw the Italian
Renaissance romance, clearly a mixture of literary kinds,
as a new genre while acknowledging the permanence and
immutability of the individual literary kinds of which it
was constructed.[7] As Colie has shown, the Renaissance
was most open to <u>genera mista,</u> "self-conscious, carefully
worked mixtures, which counterpoint against one another
the separate genres that Petrarca was trying to
reestablish."[8] What legitimized this impurity, and
enabled it to flourish, is best expressed by Sidney's
statement: "if severed they [genres] be good, the
conjuction cannot be hurtful."[9]

The generic impurity of the contemporary long poem observes inclusiveness as one of its generative principles. The long poem posits itself as a "new genre" which finds its shaping force in its radical employment of the epic, the lyric, the non-epic narrative forms of poetry, and other sub-genres, some of them "unpoetic." But inclusiveness alone cannot account for the mixed nature and size of the long poem, nor, for that matter, of any other genre that challenges the tradition. I agree with Alastair Fowler that "[i]nclusion is a fertile source of generic transformation. Nevertheless, it can hardly in itself provide the basis for a theory of literary change."[10] The inclusiveness of the long poem, although one of its generative factors, is not one of its generic topoi. It cannot fully explain the extent to which the contemporary long poem invites us to see it as a "new genre."

The phrase "new genre," even within a context of generic impurity, conveys a certain kind of tentativeness that I have to address. Whether or not one agrees with the biological analogy that would connect genres and species, it is impossible to determine with any degree of precision the emergence point of a "new genre," as it is equally impossible to issue a pronouncement about, say, "the death of the novel" and identify the death of this genre with a particular author or date. As Karl Viëtor argues, "[l]'histoire d'un genre ne connaît de terme qu'

historique, de même qu'elle a un commencement dans le
temps. On peut trouver que certaines oeuvres contiennent
l'élément générique avec plus de pureté relative que
d'autres, mais l'on ne trouvera aucun moment dont l'on
puisse dire que le 'type' y est réalisé, le genre dans sa
plénitude, et son histoire parvenue à son accomplissement
idéal." Viëtor relies on the assumption that "la
singularité du genre ... se développe dans le temps ...
sans jamais toucher au but."[11] Even when dealing with
classical genres, the proffered immutability of literary
kinds does not preclude their constant transformation.
Fowler is right when he says that "genres are actually in
a continual state of transmutation."[12] Such a
continual development resists any attempt to trace and
locate the originary point that marks the emergence of a
new genre.

When we wish to talk about the origins of a new genre
we can only refer to a type which, to quote Viëtor again,
"est une abstraction, autrement dit c'est la définition,
le schème conceptuel de ce qui, pour ainsi dire, fait la
structure fondamentale (qui n'existe que sous la forme de
particularités pures), la 'généricité' du genre."[13]
Yet the "genericity" of a new genre does not necessarily
imply a transcendental type. Rather, it is a type
inferred by the linguistic materiality of the texts that
comprise a new genre, namely the accumulation of constant
elements whose mutability points in a common direction.

It then becomes apparent when I state that the
contemporary long poem is a "new genre" that I make no
claims to knowing its exact origins (though we can trace
some of its origins). The word contemporary is not meant
to delineate a precise historical point which might mark,
let's assume, the contemporary long poem's radical exit
from what is called modern poetry. On the contrary, it
offers me a frame of chronological relativity, an
archaeological field whose margins are not categorically
determined and which, as a result, can exceed both in a
forward and backward movement the ever-tentative line that
designates contemporaneity.

"[G]enres," as Fowler says, "at all levels are
positively resistant to definition."[14] This sobering
observation holds all the more for the contemporary long
poem, which I propose to define as a genre whose main
trait is precisely this resistance to generic definition.
This definition both affirms and undoes itself. But
contradiction in reference to the long poem, as will
gradually become evident, is not to be overcome. Quite
the contrary. It is a form of discourse that has to be
explored in itself. Although long poems such as
bpNichol's The Martyrology and George Bowering's
Allophanes cohere when one reads them, their coherence is
assigned to them by the reading act, it enters the poems
together with the reader; it is not inherent in them. In
fact, coherence occurs, it is marked, only when the

contradictory genre systems of epic, lyric, and non-epic narrative poetry (even of non-poetic discourse) operating within the long poem posit their heterogeneous interrelationships. Coherence, in this case, does not annul contradiction; it brings to light the generic interplay that renders the contemporary long poem such a distinct poetic form. It signifies a dialogue of genres. The inclusiveness of the long poem, that is, neither presupposes a harmonious interrelationship among its mixed literary kinds nor does it necessitate a complete cancelling out of their idiosyncratic generic elements.

Contradiction, as a form of discourse that suspends what it enunciates, reveals the discursive formation of the long poem while also revealing itself as one of the poem's generic topoi. In this light, my claim that the contemporary long poem is a new genre whose main generic characteristic is that it defies generic canonization is a contradiction that folds within itself, a necessary double suspension of a proposition which states what has not yet been proven.

But my initial gesture which meant to outline the long poem's resistance to genre may have raised more questions than it has clarified. When one works with a genre that eludes definition, the process of questioning becomes the only means by which to come to grips with its continuous unfolding. I will, then, continue this interim questioning by probing further into the tradition of genre

in order to delineate the context of the contemporary long
poem.

III: The Legacy

Since Aristotle's Poetics -- the locus classicus of
genre theory -- generic distinctions have affected the
course of literature as well as the course of criticism.
This is so not only because Aristotle was the first to
articulate a cohesive theory of genre, but also because he
introduced the notion of genre both in a descriptive and
prescriptive fashion. He described and classified the
idiosyncratic qualities of classical drama and epic by
proceeding sympathetically. He employed as his methodology
the same method, clearly ideologically based and
ideologically expressive, that informs the genres he chose
to isolate: mimesis. Mimesis for Aristotle is clearly more
than a literary trope; it is the basis for an ideology
constituted by the totalizing effects of logos. Behind
the legein of a work, in Aristotle's theory, there is the
logos of tradition and culture; legein, the act of making
words (writing/speech), is subordinate to logos, the
lexis of reason, of cohesion.[15] Aristotle's emphasis
on nouns (logos, lexis, mythos) as opposed to verbs
(legein) shows that he prefers a world of things and
entities to a world of movement, fixed to fluid texts. The

same emphasis also reveals the extent to which his mimesis
validates literature only according to its degree of
referentiality and representation. Aristotle considers,
for instance, the persona of lyric poetry to be an
imitation of the poet. Beyond that, he does not merely
describe and classify the literary works of his time; he
also prescribes the content and the structure of
literature in general, relying evidently for his literary
theoretical pronouncements on his philosophical concepts
of reason and the world.

Aristotle's concept of genre, then, rests on the
concept of mimesis, on repetition of sameness. When
mimesis is employed descriptively and prescriptively --
when, that is, it is the subject, the object as well as
the critical tool of a study -- it produces a literature
that can be conceived only as a continuum. It creates a
body of works that lacks genericity, a body that engenders
only itself ad infinitum. That's why the Aristotelian
concept of genre loses its classic sovereignty when
applied to a literature that deviates from the classical
paradigms. Works of this kind threaten the stability of
classical genres.

The development of classical genres follows the
relation between genus and eidos. Aristotle opens his
Poetics by presenting poetry at large as genus and the
epic and tragedy as its main eidoi or species. The
hierarchy implicit in this distinction is confusing, even

deceptive, for Aristotle applies the term genre to both categories as well as to other literary kinds -- less important ones, according to his genre hierarchy, such as the ode. In discussing Aristotle, Viëtor points out this haphazard use of the term: "[a]insi, l'on parle de l'épopée, de la poésie lyrique et du drame comme des trois grands genres; et, en même temps, la nouvelle, la comédie et l' ode sont aussi appelés des genres. Un seul concept doit donc embrasser deux sortes de choses différentes."[16] The Aristotelian usage of the term genre erases the differences among these categories, thus solidifying even further the classical notion that genre functions more through stability than change.

Interestingly enough, Aristotle too is aware of the significance of difference in genre theory. Two of the key and frequent words in Poetics are diapherein (to differ) and diaphora (difference).[17] But the difference Aristotle has in mind is not one we might observe within the various manifestations of a single genre. His is a difference that delineates the extent to which one genre differs from another. More than that, it posits the assumption that, as Austin Warren puts it, "genre differs from genre, in nature and in glory." [18] Aristotle's sense of difference is the measure he uses to guard the boundaries of distinct genres from "impure" admixtures and interferences, and to establish generic hierarchy.

Aristotle's attitude illustrates a philosophical
stance toward reality as well as a critical stance toward
literature. "In nature and in glory." Genre, in the
classical context, is an imitation of reality. Yet some
kinds of imitations are inherently preferable to others,
and presumably therefore, certain realities are preferable
to other realities. At some remove, this explains why
genre has been viewed as cultural expession. Following the
classical norms of literature, genre theory for centuries
advocated the framing of literary expression not only
within already outlined aesthetic codes but also within
the already prescribed cultural structures of humanism.
Genre in the traditional model becomes a metaphor (I use
the term in its etymological and rhetorical meanings) of
ideology, a vehicle that communicates collective
assumptions about the dialectic between "reality" and the
"realism" of literature; it operates as a myth preserving
the images (formal or figural) of this dialectic. As Colie
points out, "the genre-system in the Renaissance offers us
not a second world but an array of ways to look at the
real world, offers us a special way to make of culture a
common place." [19] Genre, then, as genus universum.

Yet genre mythology, as it emerges from the classical
tradition and is later embellished in the Renaissance, is
effective only when we apply it to a tradition of literary
works where variation, not difference, is the order.
Variation of the established norms creates a literary

tradition that does not threaten its cultural and
aesthetic codes; difference, in contrast, produces a
tradition that thrives on the upsetting of those codes.
Thus the need for a mythology of fixed genre indicates the
fear of change, of novelty, of indeterminacy, and
advocates centrality, hierarchy, and order. Single-minded
and monophonic, "order" as derived from Aristotle and
ultimately from Plato operates as the principle that
governs things. In its application, any difference that
disrupts its established patterns is dealt with as an
exception to the rule. In such an economy, inconsistency
and indeterminacy are to be shunned; the mixtures of high
and low genres to be purified; the hierarchies of genres
to be maintained.

IV: Opening up the Category

As Todorov remarks, even when "the disappearance of
[set] genres is affirmed, one sees at work categories
whose resemblance to generic distinctions is difficult to
deny.... Therefore, it is not 'genres' that have
disappeared, but the set genres of the past, and they have
been replaced by others. One no longer speaks of poetry
and prose, of first-person accounts and fiction, but of
the novel and the narrative [le récit], of the narrative
[le narratif] and the discursive, of the dialogue and the

diary."[20] Todorov is not alone in advocating the disappearance of old genres. Bakhtin presents the novel as the replacement of the epic and talks about the "novelization" of genres; Gary Saul Morson, following Bakhtin's example, states that "genre does not belong to texts alone, but to the interaction between texts and a classifier"; Julia Kristeva insists on the "fluidity" of something as early as the French medieval romance and the "transformation" of the early novel; Paul de Man argues that the "lyric is not a genre, but one name among several to designate the defensive motion of understanding, the possibility of a future hermeneutics"; Jacques Derrida replaces the discussions of genre with the indeterminacy of texts and the récits, while presenting philosophy as literary genre. [21] Whatever their differences, none of these writers considers genres as fixed categories into which we insert literary works according to their constant elements, but as mechanisms opening up literary texts by focusing on the way they transgress their literary predecessors.[22] The emphasis on literary texts -- as opposed to literary works -- is not merely a play on words but a distinction constitutive of my approach to genre, in contrast to the classical method of determinacy and prescription.

The literary work, "classically" defined, is the product of a grammar of origins that can be traced in a line of works sharing the same formal and structural

principles. It posits a unity of meaning which is determined by a meaning always anterior, and hence exterior, to what it itself expresses. Conversely, the literary text is a "productivity" of an interwoven signifying process which fosters contradiction and heterogeneity on its formal and structural levels. It shifts emphasis from meaning to signification and leads to plurality. "Which is not simply to say," as Roland Barthes puts it, "that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an _irreducible_ (and not merely an acceptable) plural."[23]

This distinction between product and productivity leads to a further distinction, between tradition and genealogy. The literary _work_ is valorized by a tradition which seeks a system of homogeneity derived from the work's relations to its origin. This origin should not be confused with those privileged literary works that function as models best exemplifying the turns of a tradition; it is a transcendental model, a metaphysical _arche_ that marks the unity of tradition.[24] Thus the grammar of origins that determines the nature of a literary work unfolds on the principle of causality. Origin, in this sense, is the cause that presents literary tradition as a hierarchical linear movement consisting of works which are considered to be the effects or the products derived from the originary cause.

Such tradition, as Michel Foucault says, "is intended

to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena

that are both successive and identical (or at least

similar); it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion

of history in the form of the same; it allows a reduction

of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to

pursue without discontinuity the endless search for the

origin."[25] Tradition derives its power from its

continuity, which in turn is affirmed at the expense, and

by the exclusion, of the differences observed in literary

works. But the linear history of literary works achieves

its homogeneous status only by bypassing those works which

challenge the centrality of tradition's unity. Tradition

thus is deceptive in its homogeneity exactly because it

erases what does not fit into its preestablished patterns.

Deviations are not dealt with in tradition: they are

ignored, neutralized.

The reversal of the simple-minded causality of

tradition is what Foucault calls genealogy:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to
> restore an unbroken continuity that operates
> beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its
> duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively
> exists in the present, that it continues secretly
> to animate the present, having imposed a pre-
> determined form to all its vicissitudes. Genealogy
> does not resemble the evolution of a species and
> does not map the destiny of a people. On the
> contrary, to follow the complex course of descent
> is to maintain passing events in their proper
> dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the
> minute deviations--or conversely, the complete
> reversals--the errors, the false appraisals, and
> the faulty calculations that gave birth to those
> things that continue to exist and have value

for us.[26]

The genealogy to which the literary text belongs exposes
the false recognitions of continuity and deconstructs the
hierarchical structures that tradition establishes.
Whereas the literary work falls into the fatherland of
literature perpetuating thus a unity of meaning without
questioning it, the literary text follows a different
process of descent. "The search for descent," Foucault
writes, "is not the erecting of foundations: on the
contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered
immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows
the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with
itself."[27] Genealogy establishes the transgressive
field that results from the productivity of literary
texts. It is a field that privileges no center; if it
privileges anything it would be the nature of events that
have nonoriginary origins.

The literary works that disrupt the unity of
tradition, and which for this reason are in conservative
aesthetics excised as disruptive products, are what I
earlier called literary texts. By virtue of its
productivity, the literary text refuses to be, in Frank
Lentricchia's words, a "reified locus of
determinacy";[28] it becomes the effect of its own
cause. As Jonathan Culler says, "[i]f the effect is what
causes the cause to become a cause, then the effect, not

the cause, should be treated as the origin.... If either
cause or effect can occupy the position of origin, then
origin is no longer originary; it loses its metaphysical
privilege."[29] Thus the literary text abides outside
the logocentricism of tradition, namely the continuous
movement toward a center that orders the text's meaning.
The text resists the pursuit of origins and posits instead
the need to look for disparity. It activates the very
forces that tradition neutralizes.

V: Unlawful Acts

The distinction between tradition and literary work
and genealogy and literary text is certainly relevant to
the concept of genre. The literary text ex-poses what
Derrida calls "the law of genre." "As soon as the word
'genre' is sounded," he says, more radically than any
other critic on genre, "as soon as it is heard, as soon as
one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a
limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far
behind: 'Do,' or 'Do not' says 'genre,' the word 'genre,'
the figure, the voice, or the law of genre."[30] The
literary text undoes, de-forms, the mythology of stability
and limits attached to genre, of high and low origins.
Texts liquify their determination; they change the course

of their destination. The processual nature of texts
works against the history of genre -- those norms that
prescribe literature before it inscribes itself.

Although Todorov's genre theory (despite Bakhtin's
influence) is still structuralist in its search for a
"grammar," and definitely less radical than Derrida's, it
does alert the reader to the problems regarding genre as
textuality. "Dealing with any text belonging to
"literature," Todorov says, "we must take into account a
double requirement. First, we must be aware that it
manifests properties that it shares with all literary
texts, or with texts belonging to one of the sub-groups of
literature (which we call, precisely, genres).... Second,
we must understand that a text is not only the product of
a pre-existing combinational system (constituted by all
that is literature in posse); it is also a transformation
of that system."[31] Within the genealogy of the
literary text we observe the transference of norms, from
the homologous ground of generic tradition to the
heterogeneous field of textuality, where no law can
protect them from change, from difference, from
transformation, from an interplay of meanings. From genus
universum, then, to genus proximum.

This transference, this disrespect for the law of
inviolable genre, also questions the legitimacy of the
cultural and aesthetic assumptions in genre mythology.
The Aristotelian claim that the nature of literature

represents reality, the nature of things, is put under

erasure. The pair physis/techne loses its sovereignty.

As Morson, far from Aristotle, points out, "[w]hat art

represents, it misrepresents."[32] The literary text

reveals the arbitrariness of the law of genre while

positing its own fictionality, its own claim to a reality

that is not necessarily a mirror image of the external

world. The literary text is concerned with what

Jean-François Lyotard calls the "postmodern condition" of

making reality, not with the humanistic centralization of

human experience.[33] One might say that the text makes

itself visible, readable, exactly within the margins --

the blank and silent, and therefore disruptive, spots --

that lie outside the center demarcated by humanism and the

tradition of literary representation it has fostered.

As Lyotard says, "[a] postmodern artist or writer is in

the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the

work he produces are not in principle governed by

preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according

to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories

to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are

what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and

the writer, then, are working without rules in order to

formulate the rules of what will have been done." [34]

The fixed law of genre, in other words, is inoperative in

literature when we deal with texts that do not follow the

mimetic mode. Literary texts engender their own genres,

transform the old genres, posit themselves as "discursive

formations"[35] that operate according to their very

difference. Such a discursive formation is the

contemporary long poem.

Chapter Three

After Poe:

The Contemporary Long Poem as a New Genre

Lola Lemire Tostevin, Double Standards:

 for a long time I couldn't decide whether to be story
 or poem   one voice or many   the poem always losing
 its way as it scribbles towards some equilibrium   while
 the story brackets lives   chains them for something it
 can recognize   a cast of thousands   costumes   soundtrack

Robin Blaser, Image-Nations 1-12:

        it is the interchange the form took
        like walking in and out of a star
        the words are left over   collapsed
        into themselves   in the movement

        between visible and invisible

George Bowering, Allophanes:

        Archaeology is random, snow castles
        are alright for lyric poems....

        The language
        is not spoken,
        it speaks....

        history is a thing. A dead language
                in which all words
                        describe, & refer.

Frank Davey, King of Swords:

        The death of Arthur continues.
        When I bought her black peignoirs

he was dying, when I wrote her aubades
he was dying, when I took ill at her refusal
his fever rose with mine, his bile
convulsed, upward....

Dying the death of Arthur, emblazoning ...

& the death of Arthur continues.

Phyllis Webb, Naked Poems:

        star fish
            fish star

Robert Kroetsch, Excerpts from the Real World:

This is the poem I didn't write. And not because I
wasn't writing. And not because it isn't a poem.
I'm beside myself, purely as a way to anticipate
the past. Endings have stems and blossoms.

Roy Kiyooka, The Fontainebleau Dream Machine:

the Hand of the unseen Poet turning into a
Palimpsest[1]

In grouping these poems together, I intend to suggest

a scene of writing that performs a kind of "pas de deux,"

both a dance of doubleness and a gesture holding binaries

away. That same dance also configures the reader's

adventure inside the circuit of these texts.

These and other long poems such as Robin Blaser's Holy

Forest, George Bowering's Geneve and Kerrisdale Elegies,

bpNichol's The Martyrology, Robert Kroetsch's Field Notes

and Advice to My friends, Daphne Marlatt's Frames,

Steveston and What Matters, Douglas Barbour's Visions of

my Grandfather, Michael Ondaatje's The Collected Works of

Billy the Kid, Dennis Cooley's Fielding and Bloody Jack,
Christopher Dewdney's Spring Trances in the Control
Emerald Night, Jon Whyte's two volumes of The Fells of
Brightness, and Lionel Kearns's Convergences, [2] are
just examples of how the long poem, while belonging to the
genus of poetry, cannot be identified with one of its
eidoi. By being both outside and inside the established
poetic genres, the long poem participates in the genre of
poetry while defying its limits, the generic laws of its
species. This double positioning marks the deconstructive
activity of the long poem. By challenging the monism of
genre, the long poem invites the reader to rethink its
laws. One could even go so far as to consider the long
poem, as we know it now, as mutant, a potentially new
species or at least a species engendered by generic shift.

These long poems -- and the list of course could grow
-- deliberately depart from the tradition of "bound
works"[3] by positing themselves as texts. Rosalie Colie
tells us that when writers start mixing genres they do so
by working primarily with large forms.[4]

I: Epic and the "New" Genre

The long poem has always attracted critical attention,
primarily because of the significance of individual long
poems: Metamorphoses, Beowulf, The Divine Comedy,

Chaucer's narratives, the medieval romances, Orlando
Furioso, Jerusalem Delivered, Paradise Lost and Paradise
Regained, Jubilate Agno, The Task, The Seasons, The
Prelude, Don Juan, Prometheus Unbound, In Memoriam and
The Princess, The Ring and the Book, Modern Love. In the
twentieth century, The Waste Land, The Cantos, Maximus
Poems, Paterson, and Gunslinger are examples, which
despite their formal differences, have also given rise to
many discussions about their length and its generic
ramifications. Only recently, however, have critics begun
to notice the peculiarities of the contemporary long poem.
Edgar Allan Poe was, perhaps, the first writer to draw our
attention to it, although he did so in a negative fashion.
In his essay "The Poetic Principle," he attacks the long
poem as a temporal discourse (or narrative) because the
"elevating excitement" that lyric poetry occasions "cannot
be sustained throughout a composition of any great
length." He goes further and argues that "if at any time,
any very long poem were popular in reality -- which I
doubt -- it is at least clear that no very long poem will
ever be popular again."[5] What is interesting is that
Poe defines the long poem by what it is not, that he
insists on seeing it as an aberration of lyric poetry, or
as a failure to sustain lyric intensity.

This definition by deduction does not stop with Poe.
Later critics who, unlike Poe, acknowledge the
significance of the long poem, also proceed by using

deductive, if not a priori methods. Michael Bernstein's
The Tale of the Tribe, a study seminal in its individual
readings of The Cantos, Paterson and The Maximus Poems,
asserts, for example, that the long poem is primarily
"verse epic," "a poem including history."[6] Although
Bernstein is quick to identify and focus on the radical
discontinuity (or differance) between these poems'
projects and that of the epic genre, his intricate
argument rests on the premise that epic is the index to
these poems. It is worth quoting him at some length so we
can see how he tries to accommodate this problem of
generic methodology.

"I want to offer," Bernstein says, "a series of
propositions characterizing epic verse, propositions based
upon an admittedly uneasy combination of a priori
conditions and a posteriori conclusions drawn from
specific texts." He then proceeds to define the epic as
(a) "a narrative of its audience's own culture," (b) one
that exists without "the trace of a single sensibility,"
(c) whose "proper audience ... is not the individual in
his absolute inwardness but the citizen as participant in
a collective linguistic and social nexus," and (d) whose
main intent is to offer "its audience lessons presumed
necessary to their individual and social survival."[7]
Bernstein echoes Livesay's, as well as Frye's and
Dickie's, emphasis on the public function of poetry, and
specifically of long poetic forms. His definition thus

far, despite his "admittedly uneasy" methods, simply
reiterates the traditional definitions of epic.

Interestingly, however, his anxiety about his method
surfaces not so much in the main body of his text as it
does in a footnote immediately following the definition of
epic.

> I have called my four characteristics an uneasy
> mixture of a priori criteria and a posteriori
> features, inductively [my emphasis] derived by
> considering what numerous specific examples of
> the form have in common. Although such a way of
> reaching a definition is unorthodox, it is also
> methodologically necessary, as is the subsumption
> of my own characteristics under Wittgenstein's
> notion of "family likeness." That is, no single epic
> need demonstrate all of these characteristics; neither
> does the presence of one of these features assure that
> a given poem is an epic.... Phenomenologically, the
> epic is a project, an intentional structure to be
> isolated and distinguished from other intentional
> structures such as the lyric or the novel.[8]

Footnotes, as acts of self-reading, are where authors most
commonly give themselves away, where the slippage between
writing and reading figures as a rhetorical turn revealing
the authors' uneasiness.[9] In the above footnote,
Bernstein deconstructs his own method: he argues that he
has proceeded inductively; yet the text proper of The Tale
of the Tribe shows that his induced definition is
imported into the long poem deductively.

It is this circularity that points to the gap in his
generic approach.

> If one is willing [he continues in the main text]
> to grant my characterization at least a provisional,
> heuristic value, the most immediate gain in
> considering The Cantos as an epic is that the category

is now shown to possess a recognizable, even if rather
elastic, meaning, whereas "long poem" tells us nothing
beyond the bulk of the volume in question. Moreover,
and this consideration is at least as crucial as the
four general criteria I have posited, by agreeing to
regard a poem as an epic (or, in the case of the texts
I will discuss, as three different attempts at an epic)
the reader's horizon of expectations is affected: the
responses which previous examples of the genre will have
developed become available to guide an initial reaction
to the new work. These expectations are, of course, also
known to the poet, who can then deliberately manipulate
them, can satisfy, thwart, or even seek to "correct" and
improve upon the conventions of epic decorum. In all
these instances the tradition of epic verse has provided
a series of pre-texts with which any new poem aligns
itself, pre-texts that also directly influence the
author's own understanding of how this poem should be
structured and what features it must include. To decide
to write an epic situates a certain contract between
author and reader, one that defines the text's and the
audience's mutual responsibility and generates an
intentional framework within which the particular
exchange, poem/reading, can proceed.[10]

The extent to which Bernstein priorizes the author's

intentions at the expense of the text's materiality

indicates the reductiveness of his generic approach.

Furthermore, his qualification of the author's intention

as an "attempt" points to a poetics of failure which, in

spite of its thematic appropriateness in the context of

modern and contemporary poetry, does not account for the

generic reformulations of that poetry. Thus he rejects the

term "long poem" because of its lack of specificity; its

reference to the poems' "bulk," as Bernstein puts it, is

immaterial to him. Yet their very length, as we will see,

is certainly what permits their peculiarities, signs of

their formal, structural and ideological distinctiveness.

Bernstein clearly, and perhaps organically, given his

biases, prefers the historicity of a genre (his appropriation of Wittgenstein's "family likeness") to the challenge of an emerging form. <u>The Cantos</u>, <u>Paterson</u> and <u>The Maximus Poems</u> do rely on history and the epic tradition, but it is reductive to ignore their other major concerns and the ways in which they interrelate with other genres. Bernstein's method reflects a generic fallacy common among critics: the most "recognizable" features of a text determine that text's genre; it seems to be easier to measure something new against familiar norms than to consider its newness, its generic strangeness. Such "attempts" at an epic definition of the long poem become even more problematic when one applies such a theory to contemporary long poems dealing with history.

For example, despite Lionel Kearns' reliance on historical facts and oral accounts concerning Captain James Cook, Captain George Vancouver and the Nootka Indians of the Pacific Coast, his <u>Convergences</u> from its opening radically modifies both epic conventions and the reader's assumptions about historical writing.

> They arrive. They are visible. They make themselves
> present to whatever was here before their coming.
> ... They are in this area at this precise moment,
> their spirits merging with the indigenous ghosts
> of the place.... Some of them disappear soon. Some
> stay on and for a time become components in a
> pattern that grows more stable before it too begins
> to change. It is neither good nor bad. It is flux.
> It flows in waves and engulfs us all, a process
> whose partial record we call history.
>
> A continuous sense of disorder and confusion
> descends and threatens my life. My desk is

covered with papers that I do not want to see.
What will I do with them? What will I do with all
this information? I want only to do my work, but
how am I to begin?... At this moment I know only
that I am here and that others have been here
before and have left something for me, as I leave
something for you. Time is a ritual exchange,
though the gifts move in a single direction.[11]

The present tense of the poem alters the reader's relation
to history as the history of the past becomes synchronous
with the moment of the poet's writing. History is seen as
istorein, the art of storytelling as it occurs, not as
conveying a privileged story closed off by tradition. The
poem's double column format -- similar to the format
Robert Kroetsch uses in The Ledger where he deals with the
documents of his family's background[12] -- enhances the
duplicitous and double relation to history: on the one
hand, it shows how the making of history coincides with
the making of poetry; on the other, it maintains the
difference between the historical and poetic discourses, a
difference further emphasized by the different scripts in
which the two columns are written.

We cannot thus afford to ignore the poet's reading and
scripting activities -- which converge in turn with our
own reading act -- that contribute to the quasi-epic
character of Convergences. At the same time, however, it
is important to distinguish between the poet's signature
in the text and what Bernstein calls authorial
intentionality. Convergences bears no signs of overriding
intentionality, of overdetermination. The incorporation of

the writing process into the text manifests the extent to
which the text is engendered during the act of writing,
and not pro-grammatically, namely by the writer following
preestablished generic norms. Kearns' frequent references
to the historical characters' "genes" and to the
"generations" that followed them foregrounds the extent to
which a genre disperses its "genes," its traces, as the
poet reformulates it. Kearns, contrary to Bernstein, shows
that historical material alone does not determine the
generic signature of the epic; instead, the focus in his
text lies on epos, the act of telling. We can surmise from
long poems such as Convergences, and also from the
postmodern novel and metaliterature on the whole, that
genre becomes its own dynamic interpretant, interpretant
in the sense of effecting its own changes, its own
manifestations of difference.

Bernstein's is the most rigorous study of the long poem
based on the epic. Although he makes no references in it
to Roy Harvey Pearce's classic The Continuity of American
Poetry, he advances the discussion of the long poem in
Pearce's chapter, aptly entitled "The Long View."[13]
Pearce mainly argues that since the American epic is an
"impossible task," a genre that defeats its own intent
primarily because of the lack of cultural myths diplaying
epic ethos, the "strategy [of the American epic] is to
make a poem which will create rather than celebrate a hero
and which will make rather than recall the history that

surrounds him. In the American epic what is mythified is the total milieu and ambiance."[14] I will not go on here to discuss in great length Pearce's argument because Paul Bové has already done so, and in a way that finds me almost in complete agreement with Bové, in his essay "The World and Earth of William Carlos Williams: Paterson as a 'Long Poem.'" Bové's Heideggerean reading stresses the "dehistoricization" of the long poem identified by Pearce, and, in discussing the subject's "dwelling" on earth, concludes that Paterson "is, from the beginning, a self-acknowledged failure as a quest-poem," a failure primarily because of the impossibility of writing the American epic.[15] My objection to Bové's case, and largely to all other epic approaches to the long poem, centers on its tendency readily and often inappropriately to identify a poet's quest as being guided by the epic ethos.

What I am suggesting is that, although we often encounter epic elements in the long poem -- whether as instances of mimesis praxeos or as features intended to subvert the epic genre --, we should not confuse the long poem's quest with that of the epic quest. Nor should we take it to be a motif exclusively belonging to poetry; quest in the long poem, I would like to propose, is a metonymy of desire. Desire is always born out of lack, out of absence. It signifies the universal human drive to seek a future of pleasure (pleasure not only in its libidinal

sense); it also functions as a corrective in the sense that it seeks to recuperate the lost past in the form of a desired (desirable) future. As a sign of lack, desire is inherent in the incompleteness of the present, but also negates the present. It is because of this that desire becomes the converging point of self and language.

As Anthony Wilden observes in "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other," "desire, as an absolute, is fundamentally the Hegelian desire for recognition ... as a (human) subject by requiring the other to recognize his (human) desire; in this sense one desires what another desires. And in the sense that desire is unconscious, one desires what the Other (here the unconscious subject) desires."[16] Recognition, which we ought to understand here both in its literary (Aristotle's anagnorisis) and psychoanalytic (anerkennung, reconnaissance / méconnaissance) senses, is accomplished in language. In Jacques Lacan's terms, the unconscious as "the discourse of the other" enables the subject to recognize its self and address its other by situating itself within language.[17] It is this kind of quest that constitutes the subject.

I shall quote Lacan's essay "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis" at some length because it is crucial to our understanding of the relationship between desire and

language. Lacan writes

> that the more the duty of Language becomes
> neutralized by its moving closer to information,
> the more Language is imputed to be laden with
> redundancies. ... This is highly instructive for
> us, since what is redundant as far as information
> is concerned is precisely that which does duty as
> resonance in the Word.
>   Here the function of Language is not to inform
> but to evoke. What I seek in the Word is the
> response of the other. What constitutes me as
> subject is my question. In order to be recognized
> by the other, I utter what was only in view of what
> will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name
> which he must assume or refuse in order to reply to
> me. I identify myself in Language, but only by
> losing myself in it like an object. What is realized
> in my history is not the past definite of what was,
> since it is no more, or even the present perfect of
> what has been in what I am, but the future anterior
> of what I shall have been for what I am in the
> process of becoming ...
>   The Word is in fact a gift of Language, and
> Language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but
> body it is. Words are trapped in all the corporeal
> images which captivate the subject....[18]

The subject's loss in language, discourse as enabling the subject's self-recognition, and desire as the constant element that activates this "process of becoming," are behind the quest motif, thereby devaluing the notion that quest and epic ethos operate as a pair.

Lacan's notion of the materiality of language and the temporality it expresses are of great relevance to our appreciation of the epic traces in the long poem. In discussing Breuer's and Freud's "Preliminary Communication" (1893), especially their treatment of anamnesis (recollection), a key concept in the epic, Lacan articulates the relation between the singular and plural

forms of _epos_: _epos_ in the singular signifies word, speech, tale, song, story, promise, saying, word; in the plural _(epei),_ it stands for epic poetry. Lacan discusses this relation by focusing on the subject's discourse:

> He [the subject] has simply recounted the event.
> But we would say that he has verbalized it ...
> that he has made it pass into the _verbe_ or more
> precisely into the _epos_ by which he brings back
> into _present time the origins of his own person._
> And he does this in a Language which permits his
> discourse to be understood by his contemporaries,
> and which furthermore presupposes their _present_
> _discourse._ Thus it happens that the recitation of
> the _epos_ may include some discourse of olden days
> in its own archaic or even foreign tongue, or may
> even pursue its course in _present time_ with all
> the animation of the actor; but it is like an
> indirect discourse, isolated inside quotation
> marks within the thread of the narration, and,
> if the discourse is played out, it is on a stage
> implying the presence not only of the chorus, but
> also of spectators.[19]

Lacan's focus on "the discourse of the other" as what produces the discourse of _nostos_ and _anamnesis,_ so pervasive in the epic genre, discloses how epic ethos is just one of the many webs of signifiers that desire assumes during the subject's "process of becoming." From the epic perspective, it becomes apparent now why Kearns' _Convergences_ and so many other long poems are written in the present tense. As opposed to the past tense of the epic and its usurping and totalizing effects, the present tense of the long poem validates not so much what is remembered but the act of remembering itself, not the "true" origins of a bygone past but the subject's "process

of becoming."

II: Lyric and the "New" Genre

   At the opposite end of the spectrum from epic there

are those who, whether working with or against Poe, trace

the long poem as a form emerging out of the lyric -- an

approach inviting a complex reinterpretation of the

lyric's search for identity. Critics like Marjorie

Perloff, Joseph N. Riddel, and M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M.

Gall suggest that we can study and understand the long

poem only with regard to how it unsettles our generic

expectations founded on the lyric.[20]

   Once again, Northrop Frye has anticipated our

discussion, this time of what he calls lyric and

epos.[21] Although when discussing Canadian poetry he

makes, as we have seen, a strong case for long poetic

"narratives," he deals with longer poetic forms other than

epic only in a scant fashion: "[p]urely narrative poems,

being fictions, will, if episodic, correspond to the

species of drama; if continuous, to the species of prose

fiction."[22] Frye's theory of genre, whose purpose, as

he states, "is not so much to classify as to clarify such

traditions and affinities," operates according to his

"thematic modes,"[23] thus "clarifying" the distribution

of mythos and ethos rather than designating the formal

and structural ways in which mythos and lexis come

together. Yet, aware as he is of the long poem as a
distinct poetic form, Frye acknowledges, albeit very
briefly, the awkward generic spot in which the long poem
finds itself, and to which he consigns it.

> We have the three generic terms drama, epic, and
> lyric, derived from the Greeks, but we use the
> latter two chiefly as jargon or trade slang for
> long and short (or shorter) poems respectively.
> The middle-sized poem does not even have a jargon
> term to describe it, and any long poem gets to be
> called an epic, especially if it is divided into a
> dozen or so parts, like Browning's Ring and the
> Book. ... Similarly, we call Shelley's Ode to the
> West Wind a lyric, perhaps because it is a lyric;
> if we hesitate to call Epipsychidion a lyric, and
> have no idea what it is, we can always call it the
> product of an essentially lyrical genius. It is
> shorter than the Iliad, and there's an end
> of it.[24]

The instability of definitions and the resistance of
certain poems to generic categorization give agility to
the circular structure of Frye's generic theory, but also
account for the metonymic progression in his discussion of
the lyric.

Even in his most recent statement on the subject,
"Approaching the Lyric," Frye still insists on the lyric's
"sense of the discontinuous," and returns to Poe's essay
and its influence on the poetics of French symbolism and
English modernism: "[t]his essay had, as is well known, a
tremendous influence on the French school that runs from
Baudelaire to Valery, and that influence made its way into
English poetry in the generation of Eliot and Pound. I
imagine that one reason for its influence was the belief

that the standard meters of continuous verse had exhausted their possibilities, so that narrative shifted to prose, while long poems, even the poems of that master of the interminable, Victor Hugo, tended to become increasingly fragmented."[25] Frye's observation is to the point, but it is regrettable that he does not pursue any further the relation between what he calls the lyric's discontinuity and the long poem's fragmentation. Given, however, his thematics of genre, the reader could infer that discontinuity is related to treatment of themes and fragmentation to presentation of form and structure. In Frye's scheme of things, as a result, the long poem thematically maintains its position of sub-genre -- now seen under drama, now under epic, but always situated within the lyric domain -- whereas structurally it is still in want of "clarification."

Perhaps it is because the lyric is such an embracing concept that so many critics of the long poem mistakenly tend, like Frye, to subordinate the long poem's particularities to the lyric's concerns. While it is true the lyric, or rather the lyrical impulse, is certainly inscribed within the long poem, the long poem is definitely not a simple extension or expansion of the lyric. Although such critical approaches are useful in isolating and studying the long poem, their value is limited exactly because they insist on examining the long poem from the outside. These approaches locate the form of

the long poem too deliberately within preexisting and often honored generic molds -- mainly those of the epic and the lyric -- a strategy which restricts our understanding of its drive and openness. Since I cannot possibly discuss here at great length what all such critics argue, I will focus on what I think is the most rigorous and full-scale lyrical approach to the long poem. I hope to show that the lyric which is part of the long poem is not the lyric that reached its apotheosis during the golden days of New Criticism, but a lyric fracturing its "wholeness," deconstructing its own lyrical impulse.

The first thorough attempt to define the long poem as a genre is The Modern Poetic Sequence by M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall.[26] Their opening statement in fact acknowledges the need to define the long poem as a "new" genre (p. 3). Ironically, what despite their intentions is immediately noticeable in their study, beginning with its title, is that they soon do away with the "long poem," for they consider it to be too "traditional" (p. 26) a form, an uninterrupted narrative which lacks the ability to "encompass" the "tonalities" of its perhaps "fragmented structures" (p. 26) into an "essential field of emotive reference" (p. 23). Since there hasn't been a generic study of the long poem as such, except in its specific configurations as epic, narrative and romance, their dismissal is hasty and not founded on carefully explored grounds. Thus Browning's "The Englishman in Italy,"

certainly a short long poem, and Tennyson's Maud, which
they value as poetry, "remain" for Rosenthal and Gall
"long poems in the traditional sense, despite being
fragmented in their quite different ways" (p. 26). The
problem here is not that the points of departure for
Rosenthal's and Gall's study lie in the nineteenth century
-- this awareness is important for developing a sense of
the tradition of the long poem -- but that they are
reluctant, to say the least, to acknowledge the openness
and diversity the long poem can accommodate. This openness
-- a quality they observe in The Cantos, The Waste Land,
Paterson, The Maximus Poems, and David Jones's The
Anathemata -- they arbitrarily see as being characteristic
of what they call "the modern poetic sequence" (my
emphasis).

"[T]he modern sequence," they argue, "is the decisive
form toward which all the developments of modern poetry
have tended. It is the genre which best encompasses the
shift in sensibility exemplified by starting a long poetic
work 'I celebrate myself, and sing myself,' rather than
'Sing, Goddess, the wrath of Achilles'" (p. 3). The shift
in sensibility they observe is fundamental in
understanding the generic character of the long poem, but
their term "sequence" is deployed in both too limited and
too loose a sense to be of any value from a generic
perspective. As a result they blur the features of the
territory they set out to map. This is how they define

the poetic sequence: it is "a grouping of mainly lyric poems and passages, rarely uniform in pattern, which tend to interact as an organic whole. It usually includes narrative and dramatic elements, and ratiocinative ones as well, but its structure is finally lyrical. Intimate, fragmented, self-analytical, open, emotionally volatile, the sequence meets the needs of modern sensibility even when the poet aspires to tragic or epic scope" (p. 9; my emphasis). The value-emphasis of their adverbs exposes the biases of their otherwise insightful study. A sense of nostalgia, the kind Lyotard sees as the informing drive behind "modern aesthetics," "the nostalgia for the unattainable," seems to characterize Rosenthal's and Gall's central definition -- especially their emphasis on the lyric -- as well as the rhetoric of their study.[27]

While agreeing with Rosenthal's and Gall's basic premise that the long poem as "new genre" encompasses other genres such as the lyric, the epic and the narrative, I take exception to their privileging of the lyric at the expense of the other generic elements. When they put under one generic umbrella Emily Dickinson's "Fascicles," Yeats's "Words for Music Perhaps," and Stevens's "The Auroras of Autumn" along with Pound's The Cantos, Williams' Paterson and Jones's The Anathemata, it is obvious that they are engaged not so much in a generic study as in a study of poetic sensibility that has little to do with any consideration of literary kinds. In this

respect, they are very close to Poe. Theirs would have been a legitimate approach had they not initially announced they were going to deal with a "new" genre. No matter how much the reader wants to take advantage of the flexibility inherent in all generic codes, s/he cannot adequately discuss, as Rosenthal and Gall do, within the same generic framework Olson's The Maximus Poems and Hardy's Poems of 1912-13.

On the one hand, then, Rosenthal and Gall seem to be talking early in their study about the serial lyric as a long poem, "the modern sequence pre-eminently" (p. 6), a poem which has transformed its "contamination" by elements belonging to other genres into a structure that resists frames and determining centers. Although they do acknowledge the disparate generic structure of the sequence, they see this "new" genre not as encompassing other poetic and non-poetic genres without intending to privilege any of them but as a genre which has fundamentally a "lyrical structure." In short, a study of the long poem or what they call a sequence which emphasizes its lyrical aspects at the expense of all other considerations is far from adequate.

On the other hand, as their study develops, it becomes clear that what they define as "lyrical structure" is not the structure of an extended lyric poem.

'[I]ts [lyrical structure's] object is neither to resolve a problem nor to conclude an action but to

achieve the keenest, most open realization possible. This realization is, naturally, rooted in a work's initial pressures but goes beyond them in scope. By initial pressures we mean the human occasion for the poem, its set of awareness, its situation (the felt reality within the poem), its condition of sensuous or emotional apprehension--whatever constitutes an emotional center energizing the poem, which moves towards a state of equilibrium that balances, resolves, or encompasses these pressures.... The ability to hold in balance conflicting and logically irreconcilable energies, and to identify their presence and intensity, is felt as mastery over contradiction, mastery by poetic conversion into a pattern of unruly but mobilized affects. (p. 11)

Obviously this definition has very little to do with the lyric poem as a genre. In fact, it has a lot to do with the "general" sensibility of literature, more specifically with New Critical tenets about harmony, balance, and reconciliation. It is strange Rosenthal and Gall should choose "lyrical structure" as the predominant feature of the "new" genre when they are aware of its much larger applicability: "[l]yrical structure, incidentally," they say, "is by no means restricted to poems. It is a characteristic of all literary genres: plays, novels, short stories, sermons, speeches, even prose exposition. It is, precisely, the concrete aesthetic dimension of any piece of verbal expression" (p. 15). Obviously, their position is not simply puzzling but indefensible, considering that they claim they practise a generic reading.

Yet, although "lyrical structure" overrides all generic distinctions, it still calls, by virtue of its

terms, for a close generic rapport with the lyric.
Despite the irreconcilable thematic and structural
contradictions Rosenthal and Gall observe in the modern
poetic sequence, the effect of its lyrical structure, they
argue, is that of an "organic form" (p. 7), a "lyrical
matrix," which is realized within an "essential field of
emotive reference" (p. 23). It is, ultimately, their
emphasis on this emotive locus that subordinates the
"activity" they notice in the sequence to the emotional
and psychological motivations of the poetic subject. Thus
they do not locate the poem as one of a kind, but as an
ex-pression of the poet, turning attention from intertext
to poet.

The thematic and structural activity Rosenthal and
Gall focus on becomes virtually lost, neutralized by the
"equilibrium" they rush to identify beneath the "surface
variations" (p. 307) of the sequence. Their privileging
of a deep structure -- the level on which the "organic
whole" of the poem, reminiscent of New Criticism again, is
realized -- is virtually imposed on the poem by the
readers. Rosenthal and Gall fail to take into
consideration that the fragmented form of some of the
sequences they examine does not re-present this simple
"wholeness."

A brief example might illustrate the limitations of
their assumptions. Although their reading of Jones's The
Anathemata is sympathetic and sensitive, it betrays their

discomfort with long poems -- and I use here the phrase

"long poem" deliberately -- which resist easy resolution,

or dissolution for that matter, within that vague field of

"emotive reference" (pp. 295-99, 306-07). One is tempted

to think that Rosenthal and Gall wistfully, if not

wilfully, ignore the various "signs" of Jones's writing

which he shares with his readers in the "Preface" to The

Anathemata. [28] They disregard the subtitle of the

poem, "fragments of an attempted writing," which

illustrates that Jones is not interested in reconciling

the contradictions of his poem or in drawing its

discontinuities within a single "continuum" (p. 307).

> There's conspiracy here:
> Here is birthday and anniversary, if there's
> continuity
> here, there's a new beginning. (p. 51)

Continuity or a moment of realization for Jones does not

mark a moment of "equilibrium" but the processual nature

of his long poem. Furthermore, Rosenthal's and Gall's

regret that Jones's poem lacks the "confessional

dimension" (p. 299) of the sequence is nothing other than

disregard for what the poet himself discusses in his

"Preface": "one is trying to make a shape out of the very

things one is one-self made" (p. 10). By ignoring the

complexity of the poem's form, its layout on the page, its

intricate structure as well as its various levels of

discourse, Rosenthal and Gall search, bewildered, for a

lyrical self as opposed to a self that defies any
centralization of its "emotive" and "psychological
tonalities."

Their emphasis on "lyrical structure" brings them, for
a moment, close to Joseph Riddel's argument that "the
theory of the lyric, rather than being antithetical to any
notion of the long poem, indeed is the only theory of the
long poem" (p. 466). But this point is as close as their
arguments come. For Riddel, unlike Rosenthal and Gall,
does not look for the organic whole that unifies the
fragmented nature of the sequence; he focuses instead on
the lyric's constant questioning of its own form and
structure. Riddel does not simply insist on the workings
of lyric in the long poem, he is interested in the aporia
the lyric generates,

> that plays through all language, and inevitably
> produces doubled readings (the undecidable) or
> defines literature as that kind of text which
> can never be reduced to a closed spatial reading,
> either as a dialectical or a self-mirroring play.
> ... The lyric, then, undoes its own frame, or
> repeats the "force" of framing with its own
> metaphorical violence--a play of displacements
> which the modern "long poem" only makes explicit.
> The lyric is irreducibly temporal, a text never
> present to itself. It represents the flaw of
> myths of origin.
>   Perhaps, then, the "long poem" has become our
> model of "reading" (or better, re-reading) as
> decentering.
>   (pp. 466-67)

Athough this last statement by Riddel, the long poem as
"our model of 'reading' (or better, re-reading) as

decentering," like Frye's statements, extends the lyric beyond strict generic specifications, it does so in a way that gives us a different understanding of how the lyric and the long poem converge, however contradictory this convergence might seem. In Rosenthal's and Gall's formulation the lyric is no longer considered to be a preestablished genre. It engenders its own tropes, generates its own reading.

Riddel is not alone in positing the lyric as a non-genre vis a vis the long poem. Extending Frye's theory of genres, Andrew Welsh also argues in Roots of Lyric, that "[l]yric is...less a particular genre of poetry than a distinctive way of organizing language, and we can see in Williams' Paterson and Pound's Cantos that there are basic conflicts between the traditional demands of a long poem and the very different organization of a lyric-centered language."[29] Welsh does not bother to tell us what the "traditional" demands of the long poem are, but he moves ahead of Frye when he relates the lyric to certain linguistic structures that can be found in the long poem. Lyric as a nongenre is not, in contrast to its positioning in Frye's generic theory, constituted by the contract the poet and the public sign about writing and reading conventions. Rather, for Walsh, it comes forward as an aspect of the poem's linguistic phenomenality.

In this respect, both Riddel and Welsh seem to move toward Paul de Man who states that "[t]he lyric is not a

genre, but one name among several to designate the defensive motion of understanding, the possibility of a future hermeneutics. From this point of view, there is no significant difference between one generic term and another: all have the same apparently intentional and temporal function."[30] The motion de Man talks about is the troping of language, the rhetorical turns the reader has to follow in order to become part of the poem's intelligibility. According to de Man, the lyric moves away from "description" toward the "materiality of an inscription." "Description, it appears," de Man says, "was a device to conceal inscription," a device that revealed only the phenomenality of the lyric subject's experience.[31] The lyric, then, signifies a certain inscription, which is part of its intelligibility, and a certain reading.

This reading, since it breaks through the lyric's "description," is not an act of mimesis; instead, it is what de Man calls an "allegory of reading." In the de Manian lexicon, "[a]llegory means the rhetorical process by which the literary text moves from a phenomenal, world-oriented to a grammatical, language-oriented direction."[32] The trajectory of such a reading illustrates a different functioning of the lyric poem's self-referentiality, one that does not thwart, but changes the direction of, interpretation, one that discloses its own contradictions.

It is this kind of lyric that the long poem

encompasses: not a particular kind of genre which is

relatively short, articulated by a single speaker's

apostrophe, framed by a specific occasion, and focusing on

the speaker's emotive locus; but the self-referentiality

that binds the subject's writing and reading acts as they

are materialized through language.[33]   The pure short

lyric, a "monological form" according to Tilottama Rajan,

does not allow the subject's otherness to speak

through.[34] Only when it is incorporated into the

larger structure of the long poem where it interacts with

other elements of the long poem does it articulate

difference.

What Rajan says about genre sums up the tension between

the epic and lyric readings of the long poem.

> A semiotics of genre, to complement the structural
> study of genre begun by Aristotle and the thematics
> of genre completed by Frye, would see the pure lyric
> as using its proximity to song in order to mute the
> gaps between signifier and signified by conferring
> on the words the illusory unity of a single voice.
> By contrast, narrative, which dramatizes the gaps
> between what is told and the telling of it, is
> always already within a world of textuality, of
> interpretation rather than origination. A more
> complex case is that of drama, which at first sight
> seems to share the lyric proximity to the order of
> voice. In fact drama deconstructs that order, and
> reveals the textuality even of voice. [35]

The long poem, as Rajan's remarks implicitly confirm,

although not necessarily narrative in form, has the

ability to absorb into its large structure lyric,

dramatic, and other disparate elements, thus creating a world of difference.

III: A Genre in the Present Tense

The long poem, as we have seen, cannot be read with the single purpose of defining it. Instead, it invites the reader's act to merge with its own textuality. As Robert Kroetsch says in a statement he made on Seed Catalogue,

> The writing the writing the writing.
> Fundamentally, I mean. The having written
> excludes the reader. We are left with
> our selves as critics. We want to be readers.
> The continuing poem makes us readers.[36]

If we were accustomed to thinking of reading as a genre, the long poem would offer a "reading" par excellence. "Writing," as Culler says, "can itself be viewed as an act of critical reading, in which the author takes up a literary past and directs it toward a future."[37] The long poem then as a re-reading of writings, a re-writing of readings. But if we are invited to consider the poet of long poems as a reader, there is no specific and legitimate reason to assume that the long poem's decentering is the "explicit" manifestation Riddel finds in the lyric's own undecidability.

George Bowering's account of his process of writing Allophanes explains why the long poem derives its energy

from more than one generic source.

> What I want to hear is the voice that enters my
> secluded study. I don't care, really, to enquire
> of it where it is coming from. If it is loud enough
> it is all round one.... I am aware of myself as
> audience....
>   As I get older, I come more to realize that my
> activity as a poet composing is an extension of my
> desirous childhood Christianity. I want like crazy
> to get here alone & hear God's voice. I mean it. If
> I hear the gods instead, I am acknowledging, like
> it or not, my adulthood.[38]

The poet as audience cannot determine what s/he hears nor
can s/he determine in what genre "voices" or "re-readings"
mark the field of the long poem. The nostalgia that we
detect in Bowering's statement -- the same kind of nostos
that informs the heterogeneous movements of other long
poems such as The Cantos, many of the long poems by Jack
Spicer as well as most Canadian long poems from Al Purdy's
In Search of Owen Roblin and Eli Mandel's Out of Place to
Daphne Marlatt's Steveston, Douglas Barbour's visions of
my grandfather and Jon Whyte's The Fells of Brightness --
is not something that can be expressed through the lyric
alone, no matter how much the lyric generates its own
aporias. As Eli Mandel puts it, "[i]f the poets tended to
see the long poem as a form, especially a superior form
escaping the limitations of the lyric, its critics tended
to see it rather as 'writing.'"[39]

Behind this longing, behind this writing of
re-readings, there are also traces of the epic and the
non-epic narrative traditions, traces which are often

translated into the compulsion simply to tell a story.
This is how Roy Kiyooka, for instance, points toward the
non-lyrical decentering of these other poetic traditions:
"the slowly turning propeller of our adamant History
proposes that the yet-to-be-written Canadian Epic will be
a wind-borne series of discreet images, 4000 lines long,
with an ocean at either end for ballast. everytime I
re-read the F.D.M. [his long poem The Fontainebleau Dream
Machine] ... I re-invent myself. 'it' is a musical score
for a small ensemble. a window, sky-light an open
door."[40] And Riddel too acknowledges the epic element
in the contemporary long poem: "[T]he (modern) long poem
originates in this space [space an an elliptical metaphor]
and represents it; represents the undoing of the dream of
the epic to produce a myth of origins, to return upon
itself" (p. 477). But the lyric and epic elements in the
long poem do not, as we have seen, make it what Morson
calls a "boundary work ... uncertain which of two mutually
exclusive sets of conventions governs."[41] The long
poem, although it fosters plural meaning, is not, to use
Morson's word, "[d]oubly decodable," that is, "the same
text becom[ing], in effect, two different works."[42]
Neither the lyric nor the epic can be privileged over the
other, for the long poem derives its energy from the
interaction of these, among other, generic elements.

Riddel, however, as I have noted, sees the energy of
the long poem as deriving predominantly from the lacunae

one finds in the lyric as "an analytical machine which put[s] itself in question" (p. 476). But although, as Riddel argues, the long poem does transgress the limits of genre, its transgression, I am proposing, should not be confused with the flexibility of a given genre's codes. Generic limits are indeed elastic: they can stretch, extend, fold within and without. Nonetheless, the long poem transgresses not the limits of a single genre but the limits, the frames, of various genres, such as those of the lyric, the epic, the narrative, the dramatic, the documentary and the prose poem. Only when the reader remains constantly attentive to the dynamics of the various generic components of the long poem, will s/he do justice to its protean form.

The long poem enters the margins of these genres by appropriating the very concept of genre, by extending itself within its own margins. The proliferation of its forms questions the classic notion of a unified genre. The flexibility of the limits (principles, codes) set between genres, their readiness (desire) to bend, tease the long poem, provoke its textuality to transgress them, to bypass Aristotle's guardian pen. The long poem has the ability to accommodate through its form and within its structure radically disparate elements. These elements, although they also appear in their purer forms in the genres from which they are absorbed, display within the field of the long poem the extent to which its textuality continues

(conserves) and parodies (reverses) their traditional functions.[43] Thus the long poem breaks the hymen of its own genre. Making no claims on generic purity, it solicits other poetic genres. The breaking of a genre's hymen (the violation of its purity) marks the breaking of the logocentric model of tying a literary work to a center whose limiting power lies exactly in the fact that it does not shift. This penetrated hymen releases the center from its fixity and as a result releases as well the stuff of language, gives birth to writing as genre.

The simultaneous presence of these disparate generic elements -- genre as writing -- and their heterogeneous interrelationships mark what Bakhtin would call the "polyphonic" nature of the long poem.[44] As a polyphonic structure, the long poem "novelizes" the function of the genres deployed in it. Through their "novelization" these genres, according to Bakhtin, "become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally -- this is the most important thing -- the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)."[45] It is apparent that Bakhtin's novelization theory considers the "novel

[to be] the only developing genre,"[46] and this may
lead one to question the applicability of his theory to
the long poem. Although I am not suggesting at all that
one could replace in Bakhtin's study the novel with the
long poem without risking misapprehension, what I see as
being pertinent for my purposes here is that his genre
theory rests on the same observation which illustrates the
long poem's idiosyncratic nature, that of a "literature
... caught up in the process of 'becoming.'"[47]

In this respect, the novelization of the long poem
designates two things: first, its malleability, namely its
continuous resistance to any kind of formalized closure
and its propensity to assume various configurations; and
secondly, its tendency to absorb diverse generic elements,
a tendency which results in the recontextualization of
these literary kinds. As Davey remarks, "[e]ven some of
what Livesay termed documentary may perhaps more precisely
be seen as appropriation, re-contextualization, literary
intervention, historical revision, textual subversion,
improvement, conversion. A dialectic occurs here, but not
so much between the 'objective facts' (presuming that
there can be 'objective facts') and the subjective
feelings of the poet as between the original texts and the
new one."[48] Although Davey talks here about the use of
documentary material, his statement could as easily be
applied to the long poem's re-contextualization of other
genres. Thus the presence and the heterogeneous

interrelationships of the various literary kinds of poetry found in the long poem do not imply that we simply encounter these genres in their traditional forms; their re-contextualization within the field of the long poem marks these genres as the inner signs of the long poem itself.

This is precisely the reason why a generic reading of the long poem should not valorize one of its incorporated genres at the expense of another. The long poem does not simply work against any attempt to retrieve the generic matrix of literary texts -- namely the specific genres that engender them -- but it also parodies the nostalgia for retrieving generic origins while incorporating this search within its own textual body. The implicit denial of an overriding single structure of generic authority posits the long poem as a metagenre, an instance of <u>mise en abyme</u>, a genre without a genre.

The long poem, then, is a trace-structure of the signs of all these genres. In other words, it is no longer an <u>eidos</u> but the act of <u>eidenai</u> itself, not a fixed object but a mobile event, the act of <u>knowing</u> its limits, its demarcated margins and incorporated literary kinds. Thus in a non-Aristotelian context genre as <u>genus</u> generates species, the spacing of margins in such a way that <u>eidos</u> ceases to be a kind of a species and becomes the kind of its "other."

The otherness of this "new" genre obviously rests, as

Davey alludes, on the intertextuality of genres. We should

not, however, restrict intertextuality in this context to

mean allusion, as Michael Riffaterre defines it, or

transference of certain signifying forces from one text or

genre into another, as Kristeva herself defines it,[49]

but mimesis and simultaneous alteration of these forces.

Intertextuality is too general a term to articulate the

dynamics that shape the long poem. I would like to propose

another term, that of parallaxis, to signify the

particular instances of intertextuality that characterize

the long poem as genre in a state of continuous

"becoming."

Parallaxis derives etymologically from para + allaxis.

It is the polysemy of these roots that make parallaxis a

useful tool in discussing specific functions of

intertextuality in the long poem: para- means beside,

towards, going by, beyond, contrary to, in comparison

with; allaxis means change, interchange, making other than

it is, giving in exchange. Parallaxis then signifies the

range of forces that build up a tradition, the dynamics

that gravitate one text or genre toward another and which

determine the extent of influence, namely the

interdependence of texts as well as the autonomy of

individual texts. The parallactic movement is accomplished

through transference by alteration and variation, a

transference based on sameness as well as difference.

Parallaxis, as an extension and qualification of

intertextuality, delineates, I believe, the dialogue
between texts and genres with greater precision, while its
particular configurations evoke the diversity of the
dialogic play at work. It indicates an exchange
(expropriation), the shifting of text and genre in
alternating contexts, a shift and change which often
involve corruption of origins, deviation from an original
or originary point.

It is parallaxis that points to the long poem's
underwriting of the monumentalization of literature
generally, and of genres specifically. What motivates this
underwriting (writing under erasure) is the long poem's
intent to disclose otherness, namely to ex-pose the
ungrammaticality suppressed by the grammar of the
particular genres that comprise it.

The long poem accomplishes the inscription of otherness
by its use of present tense.[50] The present tense calls
for an inversion of the function of lyric, epic, narrative
and other elements of the long poem. It is used to explore
new complexities of the lyric utterance in relation to the
subject that enunciates it. Although many lyrics, as
George Wright observes, are also written in the present
tense, the present tense of the long poem operates
differently.[51] Sharon Cameron's response to Wright's
argument helps us illustrate some of these differences:

> this present [the lyric's present] seems to
> contain a multiplicity of temporal features
> that we ordinarily think of as mutually ex-

clusive. It is past-like as well as indicative
of future. It locates action temporally, but
not in time as we know it. Although timeless,
this present tense implies duration.... A
present that houses the past as well as the
future and that, moreover, evades spatial
location and fixture is very close to the
creation of a temporal myth built between
past and future, real and imagined time, this
world and some other.[52]

The present tense of the lyric, even when it is not meant

to re-present the occurrence of its subject matter's

occasion, is fixed on the occasion of its writing while,

paradoxically, remaining silent about it. As Cameron

suggests, in spite of the spatial and temporal

dislocations incurred by it, the present tense of the

lyric, forgetting as it does its verbal materiality,

expresses not so much the present as the permanence of

myth. "Given the desire," Cameron remarks, "to frame the

present in the stasis of perception, it is easy to see why

the lyric confuses present tense with the presence that

... will bring them [temporal fusions] to a halt."[53]

In contrast, the present tense of the long poem does not

seek to fuse other temporal dimensions nor is it its

objective to evoke metaphysical or mythical presence. The

only presence it speaks of is that of the materiality of

language, namely the process of the writing act, the

progression of present action.

The materiality of language implies that language is

not representation but an act, an act that concretizes

perception. Its materiality is that of the material of

signifiers which correspond to conceptual signifieds. The present tense, then, whether it occurs in its simple or progressive form, is in the long poem the vehicle of the process of signification itself. Since, as I stated earlier, the process of signification is inscribed only within a textual system, as opposed to the system of a work, the long poem's present tense is one figuration of its textuality. Beyond this, the present tense in the long poem is reinforced by the present tense of our reading act. The temporality of the reading act coincides, in turn, with the "allegory of reading" inscribed in the long poem.

The poet, engaged in an ongoing process -- a process which accounts in part for the length of the long poem -- writes/speaks in the present tense through a dialogized, in contrast to the lyric's monologic, "I." The traditional dichotomy between spectator and actor, signifier and signified, is erased. The two functions become interchangeable, the distance between them breaks down, the writer finds herself/himself at times lost in a fluid world where everything is possible. This is an experience we too share as readers. When we enter into the present-tense world of the long poem, we cannot tell with certainty to what extent our reading graphs our recognition of the poem's own inscription or becomes an "allegory" of its own interpretation.

A further consequence of the long poem's unfolding in

the present is the decentering of the self, the
questioning of the Cartesian ego. The present tense,
because it expresses only a given moment's occurrence and
meaning, and because it remains by definition inconclusive
and constantly moving, designates the tentativeness of the
enunciating subject, makes the poet aware of the
polyphonic and inconclusive nature of the self.

The dialogic enunciation of the self and the aporias
it gives rise to explain the loss of epic distance in the
long poem. The epic as a genre is marked by the
transferral of a represented world into the past. The
long poem, by contrast, attempts to deal with the
inconclusive present. It recalls the past not so much as a
presence entirely lost, but as a presence which is
unavoidably what in its different configurations the long
poem inscribes. It is, in part, through this attempt to
retrieve the past that the long poem practises a critique
of the culture that produces it; for the long poem seeks
to explore not the tradition of the past but its
genealogy. Thus from the monologic worldview represented
in the epic, from the intense "cry of the heart" in the
lyric, we move to a worldview that continually affirms the
present.

The grounding of the self in the present contributes
to the discursive form of the long poem. That
discursiveness results partly from the long poem's
preoccupation with locality, and partly from its mode of

enunciation. Although locality is a concern pervading Canadian literature in general, its treatment in the long poem recasts it as one of its distinct themes. Locality in the poem, together with the documentary material that often goes along with it, may designate the place that generates narrative and where narrative events occur, but more than that it causes its own temporalization and the liberation of documents from fixed interpretation.

At the same time locality also becomes the _field_ of writing, that is, the space where the long poem's inscription and process are thematized. In a similar way, the long poem's discursiveness marks the loss of authorial distance, which interrelates poet and locality. The main consequence of the loss of authorial distance is that the single-minded narrative of the epic, together with its implicit overview, is erased as well. As a result, narrative is replaced by discourse, by enunciation itself. The linearity of narrative now takes the form of a dialogue between different levels of discourse and genres that privilege an awareness of the writing act while speech still maintains its significance through the voice's textuality. All these features -- locality, the decentered self, and discourse -- characterize the indeterminacy of meaning and the resistance to closure in the long poem of contemporary Canada.

<u>In Practice</u>

Chapter Four

Polygraph of Itineraries:

Locality in the Long poem

Although the long poem is largely defined by the

present progressive tense, it is not a genre that lacks a

specific ground. Locality in the long poem is of

paramount importance for a variety of reasons. It

determines the formal construct of the long poem as a

text; it is the ground, the field within which this

textuality is realized. Beyond this reflexivity, however,

locality in the long poem functions also as a Canadian

signature. Frye's succinct, and rhetorical, question

"where is here?" expresses the concerns of the

contemporary long poem.

Locality is the trace that spells out the concern, so

ubiquitous in Canadian literature, with place. Locality

gives the long poem its spatiality, and because this

spatiality has a fluid ground and flexible limits it does

not stand dialectically in regard to the long poem's

temporality. Locality in the long poem is not employed for

the sake of creating a setting. Instead, it operates as an

intrinsic generic element thematized within the discursive

formation of the long poem. In this chapter I will examine

the concern with locality, the causes that give rise to
this concern, and the various ways in which locality is
thematized by focusing on long poems by Robert Kroetsch,
Daphne Marlatt, and Eli Mandel.

I: Origins without Beginnings / Poems without Endings

     The following statement by Robert Kroetsch affirms one
of the fundamental manifestations of locality in the long
poem:

> What has come to interest me right now is what I
> suppose you can call the dream of origins.
> Obviously in the prairies, the small town and the
> farm are not merely places, they are remembered
> places. When they were the actuality of our lives,
> we had realistic fiction, and we had almost no
> poetry at all. Now in this dream condition, as
> dream-time fuses into the kind of narrative we call
> myth, we change the nature of the novel. And we
> start, with a new and terrible energy, to write
> the poems of the imagined real place.[1]

Kroetsch's "dream of origins" speaks of the desire to
locate an origin, a desire ingrained in the Canadian
literary imagination. When this desire, often in effect a
memory of colonialism, privileges absence, it locates
origins in a place that has not been directly or recently
experienced -- Europe, the Old World. In Kroetsch's case,
however, the desire for origins does not privilege the
place from which his ancestors came, but rather the place
to which they came, the place he was born in -- the small

prairie town, the New World.

Kroetsch's early long poems -- The Ledger and Seed
Catalogue -- deal with a place he has known personally.
Yet the tension that generates the desire for place occurs
when the poet no longer inhabits his place of origins. As
E.D. Blodgett puts it, in his essay "The Book, Its
Discourse, and the Lyric: Notes on Robert Kroetsch's Field
Notes," "[t]he acceptance of origin in Kroetsch's text ...
is manifested primarily in the integrative arrangement of
texts on the page: the page, by becoming a picture-space,
immediately makes of history, memoir, and the play of
origin a static activity in the temporal sense."[2]
Kroetsch's "dream of origins" is a dream of a real place
experienced in time, its reality being reenacted by what
Blodgett calls the "picture-space," the visual and
therefore spatial arrangement of language on the page.

The awareness Blodgett describes is not necessarily a
static awareness. Kroetsch's "dream of origins" is also a
dream of motion, ultimately a dream of dream-as-desire
that defines itself by means of dislocation. Thus Heisler
(Kroetsch's home town) becomes Bruce County (the place
where some of his ancestors first settled), "the green
poem,"[3] which becomes Heisler again, which becomes in
turn upstate New York, the prairie, Nanaimo; which becomes
Winnipeg, then Banff, Greece, China, Germany, and so on.
Locality in Kroetsch's work is informed and shaped by
"arrivals ... departures ... arrivals" (FN, p. 29).

Dislocation opens up the way toward the "imagined real place" and occasions the writing process that recasts it.

Seed Catalogue does not display an epic nostos as Mandel's Out of Place does, for Kroetsch does not undertake a journey of nostalgia. His arrivals and departures mark, to a great extent, the movements of a nomad, the nomad as poet. "We write mandalas," Kroetsch says, "towards a cosmology that cannot be located. Towards a cosmology that, possibly, we do not wish to locate. Like Wordsworth, we spend years on the prelude. Like Stevens, we make notes towards a supreme fiction."[4] Memory and dreaming become the substitutes for the homeward journey. As the title of one of Webb's poems reminds us, "The Place Is Where You Find It."[5]

Although Kroetsch has always acknowledged Williams' influence on him, Seed Catalogue is not as close to Paterson as the reader might expect. Paterson, while proclaiming the significance of locality and, at the same time, shifting from setting to setting, remains located within the same ground. The city of Paterson, the library, the waterfalls, the park, the doctor's office, are all firmly mapped within the territory which fills Williams with "local pride." In contrast, Kroetsch's treatment of locality in his long poem, like that of his contemporaries, indicates a parallactic treatment of locality by way of a continuous displacement. "The placing of place," he says, "but not as in the American poem of

(Paterson, Gloucester) place." The placing of place
inscribes not only what the eye sees -- "(place: the eye /
consumes itself: time)"[6]-- but what the poet's gaze
fails to grasp, namely the absence in the Canadian
landscape. Absence in and of place is the parallaxis of
place in the long poem. The paradox of its inscription is
in keeping with the long poem's aesthetics, its generic
contradictions and its ideological and cultural traits.
The poet can fully inscribe absence only in the present
tense.

It is this parallaxis of locality which explains why
in "Stone Hammer Poem" the stone becomes the measure of
place and writing process alike.

> 1.
> ...
> the stone is
> shaped like the skull
> of a child.
>
> 2.
> This paperweight on my desk
>
> where I begin
> this poem   was
>
> found in a wheatfield
> lost (this hammer,
> this poem).
> ...
>
> 7.
> The poem
> is the stone
> chipped and hammered
> until it is shaped
> like the stone
> hammer, the maul.
>   (FN, pp. 13-6)

The stone -- by means of image, simile, assertion, metaphor, metonymy and repetition -- is object and poem and place and dream, all at the same time. "This won't / surprise you," says Kroetsch: "My grandfather / lost the stone maul"; "he [Kroetsch's father] found the stone maul / on a rockpile"; "I keep it / on my desk / (the stone)" (FN, pp. 17, 18, 19). The stone as a found, lost and retrieved object triggers the poet's imagination and becomes transfigured into its namesake, a "found" poem. It functions as a heuristic poetic device that sets up spatial limits while breaking down the finiteness of geography; it helps the poet locate himself within a familial territory which, significantly enough, lacks a center. The grandfather and the father may represent the phallogocentric tradition, but the poet enunciates their presence in the past tense: they are the figures that delimit the beginning of this tradition as well as the place of loss. The past, and what it represents, is framed by the poet's present, the present tense of his location and writing process alike.

The loss of center-as-place and of place-as-center, the absence of demarcated boundaries, posits the "dream of origins" as the only substitute for real, geographical place. Russell Brown, in his essay "Seeds and Stones," observes that "that loss is a precondition of the eventual finding."[7] It is indeed a precondition of finding a place, but the eventuality Brown is looking for is simply

not there. Or, it is but at the same time it is not.

Kroetsch's obsession with beginnings defies any eventual

finding of place because he resists telos. His long

poems, although they stand by themselves, form "a

continuing poem" (FN, title page), the present participle

as adjective marking the mazing path he follows in his

attempt to find a place.

The "doubleness," according to Brown, which loss and

finding seem to suggest is also reiterated by Robert

Lecker in his book Robert Kroetsch:

> in [Kroetsch's] long poems, as in the best verse in
> Stone Hammer Poems, we note several points of
> tangency and ongoing concern: an involvement with
> establishing through poetic language a particularly
> Canadian and western sense of place, a desire to
> represent a peculiarly double sense of Canadian
> experience, and a need to find a sense of personal
> and public origins that may be dreamed by the poet
> whose task it is to write his world into existence.[8]

Lecker, although his argument is more elaborate, makes the

same mistake as Brown. He discusses Kroetsch's individual

"long poems" but ignores Field Notes, the "continuing

poem" which, by gathering the individual poems together,

transcontextualizes them. Similarly, Brown states about

"Stone Hammer Poem" that it "consoles us [about its sense

of loss] in rather traditional fashion by suggesting that

there are recompenses -- the most notable of which is the

creation of this poem."[9] But Kroetsch writes,

"[s]ometimes I write / my poems for that / stone hammer"

(FN, p. 19; my emphasis). If the "-s" of "poems" suggests

anything it is not a doubleness but a plurality. The poems
can be read individually as long as they remain
independently published. When they are published together,
however, we cannot help but consider their parallaxis.
Their internal echoes, contradictions, reversals, all
manifest the plurality of Kroetsch's sense of place.

The poet finds the lost place he dreams about only to
lose it again. "Death as deferral only, as another grammar
of delay," he states in his epigrammatic way; "[t]he poem
itself, surfacing. The poem of the place, the place lost.
Things fall into place in the poem."[10] This delay is
evidence of the generic function of locality. Locality in
the long poem, although a central concern, is
decentralized. And for Kroetsch specifically, locality
lies outside the logocentric tradition: "[t]he problem of
the writer of the contemporary long poem is to honor our
disbelief in belief -- that is, to recognize and explore
our distrust of system, of grid, of monisms, of
cosmologies perhaps, certainly of inherited story -- and
at the same time write a long work that has some kind of
(under erasure) unity."[11] Kroetsch refuses to be
seduced by the soothing promises of the logocentric
tradition that say origins can be found. The very act of
finding a fixed place of belonging is put, as he says,
under erasure.

"Mile Zero," as it appears in its rewritten and
augmented form in Advice to My Friends, the second

volume of his "continuing poem,"[12] visualizes formally

and structurally this erasure. The incomplete lines that

attempt to frame the pages by forming parallelograms, the

diagonal lines that point to the parallaxis of the facing

texts, graph that erasure: erasure not only because they

resemble the Heideggerian and Derridian "X" crossing out a

word in order to release its coerced meaning, but because

they suspend (visually and verbally), and therefore

subvert and re-contextualize the original version of the

text. Blodgett's "picture-space" comes again to mind. But

here erasure erases itself and becomes its own supplement,

for Kroetsch not only maintains what is deleted within the

text, he also comments on his erasure tactics:

> *I have removed from this stanza the single line
>
> (her breasts were paradigms)
> (originally in parenthesis, as indicated) because
> I am somewhat offended by the offhand reference
> to paradigm.... The concern with nostos is related
> to a long family history of losses: e.g., the
> paternal side of the family landing in New York
> in June, 1841, aboard the Pauline, and the mother
> of the large Kroetsch family, settled in Waterloo
> Country, Ontario, a few years thereafter widowed,
> the early death of the poet's mother in Alberta,
> a century after that first un-homing. Both quest
> and goal become paradigmatic (RK).
> (AF, p. 36)

Origins can be dreamt, but they are unoriginal; they exist

only as traces that contain the lost, deleted place

without formalizing it.

"The trace," according to Derrida, "is not only the

disappearance of origin ... it means that the origin did

not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin.... we know that the concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace."[13] Kroetsch engages himself in a continuous search for an origin, but his search is informed less by nostalgia for a lost place and more by a desire for difference. "Un-homing" is the name he gives to locality. Hence the metonymic route he follows.

It is significant that Advice to My Friends ends with a poem about the poet's mother, who died when he was thirteen, its last line being "Mother, where are you?" (AF, p. 142). After a series of long poems searching for origins both in, and in places other than, Canada, Kroetsch has traced the trace of matrilinear origins. It is not a coincidence that it has taken him a decade since his first long poem (1975) to write about his mother in "Sounding the Name" and "The Poet's Mother" (1985). He comments on this himself in 1981 when he says in "Mile Zero": "is not the mother figure the figure at once most present in and most absent from this poet's work?" (AF, p. 36). Kroetsch's delay tells how place can be lost, misplaced and displaced, even hidden by his own patriarchal tradition. The simultaneous presence and absence form a teasing figure, the shape delay takes. This is why the place he reaches by tracing his mother's

presence, a presence also put under erasure, is only the
space a question mark takes. As he says, "[d]elay is the
mother of beauty. Delay can become a misnaming of
death."[14]

Appropriately, the question "Mother, where are you?" is
answered by the questioning of this question, the very
last poem of Advice to My Friends:

> envoi (to begin with)
>
> There is no real
> world, my friends.
> Why not, then,
> let the stars
> shine in our bones?
>
> (AF, p. 143)

The last, at least so far, sign of Kroetsch's continuing
poem is, again, and almost predictably so, given his
aesthetics, a question mark, a closure under erasure. The
signifier as place cannot become self-identical with the
signifier of the nostalgic desire that drives the poet
toward a place. Kroetsch dreams about the
signifier-as-place not as topos but as tropos. It is only
as real as the forever receding and appearing figure of
mise en abyme. The sign as trace delimits the nonoriginary
boundaries of place, its freeplay speaking the equivocal
desire that sets the poet after new beginnings. It is
important that the "nonoriginary" origin of the dreamed
place Kroetsch reaches, ever so tentatively, at the "end"
of Advice to My Friends is the same as that in the

beginning of <u>Field Notes</u>: bones. Bone neither as weapon
(what Brown argues for), nor as the "privileged signifier"
of the phallus (as Lacan would have it).[15] Bone as
both and as more....

It is evident that the "dialectical tensions" Lecker
observes as "central" to Kroetsch's work are
deceptive.[16] "There is only one release," Lecker
argues: "find the home place, reinstate the stone....
[H]owever, the stone's true home cannot be guessed at." In
spite of his occasional deconstructive vocabulary, the
dialectic pattern on which Lecker insists does not reveal
Kroetsch's deconstructive vision of place in its entirety.
Trying to emulate what he calls Kroetsch's "wedding
oppositions," Lecker adopts an approach that bypasses the
parodic reversals which are so ubiquitous in Kroetsch's
long poems.[17] Lecker seems to equate opposition with
contradiction. But whereas oppositions may balance,
contradictions do not. Kroetsch's concern with place is
dialogic not dialectic.[18]

Because of Kroetsch's troping with contradictions, the
referentiality of locality in his long poem is constantly
deferred, as we have seen, by the metonymic nature of his
writing and by his nomadic movement from place to place.
Kroetsch is interested in the semiosis of place, not in
its semantics. Hence the semiotic intentionality behind
his dislocations and displacements, which both eschews
complete identification with place that might lead to

closure and therefore blindness, and intensifies, prolongs (delays) the dreaming, writing process.

The "long" search for one's place makes locality one of the elements of the long poem as a "new" genre. Locality in the long poem unifies the real place the poet inhabited in the past or the fictive place s/he inhabits now within the textual place s/he creates. Yet this unity is immediately disrupted, put into question, by the absence present in the Canadian landscape, an absence which is allowed to inhabit the long poem as well. The inclusiveness of the long poem makes it possible for place and absence (the locus of desire) to be inscribed in its textuality.

This is why Kroetsch's "dream of origins" reaches, more often than not, beyond the dreamed memory of real place. "His dream of origins" is frequently rendered as a rewriting of the dream of Eden -- another imagined (and desired) place -- which evokes yet another dimension of the colonial mentality. Kroetsch's long poem decodes the absolutism and dialecticism of the dream and human drama of the Garden of Eden. Although there is in his poetry an abundance of gardens, Kroetsch does not deal with this archetype of place in traditional dialectical manner. The prelapsarian innocence and guilt consequent to the Fall are continuously deconstructed. Here is what he says early in "Seed Cataloge":

> Winter was ending.
> This is what happened:
> we were harrowing the garden.
> You've got to understand this:
> I was sitting on the horse.
> The horse was standing still.
> I fell off.
>   (FN, p. 47)

The parodic reversal and its ironic humor in these lines work against the consoling promise entailed by the dialectic structure of the myth of Eden. The fall is presented as a nonevent.

In talking about the garden in Kroetsch's poetry, Lecker says that "[a]ll of the senses are opened to the garden that must be saved. This can be done by reinterpreting the myth of Eden not as a fall from innocence but as the birth of possibility. Better still, the birth of possibility depends upon the fall, for only when these opposing forces are synthesized does true creation begin. We are back to Kroetsch's dialectical concept of vision as a collection of meetings between mind and matter, time and space, voice and silence."[19] Whereas Lecker is right in arguing that the garden in Kroetsch's long poem marks the birth of possibility, he implicitly supports the tradition Kroetsch works against when he suggests that possibilities emerge out of synthesis. He insists on seeing Kroetsch as a structuralist. But the polyphony that marks the long poem in general, and Kroetsch's poem in particular, recontextualizes Eden in a way that frees consciousness

from the humanistic versions of the myths of place, self
and language, ultimately from the closure of harmony and
synthesis.

Kroetsch's questions at the end of "Seed Catalogue"
disperse Eden by dissolving its impossible dream of unity:
"how/do you grow a garden?" "How do you a garden grow? /
how do you grow a garden?" (FN, pp. 66, 67). The garden is
used here as a principle for organizing the unstructured
space of the prairies. Kroetsch's repetition with
difference exemplifies "how" he appropriates place by
overcoding locality: the tonal and syntactic
transformations of the same question are an attempt to
decode the memory of the original origin, namely that of
nature.[20] The grammar of Kroetsch's narrative is one
of dislocation, a dislocation enunciating what has become
of nature as the original origin.

If nature as space is the original origin, nature as
memory -- a shared memory of human origins, the mother as
the symbolic chora -- is not.[21] Kroetsch's garden is
both trace and residue. And if nature threatens to
disappear irrevocably, the poet can still work with its
trace and residue. He is left with language alone, and his
search for origins affirms his desire to represent what is
lost. He does so largely in a non-mimetic fashion, not
only because nature survives as trace, but also because he
defers representation through continuous dislocation.

In his later poems Kroetsch moves gradually away from

the garden -- the trace of nature as myth/symbol -- and
toward other versions of locality. In "The Criminal
Intensities of Love as Paradise" the paradise remains in
the title, unattainable and unrealized in its humanistic
interpretation -- a horizon retreating. The poem takes
place "in elk meadow / or forest" (FN, p. 133); the lovers
are "Standing near a waterfall" (FN, p. 134), reminiscent
of course of the Fall as well as of Williams's falls in
Paterson, or go "into town," Jasper, a parody of tourists'
paradise, or find themselves in "Campsite, Home, Away
From" (FN, p. 141). Movement as dislocation and/or detour
from origins. "Un-homing" marks the grammar of the lovers'
movements.

Is, then, desire itself the origin of desire? In
"Letters to Salonika" Kroetsch says: "to desire an end to
desire / is to desire" (AF, p. 65). There is no precise
originary point in the motion desire engenders. This
movement without beginning and without end becomes more
poignant in Kroetsch's Advice to My Friends where cities
and archaeological sites assume greater importance. The
change of setting here marks a shift that can be viewed
within the larger context of Canadian literature, a shift
which George Bowering points out in an interview with
Daphne Marlatt: "[s]o the whole thing about a New Eden was
just a crock. They were just making a New Babylon when
they came over here."[22] As the garden is seen to be
the prototype of nature before the fall, so Babylon is

seen as the prototype of the city after the fall. The garden as Eden can be understood only in dialectic opposition to the city: as the space of innocence (both in the sense of locality and concept), the garden precedes the city, by definition a profane habitat, and determines the degree of the city's expansion -- not to exceed the boundaries demarcated by the garden. The city as Babylon, in contrast, works against this spatial dialectic: it is a city not situated outside the periphery of the garden but containing the garden within. It is what Henri Lefebvre calls "l'espace fabrique."[23]

Kroetsch indeed creates a Babylon in Excerpts from the Real World, where his visit to the real Babylon ends this long poem.[24] Whereas in Field Notes and in Advice to My Friends the origin as garden leads him to his dead mother, in Excerpts from the Real World the origin as city leads him to Ishtar. It is certainly more than a coincidence that in the endings of these long poems the elusiveness of locality and dislocation are inscribed in the feminine, but this is not the place to discuss this aspect of Kroetsch's work. Given, however, the polyphony that characterizes the generic plurality of his long poems, as well as many other long poems, displacement is just one of the ways in which locality is treated in this "new" genre.

II: The Eye of the Poet / Locality as Polis

William Carlos Williams's treatment of locality has largely influenced the focus on the concept of place in the long poem, a concept that does not necessarily derive from dislocation or from dreaming, as is the case with Kroetsch's long poems. Williams' notion of "local pride" that prefaces Paterson reverses the direction of the "dream of origins" of the early immigrants in North America. This parodic inversion accomplishes in the long poem the two impulses that Linda Hutcheon identifies in A Theory of Parody as the primary functions of parody: "[p]arody is fundamentally double and divided; its ambivalence stems from the dual drives of conservative and revolutionary forces that are inherent in its nature as authorized transgression."[25] The conservatism that Hutcheon talks about does not refer to the maintenance of a conservative political tradition but to the "conservation" of a constantly reviewed and revised literary tradition. Thus the "local pride" behind the "dream of origins" in the long poem legitimizes locality in ways that invite the reader to rethink the very notion of origin. But the treatment of locality in the long poem does not always go so far as its origins, whatever they might be. Quite often, locality is taken to be what it literally is: local place. But this aspect of locality

maintains the same features of delay and motion.

Bowering talks about this pressure on the local in an interview with Caroline Bayard and Jack David:

> The word that we [West Coast poets, mainly those of the Tish group] used all the time was "locus," which we liked partly because it came out of Olson, partly because it didn't say setting, it didn't say place, it didn't say landscape, it didn't say all those things that are literary devices. Every time you use one of those terms you posit a person who is saying, OK, now how can I organize all this into a literary work. But if you said locus, it implies trying to find out where you are. It implies, I'm trying to locate myself. We didn't know much about our own skills and we didn't know hardly anything about the place that we lived in so those two things were built simultaneously.[26]

Bowering's "locus," as his reference to Olson implies, relies heavily on Herodotus's notion of locality and writing of history, a notion that has almost nothing to do with displacement and a lot to do with locating one's self within a specific place. Kroetsch's strategies -- the distrust of the eye, the deferral of the poet as beholder -- no longer operate in Bowering's poetics.

If Thucydides is the father of history as we now know it in professional or academic practice, then Herodotus is the father of history as an art form: he divided his Histories into nine books, each named after one of the Muses. Thucydides is the historian of logos, the historian who distinguished historiography from mythology by carefully scanning available information and tracing facts to their causes. Herodotus, on the other hand, practised a

history which privileged the eye, as in personal
observation, and took as much interest in the description
of people and events as in the act of story-telling, the
narrative rendering of facts. "To satisfy my wish to get
the best information, I possibly could on this subject,"
Herodotus says in the second book of his history, "I made
a voyage to Tyre in Phoenicia."[27] The visible, what
the eye holds in its gaze, determines the mode as well as
the matter of history. Herodotus' history, tested on his
own pulse, shows how place may remain "in place" until the
eye becomes a locus of knowledge. Or, as Olson remarks,
"istorin in him [Herodotus] appears to mean 'finding out
for oneself,' instead of depending on hearsay."[28] The
historical act for Herodotus is identical with the
etymology of history: to look for one's self, to learn by
inquiry, to tell a story. Such inquiry leads to
self-knowledge, a knowledge constructed largely through
the way in which it is conveyed to someone else. Whereas
for Thucydides logos refers primarily to reason, for
Herodotus it refers to the act of telling. The emphasis of
the Herodotian mode of history on the gaze locates the
writer's self in the field of writing.

Through Herodotus, Olson discovered that "[h]istory is
the new localism, a polis to replace the one which was
lost in various stages all over the world from 490 B.C.
on, until anyone of us knows places where it is
disappearing right now."[29] Olson's appropriation of

Herodotus might best be understood in Katharine R.
Stimpson's words: "[t]he past presses the historian as the
present does the poet."[30] The immediacy of the poet's
gaze renders history in the present tense. "History,"
Olson states, "is the practice of space in time."[31]
Olson's poetics has had a great influence on many Canadian
poets, especially those on the West Coast such as Fred
Wah, Daphne Marlatt, Phyllis Webb, Robin Blaser, and
George Bowering.[32]

Roland Barthes' comments on the gaze in "Right in the
Eyes" help us appreciate more Olson's emphasis on the
immediacy of perception:

> the gaze is not a sign, yet it signifies. What is
> this mystery? It is that the gaze belongs to that
> realm of signification whose unit is not the sign
> (discontinuity) but signifying (signifiance),
> whose theory Benveniste proposed. In opposition to
> language, an order of signs, the arts in general
> derive from signifying. ... literally, gaze cannot
> be neutral, except to signify neutrality....
>   Science interprets the gaze in three (combinable)
> ways: in terms of information (the gaze informs),
> in terms of relation (gazes are exchanged), in terms
> of possession (by the gaze, I touch, I attain, I
> seize, I am seized): three functions: optical,
> linguistic, haptic. But always the gaze seeks:
> something, someone. It is an anxious sign: singular
> dynamics for a sign: its power overflows it.[33]

The enabling power that allows, in fact invites, the gaze
to enter locality resides in its threefold function
(optical, linguistic, haptic), which seems to be
equivalent to the expression of desire. "History as
place," according to Olson, "verifies the desire."[34]

Since Olson does not specify what the desire is, the definite article might be taken to suggest that desire is the first locus, the mobile field, we all inhabit; it is what moves us. Desire endows the subject of the gaze with dynamism, what Olson calls "kinetics," the ability to perceive place in time, in other words, in process.

Located in the on-going present -- not the timeless present of the lyric, but the present of the writing process -- the gaze has access to the past while looking ahead, toward the future. It locates itself at the crossroads of past and future: the pen traces the gaze, the eye follows the hand; from seeing to writing; seeing writing as reading. The anxiety, the desire of the gaze as sign, suggests that the gaze is always on the go. Yet the anxiety inherent in the gaze as sign doesn't simply signify desire. "Voir est un acte dangereux," Jean Starobinski says, reminding us of Orpheus, Narcissus, Oedipus, Psyche, and Medusa.[35] The danger and desire evoked by the gaze are in keeping with the writers' of long poems ambivalent but nevertheless obsessive feelings about locality. In the long poem the gaze is where skin (the inner/outer) and place (outer) meet.

III: Locality as Archive / The Poem Running

Daphne Marlatt's Steveston exemplies the processual

view of locality in the long poem. In Douglas Barbour's words, Steveston is a "complex perception which engages the place as process in time."[36] Marlatt herself has repeatedly acknowledged the importance of Olson to her form and to her obsession with locality. Perhaps this is why most readings of Steveston discuss its "rootedness" by privileging the concept of place in motion: place in Steveston, a number of critics have argued, is engendered by the confluence of the Fraser river and the poem's processual form. Marlatt, too, makes the same point more than once. In "Text and Tissue," for example, an interview with Ellea Wright, she says that "Steveston was a book I wrote in which I was trying to imitate the flow of the river in long, long extended sentences."[37] Locality here becomes place as flux: the river holds the eye, the gaze follows the motion of fluid place.

But the river in Steveston, despite Marlatt's insistence on it as the primary force in her poem, is just one dimension of locality. In fact, I want to argue, the river is seen by Marlatt but her gaze can only hold its Heraclitean elusiveness, its constant flow and renewal.

Pour, pour

    from its bank) this river is rivering urgency,
roar
(goku, goku) thru any hole ...
                              "This river is
alive," he says ...
...
some seed as imprint or, continuance, continuing
to pour/down as light, or time, this town down

stream its own downpour ...[38]

The river, so powerful as physical presence and socio-productive force alike, is ubiquitous. Its ubiquity is one which relies on presence as well as absence, often exceeding its physical reality to give way to social reality, "the town down stream." By "imitating" its flow, one might say, Marlatt renders it as an organic metaphor that accounts for her "proprioceptive" engagement with locality and her writing process.

The river, at the same time an image and a floating signifier, is subjected to representation. It is represented as both space and mode of production. Marlatt's mimesis of its flow is not mimesis strictly speaking; it is parallaxis, for she translates only the river's representation, not its reality; she presents the social and economic impact of the river on the Japanese community of Steveston. "Steveston," she says in an interview with Gilbert Bouchard, is "about a Japanese-Canadian fishing community on the Fraser river -- what I did was to try and develop a syntactical movement that would parallel the ongoing movement of the river on to the sea."[39] Her focus on the river, in other words, enables her to produce the signification of her long poem: locality is presented as an open site to be graphed by sight.

The fact that the primary locality in the poem is not

the river has been intimated by some of Marlatt's
statements about the genesis of the poem. As she says,
"[w]ith Steveston, my interest was occasioned by taking a
Sunday drive there in the spring of '71 or '72 and finding
Star camp, the last extant cannery camp, little houses,
shacks still standing -- it was about to be torn down, the
people had moved out. You could sense a whole life there
in what they had left behind. Again i wanted to find out
more about it, about what that life had been like."[40]
Marlatt becomes a special sort of historian when she
encounters this landscape. But the landscape that
immediately fascinates her is, obviously, not the river.
It is the human habitat, its ecology, the story it tells
of itself. Davey is the first critic so far who has not
exaggerated the river "localism" most critics find in
Steveston. In his essay "The Explorer in Western Canadian
Literature," he points out that in Steveston "it is not
just place but time and place, or place in time, which are
to be explored and mapped."[41] The primary locus in the
poem is the town itself, the social, fabricated space
that defines the texture of Steveston.

The town, unlike the river, is presented in all its
multiplicity:

> Steveston as you find it:
>
>   multiplicity simply there: the physical
> matter of the place (what matters) meaning,
> don't get theoretical now, the cannery.
>   (p. 23)

The poet resists the temptation to theorize because of the fear that theory, when unmediated, might abstract and distance. But Marlatt's Olsonian poetics -- recorded in a journal she "kept during the Summer of '63 Conference, Vancouver" -- includes the theoretical in writing as well as the universal:

> Olson: "the DETAILS interest"--why? because "truth"
> i.e. concrete reality -- exists only in THEM & the
> whole is an abstract assumption made by the MIND--
> yet the excitement breaks forth in the mind's
> jump from details (clicking into place) to form)
> the whole[42]

The abundance of details in the poem is an attempt to create a visceral image of Steveston, to people the page with what peoples the town. At the same time, the layers of details decode the structural levels of life as seen by the poet:

> That I persist, also, in seeing them, these
> men, who are cut down to one day a week: their
> technology too great for the crop to bear, $600
> worth in one day off one boat. The persistence
> that has always in the industry characterized
> them. He knows he's an expert fisherman, tho
> deprecates, "Oh one day a week's easier for an
> old man like me." But idle, how strange that
> idleness sits on one given to work--A glass of
> water, a glass of sevenup, in town, at a cafe
> counter. So familiar it's boring. But for the
> dream that surfaces when the young woman from
> out there walks in, with whom, momentarily,
> over a hamburger & a glass of water, he connects.
> (p. 53)

The poet's seeing, economical and social conditions,

pride, erotics: all these informing details, while

recording what the gaze contains, deconstruct the

totalizing effect that the eye might have on what it

touches.

Even when the poet's eye sees the past of the town

imaginatively, the details of the recording process render

imagination as real as reality itself. The opening of the

poem is, as Lecker puts it, a "step into Steveston's

past"[43] and a step into its "continuous present":

>   Imagine a town running
>   (smoothly?)
>   a town running before a fire
>   canneries burning
>
>   (do you see the shadow of charred stilts
>   on cool water? do you see enigmatic chance standing
>   just under the beam? (p. 13)

Roy Miki is convincing when he points out that "[t]he town

Steveston ... is approached simultaneously as a literal

place with finite history and a figural place where the

imagination dwells."[44] The poet's gaze transgresses

the temporal boundaries of the past and the future. The

site produced by the imagination and the gaze alike is, as

Marlatt says, the "[c]ity as the image of a social

paradise."[45] There is a shift here from Kroetsch's

memory of paradise to Marlatt's present-tense experience

of paradise as a social environment. Steveston is polis as

the space of the imaginary, polis as community. As Marlatt

herself says, appropriating Olson: " & 'polis is eyes': we

use our eyes to see/be aware of all that is around
us--leads to individuals & their unique awareness (I am
complete <u>in my own body)</u> & thus 'polis' is also my/your
body: each cell as individual/complete one aware of
others, working with others but in itself at same time ->
cosmos."[46]

But this correspondence between gaze and locality does
not imply that the poet, as an outsider to the community
of Steveston, engages in some version of voyeurism.
Voyeurism, "le désir de posséder par le moyen de l'oeil,"
as Starobinski defines it,[47] is not what Marlatt's act
of writing is reduced to. Voyeurism is defined by the
distance between the subject viewing and the object
viewed. Marlatt's gaze, instead of freezing in its hold
the motion of the town and keeping the town at a distance,
introduces a different erotics: desire that brings
together the body (the poet's/the locals'), the town and
language.

Marlatt's scopic drive re-creates the town as a
writerly text. The textuality of the poet's gaze, as it
translates itself into discourse, goes beyond creating an
optical artifact of the town.

    The place? These kids, who live by the sea & know
nothing of boats. But orders, orders of power, of
hoarded wealth. Insistent, hey you guys, to break in
on what the others are earnestly engaged in: Somebody's
pants! Got any money? Look, batteries, gasoline, a
licence--I could be a driver of a boat. Hey, cool!
this is a masterkey you know, it'll open up that door.
                                              (pp. 34-35)

"The place" reverberates with voices . The poet works not only with the eye but the ear as well. The voices of the locals are inserted in direct speech, and the result is a double discourse, a hybrid of voices. Marlatt's own voice is dialogically related to the voices of the locals. She articulates this dialogism in the present tense because it affirms her presentness, the proprioception of her writing act.

The eye, the ear, discourse: locality, for Marlatt, ceases to be only place. It becomes a living archive. The archive, Foucault tells us, "does not have the weight of tradition ... cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence it is unavoidable. It emerges in fragments, regions, and levels.... It establishes that we are difference."[48] The town as a living archive does not function as the border of past, present and future; it deconstructs, instead, the notion of origin.

Marlatt, in her attempt to "find out" about the town, posits herself as an archaeologist, an archaeologist who makes a step into her imagination. Archaeology, as Foucault has taught us, does not seek the beginnings of things; it establishes discontinuities, finds meaning in the gaps, fragments and shards it discovers. In Steveston Marlatt allows discontinuities to exist in the "continuous present" of the poem.

Place, then, is located on the ground where the poet

walks. Marlatt's history begins at ground level; each one of her footsteps links one site to another. If Kroetsch is to be seen as the poet as nomad, Marlatt is, then, the poet as pedestrian. Walking, moving within a locus that exists outside the body but which is also created by it, is synonymous with Marlatt's archaeological process.

                              She runs in the
    throat of time, voicing the very swifts & shallows
    of that river, urging, in the dash of it, enough
    to keep up, to live on. (p. 65)

    What do the charts say? Return, return. Return of
    what doesn't die. Violence in mute form. Walking
    a fine line. (p. 76)

              To live in place. Immanent. In
    place. Yet to feel at sea. To come from elsewhere
    & then to discover love, has a house & name. Has
    land. Is landed, under the swaying trees which
    bend, so much in this wind like underwater weeds
    we think self rises from. (p. 79)

              (fishy as quick slime, saying, it's here,
    & here, & here, this self

              whose wealth consists of what?
                              A house? (p. 80)

Marlatt as walker, as archaeologist of streets and canneries and people, always translates the spatial signifiers she sees around her into something else. Accretion -- "the accretion of all our / actions" (p. 70) --, parataxis, the deferrals of main verbs, are the poetic devices which prolong her archaeological discourse, which extend the poem "out to sea" (p. 86) -- its last words. In the landscape the sound and movement of language and body offer a stunning choreography of infinite possibilities.

Locality in Marlatt's poem is not merely a theme, a setting that might be replaced by other themes or settings. As an element engendering her long poem, locality is always there yet it is never static, a fixed place awaiting description.

The scriptive act, almost always recorded in the long poem, foregrounds the letter of geography, writes the alphabet of place in more ways than one. The poet of long poems seems to be more concerned with the fixity revoked by the act of writing, a concern that speaks yet another generative principle of the long poem. Even when we move from Marlatt's treatment of locality in Steveston to Mandel's in Out of Place, a poem radically different from hers, locality remains a central issue. Marlatt locates herself in a strange place; Mandel revisits a familial and, therefore, familiar location. The sites are different, movement follows a different trajectory, but locality and the anxiety (desire) it entails remain equally central.

IV: The Poem as Preface / The Poet out of Place

In the entry that introduces the journals of Life Sentence Eli Mandel poses the question: "[w]hen do language and place become identical?"[49] Although he does not provide an answer, within the grammar of his question there is already an implicit assertion, one that

suggests that language and place may converge onto the
same figure. The convergence of these orders of reality is
a matter of time: "[w]hen do language and place become
identical?" Mandel also asks. His journey in Out of Place
has as its point of departure the question asked in Life
Sentence. The question mark introduces into the implicit
assertion the element of differance (deferral/difference).
The delay of this convergence is articulated by Mandel
when he locates the focus of his question in the process
of "becoming identical," as opposed to an achieved still
point of identity.

I see this question as the main intertext behind many
Canadian long poems: the search for language in place; the
search for place in language. The graph of geography as a
sign in the long poem. Out of Place exemplifies this
persistent concern through its formal and thematic
elements. Here begins the wandering of the written word
in a place which, although created by the poet, cannot
quite contain the poet himself. When the poet's journey
reaches an ending, after Out of Place reaches the hands of
its publisher, Mandel asks, again in Life Sentence,
another question: "[w]ill it be evident that Out of Place
tries to be a book existing in the gaps between its poems,
its absences?"[50] He locates the substance of the poem
in an absence which we can trace if we observe the poem's
warring forces: here and there, past and present; written
records and current writing; man and woman; the self and

its other. These gaps between the poems, these absences, signify the erasure of binary structures that threaten to lock the poet between the landscape he visits and the mindscape of his language. Mandel's poem is situated on the edge of a mimesis that soothes by offerings of illusory fixity, but also on the verge of a fiction that opens up vistas nominally blocked off by the mimetic act.

Language and place in Out of Place become identical through the poet's displacement, a displacement that exposes the illusions of factuality that have shaped our notions of self and place, a displacement that reveals fiction as the way to discovery. Out of Place as a long poem disseminates its own making and writing. Mandel deconstructs here the longing to return home, namely the nostos that informs the long poem as epic. His longing is to break out of space as a particular locality that locks the self within it.

Before the poem qua poem begins, the reader confronts Ann Mandel's "Preface." The "Preface" is the first sign in the book of the desire to break out of space. Because of its location and its function as preface, it marks the ground the reader has to traverse. Yet it also foregrounds its own expulsion from Eli Mandel's text and its inclusion as one of the poem's main intertexts. While it introduces the poem, it also presents itself as the sum total of the signifying forces at work there. It is the seam that connects the empirical historicity of Out of

Place with its materiality as a text.

Derrida observes in Dissemination that "[t]he signifying pre-cipitation, which pushes the preface to the front, makes it seem like an empty form still deprived of what it wants to say; but since it is ahead of itself, it finds itself predetermined, in its text, by semantic after-effect."[51] Ann Mandel's "Preface" fights against its generic marginality, its "empty form," by its central location on the page.[52] And although it is written retrospectively as the semantic after-effect of the poem, it is significant that it does not announce in the future tense, as many prefaces do, "you will read..." It is written in the past tense: "[k]nowing we could not take those papers from the vault, yet curious to know their contents, we moved into it and settled down for whatever stay seemed necessary" (p. 7). The past tense of the "Preface" disseminates the reader's experience of Out of Place. It contains both the past of the poem -- the history of its making -- and its presence as a text.

The past tense of the "Preface" also becomes the reader's future, pointing to what we will read. Although the "Preface" does not prescribe a particular interpretation of the poem's text, it does delineate the semantic horizon of Out of Place. Yet after reading both "Preface" and poem, the reader notices that the "Preface" as an empty form and the fullness of the meaning of the poem deconstruct each other's intentions. The "Preface"

re-verses the poet's attempt to excise from his poem all but one reference to the vault, which I take to be the originary topos of Out of Place. This single reference in Eli Mandel's text appears in the poem "the hoffer colony" which, like the "Preface," is situated within the vault. The "Preface," in other words, is the after-effect of the poem's meaning as well as the pro-gram of its making. Ann Mandel, the poet's companion on the journey, is the first I/eye through which the reader enters the poem. Her "Preface" out-lines the itinerary of Out of Place.

As Ann Mandel's "Preface" stands outside the poem, so the poet is speaking "out of place" in her "Preface." Eli Mandel is not foregrounded as a poet, as the person who initiates the journey. He is situated within the language of the "Preface," within the space occupied by the pronoun "we," which carries the main thrust of Ann Mandel's brief but eloquent narrative. Emile Benveniste says that,

> If there cannot be several "I"s conceived of by an
> an actual "I" who is speaking, it is because "we"
> is not a multiplication of identical objects but
> a junction between "I" and the "non-I," no matter
> what the content of this "non-I" may be. This
> junction forms a new totality which is of a very
> special type whose components are not equivalent:
> in "we" it is always "I" which predominates since
> there cannot be "we" except by starting with "I,"
> and this "I" dominates the "non-I" element by means
> of its transcendent quality. The presence of "I" is
> constitutive of "we."[53]

Ann Mandel's "I" dominates in the "Preface" not only as one of the elements of the plural subject of "we" but also

as a separate "I."

> At first we could make no sense of things, and
> I spent long hours staring from the black interior
> to the blazing doorway. When my eyes burned past
> that white rectangle, I could see long beige and
> yellow prairie grasses. ... I knew the grain
> elevator was to the right but refused to lean
> forward to see, leaving the framed picture
> intact. (p. 7)

The shift from the pronoun "we" to the now dominant "I" at
this point in the "Preface" emphasizes the absence of
specific reference to Eli Mandel, who remains anonymous
and not clearly enunciated as a "he"; only the love-making
references in the opening paragraph of the "Preface"
indicate the identity of the "I'"s companion. The poet in
the "Preface" is a mute presence, a silent reader of the
records they find in the vault.

It is the evocative style of Ann Mandel's "Preface"
that initially engages the reader. Her "Preface" is a
poetic overture that transcends the marginality of the
ordinary preface by positing itself as a "primary
text."[54] In a book such as Out of Place where the
poet's self and its locality are the informing concerns,
the reader cannot consciously ignore the enunciative
silence of the "Preface" that posits the presence of the
poet as a shadowy figure in the dark interior of the
vault. The poet's effacement discloses the "Preface" as
the double of what goes on beyond its pages. Considered as
part of the chronology of writing the text, the "Preface"

is by definition the residue of the writing of Out of

Place, yet structurally, by virtue of its initial and

initiating position in the text, it is, too, the breath

that releases what prompted Eli Mandel to open the gaps

between his poems. It is what draws the reader closer to

the core of the poem, but it is also what defers the

direct confrontation with the poem.

Although the "Preface" precedes the poem, it does not

stand outside it. The "Preface" contains both the silent

poet and -- the reference is there -- the seeds of the

poem he is going to write. Moreover, it originates the

motion that links in Out of Place difference and identity,

the self and its other, absence and presence. The silence

and the absence that the "Preface" inscribes through its

own writing render it as the supplement to the poem. As

Derrida observes in Of Grammatology,

> The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a
> plenitude enriching another plenitude, the
> fullest measure of presences. It cumulates and
> accumulates presence. ... But the supplement
> supplements. It adds only to replace. It
> intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of;
> if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it
> represents and makes an image, it is by the
> anterior default of a presence. ... [T]he supplement
> is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which
> takes-(the)-place [tient-lieu]. As substitute, it
> is not simply added to the positivity of a presence,
> it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the
> structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere,
> something can be filled up of itself, can accomplish
> itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through
> sign and proxy.[55]

The "Preface" as a piece of writing of a marginal nature

frames the poem; as a supplement it is the threshold to and a part of the interiority of <u>Out of Place.</u> It reveals the central idea of the poem, that of writing.

Writing, the subject and matter of <u>Out of Place,</u> finds its first configuration in the image of the vault -- the vault as it is described in Ann Mandel's "Preface." The vault confronts the reader through a series of familiar symbolic recognitions. It is the womb one exits from and whose security, we're told, one longs for; it is a place of death, of old records, of the past one retreats to, but it is also a place of life once Eli and Ann Mandel move into it; it is Jung's unconscious, the hidden self. Each of these interpretations operates in the poem. But the symbolic configuration of the vault that most clearly points to the absences on which <u>Out of Place</u> rests is that of Plato's cave.

The doorless vault, like Plato's cave, has an "entrance open to the light" that invites the Mandels to enter its dark interior.[56] In the light of the present that surrounds the Mandels everything else appears obscure; everything else, that is, inside the vault. Papers of accounts and invoices, pages from magazines and from a "diary or fiction of a kind" (p. 8), litter the floor of the vault. These scattered documents are the shadows of the past. They are memories of lives put to sleep on paper. Their writing is sown on the floor of the vault by <u>ghost</u> writers, writers of an/other reality.

A look at Plato's allegory illuminates the

happenings in the vault. After the prisoner released from

Plato's cave

> come[s] out into the light, [he] finds his eyes so
> full of its radiance that he [can] not see a
> single one of the things that he [is] now told
> [are] real.... He [needs] to grow accustomed before
> he [can] see things in that upper world.... Now
> imagine what would happen if he went down again to
> take his former seat in the cave. Coming suddenly
> out of the sunlight, his eyes would be filled with
> darkness. He might be required once more to deliver
> his opinion on those shadows, in competition with
> the prisoners who had never been released, while
> his eyesight was still dim and unsteady; and it
> might take some time to become used to the
> darkness.[57]

Ann Mandel's experience, after her "eyes burned past" the

"blazing doorway," evokes the experience of Plato's

figure. "Bringing my sight back into the room required

another period of blindness before the layered white paper

emerged from the dark. Then colour, a greyness

reappeared, and the corners of the cement vault" (p. 7).

This experience stands, as Plato would put it, for the

"upward journey of the soul into the region of the

intelligible."[58] But whereas Plato values the world of

the shadows as a paradigm that reveals unreality, the

Mandels view the shadows as being animated, realized by

writing.

When the Mandels enter the vault, they step into "the

double world" that Eli Mandel describes in Out of Place.

the double world:

> it is variously believed that this world is the
> double of another, as in Plato, Swendenborg,
> Malebranche, some of Immanuel Kant, Arthur C.
> Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Stanley Kubrick
>   Two clocks set at the same time in
> identical universes should stop at the same time.
> This clock is a shadow of that real clock. When I
> look at my clock I have no way of knowing whether
> I am in the first or second universe.... Nothing
> on either prairie changes though the winds blow
> across immensities your heart would shrivel to
> imagine knowing they pass between the worlds and
> can be heard to do so on the road to Wood Mountain.
> That is what was written in the rocks. (p. 53)

It is writing again that discloses the presence of the

"double world" whose boundaries merge with those of "this

world."[59] The "double world" is the supplement to this

reality. The vault, then, situated as it is on the edge

of these two worlds consists of a duplicitous reality. It

is a place where opposites meet in order to lose their

polarity: the "we" contains the "I"; the poet inhabits

silence in order to enter the realm of writing; the poet's

companion moves from critical discourse to poetic

language; the past rises to meet the present. It becomes

evident that the confounding of these opposites in the

space of the vault, instead of establishing opposition,

accentuates the doubleness of their presence. It is the

dynamics of the vault that infuses this polarity with a

desire for unity, a desire for an absolute intelligibility

the truth of which is not revealed but written.

Writing, what is "written in the rocks," the written

records of the vault, becomes the spatial surrogate of the

place that Eli Mandel seeks to inhabit. Language and place

become identical in the greyness of the vault. As Mandel said once, "[b]ooks are always writing us."[60] The written records incite him to embrace the impossible dream of plenitude.

Eli and Ann Mandel, once inside the vault, are both haunted and hunting. They are haunted by the insignia of the ghost writers, the records of Eli Mandel's ancestors. The vault, like Plato's cave, is a prison. It is a prison of language, for the Mandels become prey to the writing they feel compelled to read. Hence the "gloom" and the "uneasiness" that Eli Mandel confesses to in "the hoffer colony":

> and in a concrete vault its floor
> littered with prairie I find
> scripture a farmer's exodus Israel
> ...   I begin
> to feel gloomy about possibilities
> ...
> I look uneasily at grain inventories (p. 38)

But whereas the Mandels' psyches are threatened by their imprisonment, by the drawing force the records exercise upon them -- "[o]ur work proceeded over days," says Ann Mandel (p. 7) -- their own presence threatens in return to desecrate the internal purity of the vault.

The Mandels breach the silence that surrounds the place. Within the encompassing walls of the vault, space and writing succumb to the bodily functions of the visitors, to the scrutiny of their reading.

> What pages we were not reading and sorting
> served for mattresses, sheets, and head
> rests. When we decided a page was insignificant
> for our purposes or saw it was blank we placed
> it in a pile to use for wiping ourselves or for
> after love. Others became serviettes, sunshades,
> etc.   (p. 7)

Content or the absence of content determines the function of writing. "[W]riting," as Edward Said says, "is a ceaselessly changing triangle of encipherment, decipherment, and dissemination."[61] The Mandels' presence introduces an element of profanity in the vault which stores within its concave space traces of people long dead. The body of writing in the vault is purloined from an existence that has remained unstained. Pages now become conjugal sheets. The Mandels break the hymen that has protected the interiority of this writing from any outside interferences. Their presence consummates a relationship between the past held in the vault and the present that now flows into its hollow. The neutrality of the written records is erased by the intimacy created when the Mandels employ writing in a merely physical way. The vault is after all a prison that does not remain inviolate to the Mandels' intrusion.

The interior purity of the vault is violated by the Mandels' desire to impose an intelligible order on the scattered records. As Ann Mandel says, "[u]sing sentence structure from bottom and top lines, we put the sheets together in what we conceived was the right order, then

began to read" (p. 8). As the vault is no one's really, so the scattered records Ann and Eli Mandel find there signify the Jewish diaspora. The reading order they try to establish is, then, an attempt toward an anti-diaspora, an attempt to put an end to displacement and return to the promised land. The power by means of which both parties, ghost writers and guests / readers, threaten to overwhelm each other, is solely that of language. Through the grammar of language the poet and his companion transform the litter of the vault into the order of letter. "A peculiar tale emerged, the pilgrimage west of a man and wife from the east to the place of his birth, home of his ancestors, a search for a lost home. Evidently the place they came to was this farm" (p. 8). What is this tale but the double of Out of Place, the double of the journey west the Mandels' take?[62] And in the light of Mandel's Jewish heritage, the journey west evokes (marginally) that of Joseph's and Mary's, returning to their home town, there to (re-)create the Word.

Writing, within the space of the vault, sustains that old journey, whereas Ann Mandel's "Preface" and Eli Mandel's poem are a repetition moving both backwards and forwards, a duplicitous translation of a past and a present that encounter each other within the territory of writing. The deferred lives of the ancestors are now released as the Mandels learn to read the discourse behind the ungrammaticality of the broken records. It is a

discourse that finds its Platonic paradigm in the vault.
The ghost writers and the poet and his companion become
figures in a parallactic dance that is held on the floor
of the vault, the space of writing.

It is evidently the Mandels' reading act that
initiates this dance. But although they are under the
rule of the shadows in the vault, in-spired by the old
voices, their reading activity disrupts the harmony of
their dance. As the Mandels start applying to the written
records the hermeneutics of their subjective reading, they
also begin a disseminating process that breaks the meaning
of the old texts. To quote Kroetsch, "[t]he grammar of
narrative [is] remembered, even if it can only occasion a
mis-telling."[63] On the level of writing Ann and Eli
Mandel are identified with the "man and wife from the
east," Joseph and Mary; on the level of reading they are
displaced by the writing they read. The reading "I's" are
not identical to the I's of that couple. The Mandels'
reading act, invited by the silent ciphers, emancipates
them from the vault as the last stronghold of the past and
proves these old records to be writerly texts. The
reading the records initiate is the first step toward the
process of writing Out of Place that will articulate the
reality of place as a reality of words.

"The last pages were missing," says Ann Mandel at the
end of her "Preface," "but we could see the end. We put
down the story and turned back toward the vault." The

missing end of the narrative is imagined before the

narrative of Out of Place begins. The writer of the

"Preface" delivers the poet to his poem which will be an

inscription of deviations. Out of Place, in turn, is only

the preface to a poem that Mandel seeks to write. When he

goes west he begins a quest that is too processual to have

a definite end. In his interview with David Arnason,

Dennis Cooley and Robert Enright Mandel says:

> We're travelling through the Prairies, we've
> encountered the gods; the gods are in storm;
> they hold us up; and we look at them; we're
> awestruck; and then we move to another set
> of gods, and then to another time. So the
> answer is: yes, I think I'm so fascinated by
> process that I spend a lot of time trying to
> work it out in [Out of Place], always, and
> to learn the ways of drama in poetry -- the
> speaking voice, starting in the middle of
> the situation always, your structure being
> anything but a form put on. It is an event,
> an inevitable event of ordering.[64]

The process of the quest can be ordered only through the

structural repetition of encounter with gods of one time

and then with gods of another time and so forth. But the

epic dimensions of Mandel's quest do not offer him the

consolation of a foreseeable ending. Hence the Mandels'

turning back toward the vault. The vault they turn to now

is the vault of "another time." It is a vault of the

present world, the resource the poet must revisit in order

to confront its dark interior through the light of his own

language. The vault is a metonym(y) of Out of Place

pronouncing the absences that bind Eli Mandel to his self

and to the place of his origins.

While in search of his beginnings in the vault, Eli Mandel is pursued by the ghosts' voices beckoning him to enter onto the road of exodus. He says at the end of "the hoffer colony":

> before we take our easy leave
> how should we understand
> prophecies and miracles? (p. 38)

The gloom and uneasiness that Mandel felt inside the vault, while engulfed by the old ciphers, are gone once he sets out to translate his reading act into writing, once that is he starts wandering within the space of his own language. It is a wandering that promises no return to a place of pure origins. The ghost writers, Mandel's ancestors, are the original demiurges of Out of Place. Eli Mandel, the double of these ghosts, slips into the difference that separates him from his origins; he slips, that is, into his own writing. As Andrew Suknaski puts it in his characteristic way, "Wowk, in Out of Place you returned to find your WORD in some magical cipher."[65] Mandel delivers himself to the omnipotent fictionality of language where his true origins lie.

Like a contemporary Odysseus, Mandel has passed through the region of the dead and the labyrinth of language (the vault) without dying. His passage, like that of Odysseus, has been inspired by nostos, the desire to return home. The concept of nostos in Out of Place is

actually what pre-dicates (prefaces) the two distinctive

journeys that underlie the structure of the poem. These

are the journey home, that is the journey back to Estevan,

Saskatchewan, and the return from darkness, that is the

exodus from the greyness of the vault. The first journey

frames the second one not so much out of geographical

necessity as out of the need to repeat the mythic

structure of the concept of nostos. The root of nostos,

*nes-, in its "earliest reconstructible context" means "a

return from death and darkness," and is also the root of

noos which means mind, intelligence.[66] The descent

into the underworld, no matter what mythic configuration

it takes, is perhaps the most important ritualistic step

the homecomer has to take before his wish to return home

is fulfilled. (Given the presence of Ann Mandel, the

poet's passage is also comparable to Orpheus' journey.) It

becomes clear now that the Saskatchewan Mandel revisits is

not his destination. The actual journey toward home is the

route he follows after he emerges from the vault. Thus

locality in Out of Place is not a place to return to but a

place to exit from.

The Platonic configuration of the vault in Ann

Mandel's "Preface" accentuates this double journey. After

Plato's prisoner emerges from the cave he says that he

would rather "be on earth as a hired servant in the house

of a landless man" than return to the cave.[67] These

words, however, that Socrates puts in the prisoner's mouth

are a direct quotation from The Odyssey, namely Achilles'
statement to Odysseus when they encounter each other in
Hades; but Achilles' statement in the Odyssey is that he
would rather "be on earth as a hired servant in the house
of a landless man than be a king over all the perished
dead."[68] The ascent from the cave to the light of the
sun in Plato's allegory is, of course, a metaphor for the
intellectual ascent from a topos doxastos to a topos
noetos. Through Plato's dual scheme of illusory opinions
and intelligence that directly echoes Odysseus'
homecoming, Mandel's own nostos is revealed in all its
ramifications. His memory, what maps out the movement of
his nostos, has to be purged of the extraneous material
that misleadingly presents Estevan as the destination of
his journey. Mandel's purgation involves the emptying out
of notions of home as a locality that welcomes the
wayfarer by offering him comfort of teleological import.
For this reason his purgation has to take place within the
space of the vault.

V: The Place as Poem / The Poet as Reader

Mandel's desire to return home is a desire to valorize
the past and to affirm his displacement. This
valorization, however, is not practised by a warrior/hero
as the epic tradition demands, but is practised by a man
of language whose fate was set in the past "by fowl":

> On Fridays in Regina the difficulties become acute,
> how to smuggle two live chickens in a burlap sack
> down the street of Ukrainian neighbours, past two
> alien churches, one Russian Orthodox, its onion
> domes looming over me (alien afraid as Klein would
> say) like a Chagall version of shtetl-life, the other
> Greek, its angular priestly spire aloofly
> critical of the gross yiddishkeit of chickens.
> Their obstinacy, their cunning. How do they manage
> to wiggle their obscene squawking heads through
> burlap? Why should my fate be set by fowl? The
> murderous notions in my head on Friday, Sabbath
> eve: "chicken you'll die before the ritual blessing,
> that's for sure" detestable the squalid hut to which
> I move, its bloody rows of funnels, feathers stuck
> to crusted blood of slaughtered birds.
>
> I think of god, his commandments regulating the
> sanctity of chicken soup, appeal the case to high
> authority: "It isn't fair" I say. "To whom" my
> grandfather's omnipotent reply," you or the chickens?"
>
> (p. 67)

The young boy's journey here is again a homeward journey

but this time, accompanied by the signs of his ethnic

origins, Mandel's experience is not that of nostalgia but

that of embarrassment if not shame. The young boy is

"beside" himself because the chicken by squawking voices

the difference of his identity. The parody of the Jewish

ritual is also a parody of his self-characterization. The

ritual, for Mandel, is a passage of literal transition:

his walk through the various neighborhoods obliges him to

recontextualize his ethnic identity within a setting of

multiple ethnic signs. His appeal to authority

(grandfather) for the affirmation of his ethno-ego

position is parodied as well by the authority figure

himself who displaces the young boy even within the

context of his own statement.

The fact that the answer to young Mandel's question is another question, "you or the chickens?", upsets the codes of epic heroism while illustrating that recontextualization can be a form of parallaxis ("you _or_ the chickens?"). This parody destabilizes the function of the hero as well as the concept of identity: the transference to the chickens as the figure of the other misplaces the young boy within his own system of justice, propriety and selfhood. The chickens as the marker of the parodying act deflate the importance of the homeward journey by showing that the notion of faith in the ideals of home is quite often a blind faith, and that identity is a concept that keeps changing its meaning. This same parodic marker also points out that displacement is a misdirected form of referentiality -- "_you_ or the chickens?" -- which often relies on binary opposition -- "you _or_ the chickens?" -- and which only deceptively leads toward self-definition.

Referentiality as displacement is accomplished here by means of the present tense. The "Epilogue," unlike the "Preface," is written in the present tense, which has a double function. On the one hand, the simple present tense can be used to express an act which displays the frequency and repetition ("On Fridays in Regina ...") of the recounted event.[69] In this respect, the present tense functions as the historical present which achieves

simultaneity for the sake of narrative vividness. However,
the past revoked through it is temporally annulled by
Mandel: he creates a sense of continuity and duration
while universalizing the import of this continuity by
extending locality toward a national geography:
"[m]eanwhile the chickens continue to squawk, past
Eleventh Avenue, down the mean streets, St John, Halifax,
Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, to where the gleaming razor
waits" (p. 68). The present tense here does not designate
time; it has a generalizing function.

Yet the continuity incurred by the use of present
tense is tied in with the ritual Mandel describes, which
further erases the distinction between past and present.
The present tense becomes identified with time. On the
other hand, though, the present tense of the repetitious
event Mandel narrates coincides with the occasion of the
recounting, which is also linked to his act of
enunciation.[70] What is interesting here is that the
present tense of enunciation -- which operates purely on a
linguistic level -- displaces the past the writer wants to
retrieve from within its temporal frame and relocates it
within the present. The effect of this linguistic
instantaneousness is a certain ambiguity, for it is not
clear (linguistically) whether what happens "on Fridays in
Regina" is lived, re-lived, or still continues to happen
in Regina. As Christine Brooke-Rose says, "[t]ense is
either used to blur order ... or it becomes wholly a

category of voice."[71] The blurring of the order of

the past in Out of Place relocates the past within the

poet's present, thus further frustrating his attempt to

return to that place and time. Moreover, the present tense

works against mimesis by foregrounding the notion that

what exists exists only on the level of the poet's writing

act. The past is not represented but re-presented by

Mandel's enunciation in the present tense.

The employment of the present tense throughout Out of

Place encounters a moment of paradox in the "Epilogue."

The structural posteriority of the "Epilogue" as a genre

is paradoxically cancelled by the fact that a part of it,

"Pictures in an Institution," was previously published in

Mandel's earlier book, An Idiot Joy. But the epilogue's

posteriority is also inverted by its present tense,

whereas the textual anteriority of the "Preface" is

inverted by its past tense. It is this inversion that

allows Mandel to inhabit the textual place he creates. If

he privileges at all the past, he does so by determining

it not "by fowl" but "allegorically," by his acts of

reading and writing. The opening poem of Out of Place

asserts this.

```
    the return:
            in the estevan poem, for example,
            how everyone can be seen eating
            or is it reading
                        but not everyone
            there is myself in the souris valley
            forty years later
                        Ann
```

                    looking at wild flowers
                    cactus   their thick colours

                    I remember how I dreamt
                    her ...
                                        (p. 13)

The first place of return after the exodus from the vault

is "Estevan, Saskatchewan," not Mandel's hometown, but a

poem of his that first appeared in the Minotaur Poems.
[72] Writing is the place toward which his true nostos

has led him. As Peter Stevens says in his essay "Poet as

Critic as Prairie Poet," "[l]andscape and page have become

one."[73] It is Mandel's writing act that modulates his

present, liquifies the past, stirs the stillness of the

abandoned vault, reopens the "doors of perception" (p.

15).

VI: From Geography to Genre / The Syntax of Place

    The return to the geographical Estevan can be completed

only by metonymic substitution: from geography to genre.

The name of place loses its stability; it becomes

signature, the name bearing the mark of its occasion. The

materializing imprints of Mandel's words on the page are

the supplement to the gaps in his memory. His writing act

transforms his displacement into the discovery of his self

within the space his words occupy.

    The "Preface" as text discloses Ann Mandel's own place

in the poet's homecoming. Instead of the warrior/hero

going home to a Penelope, we have the writer whose destiny is "set by fowl" going with his female other to the lost place. In the "Acknowledgments" of the poem Eli Mandel says that the "companion and guide is of course a familiar figure in tales of journeys" (p. 75). Ann Mandel both triggers and witnesses the different aspects of parallaxis the poet and his text undergo. As a companion she inspires, and she witnesses the shedding of the poet's old self; as a guide she is the presence (anima) that mediates between the poet and the underworld, redoubling thus his encounter with his doppelganger; as the writer of the "Preface" and the eye and maker behind the photographs that accompany the text of Out of Place, she enters the space of writing and becomes one of the voices that participate in the making of the poem.

The parallaxis, then, that informs the generic plurality and structural complexity of the long poem is first actualized in Out of Place by Ann Mandel's presence. More specifically, the parallaxis here emphasizes that the monologic authority of the poet is "out of place" in a poem that explores the absence of place as a fixed ground. The female voice of the "Preface" not only accompanies the male voice of the poet when he sets out to create the space of writing both of them are going to inhabit but also suggests the importance of the period of gestation spent in the vault. One might want to push this even further and suggest that the female voice of the "Preface"

begets the poet's voice, that the poet echoes her.

Beyond this, however, the "Preface" is the first marker in the poem of the flexible boundaries of the genres employed. Despite the suggestiveness of its title, Out of Place turns out not to be marginal. In this context, even though Mandel's journey has been presented according to the conventions of the epic as dramatized by their parodic inversion, the quest does not consist of a continuous epic narrative but, quite the contrary, of lyric discourse, prose poems, letters, and photographs taken by Ann Mandel. This generic plurality illustrates the poetics of indeterminacy that characterizes the long poem in general while, at the same time, delineating the textual flexibility of Out of Place.

The lyrics that comprise "The Return," the first section of Out of Place, localize the quest within the poet's subjective experience. His personal quest assumes its epic character only because he foregrounds himself as a quester who is a poet. Thus Estevan, a geographical site, is replaced by "Estevan, 1934," a linguistic site -- the ground actually sought by a poet. This transference is further accentuated by the reflexivity of the lyric discourse which is accomplished through repetition and recollection in Kierkegaard's sense of these terms. "Repetition and recollection are the same movement," Kierkegaard says, "only in opposite directions: for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas

repetition, properly so called, is recollected forwards."[74] This double movement, together with its many *discursi*, exemplifies the generic structure of <u>Out of Place</u> as well as its tension between the past and the present.

More specifically, it points out how referentiality operates in the long poem. "The return," for instance, manifests this double movement simultaneously: the "estevan poem" mentioned in the first line of "the return" is a recollection of the "estevan poem" written years earlier, becoming thus a reference outside <u>Out of Place</u>. In this respect, the opening lyric is a return, too, return as reference to a text's parallactic other, to one of <u>Out of Place's</u> originary resources, a movement backwards; but it is also a repetition as the phrase "estevan poem" will repeat itself, with difference, later on in <u>Out of Place,</u> in the form of the actual Estevan poem, "estevan, 1934."

That forward movement, which is the movement the reader follows, extends referentiality to include self-referentiality: the opening lyric refers to the poem it is going to become (p. 29), it moves toward its parallactic other. The exterior and interior boundaries of the long poem are dissolved as Mandel's language affirms its materiality. Similarly, the margins that separate the present from the past are erased as well. The enabling power that makes room for the metonymic transposition and

double movement is the long poem's heterogeneity. Whereas
the transferral works metonymically -- Estevan as poem,
Estevan as town -- the generic contrast of the epic and
lyric modes occurs temporally, in their differences in
tense. Temporality dissolves the distance that
characterizes epic representation without, however,
neutralizing the epic impact of the poet's quest.
Reflexivity seems to be what resolves the contrasting
intents of these separate genres.

The second lyric poem further emphasizes this
reflexivity.

```
        signs:75
                and omens    windows
                facing inward
                            "an ideal
                inserted into the plane
                we call reality"  words
                warning this is the place
                you reach
                            to name
                remember and recite

                the Hebrew alphabet
                Invictus the first three
                lines of Genesis
                the unremembered man who stole
                children from an empty town and
                Latin   heroes in the hills and
                glyphs uncles cousins step-
                grandfather's sons and sisters
                whatever has been hidden here
                remains of speech
                            the town lives
                in its syntax we are ghosts

                look    on the road beyond
                mesas and moonscape
                hoodoos  signs cut in rock
                graffiti    gods
                an indescribable border (p. 14)
```

The gravitational pull of grammar tempts the reader to ignore the colon after "signs" and read "signs and omens ..." But if we allow our reading to follow the notation of the poem, we avoid the ensuing tautology and the semantic problem it poses -- although signs are not always omens, omens always remain signs. So we are left with "and omens," a, perhaps ominous, beginning without beginning. "And" as the opening word is connected to no other words; it is connected instead to nothingness and its many "signs," the plurality of origins that Out of Place continually asserts.

"And," then, embodies the same double movement: looking backwards, which is to say toward the preceding substantive its grammar implies, "and" sees nothing, which might be interpreted as a "sign" of pregnant silence, indeterminacy, unreadability, or utter nothingness; looking forwards, "and" sees "omens windows / facing inward" -- the paradox here, also a parodic sign, affirms the self-reflexivity of the poem. Indeed, the following lines support this forward gaze: "words / warning this is the place / you reach." The deictic referentiality of "this is the place" is yet another "sign" of self-referentiality -- the place being the blank space trailing in the rest of the line, a window facing inward, the page, the poem itself. Even if we take the apostrophic "you" to refer to Ann, Ann as the writer of the "Preface" further asserts the poem's materiality.

The place Mandel reaches after traversing the white space of his lines is also the tentative space evoked by the infinitives "to name / remember and recite." Naming, the act of enunciation, invents the past as memories and creates poetry as "recitation," again a linguistic act, that actualizes the past, and makes it present. The projection of the past into the present makes the past accessible by minimizing the distance that separates us from it. Our only way of knowing the past is by way of erasing this distance. Mandel, however, does not take this knowledge of the past for granted.

> the endless treachery
> that is remembering
>
> there are no definitions (p. 19)

He is cautious of memories because of the distortion they might incur. Undue reliance on memories, he seems to be saying, tends to valorize one aspect of reality at the expense of another, and an obsession with memories threatens to reduce the immediacy and primacy of the present.

This is why throughout Out of Place Mandel constantly thwarts his own temptation to make his journey of nostos follow a linear track of memories. Simultaneously, he also resists the search for a definite identity. He lets himself instead follow the traces of language -- "whatever has been hidden here / remains of speech." Memory is found

in the hiatuses of speech and is retrieved through speech. Similarly, locality is defined through language -- "the town lives / in its syntax we are ghosts."

Recollection and repetition are what accounts here for the length of Out of Place. They become the generative principle, the cause and effect of the poem. They also direct the reader's trajectory, as s/he constantly has to move back and forth in the textual space of the poem. The phrase "signs cut in rock," for instance, demands that the reader make a leap across the text to "the double world" where s/he finds "what was written in the rocks" (p. 53). Leaps of this sort are far from being cases of gratuitous self-reflexivity nor are they meant merely for the reader's pleasure in tracing references. Their primary function is to undo the closure of the individual lyrics Out of Place consists of, to stretch the individual short poems beyond themselves and into the textual maze of the long poem. The ragged lines of the poet's and the reader's itineraries mark the "indescribable border" between the epic and lyric elements in the poem.

The colon that punctuates the titles of the individual poems contributes to the extensive and extending nature of the lyric genre in Out of Place. The colon not only establishes a closer rapport between title and poem -- almost setting the title out as the opening word of the poem --, but also creates a chain of poems-as-events which is what formally makes Out of Place a long poem. Here is

how it looks schematically:

preface: ... the return: ... signs: ... doors of
perception: ... birthmark: ... souris river: ...
badlands: ... etc.

Besides being a pointer of continuity, the link of
disjointed narratives, the colon is also an indicator of
parallaxis. It is a pause announcing the departure from
one version of nostos or definition and the arrival at
another. Further, it punctuates Mandel's fascination with
doubles, and his own double in particular, as it
introduces various configurations of the poet's identity
-- a repetition with difference which questions the
concept of identity and which makes it as fluid as the
place Mandel seeks during his journey. This is evident
throughout the whole poem, but it is best exemplified in
the section called "The Double" -- significantly, the
second part of Out of Place.

The colon is used in this section as a rhetorical
figure of equilibrium with difference: it outlines and
blurs the differences and similarities of self and place
as is the case in "various kinds of doubles:" (p. 57).
This poem is repeated in an inverted form on the preceding
and facing page. This inverted double posits itself as the
figure of mise en abyme, a mirror that reflects identity
with difference, a mirror that unsettles reflexivity,
while also deflecting and delaying the reading act by
blurring language. The colon, then, is a metaphor of the

substitution devices Mandel uses as well as a trope of the constant shift of meaning.

The only exception -- a good example of the contradictions inherent in the long poem -- of the use of colons in the titles is found in the third section of <u>Out of Place,</u> "A Suite for Ann." The absence of the colon here marks a shift in the lyric tone. The disjointed attempts toward narrative of the earlier parts of the poem, which the book will resume later, are abandoned here for a more authentic lyricism. The shift is marked by the rhetorical modulations employed in this section. The tone is more subjective, the language more abstract, indicating yet another attempt, this time more meditative, to deal with locality. The four poems, "Fear of Flying," "Strange Places," "Place," and "The Wayfarer," all deal with place, while the ambiguity of the collective title of the section further enhances the complexity of locality.

The first poem opens as an extension of Mandel's encounter with his shadowy self in "The Double":

```
            I dream of flying but I fear
            I either will or will not fly
            or flying will not land or will
            or landing will at once arise

            waking
                    I place my feet on
            creaky floors
                              you beside me
            dream of stairs    climbing
            vines
                    and wings      (p. 61)
```

Mandel moves beyond the conscious self and geographical place within the intersubjective self and space of his dream. But the dreamscape he promises to present is immediately put under erasure. It suspends itself within the undetermined mental frame of the poem. The either/or structure, the give-and-take of possibilities and action, the hesitation together with the need for certainty, all these become the rhetorical modulations that double-speak (contradict and interdict) the poet's trajectory. His search for the precise meaning of his dream is rechanneled by the antithetical options he locates within the dream itself. This instance of what de Man calls dedoublement is another phase of Mandel's journey.

Dedoublement, as de Man says,

> designates the activity of a consciousness by which a man differentiates himself from the non-human world. The capacity for such duplication ... belongs specifically to those who, like artists or philosophers, deal in language.... The reflective disjunction [the heterogeneous material of experience made to fit through language] not only occurs <u>by means of</u> language as a privileged category, <u>but it transfers</u> the self out of the empirical world into a world constituted out of, and in, language -- a language that it finds in the world like one entity among others, but that remains unique in being the only entity by means of which it can differentiate itself from the world. Language thus conceived divides the subject into an empirical self, immersed in the world, and a self that becomes like a sign in its attempt at differentiation and self-definition.[76]

Mandel's questioning of his dream inside his dream, which,

of course, is atemporal, is enunciated through language,
which takes time. More than that, his enunciatiation is
framed by the present tense, which makes the dream
simultaneous with empirical knowledge. His constant
wavering, however, between his fear of flying and fear of
landing is expressed in the future tense. Thus the present
tense, the repetition of "will," and the uneasiness of
this stanza's syntax convey the illusion of mimesis -- in
accurately recording the dream he shows dramatic
confusion. But these elements also stress that, although
the poet can come to grips with his dream only through
language, dreams resist interpretation because of their
inherent unreadability.

The differentiation Mandel tries to reach through his
dream leads not to self-definition but to his increasing
awareness in the course of the poem that binaries such as
that of the either/or structure in the dream do not
provide concrete answers to his questions. That's why he
constantly shifts away from the stability of fixed meaning
toward the indeterminacy of signification. The grammar
and syntax of the dream mark, then, not its semantics but
its semiosis. The place the poet inhabits is not the
atemporal space of his dream, nor is it the creaky floor
on which he places his feet when he wakes; it is his poem
itself, a meta-place, the writing ground that enables him
to engage himself in dedoublement, continuing thus his
meditation on place.

As soon as Mandel exits from his dream of flying he enters the dream of Ann sleeping beside him. The line "you beside me" is the first direct apostrophe to her. Although the figure of Ann appears frequently throughout Out of Place, the marginality by way of which she has introduced herself is now formally resolved through the rhetorical trope of apostrophe. Having realized that place is to be found in writing, and having already dealt with his shadowy self, Mandel moves now to an encounter with his contra-sexual self.

"A Suite for Ann," as the title suggests, is a "place" clearly delineated "for Ann," an attempt to get hold, through her, of the elusiveness of place. It is the poetic ground of the writer of the "Preface." She appears in this section through the apostrophe in "Fear of Flying." Apostrophe, Culler reminds us, "is perhaps always an indirect invocation of the muse."[77] But, as we have seen, between Ann Mandel as the writer of the "Preface" and the Ann of this section there lies a whole range of roles which both support and deconstruct the traditional assumptions of the muse figure.

Mandel employs apostrophe to present yet another version of the I-Thou relationship. To quote Culler again, "the vocative of apostrophe is a device which the poetic voice uses to establish with an object a relationship which helps constitute him. The object is treated as a subject, an I which implies a certain type of

<u>you</u> in its turn. One who successfully invokes nature is one to whom nature might, in its turn, speak. He makes himself poet, visionary. Thus, invocation is a figure of vocation."[78] The "you beside me" in "Fear of Flying" dramatizes, similarly, the alienation of the poet's empirical self from his dreaming, poetic, self. Ann as "you," as the second person, becomes the poet's other that reestablishes his bearings with external reality, that soothes his fear of flying, his uneasiness about the creaky floors. In this respect, the "you" becomes an "allegory" of desire, it constitutes what the "I" lacks.

The apostrophe further dramatizes the way Mandel relates his dream to himself and to Ann. He wills himself to imagine that Ann, as he was himself moments ago, is dreaming. His dedoublement here is the continuation of his dream in his waking. But the lines "you beside me / dream of stairs" are syntactically ambiguous. If we take "dream" to be a noun and not a verb, the apostrophized "you" may well refer instead to the "dream of stairs" Mandel imagines. His dream has become now a fiction, a dream imagined. When apostrophe functions as a sign of fiction, it stresses, according to Culler, its optative character. The result is that such an apostrophe does not establish a relationship between the self and the other; instead, it reveals an act of "radical interiorization and solipsism," one that either disperses fragments of the self in order to fill the world, or allows the self to internalize what

is external. This latter procedure, Culler argues, implies that when the _I_ names as a _you_ something that cannot possibly be a _you_ (i.e. the earth), the _I_ preempts the place of the _you_ in a gesture of poetic intervention.[79]

The dream as the "you" of Mandel's apostrophe externalizes, then, what he has interiorized. The dream he refers to in his waking is a recollection of his own dream but with a difference. That dream too can be about what Ann dreams. Ann dreams of "stairs   climbing / vines / and wings." Ann's dream and/or the dream that Mandel imagines is a metonymic substitution for his own (real) dream. The difference lies in the syntax and diction he uses when he talks about the different dreams. Mandel translates Ann's dream in a discourse that lacks the abstraction and the syntax, doubling upon itself, that the discourse of his dream had. Whereas he was dreaming of the act of flying as an abstract concept, Ann dreams of things that climb or fly naturally or facilitate flying. The concreteness and the litotes in the discourse of Ann's imagined dream are accomplished, primarily, by "wings" becoming a synecdoche for "flying." The function of the apostrophe is nothing other than to translate Mandel's own dream in terms that interiorize the positiveness of his female other, that exorcise his fear as he departs from this lyric, donning the wings of its last line.

Thus the apostrophe allows Mandel to leave a space

that inspires uneasiness and to concretize his notion of the self. All this is achieved through what Culler calls the "now" of apostrophe, "not a moment in a temporal sequence but a now of discourse, of writing."[80] But, although there is no narrative sequence in this suite of poems, the vocative "you beside me" prepares the reader for the "we" of the following lyric, "Strange Places." The first stanza of this poem, like the first one in "Fear of Flying," has the same lexical repetition and doubling syntax that make the poem turn back upon itself. The "strangeness" of place marks the poet's estrangement from a monologic self, futher emphasized by the persistent "we." Contradiction, once again, functions as the generative principle both of "A Suite for Ann" and of the entire long poem.

"Place," the lyric that follows, in its lean column of no more than two words per line, evokes the separation of self from place, presence and absence, writing and silence. What trails behind the last word/line of the poem, "here," is the deep white silence of the page. "Here" is empty. Where there are no words, for Mandel, there is no place, or at least no discernible place. And this is by no means an element peculiar to Mandel's aesthetics. It is one of the elements that characterizes the long poem at large. The long poem, as a series of conscious acts of writing, is always tempted to identify location with the field of writing. But that connection

again opens new crises. Whether location takes the form of the page or of the whole poem, or whether it manages to maintain, to a larger or smaller extent, its geographical entity, place as treated in the long poem cannot contain the poet's self in its plenitude. The desire to get more of the self into place, into writing, while knowing that there is always a part of it left out, is another generative principle of the long poem.

The co-presence in Mandel's work of epic and lyric elements, together with the non-linear narrative of letters and photographs, illustrates the different versions of place with which Mandel is concerned. The poet's nostos sets him on a personal epic journey toward a real place that can be identified geographically. This movement toward real place both affirms the need to understand one's locality and shows how genre and reality interrelate. But the personalized vision of this epic journey manifests the extent to which the long poem parodies the heroization of the epic tradition. That same vision causes too a detour of the epic direction, and it leads Mandel to a space that is identifiable textually. Locality becomes the field of writing.

The transference from geographical locality to textual locus has a multiple function. It accentuates, first of all, the difference between place and space, the former delineating the physical boundaries within which an object is contained and by which it is named (i.e. Estevan),

whereas the latter indicates the inner boundaries of the containing object (i.e. the location of the poet's self). The emphasis on textuality as locality stresses the indeterminant quality that liquifies the parameters defining place, that is, limits and name.

One might be tempted at this point to see the transference from geographical location to textual locus as a metaphor (literally a metaphora), with place being the tenor and space being the vehicle. But given the continuous emphasis in Out of Place on the impossibility of locating a place of the past and on the need to produce space through language, it would, perhaps, be more accurate to view place and space as a parallactic coupling. Place, having a concrete form and structure, is conducive to mimesis; space, being inner and indeterminent, defies it. This reflects the anti-mimetic intent of the long poem's textuality. Space as writing -- the poem as locality -- signals to the reader that place, even when we take it to be the destination of an epic journey, has to be viewed, inhabited, with difference.

It is the rendering of place into space that partly accounts for Mandel's personalized epic journey. He articulates his journey in a parodic epic discourse, thus undoing the epic genre by interspersing it with lyrics, letters and photographs that enunciate the ways in which inner space becomes external. Ann Mandel's "Preface" as well breaks down the patriarchal ideology of the epic

tradition, while the presence of the poet as anti-hero and as his double dismisses the monologic ethos of that tradition. The reliance on tradition and on an absolute past that Bakhtin sees as generic elements of the epic are dismissed too. Mandel affirms the fictionality of any linear tradition as he valorizes the non-linear significance of the genealogical documents in the vault. The epic notion of an absolute past is also parodied, for he traces the past of a place in the present of textual space. Thus the poet's nostos is no longer a nostos that purports to articulate Bernstein's collective nostos of a tribe, the nostos for a specific place.

V: The Poet's _Chora_

The long poem brings together a multiplicity of diverse spaces. The plurality of locality introduces not a synthesis but a kinetic place. Place as mapped and named territory is disfigured; it is supplemented by the field of writing. The dislocations, the detours, the displacements we observe are the artful connections the poet makes within the scene of writing: the long poem as a polygraph of itineraries.

Chapter Five

The Self in the Long Poem

I: From the Cartesian Ego to the Elliptical Self

Locality in the long poem, both in its geographical and writerly dimensions, is inseparable from the concept of self. The poet's unfulfilled nostalgia, her or his dislocation, exposes a subject which is more conscious of what it lacks than of what it consists. This exposition postulates the self as a figure situated within a nonoriginary ground. In its anxiety to trace its adamic origins, the self crosses out parts of its selfhood. It reveals its susceptibility to the play of rhetoric, it questions its own subjectivity, intercepts its own epistemology. Such a self, although it finds itself situated in language, has the power to engender the writing that contains it.

The concern with this concept of self surfaces through the speaking "I." Most of the long poems under discussion are written in the first person. The first person in the long poem, however, does not merely express point of view. Point of view is what the reader, almost invariably, focuses on when dealing with novels or short stories.

Point of view in fiction is a matter of technique, a matter of perspective. Yet, although it is a significant aspect of fiction, critics don't usually pause to think of it as an element that determines a specific fictional or prose genre, except in the case of autobiography where it figures as the primary generic signature. But the nouveau roman and, more recently, the postmodern novel and the recit, together with the advent of theories which challenge perception and representation, have made critics question their readiness to identify point of view.[1] Point of view in the postmodern novel has been problematized, and the long poem, sharing a similar ideology, explores, in its own way, the same problematic.

In poetry, point of view acquires a different name. It becomes a persona -- a person masked, the voice behind apostrophe, the hand inscribing writing -- whether it personifies an object or represents a real individual. In the long poem, however, point of view loses its missive and manipulative authority, and manifests itself in a reflexive manner. We notice a shift from point of view as a rhetorical device to the poet's, and poem's, own self-expression. But although we are led to believe that it is the poet and not a devised persona speaking, our search for the poet's own projected self is constantly thwarted.

Almost invariably, the self remains elliptical and aleatory. Even in its moments of certainty, as we will

see, the self never shares its totality with the reader.
Quite the contrary. It _promises_ to unveil its truth, but
it continues pointing away from it, and distances itself
not only from the searching reader but from its own
meaning, too. The self, then, creates the impression that
it feeds on mystification and disclosure at the same time:
it plays hide-and-seek with the reader. Since the self
posits itself in the long poem only elliptically, the
reader, in turn, can only talk about it only partially, that is
"generally." Yet the specific configurations of the self
that we encounter attest to its ability to engender itself
as subject, and thematize itself as object.

This double function of the elliptical self is
contrasted to the Cartesian ego, one that feeds on its own
fiction of total truth. The Cartesian ego would never
consider positing itself as object. Its function is
monologic. What allows it to act this way is its
traditional wilfulness both in generating and controlling
knowledge. It is the self-as-subject alone that determines
the significance of the object of epistemology, and
subjects this object to its scrutiny. The discussion of
any object presupposes consciousness and the object's
relevance to the self. The authorial/authoritative
configurations that the Cartesian ego assumes invite us,
then, to consider it as the generative principle par
excellence, namely what generates and has control over,
all themes (what concerns consciousness) and forms.   The

Cartesian self celebrates humanism by following a project
that its own tradition has outlined.[2]

In the contemporary long poem poets undermine this
celebration. They present humanism as a set of aporias
derived from a system of totality and the privileging of
the self. The long poem goes beyond this humanistic man.
The self in the long poem decentralizes the traditional
concerns of the Cartesian ego. Its only constant element
is that of (self-)questioning, of teasing. Whenever the
long poem foregrounds the self, there is always a missing
element, a broken link. That which is missing creates
longing (desire and deferral).

II: The Name of the Self

The reality or "truth" of the self is concomitant with
the form in which the self is presented in a given context
of language, style, and narrative grammar. Yet, it is not
my intention to argue that the pervasiveness of self in
the long poem renders this genre as poetic autobiography,
although there are many long poems, such as Marlatt's
prose poem How Hug a Stone and her journal poem What
Matters, which are clearly autobiographical.

The self may be one of the long poem's major themes,
but the long poem is not to be confused with autobiography
for reasons which are many, and perhaps too obvious.
Starobinski's observations help us eliminate this thematic

determination.

> A biography of a person written by himself: this
> definition of autobiography establishes the
> intrinsic character of the enterprise and thus
> the general (and generic) conditions of autobio-
> graphical writing. But this is not merely the
> definition of a literary genre: in their
> essentials, these conditions ensure that the
> identity of the narrator and the hero of the
> narration will be revealed in the work. Further,
> they require that the work be a narrative and not
> merely a description.... The narrative must cover
> a temporal sequence sufficiently extensive to
> allow the emergence of the contour of life.[3]

The autobiographical impulse is undoubtedly present in the

long poem. Mandel's Life Sentence, Kroetsch's Seed

Catalogue and Delphi: A Commentary, Andrew Suknaski's

Montage for an Interstellar Cry, Lola Lemire Tostevin's

Double Standards, are examples of long poems which are

based on the writers' experiences. But it would be

misleading to argue that these poems are autobiographical.

They flirt with autobiography: they use the experientially

real as a point of departure for their meanderings in the

linguistically real. In fact, one wouldn't be going too

far to argue that the practice of the strictly

autobiographical element in the long poem continually

upsets its generic "laws." The formal and thematic

configurations the self assumes in the long poem resist

the very essence of autobiography as genre: to make sense

out of one's life. For whereas in autobiography, as

Starobinski says, "the narrator takes his own past as

theme,"[4] in the long poem it is the present of one's

self that is explored. Life as a process substitutes for
life as a totality; the representation of reality gives
way to the reality of language and to its articulation of
the self.

What I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that the
self as one of the major themes of the long poem cannot be
fully addressed; yet, at the same time, because it relies
for its formulation on linguistic enunciation, it can be
addressed as one of the principles that define the long
poem as a genre. As James M. Cox argues, "[l]anguage will
... be recognized as writing the self; we will give up the
ego and search for ourselves in that shifty pronominal
shifter -- the 'I' of discourse."[5]

The "I," the self's constant name, functions as
signature. In fact its roles as subject and object often
converge not in a narcissistic hiatus but in the very
convergence of inscribing and reading the self as the
figure of signature. In the long poem, the "I" signs
itself as the subject of utterance but at the same time
also signs itself off: the self as signature is almost
always present, but the self as presence is not. As
Derrida says about signature, "[b]y definition, a written
signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of
the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and
retains his having-been present in a past now, which will
remain a future now."[6] It is this paradoxical
empirical and nonempirical aspect of the signature that

accounts, in part, for the first person pronoun and the present tense in the long poem. Beyond this, however, according to Derrida, "[i]n order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production."[7] In this respect, the signature bears too a generic and textual seal. It assumes the simultaneous presence and reversal of the various genres employed in the long poem. Thus the signature gives us a version of parallaxis marking the textual world of the enunciating subject as well as the texts themselves that comprise this world.

The repeatable nature of the self as signature is contrasted to the self as protean concept. Such a self testifies to the long poem's resistance to any precise generic definitions. The self functions as both content and context, while putting the long poem forth as a genre which, in Derrida's words, "is without beginning or end, without content and without edge. There is only content without edge -- without boundary or frame -- and there is only edge without content."[8] Thematic and formal considerations are transcontextualized within the field of the long poem. In the long poem, then, the presence of the self -- a phrase that ought to be put under erasure immediately because of the contradiction it contains -- is that of a decentered self marking the absence of a

Cartesian ego. With the decentering of the self, the poet also loses any possibility of expressing a monologic view; quite the contrary, in the long poem monologism becomes suspect. The decentering of the self foregrounds the processual act of writing, which is what constitutes the self -- under the poet's eyes, under the poet's pen.

Since it would be practically impossible to account here in great detail for the treatment and function of the self in the long poem, I will focus on only two configurations of the self, which, I think, are representative of its overall function: the signature of the self and of its textuality in George Bowering's Kerrisdale Elegies, and in bpNichol's The Martyrology.

III: Signing the Text

George Bowering's Kerrisdale Elegies [9] is an example that best articulates the ramifications of the self's signature in the long poem. Despite the title's indication, this poem is not simply an elegy: it is an elegy imitating another elegy, specifically Rainer Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies. It is a double-voiced poem, a poem which is generically located on the edge of quotation and of discourse, thus blurring the difference between mimesis and originality. The author's signature and its transgressions of the genre Kerrisdale Elegies employs constitute the self in this poem.

Given the long poem's resistance to definition, there
is a certain appropriateness and irony in that the cover
of Kerrisdale Elegies displays a facial image creating
illusions of proximity to the poet. The cover image is the
face of the author wearing dark glasses. The ragged edges
of its frame simulate the double texture of a torn
photograph, the texture of glossy and rough paper (a
manuscript page of writing?). The torn top of the
photograph exceeds its margin and threatens to erase
Bowering's name: the author's visage is foregrounded; his
name is held in disbelief. The reader is faced with the
double bind of signature, the naming of an absent
presence.

While the author holds a pose, his long poem signs
itself on the cover as the specific instances of a genre:
that of the elegy. Yet, as is the case with many long
poems, the readily identifiable marks of one genre, here
the elegy, do not present the sole generic character of
the poem. The reader can take for granted only a number of
elements when dealing with this poem. One book (one face)
: one long poem (and its double) : one reader (the
viewer). As the reader of this poem I find myself caught
in the perennial triangle of the story of desire. The
author's face presents me with the "organ" I need in order
to see it, to touch it; it gives me the "eye" and the
"ear" through which I can read it.[10] This facial image
(of poetic toughness), the textual mask of the poet,

initiates a series of paradoxes between itself and what it refers to. Beginning with his parodic self-portrait on the cover, Bowering imitates the tropes of the genres he employs but at the same time practises a mimesis that unwrites the style of these tropes. The generic interplay in Kerrisdale Elegies points to an erotics of reading: the poet as faithful or adulterous reader -- reading, misreading, plagiarizing. The parallaxis of the author's signature reconciles the constructive and deconstructive activities within the generic context of this poem. If this author's fixed image fails to seduce me, the translation of the authorial image into signature does not.

The authorial signature in Kerrisdale Elegies, which begins to assert itself on the cover, supplements the doubleness of genre in the poem. The signature not only authorizes the deployment of diverse genres; it thematizes genre by presenting signing as yet another form of writing. "How can one cite a signature?" Jacques Derrida asks; "[t]he signature spreads over everything, but is stripped off or makes itself take off...."[11] The authorial signature, in other words, disseminates in the text not only the author's presence but his act of writing and what it entails. Signature elides the self as signified; it posits itself as the signifier of a sign whose signified remains aleatory and elliptical.

This multiple signing enables Bowering to play

hide-and-seek with his readers. He makes brief
appearances: the poet as flesh, as desire incarnate, as
the one who enters where I as a reader, to "misquote"
Bowering, "have been but can never enter" (3, p. 43). The
reader is invited to share a slice of life, those
fragments that become poetry. The authorial signature
foregrounds the presence of the reader in the text while,
at the same time, putting this presence into doubt. I'm
there, in the text, but at the same time I'm constantly
put on hold.

IV: Stealing the Text


```
        If I did complain, who among my friends
        would hear?
                    If one of them
        amazed me with an embrace
        he would find his arms empty, his own face
        staring from a mirror.   (1, p. 9)
```

Love me / love me not, says Bowering's picture. Love my
text, the flesh of my life.

```
        Beauty is the first prod of fear,
                                    we must
        live our lives in.
                        We reach for her,
        we think we love her, because she holds the knife
        a knife-edge from our throat.
                                    Every fair heart
        is frightful.
                    Every rose petal
        exudes poison in bright sunlight. (1, p. 9)
```

Love the terror of beauty, the image says;   make a home

for yourself, reader, at this knife-edge space.

```
                                        She says
        I've got you under my skin, yes, she says
        you walk with me wherever I go,
                                        you are
        the weather.
                I reply with a call for help,
        I'm disappearing,
                there's a change in the weather.
                        (2, p. 25)
```

Love me if you can, if you can really afford it, it says. I nearly can. I can only if I let "you" steal my freedom, my strategies as a reader. Only if I steal "your" glasses covering what is already hiding within the pages of the book. Only if I let the mirror image ("his face") erase my gender, become the neutral reader which objectifies these textual slices of life. It is the "I" of the cover image speaking not the author, its life assuming the physical reality of language, being affirmed by the signature of the writer. Bowering threatens to disappear when the weather changes, when the reader threatens to get too close.

Although Bowering remains nameless in the poem, his signature is disseminated by place names and images: Kerrisdale is the name of his Vancouver neighborhood; street references point to the same area; he has been in Duino and some of the other Italian locations he refers to; he is a baseball fan and has written about baseball before both in his poetry and in his fiction; there are allusions to some of his favorite poets such as Shelley,

H.D., Robin Blaser and Jack Spicer[12] as well as references to his own <u>A Short Sad Book.</u> As a consequence the signature is no longer the author's proper name but has become a metonymy. As Derrida observes, "[t]he <u>rebus</u> signature, the metonymic or anagrammatic signature, these are the condition of possibility and impossibility. The <u>double bind</u> of a signature event. As if the thing (or the common name of the thing), ought to absorb the proper, to drink it and to retain it in order to keep it. But, in the same stroke, by keeping, drinking, and absorbing it, it is as if the thing (or its name) lost or soiled the proper name."[13] The signature as common name writes the poet into his text but it also marks his departure from it, becoming thus a countersignature. The writer's departure -- his decomposition that erases the strictures of the dialectic presence/absence -- is one of the markers of the elegiac tone of the poem.

<pre>
                    God, there goes another breath,
        and I go with it,
                    I was further from my grave
        two stanzas back, I'm human.
                            Will the universe
        notice my unattached molecules drifting thru?

        Will the dead poets notice our lines appearing among
                                                    them,
        or are their ears filled with their own music?
                            (2, pp. 26-7)
</pre>

When the author-in-the-text asserts he is dead, when his friends' arms reach toward him to embrace only air, when his lines appear written over and in-between the lines of

a dead poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, it is his signature that survives this death incurred in language, that posthumously, postwriterly, keeps him absorbed as a non-proper name in the text.

The translation of Bowering's signature into countersignature is the first marker that designates Kerrisdale Elegies as a counterfeit of Rilke's Duino Elegies. And it is not only the title of Bowering's poem that points to Rilke's Duino Elegies. A comparison of Bowering's text to any English translation of Rilke's Elegies will testify that Bowering's long poem is a palimpsest, his own text superimposed on Rilke's text. In one sense it doesn't really matter what specific translations Bowering used.[14] What matters is the ways in which Rilke is re-cited, countersigned, in the site of Bowering's text. Here is an example from the fourth elegy:

Rilke

Even when fully intent on one thing,
we feel another's costly tug. Hostility
is second nature to us. Having promised
one another distance, hunting, and home,
don't lovers always cross each other's
                        boundaries?[15]

Bowering

I follow one scent,
                sure of my appetite,
but am distracted by a crossing spoor.
                                My nature
is torn,
        I am a trespasser,
                        I promised to
steer clear,
        stay in my own territory,

                                              but love
        makes intruders,
                        I am not I here,
                                          but the burglar
        of your past.   (4, p. 52)

There is as much sameness as there is difference between

these two texts. The sameness violates the distance we

traditionally are promised between an original source and

a text derived from it. But this sameness is "translated"

into difference as mis-representation when Bowering alters

Duino Elegies in ways that thematize his misappropriation

of Rilke's text. Duino Elegies is also violated by the

form of Bowering's text, that is the visual rendering of

Rilke's Elegies in Kerrisdale Elegies.

Nonetheless, Bowering does not intend to erase Rilke's

signature from the Elegies, [16] for his long poem is

inscribed by the games of desire: the mating of text with

stolen text; the mating of poet with poet. The poet, then,

as thief of words. He is made a thief by the object that

inspires the theft -- the poem that expropriates itself

from the singularity of authorship, that liberates itself

from monologic existence --, a thief exonerating himself

for the stealing of text by using his signature -- a

double signature at that --, a thief appropriating origins

and mocking originality by stealing in the name of

writing.

The games Bowering plays with origins point to an

erotics of textual relationships, more specifically the

parallaxis operating in his poem. Kerrisdale Elegies identifies itself with Duino Elegies, but this is an identification which has to be perceived, to use Linda Hutcheon's expression, with "critical difference."[17] Parallaxis here articulates the dynamics that bring close and keep apart Bowering's and Rilke's Elegies. Bowering's deviations from Rilke's text do not erase the original; they alter it while maintaining the "crossing spoors" that affirm not only the similarities between the two poems but also the writing steps that make Bowering's own text differ from Rilke's. The parallaxis that informs Bowering's writing act produces a text of marginal differences, a text of differance. For if Kerrisdale Elegies is a "translation," it is an annotated "translation," the annotations being Bowering's appropriation of the marginal space and the space between the lines of Duino Elegies.

The infidelities that the reader notices in Bowering's "translation" of Duino Elegies operate exactly on the level of parallaxis: he remains faithful to the fundamental structure, imagery and ideas of Duino Elegies by stealing and appropriating them in his own text through re-writing. One of course could explain this appropriation by pointing out that Bowering relocates Duino Elegies in Vancouver; yet the changes incurred by this relocation do not account for the composition of Kerrisdale Elegies. For Bowering alters (adulterates)

Rilke's form, language, and allusions. Linos, for
instance, to whom Rilke refers at the end of his first
elegy, in Kerrisdale Elegies turns into Marilyn Monroe.
Bowering's parallaxis maintains the mythological allusion
but translates it into contemporary terms. From the myth
about a pagan figure we move to the stardom of Hollywood,
to Marilyn who is, as Bowering says, "the stuff our words
are made from" (1, p. 20). Linos in Rilke's poem functions
as a double code: it signifies a mournful song; it is also
the name of a young man whose life assumes three mythic
configurations, two of them related to Apollo -- Apollo as
Linos's father avenging the death of his son, Apollo as
the god of song punishing Linos for transgressing his
human limits as singer.[18] Both Linos's signatures
relate the genre of the poem to elegy and raise questions
regarding the nature of origins and transgression.
Marilyn Monroe's life has similarly evolved into a myth
that is still being re-written.

Bowering's parallaxis here becomes a form of
parallelism, the setting side by side of two texts, thus
further enunciating the degree of sameness and difference
between Kerrisdale Elegies and Duino Elegies. His writing
act is an act of mimesis, mimesis, however, in Gerard
Genette's sense of forgery: "la forgerie est l'imitation
en regime serieux, dont la fonction dominante est la
poursuite ou l'extension d'un accomplissement litteraire
preexistant."[19] During this mimetic act as "forgery,"

Bowering also imitates (writes into the text) the writing
process he is engaged in. The poet's role as trespasser
affirms the function of signature as common name, but this
time signature thematizes the questions of self and genre
in this long poem. Poet and poem set out to encounter
their doubles, having decided beforehand on what duplicity
consists of.

But if plagiarizing Rilke's text is an aesthetic
si(g)n that stigmatizes Kerrisdale Elegies with the double
signatures of Rilke and Bowering, it is a si(g)n that
Bowering is far from ignoring. "[B]ut love / makes
intruders," he says, "I am not I here, / but the burglar /
of your past." Bowering's apostrophe is to the figure of
the lover, but, given the parallaxis in his poem, his
apostrophe may also be directed toward Rilke. Love effaces
the writing poet as origin, as the single maker of a text;
it presents the poet as the parallaxis of his own self, as
a "burglar" who cannot extract himself from the tradition.
He is "playing house with" (1, p. 12) the textuality of
writing. "[T]hrowing" his proper "name away" (1, p. 18),
writing himself over (making love to) Rilke's text, the
poet as lover and thief emerges from within the text of
another poet in the carnivalesque paradise of his own
text: "[u]pstairs with my toys -- a pen, some lined paper,
/ my books open around me" (4, p. 58). Bowering's
signature and countersignature present his long poem as
the hiatus of text as source, and text as the other of

that source.

In <u>Kerrisdale Elegies</u> the authorial signature
legitimizes the act of stealing, the appropriation of
another text and genre. To steal words in the open from
another text or from one's own text is an act that denies
originality. This act smears the originary point of
writing; it merges the beginning of a poem with the
beginning of poetry, and dissolves the frame of the self.
It is the poet as thief, as criminal, who can immerse
himself totally in writing, who can marginalize his own
self. Bowering plays with the elegy, with the
self-contained tensions of the short lyric, and locates
himself in the tradition. But at the same time he also
practises a philosophical deferral of the meditational
narrative, of the long poetic forms of the Romantics, and
of the serial poem of Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser.

This admixture of diverse genres is not so much a sign
of Bowering's inventiveness and innovation, although his
work can certainly lay claims to both, as it is an
intrinsic element of the long poem. And it sends a double
signal: it outlaws the classic law of genre theory that
argues for the purity of genre; and it legalizes, as
Derrida would say, "the limitless field of general
textuality."[20] If this "general textuality" creates
the impression of generic or formal chaos, it is the chaos
of carnival. And it is precisely the presence of authorial
signature that in part legitimizes generic carnivalization

in the long poem.

V: The Life-Long Poem

bpNichol's The Martyrology, although it has attracted
critical attention only recently, has been since the
publication of its first volume the long poem par
excellence, at least in writers' circles. The reasons?
Perhaps because of its sheer size, which increases and
will continue to increase,[21] and because it
exemplifies all the concerns one finds in the long poem.
More than any other long poem, The Martyrology illustrates
the carnivalization of genre.

One could call The Martyrology a long poem about the
long poem, a meta-long-poem, because its complexities and
tension derive from its anxiety about writing itself,
writing about one's self. Kroetsch calls it a "life-long
poem," an appellation also reiterated by Stephen Scobie:
"[i]t has become not just a long poem but a life/long
poem; it may even be regarded, after Eli Mandel's punning
title, as a 'life sentence,' from which the author
occasionally gets out 'on parole.'"[22] The poem as long
as life emphasizes temporality and undoes the stability of
the generic paradigms it accommodates in its form. We
could also attribute the same elements of The Martyrology
to Japanese linked poetry, and more specifically the
utanikki. [23] Nichol himself has called his poem a

journal, and a book about the history of saints.[24] The poem often calls itself into question, but it stresses too its epic elements, its series of lyric moments, its account of the self's journey; it also calls itself poem and text. In short, Nichol brings together life and poetry. The life-long poem shows how genre and ideology are interrelated and how the long poem is informed both in terms of form and in terms of theme by the life of the self, namely the ways in which poetry articulates the self.

The Martyrology is a superb example of a long poem that cannot be defined with precision. If we define it metonymically, as I have done, each definition brings into focus only one of its genres or forms at a time. The plurality of its form comes together only if we see it as a long poem, a genre which does not priorize any of its included genres. Read this way, The Martyrology opens with the same concern for and distrust of origins that we find in Kerrisdale Elegies. But The Martyrology, more than any other Canadian long poem, displays how this distrust of origins is grounded in the self. Nichol deals with this distrust by inventing his own origins, by creating a cosmology and a genealogy which substantially alter the humanistic interpretation of origins as well as the humanistic ways that have defined the self. In keeping with his anti-humanistic ideology, Nichol takes a nonlinear approach to the self. He uses deferrals,

detours, repetitions, and hiatuses in order to disclose the elliptical, but paradoxically abundant notion of self.

VI: How to Begin

Book 1 of The Martyrology begins with a series of textual delays. In the first edition of Book 1 (1972) we find, tacked between the cover and the first blank pages, a loose leaflet of four pages. On the first page, and above the title The Martyrology, we see the icon of St. Maria Goretti[25] whose brief life, violent death, and subsequent canonization are reported on the fourth page of the leaflet (together with her photograph) in the journalistic language of The Toronto Star. St. Maria substitutes, in a parodic way, for the muse figure and announces the recurring theme in the poem, that of martyrology. In the inside pages of the leaflet we read Nichol's own genealogy of saints, a genealogy which parodies both Christian and literary canons alike: "of those saints we know the listing follows," the opening line says. What follows is indeed a list of names presented in the discourse of Genesis. This discourse, however, is multilayered, as it evokes the ancient cosmologies and genealogies such as Hesiod's, and the epic catalogues we find in Homer. These multiple evocations, together with St. Maria Goretti, substitute for the invocation to the muse.

The Martyrology begins, then, in the most traditional
fashion. But given Nichol's private and invented
genealogies, its beginning is one of parodic inversion. We
participate in Nichol's parody as readers when we identify
in the discourse of The Martyrology traces of the
discourse of cosmogonies, genealogies, epic invocations,
catalogues, biblical and canonical texts. But Nichol
himself turns parody from a mode of discourse into a theme
in itself:

>   is nothing but a history
>   brief at best
>   an end of one thing
>   beginning of another
>   premonition of a future time or line we will be
>   writing
>   (Book 1, leaflet)

What we read here is a beginning before the formal
beginning of the poem, and a beginning within this
beginning: medias res in medias res. Nichol's beginnings
are tentative and arbitrary. The fact that the above
beginning appears in the physical form of a loose leaflet
that we can lose or misplace in the text, thus erasing a
beginning, and/or creating different versions of
beginnings, shows that Nichol overtly engages the reader
in the making of his text: the reader has a hand in the
poem's parallaxis. The poet's allowance toward the reader
stresses too the extent to which Nichol deconstructs the
notion of origin, and the certainty that humanism and
specifically the Christian tradition have endowed it with.

The fluidity of the beginning situates The
Martyrology not so much within the world of specific books
-- although there are plenty of examples of the poem's
indebtness to many sources[26] --, but within the
tentative boundaries of parallaxis. Nichol has always
displayed an interest in the fluidity of texts. His
shuffle texts Transformational Unit, Still Water and
Continuum, for instance, exemplify a writing whose
position we cannot fix in the text.[27]

"Things I Don't Really Understand About Myself," one
of his statements about the long poem, is exactly such a
shuffle text, dispersed and disseminated throughout Open
Letter's special issue on the long poem. The dispersal and
dissemination of the text, Nichol seems to tell us, does
not simply affect the deliberate unravelling of his
writing; it actualizes the continuous alterations of the
self's narrative. For a shuffle text, Frank Davey (the
editor of Open Letter) reminds us, "may be read in any
order."[28] The dispersal of Aristotelian structure, the
resistance to thematic unification, the continuous
reversals of beginnings and endings, all come into the
fore in Book 5 of The Martyrology. Here, the twelve
chains of the text link its different parts in ways that
create a labyrinthian system which defies the unity of
self. Nichol's writing reads as a continuous series of
detours, which inevitably affects the reader's own
movement in the text.

But to return to Book 1, following the leaflet -- my own placing of it in the book --, the page with the epigraph from Gertrude Stein,[29] and the title page, is yet another beginning: Knarn's icon and an excerpt "from The Chronicle of Knarn." The word "from" signifies a missing beginning and marks these three pages as direct quotations from a text, obviously of Nichol's invention but seemingly situated here as an excerpt from the canonical tradition. The most characteristic difference between the two beginnings so far comes in the point of view. The beginning of genealogies is told in the first person plural. The "we" gives authority to the text -- the authority of collective voice, the sacredness of material that has been sanctified by The-Word-become-Flesh and filtered through consciousness. This authority, by implication, also points to the kind of objectivity and truth that we, presumably, cannot question because they directly derive from "The Word." In contrast, the "i" in the fragment "from The Chronicle of Knarn" challenges authority by foregrounding its personal narrative of sorrow and loss. The lower case pronoun is an immediate deconstruction of the Cartesian "I," the erect letter that has inscribed patriarchal tradition and which bears the weight of responsibility for compiling genealogies and history by following solely its own ideology.

The interrelationship between the singular "i" and the plural "we" is, I believe, one of Nichol's primary

concerns in The Martyrology. The unfolding of the self follows the shift from singularity to plurality both in terms of the quantitative nature of the self and of its perspective. But before Nichol focuses on this shift, he continues his play with beginnings. The multiple beginnings correspond to the multiple "i's" of the poem. As the self resists definition so the poem amplifies its beginnings, its origins, thus echoing its resistance to reaching the "middle" and "end" of its structure.

What subjectivizes further this section is the tentativenes of the "i"'s discourse -- "i used to love you (i think)" -- and the direct expression of its desire -- "wishing i were near you," "my arms ache from not holding you." The tentativeness of love questions the Christian fundamental notion of agape, which is a selfless love devoid of desire for the human self, and solely informed by desire for the Other, God. Agape is directed toward the symbolic Other lying outside the self, whereas desire returns to the self. Ironically, the lower case "i," while not expressing a selfless self but implying a center absorbing the self, posits a self conscious of its limitations and relative marginality as illustrated by the following parenthetical prose stanza:

           (a long time ago i thot i knew how this poem
           would go, how the figures of the saints would
           emerge. now it's covered over by my urge to
           write you what lines i can. the sun is dying.
           i've heard them say it will go nova before the
           year's end. i wanted to send you this letter

>   (this poem) but now it's too late to say
>   anything, too early to have anything to send.)
>
>   (Book 1)

Scobie assumes that the "i" is the "singer" of the Chronicle, but, for some reason, he leaves the singer unnamed.[30]

It is important to notice that the "singer" of "The Chronicle of Knarn" and Knarn himself are one and the same rhetorical persona. The title of this section evokes the classic narrative tradition where there is a distance between narrator/singer and hero/character. Nichol collapses this distancing device by asserting that his central character is the "singer" himself. Hence Knarn's self-consciousness about his art. But the art Knarn talks about is not singing, as Scobie assumes; it is writing. Nichol does not locate his "Chronicle" in the oral tradition but in the tradition of the written word, or more precisely the genealogy of the word being written, the genealogy of writing.

The line "the language i write is no longer spoken" (Book 1) illustrates that both Knarn's life and art function on the same plane and are thus inseparable. Moreover, it emphasizes the difference between speech and writing, a difference which, through its Sausserian and Derridean ramifications, questions the placing of the oral tradition as the beginning of literature, and thus further questions the notion of a canonized literature itself. The

result of the process is that, in de Man's words,
literature as a "humanistic and historical discipline," as
"a relatively stable canon of specific texts," gives way
to écriture. [31]

The artist, Nichol seems to be arguing, cannot
divorce her/his art from the life that generates it. That
is why he foregrounds the self as a principle which
engenders art. As such, it loses its generality, it is
particularized. Autobiography becomes then not a genre
that seeks to totalize and unify the life of the self by
assigning meaning to it, but a writing that unravels the
complexity of the self by exploring its signification.
Nichol says that

> the hardest thing about using autobiographical
> detail in the long poem is to get the reader
> to accept it as what it is: words in a book
> revealing exactly the amount of information
> necessary for that moment of the composition.
> autobiographical information seems to raise
> the desire for more such information, as if
> knowing it would somehow increase one's
> appreciation of the text when, in fact, the
> exact opposite happens; the additional
> information changes our reading of the text
> & thus distorts it. [32]

Hence Nichol's a-version to literary beginnings where the
self begins to express itself only through the act of
writing. That is why the chronicler is not a poet who
sings but a poet who writes. Orality, which necessitates
presence, creates a support system for the self that lies
outside it; writing, implying absence, demands that the

self be disseminated....

Before we move to the next beginning, it is important
to notice that the fragment "from The Chronicle of Knarn"
is presented as direct quotation. However, there are no
quotation marks because "from" is used as a deictic
signifier of an assumed larger text. The last lines "from
The Chronicle of Knarn," "my hands turn the words /
clumsily," announce that the turning of the page will
reveal yet another beginning, this time a more formal one:
the usual title page with the publishing information.

Following this is an epigraph, another direct
quotation, whose source, "from THE WRITINGS OF SAINT AND,"
also reveals it to be a text of Nichol's invention. Again,
the title of this missing text thematizes the delay of
beginnings that Nichol has been playing with. Saint And
reminds the reader that he has to stand by the poet's
principle of delays if he is ever to reach the text
proper. Saint And signifies the cumulative principle that
characterizes The Martyrology.

> the precision of openness
> is not a vagueness
> it is an accumulation
> cumulous
> > (Book 4)

Delay and accretion are two of the most significant
principles of composition and structure in The
Martyrology, and in the long poem in general. Since the
textuality of the long poem depends largely on its

thematization of structural and formal devices, delay and
accretion are also two of the principles that reveal,
gradually, tentatively and polyvalently, the self.

Saint And, then, points to the dedication page[33]
which again foregrounds the importance of the writing act.
But this is not the end of delays. Two brief stanzas
precede Saint And's icon and the subtitle of the first
section of Book 1, "the martyrology of saint and":

> the breath lies
>
> on mornings like this
> you gotta be careful
> which way you piss
>   (Book 1)

Breath is a synecdoche which brings together Nichol's
major concerns in The Martyrology: speech, logos, spirit,
pneuma. Yet the breath, Nichol warns us, is capable of
lying. He rejects the pneumatological nature of
phonocentricism, that the sign is always turned toward
God, and proposes instead his grammatological project, a
project in which writing cuts breath short.

Although the poem is filled with speech and sound
patterns, Nichol's intention is not to privilege speech at
the expense of writing. Quite the contrary. While
extending the possibilities of speech toward a graphics of
phone and those of writing toward a phonetics of
inscription,[34] he seems to criticize the Platonic
ideology, and its impact on western tradition, that has

valorized one and condemned the other. It becomes clear at
this point that the textual delays of beginning have yet
another function, and that is to question speech and the
sign, and the ways in which they privilege presence.

The main text of the poem begins to unfold with a line
that further emphasizes the thematization of beginnings
and delays:

> so many bad beginnings
>
> you promise yourself
> you won't start there
> again

december 67

the undated poem is
found and
       forgotten
          passes

(Book 1)

This final beginning introduces yet another genre, that of
the journal, which further foregrounds the first person,
one of the most frequently used points of view in Nichol's
work.

By this point it is obvious the textual delays which
introduce the beginnings of The Martyrology are organic to
the elliptical notion of self. The layers of genre that
Nichol works with -- chronicle, oral versus written
traditions, genealogies, epigraph, journal -- depend on
the principle of deferral, for deferral works against the
intent of traditional autobiography, which pursues

totality and wholeness. Moreover, deferral also works against linearity, which is one of the fundamental devices employed in traditional autobiography. As Philippe Lejeune argues, "[l]e récit autobiographique traditionnel choisit comme structure principale l'ordre chronologique (avec tout ce qu'il implique d'explication 'diachronique' de cause à effet), réduisant l'ordre thématique au role de structure secondaire à l'interieur de l'autre."[35] The textual delays beginning The Martyrology speak the aleatory nature of the self, and illustrate that the content of the self cannot be taken to be anterior to form or style. This is why Nichol's fascination with the first person pronoun keeps changing ground and names.

VII: Self : Identity : Pronoun

The polyphonic beginning of The Martyrology announces both the formal and thematic plurality of the poem. It enhances what Edward Said calls in Beginnings "the degrees of self-consciousness" characterizing the opening point of a work. "The search for such points," Said continues, "not only is reflected in language, but is carried out in language and ... is necessary because of language. Polytechnical unlike any other human activity, language was discovered to be a suitable vehicle for posing questions of origin for purely linguistic as well as social, moral, or political reasons."[36] Nichol's long

poem deals with the martyrology of language, <u>logos</u> being
both the persecutor and the martyr, what has to be
debunked. "Man the beginning," Said observes, "man as the
subject of human thought and activity in what is now seen
as the utopia of Renaissance humanism, is admitted to
language only as an incipient, and inarticulate, ensemble
of relationships among his activities."[37] Nichol
parodies the beginning proper of a literary work because
he also wants to question the power of origins, that is,
the ways in which humanism and the literary canon it
constructed formalize and determine perception of the self
and artistic expression.

The "zero point" that precedes a beginning designated
in writing is, in Said's words, "a forbidden paradise
which literacy [writing] penetrates only at the same
critical moment that the paradise is obliterated."[38]
Nichol plays out the ritual nature of every beginning by
exaggerating ritualism and therefore by parodying
paradise. Each beginning, while starting the poem anew,
falls behind its previous beginning in <u>a mise en abyme</u>
configuration and expresses the impossibility of stating
the self.

> it's so far from one end to the other
> sound repeating itself beyond perfect zero
>
> (Book 1, "scenes from the lives of the saints")

The zero point of formal beginnings echoes the lost

paradise of Nichol's saints. Paradise cannot be entered,
let alone experienced, without a language that can exceed
profane knowledge. Paradise is a different name for the
language of transcendence, of unification. Thus in his
attempt to create a genealogy of the self, Nichol also
employs a discourse that addresses the sacred, the origin
of the self.

The poet's attempts in The Martyrology to speak the
"father" are constantly frustrated by the "father's"
unnameability.

```
        you have made me
        granted me friends
        given me reasons for singing their praises
        as i do
                & in the praising name them
        as i cannot name you

        do you think the poem will change
        . . .
        there are finally no words for you father
        too many letters multiply the signs
        you are the one
                        the unifying
        no signifier when we cannot grasp the signified
        saints in between
                        the world of men
        women
                the sign complete
                                (Book 3)
```

The completeness of the sign marks the degree zero of
knowledge. Even though "Lord" in The Martyrology, as Davey
remarks, "appears to be the stable guarantor of
meaning,"[39] "Lord's" absolute unity does not always
guarantee meaning.

```
& God of (the many) (no) names
who is (the one) (the many)
(above) (around) (inside) all
(watched) (did not watch) over everything

God of names
who is all over everything
i read it different ways
                    (Book 5, Chain 1)
```

Nichol's bracketing signifies the possibility of absence, of emptiness. The language made by "Lord" loses its sovereignty in the poet's hands.

According to Davey's argument, "[d]espite the openness of The Martyrology as an unfinished poem, or of the narrative choices offered Book 5's readers, or of the 'playfulness' of the many punning passages, the language theory implied here suggests a bound meaning: that a scrutiny of signifiers will invariably lead back to 'You' or 'Lord,' or at least to the complex of meaning associated with 'Lord.'"[40] Davey's argument is persuasive as long as we don't always take the apostrophized "you" to be a referent of "Lord." "Lord" and "His" unnameability remind us of the sign of fiction -- which I discussed in Mandel's work -- often addressed by apostrophe. "Lord" in The Martyrology appears to be the sign of desire, displaying the optative elements we often encounter in Nichol's discourse.

The return of signifiers to "Lord" as signified does not, then, necessarily suggest that Nichol's discourse is "bound." Nichol does not resign as man of words nor does

he hesitate to address "Lord." The Martyrology as a long
poem accomplishes the un-bounding of this "bound meaning"
by unravelling the "many guises of [Lord's] signifiers"
(Book 5, Chain 3). The sign of the "father" can only be
imagined; its power lies in in its repetition with
difference, ultimately in its unreadability.[41] Thus
paradise in The Martyrology remains unnamed not only
because it is untenable but because the poet understands
it only when he translates it into profane, processual
terms, through his own linguistic utterance.

The poet situates his self in a paradise of a
different order, a paradise of words occupying the middle
ground between the nonlanguage of transcendence and the
language of the body, "what comes forth from my mouth"
(Book 3).

```
          this time the sky screams     BLUE
          thru a break in the clouds     high above me
          so high i cannot fly there with the mind
          the saints live      & they called it cloud town
          when they fell to earth as strangers
          wide-eyed at all this tumbling green land
          spun thru space towards their falling bodies &
                                             caught them
          SKY BLUE     the colour of saint and's eyes
          taking in this surprising place he'd come to

          if there is a land which is the mind
          it is as brown as earth & cool there
```

                    (Book 2, "clouds")

The scream of the sky conveys no meaning in its
inarticulateness -- meaning being always stable, and what
validates the practice of tradition -- but signification,

which amounts to tentative, self-doubting meaning. The

upper case of BLUE foregrounds a linguistic sign which

sits both in-between and apart from the sentence because

of the blank space that precedes and follows it. The

reader is reminded of the arbitrary convention that gives

the sky the quality of blue, a color which by extension

becomes the signifier of things celestial, of purity,

sainthood. The poet salvages language from the martyrdom

it has been subjected to; he lets language be itself. As

he puts it, "it's a good idea, at least from time to time,

to let the language speak."[42] It has to be brought

down from paradise, down to "earth," to its actualization,

the linguistic utterance. Otherwise it remains untenable.

The self in The Martyrology is untenable in the same

way that paradise is untenable. It is polyphonic, protean.

The fact that the "i" in The Martyrology is the speaking

persona of Nichol's many saints -- that is language -- as

well as of himself illustrates that the content of the

self is not taken to be anterior to form, style or

linguistic utterance.

> i want the absolute precision
> of fluid definition
> the saints learned
> long ago
> . . .
> there is no definition
> where you cannot see the line
> of drawing
>   writing
>   music
> the form a focus for us
> i wakens from

```
the dreamed landscape
out of the words' tumble
should meaning separate
when it is the torrent sweeps me
thru the bound beeches
                          (Book 4)
```

"i want" asserts the presence of the self's desire and at

the same time defines the self by its lack or the absence

it suffers. The contradiction between fluidity and

definition locates the self within the realm of desire.

The object desire addresses is language. Language not as

speech in which the signifier as sound is self-validating

and reliant on presence. But language as "the line / of

drawing / writing / music." Nichol sees the fluidity of

definition in language as graphism, in the Derridean sense

that "there is no linguistic sign before writing."[43]

It is the fluidity of definition that elongates

definition, delays the writing act, prolongs the poem.

It is the same fluidity of definition which draws a

distinction between the self and the first person pronoun.

Here is what Nichol says about his use of pronouns:

> often when I'm talking about "I," I'm talking
> about the "I," that is to say, your I, his I,
> her I, so on.... See, to me, pronouns are more
> universal, that's why I like them. I think it's
> harder for a general reader to identify with an
> "I," I would agree, but I think that we get into
> that eventually. He, she, we--it's looser, it
> isn't named. Naming, though on the one hand it
> claims, often distances. So in trying to deal
> with the reality of how we perceive and so on,
> I often prefer to use pronouns. In those cases,
> that shift to the third person verb is to
> indicate that type of usage of the word "I."
> "I" is an interiorized concept--in short, "I"

is inside.[44]

Nichol's use of the first-person pronoun with the third-person predicate, as it is obvious in his line "i wakens," displays both his aesthetics and his attitude toward language. "I" is the name of the self, its own self-appellation as well as the naming act that characterizes the performative function of language. The self's every manifestation is preceded by its self-appellation, which means that the self does not exist or cannot be perceived outside language. In this respect, the pronoun "I" functions as the collective name of all the saints, Nichol himself, and the other personae that figure in The Martyrology. What differentiates them is the level of discourse each "I" employs.

In "the sorrows of saint orm" (Book 1), the "I" is distinguished by its poetic identity, its writing activity: "notes in my journals / don't hold true." The journal as genre that relates in a first-person narrative what constitutes the self as an object of knowledge loses its authenticity; it becomes a genre that is defined by the writing action of the text, by the "I"'s discourse.

> i knew when i headed home tonight
> the whole poem graphed in my mind
> i'll never make it
>
> some things are stronger than words
>
> if i could throw down this pen i never use
> then i could live my life   free of naming

(Book 2, "book of common prayer")

This break point between the poem as mental graph and as writing act is a critique of the genre of autobiography. The pen -- not a pre-thought notion of the self -- is what literally marks Nichol's long poem.

This graphic identity of the self is a recurring motif in The Martyrology. In Book 4, for instance, we read:

    style's stylus
    the fingers an extension of the mind
    ma 'nd me 'nd
                    personal history

Style inscribes the present self of the writer. It becomes his signature, the present rendering of the self. As Starobinski says, "[i]t is the image of the stylus with a sharp point that tends ... to prevail over that of the hand moved by the writer's inner spirit."[45] In this respect, the manuscript facsimiles in The Martyrology attract the reader's eye more than the printed pages do, not so much because of Nichol's handwriting in longhand, but because they affirm, while casting into doubt, his presence as author. As Shirley Neuman, extending Starobinski's argument, remarks, "[s]tyle is autobiographically significant because it is attached to the writer's present.... Style carries the 'truth' of autobiography."[46] Style, then, brings together signature, mind (ma), the "I," and one's personal history, "ma" (mother).

Style indeed renders as personal what the pronoun "I"
depersonalizes in The Martyrology. The carnivalesque
atmosphere of the "freak show" in "the martyrology of
saint and" (Book 1) enhances the style of the beginning of
the long poem. The "maudlin" style of the clownish saints,
the "circus finally grow[ing] old & jaded," and the poet's
own apostrophe to the "dear funny paper i write upon," all
account for the confusing myths about the saints, and
their erratic personalities.

Nichol's "i" moves into a series of identities. As he
says in Book 2,

> we move in threes
> the short statements linked to
> the worlds i live in
> hidden personal one & the same
>   (Book 2, "auguries")

The ambiguity of this last line is just another indicator
of the self's polyvalence. It is this same plurality that
brings into focus one of the difficulties in reading The
Martyrology. The poem doesn't simply resist a unified
notion of the self; it also resists any reading attempt at
"figuring" out the different selves as well as their
interrelationships with (their) others. One of the ways of
understanding Nichol's treatment of the self is to pay
attention to the distinctions he draws among pronouns.

At the risk of reducing the complex notion of self in
the poem, I will argue that Nichol structures his poem
around the polarity between self and identity. The first

person pronoun is employed as a purely linguistic
construct, as the performative that actualizes the self's
enunciation without assigning any eventuality to the self.
Identity, in contrast, derives from the specific
configuration the self insists on assuming during its
performative acts. The uniqueness of identity is
constituted by the repetition of compatible performative
acts. Its uniqueness is thus based on reduction. Whereas
signifiers and signifieds shift, the agent of the
performative act initiating the shifts remains stable, has
only one name. The closer the self comes to achieving an
identity, the more rigorously do pronouns claim to be the
performatives of the self.[47]

Although Nichol for the most part does away with
hierarchies, there is an implicit schema in his treatment
of self: the self, by lying outside any totalizing whole,
also lies within its specific configurations; the multiple
identities in The Martyrology are related to the self
syntagmatically; the pronouns are what perform the actions
to which the identities refer.

> father i am one am many
> as ever the need to be obsesses
> simply as i would i would speak to you
>
> (Book 2, "auguries")

"the need to be" here is nothing other than the need to
define one's identity, to ground the self in a singular
way. Nichol acknowledges the compelling need for

definition; at the same time, however, that this need becomes one of the main drives in his poem, he also deconstructs this need. The "being," or the series of "beings" we encounter in the poem, could not be defined according to ontological and metaphysical traditions; "being" lacks substance and precision; we get only glimpses of it as a supreme fiction. The "being" in The Martyrology is, then, en voyage, destabilized. "i am one am many" does not leave room for any specific identity to take over. Finally, for Nichol, the tyranny of "being," equivalent to the totalizing effects of episteme, is not immanent.

And so this "being" cannot be without language. Thus although The Martyrology is narrated in the first person, its point of view does not simply express one identity or one condition of the self. "i am one am many" -- echoing as it does Olson's "one makes many" -- illustrates the relation between the "i" and the "we," and contains within its schematic formulation the middle ground between self and identity. The absence of the conjunction "and" in "i am one am many" over which I trip as a reader in a moment of blindness is the absent marker, the hiatus point where the war between signification and meaning, where dissemination (intrinsic to the self) and totalization (extrinsic to the self) takes place. The hiatus between "i am" and "am many" connects and separates, delimits and extends the groundless ground of the self. This

deconstructive vacillation, inherent in the self, keeps "being" in suspension. It is present only as long as it is meant to evoke what has constructed its supreme fiction. Nichol's The Martyrology shows why the long poem privileges the self while subverting it. The various configurations of the self become temporalized in the long poem's meandering discourse.

By following the schema self:identity:pronoun, we become aware that the early stage of the self in The Martyrology is that of a self realized and deconstructed through mirrors. The mirror as "figure" stands in the middle ground, between self and identity.

> the part of yourself least recognized
> merges with the mirror
> your fingers do not know your skin
>
> (Book 2, "auguries")

The unfamiliar skin reminds the speaker that there is nothing there to be fully grasped, to be recognized. The mirror image is not an instance of deja vu.

> i remember now that i remember nothing ...
>
> who takes me as i am
> not this self confronts me in the mirror
>
> (Book 2, "auguries")

I am not suggesting here that Nichol adopts a Lacanian approach to the self, for Nichol's mirror doesn't offer recognition. Lacan's "mirror's stage," during which the

child experiences, "in a flutter of jubilant activity," a

"transformation" that helps it identify itself as a

coordinated being, is clearly not in operation here.[48]

In Nichol's poem, mirrors are not a source of jubilation,

for the specular image the self sees in them ensues in no

recognition of self or its other. When the specular image

unveils an otherness that terrifies, as in "look in the

mirror / knowing you have found the beast" (Book 2,

"auguries), it becomes clear that mirrors in The

Martyrology parody the unity of the self. They promise

only what Lacan calls méconnaissance. But, according to

Lacan, méconnaissance (failure to recognize,

misconstruction) is always related to connaissance

(knowledge).[49]

"auguries" of Book 2 focuses on the tension between

the certainty and doubt self-knowledge provides. All the

occurrences of "now" and "know" in this section engage in

battle. The "now," which signifies the tense of the poem's

grammar, works against an achronic, absolute point of

self-knowledge. You "learn to know yourself" only when you

pursue the seriality of knowledge the "now" points to --

that same seriality that elongates the long poem. This

seems to be the poet's imperative: "live in the present /

it is all around you."

        of those things we understand this is the greatest
                                        mystery
        knowledge deceives us
        believing we move in our lostness purposefully
        discover new worlds as and did

             knowing nothing he came to that place saint
                               rike now lives in

        (Book 2, "auguries")

The phonetic proximity of "now" and "know," amplified by

the alliteration of "new" and "nothing," dramatizes the

impossibility of fully "knowing ... now," which is nothing

other than the unreadability of the self. "knowledge

deceives us," the speaker reminds us. The "now" dissolves

the power with which knowledge fixes on the self. The

moment-by-moment construction and deconstruction of self

puts forward a lack of identity: "you are the mirror of

what you deny" (Book 2, "sons and divinations"). This lack

is emphasized by the specular image in the mirror, which

accentuates the self's dispersal.

        But Nichol does not stop at this; he also

deconstructs the medium of this dispersal, the speculum

itself.

            I preferred St And a clown
            human & vulnerable
            critical of stupid posturing
            absurd hierarchies he'd left behind ...
            lived on
            isolate among the many
            his face mirrored in the air
            he gazed into & fell
            self into self
            narcosis of narcissus
            wandered then
            lost among men
            the full pain of his loss haunting him

                    (Book 4)

St And, his name a signifier of the connecting/connective

ground he occupies, experiences only disconnection. His public and symbolic role as saint does not help him stand opposite or beside himself. For him there is no other to look at. When he gazes at the ethereal mirror, it is not self-love he feels; rather, the specular image he looks at is one of emptiness and loss, the figure of the abyss itself. The figure of the other as the object of self-love recedes into slumber. The self resists its own reflexivity, it refers to its inexactness, its desire to proliferate beyond a single other.

In that, the mirror in The Martyrology, far from offering illusions of identity, emphatically presents recognition as a form of blindness and reductiveness -- "the thinner man confronts you in the mirror" (Book 2, "sons and divinations"). In no way does it function as locus for any self's figuration of certainty; on the contrary, instead of being there as a space that inspires and contains representation, the mirror is the pharmakon. [50] As pharmakon it creates momentary illusions of identity and remedies these illusions. It becomes the spectacle of the rhetorical ground within which The Martyrology explores the multiplicity of the self.

Another way through which Nichol explores this multiplicity of self is by tracing the linear and jagged patterns of his writing process.

(i moved during the course of this writing, inter-
rupting the patterns, jarring at first because i

> found myself, ten years later, back in the same
> house i'd lived in during the writing of 1335 Comox
> (poem that began JOURNEYING & THE RETURNS (whose
> form was perceived after i moved away from there
> (from here))) the dilemma being i found
> myself caught up in a) mirror image
>
> (Book 4)

The writer's recognition here is a matter of mapping out his movement, a movement repeated with difference. Nichol's act of writing frustrates his attempt to situate himself in a familiar locus. In fact, his act of writing becomes the sole parameter by which he can "find himself." The writer as his own reader, his first reader indeed, creates a textual mirror. The "mirror image," the writer's act of reading his own text, lies outside the bracketing of self-recognition; it is behind the vision of the writer/reader who is framed by his own frame. The mirror's own reflexivity coincides with the text's inner referentiality. They both contain, and point to, referents of the self, but never the self itself.

These referents are the series of identities the self moves into, the variants of the pronoun "i" it tries out. This is not the place to enumerate the many identities posited by the first person pronoun. Nor is, I think, such an enumerative interpretation part of the poem's design. To be sure, the shift from identity to identity is conducive to the poem's length; it is also what develops the risks of the self's representation. The layering of identities, almost synonymous with the unmasking of the

self, takes place on a temporal level which coincides with the poem's utterance. The "i" is conscious of the dangers of naming and fixing: "having tried to fix time / it is myself i am the one destroyed" (Book 2, "clouds"). The same cautiousness must also inform the reader's trajectory through the poem.

There is no doubt that, among the abundance of "i's" in the poem, there is one which stands out, that of the writer's "i." Yet this "i" is not one that particularly inspires authority or establishes priorities. More often than not, it is this "i" that undergoes the harshest questioning, the most relentless displacement:

> this poem becomes a diary of a journey
> personal it evolved impersonally
> a longing as i will say must say please
> saint rand stranded in that strange place
> how would you call it
> "a problem of resolution"?
> as tho the "i" the writer of these poems
> controlled your destiny
>
> (Book 2, "sons and divinations")

The depersonalization of the poet's "i," the standing of the self outside and next to the self as writer, is indicative of the parallaxis that informs The Martyrology. The questions parallaxis raises here are those of referentiality and representation, or, more to the point, representation as genre. The tension between the poet's "personal" journey, and his "impersonal" rendering, accounts for the poet's feeling of "longing," a

longing that elongates his poem. In that project self and
genre become interrelated and co-productive. The
Martyrology as a collage of genres, a collage that does
not erase, though, the rough edges where contradictory
genres meet each other, also pastes together self-erasing
selves.

However odd the idea may at first seem, the self's
erasure or suspension is obviously accomplished by the
first-person pronoun. In the first person, as Benveniste
says, there is "both a person involved and a discourse
concerning that person. 'I' designates the one who speaks
and at the same time implies an utterance about
'I.'"[51] Discourse, then, actualizes the self's
differentiation in The Martyrology. What the reader
encounters is a series of i's, a series of identities. But
as soon as an "i" gets stabilized, as soon as its words
are read or heard, its enunciation puts forward the
characteristics (style, signature) of a specific identity.

Nichol, as we have seen, is aware of the danger of
solidifying identity, hence his proliferation of the
first-person pronoun.

        people how i lose myself in you
        as stein saw it the difference between identity
                                    & entity
        it is so much more soothing to live with memory

                (Book 2, "friends as footnotes")

Identity, for Nichol, rests in monologic expression, a

reification of the self. Entity is what opens the self up, what speaks its polyphonic structure. It is this resistance to a reified self that operates against the autobiographical impulse in The Martyrology. Autobiography as genre, we remind ourselves, takes for granted the existence of a single identity; it aims, as measure of its success, to put together the disparate selves. The Martyrology defies the unified self as well as the pure genre.

It is not surprising, then, that Nichol does not seek clarity and certainty. Clarity for him takes the form of wilful blindness. This is why the various speakers in his poem keep reminding themselves that they are one and many. Because no speaker, no writer -- or reader for that matter -- can do away with the pronoun "i" Nichol recognizes that we ought to rethink and expand the function of the "i." That's why he constantly shifts from "i" to other pronouns in order to elaborate this differentiation.

> saint of no-names
> king of fools
> the days are spent in piecing things together
> the night's strewn with pages you do not remember
> writing
> third person to first person
> am i the fool
> sick of everything i've written
> fascinated by my own distaste
> keep placing one letter in front of another
> pacing my disillusionment

(Book 3)

Nichol seems to choose escape from one pronoun to another

as a way of dealing with his frustration. Yet, no matter
what pronoun for the moment he privileges, he cannot get
away from discourse, nor can he ever as writer and speaker
get rid of the "i." What the pronouns as well as Nichol's
shifts illustrate is that the self cannot be imagined or
thought of outside language.

The apostrophic mode of the poem is one of the primary
rhetorical tropes Nichol, like Mandel, uses to counter the
"i's" monologism. Whether the "i" addresses its other as
"you," or whether it addresses a "you" other than itself,
its rhetoric of apostrophe marks, in Culler's words, the
"proximity and distance" that inform the self's
reflexivity and referentiality.[52] As Benveniste
observes, "[i]n effect, one characteristic of the persons
'I' and 'you' is their specific 'oneness': the 'I' who
states, the 'you' to whom 'I' addresses himself are unique
each time.... A second characteristic is that 'I' and
'you' are reversible: the one whom 'I' defines by 'you'
thinks of himself as 'I' and can be inverted into 'I,' and
'I' becomes a 'you.'"[53] The intersubjectivity of
discourse that Benventiste talks about reminds us of
Culler's point about the "radical interiorization and
solipsism" of the apostrophizing "I" that I discussed in
the context of Mandel's Out of Place.

This intersubjectivity illuminates Nichol's interplay
of identities. The reversibility of "i" and "you" points
to the parallaxis of the rhetoric of apostrophe.

Parallaxis pre-empts the "i," dispossesses it of its constitutive identity. Hence the ensuing reversibility of the "you's" functions: "i fear you think me strange / you lacks meaning for me" (Book 3). "you" here serves as the decoder of the apostrophic act, but it also fails to fulfill this function. It ceases to be the second person; it becomes the third party that is being discussed, what "lacks meaning" and reference, and therefore what puts the "i's" enunciation under erasure.

Nichol obviously avoids an essentialism of the self. In lieu of this, he moves toward and appropriates the ground of another pronoun.

        the i is always clear
        it's just the we
        forcing a retreat to memory
        i define myself too often by what went before

            (Book 2 "friends as footnotes")

Memory functions here as the entity of collectivity, the dissemination of the self in multiple contexts which revise and reshape it. Nichol's propensity toward the "we" can be partly explained by the "we's" stronger rhetorical, and therefore persuasive, function because of its collectivity, and its claims for a complicity with "you." On the other hand, however, the "we" puts a halt to the "i's" claim for sovereignty. "this is how the false 'i' ends" (Book 3), Nichol says before the "we" threatens to dissolve the limits the "i" establishes.

```
no 'i' stands alone
its base is 'we'
all the universe embodied in that term
```

                    (Book 3)

The "universe" the "we" embodies is not simply humanity,
though it is that. More specifically, it is the uni-verse,
writing and its parallaxis. Furthermore, Nichol re-verses
the constitutive structure of "we" as Benveniste defines
it. For Benveniste, as we have seen in the section on Eli
Mandel, "[t]he presence of 'I' is constitutive of 'we.'"
Nichol argues instead that "we" does not simply function
as the context for "i" but is in fact what constitutes
"i."

The relationship between the "i" and "we" is no longer
one of extension and accretion, for the plurality of "we"
does not consist exclusively of a series of i's. Nichol,
in other words, does not see "i" as genus-as-genre, as
what constitutes the value of what Derrida calls "the
human genre, a genre of all that is in general."[54] On
the contrary, he emphasizes the contextualization of the
"i," its participation in the "we" without being
obliterated by it.

The "i"'s difference resides in the id of identity,
but it is a difference echoing sameness, the sameness of
the "i" as the letter of order, naming, knowledge. The
"i," being both intrinsic and extrinsic to the "we," often
becomes in The Martyrology a formless form, a pronoun

without a person, thus engendering a genre without a
genre.

>   i'm afraid of writing something which does not end
>   as we does not
>   only the link which is i
>   to be replaced
>   other i's to see thru
>
>   (Book 3)

The incompleteness of the "we," its limitless content, is
both liberating and terrifying. The "i" is only a link to
"we's" textuality, a boundary without a frame. The
"something" Nichol is "afraid of writing" is his own long
poem, interminable, as The Martyrology is, inclusive and
inconclusive at the same time.

The "we" marks then the palindromic movement of the
poem:

>   there is a we
>   different   the same
>   links us in the law language comprehends
>   i have to trust to carry me thru into somewhere
>   ...
>   a we that lacks connections
>
>   (Book 3)

Because of the difference and sameness of what makes The
Martyrology both reflexive and referential, the poem's
elongation establishes an inward and, at the same time, an
outward unfolding. Outwardly, The Martyrology extends to
encompass everything that constitutes the self,
incorporating within its corpus those genres conducive to

the self such as the journal and hagiography. Inwardly, it
spirals within its textual locus as it follows "the law"
of language, a law that is being constituted
simultaneously with the poem's composition.

These two movements relate parallactically, and
illustrate that the genre of the long poem is not
"something" arbitrarily assigned to its textuality, or
designed independently from it. Quite the opposite. The
parallaxis of the reflexive and referential elements of
The Martyrology indicates the extent to which genre is not
just a formal matter. As Derrida says, "it [genre] covers
the motif of the law in general, of generation in the
natural and symbolic senses, of birth in the natural and
symbolic senses, of the generation difference, sexual
difference between the feminine and masculine
genre/gender, of the hymen between the two, of a
relationless relation between the two, of an identity and
difference between the feminine and masculine."[55]
Nichol's questioning of the self inadvertently
destabilizes genre as well, genre considered in all its
semantic ramifications.

Self and genre often figure as each other's parallaxis
in The Martyrology. Nichol says in Book 3, "it is the
parallels & not the differences confuse us." The
elliptical grammar of this sentence/line marks the
impossibility of fully delineating self and genre as a
couple graphing the same line, as well as of fully

grasping the complexities of either of them when they move
on parallel lines.

Later in Book 3, Nichol articulates in a more explicit
way the parallaxis binding, but never erasing, difference,
self and genre-as-gender.

<pre>
                         a complete thot
           born from the dialogue between you
           or what comes forth from my mouth
           born from the woman in me
           handed down thru my grandma ma & lea
           is what marks me most a man
           that i am finally this we
           this one & simple thing
           my father Leo
           my mother Cancer
                              she births herself
           the twin mouths of women
                                 w's omen
           it turns over and reverses itself
           the mirrors cannot trick us
           are words are spun within the signs our
                              fathers left
           the sibilance of s
                              the cross of t
           ...
                    the sign complete
           the w & the circle   turning
           add the E
                    the three levels
           linked by line
                    or the two fold vision
           H to I
                the saints returned to this plane

                         ME
                         WE
</pre>

Gender and self, genre and identity, genealogy and history
are interwoven with the signs of language. Their
parallactic unfolding creates unities that immediately
destabilize, tensions that are either resolved by
momentary balance or left to probe further into the layers

of signification. Self and genre, the "i" and the long

poem, are bound by a paradoxical logic which the reader

cannot subvert. To subvert it would mean to evoke the law

of logos, to make sense out of the sense-less.

In a doubly paradoxical way, The Martyrology is a

monumental attempt to create a

> poem of
> perfect movement
> containment of
> the flux
>   (Book 4)

The Martyrology suggests that the long poem's limits are

hardly self-evident. Positioning the self as a center

which constantly teases its own centrality, and as an

origin which blurs origins and originality, is indicative

of the long poem as a volatile genre. In turn, the self

finds itself within, not at the source of, language;

similarly, the genre of the long poem finds itself

begotten within, not outside, the long poem itself. The

self is ec-centric to itself as the long poem is

ec-centric to any predetermined laws of genre. The

Martyrology, perhaps more than any other Canadian long

poem, is a textual locus of permanent conflict and

indeterminacy, generating its own subject and genre. The

form of the long poem is an uncanny form, familiar and

strange at the same time.

Chapter Six

Outlawed Narrative

I: From Narrative to Discourse

I have raised a variety of questions relating to
structure and origin in the long poem, to its continuous
unfolding in nonlinear, jagged ways. I have shown its
intergeneric character, its acknowledgement of the
strictures of certain genres, and its unfailing tendency
to bypass and to mock them, to recontextualize them. I
have also shown that the present tense is consistently
employed in the long poem by way of openness and impetus.
More specifically, my treatment of locality and the self
in the two preceding chapters focalizes the conscious use
of language as initiating the long poem, and justifying
its ludism. More often than not, in talking about these
matters, I have used a rhetoric of erotics. That rhetoric
reflects the long poem's desire to speak the paradox of
generic, formal, and semantic limits. What I intend to
address here is how all these elements are arranged in the
long poem, how it is structured, what body of language its
desire creates.

The structural arrangement of a literary text's

elements usually refers to narrative. But with the
emergence of narratological studies since the early
seventies, narrative has lost its innocence. Now narrative
is accompanied by terms like "story," "antistory,"
"recit," "discourse," "narration," "master narrative,"
"histoire," "fabula," "sjuzhet," to mention only the terms
that have caught on. Although all of them focus on
structure, on the meaningful arrangement of a text's
elements, they also tend to isolate different subtleties
of the narrative process. But what is interesting about
most of recent narratological theory is that it hardly
deals with poetry. Its primary focus is on the genre of
fiction.[1]

In order to avoid any misunderstandings, in this
chapter -- although it is not my intention to retrieve the
innocence of "narrative" -- I take narrative to mean the
telling of a story, the utterance of past events. I
juxtapose this traditional definition of narrative to
discourse, discourse in Benveniste's sense as "both the
bearer of a message and the instrument of action," as
"every utterance assuming a speaker [writer] and hearer
[reader], and in the speaker, the intention of influencing
the other in some way."[2] The main distinction that I
perceive between narrative and discourse is that narrative
as a history of events[3] is primarily expressed in the
past tense whereas discourse as an utterance functions in
a performative way and is enunciated in the present tense.

Insofar as the contemporary long poem is concerned, narrative as the telling of a <u>story</u> rarely plays a primary role. The emphasis lies in the <u>telling</u> of the story. As a result, narrative in the long poem acknowledges, as we will see, no master. A narrative without master is a narrative without grammar, the grammar that structuralists like Todorov read into literary texts.[4] The ungrammaticality of narrative constantly alerts the reader of the long poem to what D.A. Miller calls "the dangers of narrative."[5] The long poem suppresses narrative grammar in order to follow its own line of unfolding, namely the linguistic movement of utterance.

Even when we deal with long poems having more or less straightforward narrative, like Patrick Friesen's <u>The Shunning,</u> for example, story does not emerge as a central issue. The story of Peter Newfeld, a fictional character, shunned by the Mennonite church, is narrated in <u>The Shunning</u> by many voices, including Newfeld's own.[6] The poem's complexity, however, lies not so much in the order of events, which often proves to be deceptive, but in how the different voices interact. It is with the texture of voices that <u>The Shunning</u> is concerned. The voices' quality affects the nature of the events.

Narrative in the contemporary long poem is almost invariably undone by its own ungrammaticality. Accordingly, Stuart MacKinnon, in talking about the

composition of his long poem The Intervals, says that "I

wished to avoid the temporal narrative of simple

cause-effect logic, so I tried to write discrete pieces

that would go together as a longer work."[7] Indeed,

Davey, in his essay "The Language of the Canadian Long

Poem," points out this "absence of plot" in The Intervals.

[8] "As someone engaged in writing long poems, and in

reading both published and unpublished long poems," Davey

observes that the long poem lacks the signs of cohesive

narrative.

> I see narrative [Davey argues] as still the central
> issue of the form. Sequential narrative is an organ-
> izational system, a language, a structure of signs
> that speaks of certain assumptions about reality:
> that it is linear, directed by cause and effect,
> excluding in its constructions and focusses. In
> distrust of such assumptions writers have attempted
> to replace narrative as the long poem's dominant
> sign.

Davey's observation sums up the intent of the long poem

succinctly. But the substitutes he proposes for narrative

are not, I think, what narrative yields to in the long

poem. Here is what he suggests: "[p]lace has been

substituted for sequential narrative in recent Canadian

long poems to such an extent that it promises to become as

much a convention as what it replaced.... In other long

poems language itself -- rhythm, syntax, word-play -- has

been given narrative's once dominant role.... In some the

recurrent image ... provides the cohesion and focus once

provided by plot."[9] Place, rhythm, syntax, recurrent

images, linguistic inventiveness and game no doubt figure
prominently in the long poem. Davey's definition of
narrative, though, as "a structure of signs that speaks of
certain assumptions" is too broad to explain how or why
these elements replace narrative. Only his phrase "cause
and effect logic" touches upon narrative as the order of
events. But fragments of disseminated narrative do not
necessarily constitute the structure of a long poem as
narrative. It is discourse that replaces narrative in the
long poem, that ties narrative fragments together into
meaningful patterns.

In this chapter, by discussing Michael Ondaatje's The
Collected Works of Billy the Kid, I will show that poetic
discourse not only accounts for the absence of cohesive
narrative in the long poem, but also helps us go a step
beyond the strictures of genres as they survive in the
limits imposed on epic, lyric and narrative poetry.

II: White Mythology

When we open Michael Ondaatje's The Collected Works of
Billy the Kid: Left Handed Poems, we encounter first a
blank square, perhaps the frame of an absent photographic
image.[10] Contrary to Nichol's method of beginning that
keeps resounding the poem's multiple points of departure,
Ondaatje's opening device foregrounds a beginning that is

both there and not there. If this frame enframing nothing

is supposed to be the beginning of the poem's narrative,

then the narrative in question bears no signs of

inscription except the four geometric lines drawn to form

the empty square. The white space becomes the figure of a

narrative that is both present and absent, a discourse

without subject. It is a gap for the reader to fill. The

opening of the text teases the reader as it forecloses on

monologic interpretation: while offering no specific

direction, it creates many reading possibilities. Only

when the reader's eyes move past the white space and begin

reading the text that follows it, do we infer the

signification of the empty frame.

From that frame of nothingness, Ondaatje moves to a

quotation by Western photographer L.A. Huffman.

> I send you a picture of Billy made with the Perry
> shutter as quick as it can be worked--Pyro and
> soda developer. I am making daily experiments now
> and find I am able to take passing horses at a
> lively trot square across the line of fire--bits
> of snow in the air--spokes well defined--some blur
> on top of wheel but sharp in the main--men walking
> are no trick--I will send you proofs sometime. I
> shall show you what can be done from the saddle
> without ground glass or tripod--please notice when
> you get the specimens that they were made with the
> lens wide open and many of the best exposed when
> my horse was in motion.   (p. 6)

This quotation emphasizes the historical referentiality of

the poem, a referentiality, however, which, as we will

see, plays with and against history. Moreover, the

quotation also invites the reader to abandon a linear

reading of the text. Before turning the page, the reader

is tempted to go back to the empty frame, to reread its

signifying emptiness. This reading detour reveals that

once we reflect on the first graph, the empty frame turns

out to be no longer empty. In fact, we rename it: we see

it as a specific photograph. A photograph, though, without

an image; a photograph of whiteness, of what leaves no

graph, no mark when printed. It announces Billy the Kid's

"white mythologies,"[11] the true and legendary stories

that compose his portrait. The absent portrait of Billy

also announces the "negative" of narration. It becomes, in

Derrida's words, an exergue, what lies "outside the work,"

"inscription," "epigraph."[12] It suggests that Billy

lies outside the poem, cannot be contained in a single

frame. He evades the poem as he will gradually evade all

the attempts to capture him, in fact or word. The

discourse of this emptiness has no precise origin; it

becomes the discourse of language itself, a discourse that

speaks hesitancy.

The re-reading of the poem's opening shows how Ondaatje

delays the beginning of his long poem. Beyond this, the

quotation from Huffman's text introduces narrative as a

story already begun, begun that is outside the poem

itself. We are reminded of how narrative is essentially a

referential system, but also of the extent to which

referentiality is textual. Not only Huffman's quotation

but the other sources Ondaatje acknowledges at the end of

Billy the Kid affirm the parallactic textuality of this
long poem. I am going to leap for a moment to that last
page, and create a hiatus in my reading, because what
happens there is, I think, the index to the poem's
outlawed narrative.

On the very last page of The Collected Works of Billy
the Kid, following the dedication and the publishing
data, Ondaatje cites the sources he has used in the making
of his long poem. He concludes his list of references by
saying: "[w]ith these basic sources, I have edited,
rephrased, and slightly reworked the originals. But the
emotions belong to their authors." Ondaatje denies himself
the authority of the author; instead, he foregrounds his
role as reader, a reader of found narratives, a reader who
becomes a writer. This exchange of roles has become an
integral part of Ondaatje's literary signature.[13] It
dramatizes the degree to which he posits both his reading
act and his found material as being the generative forces
of his poem. The assumed authorial control of that
material gives way to inscription, to the act of recording
the "emotions belong[ing] to their authors." Accordingly,
the readers' expectations of originality are replaced by
their search for authenticity, their desire to measure the
extent to which Ondaatje departs from, or distorts, his
sources.

Ondaatje's ambivalent distance from his documents has
given rise to a number of interpretations which tend to

privilege the documentary material at the expense of the textual evidence provided in the poem. These critics focus more on the historical and legendary narratives of Billy's life and less on the telling of the story itself. The quotations, paraphrases and photographs that we find in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, as the title of the poem indicates, are not elements of a found narrative but signs of literariness.[14] In spite of his claims, Ondaatje does not free himself from this referential context. As reader and writer, he is inside the referential system of textuality. The Collected Works of Billy the Kid is a collection, an accumulation of textual sources, including the textuality Ondaatje has woven in his own game with the reader. The result is a book recording the testimonies of characters, Ondaatje's reading of, and selection from, his sources, the telling of the reading act, a telling that becomes the writing down of reading and storytelling alike. The narrative figure emerging from this collection has no precise origin, or, to put it another way, has no origin other than in language. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that prompts Ondaatje to disclaim control over his characters' emotions. The narrative of his poem, acted out as a juxtaposition of dramatic monologues, does not acknowledge him as its master.

Ondaatje's borrowed sources, whether cited accurately or imaginatively appropriated, are not meant to recreate

within the context of Billy the Kid   the sequence of

Billy's experiences and actions. Ondaatje is not

interested, as his ludic use of documents indicates, in

narrative as a sequence of actions. Yet most criticism of

Billy is characterized by a search the critics have in

common, the search for narrative.

Judith Owens, for instance, opens her essay by stating

that "[t]the reader finds in Ondaatje's Billy a strong

desire for order, a rage for order," and concludes that

"the narrative line, which has progressed only fitfully to

this point in the volume [76], moves rapidly and fairly

straightforwadly to its conclusion in Billy's death ...

draw[ing] attention once again to the relationship betwen

'order' and 'death.'"[15] Owens relies heavily in her

interpretation on Ondaatje's placing of Billy's death at

the end of the long poem. In a seemingly similar way,

Stephen Scobie observes that the poem's "material may be

seen as a narrative with two main strands: the conflict

between Billy and Pat Garrett, culminating in the manhunt

and the deaths of Tom O'Folliard, Charlie Bowdre, and

Billy himself; and the opposite of conflict, the scenes of

peace and companionship, centring on Miss Angela B. and

the Chisum ranch. Underlying these two narrative strands

is the central theme of violence, as it erupts in both

outlaw and artist."[16] Scobie is correct in outlining

the action of the poem, but his "may" is, I think, more

forceful than he intends it to be. Although Scobie is

primarily interested in the historical aspect of Billy and in how Billy has been mythologized, he structures his reading around his binary arrangement of Ondaatje's material.

Although critics of Ondaatje such as Scobie, Owens, Sam Solecki, Peter Nodelman and Dennis Lee delight in the artist's aesthetic violence, they also set out to put him straight.[17] But Ondaatje's disjointed presentation of action is meant to remain this way. The lack of surface narrative does not necessarily imply that there is a deep structure to be discovered or, worse, invented by the reader, as I think Dennis Lee insists.[18] Ondaatje displays an interest in discourse, in the way these actions are reported by language and become known as verbal acts. Discourse does not, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith puts it, "consis[t] of sets of discrete signs which, in some way, correspond to (depict, encode, denote, refer to, and so forth) sets of discrete and specific ideas, objects, or events."[19] This holds all the more for so self-regarding a construct as the long poem. Discourse in the long poem does not consist of a series of signifiers representing signifieds to be found outside the poem, but resides in the series of verbal acts that actualize the performative function of language. The referentiality of Billy the Kid confirms the textual system it is a part of.

To return to the beginning of the poem, the citation

from Huffman's book not only deconstructs narrative order but also illustrates the many levels of discourse operating in the poem. The prose paragraph takes the reader from a discourse degree zero -- the vacant frame written in white ink -- to a discourse that is already double-coded. Challenging the norm is for Huffman a "daily experiment." His lens remains "wide open," an instruction to the reader to keep her/his reading perspective open. Beyond this, Huffman's discourse is technical -- the Perry shutter, Pyro and soda developer, the proofs, the ground glass or tripod -- asserting the particular referents of textuality.

Yet, despite this specialist's vocabulary, the reader is drawn into the poem by Huffman's apostrophe. Since Huffman is quoted here out of context, the "you" he addresses remains undetermined. That "you," however, at the same time that it addresses Huffman's reader or addressee, also apostrophizes Ondaatje and his own reader who are overhearing or, more precisely, overreading Huffman's discourse. This direct address marks the first apostrophe in a long series of apostrophes throughout the poem. Apostrophe is indeed the primary rhetorical trope of the poem's self-referentiality, for it establishes the priority of discourse over narrative.

III: <u>Thanatography</u>

   <u>The Collected Works of Billy the Kid</u> may be about

Billy, but the numerous accounts about him and by him do

not amount to a traditional narrative. Ondaatje has

structured his poem as a series of dramatic monologues,

prose fragments and lyrics which interweave with each

other and which lead in different directions. Indeed, it

is the use of dramatic monologue, and not narrative, that

foregrounds discourse as the poem's movement. Ondaatje,

relying on the drive and immediacy of discourse, composes

his poem as a chorus of voices. Discourse, Roland Barthes

reminds us, is "<u>Dis-cursus</u> -- originally the action of

running here and there, comings and goings, measures

taken, 'plots and plans.'"[20] The dramatic monologue as

a specific mode of discourse and the <u>I</u> as the vehicle of

its utterance choreograph the movement and texture of the

poem's voices. Some cacophonous and discordant, others

elegiac, parodic or lyrical, they all dramatize Billy's

persona.

   Billy, as we have seen, is introduced as a figure drawn

in white ink, invisible inside the frame of Huffman's

photograph. This absence, although initially puzzling, is

immediately explained on the page following the poem's

first photograph. The list of the dead given by Billy

himself is the index to the structure and discourse of the

poem. Like an epic catalogue, and in the epic fashion of

conflict,[21] Billy gives us two separate lists of "the

killed" (6), those killed "(By me)--" and those killed

"(By them)--." Sheila Watson rightly observes about the

list that it "paradoxically includes the name of the

sheriff Garrett, who survived to record the experience in

print."[22] The paradox affirms the fictionality of the

world Ondaatje invents and, beyond this, points out the

extent to which textuality determines its own referents.

But there is yet another paradox which Watson doesn't

comment on. The last one mentioned in the list of the

killed is Billy himself.

>   and Pat Garrett
>   sliced off my head.
>   Blood a necklace on me all my life. (p. 6)

Although dead, Billy is the speaker of this monologue, and

of all the other monologues he presumably delivers in the

poem. We see now that absence in the opening photograph

signifies his death. The poem's discourse, then, is

largely uttered by a dead subject. It is this paradox that

defies most critics' attempts to identify the narrative

pattern that leads to Billy's death. Billy does not die in

the poem. He is already dead when he utters his first

monologue.

What accentuates this paradox even more is the

contrast between the present tense which frames the whole

Collected Works and the past tense which refers to Billy's

death, a reference, that is, to a narrative event outside the poem. This death is the real _exergue_ in the poem. It is the "work" that cannot be collected in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid. Billy's last monologue, uttered as he lies dying (p. 95), is not a performative but a constative act of language. Nothing happens under the reader's eyes but the very acting out of language.

Billy's dead voice demarcates itself by leaving on the poem's text the marks of its genre. White voice. Black marks. Red necklace. Discourse with and without subject. As the "I" of his discourse, Billy is dead but living, the subject of paradox itself, for he is not tongue-tied. "A discourse on life/death," Derrida remarks, "must occupy a certain space between logos and _gramme_, analogy and program, as well as between the differing senses of program and reproduction. And since life is on the line, the trait that relates the logical to the graphical must also be working between the biological and biographical, the thanatological and thanatographical."[23] One could argue, then, that the rhetoric of Billy's monologues is that of thanatography, a writing that emerges from death, a writing, ultimately, that seeks to cancel the finality we usually ascribe to death. _immortality_

Although a dead subject, Billy displays volatility, as the following monologue shows:

> Am the dartboard
> for your midnight blood

```
        the bones' moment
        of perfect movement
        that waits to be thrown
        magnetic into combat

        a pencil
        harnessing my face
        goes stumbling into dots (p. 85)
```

The dartboard is one of the many masks Billy puts on. The metonymy -- "am the dartboard" -- eliminates the "I" -- he doesn't say "I am the dartboard" --, the supreme figure of logos because the dartboard becomes the locus of utterance where the combat between life and death occurs. Life is on the line of the "perfect movement," but it is a gramme (line) already become gramma (letter), inscribed by "midnight blood." Red, the color of blood, is the color of thanatographical inscription, the color of death. Playing darts is here almost synonymous with the game of writing. Billy's discourse oscillates between violence as game and violence as reality. His writing, a writing of loss, progresses toward the "bones' moment," the moment of death. The dartboard figures as a "magnetic" field where biography and thanatography overlap, where scriptor and reader meet: "a pencil / harnessing my face / goes stumbling into dots." Writing posits itself as torture, turns the dartboard metonymy upside-down. So when Billy shows his face at the end of this monologue, marked with dots, signs of torture and language, the face is nothing less than the text itself, the face of Billy's other. Death here refers not only to Billy but to the drama of

death incurred by language.

But the main drama in Billy's monologues is his return

from death as subject of discourse and as the subject of

his namesake text, <u>Billy the Kid.</u> Billy plays against the

logos of narrative.

> Not a story about me through their eyes then.
> Find the beginning, the slight silver key to
> unlock it, to dig it out. Here then is the
> maze to begin, to be in.
>
> Two years ago Charlie Bowdre and I criss-crossed
> the Canadian border. Ten miles north of it ten
> miles south. Our horses stepped from country to
> country, across low rivers, through different
> colours of tree green. The two of us, our criss-
> cross like a whip in slow motion, <u>the ridge of
> action rising and falling,</u> getting narrower in
> radius till it ended and we drifted down to
> Mexico and old heat. That there is nothing of
> depth, of significant accuracy, of wealth in the
> image, I know. It is there for a beginning.

> (p. 20; my emphasis)

Billy's knowledge challenges the reader's epistemology

because he speaks from within that ultimate knowledge

ensuing from death, a knowledge located on the borderline

of impossibility. Like the Canadian border -- Ondaatje's

authorial signature -- this borderline is both signed and

signed off. From Billy's vantage point, borders cease to

mean, to demarcate difference. Billy's and his companion's

criss-crossing from country to country becomes the

symbolic movement of his return from the dead. It echoes

parodically Dante's journey with Virgil through inferno,

purgatorio and paradiso. But the order of Dante's pauses

on the planes of death and afterlife is here diffused, for Billy ends up in the "old heat" of Mexico and returns to us without seeing the "dunque di candida rosa"[24] but "the sun turned into a pair of hands" (p. 76).

The only knowledge Billy can convey to the reader is that "there is nothing of depth, of significant accuracy, of wealth in the image." The reader is told that s/he is already inside the "maze" of narrative he alludes to. A "maze to begin, be in." The typographical gap between "be" and "in" is the glyph of g in "begin." The maze is engendered by the alliteration in Billy's discourse; the repeated sounds (begin, be in) echo the labyrinth of language. Billy's appeal to the reader is not simply to begin, but to admit the fact that the very act of reading implicates the reader's presence in the maze of discourse. Billy talks about rebeginning "here," on the page, in the text.

The hiatus between absence and presence, that is, death and the materiality of Billy's language, is the pivotal figure in the poem. "The others, I know, did not see the wounds appearing in the sky, in the air" (p. 10). The difference between Billy and the "others" is his own "otherness." Billy is both within and on the far side of language. It is not so much the reader who overhears his monologues, as it is Billy who overhears the reader. Hence his warning that the narrative image is there only "for a beginning."

Billy's existence becomes an event validated solely by discourse. His discourse occasionally assumes a visionary style when he talks about stars:

> I have seen pictures of great stars,
> drawings which show them straining to the centre
> that would explode their white
> if temperature and the speed they moved at
> shifted one degree.
>
> Or in the East have seen
> the dark grey yards where trains are fitted
> and the clean speed of machines
> that make machines, their
> red golden pouring which when cooled
> mists out to rust or grey.
>
> The beautiful machines pivoting on themselves
> sealing and fusing to others
> and men throwing levers like coins at them.
> And there is there the same stress as with stars,
> the one altered move that will make them maniac.
> <div align="right">(p. 41)</div>

Billy's view of the stars, although he is on the other side of life's border, is uttered in the conditional mode, but sustained by the epimethean knowledge that pervades his discourse as a dead subject. His discourse echoes, on a purely textual level, Dante's description of the stars in Canto II of "Paradiso," a description relying on knowledge current during his time as well as on what the deified Beatrice explains.[25] Like life and death, the beauty and stress of the "machines pivoting on themselves," analogous to the beauty and stress of the "great stars," are defined by "the one altered move that will make them maniac." That move is what constitutes the alterity of identity, the otherness of self. It is

effected by Billy's "manic" desire to be in a state of otherness.

The same manic desire is the impetus behind Billy's actions. Billy does not act out of "fear of mortality," as Owens argues,[26] for he is already outlawed from the world of mortals. What activates his discourse is a desire to be impervious to motion, a wish which explains a seeming distancing from emotions that Nodelman finds in Billy.[27] Desire for Billy points to the radical place that is both inside and outside, life and death, earth and the "great stars." This is the topos of his discourse, a place of paradox. Death does not stifle language. Instead it imports into narrative the strangeness of discourse, the same strangeness that characterizes Billy's relationship with Angela Dickinson.

IV: The (Rh)etoric

Angela D. figures in the poem as a series of prosopopoeias. In many respects, Angela is an allegory of the erotic.[28] The fact that she is usually referred to as Angela D. and not as Angela Dickinson points, I think, to her signifying the other that desire yearns for. She is an apostle of Desire itself, a desire that occurs on the edge of Billy's textual life. Unlike Sallie who "slowly lean[s] up to find her body" "when the sun eventually reach[es] the bed and slid[es] over her eyes" (p. 32),

Angela never loses hers and is always in tune with its desires. Because of this she is a reminder of the pleasure, fears, and violence the life of the body entails. As a woman who shamelessly puts forward her body, she is a whore; as the first woman to shave her legs "hairless" (p. 25), she is a suffragette; and she also cuts a courageous and passionate figure as Billy's lover. She is, in other words, the prosopopoeia of paradox itself. That's why Billy parodically both resists and adores her.

Angela's supple body cannot be contained within frames, and she thus becomes a prosopopoeia of the edge. "The edge of the pillow in her mouth, her hip a mountain further down the bed"; "over the edge of the bed like a peninsula rich with veins and cooler than the rest of her for it has been in the path of the window's wind all night" (p. 71). She is a woman of edges, edges which reveal yet another layer of prosopopoeia, the edges of earth formations, the borderline marking low and high, the difference of elements. Edges are what Angela D. and Billy primarily share. Billy stays "at the edge of a farm" (p. 17), sees "a flashy hawk / on the edge of" the "sun" (p. 26), is aware of "the edge of the dark empty desert" (p. 62), finds himself "on the edge of the cold dark," "on the edge of sun" (p. 74). But Angela D. outdoes Billy in her capacity to be a figure of edges, and she does so in a way that forces him to confront his thanatographical

discourse.

During one of their most powerful and evocative
encounters, Angela D. shows her true face.

> She leans against the door, holds
> her left hand at the elbow
> with her right, looks at the bed
>
> on my sheets--oranges
> peeled half peeled
> bright as hidden coins against the pillow
>
> she walks slow to the window
> lifts the sackcloth
> and jams it horizontal on a nail
> so the bent oblong of sun
> hoists itself across the room
> framing the bed the white flesh
> of my arm
>
> she is crossing the sun
> sits on her leg here
> sweeping off the peels
>
> traces the thin bones on me
> turns toppling slow back to the pillow
> Bonney Bonney
>
> I am very still
> I take in all the angles of the room
> (p. 21)

This monologue articulates the drama of Billy's life and
death, his move away from narrative and toward discourse.
From being a figure of desire, Angela D. figures now as
the angel of Death. Desire for the other reaches here its
ultimate edge; it "topples" over the border of life. The
rhetoric of Billy's discourse renders the love scene as a
scene during which the female lover, the woman of edges,
administers the rites of death. The peeled oranges "as
hidden coins" mark the economy in Billy's discourse. It is

an economy which deflates Angela Dickinson as person but which also inflates Angela D. as rhetorical persona.

Beyond this, through the same economy of rhetoric the sun emerges not as the intruder let into the room by Angela[29] but as the element conflating the physical time of heavenly bodies with the biological time of mortal bodies. Angela can cross the sun and sweep off the orange peels in the same stanza, for she, the woman of edges, belongs to both temporal dimensions as they are actualized in the monologue. In the present tense of Billy's discourse, the bed sheets serve as a euphemism for shroud. Angela D. is "tracing" Billy's "thin bones" while calling him "Bonney Bonney." This testifies to Billy's rhetorical death. Apostrophising him in his last name does not suggest a psychological distance between the two lovers, as Owens argues. Quite the contrary. It is not the first time Angela calls him Bonney. To call someone by last name frequently signals a kind of intimacy, as it does when Angela, after she is shot in the hand by Billy's enemies, shouts to Billy: "O Bonney you bastard Bonney / kill him Bonney kill him" (p. 66). The family name in this instance, accompanied by the exclamatories "O" and "bastard," expresses her pain and rage. In both instances, the last name functions as a double signature referring not merely to the owner of the name but to the namer as well. Since the use of "Bonney" both times connects with death, we surmise Angela mediates between Billy and a

death that does not claim her. We are reminded that the
bullet that wounded her hand was meant for Billy, and,
although she does not die, he includes her in the list of
those killed "by them." Whether angel of Death or guardian
angel, Angela D. herself remains immune to the ordinary
concept of mortality.

The mise en scene in this monologue involves both
thanatos and eros. Thus while Angela's fingers feel the
thin bones under Billy's white flesh in a gesture of
desire, his stillness marks his readiness to delay his
orgasm, the "little death." Her loving fingers make of his
"phallus" a double signifier, one that brings together
sexuality and death. The proper name Bonney, because of
its phonetic variations, reclaims its "thingness": bone;
skeleton; phallus. That same name designates that Billy is
a "bony" man, and it becomes too a "bonny" thing because
it reveals the textuality of its signification, and the
multiple desire contained in language. Although it is
Billy who is the subject of this monologue, it is Angela
D. who makes the poem turn around rhetorically. Angela is
"all the angles of the room" [my emphasis] Billy takes in,
the near anagram (Angela / angles) of the multiple
perspectives the reader discovers in this long poem.
Despite the game of life and death Angela plays here,
Billy's discourse does not imply any resentment toward
her. Instead he intuits that he has been "framed" by the
sun, and shares this with the reader in an almost

nonchalant way.

The sun, which is one of the most frequently recurrent images in The Collected Works, "crosses" Billy. Hatless, his "legs handcuffed," his "hands bound" to his horse's bridle, Billy goes "mad from saddle pain" and the merciless heat of the sun as Garrett leads him and his two buddies, Wilson and Rudabaugh, to face the law (p. 76). Billy's delirium begins with a prosopopoeia of the sun: "the sun turned into a pair of hands" (p. 76). This personification places emphasis on absence, presupposes the non-presence of a thing.[30] At the same time, however, it functions by foregrounding the presence of absence, by creating, like all rhetorical tropes, a figure through the materiality of language.

Once the distant sun is brought down, once it is endowed with hands, it begins torturing Billy. "It used a fingernail and scratched a knife line from front to back on the skin"; "with very thin careful fingers it began to unfold my head drawing back each layer of skin and letting it flap over my ears" (p. 76). The scratched and peeled head of Billy (metonymically related to the peeled oranges and the sun itself) is also engraved, marked by the sun's unreadable signifiers. The violent unfolding of the skin signals to the reader the turns of Billy's discourse, the unfolding of the long poem's textuality. We thereby encounter the same texture of language when Billy muses about the fatal shot he receives from Garrett. His

delirium, now one of physical death, conjures up images of "lovely perfect sun balls / breaking at each other click," "oranges reeling across the room ... / it is my brain coming out like red grass / this breaking where red things wade" (p. 95). Billy goes out of his mind. The slippage of time in this passage, Billy "wading" both in physical and biological time, suggests that perception and discourse are equally constituted by language.

The spectacular and graphic elements of Billy's torture are not just here for the sake of sensational emphasis; they are meant to accentuate the theater of torture, the inscription of pain on the body. In fact Billy's body is the theater, is at the core of the performance itself. "The brain juice began to swell up. You could see the bones and grey now. The sun sat back and watched while the juice evaporated" (p. 76). The merciless sun, both inside and outside the performance, figures as the god of torture. The sun's role as viewer sitting back to watch Billy may be seen as a metaphor of the reading act. The god of torture is busy reading the work of cruelty it has created.

The theater of cruelty continues, and the personification of the sun seems to be completed when the neutral, inanimate "it" that has so far carried the personification is replaced by the male personal pronoun. "When he touched the bone with his fingers it was like brushing raw nerves. He took a thin cold hand and sank it

into my head down past the roof of my mouth and washed his
fingers in my tongue" (p. 76). The personification elicits
now a double disfiguration: Billy is disfigured by the sun
but the sun is also disfigured by the new pronoun that now
defines it.

Yet the personification in this passage never reaches
complete maturation. The sun remains e-ffaced, "he" never
assumes a face, not even what we might call a body. He is
all hands, hands touching Billy's bones, hands penetrating
his skull. "Down the long cool hand went scratching the
freckles and warts in my throat ... with his wrist, down
he went the liquid yellow from my busted brain finally
vanishing ... the long cool hand going down brushing
cobwebs of nerves the horizontal pain pits ... the cool
precise fingers went into the cistern of bladder down the
last hundred miles" (pp. 76-77). The visceral details in
this monologue assert Billy's cannibalistic discourse. The
sun un-texts Billy. His tortured body becomes the text but
a text that is dissected mercilessly and with great,
almost scientific, precision. His textual body, with loose
nerves and a brain full of fissures, has been unbound.

Billy's bodily and textual dissection bears signs of
mysticism. Billy is transverberated. "[I]n a jerk breaking
through my sacs of sperm got my cock in the cool fingers
pulled it back up and carried it pulling pulling flabby as
smoke up the path his arm had rested in and widened. He
brought it up fast half tearing the roots off up the

coloured bridges of fibers again ... locked in his fingers up the now bleeding throat up squeezed it through the skull bones, so there I was, my cock standing out of my head" (p. 77). His transverberation borders on death and orgasm. "Ive been fucked Ive been fucked by Christ almighty god Ive been good and fucked by Christ," he yells to Garrett (p. 78). But this ecstatic cry does not elucidate the experience Billy describes in this monologue. Although it is an utterance seemingly affirming Billy's apotheosis, it creates more aporias than it resolves. The beginning of Billy's description of his torture suggests a narrative movement toward rape, and perhaps castration, but the tone of Billy's exclamatory utterance is definitely problematic.

In the double context of torture and mysticism, the passive voice of the utterance signifies ambiguity. "Ive been fucked by Christ" could certainly suggest rape or castration, the first gesture toward male death, the eradication of the phallus as sexual organ and as "the privileged signifier." Billy's hallucination during his sun stroke, instead of belying the reality of his experience, affirms his desire for the other and, paradoxically, his desire to erase his otherness which is an expession of his death drive. (We don't have to resort to Freud to understand Billy's death drive; we just have to be reminded that Billy is already one of the "killed" before he begins to tell his story.) Thus we can hear

Billy's utterance as a cry of rage barely released from

his agony of pain; but we can also hear a voice of

jubilation -- "Ive been good and fucked by Christ."

Whether what we hear is agony or jubilation, or both at

the same time, the ambiguity is in keeping with Billy's

mystical experience.

Knowing Billy's voice tastes of death, we cannot afford

to read his ecstasy about being "fucked by Christ" as an

affirmation of faith in God's existence. We cannot for the

simple reason that it is devoid of any metaphysical

import. Instead, dwelling as he does in a realm of

rhetoric that comes meta-ta-physica, after things

physical and next to the materiality of language, his

ecstasy celebrates not faith but his knowledge of the lack

of a supreme God. God as someone who "fucks" so furtively

and so violently an outlaw figure is, to say the least,

not the image of the Christian God. God is himself

outlawed. He becomes a "dark   AMATEUR," a figure loved

and feared, inspiring the same vacillation of emotions

that Garrett (and to some extent Angela too) does (p. 53).

The sun as a dark amateur assumes the double configuration

of the Beloved Son and the Infidel. Billy's week-long ride

across the desert, with its biblical allusions, is not

affirmative but parodic in its function. Billy seems to be

speaking here through Angela's "mouth [which] is an

outlaw" (p. 64).

The sun become Christ is, of course, hardly surprising

when seen within the conventional configuration of what
constitutes the source of life. The aporia does not center
on this metonyny but on the presence or absence of the
male sexual organ. As the sun/Christ in its/his
personification is not given a face (or rather as it/he
has a face neither Billy nor the reader can risk looking
at directly) nor is it/he given a penis. Thus Billy has
not been "fucked" at all, or at least he has not been
"fucked" by a penis. His reference to his own "cock"
becomes narratively redundant because it is implied by the
homologous gender relation between himself and the
sun/Christ. The homoerotic component in Billy's delirium
suggests that he has reached his other, a male other
metonymically related to the ultimate other, Christ.
Again, sexuality and mysticism overlap. His torture, in
this respect, can be seen as his "passion," the same
passion alluded to by the nails and the cross and the
sackcloth and the sun hoisting itself in the monologue
about Angela and Billy.

We are left then with Billy's words, his words now
speaking of the "long cool hands." Words and hands brought
together here become a sign of inscription affirming the
way Billy communicates his story to the reader, that is
through his discourse.[31] Thus the icy coolness of the
sun's hands, contrasted to the sun's intense heat, grounds
Billy's delirium in his ride across the desert and in his
desire to reverse the circumstances. But the text does not

instruct the reader to interpret the hands metaphorically, and certainly the repetitive references to hands in this prose monologue further reinforce their tangible presence.

After Billy's penis is "spirited away," "standing out" of his head like the fire of the Holy Ghost, the sun's hands continue their manual gestures in a way that adds yet another layer of interpretation to Billy's discourse.

> Then he brought his other hand into play I
> could feel the cool shadow now as he bent
> over me both his hands tapering into
> beautiful cool fingers, one hand white as
> new smelling paper the other 40 colours
> ochres blues silver from my lung gold and
> tangerine from the burst ear canals all
> that clung to him as he went in and came out.
>
> The hands were cold as porcelain, one was
> silver old bone stripped oak white eastern
> cigarettes white sky the eye core of sun. Two
> hands, one dead, one born from me, one like
> crystal, one like shell of snake found in
> spring. Burning me like dry ice.
>
> They picked up the fold of foreskin one hand
> on each side and began the slow pull back
> back back back down like a cap with
> ear winter muffs like a pair of trousers down
> boots and then he let go. The wind picked up,
> I was drowned, locked inside my skin sensitive
>
> (p. 77)

The hands' motion suggests masturbation, not exactly what Billy means by "fucking," but this sexual act, too, since Billy's hands are bound, is one of homoeroticism, reinforcing his mystical experience of otherness.

If this orgasmic and mystical passage is the pivotal place in the poem where Billy achieves a state of otherness, it is by no means the only place where Billy

pays attention to hands. Hands are generally important to Billy. They can be both self-loving and destructive instruments as when, while "cross[ing] a crooked river / loving in my head," he shot a "crooked bird / Held it in my fingers" (p. 14). The pun on bird, together with the references in this lyric to riding and yelling and to eyes, signifies the same movement that we saw above, violent death and sexuality come together. These cross-references do not stop here. They all emphasize the textuality of this long poem, a textuality that keeps unfolding like Billy's skin, in his hand, under his hand, his signature. For hands are instrumental in this unfolding: they make love and kill, but they also act as deictic signifiers, markers pointing the reader to the multiple directions of Billy's discourse.

Similarly, the recurrence of bones and hands brings the sun and Angela together, a rapport that could be extended to include other characters such as Garrett or Maxwell. For instance, the "first time" Billy makes love with Angela he uses the same narrative of hand imagery we see in his delirium:

> my hand locked
> her body nearly breaking off my fingers
> pivoting like machines in final speed
>
> later my hands cracked in love juice
> fingers paralyzed by it arthritic
> these beautiful fingers I couldn't move
> faster than a crippled witch now
> (p. 16)

The self-amatory "beautiful" is the same adjective Billy

uses when referring to the sun's fingers. Yet the

connections between all these hands remain discursive, and

reflexive within the text; they do not function as codes

or signs prescribing an already established meaning and

narrative order. What they accomplish instead is a

sequence of images whose patterns and significance the

reader constitutes. The order of reading replaces

narrative. Whenever that happens narrative as a sequence

of facts then refers to the narrative of the reading act.

Clearly, The Collected Works of Billy the Kid outlaws

narrative as I have defined it. What makes this possible

is the absence of linear chronology in the poem as well as

the use of the present tense. Most critics, however, tend

to apply to The Collected Works of Billy the Kid the

historical chronology of action. They do that intending to

assess a persona's growth and particular traits, hoping to

determine the meaning of his or her dramatic monologue, to

assign a definite meaning to their actions. Such an

attempt not only violates the text's resistance to

linearity but also implies a wilful misreading because it

brings into the text a reality extraneous to it. The

reader of Billy the Kid cannot afford to ignore that the

"reality" the dramatic monologues allude to, and which

often deploy as paradigm, is itself a textual reality. As

Adena Rosmarin remarks, "[t]he interpretive histories of

dramatic monologues repeatedly testify to the lure of

realism."[32] As I pointed out earlier, Ondaatje's
credits at the end of his long poem signal his readers
that The Collected Works' subtexts are themselves textual
realities, interpretations of yet another layer of
reality. If we neglect this fact in our reading, we will
devalue the import of the dramatic monologues.

V: The Present Tense

Billy's discourse disseminates the genealogy of his
history and of his legend, and it does so in the present
tense. The present tense lifts all temporal restrictions
of duration off narrative. Duration, which measures
mortality, does not apply to Billy because his present is
equivalent to eternity. Billy's choices and actions are
made in the present of his monologues. The temporal
immediacy is not only important for the reader's emotional
response; it also initiates a reading act which is
contemporary with the speaker's textualized self.

Rosmarin observes that "the monologue ... teaches us
that the [speaker's] acts of remembering, of anticipating,
and of supposing are all present-tense acts, which,
moreover, themselves occur in time. Their 'content,'
particularly when it is 'past,' only masks this
presentness. How, then," she asks, "can using these
temporal tropes free the speaker from his present self?
They can do so precisely because their enactment, both the

acts of self-writing and of reading or rewriting that [same] writing, happen in the eternal present of textualized time. This time, which is capable of infinite repetition, is the discourse time of the text."[33] As we have seen, the enunciation of Billy's discourse does not designate speech alone. In the same way, the gun is not the exclusive instrument of his actions. His hands are familiar to the touch of pen and paper as well. His illocutionary acts are performed in writing. Billy's acts are legible as "real" effects only within the context in which they are inscribed. In this respect, the present tense of Billy's monologues coincides not only with the present tense of the reading act but also with the present tense of his (verbal) performance.

The past tense of Billy's prose monologue about his delirium deceptively creates the impression that we read a straightforward narrative passage. Yet the pastness of this narrative, to use Rosmarin's figure, only masks the presentness of Billy's discourse. The past tense is the present of a past thing, and as a result it marks Billy's rereading of what happens during the textualization of his monologue. Billy tells us that the sun "sat back and watched," but the past tense of his discourse reveals his own rhetorical position as he speaks: Billy sits back watching what is happening to him. That is, his utterance shows that he is not only capable of self-description but that he is also capable of (re)reading a context where he

is the object of someone else's action.

Thus the past tense deconstructs its own performance, it is the reading effect of Billy's own inscription. The present tense of Billy's discourse, then, designates the genre of his reading. Through the acts of reading and writing and through the employment of the present tense, Billy the Kid brings into focus two of the primary concerns of the Canadian long poem, reflexivity and openendedness, which certainly defy narrative cohesiveness. The present tense posits the incompleteness of his textualized self, that same incompleteness we encounter in the end of The Collected Works of Billy the Kid.

The Collected Words of Billy the Kid outlaws narrative. But the figure of Billy's outlawed narrative is never fully drawn, because Ondaatje ends the poem by using a series of delay devices, similar to the ones he employed in opening the poem. Toward the very end of the poem, the prose monologue that appears immediately before Billy's picture, which is the cover illustration of the "Wide Awake Library" series on Billy, is uttered in the conditional, apostrophizes the reader or an even more indefinite "you," and carries no "I" to designate the speaker's signature. This missing "I" speculates about what would happen "if you dug him [Billy] up and brought him out" (p. 97). The "ifness" of this anonymous discourse is seeking traces, "[p]erhaps Garrett's bullet," "the

silver from the toe of each boot." But these traces are already erased not only by the conditional mode of the discourse but by this outrageous act of imagining. For a moment, the anonymous speaker of this passage (perhaps the informant Paulita Maxwell, or Ondaatje himself) desires to find Billy not in the present tense of his monologues but in his grave, in a past that defies reading. Since the only traces the anonymous "I" can find are those of Billy's own inscription, this discourse concludes inconclusively: "[h]is legend a jungle sleep."

This prose fragment is followed in the poem by the device recurring in both the beginning and the conclusion of Billy the Kind, that of the frame. The blank frame of Billy's photograph reappears now as a frame where we find embedded a parodic version of the narrative the poem has outlawed. I'm referring, of course, to the narrative of the comic-book legend, Billy the Kid and the Princess. The reason this hilarious story is quoted in the poem within a frame is partly because it fulfills, while paroding, the norms of traditional narrative, and especially those of the romance. Billy the Kid, a figure that eludes narrative, becomes in this story Billy the Gringo, the gallant cowboy who saves La Princessa Marguerita's life and who doesn't quite know how to protect himself from her amorous advances. This story illustrates how Billy's life defies the beginning, middle and end of life's narrative; his life is matter for textual appropriation.

The poem approaches its physical ending in another prose monologue which, significantly, maintains the present tense. Although the "I" of this monologue also figures without precise signature, the present tense of "I smell the smoke still in my shirt" (p. 105) foregrounds the textuality of the long poem, the present tense of self-writing.

Finally, in the last frame of the book, we find embedded a small photograph of a boy dressed as cowboy. It's a picture of young Ondaatje himself.[34] Billy the Kid has become Michael the Kid. These frames, embedded as they are in the poem, reinforce the breakdown of linear narrative and also the breakdown between life and death. The author -- the author, remember, who has no control over his characters' emotions -- appropriates his character's place in the photograph as the character himself has appropriated the author's language.

Billy's voice, although it speaks from beyond death, does not speak the death of the author. It is a voice of ambiguity and uncertainty as the last brief dialogue in the poem illustrates:

> "Pat," replied Poe, "I believe you have
> killed the wrong man."
> "I'm sure it was the Kid," responded
> Garrett," for I knew his voice and could
> not have been mistaken." (p. 103)

Billy's voice is the equivocal witness of his life as well as his death. What his voice speaks of, be it the voice of

a dead or living person, is the enabling power of discourse. Michael Ondaatje, reduced now to the size of Mike the Kid, evidently does not want to interfere with Billy's "manic" discourse. Billy's discourse remains at the conclusion of the poem powerful and evocative exactly because he is "narratively" dead.

Ondaatje, then, concludes his poem with a series of (false) endings, reversing thus the multiple series of beginnings we see in The Martyrology. That none of these endings can, paradoxically, signal a definite narrative conclusion testifies to the long poem's openendedness, its presentness.

As the genre of the long poem defigures narrative, so the present tense designates a motion resistant to the reader's complete appropriation of the text. The present tense defends the long poem against mimetic interpretation. The long poem's intelligibility depends on the voice of poetic discourse, which is accomplished by the materiality of language rendered in the present tense. The present tense contains and projects onto the reading act the deconstructive principle of the long poem, a principle manifested as an endless process. The relapses into the past we find in Billy the Kid and in many other long poems are not to be seen as instances of aberration; they are in keeping with the regressive motion that characterizes the long poem's deconstructive principle. They belong to the long poem's self-referentiality and

illustrate the extent to which referentiality in the present tense can be nothing but the text becoming its own referent. The text is produced and comes to know itself as the object of its own cognition in the present tense.

Envoi : Not Yet

The long poems read in the last three chapters operate according to the logic of contradiction. Advice to My Friends and Field Notes, Steveston and Out of Place are situated in the world, but they deem the world to be a complex system of textuality. Whether the text is another text (discarded papers in a vault, a poet's old poem, another poet's celebrated texts, stories about a historical figure, the page the poet writes on at a given moment) or whether the text is a place (Steveston, Estevan, Kerrisdale, Cloudtown), it is always realized through language. The poets of these poems read the world as text, and then make their reading act the theme of their writing. At the same time, however, they insist also on the world's materiality. Thus the old papers the Mandels discover in the vault assert their "thingness" by becoming sunshades, sheets, head rests; Kroetsch's stone hammer poem becomes a stone hammer; the words and letters of Nichol's language become saints and are martyred. These reversals, this infinite series of double dealings between locality and language, language and locality, affirm the parallaxis of the long poem.

We find the same affirmation in the ways these poets deal with the self -- with themselves or with others. The

self, they argue, is constructed by the acts of reading and writing. Language materializes the elliptical nature of the self. But discourse also deconstructs our knowledge of the self.

The question these poets raise, then, is, in de Man's words, "whether a literary text is _about_ that which it describes, represents or states."[1] The answer they provide is, no, not quite, the reading of the world's textuality never fully converges with what that textuality presents. This is precisely what marks the linguistic felicity of these poems: their stated awareness of the world's unreadability. It is this unreadability that makes these poems long, long and full of contradictions.

That same unreadability is what explains the long poem's close affinities to other genres. Its epic, lyric and narrative elements establish its generic referentiality. These elements locate the long poem within recognizable systems, assign to it previously stated meanings. But the convergence of these elements in the present tense, indeed a felicitous one, unsettles our expectations as readers. We cannot translate our reading of the long poem only into what we already know about these established genres. The long poem as a new genre celebrates unreadability, does not want to be named. That's why I can't use in this study the terms serial poem or sequence. These terms qualify the length, the materiality, of the long poem. I want instead to let the

reference to its matter, its bulk, be; I want that because its length signals the abundance of language and the world. Its length is its formal and thematic signature. This signature repeats other genres and represents the world, but it does so by revealing a deconstructive intention: it repeats with difference.

By way of recapitulation, I will repeat here that the long poem, no matter where and how it begins, extends beyond its beginning, tracing a double trajectory. It moves forward; it writes itself; it creates its textuality. This movement directs the reading act, invites the reader's hand to turn the text's leaves. But the long poem also moves backward, toward what preceded its beginning, toward the nonoriginary origin. Yet this backward movement moves ahead of the poem as well, it speaks the absences that have not been written, it marks the space of an utterly mute writing, the writing of the past. And this space of writing, nonexistent but full of resonances, is part of the parallaxis of the long poem.

The long poem is grounded in the present, for desire exists, is activated, in the present tense. Its materiality is attained through the body of language. The long poem speaks a poetics of the present tense: _present_ because it cannot be anything else, for writing always presents itself during the reading act which occurs in the present; _tense_ because it makes itself felt through its discontinuities, its absences, its deferrals.

ENDNOTES

Preamble

[1] Maurice Blanchot, "Reading," in The Gaze of
Orpheus and Other Literary Essays, with a Preface by
Geoffrey Hartman, translated by Lydia Davis, edited, with
an Afterword, by P. Adams Sitney (Barrytown, New York:
Station Hill Press, 1981), p. 93.

Chapter One

[1] Northrop Frye, "The Narrative Tradition in
English-Canadian Poetry," in The Bush Garden: Essays on
the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 149.

[2] I am not suggesting here that the long poem
was a popular form in nineteenth-century Canada. The
Confederation poets, better known and more widely
esteemed, wrote lyrics almost exclusively.

[3] Milton Wilson, "Recent Canadian Verse," in
Contexts of Canadian Criticism, edited and with an
Introduction by Eli Mandel (Chicago and London: University
of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 199.

[4] Wilson, p. 200.

[5] Paul West, "Ethos and Epic: Aspects of Contemporary Canadian Poetry," in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p. 212.

[6] Dorothy Livesay, "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p. 267.

[7] Eli Mandel, "The Death of the Long Poem," Open Letter, Long Liners Conference Issue, Sixth Series, 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1985), p. 14.

[8] Mandel, "The Death of the Long Poem," p. 19.

[9] Robert Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," Dandelion, 8, 1 (1981), pp. 61-84; Frank Davey, "The Language of the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," in his Surviving the Paraphrase (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1983), pp. 183-93.

[10] "The Death of the Long Poem," p. 21.

[11] Frye, pp. 148-49; my emphasis.

[12] Rosalie L. Colie, The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance, edited by Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 6.

[13] Archibald Lampman, "Two Canadian Poets: A Lecture, 1891," in Masks of Poetry: Canadian Critics on Canadian Verse, edited by A.J.M. Smith (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 27.

[14] Lampman, p. 27.

[15] Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism," in The Theory of Reading, edited by Frank Gloversmith (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984), p. 95.

[16] Oliver Goldsmith, "The Rising Village," in An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, Vol. I, edited by Russell Brown and Donna Bennett (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 42, ll. 17-18. Further references will appear in the text.

[17] Goldsmith, Autobiography, as cited in An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, p. 42; my emphasis.

[18] The first ten lines of the poem are a classic example of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence." See note 26 below.

[19] About the absence of a literary audience in Canada see E.K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry (Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 1973), p. 5.

[20] Although Crawford is vehemently anti-imperialist, she nevertheless uses the forms she inherited.

[21] Bhabha, p. 97.

[22] See William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 11.

[23] See, for instance, Frye's Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York, Burlingame: A Harbinger Book, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963),

which is dedicated to Pratt.

[24] Frye, "The Narrative Tradition," p. 148; my emphasis.

[25] The term _chora_, which literally means space, place, country, position, is to be found in Plato's _Timaeus_ (Francis M. Cornford, tr.,52a-52b) meaning a "receptacle," a mysterious formless being which receives all things ("mother" of all things). Julia Kristeva appropriated the term in "The Semiotic _Chora_ Ordering the Drives," in _Revolution in Poetic Language,_ translated by Margaret Waller, with an Introduction by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 25-30. Kristeva's appropriation is meant to remove from _chora_ what Plato saw as "incomprehensible" in what he called "mother and receptacle." The _chora_ for Kristeva, although it "precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality," is also part of "the discourse of representation," p. 26. See also Jacques Derrida's critique of _chora_ and its ontological essence in _Positions,_ translated and annotated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 75 and 106, n. 39.

[26] Harold Bloom, _The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry_ (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 5.

[27] Mandel, "The Death of the Long Poem," p. 13.

[28] See Bloom, p. 10.

[29] I am obviously alluding here to the title of

Mandel's latest book of criticism, A Family Romance
(Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1987), which "names" Bloom's
influence on Mandel; "a family romance" occurs on p. 8 of
The Anxiety of Influence.

[30] Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy: An Essay
on Interpretation (New Haven and London: Yale University
Press, 1970), p. 539.

[31] On the difference between the symbolic and the
semiotic see Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language.

[32] Ricoeur, p. 422.

[33] W.D. Lighthall, "Introduction to Songs of the
Great Dominion, 1889," in Masks of Poetry, p. 19.

[34] A.J.M. Smith, "Introduction," Masks of Poetry,
p. ix.

[35] Walt Whitman, "Preface" to "Leaves of Grass,"
Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Prose (New York: The
Library of America, 1982), p. 8; my emphasis.

[36] Paul Merchant, The Epic (London: Methuen,
1971), see the "Introduction," pp. 1-4.

[37] On the construction of tradition and
appropriation see also T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the
Individual Talent (1919)," in Selected Essays of T.S.
Eliot (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1964), pp. 3-11.

[38] On the pragmatic function of genre see Adena
Rosmarin, The Power of Genre (Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 1985).

[39] Frye, "The Narrative Tradition," pp. 154-55.

[40] Frye, _Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays_ (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 247.

[41] CBC's literary contests and programs, for example, although they provide writers with a market, and with an audience, certainly influence the content and form writers use.

[42] Margaret Dickie, _On the Mordenist Long Poem_ (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986), p. 6.

[43] Dickie, p. 5.

[44] Dickie, pp. 3 and 4 respectively.

[45] According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in _The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,_ edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), "[t]he field available for representing the world changes from genre to genre and from era to era as literature develops. It is organized in different ways and limited in space and time by different means. But this means is always specific," p. 27.

[46] Tzvetan Todorov, _Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle,_ translated by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 80.

[47] Todorov, p. 83.

Chapter Two

[1] The relations between genre and gender have largely been explored by feminist literary theory. See, for example, Nina Auerbach, Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1981); Susan Koppelman Cornillon, ed. Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972); and Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," in The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, edited by Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 46-62.

[2] Maurice Blanchot, The Writing of the Disaster, translated by Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 42.

[3] Todorov, "The Origin of Genre," NLH, 8 (1977), p. 159.

[4] René Wellek and Austin Warren, "Literary Genres," in Theory of Literature, new revised edition (New York: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970), p. 233.

[5] See Colie, p. 76.

[6] See Colie, p. 19.

[7] See Heather Dubrow, Genre (London and New

York: Methuen, 1982), p. 56.

[8] Colie, p. 19.

[9] Sir Philip Sidney, <u>An Apology for Poetry or</u>
<u>The Defense of Poesy</u>, edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (London:
Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965), p. 116.

[10] Alastair Fowler, <u>Kinds of Literature: An</u>
<u>Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes</u> (Cambridge,
Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 180.

[11] Karl Viëtor, "L' histoire des genres
littéraires," <u>Poétique,</u> VIII, 32 (1977), p. 501.

[12] Fowler, p. 24.

[13] Viëtor, p. 500.

[14] Fowler, p. 40.

[15] <u>Aristotle's Poetics,</u> A Revised Text with
Critical Introduction, Translation and Commentary by
Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909),
1447a-1447b.

[16] Viëtor, p. 490.

[17] Aristotle, see pp. 4, 6, 8, 14, 26 and 34
where <u>diapherein</u> and <u>diaphora</u> always occur in conjunction
with mimesis.

[18] Wellek and Warren, p. 233; my emphasis.

[19] Colie, p. 119.

[20] Todorov, p. 160; his brackets.

[21] See Mikhail Bakhtin, <u>Problems of Dostoevsky's</u>
<u>Poetics,</u> edited and translated by Caryl Emerson,
introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 1984) and The Dialogic Imagination; Gary

Saul Morson The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's 'Diary

of a Writer' and the Traditions of Literary Utopia

(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. viii;

Kristeva, Le texte du roman: Approache sémiologique d'une

structure discursive transformationnelle (Paris, The

Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 12, 16-18, 22, 72-78; Paul de

Man, The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia

University Press, 1984), p. 261; Jacques Derrida, "The

Supplement of Copula: Philosophy before Linguistics," and

"White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in

Margins of Philosophy, translated, with Additional Notes,

by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982),

pp. 175-271, Dissemination, translated, with an

Introduction and Additional Notes, by Barbara Johnson

(Chicago: Unversity of Chicago Press, 1981), and "The Law

of Genre," Critical Inquiry, 7, 1 (Autumn 1980), pp.

55-81.

[22] On this function of literary works see Frank

Kermode, The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and

Change (Cambridge, Mass:, London: Harvard University

Press, 1983).

[23] Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, Essays

Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana,

1977), p. 159.

[24] Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

is, again, pertinent here.

[25] Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1976), p. 21.

[26] Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, edited with an Introduction by Donald F. Bouchard, translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 146.

[27] Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, p. 147.

[28] Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 179.

[29] Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 88.

[30] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," p. 56.

[31] Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, translated by Richard Howard, with a new forward by Robert Scholes (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 6-7.

[32] Morson, p. 7.

[33] Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword by Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 81. Arguing against Jurgen Habermas' theory of "consensus," Lyotard defines postmodernism as "that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste ...

that which searches for new presentations, not in order to
enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the
unpresentable," p. 81.

[34] Lyotard, p. 81.

[35] Foucault was the first to use this term. See
The Archaeology of Knowledge, especially pp. 31-39.

Chapter Three

[1] Lola Lemire Tostevin, Double Standards
(Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1985), np.; Robin Blaser,
Image-Nations 1-12 & The Stadium of the Mirror (London:
Ferry Press, 1974), p. 28; George Bowering, Allophanes
(Toronto: Coach House Press, 1976), parts II and XXIII,
np.; Frank Davey, King of Swords, in The Long Poem
Anthology, edited by Michael Ondaatje (Toronto: Coach
House Press, 1979), pp. 183, 191, 200; Phyllis Webb,
"Naked Poems," in The Vision Tree: Selected Poems, edited
and with an introduction by Sharon Thesen (Vancouver:
Talonbooks, 1982), p. 63; Robert Kroetsch, Excerpts from
the Real World (Lantzville, B.C.: Oolican Books, 1986), p.
24; Roy Kiyooka, the Fontainebleau Dream Machine (Toronto:
Coach House Press, 1977), np.

[2] Douglas Barbour, Visions of my Grandfather
(Ottawa: Golden Dog Press, 1977); Dennis Cooley, Fielding

(Saskatoon: Thistledown Press, 1983) and Bloody Jack
(Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1984); Christopher Dewdney,
Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night (Berkeley: The
Figures, 1978); Jon Whyte, The Fells of Brightness
(Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1985); Lionel Kearns,
Convergences (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1984).

[3] See Kristeva, "The Bounded Text," in Desire in
Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,
edited by Leon S. Roudiez, translated by Thomas Gora,
Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1980), pp. 36-63.

[4] See Colie, pp. 105 and 122.

[5] "The Poetic Principle," Edgar Allan Poe:
Essays and Reviews (New York: The Library of America,
1978), p. 71.

[6] Michael Bernstein, The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra
Pound and the Modern Verse Epic (Princeton, New Jersey:
Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 4 and 29
respectively.

[7] Bernstein, p. 14.

[8] Bernstein, pp. 14-15.

[9] From my notes from J. Hillis Miller's course
"The Ethics of Reading," School of Criticism and Theory,
Dartmouth College, June 22-August 1, 1986.

[10] Bernstein, p. 15.

[11] The opening section from Kearns' Convergences,
np.; these two passages in the original are printed in two

parallel vertical columns.

     [12] Kroetsch, The Ledger (London, Ontario:
Applegarth Follies, 1975; rpt. Ilderton, Ontario:
Brick/Nairn, 1979).

     [13] Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American
Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp.
59-136.

     [14] Pearce, p. 61.

     [15] Paul Bové, "The World and Earth of William
Carlos Williams: Paterson as a 'Long Poem,'" Genre,
special issue on "The Long Poem in the Twentieth Century,"
XI, 4 (Winter 1978), p. 588.

     [16] Anthony Wilden, "Lacan and the Discourse of
the Other," in Jacques Lacan, Speech and Language in
Psychoanalysis, translated, with notes and commentary, by
Anthony Wilden (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1968; rpt. 1981), p. 189.

     [17] Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psycho-
analysis," in Speech and Language, p. 27.

     [18] "The Function of Language," pp. 63-64; my
emphasis.

     [19] "The Function of Language," p. 17; my
emphasis.

     [20] See Marjorie Perloff, The Poetics of
Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1981; rpt. Northwestern University Press
Paperback edition, 1983) and "From Image to Action: The

Return of Story in Postmodern Poetry," <u>Contemporary Literature,</u> 23, 4 (Fall 1982), pp. 411-27; Joseph N. Riddel, "A Somewhat Polemical Introduction: The Elliptical Poem," <u>Genre,</u> special issue on "The Long Poem in the Twentieth Century," XI, 4 (Winter 1978), pp. 459-77. Further references to Riddel's essay will appear in the text.

[21] Frye, <u>Anatomy of Criticism,</u> p. 293.

[22] <u>Anatomy of Criticism,</u> p. 293.

[23] <u>Anatomy of Criticism,</u> pp. 247 and 293 respectively.

[24] <u>Anatomy of Criticism,</u> p. 246; my emphasis.

[25] Frye, "Approaching the Lyric," in <u>Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism,</u> edited by Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 31 and 36 respectively.

[26] M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall, <u>The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry</u> (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). Further references will appear in the text.

[27] Lyotard, p. 81; on nostalgia and the lyric see also de Man, "Lyric and Modernity," in <u>Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism,</u> Second edition, Revised, with an Introduction by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 166-86, especially p. 168.

[28] David Jones, "Preface," <u>The Anathemata:</u>

fragments of an attempted writing (New York: Viking Press, 1965), pp. 9-43. Further references will appear in the text.

[29] Andrew Welsh, Roots of Lyric: Primitive Poetry and Modern Poetics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 21.

[30] As quoted by Culler, "Reading Lyric," in "The Lesson of Paul de Man," Yale French Studies, 69 (1985), p. 101.

[31] de Man, "Lyrical Voice in Contemporary Theory: Riffaterre and Jauss," in Lyric Poetry, p. 65; this essay is a revised version of de Man's "Hypogram and Inscription: Michael Riffaterre's Poetics of Reading," Diacritics, 11, 4 (Winter 1981), pp. 17-35.

[32] de Man, "Lyrical Voice in Contemporary Theory," p. 69; see also p. 68. For more on de Man's notion of "allegory" see his Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), especially his "Preface," pp. ix-xi, and the chapters "Allegory (Julie)," and "Allegory of Reading (Profession de foi)," pp. 188-245.

[33] On the materiality of language see de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, second edition, Revised, with an Introduction by Wlad Godzich (1971; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. xix-xx, xxiv,

and 192; also de Man, <u>The Resistance to Theory,</u> Foreword

by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

Press, 1986), pp. 11, 50 and 51.

[34] Tilottama Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of

Lyric Consciousness," in <u>Lyric Poetry,</u> p. 196.

[35] Rajan, p. 196.

[36] Kroetsch, "Seed Catalogue," in "Statements by

the Poets," <u>The Long Poem Anthology,</u> p. 312.

[37] Culler, "Prolegomena to a Theory of Reading,"

in <u>The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and

Interpretation,</u> edited by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge

Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.

50.

[38] Bowering, "Look into your Ear & Write:

Allophanes," in "Statements by the Poets," <u>The Long Poem

Anthology,</u> p. 329.

[39] Mandel, "The Death of the Long Poem," p. 20.

[40] Kiyooka, "The Fontainebleau Dream Machine," in

"Statements by the Poets," <u>The Long Poem Anthology,</u> p.

332.

[41] Morson, <u>The Boundaries of Genre,</u> p. 48.

[42] Morson, p. 48.

[43] See Linda Hutcheon, <u>A Theory of Parody: The

Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms</u> (New York and

London: Methuen, 1985).

[44] Bakhtin, <u>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,</u> p.

105.

45 Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in <u>The Dialogic</u> <u>Imagination,</u> p. 7.

46 This statement occurs twice in Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel," on pp. 4 and 7.

47 "Epic and Novel," p. 5.

48 Frank Davey, "Countertextuality in the Long Poem," <u>Open Letter, Long Liners Conference Issue,</u> Sixth Series, 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1985), pp. 39-40.

49 See Michael Riffaterre, <u>Semiotics of Poetry</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978; rpt. 1984), and <u>Text Production,</u> translated by Terese Lyons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Kristeva, "Breaching the Thetic: Mimesis," in <u>The Revolution of</u> <u>Poetic Language,</u> pp. 57-61. On the history of the term intertextuality see Marc Angenot, "L''intertextualité': enquête sur l'émergence et la diffusion d'un champ notionnel," <u>Revue de sciences humaines,</u> 189, 1 (janvier-mars 1983), pp. 121-35. See also the special issue "L'intertextualité, intertexte, autotexte, intratexte" of <u>Texte,</u> 2 (1983), which also includes a comprehensive bibliography on the subject.

50 See Juliusz Kleiner, "The Role of Time in Literary Genres," <u>Zagadnienia Rodzajow Literackich,</u> II (1959), pp. 5-12. Kleiner argues that "[v]arious types of literary works develop in conformity with ... different psychological attitudes. Consequently the theory of literary genres must, apart of other significant aspects,

account for the time factor," p. 5.

[51] George T. Wright, "The Lyric Present: Simple
Present and Verbs in English Poems," PMLA, 89, 3 (May
1974), 536-79.

[52] Sharon Cameron, Lyric Time: Dickinson and the
Limits of Genre (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1979), p. 132.

[53] Cameron, p. 207.

Chapter Four

[1] Kroetsch, "Seed Catalogue," in "Statements by
the Poets," The Long Poem Anthology, p. 311.

[2] E.D. Blodgett, "The Book, its Discourse, and
the Lyric: Notes on Robert Kroetsch's Field Notes," Open
Letter, special issue "Robert Kroetsch: Reflections,"
Fifth Series, 8-9 (Summer-Fall 1984), p. 201.

[3] Kroetsch, Field Notes (Don Mills, Ontario:
Spectrum Poetry Series, General Publishing, 1981), p. 24.
Further references will appear in the text.

[4] Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance," p. 77.

[5] Webb, "The Place is Where You Find It," from
Wilson's Bowl, collected in The Vision Tree, p. 134.

[6] Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance," p. 67.

[7] Russell Brown, "Seeds and Stones: Unhiding in

Kroetsch's Poetry," <u>Open Letter,</u> "Reflections," p. 165.

[8] Robert Lecker, <u>Robert Kroetsch</u> (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), pp. 125-26; my emphasis.

[9] Brown, p. 173; my emphasis.

[10] Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance," p. 69.

[11] "For Play and Entrance," p. 62.

[12] Kroetsch, <u>Advice to My Friends</u> (Don Mills, Ontario: Spectrum Poetry Series, Stoddard, 1985), p. 3. Further references will appear in the text.

[13] Jacques Derrida, <u>Of Grammatology,</u> translated, and with a "Preface," by Gayatric Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974; rpt. 1976), p. 61.

[14] Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance," p. 82.

[15] Brown, pp. 163-64, 166-67; Lacan's famous phrase "[t]he phallus is the privileged signifier" occurs in his essay "The signification of the phallus," in <u>Écrits: A Selection,</u> translated by Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1977), p. 287. For an analysis, and a critique, of the term see "Introduction-I" by Juliet Mitchell and "Introduction-II" by Jacqueline Rose in <u>Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the ecole freudienne,</u> edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, translated by Jacqueline Rose (New York, London: Pantheon Books and W.W. Norton, 1982), pp. 1-57.

[16] Lecker, p. 126.

[17] Lecker, pp. 128 and 129 respectively.

[18] The difference between dialogism and dialectics is spelled out by Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. He says specifically that "[d]ialogic relationships are reducible neither to logical relationships nor to relationships oriented semantically toward their referential object," p. 183.

[19] Lecker, p. 132.

[20] On the ability of nature to "overcode" locality see Henri Lefebvre, La production de l'éspace (Paris: Éditions anthropos, 1974), pp. 24-26.

[21] For the idea of nature as memory I am indebted to Lefebvre, La production de l'espace, pp. 39-40.

[22] Bowering, "Given This Body: an interview with Daphne Marlatt," Open Letter, special issue "Three Vancouver Writers: interviews by George Bowering," Fourth Series, 3 (Spring 1979), p. 75.

[23] Lefebvre, p.

[24] See the last section of Excerpts from the Real World.

[25] Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, p. 26.

[26] "George Bowering," in Out-Posts: Interviews, Poetry, Bibliographies & a Critical Introduction to 8 Major Modern Poets, Caroline Bayard and Jack David (Erin, Ontario: Press Porcepic, 1978), pp. 79-80.

[27] Herodotus, The Histories, translated, with an introduction, by Aubrey de Selincourt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954; rpt. with an index, 1971), p. 120.

[28] Charles Olson, The Special View of History, edited, with an Introduction, by Ann Charters (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p. 20.

[29] Olson, p. 25.

[30] Katharine R. Stimpson, "Charles Olson: Preliminary Images," boundary 2, special issue "Charles Olson: Essays, Reminiscences, Reviews," edited by Matthew Corrigan, II, 1 & 2 (Fall 1973 / Winter 1974), p. 159.

[31] Olson, p. 27.

[32] Olson's influence on the West Coast Canadian poets can be dated from the publication of Donald Allen's New American Poetry anthology in 1960. Also influential was the summer session course Olson taught at the University of British Columbia in 1963. That same summer, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, Philip Whalen, Denise Levertov, Allen Ginsberg, and Margaret Avison (the only Canadian) took part, together with Olson, in the Vancouver Poetry Conference.

[33] Roland Barthes, "Right in the Eyes," in The Responsibility of Form: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), pp. 237-38.

[34] Olson, p. 26.

[35] Jean Starobinski, L'oeil vivant: essai (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 14.

[36] Douglas Barbour, "The Phenomenological I:

Daphne Marlatt's <u>Steveston,</u>" in <u>Figures in a Ground:</u>
<u>Canadian Essays on Modern Literature Collected in Honor of</u>
<u>Sheila Watson,</u> edited by Diane Bessai and David Jackel
(Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), p. 182.

[37] "Text and Tissue: Body Language," an interview
with Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland by Ellea Wright,
<u>Broadside,</u> 6, 3 (December 1984 / January 1985), p. 4; my
emphasis. My thanks to Marlatt for pointing out to me that
what was printed as "to imitate the flow of the rhythm" in
<u>Broadside</u> was a misprint of "to imitate the flow of the
river."

[38] Marlatt, <u>Steveston,</u> with photographs by Robert
Minden (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974; rpt. Edmonton:
Longspoon, 1984), pp. 17-18. (I quote from the Longspoon
edition.) Further references will appear in the text.
Regretably, I can only quote Marlatt's long lines as prose
due to the space limits of the page.

[39] Gilbert Bouchard, untitled interview with
Daphne Marlatt in The University of Alberta newspaper <u>The</u>
<u>Gateway,</u> Tuesday, October 1, 1985, p. 7; my emphasis.

[40] Unpublished interview with Marlatt "on the
West Coast" by Eleonor Wachtel, p. 3 of manuscript. My
thanks to Marlatt for providing me with a copy of the
interview.

[41] Davey, "The Explorer in Western Canadian
Literature," in <u>Surviving the Paraphrase,</u> p. 145. Chris
Hall, in his essay "Two Poems of Place: Williams' <u>Paterson</u>

and Marlatt's Steveston," The Canadian Review of American
Studies, 15, 2 (Summer 1984), also talks about Marlatt's
"research" methods, but he does so by relying on
Levi-Strauss's anthropological model and calls Steveston
"a structuralist poem," p. 143.

[42] Marlatt, "Excerpts from Journal kept during
the Summer of '63 Conference, Vancouver," in Olson: The
Journals of the Charles Olson Archives, 4 (Fall 1975), p.
76.

[43] Lecker, "Daphne Marlatt's Poetry," Canadian
Literature, 76 (Spring 1978), p. 65.

[44] Roy Miki, "The Lang Poem: The Cosmology of the
Long Poem in Contemporary Canadian Poetry," Open Letter,
"The Long-liners Conference Issue," p. 77.

[45] "Given This Body: an interview with Daphne
Marlatt," p. 75.

[46] "Excerpts from Journal," p. 79.

[47] Starobinski, p. 19.

[48] Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, pp.
130-31.

[49] Mandel, Life Sentence: Poems and Journals:
1976-1980 (Toronto, Victoria: Press Porcepic, 1981), p.
55.

[50] Life Sentence, p. 62.

[51] Derrida, Dissemination, p. 20.

[52] Mandel, Out of Place, with a "Preface" and
photographs by Ann Mandel (Toronto, Victoria: Press

Porcepic, 1977), pp. 7-8. Eli Mandel says in <u>Life Sentence</u>

that "<u>Out of Place</u> will be designed by Ann," p. 93.

Further references to <u>Out of Place</u> will appear in the text.

[53] Emile Benveniste, <u>Problems in General

Linguistics,</u> translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral

Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 202.

[54] Geoffrey Hartman, <u>Criticism in the Wilderness:

The Study of Literature Today</u> (New Haven and London: Yale

University Press, 1980), p. 6. Hartman says that

"criticism is a genre, or a primary text" insofar as the

critic is aware of employing a creative "style." A careful

look at Ann Mandel's prose rhythms and use of imagery

provides evidence of the extent to which she engages

herself in the "Preface" with language in a creative way.

[55] Derrida, <u>Of Grammatology,</u> pp. 144-45;

translator's brackets.

[56] <u>The Republic of Plato,</u> translated, with an

Introduction and Notes, by Francis MacDonald Cornford (New

York and London: Oxford University Press, 1945; rpt.

1960), p. 227.

[57] <u>The Republic,</u> pp. 230-31.

[58] <u>The Republic,</u> p. 231.

[59] See Andrew Suknaski, "Emir Rodriguez Monegal,

<u>Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography,</u>" Brick (Spring

1980), pp. 16-24. In this review of Borges's biography,

Suknaski explores some important aspects of <u>Out of Place,</u>

mainly that of doubleness.

[60] "Interview with Eli Mandel, March 16/78," David Arnason, Dennis Cooley and Robert Enright, Essays on Canadian Writing, "Prairie Poetry Issue," 18/19 (Summer/Fall 1980), p. 89.

[61] Edward W. Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), pp. 20-21.

[62] Peter Stevens notices the same duplicity in his essay "Poet as Critic as Prairie Poet," Essays on Canadian Writing, "Prairie Poetry Issue," p. 68.

[63] Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance," p. 77.

[64] "Interview with Eli Mandel," p. 71.

[65] Suknaski, p. 20.

[66] Douglas Frame, The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. ix and 23.

[67] The Republic, p. 230.

[68] The Odyssey of Homer, translated, with an Introduction, by Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 180.

[69] The structure and the devices Mandel uses in this passage could also be examined in the light of Gérard Genette's "iterative narrative," the "type of narrative, where a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event." See Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, translated by Jane E. Lewin, Foreword by Jonathan Culler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 116.

[70] On the different layers of narration in the present tense see the chapter entitled "Voice" in Gérard Genette's Narrative Discourse, pp. 212-62.

[71] Christine Brooke-Rose, A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in narrative and structure, especially of the fantastic (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981; rpt. 1983), p. 314.

[72] Mandel, Minotaur Poems, in Trio (Toronto: Contact Press, 1954).

[73] Stevens, p. 58.

[74] Søren Kierkegaard, Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology, translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 3-4.

[75] Due to a misprint, the title, "signs," of this poem does not appear in Out of Place. My thanks to Mandel for mentioning this to me.

[76] de Man, Blindness and Insight, p. 213.

[77] Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," in The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 143.

[78] "Apostrophe," p. 142.

[79] "Apostrophe," p. 146.

[80] "Apostrophe," p. 152.

Chapter Five

[1] See David Carroll, The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and Linda Hutcheon, Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox (New York and London: Methuen, 1980; rpt. 1984).

[2] Most of Derrida's work is of great relevance to these issues; see especially his essay "Languages and Institutions of Philosophy," RSSI (Recherches Semiotiques Semiotic Inquiry), 4, 2 (June 1984), pp. 91-154; see also Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979; rpt. 1980).

[3] Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, edited by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Unversity Press, 1980), p. 73.

[4] Starobinski,"The Style of Autobiography," p. 74.

[5] James M. Cox, "Recovering Literature's Lost Ground Through Autobiography," in Autobiography," p. 124.

[6] Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in Margins of Philosophy, p. 328.

[7] "Signature Event Context," p. 328.

[8] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," p. 70.

[9] Bowering, Kerrisdale Elegies (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1984). Further references will appear in the text, with the first number indicating the elegy and the second the page.

[10] I am quoting from Maurice Blanchot's essay "Reading," in The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays, p. 92.

[11] Derrida, Signéponge/Signsponge, translated by Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 150.

[12] Spicer is particularly important because he "translated" Rilke's Elegies between 1950 and 1955; see his "Imaginary Elegies I-IV," in The Collected Books of Jack Spicer, edited, and with a commentary, by Robin Blaser (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), pp. 333-39. Bowering, who has shown his indebtedness to Spicer in Allophanes, said that Spicer facilitated his "intrusion into the field of Rilke that had been staked out by my many Rilke-loving friends, and to which I didn't feel real rights, being hesitant about Rilke ... and not German." Personal correspondence. My thanks to Bowering for permission to quote him.

[13] Signsponge, p. 64.

[14] Bowering said that he "used basically 2 translations, and a bit of a third ... Not David Young," but he couldn't recall which ones (personal correspondence). The translations I consulted are J.B.

Leishman's and Stephen Spender's, <u>Rainer Maria Rilke:</u>
<u>Prose and Poetry,</u> edited by Egon Schwarz, with a foreword
by Howard Nemerov (New York: Continuum, 1984); Stephen
Mitchell's <u>The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke,</u>
edited by Stephen Mitchell, with an introduction by Robert
Hass (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House,
1984); and A. Poulin's, Jr., <u>Duino Elegies and The Sonnets</u>
<u>to Orpheus</u> (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

[15] Translated by Poulin, p. 27.

[16] In response to this statement, Bowering said
that "I wasn't interested in erasing Rilke so much as
rewriting him. I have a funny relationship with him;
although he is probably the most popular source for my
poet companions in Vancouver, I have never been quite
ready to trust him, his feyness, his rhapsody; I realize
that he is right, he is onto something, and that he is a
pre-Spicerian demonstration of the poet inspired or
inspirated; but I have always been uneasy. I had to
respond to that double feeling somehow" (personal
correspondence). Bowering's uneasiness about Rilke is
manifested in the poem in more than one way, but
discussion of it falls outside the scope of my study here.
But whereas Bowering lets Rilke's signature stand, he
hardly provides any clues for the poets' identities with
regard to the French quotations in <u>Kerrisdale Elegies.</u> It
is their language and tone that locate them in the context
of French poetry. As Bowering said about them, "Re the

French quotations: well, they seem to me to do
something--make connections? make correction, comment? on
the surrounding text. They operate, it feels to me, the
way quotations operate re the rest of the text in
Allophanes. It is not exactly collage, because it reads on
like poetic text, along the alonging poetic text that is
there. They make sure that the writer is not running away
with the poem ..." Personal correspondence. The quotations
are from: Baudelaire's "La Prière d'un païne" (1, 17);
François Villon, "Le Testament," CXIX (2, 30); Anne
Hébert, "Le tombeau des rois" (4, 61) (my thanks to
Professor Stan Dragland, University of Western Ontario,
for this reference); Apollinaire's "L'ermite" from Alcools
(5, 72); Michel Beaulieu, "remission du corps enamouré,"
in Visages (6, 83) (my thanks to Bowering for this
source); Mallarmé, "Petit air I" (7, 99); Nerval's "Vers
Dorés" (8, 11); Laforgue's "Complainte de l'oubli des
morts" (9, 123); I have failed to trace the source of the
last quotation (10, 131). Since the completion of my
study, Dragland published the first essay on Kerrisdale
Elegies, "The Bees of the Invisible," Brick, 28 (Fall
1986), pp. 14-25.

[17] Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, p. 36.

[18] See "Linus," The Oxford Classical Dictionary
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949; rpt. 1968).

[19] Genette, Palimpsestes: la littérature au
second degré (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982), p. 92.

[20] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," p. 63.

[21] All volumes of the poem were published by Coach House Press in Toronto. The Martyrology, Book 1 (1972); Book 2 (1972); Books 1 and 2 (1972; revised edition, 1977); Books 3 and 4 (1976); Book 5 (1982). Book 6 is in the press, and Nichol is currently working on the seventh and eighth volumes. None of the volumes has page numbers.

[22] Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance," p. 65; Stephen Scobie, bpNichol: What History Teaches (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984), p. 106.

[23] See bpNichol, "In Conversation with Daphne Marlatt and George Bowering: 'Syntax Equals the Body Structure,'" Line, 6 (Fall 1985), p. 24; see also Bowering, "bpNichol On The Train," Read the Way He Writes: A Festschrift for bpNichol, Open Letter, Sixth Series, 5-6 (Summer-Fall 1986), p. 15.

[24] "'Syntax Equals the Body Structure,'" p. 24.

[25] All cartoon-like figures, as well as the clouds, appearing in The Martyrology, are drawn by Jerry Ofo.

[26] See Brian Henderson, "Soul Rising out of the Body of Language: Presence, Process and Faith in The Martyrology," in Read the Way He Writes, pp. 111-28; see also Scobie's chapter "The Martyrology," in bpNichol.

[27] Transformational Unit, "350 copies printed as a gift for friends and family, Christmas 1983 by bp,

Eleanor and Sarah Nichol"; Continuum (Toronto: The Nightshade Press for Underwhich Editions, June 1984).

[28] In Read the Way He Writes, p. 152; Nichol's text appears on pp. 13, 20, 25, 39, 49, 62, 69, 73, 80, 87, 95, 102, 108, 118, 132, 141, 148, 152, 156, 228, 258, 277, 285, 292, 308, and 323.

[29] See Scobie, pp. 110-11.

[30] Scobie, pp. 117-18.

[31] de Man, The Resistance to Theory, p. 21.

[32] Nichol, "Things I Don't Really Understand About Myself," p. 73.

[33] See Scobie's discussion of Saint And, pp. 115-18.

[34] See Derrida, Of Grammatology ; see also Steve McCaffery, "The Martyrology as Paragram," in Read the Way He Writes, pp. 191-206.

[35] Philippe Lejeune, Lire Leiris: Autobiographie et langage (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1975), p. 16.

[36] Said, Beginnings, p. 47.

[37] Said, p. 317.

[38] Said, p. 317-18.

[39] Davey, "Exegesis / Eggs à Jesus: The Martyrology as a Text in Crisis," in Read the Way He Writes, p. 180. See also Scobie for his Freudian reading of the "father" figure in The Martyrology and in the rest of Nichol's work.

[40] Davey, "Exegesis," p. 180.

[41] On the question of unreadability see de Man's "Reading (Proust)" and "Allegory (Julie)," in Allegories of Reading, pp. 57-78, and 188-220.

[42] Nichol, "Things I Don't Really Understand About Myself," p. 132.

[43] Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 14.

[44] "'Syntax Equals the Body Structure,'" p. 41.

[45] Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," p. 76.

[46] S. C. Neuman, Gertrude Stein: Autobiography and the Problem of Narration (Victoria: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 1979), p. 11.

[47] See Benveniste, Problems in General Linguistics, on the performative and constative acts of discourse, pp. 233-38.

[48] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," in Écrits, p. 1.

[49] See the translator's notes in Écrits, pp. vii-xi.

[50] Derrida, Dissemination, especially pp. 95-134.

[51] Benveniste, p. 197.

[52] Culler, "Apostrophe," p. 137.

[53] Benveniste, p. 199.

[54] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," p. 56.

[55] "The Law of Genre," p. 74.

Chapter Six

[1] See Genette, _Figures of Literary Discourse_, translated by Alan Sheridan, with an Introduction by Marie-Rose Logan (1966-72 in French; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) and _Narrative Discourse_ (1972 in French, 1980 in English); Todorov, _The Poetics of Prose_, translated by Richard Howard, with a Foreword by Jonathan Culler (1971 in French; Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977); Seymour Chatman, _Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film_ (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1978); F.K. Stanzel, _A Theory of Narrative,_ translated by Charlotte Goedsche, with a preface by Paul Hernadi (1979 in German; London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Culler, "Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative," in _The Pursuit of Signs_ (1981); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, _Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics_ (London and New York: Methuen, 1983); Paul Ricoeur, _Time and Narrative,_ translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (1983 in French; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Peter Brooks, _Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative_ (New York: Vintage Books, 1984; rpt. 1985); Ross Chambers, _Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction,_ Foreword by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 1984); Mieke Bal, <u>Narratology:</u>
<u>Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,</u> translated by
Christine van Boheemen (1980 in Dutch; Toronto, Buffalo,
London: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Wallace
Martin, <u>Recent Theories of Narrative</u> (Ithaca and London:
Cornell University Press, 1986).

[2] Benveniste, pp. 67, 209.

[3] See Benveniste's distinction between history
and discourse, p. 206.

[4] I have in mind here Todorov's theory of the
"grammar" of narrative in <u>The Poetics of Prose.</u>

[5] D.A. Miller, <u>Narrative and Its Discontents:</u>
<u>Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel</u> (Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 3.

[6] Patrick Friesen, <u>The Shunning</u> (Winnipeg:
Turnstone Press, 1980).

[7] Stuart MacKinnon, "The Intervals," in
"Statements by the Poets," <u>The Long Poem Anthology,"</u> p.
314.

[8] Davey, "The Language of the Canadian Long
Poem," pp. 187 and 184 respectively.

[9] "The Language of the Canadian Long Poem," p.
184.

[10] Michael Ondaatje, <u>The Collected Works of Billy</u>
<u>the Kid</u> (Toronto: Anansi, 1970). Further references will
appear in the text.

[11] I am appropriating here Derrida's phrase

"white mythology" from "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in Margins of Philosophy ,pp. 207-71.

[12] "White Mythology," p. 211.

[13] Ondaatje inscribes his "signature" in similar ways in Running in the Family (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982) and in Coming through Slaughter (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1976).

[14] On the concept of literariness see de Man's title chapter in The Resistance to Theory.

[15] Judith Owens, "'I Send You a Picture': Ondaatje's Portrait of Billy the Kid," Studies in Canadian Literature, 8, 1 (1983), pp. 117 and 139 respectively.

[16] Scobie, "Two Authors in Search of a Character," Canadian Literature, 54 (Autumn 1972), p. 45.

[17] See Peter M. Nodelman, "The Collected Photographs of Billy the Kid," Canadian Literature, 87 (Winter 1980), pp. 68-79; Dennis Lee, "Savage Fields: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid," in Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje, edited by Sam Solecki (Montreal: Vehicule Pres, 1985), pp. 166-84. See also Dennis Cooley, "'I am Here On the Edge': Modern Hero / Postmodern Poetics in The Collected Works of Billy the Kid," in Spider Blues," pp. 211-39; and J.M. Kertzer, "On Death and Dying: The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, " English Studies in Canada, 1 (Spring 1975), pp. 86-96.

[18] Dennis Lee argues that the poem is structured around "six moments" which "played no conscious part in

the writing or editing; they are critical constructs devised after the fact," in Spider Blues, p. 167.

[19] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," Critical Inquiry, special issue "On Narrative," 7, 1 (Autumn 1980), p. 225.

[20] Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse: Fragments, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978; rpt. 1979), p. 3.

[21] Kertzer and Owens argue that the breakdown between friend and foe demonstrates the "clear-cut pattern" of Billy's list. Their argument, I think, depends on the balance they expect to find between the opposites on a binary scale. If, however, they had approached this section from a generic point of view, they would have been sent, by the epic echo of Billy's list, to the epic model where conflict does not merely occur between friends and foes but also among friends or among foes.

[22] Sheila Watson, "The Mechanization of Death," in Spider Blues, p. 157.

[23] Derrida, The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation, Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida, English edition edited by Christie V. McDonald, translated by Peggy Kamuf ("Otobiographies" translated by Avital Ronell) (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), pp. 4-5.

[24] Dante Alighieri, "Paradiso," The Divine

<u>Comedy</u>, translated, with a commentary, by Charles S.

Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

Bollingen Series LXXX, 1975; rpt. 1982), Canto xxxi, l. 1,

p. 346.

    [25] "Paradiso," Canto ii, pp. 14-25.

    [26] Owens, p. 120.

    [27] Nodelman, p. 69.

    [28] Owens, too, acknowledges Angela's "largeness,"

but insists on seeing her in exclusively archetypal terms.

    [29] Owens, pp. 127-28.

    [30] For my rhetorical reading of prosopopoeia I am

indebted to J. Hillis Miller's course "The Ethics of

Reading," where he discussed de Man's ideas on the

subject.

    [31] My reading of Billy as writer is close to, but

not exactly identical with, Scobie's argument that Billy

is both "outlaw" and "artist." See "Two Authors in Search

of a Character." See also Linda Hutcheon, "'Snow Storm of

Paper.' The Act of Reading in Self-Reflexive Canadian

Verse," <u>Dalhousie Review,</u> 59 (Spring 1979), pp. 116-17.

    [32] Rosmarin, <u>The Power of Genre,</u> p. 77.

    [33] Rosmarin, p. 96.

Envoi

    [1] De Man, "Reading (Proust)," <u>Allegories of</u>

Reading, p. 57.

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